

Slide 1 Title

*Investigating a Shotgun House:*  
**Piloting a New Project Archaeology Shelter Investigation**

by

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Paper presented at the 82<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the  
Society for American Archaeology  
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada  
2017

**ABSTRACT**

*Investigating a Shotgun House* draws on diverse data sources to examine the lives of poor, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century working-class people in Davis Bottom, an historically integrated neighborhood near downtown Lexington, Kentucky. Piloting drafts of the investigation were integral elements in its development. A week-long teachers' academy provided revisions to the draft, which was then piloted by four 5-7<sup>th</sup> grade teachers who had attended the academy. Feedback from interviews with both teachers and students shows that the investigation provides a rich, inquiry-based learning experience. Teachers could make clear links to their mandated curriculum, and students enthusiastically embraced the unit. Unanticipated outcomes included the lack of time, which prevented most teachers from teaching the preservation thread of the unit, the way the students identified with the Davis Bottom residents and aspired to live in a racially diverse neighborhood, and the unit's relevance for challenging students to consider broader themes such as civil rights, economic inequalities, and the uses and abuses of power.

## Slide 2 – mimi looks up

### INTRODUCTION

“Who knew shelter was so emotionally charged?”

So wrote one of the participants who had just attended our teachers’ academy - Making History Local: An Inquiry-Based Approach - and who had just participated in the first trial run of *Investigating a Shotgun House*, Number 12 in the *Project Archaeology: Investigating Shelter* case studies.

Who knew, indeed?

Who knew that the unit’s straightforward guiding question - What can we learn about the lives of urban, working class people by investigating a shotgun house? – explored by 5th, 6th and 7th grade students a few months later would open up conversations about race and class? About what is important in history to preserve?

Who could have foreseen that students would have become so engaged that they would yearn to live in an integrated neighborhood like the one they were studying?

## Slide 3 – kids with map on floor

Certainly Linda and I didn’t. Sure, we figured the kids would enjoy it. What kids

don’t like to learn about the lives of other kids?  
aren’t interested in studying body functions like poop?

We were confident the teachers would recognize the many ways the unit met their curriculum needs. And we hoped we had adequately handled common stumbling blocks to learning (such as inappropriate reading level, confusing graphs and maps, ambiguous discussion questions).

But wow! The powerful humanities themes that emerged during instruction!

Our paper today begins with a brief consideration of the why’s, and the who’s, and the so forth’s. Then it moves to our research findings. We consider briefly what we learned from discussions with the teachers, and then we spend the rest of our time sharing our discoveries concerning what the students learned and how what they learned influenced their ideas about preservation issues.

## **WHAT IS INVESTIGATING SHELTER?**

I'm glad you asked!

### **Slide 4 – various shelter graphics**

Developed for grades 3-5, *Project Archaeology: Investigating Shelter* is designed to teach basic inquiry skills that emphasize archaeological questions, sources, and techniques to support a preservation ethic. Students apply these skills to investigate a particular shelter chosen by their teacher from an array of case studies.

*Investigating a Shotgun House* is one of these case studies. Students consider the guiding question I just mentioned as it pertains to the shotgun houses in Davis Bottom, a poor, working-class community in Lexington, Kentucky.

### **Slide 5 – Susan Walton mural of neighborhood**

The neighborhood developed after the Civil War as a community for free and newly freed African Americans. Later, immigrants and Appalachian out-migrants turned Davis Bottom into Lexington's first integrated neighborhood. In 1931, a proposal for the construction of a new road threatened to destroy the neighborhood. Though postponed, the specter of destruction still loomed, leading to infrastructure neglect. Absentee landlords let the cheaply built shotgun houses deteriorate. Eventually, Davis Bottom became the neighborhood where Lexington's poorest people lived.

### **Slide 6 – modern Davis Bottom**

Nearly 60 years later, the City of Lexington revived the road project. Archaeological and social impact assessments were carried out, archaeological excavations were undertaken, and residents were moved into nearby trailers while the road and new houses and apartments were built.

As part of this shelter investigation, students explore the size of a shotgun house. They use a map of the archaeological site at 712 DeRoode Street, privy stratigraphy,

### **Slide 7 – privy**

and images and information on artifacts similar to the ones found in the privy and in the house excavations to establish a context for their study. Archival and manuscript sources - including Sanborn Fire Insurance maps,

## Slide 8 – Sanborn map

U.S. Federal census records, recordings of interviews with black and white residents, and historic photographs - provide further evidence of what life was like in the neighborhood.

Now let me describe our project.

### OUR PROJECT

It consisted of a week-long teachers' academy, in-class piloting of *Investigating a Shotgun House* as part of teaching the *Investigating Shelter* curriculum, and data collection from students and teachers.

It was funded by the Nashville District Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps wanted to train southeastern Kentucky teachers in *Investigating Shelter* as a way to reduce the negative impact of the drawdown of Lake Cumberland to repair the dam, which had exposed archaeological sites to looting along the lake shore. They reasoned that by training teachers, they would enhance the protection and preservation of archaeological sites exposed at Lake Cumberland, as well as those in the surrounding region.

Our case study pilot explored how well the curriculum served as a model for inquiry-based teaching approaches and techniques, in history and social studies education. This was different from previous *Investigating Shelter* case study pilots, which focused on examining the curriculum's success as culturally relevant *science* education.

## Slide 10 – kids with desks and smartboard

Our project had three purposes:

First, we wanted to understand how historical archaeological inquiry might inform students' ideas about the significance of working class people's lives, and by extension, the lives of other people often under-represented in the historical record.

Second, we wanted to examine how well the unit promoted deep conceptual understanding of how humanities subjects inform the development of a preservation ethic.

And finally, in a more tangible vein, we wanted to evaluate *Investigating a Shotgun House* by field-testing its usability before we finalized it.

Pilot Study

Ok, so...

After the academy, four participants volunteered to pilot *Investigating Shelter* in their classroom during the 2014-2015 school year.

### **Slide 11 – kids with floor map**

These teachers were experienced educators. Two taught in Grade 5, one in Grade 6, and one in Grade 7. They used a revised draft of *Investigating a Shotgun House*.

The schools within which they taught were located in rural or small town locales. Student populations were predominantly European American (97%) and Protestant, and a large proportion were on free and reduced lunches, an indication of economic disadvantage. Out of a total of 121 students who received instruction, over half were fifth graders. A total of 67 students (or 55.4%) participated in the pilot study.

Instructional contexts were highly variable across the four classrooms. In addition, we purposefully did not dictate to the teachers how they should teach the unit - we wanted our data to reflect how “real” teachers used it.

### Data Collection

Our data sources consisted of identical written surveys administered before and after instruction, post-pilot interviews with students and teachers,

### **Slide 12 – linda interviewing the kids**

classroom observations, and instructional artifacts generated by students individually and in groups.

Ok. Now let’s turn to our research findings.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The research results we present here come mainly from our analysis of teacher and student interviews, supplemented with information drawn from the other data sources where relevant.

We’ll begin with the teachers.

### **Slide 13 – academy teachers at rock shelter**

## Teachers

With respect to broad issues, these teachers were able to integrate elements of *Investigating Shelter* and *Investigating a Shotgun House* into their on-going social studies and language arts curricula. They said that using primary sources was a rich experience for their students, and they reported that their students were able to tie what they had learned into their tested content.

Our research results suggest that these teachers did not use inquiry to its fullest potential, however. Like other studies, ours found that inquiry is a challenging instructional approach, especially if teachers have not had training and practice in doing it. Despite this, neither the teachers nor their students reported having serious problems with the unit's inquiry aspects.

### Slide 14 – historic photo analysis sheet

In terms of concrete issues, time constraints posed a significant challenge. The *Investigating Shelter* curriculum guide estimates instructional time at one month (or about 18 hours). Our teachers reported instructional times ranging from a low of 18.75 hours to a high of 45 hours.

Because of these time constraints, the teachers made adjustments, and thus content coverage varied. For example, they eliminated particular lessons they considered redundant; left out entire sections; or chose to focus almost exclusively on the *Shotgun House* case study. Only one teacher taught all of the lessons.

Now for the students.

### Slide 15 – girl in pink

## Students

We searched student interview transcripts for evidence of their understanding of the past; and how that understanding influenced their ideas about preservation issues.

### First - Students' Understanding of the Past

We found that archaeological study was a powerful tool for introducing concepts and skills specific to inquiry, and basic to historical thinking - agency, cause and effect, chronology, evidence, and perspective.

Let's examine perspective in more detail, because it's here that our findings are the most compelling.

A number of scholars have pointed out that perspective recognition requires empathy. But empathy is influenced by personal identities. So we expected that personal identity, with respect to both class and race, would influence these students' perspective about the people who lived in these shotgun houses. And it did, although not necessarily in the ways we anticipated.

One.

### **Slide 16 – mary and cissy**

Students tended to identify strongly with the perspectives of people who they saw as similar to them socioeconomically (class) - they saw something of themselves in the people of Davis Bottom, and described their shotgun shelter inquiry as a rare instance in which they studied "just normal people like how we are." This was reflected in all interviews. This level of identification kept students engaged in the on-going inquiry, but it also helped them recognize why Davis Bottom residents saw their history as significant and wanted to preserve it.

Two.

Students also identified with the perspectives of people who were different from them in terms of race and ethnicity. We were surprised and encouraged to learn this, even though, in many ways, their discussions of race were naïve, tending to emphasize the more positive comments in the sources they examined. Their comments showed that they longed to live in a peacefully integrated community like Davis Bottom; and they admired friendship patterns that were not race-based. This was a feature of all but one of the sixty-seven student interviews.

What's so important about this finding?

It represents the impact of an instructional shift: from race as an inevitable *problem* to race as a *fact of human communities*. And we think that at least, in part, this shift appears to be a function of an archaeological emphasis on the guiding question—what can a Davis Bottom shotgun house tell us about the lives of poor, working-class people—and

### **Slide 17 – Davis Bottom archaeology site map**

on archaeological and historical sources (material culture, documents, and oral histories) that provided insider perspectives to help students answer that question.

Moving on to two other points we'd like to make...

*Questions Initiate Inquiry.*

One.

Our findings are similar to others' who note that when historical questions require students "to interpret texts, make connections, solve problems, support or dispute ideas, or ask further questions," students more often ask critical questions related to civic life. Unfortunately, such experiences occur most often in schools with high socioeconomic status and low diversity.

### **Slide 18 – girl in green with artifact slips**

A major contribution of our study is that it shows that students who attend low socioeconomic status schools (although still with low diversity) also can enjoy and benefit from inquiry-based instruction. Teachers' reports and our own observations showed that, with the scaffolding built into the *Shotgun House* case study, students had little difficulty in using multiple material culture and documentary sources to build evidence-based historical interpretations or in connecting their study to a preservation ethic.

WOW.

*Sources Shape Interpretation.*

Two.

As powerful as the guiding question was in shaping student inquiry, material objects,

### **Slide 19 – Davis Bottom privy profile and artifacts**

documents, and oral histories also shaped these students' responses. An archaeological emphasis, in particular, provided material evidence of residents' habits and activities.

We should note that few of the sources in *Investigating a Shotgun House* presented outsiders' analyses of the community or approached its existence as a problem. These

sources privileged, for example, the lives of Davis Bottom's children and the community's perspective about the road.

This was a purposeful decision on our part during development of the *Shotgun House* case study. We did not include sources that stereotyped or denigrated the neighborhood, or used derogatory terms to describe it, like "slum." If anything, the perspectives represented in these sources led students to romanticize rather than demonize Davis Bottom. Despite this fact, the photographs certainly showed how poor the community would have looked to outsiders,

### **Slide 20 – census data**

and the census data revealed the menial jobs held by residents. Still, in all but one 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, students looked beyond houses in disrepair and wage labor jobs to search out details of lives whose historical significance, they concluded, should be remembered.

These sources also presented governmental encroachment—road widening and the resultant demolition of houses—and the residents' wish for some way of preserving their history, as the problem space in a peacefully integrated, fully functioning, poor working-class community. Thus, the students' study of Davis Bottom offered an alternative to the common conception/prevaling local attitudes of racial identity and racial separation.

Now let's move to our second analytical question, concerning students' ideas about preservation and civic agency.

### **Slide 21 – why preserve a shotgun page**

#### Second - Students' Ideas about Preservation and Civic Agency

Students were strongly in favor of preserving aspects of ordinary people's lives and recognizing histories that might otherwise be invisible. They identified a moral/ethical component to preservation. The majority thought it was a bad idea to demolish Davis Bottom to make way for a major road - not just because a significant history and community would be lost, but because this would not have happened to a wealthier community.

Despite their concern that Davis Bottom would be destroyed, students struggled to explain what alternatives might have been available to people on any of the various sides of this public issue, or how citizens might have intervened at any point over the

years. Students knew that people could complain to “the government,” but they were not exactly sure what that meant.

Students also struggled with civic agency, and civic agency is a significant part of *Investigating a Shotgun House*. That part, however, was the most frequently omitted portion of the unit. Thus, it is unclear how these students would have performed, had they worked through the relevant portions of the unit. It remains to be seen what impact those lessons would have had.

## CHALLENGES

### Slide 22 – kids with map on the floor

As promising as our results are, we should mention some of the challenges our study uncovered.

Welcome to the real world!

These teachers’ instruction was governed by time (or its lack) and by curricular constraints imposed by mandated state and national standards. It also was impacted by administrative support (or its lack). We need to remember that it is not enough to train teachers in inquiry. Administrators need to understand and value unfamiliar pedagogies, too.

Weather delays stretched out project implementation way *way* beyond what we had planned. We worried that student attention would wander and that enthusiasm would wane.

However, the bad weather was a gift, of sorts. We were able to see that teachers could adapt *Investigating a Shotgun House* easily to different time constraints.

But perhaps the best outcome was that the bad weather revealed the unit’s staying power. Instead of wishing the unit was over, students wished similar studies were in their future. This unit sustained interest despite interruptions and over sometimes quite long periods of time, which serves as a testimony to its motivational power.

That said, the civic connections were the first to go when time was an issue (and sometimes when it was not). This could simply have been a matter of omitting the civic connections because they came at the end of the unit. If so, that’s an easy fix – just move some of these connections to earlier in the unit.

However, we suspect that ditching the civic connections had less to do with time and more to do with teachers' lack of comfort with teaching civic connections.

These teachers were using a new curriculum in the classroom for the first time, and in several cases, also instructing in a new content area - archaeology. So it is not particularly surprising that they were not always using inquiry to its full potential, or that they might have skipped lessons they perceived as more discomfoting.

It also was challenging for these established teachers to change their teaching style to inquiry and move out of their pedagogical comfort zone. Teachers need scaffolding to approach inquiry confidently. We hypothesize that this is even more the case with teaching civic engagement.

### **Slide 23 – Susan Walton's mural**

#### **"AND NOW THIS," AS JOHN OLIVER WOULD SAY...**

Studying shelter involves studying the people sheltered: the size and composition of households, the impacts (for good or ill) of the shelter type on the lives lived within it, and the day-to-day social, cultural, and economic activities of residents of all ages and statuses. We hope we have illustrated how, considered in this manner, shelter is, indeed, an emotionally charged topic.

But so what?

Two points.

Research in education has documented that a single experience may motivate student interest and introduce or expand knowledge and skills, but it rarely fundamentally and permanently changes students' perception of history (or in this case, archaeology, the challenges of site protection and preservation, and the role students should play as citizens in making decisions regarding the preservation of our cultural resources).

And that may be true of the students who experienced the *Investigating a Shotgun House* unit. These students may not necessarily apply their analyses of race relations in Davis Bottom to future encounters across racial boundaries in their *own* lives. But our study does show that *Investigating a Shotgun House* offers curricular space for a necessary conversation about race and class; and that it challenges students to think about the issues surrounding site protection and preservation of our historic resources. And we think these are good things.

We'd like to close by saying...

#### **Slide 24 – Davis Bottom shotgun houses then and now**

In the general media, students are exposed to issues concerning “Save the .... Fill in the blanks Whales; Planet; whatever.” Our pre-instruction survey showed that students are not blank slates when it comes to issues relating to site protection and preservation (although perhaps not specifically about looting and the collecting of artifacts from prehistoric sites).

Students know that stealing is wrong. They know that something, if it's important, should be saved. In some cases, they also know that saving our heritage is influenced by financial considerations, such that looting objects to sell for money in a depressed economic situation trumps historic preservation and site protection.

The important issue here is not for students to come away from curricular experiences like *Investigating Shelter* thinking that every archaeological site or every historic building must be saved. What they need to be exposed to (and we would contend, adults in the general public as well) are issues relating to sustainable development. They need opportunities to be introduced to what it means to strike a balance between the living and the needs to preserve the past, and how to take into consideration the historical merit of archaeological sites and historic structures, and understand the ways in which the old and new can be blended. Understanding the historic context of an archaeological site provides them with the information they need to understand what should be preserved for the future.

Our study shows that students as young as elementary school can manage the conversation and should be exposed to the ambiguity of the kinds of answers that are realistic when it comes to site protection and preservation.

We know of no other curriculum available today that considers these themes in site protection and preservation in such a manner as *Project Archaeology: Investigating Shelter*.