



PA's NATIONAL HERITAGE AREAS ARE STEWARDS OF AMERICAN HISTORY

National Heritage Areas (NHAs) marry heritage, conservation, recreation, and economic development to tell nationally significant stories that connect people to places. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan signed the first NHA into law, calling it a “new kind of national park.” Today, there are 49 NHAs in the country and five in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania’s NHAs include the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, Lackawanna Heritage Valley, Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, Schuylkill River National Heritage Area and Oil Region Alliance. According to a recent evaluation, 26% of federal funding received by PA’s NHAs is dedicated to education. NHAs build place esteem through educational programming that helps children and adults understand how the unique heritage of their region contributed to the development of the country. Programs that instill pride in place and appreciation for history would be eliminated in the President’s Fiscal Year 18 federal budget proposal, resulting in a negative impact on 56% of Pennsylvania residents.

Scranton-based Lackawanna Heritage Valley Area supports an award-winning Summer Heritage Passport Program designed to familiarize children with their community, heritage and environment. They also support *Railroads, Rivers & You*, developed by Steamtown National Historic Site and featuring hands-on activities and demonstrations at Steamtown and along the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail. The Oil Heritage Region, headquartered in Oil City, hosts high school student re-enactors who serve teas at the now fully restored Tarbell House in Titusville. Within the past year, Pittsburgh’s Rivers of Steel NHA acquired RiverQuest, a floating environmental education vessel and program, and its ship, Explorer. In Pottstown, Schuylkill River NHA has the Schuylkill Explorers program for elementary aged (grades K-8) student groups to explore the Schuylkill River Trail, learn about the Schuylkill River's history and environment, and to develop an awareness of watershed protection.

One of Pennsylvania’s best local history curriculum was launched eleven years ago by the Easton-based Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor (D&L).

The D&L began developing the Tales of the Towpath elementary school curriculum in 2006. It had no idea how it would be received. “We thought we had a good product,” says D&L Education Manager, Dennis Scholl, who was one of 16 members of the curriculum’s development committee, “but the concept was brand new in our area; a curriculum based on a children’s storybook. We had our fingers crossed.”

Today, Tales of the Towpath is alive and thriving in the D&L’s five eastern Pennsylvania counties, where 20 public school districts and two private schools – 80 elementary schools in all – use the curriculum to teach lessons about America’s 19th-century canals and industries. More than 6,500 fourth-grade students annually. A total of 32,000 students have participated to date.

The history is engaging, primarily because it’s introduced through the eyes of a friendly, adventurous, albeit fictitious, 10-year-old storybook character named Finn Gorman, an Irish boy who guides his

readers up and down the Corridor's Lehigh and Delaware canals, with stops at coal mines, lumber camps, blast furnaces, towns big and small, and even America's first "long-distance" railroad, the Switchback Gravity Railroad in old Mauch Chunk, now called Jim Thorpe in honor of the great American athlete buried there.

Tales of the Towpath was named Pennsylvania's Outstanding Social Studies Program in 2011. School administrators and teachers who instruct the curriculum like that they can teach local history in the context of its importance to the development of Pennsylvania and the growth of the United States. Students up and down the Corridor learn, for example, that they live within one or two hours of the canals, coal mines, and pig-iron furnaces that drew millions of immigrant workers from overseas and eventually catapulted America to the top of the world's industrial leaders.

"The teaching of this curriculum is an asset to the elementary schools in our district," says Nikki Giannaras, a fourth-grade teacher at Hanover Elementary School in Bethlehem, PA. "Students learn about the struggles of making a new, productive life in a new country, along with learning life lessons about friendship and hard work, lessons that need to be reinforced in today's society. It's important that we enlighten our students about the past and its importance in our lives today."

The D&L offers all curriculum components – student books, reproduction period trunks and artifacts, teacher manuals, teacher training – free of charge thanks to more than \$215,000 in public (including the National Park Service), corporate, and private grants since 2006. The D&L has subsequently raised an additional \$85,000 from schools that wanted to own their own materials, money that the D&L has used to recruit and equip new schools.

The curriculum also includes a highly interactive website and two related student field trips in Easton's Hugh Moore Park and in nearby Freemansburg, PA, where the D&L has turned a collection of original and restored canal structures into a canal education center. The two trips attract 3,500 students annually, grossing the D&L approximately \$35,000 a year, a portion of which is paid to a corps of trained field trip docents.

"I feel that the Tales curriculum has made a big impact on our fourth graders' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of local history," says Lisa Gridley, who has been instructing the curriculum for eight years at Pfaff Elementary School in Quakertown, PA. "Overall, we have found that our students are interested and highly engaged. The book, the boat ride and other activities on the field trip; those are things that children talk about for years to come."

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