

## The Outer Banks Brogue

*“We’re losing our heritage basically. I mean...we’re going from a fishing community to more like a tourism community...And you don’t realize it, but you slowly adapt to a new way of life. And it ain’t nothing negative, but it ain’t nothing positive.” –Bubby Boos, resident of Ocracoke Island*

### Overview

North Carolina’s Outer Banks is one of the most geographically, historically, and culturally distinct areas in the state and along the entire Atlantic Seaboard. In this lesson, students will explore one of the more distinctive aspects that makes the North Carolina coastal area so culturally rich – its dialect. For several centuries, the small villages dotting the barrier islands of North Carolina and the adjacent coastal mainland harbored one of the most distinctive varieties of English in the United States, the so-called “Outer Banks Brogue.” Through reading, discussion, and interaction with audio and visual clips, students will not only have the chance to hear the Brogue, but also begin to think about how the history and geography of North Carolina resulted in such diverse language qualities. Students will culminate their exploration by experimenting with a long-time Outer Banks tradition – storytelling – in which they practice integrating some of the unique words and pronunciations of the region.

### Grade

8

### NC Essential Standards

- 8.H.3.2 - Explain how changes brought about by technology and other innovations affected individuals and groups in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.3.4 - Compare historical and contemporary issues to understand continuity and change in the development of North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.G.1.1 - Explain how location and place have presented opportunities and challenges for the movement of people, goods, and ideas in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.G.1.2 - Understand the human and physical characteristics of regions in North Carolina and the United States (e.g. physical features, culture, political organization and ethnic make-up).
- 8.G.1.3 - Explain how human and environmental interaction affected quality of life and settlement patterns in North Carolina and the United States (e.g. environmental disasters, infrastructure development, coastal restoration and alternative sources of energy).
- 8.C.1.3 - Summarize the contributions of particular groups to the development of North Carolina and the United States.

### Essential Questions

- How has the geography of North Carolina’s Outer Banks make it distinct?
- What are some of the most prominent historical occurrences that took place in the Outer Banks?
- Why does North Carolina have such a diversity of dialects?
- What is the Outer Banks Brogue?
- In what way did the history and geography of the Outer Banks lead to the distinctive dialect of the Outer Banks Brogue?
- Why is the Outer Banks Brogue receding, with fewer residents speaking in this dialect?

### Materials

- “The Outer Banks Brogue,” reading and corresponding questions attached
  - This excerpt is from *Talkin’ Tar Heel: How Our Voices Tell the Story of North Carolina*, by Walt Wolfram and Jeffrey Reaser
  - For information on purchasing the book *Talkin’ Tar Heel: How Our Voices Tell the Story of North Carolina*, and to access numerous audio and video files, go to <http://www.talkintarheel.com/>
- *Sayin’ a Word*, quote (for projection or handing out) attached
- Ocracoke and Core Banks Island dictionary strips, attached
- **Optional Resource:** For teachers interested in exploring North Carolina dialects further, a multimedia dialect awareness curriculum, *Voices of North Carolina*, is available for free. Download the materials at [http://www.ncsu.edu/linguistics/research\\_dialecteducation.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/linguistics/research_dialecteducation.php)

### Duration

1 class period

### Procedure

#### The Outer Banks Brogue

1. As a warm-up, tell students you are going to play them a one-minute clip and you want them to simply listen and write down their reactions to the voice they hear. Ask them to think about where this person is from and to also see if they can summarize what he is saying. The clip is available at <http://www.talkintarheel.com/chapter/5/audio5-7.php>. Discuss:
  - How would you describe the voice you heard? Did you have a hard time understanding him? Why or why not?
  - Is there anything recognizable about the voice in terms of particular words, accents, etc.?
  - Who does he sound like? Where do you think this person is from and what makes you think this?
2. If no student has guessed, let them know that the man they heard speaking is from the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Ask students if any of them have been to the Outer Banks, have relatives there, etc. Also ask students to begin sharing what they already know about the Outer Banks (both geographically, historically, etc.) Let students know that in today’s lesson, they will be learning more about the Outer Banks, particularly the distinct dialect that is still present in some areas of the region, called the Outer Banks Brogue. As an introduction to the Brogue, play the following clip from CBS This Morning <http://www.talkintarheel.com/chapter/5/video5-6.php> (3 minutes) and afterwards discuss:
  - Why do you think Dr. Wolfram, an NC State professor, says North Carolina is like “dialect heaven?” Have you ever considered all of the different ways people speak in this state?
  - Based on the residents that spoke in the clip, how would you describe the Outer Banks Brogue? Does it surprise you that people speak so differently across the state, depending on where they live?
  - What leads to such dialect diversity? What do you think may have led to the Brogue way of speaking in Ocracoke and the Outer Banks?
  - What is happening to the Outer Banks Brogue and why?
  - The news anchors say “homogeneity is boring.” What do they mean?
3. Pass out the attached reading and corresponding questions on “The Outer Banks Brogue” for completion (this can be done individually or in partners.) Once finished, discuss the questions as a class to ensure comprehension:
  - How does the geography of the Outer Banks make it distinct?
  - What are some historical occurrences you know about that took place in the Outer Banks?
    - Teachers can use this as a quick review of some of the most compelling Outer Banks history. The article mentions Virginia Dare and the Lost Colony, Blackbeard, the Wright Brothers, the Graveyard of the Atlantic, the Underground Railroad, the Pea Island Life Savers, and the Roanoke Island Freedmen’s Colony. (Lesson plans on many of these topics can be found in the Carolina K-12’s Database at <http://database.civics.unc.edu/lesson/?s=&course=8th-grade-social-studies>)

- What drives today's Outer Banks economy?
- In what way did the history and geography of OBX lead to a distinctive dialect, the "Brogue?"
- Which dialects is Brogue often confused with, despite the fact that these are life-long residents of North Carolina?
- Why is the Outer Banks Brogue receding, with fewer and fewer residents speaking in this dialect?
- What seems to explain why some people do still speak Brogue?

### **Sayin' A Word in the Outer Banks**

- Next, point out to students that in addition to and related to the Brogue dialect, a tradition of storytelling and folklore also exists with the Outer Banks. (Teachers might connect this to the similar type of traditions connected to Mountain culture.) Project the attached quote from *Talkin' Tar Heel* and read it out loud to the class for discussion:
  - "People on the Outer Banks who have a propensity for talking or have a reputation as a good storytellers are described as *sayin' a word*. But the meaning of all the words they use may not be apparent to outsiders or, in some cases, even to people from other regions of the Outer Banks. The general vocabulary of the Outer Banks includes hundreds of distinct words, some used generally up and down the islands and others restricted to local residents of a particular community." (p. 114)
  - Discuss:
    - What does it mean if you are *sayin' a word* in the Outer Banks?
    - Similar to the unique dialect, why do you think certain words that are used in the Outer Banks may be unfamiliar to residents in the Mountains or Piedmont, and in other states?
    - Do you think this is true for all North Carolina regions? Explain. What causes people in particular regions/communities to utilize words in different ways or unrecognizable ways to "outsiders?"
    - Why is storytelling so important to people of a similar group (e.g., a family or community), culture or location?
      - Discuss with students how storytelling is a way people tell about their history, culture, life, etc. It also becomes a means for preserving certain memories, culture and heritage.
    - Have you ever heard any Outer Banks residents tell a story? What about a North Carolinian from another region? What characteristics do you typically associate with a good storyteller?
- Tell students that they are going to see an example an Ocracoke resident telling a story as you play a 3 min., 9 sec. video, available at <http://dialectblog.com/2011/07/07/ocracoke-brogue/> (this is the second video on the page.) After watching, discuss:
  - What was the story about?
  - What made the story humorous?
  - What sense did you get of the storyteller's personality based on how he talks and the story he tells?
  - Even though you might consider the story teller to be different than you (e.g., perhaps because of how he speaks or where he lives), what makes him so likable?
  - How would you describe the dialects of the speakers? Did you hear any Brogue sounds?
    - There are some slightly brogue-like markers in their accent. For example, they occasionally exhibit raised pronunciations of the vowel in PRICE and MOUTH (as in Irish or some West Country English) so that they sound more like "prois" or "maith." But it's also clear that many features of mainstream Southern English have made their way onto the island. (Source: <http://dialectblog.com/2011/07/07/ocracoke-brogue/>)
- Tell students they are going to practice their own ability to *say a word*. Break students into small groups and provide each group with one of the attached strips containing words from the Ocracoke Island and Core Banks Island dictionary. Using the words provided, groups will need to create part of a short story that involves the words, as well as cultural or interesting aspects of the Outer Banks based on what they have learned in class thus far and their prior knowledge. A suggested length is roughly 1-2 paragraphs. Upon completion of their story snippet, groups will be asked to share. Options for sharing include:

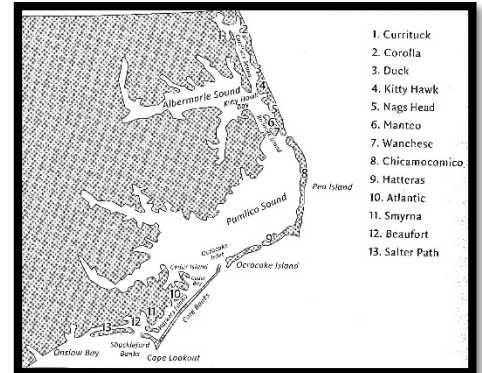
- Have each group select a narrator who reads the story for the rest of the class. Encourage student readers to try and incorporate the type of personality, energy and drama they witnessed in the oyster story.
  - Have the initial “writing groups” reassemble themselves into new “sharing groups” with entirely new members. Each student will then take a turn in the new group reading their first group’s story.
7. Once students have had time to create their short story excerpt and are ready to share, instruct students that they have a job when listening to the stories. As each group is presenting, the audience is challenged with the task of identifying the three words from the Ocracoke Island and Core Banks Island dictionary, as well as to try to glean each word’s meaning. After each presentation, (either as a class or in the small “sharing” groups), students will share their guesses, after which the storyteller will confirm the words and meanings.
- **Optional:** Another unique aspect of Outer Banks speech is what they call “talking backwards.” Play the following clip (1:26 minutes) which describes this: <http://www.talkintarheel.com/chapter/5/video5-5.php>. After the clip, discuss:
- What to Outer Banks residents mean by “talk backwards” or in not saying what they mean?
  - Have you ever heard anyone talk this way? (If so, ask students to share examples.) Have you ever heard someone say something like, “That concert was wicked” or “That party was sick?” If so, what are they really trying to say?

Teachers can further have students return to their original writing groups and instruct them to go back through the stories they created and rewrite parts of it so that they are “talking backwards.” Teachers can solicit a few volunteers to share the new story versions.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Excerpt from *Talkin' Tar Heel: How Our Voices Tell the Story of North Carolina* The Outer Banks Brogue

Despite its ecological vulnerability, the 200-mile stretch of sandy barrier islands off the coast of North Carolina, fashionably abbreviated as OBX on signs and decals, is one of the most geographically, historically, and culturally distinct areas along the Atlantic Seaboard. The Outer Banks islands extend about half the length of the state, stretching from Corolla near the Virginia border in the north to Harkers Island by the Core Sound and Back Sound in the south. These islands separate the lagoon-like areas, or sounds, of the Atlantic Ocean from the mainland by as little as a few hundred yards to as much as thirty miles. Technically, a sound, derived from the Old English word for "swimming" (*sund* or *sunde*), is a stretch of water between the mainland and the ocean, but the technical distinctions between a sound, bay, strait, cove, inlet, and so forth are not preserved in the arbitrary naming conventions on our maps. Along the coast of North Carolina, the larger bodies of water standing between islands and the Atlantic Ocean are called sounds and the term bay is reserved for smaller, local indentations of water such as Cedar Bay in Manteo, Kitty Hawk Bay, or Onslow Bay between Cape Lookout and Cape Fear.



The Outer Banks is replete with history, including its status as the site of the first English settlement, the birth of the first person of English descent (Virginia Dare, born August 18, 1587), the infamous Lost Colony, the base and death of the fabled pirate William Teach (better known as Blackbeard), the Wright brothers' first flight, and a fleet of offshore shipwrecks in the Atlantic Gulf Stream that have led it to be labeled "The Graveyard of the Atlantic."

Lesser known, but just as significant, these estuaries provided a maritime route of the Underground Railroad for escaping slaves, the site of the Freedmen's Colony on Roanoke Island, and the location of the first all-black lifesaving station on Pea Island that served from 1880 until 1947. That's a lot of history for a small set of barrier islands that was the domicile for only a few thousand residents until its emergence as a prime tourist attraction in the latter half of the twentieth century. Even today, the permanent population on the Outer Banks is only about 30,000, well under a half percent of North Carolina's population.

Notwithstanding the Outer Banks' impressive history, the current economy and culture is driven by the extensive and pristine beaches and surf, recreational activities on the sounds, and deep-sea fishing. The recognition of the beach on Ocracoke Island as the "Best Beach in the United States" on June 8, 2007, by "Dr. Beach" marked a symbolic landmark of recognition for this narrow barrier island, completing its transformation from a once-obscure village site based on a marine-subsistence economy into one of the Atlantic coast's most popular tourist sites. As the national television crews descended on Ocracoke to broadcast the announcement of this prestigious award, they claimed that they "didn't know where to find it on the map," and Dr. Beach himself proclaimed that "it's not the end of the world, but you can see it from here."

For a couple of centuries, the small villages dotting the barrier islands of North Carolina and the adjacent coastal mainland have harbored one of the most distinctive varieties of English in the United States, the so-called Outer Banks Brogue, a word borrowed from the Irish word *barroq*, meaning "twisted tongue." A number of dialect situations may be described by this label, but it seems that only on the Outer Banks is it becoming a proper noun referred to simply as the brogue. Mainland North Carolinians and other visitors have recognized this distinctive variety, and islanders themselves have become accustomed to its unique status thanks to regular comments about their speech by outsiders. As one native Outer Banks resident experienced:

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"This man and woman walked in and I was like, 'Hi, how are y'all,' you know, and they walked around and stuff and everything, and the lady come up and she said, 'Speak!' And I said, 'Excuse me?' She's like, 'Speak!' And I said, 'Whatdoyou mean, speak? I'm talking to you right now.' 'No! You have this way that y'all are supposed to talk down here. Speak!' And I'm like, 'Ma'am, this is the way I talk. I've lived here thirty some years,' I said, 'and I've always talked like this.' So that was basically about the story: she wanted me to speak and I got ready to say, 'Well, you gonna give me a biscuit and I'll be glad to speak.'"

If enough people keep telling you that you have a distinctive way of talking, eventually you will start believing it and accept it as part of your character and community.

Various terms have been used to describe the dialect of the Outer Banks, including "Banker speech" and "Hoi Toider speech," though the most common term used by native islanders is the brogue. The Outer Banks Brogue is arguably one of the United States' most distinctive dialects. It is also one of the few dialects spoken in the nation that is commonly misidentified as British ... or Australian ... or Irish. Islanders commonly recount stories of tourists asking them what country they are from and acting confused when they respond "right here." The brogue elicits a wide range of comments from people trying to guess where it comes from, but most first time listeners think that it is from Australia or England, usually in the southwest of England where they pronounce their *r*'s in words like *ear* or *far*.

The other part of the story about Outer Banks English is the way in which it is receding, including the commodified status it now has even for natives. To give some historical context, remember that the Outer Banks was the site of the Wright brothers' historic first controlled, powered flight in Kitty Hawk in 1903. The first flight took place on an isolated barrier island in a linguistic context resonating with the sounds of the Outer Banks dialect tradition. In fact, the local residents would have referred to the "Wrights" as *Wroits* and "flight" as *fioit*, leaving little doubt about the distinctive dialect surrounding the rudimentary airstrip for a breakthrough aeronautical achievement. The clash of traditional language and technical innovation represented on that occasion has been taking place ever since on these barrier islands as an inundation of tourists and outsiders has flooded the sandbars of the traditional, marine-based culture to change it forever.

Though the brogue was once spoken by the majority of the residents born and raised on the Outer Banks, this is certainly no longer the case. In some areas, particularly the northern islands of the Outer Banks, the vast majority of property is now owned by outsiders and beach development has made ancestral islanders an endangered species. In places like Corolla, Kitty Hawk, and Nags Head, it is hard to find representative traditional brogue speakers. In concentrated communities that retain a community base of ancestral islanders and a few traditional marine-based occupations, brogue speakers can be found if you know where older locals hang out - the fish house, the local convenience store, or a separate building in someone's backyard where local men might congregate to play cards, eat fish caught earlier in the day, and have a few drinks. Because of the rapid change, it is mostly older people who speak the traditional dialect, though there are some middle-aged and even a few younger speakers who have embraced it. Reasons for the retention of the brogue by speakers from diverse communities along the Outer Banks can be quite complex but often relate to a strong sense of island identity. (*Source: Talkin' Tar Heel; edited from pages 101-107*)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### **The Outer Banks Brogue**

1. How does the geography of the Outer Banks make it distinct?
2. What are some of the most compelling and/or lesser known historical events that took place in the Outer Banks?
3. What drives today's Outer Banks economy?
4. In what way did the history and geography of OBX lead to a distinctive dialect, the "Brogue?"
5. Which dialects is Brogue often confused with, despite the fact that these are life-long residents of North Carolina?
6. Why is the Outer Banks Brogue receding, with fewer residents speaking in this dialect?
7. What seems to determine why some people do still speak Brogue?

### ***Sayin' a Word***

People on the Outer Banks who have a propensity for talking or have a reputation as good storytellers are described as *sayin' a word*. But the meaning of all the words they use may not be apparent to outsiders or, in some cases, even to people from other regions of the Outer Banks. The general vocabulary of the Outer Banks includes hundreds of distinct words, some used generally up and down the islands and others restricted to local residents of a particular community. (*Talkin' Tar Heel*, p. 114)



## Ocracoke Island and Core Banks Island Dictionary

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Backhouse – Outhouse or privy

Doast – A cold or influenza

Drime – Calling one's bluff, deceiving

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Mash – To press, smash.

Buck – A good friend, usually a male

Cattywampus – Crooked, not square, diagonal

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Pizer – Porch

Directly – In a little while

Chunk – Throw, particularly natural objects

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Crowd – Group of two or more people

Goaty – Foul smelling. From the bad smell of a goat.

Off – Not on the island, not from that area

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Whopperjawed – Crooked, not square, diagonal

Across the beach – On the beach by the ocean

Creek – A small inlet running from the sound through the island

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Away – At a different location, someone who lives off-island

Mommucked – To shred or tear apart

Dingbatter – Outsider; foreigner

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Quamish – uneasy; upset

Dit-dot – Outsider; foreigner

Slickcam – Smooth water