

# The Ground on Which I Stand

A Visual Storytelling Program Exploring Personal Historical Journeys



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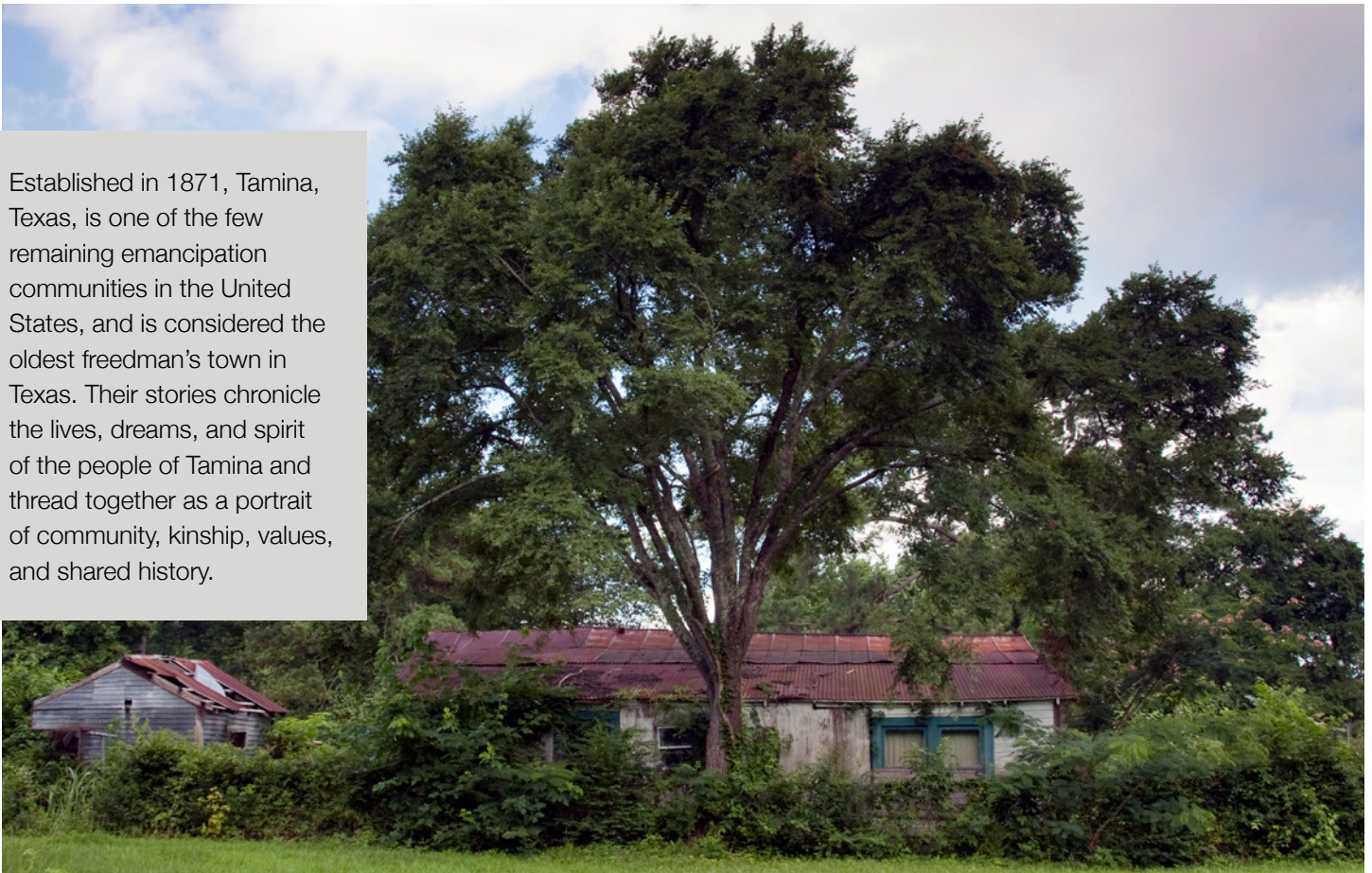
# The Ground on Which I Stand

## A Visual Storytelling Program Exploring Personal Historical Journeys

Tamina, Texas, is a deeply rooted community established by freed slaves 150 years ago. We invite you to explore its many rich lessons with your students, through visually-told stories and the oral histories of its residents.

Use their inspiring stories to create oral history projects within your classroom. This educational traveling kit includes easily transported and assembled pop-up exhibit banners; copies of *The Ground on Which I Stand*; and a flash drive with a Tamina slideshow, a curriculum suitable for all ages, student worksheets, and resource links. There also is a companion website for virtual learning and research.

Established in 1871, Tamina, Texas, is one of the few remaining emancipation communities in the United States, and is considered the oldest freedman's town in Texas. Their stories chronicle the lives, dreams, and spirit of the people of Tamina and thread together as a portrait of community, kinship, values, and shared history.



# Visual Storytelling Program Overview

The Ground on Which I Stand Educational Traveling Kit includes pop-up exhibit banners, two copies of *The Ground on Which I Stand*, and a flash drive with teacher resources. The entire kit is crated for easy maneuvering. Additionally, there is a companion website, [www.TaminaTexas.com](http://www.TaminaTexas.com), which offers a historical overview of Tamina, stories told by residents, video footage, and teacher resources.



## Pop-up Exhibit Banners

3' x 7'

Five double-sided pop-up exhibit banners include an overview to Tamina's history and 9 abridged oral histories as told by residents of Tamina.



## *The Ground on Which I Stand, Second Edition*

176 pages, 8.5 x 11, soft cover, with oral history curriculum, published by Texas A&M Press.

*The Ground on Which I Stand* offers essays, a historical background, and the unabridged oral histories of 12 families, told in their own words. The oral history curriculum addendum can be modified for all ages, elementary grades through college.



## Flash Drive

The flash drive includes a Tamina slideshow, a curriculum suitable for all ages, student worksheets, and resource links.



## [www.TaminaTexas.com](http://www.TaminaTexas.com)

This website features slideshows, a historical overview of Tamina, abridged stories told by residents, video footage, and teacher resources. For those who are teaching virtually, this resource offers all the needed information to create an oral history project for their students.

# Pop-up Exhibit Banner Details



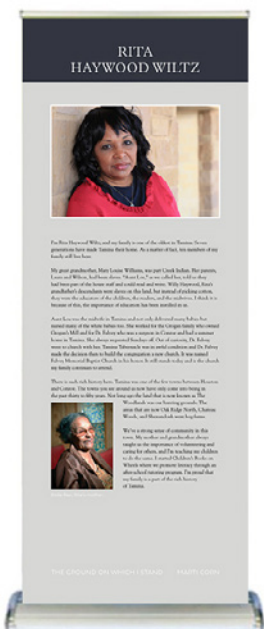
## Introduction to Tamina

Founded in 1871, Tamina was first known as Tammany and was established by families arriving from across the south.

Located north of Houston and ten miles south of Conroe, Tammany (as it was initially named) was an ideal location—property could be purchased inexpensively and work could be found in Montgomery County’s growing logging industry. Here, they built their homes, churches, a one-room school house, and a general store. They raised hogs and tilled their own land. Gradually, the town’s name changed to Tamina, though many residents continue to use the original pronunciation.

While Tamina remains a rural town with small-town values, the residents are surrounded with opportunities only larger cities can offer. Their children now attend some of the best schools in the country, employment opportunities surround them, entertainment and cultural events are a stone’s throw away, and the faith-based community and services in the surrounding areas are there to offer assistance. However, they lack infrastructure that allows them to thrive.

The residents share the stories of their ancestors, their own lives, and the tightly-knit community for which they care so much.



## Rita Haywood Wiltz

I’m Rita Haywood Wiltz, and my family was among the founders of Tamina. Seven generations have made Tamina their home. As a matter of fact, ten members of my family still live here.

My great grandmother, Mary Louise Williams, was part Creek Indian. Her parents, Laura and Wilson, had been slaves. “Aunt Lou,” as we called her, told us they were part of the house staff and could read and write. The ancestors of my grandfather were slaves on this land. Instead of picking cotton though, they were the educators of the children and the midwives. I think it is because of this, the importance of education has been instilled in us.

There is such rich history here. Tamina once was one of the few towns between Houston and Conroe. The towns you see around us now have only come into being in the past thirty to fifty years. Not long ago the land that is now known as The Woodlands was our hunting grounds. The areas that are now Oak Ridge North, Chateau Woods, and Shenandoah were hog farms.

We’ve a strong sense of community in this town. My mother and grandmother always taught us the importance of volunteering and caring for others, and I’m teaching my children to do the same. I started Children’s Books on Wheels where we promote literacy through an after-school tutoring program. I’m proud that my family is a part of the rich history of Tamina.

# Pop-up Exhibit Banner Details



## Barry Schuster

My family lived in Houston 'til I was 13 or 14, but my mother didn't want to raise me, my six older brothers, and baby sister in the big city. So, in 1968, we followed my grandfather to Tamina. We got our own property, cleared it, and built a house.

To help me feel at home, my mother bought me my first horse. My, it was a real ugly horse, loaded with cockleburs. I shaved off every bit of his hair and mane to get rid of them. He was a sight. A miracle happened when it grew back though, and I found I had a beautiful Welsh horse.

I taught myself to ride by watching old Westerns and spending a lot of time in the saddle riding through the woods and the unpaved red dirt roads. I fell in love with horses, and I've been messing with them ever since.

In 2003, I started the Tamina Trail Blazers. We have a yearly ride just before Thanksgiving. It starts with a big barbecue Friday night. Saturday morning we get the horses groomed and ready and get the ride started. It means a lot to see kids coming out there wrapped up on a horse with their daddies. The two-year-olds and other little ones ride in a horse-drawn cart filled with hay. It's family time with smiles and laughs. It's a beautiful way that Tamina can keep tight with the kids.



## Molly Brown

I've been here all my life—that's been seventy-four years. I was born September 7, 1938. Tamina was once a big place. Back when I was a little girl, it went all the way north up to Minnox, east to the San Jacinto River, all the way west to Magnolia, and south to a little place called Halton, which was just shy of Rayford. There was a sawmill on this spot on Tamina Road before I was born, way before the Grogan's came here.

There were probably twenty-five or thirty kids that went to the Phyllis Wheatley one-room school. We went there until we were promoted to the seventh grade. Annie Jenkins was our teacher. She taught everyone, first through sixth grade.

Everybody was real close when I was growing up. If one person killed and cooked a hog, everybody had a piece of meat. My mother taught me to treat

everyone right. "You never know who, down the road, you're going to have to turn to. You treat people the way you want to be treated. If you do, you'll be respected."

To this day, we have no sidewalks. We were told about five years ago the roads were going to be widened and sidewalks would be put in. Money went to fix up David Memorial going down to the stadium, but nothing's been done here. The kids have to walk to school, and I see a lot of people walking to work. They all have to walk on the street. It's real dangerous. I see signs in neighboring towns that says, "We love our kids." Well, we love our kids too. I love all kids, no matter what color. I hate to see anything cruel happen to anybody.

# Pop-up Exhibit Banner Details



## Jaren Chevalier

My name is Jaren Chevalier, and I attend Oak Ridge High School. I'm seventeen.

People are close here in Tamina. When I was younger, people would come from all over the place just to be together, even people you'd swear you've never met before in your life. It doesn't matter if you're related or not, you're still thought of as family. That kind of relationship is really important for the kids in Tamina.

When I was growing up, basketball became real important to me. I used to go to the Tamina Community Park to shoot baskets. First it was because I was kind of lonely for my dad 'cause he wasn't always around. He was busy working and trying to make money for the family, but then I

realized basketball was something I really wanted to do. I loved being on the court. I practiced and practiced, and now I'm a starter on the JV team. It keeps me focused and gives me something to work for. Basketball brought my family together, too. My family has never missed any of my games, and my dad even helped coach my teams when I played in leagues before high school.

I dream about going to college at Georgetown or Syracuse Universities so I can play basketball there. I want to give my kids the things I didn't have, just like my dad has worked hard to give our family what we need.



## Jane Gravis & Dr. Falvey

My grandfather, Dr. Thomas Seymour Falvey, was born in 1874. While he was the first surgeon in Conroe and ran a clinic there, he also owned a summer home in Tamina and became the doctor for the community.

After oil was discovered south of Conroe by George W. Strake in 1931, thousands came in search of their own fortune. My uncle was one of those and drilled for oil in Tamina. Instead of discovering oil though, he struck an artesian well deep underground. It quickly created a lake. My grandfather heard about it, purchased the property, and built a summer house on that land. He became entrenched in this community and brought a line from the artesian well to the road so that those living in Tamina could fill their barrels.

Fifteen years ago, I was invited to go on a trip to Kenya. I fell in love with the land and its people. In the following years, I built an orphanage there, which gave children the opportunity to be raised in loving homes. We dug a well and installed a spigot at the edge of our property, providing water for everyone in the neighboring village.

It was not until recently that I learned about my grandfather's summer home and dedication to those in Tamina. He was providing an African-American community with a water source, and for the past fifteen years, I have been providing water for a community in Kenya. I can't believe there is such a fierce connection between my grandfather and me, and I'm so proud to continue his legacy.

# Pop-up Exhibit Banner Details



## Shirley Grimes

Sunday mornings are what I remember best about living in Tamina as a girl. I would walk down a dirt road to a white church. I always found comfort there, and that church stayed in my mind even after we moved to Houston.

In 1974, after I moved back to Tamina with my husband, Ranson, and our children, we wanted to build our own house. Someone said, “You remember that old church? They’re tearing it down and selling the property.” Well, we bought that land, and my house stands exactly where the church once stood. So, there it is. When I go home, I can walk the land that was so important to me as a girl.

Years later, we bought the property next door, and established the Tamina Community Center where we offer after-school programs for the young kids and the elderly in the neighborhood. It’s all about serving Tamina to keep it strong.

It’s because of the generosity of those living in the surrounding communities and grant rewards that we have been able to sustain and grow this center.

Every day I tell the kids, “there’s no me without you and no you without me.” That’s how my family has lived. That’s how Tamina has stayed a community all these years. We’re in this together. We have to be responsible for each other. This has all been a lot of work, but it’s exciting and points to a good future for Tamina. That’s the number one reason I get up every day.



## Pastor Roger Leveston

My grandfather was the first one in the family to move to Tamina. He even has a street named after him. I was born and raised here. I now reside in Spring, but I’ll always think of Tamina as my home.

I’m an assistant pastor at Falvey Memorial Baptist Church, where Reverend Ginns has been the pastor for more than thirty-six years. Faith plays a very large role in this community.

When I was a kid, churches were considered holy ground in my neighborhood, and churches continue to be important to me which is why I became a pastor. I have to laugh and say that Tamina has almost too many churches. We have two Baptist

churches, one Church of God in Christ, one Church of Christ, and we have one Full Gospel Church. That’s five churches, but they all make up a family, you know?

I can remember the people who used to come to my mom’s house around dinner time. I remember two young guys who came by, and they said, “We’re such and such grandchildren, and we’re hungry.” She didn’t hesitate. She invited them in and fed them, and that’s one thing I always remember about Tamina — the strong sense of community.

# Pop-up Exhibit Banner Details



## Johnny Jones

I started playing piano when I was small. My dad taught all of us, and we had music lessons at school. I sang in the choir too.

When I came home from college during the Christmas holidays, I played with my brother and Lonnie Pitts, who I grew up with. They had guitars, so I got me a keyboard. We were all interested in music. We practiced and played until we finally all got into the same key. We didn't know what key it was, but we were afraid to stop. The three of us put together a band.

I worked for the Union Pacific Railroad during the week to pay my bills but played nights and weekends. One night when we were playing in a club, two young ladies came up all excited and said, "We've never been beside any stars before." And I thought, "Me either." But I had to go along with it. I thought to myself, they have no idea that come Monday, I'll be working on those railroad tracks.

I'm not playing anymore in the band. I spend my days singing in the choir at the Falvey Church and recording Gospel music with Clennis High, one of the original band members.



## Lonnie Pitts

In the 1950s, Tamina was beautiful. There were no towns around us but Rayford and Conroe. It seemed like the land went on and on. In the summertime, I spent most of my time hunting and fishing—deer, coon, rabbit, squirrel. Years later, when the cities were being built around us, the builders would truck in all their trash from the work sites and dump them into our ponds, polluting them so bad all the fish died. We couldn't get anyone to stop them.

The Taylors and the Piersons were the first two families to settle in Tamina back in 1871. That's when the Houston & Great Northern Railroad finished building the tracks from Houston through Montgomery County. My dad told me freed slaves came here from all over—Maryland, Louisiana, Alabama, the Carolinas, and around Texas because of the lumber work they could find. Farming brought people here too. Land could be bought for fifty cents an acre back then.

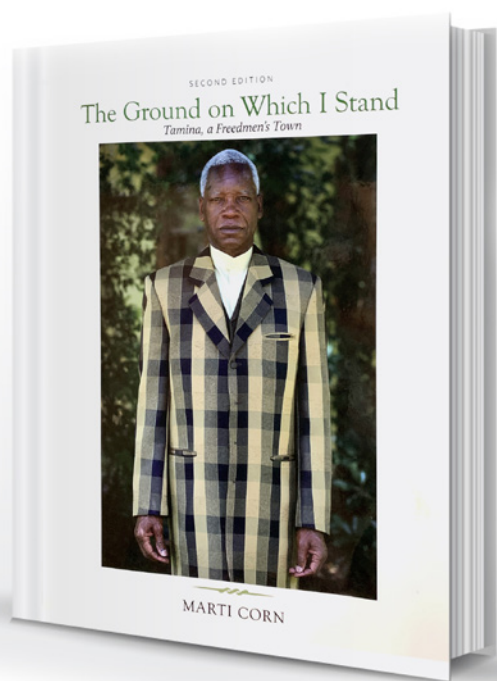
Shenandoah then bought a bunch of my uncle's farmland. When he got old, I guess it was too hard to keep it up. I remember he plowed every bit of that land with one horse. And Oak Ridge High School was built on Miss Evan's hog farm.

A lot is burdening us down. We're worried Tamina won't be here in another ten years. We worry that if Shenandoah or another town close by puts our utilities in, they'll have a reason to annex Tamina and can probably tax the residents of Tamina out. We're about to lose the property from Home Depot to the track. Shenandoah has bought more land to put in a hotel. Tamina's looking to lose that whole parcel of land.

That's why we're scared. If they take this from us, where are we going to live?



# The Ground on Which I Stand Book



Published by Texas A&M Press, this second edition of *The Ground on Which I Stand* offers essays, historical background, unabridged oral histories of 15 residents and their families as told through their voices, and an oral history curriculum easily modified for all ages, elementary grades through college.

176 pages, 8.5 x 11, soft cover

In 1871, newly freed slaves established the community of Tamina—then called “Tammany”—north of Houston, near the rich timber lands of Montgomery County. Located close to the just-completed railroad from Conroe to Houston, the community benefited from the burgeoning local lumber industry and available transportation. The residents built homes, churches, a one-room school, and a general store.

Over time, urban growth has had a powerful impact on Tamina. The sprawling communities of The Woodlands, Shenandoah, Chateau Woods, and Oak Ridge have encroached, introducing benefits and challenges in what is now an urban life for Tamina residents. On the one hand, the children of Tamina have the opportunity to attend some of the best public schools in the nation; on the other, residents whose education and job skills have not kept pace with modern society are struggling for survival.

Through striking, intimate photography and sensitively-gathered oral histories, Marti Corn has chronicled the lives, dreams, and spirit of the people of Tamina. The result is a multi-faceted portrait of community, kinship, values, and shared history.

## Reviews

“Thanks to Marti Corn and the residents of Tamina, we now have a model for identifying, appreciating, and celebrating similar vestiges of our shared past, even as they tenaciously hang along the edges of great change.”

— *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*

“...impressed not only by the beauty of Corn’s photographs and the quiet eloquence of the oral histories, but by the honesty of Corn’s storytelling.”

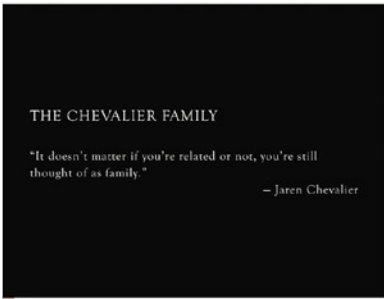
— *Houston Chronicle*

“...a poignant chronicle of the past and present of Tamina, revealing in its straightforward and never-sentimental approach. Corn’s keen eye gives us the ground truth as the story of Tamina continues to unfold, which is both deeply respectful of its inhabitants and thorough in its scope.”

— Nancy Wozny, editor-in-chief,  
*Arts + Culture Texas*

# Flash Drive Materials

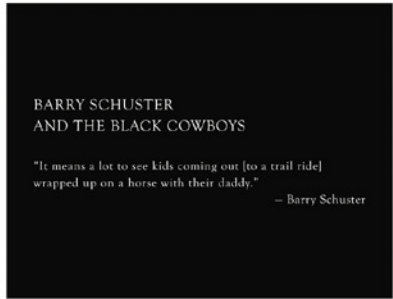
Includes a slideshow of portraits paired with quotes from those individuals from Marti Corn's oral history project in Tamina.. Below are a handful of samples.



**THE CHEVALIER FAMILY**

"It doesn't matter if you're related or not, you're still thought of as family."

— Jaren Chevalier




**BARRY SCHUSTER AND THE BLACK COWBOYS**

"It means a lot to see kids coming out [to a trail ride] wrapped up on a horse with their daddy."

— Barry Schuster



A PDF is also included containing all of the teacher resources as found on the website and in the appendix of the book. Below are a handful of samples.



**Oral History Teacher Resources**

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**What is Oral History?**

Oral history is a type of history that is passed down from one generation to the next through spoken words. It is a way of learning about the past that is different from written history. Oral history is often used to tell the stories of people who have lived through important events in our country's history.



**Oral History in the Classroom**

Oral history is a powerful tool for teaching history in the classroom. It allows students to hear the stories of people who have lived through important events in our country's history. Oral history can be used in a variety of ways, including as a primary source, a secondary source, or a supplement to other historical materials.



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**Introducing Your Students to the Oral History Process**

This slide provides an overview of the oral history process, including the steps involved in conducting an interview and the importance of ethical considerations.



**The Process**

This slide outlines the steps involved in conducting an oral history interview, from identifying potential interviewees to the final recording and archiving of the interview.



**Interview Release Form**

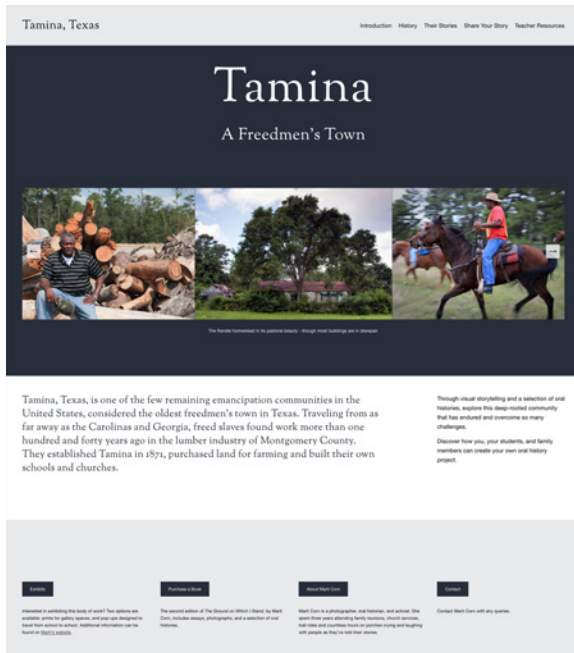
This slide provides a template for an interview release form, which is used to obtain permission from interviewees to use their stories in educational materials.



**Resources**

This slide lists various resources available for teachers and students, including books, websites, and video materials related to oral history.

# Website



*The website is a companion piece to the traveling exhibit.*

*For those teaching virtually, this site provides all the research tools needed for students to explore the oral histories of those living in Tamina as well as the tools needed to develop their own oral history projects.*

- Introduction by Marti Corn
- Slideshows
- Historical overview of this emancipation community
- Abridged stories of the 11 people as shown on the banners
- Teacher Resources
  - What Is Oral History?
  - Oral History in the Classroom
  - Introducing Students to Oral Histories
  - The Process
  - Presentation Ideas
  - Student Worksheets
  - Resource Links

[www.TaminaTexas.com](http://www.TaminaTexas.com)

# Scheduling, Costs, Workshops & Lectures

## Kit on Loan

The Ground on Which I Stand: A Visual Storytelling Program Exploring Personal Historical Journeys is a traveling kit available to borrow by any school, library, college, or other institution for a two-week period of time. The only costs involved include the shipping/delivery fee from the Children's Books on Wheels office.

Two books are gifted to each institution that borrows the kit. However, we highly recommend purchasing enough books so each student may have a copy for reference in the classroom. They can be purchased for \$35 each or in bulk of 12 or more with a 15% discount.

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## Kit for Purchase

Private schools and school districts may prefer to purchase a traveling exhibit kit so they can distribute to schools without any restriction of available dates. The cost of each kit, including a set of 36 books is \$4,000 plus shipping/delivery fee.

Please reach out to [Rita Wiltz](#) or [Marti Corn](#) with any queries, a request for personalized proposals, and/or scheduling availability.

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## Workshops & Lectures

In-person workshops and lectures by Rita Wiltz and/or Marti Corn are also available upon request. We can also coordinate a panel discussion with Tamina residents. If interested, contact [Rita Wiltz](#) or [Marti Corn](#) for details and pricing.

# About Children's Books on Wheels, Rita Wiltz & Marti Corn



**Children's Books on Wheels'** mission is to promote reading by providing books, educational literature, and community resources to Pre-K through 12th grade students and their families in rural communities and urban cities.

Our goal is to provide educational and community resources to the diverse population that we serve. CBOW is located at the Sleepy Hollow Multipurpose Building in Tamina, a rural town south of Conroe, Texas.



**Rita Wiltz** is the Executive Director of Children's Books on Wheels. She grew up in Tamina and graduated from Conroe High School. She knew access to resources and services were limited in Tamina so, she established Children's Books on Wheels (CBOW) a 501(c)(3) non-profit in 2004 to provide mobile access for educational literacy, financial literacy, and health literacy for all.



**Marti Corn** is an activist, photographer, and oral historian. In addition to her work in Tamina, she has brought attention to the stories of former refugee who now call Houston home and is currently working with the Lost Boys and Girls of Sudan who seek resettlement having spent 30 years of confinement inside a refugee camp in Kenya. Her work has been presented in museum, university, and gallery exhibitions throughout the United States and Europe, and Texas A&M Press published *The Ground on Which I Stand*, a compilation of essays, oral histories, and photographs highlighting Tamina.

Marti shares her passion for visual storytelling by teaching journal-writing and photography workshops locally and to youth living in Kenya's Kakuma Refugee Camp.

For more information about her documentary projects, presentations, and teaching work, visit [www.MartiCorn.com](http://www.MartiCorn.com).