

**Teaching with Stuff**  
**Oral Histories in the Classroom**  
**Oral History Analysis**



INSTITUTE OF  
**TEXAN**  
**CULTURES**

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# Introduction

Dear Educator,

Thank you for choosing *Oral Histories in the Classroom*. This easy to incorporate activity will inspire inquiry-based learning that will teach your students how to analyze and interpret primary sources and use oral histories to dig deeper into their study of culture and history.

As educators, we at the ITC understand that you may need to adapt these lessons to fit the constructs of your classroom and the needs of your students. Please feel free to copy the handouts included or create your own!

We hope that you will visit us at the Institute of Texan Cultures, and continue to use our classroom resources to promote your students' learning experiences. If you have any questions before your visit, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best,

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# Oral Histories in the Classroom: Tips for Using Primary Sources to Support Your Curriculum

## 1. Choose a big topic that is missing the small details.

Oral histories can be a great resource for highlighting personal experiences, differing points-of-view and small details, but researching oral histories may be more difficult than finding other types of primary sources. Identify a subject or instructional topic that could benefit from making a personal connection and is broad enough that you may find a relatable resource.

Example: World War II

Non-Example: World War II POWs held in a specific camp or prison

## 2. Find the stories the textbook ignores.

Choose oral histories that highlight the small details and personal stories that students may not otherwise get a chance to know. For example, if you are teaching a unit on a major conflict or war, consider stories of individual soldiers or the families they left at home.

## 3. Know your audience.

Before selecting oral histories, identify the strengths and weaknesses of your students. Because oral histories are transcripts of interviews, they can often be long and include unfamiliar vocabulary. Consider selecting portions of oral histories for your students to read, providing students with oral histories in multiple mediums when available (text, audio or video), and/or addressing unfamiliar vocabulary they may encounter.

## 4. Do your research.

Not all library databases include oral history collections. If students will be searching for and selecting their own oral histories to analyze, identify available sources and help students to locate searchable databases.

## 5. Inspire inquiry-based learning.

Allow students to discover the importance of the stories told through oral histories. Encourage them to examine the entire oral history and consider why the interview may have been conducted, why the interviewee felt it was important to tell their story, why it is relevant to the subject and how it may compare or contrast to what they have already learned about the topic or a personal experience of their own.

## 6. Do it yourself!

Consider asking students to collect their own oral histories and present them to the class. Students may learn about a historical or cultural topic relevant to the curriculum and practice real-life research skills used by professional historians and anthropologists.

# Analyzing Oral Histories Activity

**Estimated Time:** 45 minutes

## **Social Studies Standards:**

6.21 Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; and artifacts to acquire information about various world cultures;(B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;(C) organize and interpret information from outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps

6.22 Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:(A) use social studies terminology correctly;(B) incorporate main and supporting ideas in verbal and written communication based on research...(D) create written and visual material such as journal entries, reports, graphic organizers, outlines, and bibliographies based on research;(E) use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation; and

7.21 Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about Texas;(B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;(C) organize and interpret information from outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps...(E) support a point of view on a social studies issue or event;

7.22 Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:(A) use social studies terminology correctly;(B) use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, punctuation, and proper citation of sources;(C) transfer information from one medium to another, including written to visual and statistical to written or visual, using computer software as appropriate; and(D) create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information.

8.29 Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about the United States;(B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;(C) organize and interpret information from outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps...(E) support a point of view on a social studies issue or event

8.30 Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:(A) use social studies terminology correctly;(B) use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, punctuation, and proper citation of sources;(C) transfer information from one medium to another, including written to visual and statistical to written or visual, using computer software as appropriate; and(D) create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information.

9.21 Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:(A) analyze and evaluate the validity and utility of multiple sources of geographic information such as primary and secondary sources, aerial photographs, and maps

9.22 Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:...(B) generate summaries, generalizations, and thesis statements supported by evidence;...(D) use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation

10.29 Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:(A) identify methods used by archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, and geographers to analyze evidence;(B) explain how historians, when examining sources, analyze frame of reference, historical context, and point of view to interpret historical events;(C) explain the differences between primary and secondary sources and examine those sources to analyze frame of reference, historical context, and point of view;(D) evaluate the validity of a source based on language, corroboration with other sources, and information about the author;(E) identify bias in written, oral, and visual material;(F) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, drawing inferences and conclusions, and developing connections between historical events over time

10.30 Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:(A) use social studies terminology correctly;(B) use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation;(C) interpret and create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information; and(D) transfer information from one medium to another.

11.29 Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:(A) use a variety of both primary and secondary valid sources to acquire information and to analyze and answer historical questions;(B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing and contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations, making predictions, drawing inferences, and drawing conclusions;(C) understand how historians interpret the past (historiography) and how their interpretations of history may change over time;(D) use the process of historical inquiry to research, interpret, and use multiple types of sources of evidence;(E) evaluate the validity of a source based on language, corroboration with other sources, and information about the author, including points of view, frames of reference, and historical context;(F) identify bias in written, oral, and visual material;(G) identify and support with historical evidence a point of view on a social studies issue or event; and(H) use appropriate skills to analyze and interpret social studies information such as maps, graphs, presentations, speeches, lectures, and political cartoons.

11.30 Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:(A) create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information;(B) use correct social studies terminology to explain historical concepts; and(C) use different forms of media to convey information, including written to visual and statistical to written or visual, using available computer software as appropriate.

### Materials:

- Video, audio recordings or transcripts of oral histories
- Access to library database of historic newspaper articles
- Copies of reproducible *Analyzing Oral Histories*, page

### Instructions:

1. After introducing a topic or theme to your class, explain to students that they will be using oral histories to learn more about the topic. Then, explain to the students what an oral history is.
2. Instruct students to search for a relevant oral history to examine, or provide them with preselected copies of oral history transcripts or excerpts. Students will also need to search for, or be provide with, a newspaper article related to the subject of their oral history.
3. As students read the oral history and related newspaper article, ask them to complete an *Analyzing Oral Histories* worksheet .
4. To extend this activity, you may ask students to write a summary paragraph explaining what they learned from each of the primary sources they analyzed. How does the story told in the oral history differ from that told in the newspaper? Is one type of primary source more beneficial or important than he other? Why or why not? Consider using the oral history and newspaper article as documents to be used when responding to a Document Based Question essay prompt.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ PERIOD: \_\_\_\_\_

## Analyzing Oral Histories

*Instructions: Using a video, audio recording or transcript of an oral history, complete the following chart and answer the questions that follow.*

<b>OBSERVE</b>	<b>REFLECT</b>	<b>QUESTION</b>
Describe what you notice in the oral history (unfamiliar words, accents, setting, etc.)	What is the purpose of this oral history?  What can you tell about the person telling the story?  Why is this oral history important?  Is the story more personal or historical?  What can you learn from this oral history?	What would you like to know more about? Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

**Summarize:**

Write a 3-4 sentence summary, retelling the oral history in your own words.

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## Making Inferences

What do you think the person telling the story, and the person recording it, hoped to accomplish? Were they successful? Explain your answer.

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## Digging Deeper

Using a library database, locate a newspaper article related to the subject or period described in the oral history. Read the article and complete the chart below.

TITLE	DATE	DESCRIPTION	AUDIENCE	PURPOSE
<b>ANALYZING THE ARTICLE</b>				
List three things the author said that you think are important.	Why do you think this article was written?	What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote the article.	List two things the article tells you about the event or issue it describes.	Write a question to the author that is left unanswered. What would you like to know more about?

Library of Congress. "Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Oral Histories." Teacher Resources, Library of Congress.

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers> (accessed 27 June 2012).

National Archives. "Document Analysis Worksheets." Teaching with Documents.

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons> (accessed 27 June 2012).

# Do It Yourself:

## Tips for Collecting Oral Histories

### 1. Set goals for your project before you begin.

Before starting an oral history project with your students, brainstorm answers to the following questions:

- *What are you trying to learn?* Develop a sentence or two that summarizes your project goals, so that you can easily explain to your interviewees what you are researching and why it is important.
- *Who can best tell you the stories you are looking for?* Make a list of potential interviewees. Consider people that will be reasonably available and willing to speak to you.
- *What product(s) do you want to create from these interviews, and who is the audience for them?* The answer to these questions will help you decide what kinds of information you will need and how the interview should be recorded.

### 2. Be prepared.

The more prepared the students are for their interview, the better product they will create.

- Instruct them to learn as much as possible about the person they are interviewing in order to help them design a list of questions they would like to ask.
- Students should also familiarize themselves with the recording equipment, test it and take extra power sources (batteries and/or power cords) to the interview, just in case.
- Design a list of open-ended questions that will allow the interviewee to share their story and encourage them to elaborate on their experiences and memories. Consider sharing these questions with the interviewee before the scheduled meeting so that they are more comfortable and can begin to think about their answers.
- Students should ask interviewees to sign a release form in order to secure permission to use the oral history for their project and let the interviewee know how their words will be used.

### 3. Be respectful.

When asking someone, even a family member, to share a personal story or memory, it can be a powerful experience. It is important for students to remember to handle the interview with respect.

- Tell students to set up an appointment for the interview, confirm the appointment and keep the appointment. Students should respect the interviewee's time as much as they respect their story.
- Students should choose a place to conduct the interview that is comfortable for the interviewee and it should be away from noise and distractions.

Examples: Interviewee's living or dining room (with televisions, radios and other sources of noise powered off)

Non-Examples: A local coffee shop, restaurant, or outside near a busy street

- Students should not push for answers. Interviewees may not wish to share certain information that may be painful or emotional. Let them discuss what they are comfortable talking about.
- Allow the interviewee to completely finish a thought before asking a follow-up question or moving on to the next question.

### 4. Consider possible distractions.

Especially if creating a video recording of the interview, it is important to consider sounds and situations that may be distracting, such as movements in a swivel chair, finger tapping and loud pets.

## 5. Don't forget to include the basics.

When recording their interview, it is important for students to remember to include some basic facts about the interviewee and the purpose of the oral history. If they are very familiar with the person they are interviewing, it may be easy to forget these things.

- Students should start the oral history by stating their name, the date and the place the interview is being conducted.
- Students should then ask the interviewee to state and spell their name and age (if they are comfortable sharing their age).
- Student should then clearly state the purpose of the interview and the primary subject they are going to discuss.

## 6. It's not a marathon.

All oral histories should be transcribed word-for-word (just like closed-captioning on television) and this can be a time-consuming process. Student should keep the interview length to no more than 30 minutes in order to have a manageable transcription.

- When transcribing the interview, students will need to listen to or watch small segments of the recording and type the conversation word-for word. For a 30 minute interview, this could take up to 3.5 hours.
- Once the interview is transcribed, students should offer to share a copy with the interviewee.

# Sample Interview Questions

## Childhood

- What do you recall about your childhood?
- Where did you live and go to school?
- What do you remember best about your parents?
- What did you and your siblings do in your spare time?
- Were you an obedient child or a mischievous child?
- What styles of clothing did children wear?

## Hometown

- What was the name of the place where you grew up?
- Was it a big city or a small town?
- Were there any special activities or festivals that took place there?

## Family Traditions

- Did your family have any special traditions, such as things that they did on holidays or birthdays?
- Do you have any family heirlooms that have been handed down from one generation to the next?

## Physical Characteristics

- What physical characteristics do people in your family share?
- Do they all have the same hair color or eye color?
- Whom in the family do you resemble?

## **Previous Generations**

- Did you know your grandparents or great-grandparents?
- What were their names?
- Where did they live?
- What stories can you tell about them or their lives?

## **Growing Up**

- When did you leave home?
- Why did you leave and where did you go?
- How did your life change? Did you feel grown up? Did you have any fears about leaving home?

## **Religion**

- What part did religion play in your family?
- Were you very religious?
- Did you go to religious services on a regular basis?
- Were any religious celebrations especially important to you or your family?

## **Work**

- What did your parents do for a living when you were growing up? Did you ever help them at work?
- Was your family financially comfortable?
- What was your first job? How old were you at the time? How did you get your first job?
- What different jobs have you had during your life?

## **Historical Events**

- What significant historical events have taken place during your lifetime?
- Were there wars, natural disasters or political changes?
- How did these events affect you?

## **Immigration**

- How old were you when you immigrated to the United States?
- Where did you come from and where/when did you arrive?
- How did you travel? By boat, plane, or train? How long did the trip take?
- What feelings did you have about coming to the United States? What was one of the biggest differences between the United States and your previous home?

# Sample Interview Release Form

Project Name \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person(s) Interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

By signing the form below, you give your permission for any recordings and/or photographs made during this project to be used by \_\_\_\_\_  
for use in \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

By giving your permission, you do not give up any copyright or performance rights that you may hold.  
I agree to the uses of these materials described above, except for any restrictions, noted below.

Name (Please Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Restriction Description: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Adapted from:

Hunt, Marjorie. *The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, 2003.