

YOUR STORY MATTERS: UNDERSTANDING AND COLLECTING ORAL HISTORY

A UNIT in Two Lessons for Fourth and Fifth Grade Classes

Unit Overview:

Understand what an Oral History is and why it is important to collect and save first person narrative recordings. Learn how to collect and oral history.

Unit Summary:

Oral Histories are primary-source first-person narrative recordings that help to round out the story of the past. At times, an interview may serve as the only source information available about a certain place, event or person. Oral history helps us understand how individuals and communities experienced life in a specific time and/or dealt with major historic events. This lesson will introduce students to what an Oral History is. They will have the opportunity to listen to a recorded oral history and learn how to collect an oral history from someone that they know.

Time Allotment:

Taught in two 30 to 40 minutes of teaching time. 60 additional minutes of home connection activity.

Grade Level: 4-5

Standards

History-Social Science Content Standards

Chronological and Spatial Thinking

1. Students place key events and people of the historical era they are studying in a chronological sequence and within a spatial context; they interpret timelines.
2. Students correctly apply terms related to time, including *past*, *present*, *future*, *decade*, *century*, and *generation*.
3. Students explain how the present is connected to the past, identifying both similarities and differences between the two, and how some things change over time and some things stay the same.

Research, Evidence, and Point of View

1. Students differentiate between primary and secondary sources.
2. Students pose relevant questions about events they encounter in historical documents, eyewitness accounts, oral histories, letters, diaries, artifacts, photographs, maps, artworks, and architecture.
3. Students distinguish fact from fiction by comparing documentary sources on historical figures and events with fictionalized characters and events.

Historical Interpretation

1. Students summarize the key events of the era they are studying and explain the historical contexts of those events.
2. Students identify the human and physical characteristics of the places they are studying and explain how those features form the unique character of those places.

3. Students identify and interpret the multiple causes and effects of historical events.
4. Students conduct cost-benefit analyses of historical and current events.

Reading: Informational Text 4th Grade

1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
3. Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.
7. Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

Writing Standards 4th Grade

2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
 - a. Introduce a topic clearly and group related information in paragraphs and sections; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
 - b. Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.
 - c. Link ideas within categories of information using words and phrases (e.g., *another*, *for example*, *also*, *because*).
 - d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
- e. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented.

Reading: Informational Text 5th Grade

1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
3. Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.
7. Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

Writing Standards 5th Grade

2. Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.
5. With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.
6. With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

Define what an Oral History is and **describe** what it is used for.

Express what they have learned from listening to a recorded oral history.

Collect and produce an oral history from a family member on their own.

Consider how their personal experience today might be meaningful in the far future.

Materials

Recorded Oral Histories:

Ollie Rosetta - Ethnic Oral History Collection FCHS

Joe Ybanez - Ethnic Oral History Collection FCHS

Transcripts:

Ollie Rosetta - Ethnic Oral History Collection FCHS

Joe Ybanez - Ethnic Oral History Collection FCHS

Handout:

Questions for at-home Oral History Interview

Introduction Activity:

Set-up: Begin the class with a discussion about storytelling. Ask students about their favorite family story. Have a few students share stories that they have heard about their family with the class.

Remind students that we all have stories to tell. We organize the memories of our lives into stories. These stories are considered oral histories. Oral history gives voice to people, regular people, who often are not involved in writing history.

So, what does oral history do? It provides a systematic way to collect people's testimony from their own lived experiences. Historians currently recognize that everyday memories of everyday people, not just the rich and famous, have historical importance. If we do not collect and preserve those memories, those stories, then one day they will disappear forever.

Learning Activity #1:

Set-up:

Share with the students that the Fresno County Historical Society collects the oral histories of local residents to help preserve the history of Fresno County. Over fifty interviews were conducted in the late 1970s as part of the CETA-funded Ethnic Oral History Project. These oral histories with members of the African American and Mexican American communities profile life in Fresno and surrounding towns from pre-World War I through the 1970s.

Select one of the two provided oral history excerpts from the Ethnic Oral History Collection to listen to with the class from the *Fresno Historical Society Ethnic Oral History Collection*. As the class listens, have the students write down highlights from what they heard about the individual's life experience. Answer the following questions:

- When was the interview recorded?
- Who was interviewed?
- When and why did the family come to California?
- What did they or their parents do for a living?
- What were some of the significant life experiences that they endured (1918 Flu, racism, financial success, family challenges, etc.)?
- What was something unique that you learned from this person's oral history?

Learning Activity #2:

Set-up: Explain to the class that they will be conducting an interview to collect their own oral history. Ask students to think of a person they wish to interview. Students may want to brainstorm with their parents or caregiver to determine someone they would be able to interview, such as a grandparent, neighbor, or family friend.

Interview preparation: Have students establish 3-4 informational questions including the following:
Date of recording (example: October 20, 2020)
Full name, age, date of birth
Occupation

Interview questions: Have students identify 8 interview questions from the [interview questions handout](#) to collect information on the interviewee's life (personal and family).

Students will need to use a recording device for the interview (such as voice memo on a cell phone) and take notes. Remind students to ask for permission to conduct the interview.

Assessment

Use the following questions to guide a recap discussion, as a quiz, or a guideline for a quick drawing assignment.

Learning Activity #1:

Quick write: Have the student each select and read one of the transcripts from the *Fresno Historical Society Ethnic Oral History Collection*. Then have them write a 1-page reflection paper. Reflect on what they discovered about the interviewee's life. Have students consider the following:

- Historical and significant events, including well known individuals who made the news
- Social and economic conditions
- Culture and other interesting information about the time

Learning Activity #2:

Quick Write: Have students write a 1-page reflection paper on what current events are affecting their local community, the state, and the country. Have them write about how their own personal experience today might be meaningful in the far future.

Extension Activity

Learning Activity #1:

Quick write: Have the students watch one of the short stories from storycorps.org (links provided in *Materials*). Then write a 1-page reflection paper. Have them reflect on what they discovered about the life of the people in the story. Have students consider answering the following questions:

- Historical and significant events, including well known individuals who made the news
- Social and economic conditions
- Culture and other interesting information about the time

Learning Activity #2: Have students type up a transcript of the interview they conducted. They may use free software to assist with the transcription (<https://otter.ai/>) and edit the document as needed. Then have them switch transcripts with another classmate to read and learn about their oral history project.

Distance Learning Options

- Assign the readings and require two group discussions before presenting.
- Hold discussions via video conferencing software like Zoom or Teams.
- Alternatively, require students to contribute to an online discussion board 1-2 times per week.
- Hold live stream or video presentations in which each student is required to fill 1 minute of time.
- Each group share out to class to ensure all students comprehend the content.