

Exploring Community History: Oral History

What is “community history”? Community history is the study of the history of a relatively small geographic area, such as a town, a specific settlement, or a county. The study of community history involves students in history that surrounds them. It is “backyard history.” Every community has a story. In fact, there are thousands of voices and thousands of stories.

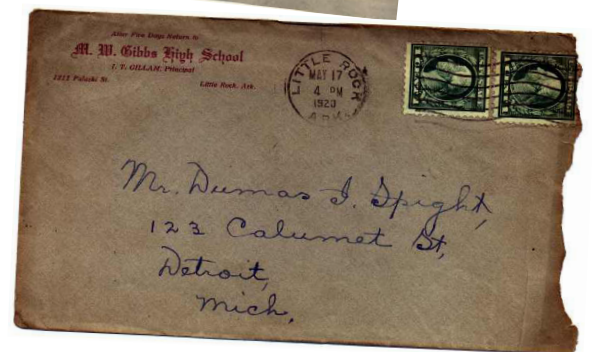
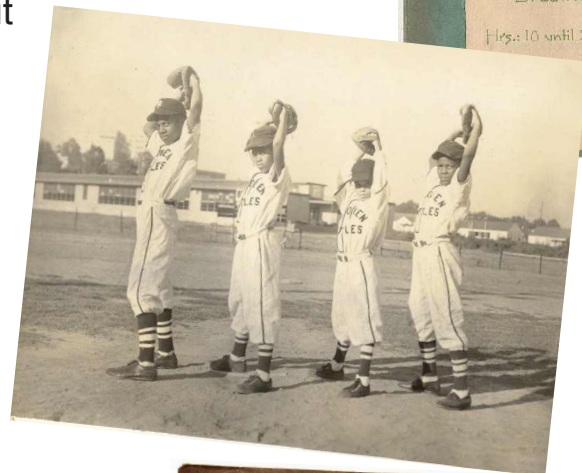
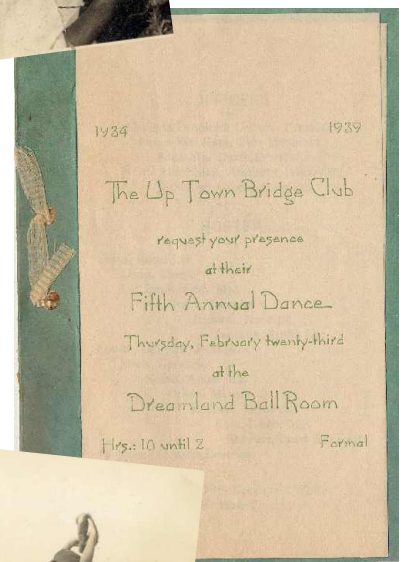
Oral history often serves as a link from the immediate present to the immediate past. Oral history is not only a research tool, but a way to capture information from one’s community that might not otherwise be available.

This lesson plan introduces students to the techniques of oral history. Through these activities, students will learn the importance of oral history and the need

Objectives

Students will:

- Develop and strengthen oral and written communication skills through oral history.
- Broaden understanding of community history and change over time.
- Understand how point of view influences and effects historical understanding.



Materials

- Tips for Interviewers Handout
- Family Story Assignment Worksheet
- Interview Assignment Worksheet
- Oral History Interview Release Form

Curriculum Connections

Arkansas History (7 - 8)

WWP.9.AH.7-8.12—Identify significant contributions made by Arkansans in art, business, culture, medicine, and science.

Arkansas History (9 - 12)

WWP.9.AH.9-12.8—Research significant contributions made by Arkansans in art, business, culture, medicine, and science.

Social Studies

Grade 5

G.2.5.2—Understand the contributions of people of various ethnic and religious groups in Arkansas and in the United States.

English/Language Arts

Grade 5

OV.3.5.1—View a variety of media to enhance and show understanding of a specific topic.

Grade 8

OV.1.8.8—Report results of interviews, research, etc.

Procedure

For Middle School Learners (5 - 8)

1. Introduce students to the idea of “community.” Brainstorm with students on characteristics that define a community.
2. Explain how oral history that can provide perspectives of individuals who might not otherwise appear in historical records and important information about a community.
3. Give the students a brief overview of the importance of oral history then distribute copies of “Tips for Interviewers.”
4. Distribute the “Family Story Assignment” worksheet. Students will interview a member of their family about a particular memorable event then record their findings in the space provided on the worksheet.
5. Students can include photographs to supplement their reports.
6. Invite students to share their reports with the class.

For High School Learners (9 - 12)

1. Introduce students to the idea of a community. Brainstorm with students on characteristics that define a community.
2. Discuss the importance of primary sources and how oral history, as a primary source, can provide clues and important information about a community.
3. Give the students a brief overview of the importance of oral history then distribute copies of “Tips for Interviewers.”
4. Distribute the “Interview Assignment” worksheet.
5. Prepare copies of “Oral History Interview Release Form” to distribute to students.
6. With a partner, students will interview someone they know, but not a relative, about a subject as specified by the teacher.
7. Students will tape record the interview and present their recordings and prepared questions to the class.

Extension Activities

Podcasting

Edit taped interviews into a radio piece to be aired on your local public radio station or on your school's web site as Podcasts. Add student narrations, sound effects, or original music to your radio spots or Podcasts.

Guest Speakers

Invite a historian or long-time resident to your class, then allow your students to ask prepared questions about your community.

Time Lines

Before an interview create a time line. It can be a good way to spark ideas for you oral history interviews. You can then use the time line to think about stories you would like to hear and the history your interviewee lived.

Be Creative

Enhance your oral history interviews by illustrating your favorite part of the oral history interview or writing a poem about what you learned from the person you interviewed.

Create a Collage

Create a compilation CD of voices entitled, "Voices of the People." The recording should include excerpts from all the students' interviews and convey some of the strong emotions/ experiences of people interviewed.

Listen and Learn

Pre-made tapes from archives or recorded by teachers can be made available at listening stations where students can hear stories about their community's past. Themes drawn from the curriculum could form the basis for these oral history stations. After listening to stories, students could summarize them in writing, compare different experiences, or represent them in artistic form.



Resource Guide

Websites

Afro-American Genealogical Society, Inc.:
www.aahgs.org

Arkansas History Commission:
www.ark-ives.com

Arkansas State Genealogical Society:
www.agsgenealogy.org

Butler Center for Arkansas Studies (Central Arkansas Library System):
www.cals.lib.ar.us/butlercenter

Encyclopedia of Arkansas:
www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net

Oral History Association:
www.dickinson.edu/oha/pub_eg.html

Oral History Questionnaire:
www.ec-online.net/Knowledge/articles/oralh.htm

Step-by-Step Guide to Oral History:
www.dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html

Youth Source—Using Oral History:
www.youthsource.ab.ca/teacher_resources/oral_overview.html

Books

Dunaway, David K. and Willa K. Baum, eds. Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1996.

Rife, Douglas M. Research and Writing: Activities that Explore Family History. Carthage, IL: Teaching & Learning Company, 2002.

Sitton, Thad, George L. Mehaffy and O.L. Davis, Jr. Oral History: A Guide for Teachers (And Others). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983.

Sommer, Barbara and Mary Kay Quinlan. The Oral History Manual. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002.

Articles

Clegg, Luther B., et al. "Creating Oral History Projects for the Social Studies Classroom." Social Studies Review 32, (1992): 53-60.

Leon, Warren. "Preparing a Primary Source Package on Your Community's History." Social Education. Nov/Dec. 1980: 612-618.

Photo Credits

PAGE 1 (from top to bottom): Two women posing for shot with their heels up, 1930s, *Community History Project, Mosaic Templars Cultural Center (2004.08.69.t)*; Invitation to the Uptown Annual Dance at the Dreamland Ballroom, 1930s, *Community History Project, Mosaic Templars Cultural Center (2004.08.61.f)*; Routen and Suttles Junior Baseball Team, 1930s, *Community History Project, Mosaic Templars Cultural Center (2004.08.80z)*; Envelope from Gibbs High School to Dumas Spight in Michigan, 1916, *Community History Project, Mosaic Templars Cultural Center (2004.08.81.e)*

PAGE 3 (from top to bottom): Parnell first grade class, 1930s, *Community History Project, Mosaic Templars Cultural Center (2004.08.69.n)*; World War II Red Cross Volunteers, 1941-1945, *Community History Project, Mosaic Templars Cultural Center (2004.08.68.a)*; Group of Women posing in front of "Happy Hollow Inn" backdrop in Hot Springs, AR, 1930s, *Community History Project, Mosaic Templars Cultural Center (2004.08.69.c)*

Tips for Interviewers

1. Avoid dead-end questions; instead ask questions that require more of an answer than “yes” or “no.” Start with “Why, how, where, what kind of . . .”
2. Ask one question at a time and keep questions brief.
3. Start with non-controversial questions. A good place to start with is the person’s background. This allows you and your narrator to become comfortable, make eye contact, etc.
4. Do not interrupt a good story because you have thought of a question or because your narrator is straying from the planned outline. If the information is related to your topic, let the person continue, but jot down your question so you will remember to ask it later.
5. If your narrator does stray into subjects unrelated to your topic, try to pull him/her back as quickly as possible. Example: “Before we move on, I’d like to find out . . .”
6. Try to establish at every important point in the story where the narrator was or what his or her role was in this event, in order to indicate how much eye-witness information is available and how much it is based on reports of others. “Where were you at the time of the Oklahoma Bombing?”
7. Do not challenge accounts you think may be inaccurate. Instead, try to develop as much information as possible that can be used by later researchers in establishing what probably happened.
8. Do tactfully point out to your narrator that there is a different account or contradictory information of what he or she is describing, if there is a difference.
9. Do not switch the recorder off and on. It is much better to waste a little tape on irrelevant material than to call attention to the tape recorder by a constant on-off operation.
10. Conduct your interview in a quiet place. Interviews usually work out better if there is no one present except the narrator and the interviewer.
11. Do end the interview at a reasonable time. An hour-and-a-half is probably the maximum. First, you must protect your narrator against over-fatigue: second, you will be tired even if the narrator isn’t.
12. Do not use the interview to show off your own knowledge, vocabulary, charm, or other abilities.
13. Do not be a noisy listener; avoid interjecting phrases or verbal expressions while an narrator is talking. Listen intently!
14. Ask follow-up questions early and often or use verbal encouragement, such as “that is interesting,” after the interviewee has finished speaking.

This handout is an edited version of a handout taken from <http://www.rsc.c.tn.us/owl&writingcenter/OWL/Interview2.html>



NAME _____

DATE _____

Family Story Assignment

Directions: Talk with a family member, such as your aunt, uncle, or grandparents, about a particularly memorable event. This could be a special holiday gathering; a community event, such as a dance or concert; or a historical event, such as wartime memories or civil rights era memories. Be sure to get details about the event! Fill in your family member's answers in the space provided.

1. Name of Narrator (Person Interviewed): _____

2. Name of Interviewer: _____

3. How old were you when the event took place? _____

4. Where were you living? _____

5. What actually happened? _____

6. What were your feelings of the event at the time? _____

7. What are your feelings of the event now? _____

8. How did **you**, the interviewer, feel about getting this story or information or just talking with your family member? _____



NAME _____

DATE _____

Interview Assignment

Directions:

- Review the “Tips for Interviewers” handout.
- Choose a topic for your interview. It could be a special holiday gathering; a community event, such as a dance or concert; or a historical event, such as wartime memories or civil rights era memories.
- You and your partner will prepare interview questions and interview someone you know but not a relative. One will be the “interviewer,” and one will be the “note taker.”
- Using a tape recorder or video equipment, conduct your interview following the questions you developed. Be sure to have your narrator sign the “Oral History Interview Release Form”!
- Your recording and prepared questions are due: _____

List five questions that you would like to ask the narrator (the person interviewed):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

List any follow-up questions that you asked:



Oral History Interview Release Form

In view of the historical value of this oral history interview, I _____

(narrator)

knowingly and voluntarily permit _____ of _____

(name of student interviewer)

(class and/or school)

the full use of the tape recordings, transcriptions, and contents of this oral history interview for educational purposes. I also understand that the tapes and transcripts may be used in public presentations including, but not limited to, audio and video documentaries, PowerPoint presentations, or reports.

Signature of Narrator _____

Date _____

Address of Narrator

(street address)

(city)

(state)

(zip code)

Special restrictions:

