

Lesson 10.3

GATHER YOUR OWN HISTORY: ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Objective: Students will evaluate the accuracy of oral histories as historical documents by conducting their own interviews and analyzing their results.

Materials:

- **Sheet 10.3A:** Gather Your Own History: Oral History Project assignment sheet
- **Sheet 10.3B:** Oral History Project Evaluation Sheet
- **Sheet 10.3C:** Interview Protocol for Budding Oral Historians (same as Sheet 7.6)
- Tape recorders and blank tapes for student use

Timing: Two to three weeks

Background Reading: Chapter Ten

Procedure:

1. After reading Chapter Ten, discuss with students the roles of the people quoted in the chapter (Charlotte Lovejoy, Arthur Woodward, Ruth Moulden, etc.). How did their stories contribute to the telling of the history? Tell students how these stories were gathered: by folklorists at the Maine Folklife Center in Orono and the Salt Center for Documentary Research who interviewed these people about the past. Tell students they will have an opportunity to gather their own oral histories from people in their community.
2. Discuss with students the advantages and limits of collecting oral histories. Ask them questions like the following:
 - How do you think oral histories might be useful for historians?
 - Can personal stories help the past come alive?
 - What can you learn from someone who lived through a certain time that you might not be able to learn from a history textbook?
 - How can you be sure that the person interviewed is remembering correctly?
 - How might an interviewer's questions affect how the interviewee answers?
 - How might an interviewer's relationship with the person affect the interview?
 - One person's experience of a certain time period can differ greatly from another's. How should this influence the way historians use oral histories?
3. Assign students the oral history project. They will interview a relative, friend, or member of the community who is over 45 years old. Students must choose their interviewee, prepare questions ahead of time, and get them approved before conducting their interview. They should practice using a tape recorder and asking their questions with a classmate before conducting their interview. Suggest a time limit for the interview (half an hour to an hour). Go over the Interview Protocol sheet with students in class. See the assignment sheet for details.
4. Give students two to three weeks to set up the appointment for the interview, conduct it, transcribe it (partially—see the assignment sheet), and complete their Oral History Project Evaluation Sheet.

Evaluation: Grade students based on the quality of their questions, the thoroughness of their interviews, the accuracy of their transcriptions, and the thoughtfulness of their

evaluation sheets. Provide students with a rubric when you assign the project, so your expectations of them will be clear.

Follow-up Activities and Alternative Ideas:

- If there is a local retirement or nursing home in your area, you might be able to create a partnership with the clients there. Your students could exchange a service for the home--such as cleaning, cooking, or spending an afternoon with residents--for the opportunity to interview its residents. Make sure the students are paired with residents with the energy and ability to sit through an interview.
- You might want to pair this activity with a unit on Civil Rights, the Vietnam War, or some other historical theme that corresponds with the stories students learn from the people they are interviewing.
- Play especially interesting interviews in class for other students to learn from. What went well? What did not? What makes a good interview?
- Have students write a biography of their interviewee, based on their interview.

Alignment with the Learning Results:

Grade Level: **9th-dipl.**

Content Area: Social Studies: **APPLICATIONS**

Standard: **Researching and Developing Positions on Current Social Studies Issues**

Students research, develop, present, and defend positions on current social studies issues by developing and modifying research questions, and locating, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing information from multiple and varied sources.

Descriptor **A1c**: Make judgments about conflicting findings from different sources, incorporating those from sources that are valid and refuting others.

Grade Level: **6th-8th**

Content Area: Social Studies: **HISTORY**

Standard: **Historical Knowledge, Concepts, Themes, and Patterns**

Students understand major eras, majoring enduring themes, and historic influences in the history of Maine, the United States, and various regions of the world.

Descriptor **E1d**: Analyze interpretations of historical events that are based on different perspectives and evidence.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Project Due Date: _____

**GATHER YOUR OWN HISTORY: ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
ASSIGNMENT SHEET**

As historians, we can so often have our noses in books that we forget about an excellent source: the people living among us. They created history. Now is your chance to contribute to the study of history by recording the memories of an older relative or friend.

Directions:

1. Choose someone to interview. The person you choose should be over 45 years old. He or she can be a relative, a friend, or a community member. Make sure you ask the person you choose if they would like to be interviewed before you prepare your questions.
2. Prepare a list of questions to ask your interviewee. As you are preparing your questions, think about who the person is. What decades have they lived through? What historical events might they remember? What are their interests? What do you think they might like to talk about? Your questions should be thought-provocative and should get your interviewee talking. Get your questions approved by your teacher before the interview.
3. Set up an appointment with your interviewee. Make sure it is a convenient time for him or her. Let him or her know approximately how long the interview will last. Write the date and time down, and make sure you don't forget it.
4. Make sure you have everything with you before you leave for your interview (tape recorder, blank tape, extra batteries, notebook, pen or pencil, prepared questions). Go over the Interview Protocol for Budding Oral Historians before you conduct your interview.
5. Complete your Oral History Project Evaluation Sheet soon after your interview, when it is still fresh in your mind.
6. Choose a part of the interview you thought was the most interesting and transcribe it (write it down on paper). Your transcription should be 5 pages long, typed, double-spaced. You may need to replay parts of the conversation to make sure your transcription is accurate.
7. Hand your tape, your interview transcription, and your evaluation sheet in to your teacher by the due date.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Oral History Project Evaluation Sheet

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate the quality of your questions.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How well prepared were you for the interview? How effective do you think your questions were? Why?

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate the quality of the interview.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How well do you think the interview went? What did you learn about the past? What did you learn about interviewing?

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate the quality of your transcription.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How much effort did you put into the transcription of your interview? What challenges did you face?

Name: _____

Date: _____

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR BUDDING ORAL HISTORIANSBased on advice in Edward Ives' book, *The Tape Recorded Interview*, 1974.

1. Know your equipment. Before you go, practice speaking into your tape recorder. You may even want to practice some of your interview questions on a friend or a parent. Make sure you know how to work the machine, how loudly you need to speak, and where the microphone is.
2. Come prepared. If you're using batteries, load up on fresh ones and test them before beginning your interview. You might want to bring a back up set, just in case. If your tape recorder refuses to work for some reason (do everything you can to make sure it won't!), be ready to take notes as best you can and write them up afterward. Bring a notebook and a pen or pencil.
3. Prepare questions beforehand! This is important--you don't want to get five minutes into the interview and find that you have nothing more to ask. Make your questions open-ended and provocative. Show your informant that you know something about who he or she is:

GOOD QUESTION: I know you used to work as a logger in the lumber camps. Did you ever hear the song "The Jam on Gerry's Rock"? Do you know any other songs like that one?

NOT SO GOOD QUESTION: What songs do you know?
4. Make an appointment with your informant. Don't just show up at his or her door unannounced with your tape recorder. When you make the appointment, tell him or her what specifically you're interested in talking about, i.e. "I'd like to talk with you about any folksongs you might know."
5. Be relaxed. Try not to read directly from your list of questions, though referring to them from time to time is fine. Help your informant feel relaxed as well.
6. Enjoy yourself!