

## Student Lesson



### “Conducting an Oral History Interview”



**Lesson Title:** “Conducting an Oral History Interview”

**Grade Level:** 7 – 12

#### **EARLS:**

##### ◆ Social Studies

**2.0 The student applies the methods of social science investigation to investigate, compare and contrast interpretations of historical events.**

2.1 investigate and research

2.2 analyze historical information

3.2 analyze how historical conditions shape the emergence of ideas and how ideas change over time.

##### ◆ Communications

**1.0 The student uses listening and observation skills to gain understanding.**

1.1 focus attention

1.2 listen and observe to gain and interpret information

1.3 check for understanding by asking questions and paraphrasing

**2.0 The student communicates ideas clearly and effectively**

2.1 communicate clearly to a range of audiences for different purposes

**3.0 The student uses communication strategies and skills to work effectively with others.**

#### **OVERVIEW:**

Oral history is a way to gather information from people who took part in past events. Gathering oral history is the technique of interviewing people who lived through historical events and recording their answers. The person being interviewed is often called the interviewee or interview subject.

#### **PURPOSE:**

This lesson will provide students with the opportunity to practice the fundamentals for doing an oral history project. Students will see how easy it is to organize and how interesting it will be to interview someone by conducting a practice oral history interview.

#### **MATERIALS:**

1. Writing materials
2. Video camera or audio recorder
3. Chair and backdrop
4. Computer access to [www.wwiihistoryclass.com](http://www.wwiihistoryclass.com)

#### **TIME REQUIRED:**

3 (45 minute) class periods

**ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:**

1. 1. The teacher and students will review and research "Oral History (How To)" from the website [www.wwiihistoryclass.com](http://www.wwiihistoryclass.com)
2. 2. The teacher will review the basics of selecting interviewees and setting up for recording or videotaping the interview subject. (Tips for oral histories are included with this lesson)
3. 3. Divide students into groups of three. (3)
4. 4. Each group will have an interviewee, an interviewer and a cameraman or recorder.
5. 5. The group will prepare six questions to ask the interview subject. (Examples of questions are provided with this lesson)
6. 6. Students will conduct a practice interview. The interview may be a classroom activity or an after-school activity.
7. 7. An audio or video recording will be the product of the interview.

**EVALUATION:**

1. Students will be evaluated on preparation, participation, questions and the final video or audio product.
2. A sample rubric is provided with this lesson plan

## Sample Questions

Where did you grow up?  
Who were your parents and what did they do?  
Any brothers and or sisters?  
Do you remember where you were when you heard the Pearl Harbor had been attacked?  
Do you remember what you thought or felt then?  
How did you get involved in armed forces?  
How old were you?  
What were you doing prior to the war?  
What was your assigned job?  
What battle were you involved with?  
What is your first memory of arriving at the war front?  
Were you scared all of the time or was it just a part of life?  
Do you remember your first day in battle?  
Did you leave anybody at home... wife, girl friend, mom, dad?  
What are the history books leaving out?  
Do you know you were a part of history while it was happening?  
During combat how close were you to the enemy?  
What did you do to break the fear, boredom, monotony, etc.?  
Did you have any pets in the service?  
Did you see any of the USO shows we hear so much about?  
If so did you see anybody famous?  
Can you remember a favorite song from that time?  
What was the hardest part of your time in the service?  
What do you want the generations to come to know and remember about WWII?  
What was an average day like?  
Were you ever wounded?  
Did you ever think you might lose your life?  
If you could tell me one short story about your time (fun, serious, sad, anything) what would it be?  
Have you ever faced anything like WWII since?

When asking questions, keep them simple one part questions. If you ask multiple part questions, most often parts of the questions remain unanswered.

## **Teacher Handout**

To the teacher: Review the basics of an oral history project

### **FINDING INTERVIEW SUBJECTS**

1. Students may have relatives or friends that may want to be involved.
2. Local veteran's organizations will be a great source of interview subjects.
3. Retirement homes are a good source of interview subjects.
4. Make sure you get back to these people personally, as soon as possible. Conversing with them over the phone will help you determine whether they are appropriate candidates for your WWII oral history project.

### **RESEARCH**

1. Provide the volunteers with a survey form that will give your students enough basic information to begin a meaningful search for information about the aspects of the WWII period relevant to that person's experiences.
2. Based on the survey, students can develop pertinent questions.
3. It will also help when summarizing, cataloguing and indexing the video.

### **PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW**

1. Make sure that students have clear, well-defined responsibilities and have followed through on them (cameraman/technician, researcher, director, interviewer, etc.).
2. Have students do a practice interview.

### **SETTING UP THE INTERVIEW**

1. Confirm interview time and place.
2. Urge the participants to bring along books, pictures, documents, medals or any other memorabilia that they wish to share.
3. Before the interview, obtain a signed release agreement.
4. Make sure that all video preparations have been made.
5. Check your equipment before the interview.
6. Use a black backdrop.
7. Before the interview, go over the procedure and questions with the narrator. Give him a chance to alter or add to the list and make suggestions.
8. Try to create a comfort zone for all the people involved.
9. It may be useful to work out a silent signal to cut off the taping if anyone wants to take a break or is uncomfortable with the direction of the interview.

### **THE INTERVIEW**

1. An interview is not a dialogue. The whole point of the interview is to get the narrator to tell his/her story.
2. Ask questions that require more of an answer than "yes" or "no." Ask who, what, where, when, why, how.
3. Ask one question at a time. Sometimes interviewers ask a series of questions all at once.
4. Ask brief questions.
5. Start with questions that are not controversial. A good place to begin is with the narrator's youth and background.
6. Don't let periods of silence fluster you. Give your narrator a chance to think of what he/she wants to add before you hustle him/her along with the next question.
7. Relax; write a few words on your notepad.
8. Don't interrupt a good story because you have thought of a question, or because your narrator is straying from the planned outline.
9. Try to establish at every important point in the story where the narrator was or what his/her roll was in this event, in order to indicate how much is eyewitness information and how much is based on reports of others.

10. Don't 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. Let the tape role.
11. Interviews usually work out better if there is no one present except the narrator, camera operator and the interviewer.
12. End the interview at a reasonable time--an hour and a half is probably the maximum.
13. Don't use the interview to show off your knowledge, vocabulary, charm, or other abilities. Good interviewers do not shine; only their interviews do.

### **POST-INTERVIEW CONCERNS**

Make sure there is some kind of follow-up (a note, a card created by the students, a copy of the interview tape).

### **DOCUMENTATION**

Each interview should be documented so that information can be easily accessed. To that end, it is suggested that the following format be used.

**Tape Number \***

**NAME**

**Address**

**Phone Number/Email/Fax**

**Classification**, i.e. Civilian, Defense Worker, US Navy, Air Corp, USMC, Coast guard, Wehrmacht, etc

**Theater of Operations**, i.e. North Africa, European Theater, CBI (China Burma India), etc.

**keywords** describing important content, i.e. The Bulge, Pearl Harbor, Holocaust, Sorrow, Loss, etc.

**Summary** a short paragraph summarizing the interview's quality and its direction.

- \* A system of numbering should be developed and followed for each sequential interview that takes place. This unique number will follow the particular tape/interview in whatever form it takes on. For example tape Number WW\_001 might generate a written transcript with a file name such as WW\_001\_TR. A list of clips from an interview might be WW\_001\_01, WW\_001\_02, WW\_001\_03 etc.

## Conducting an Oral History Rubric

Date					
Got started on time					
Everyone Participated					
Used time wisely					
Project completed					
Project contained correct criteria (such as interview planning, equipment check, appropriate questions, correct interview setup)					

**Ratings:**

5 – Excellent

4 – Good

3 – Average

2 – Poor

1 - Unacceptable