I. ORAL HISTORY IN THE CLASSROOM

This is an Adobe PDF document created from a PowerPoint slide presentation.

Navigate from slide to slide by using your keyboard’s up and down arrows.

Explore the links in the workshop for exciting resources for your classroom. Links will open in your browser upon a double click on the underlined titles.
Oral history is

... a sound recording of historical information obtained through an interview that preserves a person’s life history or eyewitness account of a past experience
Possibilities for every class:

- Oral history projects may be a single assignment for an individual or a term project for the whole class.
- Teachers may bring in guests to be interviewed in front of the class by the teacher, by a prepared student or group of students, or by the entire class.
- Younger students or first-time interviewers may start at home with older family members or neighbors with a simple question, such as: Tell me about growing up in the sixties, or, What was school like when you were my age?
- Classes may link with community groups to select topics, locate interviewees, and share outcomes.
- Classes may link with businesses (adopt-a-school partners, etc.) to obtain sponsorship funds for equipment, public programming costs, printing costs, etc.
Possibilities for the history or social science class:

- Assign a single interview on an specific topic fitting the curriculum (e.g., an interview with a veteran of the Vietnam War).

- Consider a full semester project with multiple interviews on a topic (e.g., interviews about the Vietnam War, including people on the home front as well as veterans).

- Oral history can provide valuable and unique primary materials for history fair projects.
In doing oral history, students do what career historians do

- Students do *active investigation* — just like career historians: conducting background research, composing questions, doing interviews, analyzing the outcome, and making conclusions.

- Students also do *passive investigation* — just like career historians: analyzing content, drawing conclusions, and making comparisons with information in oral histories conducted by others and available online or in archives.
Possibilities for the literature class:

- Using a recording of an interview, students may create transcripts, stories, articles, or essays, radio/television/drama scripts, poems, a Web site, a media presentation, readers’ theater, art, music, or dance.

- The project may focus on the narrativity of interviewing—e.g., storytelling, listening, writing.

- Students may look beyond what people say in an interview to dig deeper into how people express themselves and why.

- Students may do interviews to collect folklore, legends, ghost stories, and other oral traditions.
What students can do with oral history:

Click below to visit Web sites that illustrate creative ways curriculum topics come alive for students through oral history.

- Rocky Gap High School, Virginia
- Caroline Elementary School, New York
- South Kingston High School, Rhode Island
- D. C. Everest School District, Wisconsin
- Anderson Valley Rural Network, California
- Countdown to Millennium Project, Ohio
Through oral history, students …

- gain increased awareness of and appreciation for their heritage;
- gain increased awareness of their own identities;
- gain a sense of giving back to family, community, and elders;
- gain technical skills, such as handling equipment, word processing, and time & project management;
- practice the give-&-take of cooperation and the discussion & evaluation of one another’s work; and
- increase social awareness, listening skills, and questioning skills, thereby gaining confidence in oral communication.
Through oral history, students also ...

- connect local people, family members, & familiar places with historical events studied in class;
- forge stronger ties between school & community;
- learn to use both primary & secondary resources for research;
- uncover new information for use by others;
- develop critical thinking skills;
- sharpen writing and editing skills;
- and enjoy learning about & writing about real life.
Print resources for teachers

**Story Bridges: A Guide to Conducting Intergenerational Oral History Projects.**

Angela Zusman, Left Coast Press, 2010.

A practical manual, with extensive resource list and samples of valuable forms for student project.

Learn more at [http://www.LCoastPress.com](http://www.LCoastPress.com)
Print resources for teachers

**DIALOGUE WITH THE PAST: ENGAGING STUDENTS AND MEETING STANDARDS THROUGH ORAL HISTORY.**
Glenn Whitman. AltaMira, 2004. For teachers of middle and high school students, this practical and straightforward manual comes from a fellow teacher with years of experience directing classroom oral history projects.

**PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ORAL HISTORIANS.**

These and other useful resources are available from AltaMira Press. (Enter the phrase oral history in the quick search box.)
Print resources from OHA

**ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION PAMPHLETS**

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS IN YOUR CLASSROOM.** Linda P. Wood, 2001


**USING ORAL HISTORY IN COMMUNITY HISTORY PROJECTS.** Laurie Mercier & Madeline Buckendorf, 1992.

**ORAL HISTORY FOR THE FAMILY HISTORIAN.** Linda Barnickel, 2006.

[Order OHA pamphlets.](#)
Online resources

**DOING ORAL HISTORY**

Created by teacher Glenn Whitman and his students at St. Andrew’s School, this significant site includes resources for training and conducting oral histories. Includes handouts to adapt for your students and ideas for sharing students’ work with the community.

**LOC TEACHERS**

The U.S. Library of Congress furnishes tips for instruction and evaluation, lesson plans for teaching and using oral history, and primary sources based on oral history. On the teachers’ homepage, enter “oral history” in the Search this Site box.
TELLING THEIR STORIES: ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES PROJECT

The Urban School of San Francisco provides tenth-twelfth grade students with extensive oral history experience, from doing background research through creating a multimedia presentation. The ultimate outcome is a rich collection of primary source material available online to the global community. The site includes a course overview. Watch, listen, and learn from student interviews with holocaust survivors and refugees, WWII camp liberators and witnesses, and Japanese American internees.
Online resources

ALBERTA ONLINE: USING ORAL HISTORY

This site is filled with resources for teaching oral history, including unit and lesson plans, learning objectives, and classroom activities, such as “fish bowl interviews” and “bloopers skits.” Here are lists of open-ended questions for students to use in interviews and links to sites displaying oral histories online or providing additional teaching ideas.
Online resources

**USING ORAL HISTORY TO TEACH U.S. HISTORY**

This forum from History Matters (February 2003), moderated by Linda Shopes, contains teacher comments and practical advice for oral history in the American history classroom. Scroll down the list of topics to locate the title.

**MAKING SENSE OF ORAL HISTORY**

Linda Shopes presents here critical questions to ask when reading or listening to oral history interviews. These questions are useful for teaching content analysis of oral history and other primary documents.
ORAL HISTORY WORKSHOP FOR TEACHERS

You have completed ORAL HISTORY IN THE CLASSROOM and you have seen how teachers use oral history in creative ways to benefit students.

Now, learn how to choose and research oral history topics, locate interviewees, prepare a permission form, and choose your equipment in GETTING STARTED.

Return to Oral History Workshop for Teachers to continue your experience with oral history.