

Oral History Makes Learning Memorable with Heroes!



By:

Stacey Perez

Escondido Union High School District



**San Diego County
Office of Education**

Perspectives on the American Experience

PAE Teacher: Stacey Perez, Ed.D. (sperez@classicalacademy.com)
Oral History Facilitator: Laura Wendling, Ph.D. (wendling@csusm.edu)

Oral History Makes Learning Memorable with Real-life Heroes!

Overview of Project

1. Purpose

The purpose of this oral history project is for students to make connections between historical events and a real life hero, who's story might not otherwise be recorded, to gain historical empathy, context, and inquiry. This project is aimed at making history memorable and involving the students in gathering historical data. "Oral history is a method of research that seeks to preserve the memories of individuals who shaped or participated in the events of the past. Through informed and empathetic interviewing, the oral historian creates information about the famous and the obscure, about events in daily life and those of international consequence" (Oral History, 2009).

This oral history project began as a simple project, but evolved into the cross-curriculum based integration of eighth grade history, language arts, and literature.

2. Standards

8.1 Students understand the major events preceding the founding of the nation and relate their significance to the development of American constitutional democracy.

8.3 Students understand the foundation of the American political system and the ways in which citizens participate in it.

8.4 Students analyze the aspirations and ideals of the people of the new nation.

8.12 Students analyze the transformation of the American economy and the changing social and political conditions in the United States in response to the Industrial Revolution.

3. Objectives

Student will complete an Oral History Research Project using the 10 steps of Oral History Research.

4. Outline of Activities

Week One:

Students read over the Oral History Packet

Student selects a real-life hero.

Student begins research on the timeline and events during the lifetime of their hero (birth year, major events, presidents, national and international events, specific topics of interest).

Week Two:

Student continues basic historical research, to include at least three references.
Student continues basic historical research, to include at least three more references (for a total of at least 6 references).
Student completes the research and begins the rough draft of a five-paragraph research paper. The research paper does not include any specific information about their hero. The research paper will include two or three historical events that have taken place during the lifetime of their hero.
Student will include one primary source document in their research paper.

Week 3:

Schedule and conduct a preliminary interview with their hero (two or three probing questions about events that may have shaped their life).
Begin to develop a question outline of 5 to 7 open-ended questions.

Week 4:

Complete question outline of 5 to 7 open-ended questions.
Conduct additional research, based on the information discovered in the preliminary interview, to strengthen the five-paragraph research paper.
Complete the five-paragraph historical essay.

Week 5:

Conduct the 20 minute (max) interview, including video or audio recording, and pictures (mandatory – an 8 x 10 photo of the student with their interviewee).
Transcribe the entire interview.
Write a narrative journal response to the interview experience.

Week 6:

Create an oral history interview portfolio.
Create a cover page that reflects the specific research and the overall history experience.
Create the title page for the oral history portfolio.

Week 7:

Create a table of contents
Write Part I: Introduction of the oral history experience.
Complete and type Part I of the oral history experience.

Week 8:

Begin and complete Part II: Oral history interview documents: a 250 word interview abstract, a timed index, a name/subject index, the oral history interview transcript, and an interview timeline.
Begin and complete Part II: An Analysis of the Interview Process: describe the positive and negative personal dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee, assess the importance of building rapport, eye contact, body language, etc., the interviewee's control of the interview, the sequence and the effectiveness of the interview questions, the objectivity and the biases that impacted the interview, the reliability of the interviewee, the validity of the factual content of the interview, and the quality of the sound/audio recording.

Week 9:

Complete Part III: Analysis and interpretation, section 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5

Week 10:

Complete Part IV: Historical Narrative (This is the hero's biography)

Complete Part V: Personal Analysis

5. Digital Storytelling (Option)

http://www.microsoft.com/education/teachers/guides/digital_storytelling.aspx

6. Handouts and Additional Resources

Subject Area: Reshaping a Nation Grade Level(s) 8 (Eighth)

Content Standards: 8.3, 8.4, 8.6,

End Product: Oral History

Technology Emphasis: Use of computers, digital cameras, Internet, and presentation software

WHAT IS ORAL HISTORY?

Oral history is a method of research that seeks to preserve the memories of individuals who shaped or participated in the events of the past.

Through informed and empathetic interviewing, the oral historian creates information about the famous and the obscure, about events in daily life and those of international consequence.

Oral history is the search for a connection between biography and history...

Oral history is a connection between the individual and society, or the person and the nation...

Oral history is the creation of something new.

Alessandro Portelli

Making Connections:

Interviewee and Interviewer

**School (Student & Teacher)
Community Organizations
Community Members**

Historical Empathy

Historical Context

Historical Inquiry

5 MAIN BENEFITS OF USING ORAL HISTORY IN THE CLASSROOM

- 1. OH brings the social studies curriculum to life as students realize that they are surrounded by, and are a part of, the creation of history. *Oral history makes learning memorable!***
- 2. OH engages active learning by involving students firsthand in gathering historical data.**
- 3. OH builds higher level (critical) thinking skills as students develop questioning and interviewing strategies, make judgments about the point of view of the person(s) being interviewed, and then analyze, synthesize and evaluate the information they receive.**
- 4. OH is well suited to non-native English learners because it places an emphasis on interviewing subjects rather than on letters, documents, and other written records.**
- 5. OH develops strong oral language skills which are an essential prerequisite to developing good writing skills.**

DATA COLLECTION FORMATS

- Group Interview**
- Individual Interviews**
- Survey Home**
- “Object” Interview**
- Field Trip Interview**

THE 10 STEPS OF ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH

- **Select an interview topic**
- **Conduct basic “research”**
- **Find a person or persons to interview**
- **Schedule and complete a preliminary interview**
- **Develop a question outline**
- **Research! Research! Research!**
- **Develop a final question outline and set an interview date**
- **Conduct the interview and secure permission**
- **Write a thank you note to the interviewee**
- **Analyze your interview and complete the assigned paperwork/project**

THE 3 PARTS OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

- 1. Introduction:**
 - **Your name**
 - **Date**
 - **The name of the interviewee**
 - **A summary of the topic**
- 2. The Interview**
- 3. Interview Evaluation:**
 - **What were three good things about the interview?**
 - **What were three things that could be improved?**
 - **What was the best piece of information in the interview?**

TYPES OF ORAL HISTORY QUESTIONS

1. **Opinion questions (Subjective questions)**
2. **Factual questions (Objective questions)**
3. **Documentary questions**
(Used to document validity, reliability & subtext)

STRUCTURES OF ORAL HISTORY QUESTIONS

Open questions

Ex. Who? What? When? Where? How?

Closed questions

Ex. Did you? In what year?

Yes or no questions

RESEARCH AND QUESTION DEVELOPMENT

Content

Chronology

Causation (Multiple)

Context

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION *AFTER* THE INTERVIEW

Corroboration of data

Construction of a narrative

Creating something new!

HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

- **The use of primary sources**
- **The use of maps**
- **The use of visual sources / photographs**
- **The use of literary and / or musical sources**
- **Comparing and contrasting differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions**
- **The consideration of multiple perspectives**
- **The comparison of competing historical narratives**
- **The analysis of cause and effect relationships**
- **The analysis of multiple-causation**
- **Historical filtering**
- **The analysis of bias / the rationale for bias**

PLANNING AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

- ❖ **How would you use oral history in your classroom?**

**Main purpose: Content, skill development, motivation,
subject appreciation**

Topic / Theme:

Active / Passive use of oral history:

Potential sources of interviewees:

Student instruction:

- ❖ **To what standards would you relate oral history instruction?**
- ❖ **What partnerships / community resources would you develop?**
- ❖ **In what ways would you connect oral history with historical thinking skills and the construction of student narratives?**
- ❖ **What potential primary source documents would you consider using to support instruction of the selected theme?**
- ❖ **How would you use technology?**
- ❖ **What products would you have students develop?**
- ❖ **What assessments would you develop?**
- ❖ **How could the products benefit the school / community?**
- ❖ **Other questions?**

**Student Product and Assessment:
THE ORAL HISTORY PORTFOLIO
by Barry A. Lanman**

The enclosed model portfolio is a suggested accumulation of components that offer ways in which to assess student learning by providing an alternative to the traditional forms of grading such as quizzes and tests. An oral history portfolio can serve as both a product of the oral history interview and a student created document designed for assessment. Portfolios can stand alone as the only product of an oral history interview or be produced in combination with another creative oral history interview product. The processes of creating the portfolio as well as the finished piece of work can be assessed in accordance with educator's goals and standards.

It is *not* expected that all of the suggested items be included in a student's final portfolio. Instead, the educator should select appropriate items and design a portfolio that addresses specific instructional goals, standards, student abilities, student maturity and levels of instruction. In addition, the assigned portfolio may be modified for ability groupings within a given class. Conversely, it is intended that the creative teacher will augment the portfolio with components that reflect their specific subject, content, teaching styles, student interests and student capabilities. The educator might even consider allowing students to "contract" certain sections of the portfolio, thus allowing for partial student directed assessment.

Through the development of an oral history interview portfolio, students can be exposed to the roles of an historian and be engaged in higher order thinking which involve the skills of analysis and interpretation. Depending on the educator's goals / standards, a point system and/or letter grade can be assigned to the various sections of the portfolio. A rubric should be developed in advance and communicated to the students at the onset of the experience. The educator may also take advantage of the opportunity to have students complete a self-evaluation of their portfolio. A peer review of the portfolios is also highly recommended as an additional learning experience.

Components that may be included in an Oral History Interview Portfolio

A creative cover reflecting the specific research and the overall oral history experience

A title page

A table of contents

Part I. Introduction to the Oral History Experience

1. The research question / research hypothesis
2. Background information on the interviewee(s)
3. Background information on the topic
4. A summary that discusses why the research question / research hypothesis, topic and interviewee(s) were selected

Part II. Oral History Interview Documents and an Analysis of the Interview Process

1. Oral history interview documents
 - A 250 word interview abstract (Interview Summary)
 - A timed index (Each five minute section of the interview summarized)
 - A name / subject index
 - The oral history interview transcript (The best ____ minute section of the interview is an option if student is not required to transcribe the entire interview.)
 - Verbatim copy
 - Verbatim copy with interviewee and interviewer corrections/changes
 - Final edited copy
 - An interview timeline which graphically shows how the interview(s) fits into the overall time period of study
2. An Analysis of the Interview Process
 - Describe the positive and the negative personal dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee.
 - Assess the importance of: Building rapport, eye contact, body language, etc.
 - Assess the interviewee's control of the interview
 - Assess the sequence and the effectiveness of the interview questions
 - Assess the objectivity and the biases that impacted the interview
 - Assess the reliability of the interviewee
 - Assess the validity of the factual content of the interview
 - Assess the quality of the sound / audio recording

Part III. Analysis and Interpretation of the Oral History Interview(s) and the Historical Research

1. An analysis of the research question / research hypothesis:
 - The stated research question/research hypothesis
 - In what ways did the interview(s) address the research question / hypothesis?
 - In what ways was the research question / hypothesis not addressed?
2. Assess and interpret how the oral history interview(s) relate to the background research and the utilization of:
 - Primary and secondary source documents
 - Maps, photographs and other visual sources
 - Literary and/or musical sources, etc.
3. Assess and interpret the research with regard to:
 - Comparing and contrasting differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions
 - The consideration of multiple perspectives
 - The comparison of competing historical narratives
 - The analysis of multiple causation

- The issue of historical filtering
- The analysis of bias / The rationale for bias
- The issues of cause and effect, change, stability, fact vs. opinion, conflict and perceptions.

Note: This discussion can be directed towards one or more of the following areas depending on the research question/hypothesis: Political, economic, social, philosophical and/or esthetic.

4. Assess and interpret how the oral history interview(s) addressed the following historical issues relating to the National Standards of Historical Thinking:
 - Chronological and historical comprehension (How the interview relates to the overview of history)
 - Historical analysis and interpretation
 - Historical research capabilities
 - Historical issue analysis and decision making

5. Assess how the oral history interview(s) addressed the following themes of the Bradley Commission on History in Schools (Six vital themes and narratives):
 - Values, beliefs, political ideas and institutions
 - Conflict and cooperation
 - Patterns of social and political interaction
 - Civilization, cultural diffusion and innovation
 - Human interaction with the environment
 - Comparative history of major developments

Part V. Historical Narrative

Write an historical narrative based on the research. The narrative should include data from the oral history interview(s), the supporting research sources and an analysis and interpretation of the overall findings of the research project.

Part IV. Personal Analysis

The following personal analysis items may be included:

- Keep and submit a personal journal describing your feelings about the research and interview processes before, during and after the oral history interview(s).
- Explain what you liked about the oral history experience.
- How would you change the oral history experience to make it better?
- If you were talking with a student about to begin the oral history experience, what suggestions would you give to that person?
- Evaluate the strengths and the weaknesses of oral history as a research method.
- From an historical viewpoint, what were the three most important things you learned? Explain
- From an overall perspective, what were the most important things you learned from the oral history experience? Explain

Part V. Appendices

The following appendices may be included:

- Legal Agreement(s)
- Background information document
- A photograph of the interviewee
- Research question / research hypothesis
- Oral history interview question outline(s)
- Research log (Date, activity, and time)
- Research documents
- Supporting photographs
- Copies of supporting primary and secondary source documents
- Graphs and maps
- List of research sources
- A Bibliography
- Creative products produced from the oral history experience

Part VI. The oral history tape(s), videotapes and/or disks

A FEW ORAL HISTORY WEBSITES OF INTEREST
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Consortium of Oral History Educators (includes online journal)

<http://www.umbc.edu/mrc/cohe/>

The Martha Ross Center for Oral History

<http://www.umbc.edu/mrc/>

Oral History Association

<http://omega.dickinson.edu/organizations/oha/>

Oral History Review

<http://www.ucpress.edu/journals/oha/>

Columbia University Oral History Research Office – American Historians

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/oral/guides/hist.html>

H-Oralhist

(includes Oral history Association and online discussions/resources)

<http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~oralhist/>

-- BLOOPERS --

(Student/s act out incorrectly while audience guesses what element is wrong.)

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD INTERVIEW

1. Come to the interview well prepared with background knowledge of the subject, familiarity with your equipment, a document that the interviewee will sign giving permission to use the tape recorded interview, and interview questions.
2. Make the interviewee as comfortable as possible; polite, friendly behavior will put your interviewee at ease. Interviews should not begin abruptly. Take the time to introduce yourself and talk about your project. For example: "Hello Mr. Jones, I'm Jane Smith. How are you today? Thanks for taking the time to let me interview you about life in Carlsbad for my oral history project. Where do you think we should sit to do the interview? We need a quiet place."
3. Take the time to find a quiet spot in which to conduct the interview (singing birds, ticking clocks, appliances, and friendly pets all add distracting noises to the recording). Set up the tape recorder between yourself and the narrator. Before you turn on the tape recorder, ask if the interviewee is ready to begin.
4. Begin the interview with a few simple questions that the interviewee can answer easily and comfortably.
5. Ask questions one at a time and do not rush the interviewee to respond. Silences will make for a better interview; pause at least five to ten seconds before asking a new question.
6. Speak clearly so that the narrator can easily understand and hear you. Keep the questions as brief as possible so that what you are asking will be clear to the interviewee.
7. Ask as many open questions as possible. These questions encourage the narrator to tell stories rather than to give yes/no answers.
8. Listen actively to the interviewee's answers and then ask follow-up questions like: "how did you feel about that?" or "what happened next?" to bring out more details before you go on to the next question. Respond appropriately to the interviewee. Pause or say something like "that must have been difficult" if the interviewee describes a painful memory.
9. Do not contradict or correct your interviewee. Keep your personal opinions to yourself as much as possible. Do not ask leading questions like: "Tell me about that winter, you must have had a miserable time."
10. Do not rush the end of the interview. Have a good closing question that helps the interviewee summarize or come to a conclusion. Always thank you interviewee for the time and generosity in helping with your project. Remember to have the interviewee sign the document or release form.

These points were adapted from an article by Paula J. Paul in the Organization of American Historians' Magazine of History.