



Conducting Oral Histories – Teacher Guide & Student Questions

Goal: to understand that history can be constructed from the experiences of people who were there, illustrating the value of learning through primary sources. Engaging students in this activity will also illustrate the diversity of experiences related to 9/11.

Teacher Guide

Introduction – Your Students Become the Historians

1. Discuss with your students the relationship and differences between oral histories and history in books.
2. Introduce the idea of a primary source.

Preparation for Conducting an Oral History

1. Have students do some research to get background on the topic.
2. Students should identify the person they will interview (parent/guardian, local first responder, teacher, or community member).
3. After researching, students should discuss their planned focus for their interview – what is the story they would like to hear? Do they want to know about the person's connection to the World Trade Center before 9/11? Do they want to know what happened to the person on the morning of 9/11? Do they want to hear how the person may have changed as a result of 9/11?
4. Have the students set up a time and place to conduct the oral history and schedule about 30 – 60 minutes for the interview. Be sure to have them find a quiet location with minimal noise.
5. Students should obtain a recording device to record the oral history, checking the memory card or available space and battery charge.
6. Have students make a list of 5 main questions they would like to have answered, (9/11 Tribute Museum has also provided suggested questions – see attached).
7. Bring a related photograph or two to the interview. Have the interviewee comment on the photo at the end of their interview. These photos and comments could be used in student projects.

Suggestions for Students Conducting an Oral History

1. Be sure to keep the area quiet, turn off radios, fans, and cell phones.
2. Ask the interviewee to sign a release form giving you permission to record the interview. On the form you will also get contact information for the interviewee.
3. Thank the person for taking time to talk with you. Let interviewee know the purpose of the recording (for your school library, or your class project).
4. Begin the interview by stating the date, your location, your name, and the name of the person you are interviewing, so that it is part of the recording. An oral history is a primary source document and this will give historical context to people who listen to it in the future.
5. Be a good listener and don't interrupt the person speaking – show interest by looking at the person and responding appropriately (nodding your head is best so you don't keep recording your voice saying "yes" or "oh" while the other person is talking).
6. Don't rush the questions; give person time to think and reflect.

Suggestions for Building a Project with the Oral Histories

1. Students can create a hallway exhibit out of the question, "How does 9/11 connect to our community?" Use photographs of interviewees and excerpts of their interviews to create a display in their school hallway, sharing the ways 9/11 connects to their local community.
2. Students can take a journalistic approach to understanding 9/11. Have the students use their interviews as eyewitness reports to write a newspaper article focused on the events and aftermath of September 11th, 2001.



ORAL HISTORY ACTIVITY FOR STUDENTS

Conduct a brief interview with a parent/guardian, local first responder, teacher or a community member to better understand the events and impact of 9/11. See sample questions below.

Sample Questions:

- 1. What is your name? Where do you live?**
- 2. Did you visit the World Trade Center in NYC before September 2001? If yes, when? Why?**
- 3. Did you know anyone who worked or visited there? If yes, what were their experiences?**
- 4. Where were you on the morning of September 11th?**
- 5. How did you first hear about the attacks? What did you do when you heard?**
- 6. Did you go to the World Trade Center site after the attacks?
If yes, can you describe what you saw? The people, the site, the recovery?**
- 7. Have you visited the 9/11 Memorial? What are your thoughts about it?**
- 8. How do you feel the world has changed as a result of September 11th?**
- 9. Have you made any changes in your life as a result of September 11th?**
- 10. Why do you think it is important to learn about September 11th?**