



Telling My Story Conducting and Writing an Oral History Appropriate for High School

Objective: To introduce oral history as another way of gathering information about a specific time, place, or event. To understand the interviewing process, conduct an interview, and write about it. To make connections between the past and the present through a personal narrative (oral history).

Lesson #1—1 to 2 class periods

Objective: To introduce oral history/personal narrative to you class and have a discussion about the interview process and develop interview questions.

Materials:

- Paper
- Pencils

Procedure:

- Introduce the term “oral history” to your students.
- Ask your students to define oral history for you. Write their definitions on a piece of chart paper or the blackboard.
- Once your students have determined an acceptable definition for oral history discuss what uses it might serve a historian.
 - What are the benefits of oral history?
 - What are the drawbacks?
 - How does one decide what information is most relevant? accurate?
- Ask your students if they wanted to learn more about immigration today whom they would choose to talk to. Options include:
 - New immigrants
 - Immigration Officials
 - Immigrant Service Organizations
 - Etc
- What type of information would they want to learn about contemporary immigration that would allow them to compare it to past immigration?
- What questions could they ask to get this information?
- Break your class into groups of 3 or 4 and have them brainstorm a list of interview questions.
- After giving your students time to come up with a list of questions bring the class back together.
- Write the questions they came up with on chart paper or the blackboard.
- Discuss the different types of questions: open-ended (why, how) and dichotomous (can be answered with yes or no). Which type of questions will allow the interviewee to give you the most information?
- Categorize the list of questions according to the type of question each asks.

- Ask your students to make sure they have a good list of questions written down for themselves for later use.

Assessment: Evaluate your students based on their participation in the discussion of oral history, interviews, and interview questions. Look to see if they were able to identify the information they would want to learn and then create questions that would help them obtain this information.

Lesson #2—1 to 2 weeks

Objective: To conduct an interview and obtain information through that interview that will allow the students to write a narrative about the interviewee and compare present immigration to past immigration.

Materials:

- Pencils
- Paper
- Interview Questions (from Lesson #1)
- Person to interview
- Stamps
- Envelopes
- Tape Recorders (if accessible to you school/students)

Procedure:

- Students will choose a person to interview about contemporary immigration. This person should be someone a student is already knows. If a student does not know an immigrant to interview then we suggest they read a biography/autobiography about an historic immigrant and write a narrative about that person as if they were immigrating today. This will require students to research how immigrants come into the country, what problems they face, how they find work, etc.
- Students should submit a proposed set of interview questions prior to the interview. They may have to revise them several times before they are ready to interview.
- Once their interview questions have been approved, allow your students to contact their interviewees.
- Students will arrange a time and place to meet.
- Students should be sure to keep their appointments and arrive on time, as a professional would.
- Before the student begins the interview he or she should explain the project. Example: *Our class is studying immigration to the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. We are now interested in learning about current immigrant experiences so that we can compare past and present. We will be writing a narrative about you based on this interview. A copy of the final project will be available to you after it is finished.*
- Students will conduct the interview based on the approved interview questions. Once a student feels he or she has gained sufficient

- information, the interviewee should be thanked and then the student may leave.
- After the interview, within 3 days, a thank you note will be sent to the interviewee. This will be completed during class time and a stamp and envelope will be provided by the teacher.

Assessment: Evaluate your students based on their list of questions and the organization of the questions for the interview.

Lesson #3—1 to 2 weeks

Objective: To write a narrative based on the information gathered through the interview process. To learn about contemporary immigration and be able to make comparisons to past immigration.

Materials:

- Paper
- Pencils
- Computer (if possible)
- Printer

Procedure:

- Students will transcribe their notes (or tape recording) from the interview into a useable format. If they are rewriting an immigrant history, they should follow all of the same steps, but instead of using information from their interviews, they will use information from their research about contemporary immigration.
- Once they have transcribed their notes they can begin writing a narrative based on the interview.
- This narrative should tell the story of the interviewee as well as compare and contrast past and present immigration.
- Your students will probably write several drafts. They should do peer editing (you may want to designate a day for this and arrange your students in groups) as well as submit a draft to you for revision.
- After final revisions print a copy for the class and one for the interviewee.
- You may want to compile these in a book as a class resource.
- Invite the interviewees to class for a day when your students read their narratives aloud.
- After the narratives have been shared have a class discussion about the differences and similarities they found between past and present immigration.

Assessment: Evaluate students on their ability to translate information from an interview into a narrative. Also look at their ability to compare past and present immigration.