



## ORAL HISTORY LESSON PLAN

Lower Elementary School; Grades 1-3

Related Museum Programs: All; Uses content from the *Hard Times* program

**BIG IDEA:** Oral history is a tool for learning about people, places, and events.

**DESCRIPTION:** Students utilize oral histories as a tool for learning about people, places, and events. As students explore the interview process by developing interview questions, conducting interviews with their classmates, and retelling the stories they collect, they gain an understanding of the way oral histories help us to learn about the past and each other.

**OBJECTIVES:** Students will:

- Understand that oral history is a way of gathering detailed information that helps us understand a specific time, place, person, or event.
- Understand what an interview is.
- Experience what it is like to participate in the interview process.
- Understand that all of us have important stories to share.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

- How do historians learn about the past?
- How can oral histories help us to understand the past?

**TIME FRAME:** 1-3 class periods. This activity has been designed to be customized to your learning goals and your students' individual needs. Choose to do the complete lesson plan or select parts with your students based on your schedule and objectives.

**MATERIALS:**

- Object Photos (located in appendix)
- Interview Worksheet (located in appendix)
- Story Worksheet (located in appendix)
- Pencils
- Chart paper
- [Recording of Josephine Baldizzi's oral history](http://www.tenement.org/education_lessonplans.html) (available at [http://www.tenement.org/education\\_lessonplans.html](http://www.tenement.org/education_lessonplans.html))
- Picture of Josephine Baldizzi (located in the appendix of this lesson)

**VOCABULARY:**

- Historian
- Oral History
- Interview

## **PROCEDURE:**

### Pre-Lesson Prep (to be completed by the teacher before the day of the lesson)

- Listen to Josephine Baldizzi’s oral history to become familiar with the material and background of the oral history used in this lesson.

### Part 1: Introduction

- Ask students if they know any stories about themselves from when they were a baby.
- Instruct students to share that story with a student sitting next to them. Select a few volunteers to share their story with the class.
- Ask students how they know about those stories if they were not old enough to remember the events of the stories themselves. Help students arrive at the realization that someone else had to tell those stories to them.
- Explain to students that historians also collect stories about events, times, and places for which they may not have a personal memory.
- Reinforce that one way historians learn about these stories is by asking or interviewing people who experienced or remember those events, times, and places to tell them the story. Clarify that this process is called oral history.

### Part 2: Activity

- Explain that in today’s lesson, students will do the work of historians and conduct an oral history. Students will interview each other about an event—specifically their first day of school. [As a variation, you can also have students work together to interview the teacher about his or her first day at school.]
- Work with students to prepare the interview questions.
  - Explain that before historians can interview another person, they need to prepare for the interview and choose what questions that they want to ask.
  - Discuss what information students think is most important to learn from these interviews and what questions will allow them to acquire that information.
  - Help students think about different types of questions (i.e. Yes-or-no questions versus open-ended questions)
    - Example of a yes-or-no question: Did you have a nice day?
    - Example of an open-ended question: How would you describe your day?
  - Create a “question bank” by recording students’ question suggestions on chart paper or on the board.
  - Depending on your students and their grade level, assign students to choose 2-4 questions to ask the person that they will interview.
- Give students’ time to interview one another and, depending on the grade level, record the interviewee’s responses on the Interview Worksheets (see: appendix).

### Part 3: Wrap-Up

- Instruct students to retell the story that they heard by writing or creating a drawing on the Story Worksheet (see: appendix)
- Bring the class back together to share what they learned and to reflect on the interview experience. Discussion questions might include:
  - What information did they learn about their classmate’s first day of school?
  - How did it feel to be asked all of those questions?
  - How did it feel to be the person asking all of those questions?
  - What was fun about interviewing someone in class?
  - What was difficult?
  - What would you try to do differently next time?
- Have students keep in mind their own interview experience as they listen to part of an oral history recorded by historians at the Tenement Museum. Tell students that the woman they are about to listen to lived as a child in the same building that houses the Tenement Museum.
- Display the picture of Josephine Baldizzi so that students can attach her voice to a face.
- Play the recording of Josephine Baldizzi’s oral history, which can be found on our website at [http://www.tenement.org/education\\_lessonplans.html](http://www.tenement.org/education_lessonplans.html)
- Ask students to turn to their neighbor and share something they learned from listening to Josephine Baldizzi’s story.
- Facilitate a wrap-up conversation. Some questions might include:
  - How did oral history help us to learn about Josephine Baldizzi and her family?
  - How did oral history help us to learn about each other?
  - How did Josephine’s interview compare to the interviews the students conducted? What kinds of questions did the interviewer ask?
  - If they could interview Josephine, what questions would they want to ask her?
  - What other events and experiences, would the students want to learn about using the oral history method?

### **ASSESSMENT:**

- Review the Interview and Story Worksheet.
- Listen to the interview questions students choose to ask.
- Ask students what they were able to learn about each other from their interviews.
- Ask students what they were able to learn about Josephine from listening to her oral history.

**EXTENSIONS:**

- Have students “publish” their work and compile students’ “works of history” as part of a Classroom History Book.
  - On example of “publishing” could be having students create covers for their Story Worksheet.
  - One way to create a Classroom History Book is to bind together students’ Story Worksheets with a front and back cover and displaying the book in the classroom library.
- Instruct students to interview a family member/ grown-up about their first day at school. Have students record their family member’s responses and write a “work of history” that tells the narrative. Have student compare and contrast their first day of school with that of their family members.

**APPENDIX: PICTURE OF JOSEPHINE BALDIZZI**



*Josephine and her brother Johnny circa 1935*

**APPENDIX: INTERVIEW WORKSHEET**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview Worksheet**

**Question:**

---

---

**Answer:**

---

---

---

**Question:**

---

---

**Answer:**

---

---

---

**Question:**

---

---

**Answer:**

---

---

---



**Draw the story!**

