

Oral History Project

Introduction:

Much of what we study in history is what is considered "traditional" history; that is, it is the history of major political figures, important events, and significant trends. You are going to help create the history that records the story of everyday people.

What is an Oral History?

Oral histories are created when one person (the interviewer) interviews another person (the interviewee) about a specific time period in the interviewee's life or a specific topic they can recall. The interviewer takes the interviewee's responses and creates a text of the interviewee's words told through the point of view of the interviewee. *This is not an exact transcript of what the interviewee says. The interviewer must edit the transcript—moving parts around, taking parts out, and even adding words here and there (with the interviewee's permission).* The final piece of writing should capture the voice and spirit of the interviewee.

Requirements for Immigration Oral History

- ☐ Text must be 2 pages, typed in MLA format
- ☐ An introduction is included
- ☐ Your introduction should show some knowledge/understanding of the person's country of origin
- ☐ The person should be a first-generation immigrant (immigrant or child of an immigrant)

Steps to Completing the Oral History

- ☐ Select a person you wish to interview.
- ☐ Obtain their permission to interview them *on their experience as an immigrant.*
- ☐ Set up an interview time and location; set aside 30 minutes or longer.
- ☐ Do some research on the country of their origin.
- ☐ Create questions to guide your interview.
- ☐ If possible, record the interview; take notes on interviewee's mannerisms, etc.
- ☐ Transcribe the interview into Q/A format, word for word.
- ☐ Edit the Q/A into the final oral history.
- ☐ Write a thank you note to your interviewee.

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Interview Planning Guide

You should do your best to plan your own interview opening, questions, and closing. You are welcome to use this guide, but you should include your own questions. Be authentic; your words should sound like they come from you and are naturally how you would speak to someone.

Interview opening MUSTS:

- ☐ Thank them for meeting/talking with you.
- ☐ Obtain permissions:
 - ☐ okay to record the interview?
 - ☐ Okay with you taking notes?
- ☐ Show consideration/respect for their story. For example: *If I ask you any questions you do not want to answer, please tell me you would not like to share. I will understand.*

Suggested Questions for Oral History Interview

- What country are you originally from?
- Why did you leave this country?
- When did you leave? How old were at that time?
- What were the conditions in the country when you left?
- How did you prepare for your trip here?
- Who came with you when you emigrated? Who did you leave behind? What did you leave behind?
- How did you get here? Did you stay somewhere else before arriving here?
- Why did you come to the United States? Why not some other country?
- Who decided you would come here? Did you want to leave?
- How did others in your home country treat you when they knew you were leaving?
- What changes in lifestyle did you make when you came here?
- What was your first impression of the U.S.? Has this initial impression changed over time?
- What are some of the differences/similarities you've noticed in the cultures here and in your home country?
- What were your hopes for yourself (&/or your family) when you came here? Have you realized these hopes?
- How were you treated when you first arrived in the United States? How are you treated now?
- Were your expectations of America met? Was your idea of America the same as the reality?

Interview Closing MUSTS:

- ☐ Thank the interviewee. (Example: *Thank you so much for sharing your story and your time with me today.*)
- ☐ Get Permissions:
 - ☐ to edit the conversation and write it into an oral history. (Their words will be reformatted to fit a narrative, but will not be changed significantly nor will you add information other than an introduction.)
 - ☐ To share their story with your teacher, classmates, and/or school community.
 - ☐ Request their address/e-mail so you can write to them later and send a copy of the oral history.

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Oral History: Q&A Sample and Passage

Q: So you really weren't that excited to be coming here?

A: Well, no, not really. I mean, think about it. Would you be? I mean, you live in one place your whole life and then suddenly your parents tell you, "Look, we've decided it's best for all of us to move to America. Your father has a better job and we'll be much happier there."

Q: Why didn't you want to come here?

A: Well, all of my friends were in Taipei. They were all that mattered to me. I mean you spend most of your younger years in school, so it only makes sense that you'd miss your friends when you have to move away so far. Uh, I guess I might've been somewhat selfish. I mean my father did get a better job when he got here, but for the rest of us in my family it really was difficult. I think I was 12 at the time . . . yeah, 12. I started in middle school here, yeah, and it was a pretty awful experience. It's not like middle school is normally a great time in your life anyway, is it? But coming here at that time and not knowing English all that well, well that certainly didn't make it any easier for me. I was lonely here.

Q: Why were you lonely?

A: Uh, it took me a long time to get to know people. In my school I really didn't know anyone else who was from Taiwan. Most everyone else had either grown up here or they were from Mexico, yeah mostly they spoke Spanish or English. But no one spoke Cantonese —that was the only language I knew then.

Interview Transformed into an Oral History Narrative

I wasn't all that excited to be coming here. I mean, think about it. Would you be? I mean, you live in one place your whole life and then suddenly your parents tell you, "Look, we've decided it's best for all of us to move to America. Your father has a better job and we'll be much happier there." At that time, all of my friends were in Taipei. They were all that mattered to me. You spend most of your younger years in school, so it only makes sense that you'd miss your friends when you have to move away so far. I guess I might've been somewhat selfish. My father did get a better job when he got here, but for the rest of us in my family it really was difficult.

I think I was 12 at the time . . . yeah, 12. I started in middle school here and it was a pretty awful experience. It's not like middle school is normally a great time in your life anyway, is it? But coming here at that time and not knowing English all that well certainly didn't make it any easier for me. I was lonely here. It took me a long time to get to know people. In my school I really didn't know anyone else who was from Taiwan. Most everyone else had either grown up here or they were from

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Mexico, and mostly they spoke Spanish or English. But no one spoke Cantonese —that was the only language I knew then.

Criteria	5	4	3	2	1
Introduction	Introduction is: -concise, effective, original and appropriate -shows a strong understanding of interviewees country of origin	Introduction is: -concise, effective and appropriate -shows a solid understanding of interviewees country of origin	Introduction: -provides adequate lead-in to text -shows a fair understanding of interviewees country of origin	Introduction provides a simple lead-in to text -shows a limited understanding of interviewees country of origin	Ineffective or unrelated introduction -shows little understanding of interviewees country of origin
Editing between Q/A and drafts	Significant editing is demonstrated between text and Q/A transcript	Reasonable editing is demonstrated between text and Q/A transcript	Some editing is demonstrated between text and Q/A transcript	Limited editing is demonstrated between text and Q/A transcript	Little editing is demonstrated between text and Q/A transcript
Voice	Text retains strong voice of interviewee	Text retains distinct voice of interviewee	Text retains some voice of interviewee	Text retains little voice of interviewee	Voice of interviewee is difficult to detect
Focus	Text focuses on topic; doesn't ramble	Text focuses on topic; generally doesn't ramble	Text focuses on topic; may ramble slightly	Text may not focus well on topic; may ramble	Text shows little focus on the topic; rambles
Details (meaning and sensory details)	Text contains vivid, interesting details that show meaning and provide imagery	Text contains details that show meaning and provide imagery	Text contains mostly concrete details. Some details show meaning	Text contains concrete details. Meaning is not apparent.	Text contains concrete details. Meaning is not apparent.
Length & Formatting	Text is more than 2 pages in length and follows MLA format precisely. Interviewee and interviewer names and the date of the interview are recorded as instructed.	Text is 2 pages in length and reasonably follows MLA format. Interviewee and interviewer names and the date of the interview are recorded as instructed.	Text is 1.5 pages in length and mostly follows MLA format. Interviewee and interviewer names and the date of the interview are recorded clearly.	Text is 1 page in length and somewhat follows MLA format. Interviewee and interviewer names and the date of the interview are recorded.	Text is less than 1 page in length and may not follow MLA format. Interviewee and interviewer names and the date of the interview are recorded.
Conventions	Writing is flawless; no typos, spelling,	Writing is nearly flawless; no noticeable typos, spelling,	Writing is nearly flawless; 1-2 noticeable typos, spelling,	Writing is nearly flawless; 3-4 noticeable typos, spelling,	Writing is nearly flawless; 5 or more noticeable typos, spelling,

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	mechanical, grammar errors	mechanical, grammar errors	mechanical, grammar errors	mechanical, grammar errors	mechanical, grammar errors
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Student Self-assessment

Directions: Honestly answer the following questions.

Did you do your best? Explain the level of quality in your work.

Did you work hard, enjoy the project, and feel good about what you completed? Explain the level of effort and commitment you gave.

Did you finish your work on time? Explain the timeline for your process.

If you had to do it again, what would you do differently? Explain.

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Student Reflection

Directions: Complete the following statements with details that reference your interview/oral history.

What I heard that surprised me was...

One thing that shocked me was...

Something I learned from the oral histories was...

One thing I thought was important from the interviews was...

From what I heard, I have a question or would like to know more about...

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Standards:

W.7.2 Write **informative/explanatory** texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and **analysis** of relevant content.

W.8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

W.7.4 Use **digital tools** and resources to produce and publish writing, link to and cite sources, and to interact and collaborate with others.

W.8.4 Use **digital tools** and resources to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

W.8.5 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

L.7.1, 8.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking; demonstrate proficiency within the 6-8 grammar continuum.

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