

Oral History is both a "window" and a "mirror." Using oral history allows students to make "textbooks of their lives," providing reflections of themselves and others." Margaret Smith Crocco

Defining Oral History

Oral History interviews are typically well-researched, connect personal experience with past events and ways of life, and are preserved for the future. Oral Histories are not:

- Random
- Recorded speeches
- Personal diaries on tape
- Sound recordings that lack the dialogue between interviewer and narrator
- **Oral History IS dynamic, creative, and systematic**

There are many approaches to oral interviews:

- Topical (can incorporate the following)
- Autobiographical
- Genealogical/family history
- Skills or occupation
- Social history
- Site location
- Folklore

Benefits of Using Oral History in the Classroom:

- Broadens multicultural aspects of history
- Expands and contracts historical understanding. Most social history focuses on the group. Oral history places the individual in historical context
- Acts as an antidote to the textbook
- Students act as historians, using critical thinking skills and learning to corroborate sources
- An active learning process, compatible with many different learning styles
- Extends the range of learning modalities beyond reading to include oral and interactive skills
- Potentially brings families and communities together within the classroom

Ideally, students conduct research and record interviews in audio or visual form. The interviews are then transcribed and maintained in an archive for use by future researchers. Knowing that classroom situations vary, ask yourself:

- 1) How might I use oral history to augment use of the textbook?
- 2) What additional primary and secondary sources can I use with oral history to personalize the past?
- 3) How can I do this within the boundaries of the mandated curricula?
- 4) In what ways might my students document this oral testimony?

Oral Interview Tips

- **LISTEN** carefully.
- **Use common sense and curiosity to follow up when the narrator has subsided by:**
 - truly listening (use prepared questions, but asking new ones too)
 - asking for detail, examples, illustrations
 - probing: Ask why and how
 - keeping the basic six in mind: who, what, when, where, why, how
 - asking one question at a time and/or statement/question format
 - inviting personal exploration
 - allowing digression, but pulling back when needed
 - staying quiet and not interrupting