

## EXIT PROJECT: ORAL HISTORY

Each person has a story to tell. Although not everyone's story ends up in your history book, each person's story fits into the history of that time. Each person is affected by what happens and in turn leaves his or her mark upon the world.

Historians learn much about history by studying the everyday experiences and beliefs of ordinary people. Learning history from real people involved in real events brings life to history. This project provides a means to learn about history from real people.

Historians use many sources -- diaries, letters, songs, census information, photographs, public records, and oral histories. **Oral history is a way to gather information from people who took part in past events.** Gathering oral history involves interviewing people who lived through historical events or time periods and recording their answers.

### TASK

1. Pick a Topic: What are you trying to learn? (Immigration, Military Service, Memories of a specific time period, Profession, Racism and Discrimination, Gender Issues etc.)

2. Find a subject to interview: What historical information could be obtained from this person?

#### 3. Research

Historical and significant events

Social and economic conditions

Culture and other interesting information about the time

4. Write Interview Questions: Before conducting the interview, plan the questions you want to ask. Create a list of ten general questions that you would like to ask your interview subject. Be sure to phrase them in an open-ended format so that your interview subject will not answer only "yes" or "no" to your question.

#### SAMPLE QUESTIONS

What world events do you remember from the time you were growing up?

Why did you immigrate to the United States?

How is growing up today different from when you were growing up in the 1950s?

5. Conduct the Interview: Record the audio, videotape the interview or hand transcribe the answers

6. Transcribe the interview.

### **Oral History Transcription: Q&A Example**

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.

7. WRITTEN COMPONENT/FINAL PRODUCT: Using the transcription of your interview, create a story. The story can be told in either a *first-person account* or an *autobiographical narrative*.

### **Oral History Story Form – First Person**

I wasn't all that excited to be coming here. I mean, think about it. Would you be? 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 was 12 when 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. 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 Mexico, and mostly they spoke Spanish or English. But no one spoke Cantonese —that was the only language I knew then.

## Oral History Story Form – Autobiographical Narrative

John was not excited about immigrating to America. He had lived in Taipei his whole life. In 1991, when John was 11, his parents told him they had decided to move to America. His father had a better job waiting in America and his parents believed the family would be much happier there.

However, all of John’s friends were in Taipei and that is all that mattered to him at the time. He had gone to school with these boys and he would miss them if he had to move so far away. Although John realized he was being selfish, it was very difficult for him to leave his country.

After immigrating to America, John started middle school at age 12. It was a pretty awful experience for him. He did not know how to speak English and he was lonely. It took him a long time to get to know people. In his school, he did not know anyone else who was from Taiwan. Everyone else at school had either grown up in America or they were from Mexico, and mostly they spoke Spanish or English. But no one spoke Cantonese - the only language he knew how to speak.

### 8. SELF ASSESSMENT:

- A) What is the most important or meaningful thing that you learned from your interview subject?
- B) How does your interviewee’s story relate to you in both the present and the past?
- C) If the roles were reversed and you became interviewee subject, what stories would you like to tell?
- D) What is the most helpful hint that you could give to someone next year that would help them with their interview project?

### NOTES:

- The oral history project should be typed.
- CHECKLIST: The final project should contain
  - 1) Cover – Student Name and Class, Image(s), Title or Name of Interviewee
  - 2) The transcription of your interview
  - 3) A story created using the interview answers
  - 4) Self assessment

### ORAL HISTORY PROJECT RUBRIC

	4	3	2	1
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION	Minimum of ten open-ended questions that reflect thoroughness of research and an ordered plan for conducting the interview.	Approximately ten open-ended questions that might not reflect thoroughness of research and an ordered plan for conducting the interview.	Less than ten questions that lack open-endedness and use of research. Questions are unorganized and at times do not remain focused on the period or event in question.	Less than ten questions are used. Questions are not open-ended. Questions are posed in an unorganized manner and do not relate to the period or event being examined.
BIOGRAPHY	Provides a strong sense of the interviewee’s background with use of dates, details and anecdotes to provide context. Interviewee’s past is clearly established in the context of the interview period.	Provides a sense of the interviewee’s background with limited use of dates, details and anecdotes to provide context. Interviewee’s past is partially established in the context of the interview period.	Provides an unclear sense of the interviewee’s background and does not include dates, details and anecdotes to provide context. Interviewee’s past is not established in the context of the interview period.	Provides no sense of the interviewee’s background using dates, details and anecdotes for context. Interviewee’s past is not established in the context of the interview period.
SELF ASSESSMENT	All answers describe, explain and reflect on the stages of the learning process.	Most answers describe, explain and reflect on the stages of the learning process.	Some answers describe, explain and reflect on the stages of the learning process.	Answers do not describe, explain and reflect on the stages of the learning process.
MECHANICS	The project contains minor mechanical errors often limited to typing errors. The project is clearly organized and well written.	The project contains a few errors, such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, pronoun usage, and word choice.	The project contains major mechanical errors. In varied aspects of the paper, weak organizational and/or writing skills interfere with comprehension	The project is so poorly organized or written that it inhibits understanding.