

# ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

## Lesson Plan

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### INTERVIEWING A FAMILY MEMBER

#### TEACHING GUIDE

1. Conceptualize the project in terms of state standards, release forms, timeline, and output (book/presentation/distribution/sharing).
2. Most importantly, take into account your students' vulnerability. Recent immigrants may have a difficult time with the subject matter.
3. Topics to consider for this project can include history, immigration, social justice, and geography for example.
4. Acknowledge your students' contribution to having created a primary source that documents a narrative from the marginalized.
5. Acknowledge your students' opportunity to contribute their story to the national narrative by sharing it on social media or other digital platforms.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Students will design, conduct, investigate, and analyze an oral history interview with a family member to build a family tree and capture highlights of their life story to ultimately enhance their understanding of their family's history within a larger context. Student and family members should strive to capture stories/information of lasting importance or value for future generations—stories of resilience and overcoming struggles.
- Students should write an analytical paper about their interview and the research conducted.

#### FAMILY TREE

- Complete before oral history interview (recommended). The student and parent can decide how to fill in branches in the tree and whose story they want to document. **See handout:** "Family Tree Template."
- Students may want to research their family member's time period before conducting the oral history interview.
- **More advanced:** Growing the family tree through familysearch.org research. This is an opportunity to find official documents related to their family members, while you reconstruct and relive history with your students.

#### ORAL HISTORY

##### Preparation

- Consider sending your students with a release or consent form before starting a project. **See handout:** "Release Form."
- Based on who the student is interviewing, build the questionnaire around that individual with open-ended questions. Be sure the list captures the essential information about the family member. **See handout:** "Oral History Interview Questions."
- Discuss with students that often the best way to begin asking questions is by asking about the individual's favorite home cooked-meal or their favorite song and where they first heard it, for example.
- Remind students to schedule the date and time for the interview in a quiet and comfortable setting.

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- **More advanced:** For example, if your student is interviewing a great-grandparent, the student should prepare with more informed questions. Students will want to familiarize themselves with their great-grandparent's era in terms of politics, economy, music, and culture.

### Interview

- Bring to interview your questions and begin documenting the answers. Students can ask follow-up questions for clarification or even elaboration on an interesting topic.
- You can also recommend recording the interview, whether audio or video. This can help students capture details more easily.
- Allow time for answers outside the specific question. Let the individual's memory run free.
- Finally, students should write a thank you note to their interviewee and send them a copy of the audio, photos, and transcript.

### Research

- Fill in the Critical History Timeline handout ([see handout](#)) with information provided by the oral history interview and what you learn from researching the countries through traditional resources such as Google search, encyclopedias, and books.
- Research the history of the time period using newspaper articles (Los Angeles Times archives or Diario Oficial de El Salvador for example).
- Reflect on erasures in archives and in national narratives.

### Analyze (Critical Reflection)

- Identify and address the larger social relationships of power, particularly racism, colonization, patriarchy, and/or social class.
- Identify the social injustices around race, climate change, and economic disparities that cause immigration from Central America to the US.
- Examine the social, political, and economic disparities; whose perspective is heard and whose not?
- What does family history reveal about dealing with racism, oppression, and/or inequalities? Or, what new information did you learn from your interview about challenges they overcame?
- Were there any differences in lived experience from interviewee compared to your research? Again, whose perspective is heard and whose not?
- How can you/we dismantle oppressive social systems?

### Critical Action (How can you take action on what you have learned?)

- Looks like advocates, protests, demonstrations, collective mobilizing
  - Create a group to discuss social and political issues with peers
  - Communicate or negotiate with public officials
  - Mobilize collectively around a community-based issue
  - Coordinate a social media campaign to mobilize like-minded people

See [Critical Family History Project](#) "Why did my grandparents immigrate to the United States?" in the workshop page.