

Questioning: Open and Closed

Time

1 class period

Overview

Students will use the primary source documents from Lesson 2 to develop the questioning skills needed to conduct successful oral history interviews. Good questions are a prerequisite to an interview that will serve as a valuable primary source for study now and in the future. Understanding how to develop open-ended questions and the ability to use follow-up questions that clarify and elucidate are important skills for students doing oral history and beyond.

Objectives

- Students will understand the significance of words used in particular contexts.
- Students will learn the difference between open-ended and close-ended questions.
- Students will demonstrate their learning by developing questions for a potential interview of a Japanese American who lived at Amache.

Essential Question

- How does preparing for, conducting, and processing oral histories contribute to the interviewer's understanding of history, specifically the World War II experiences of the Japanese Americans incarcerated at Amache, Colorado?

Guiding Question(s)

- Why is the skill of good questioning important in doing oral history?

Colorado Model Content Standards (2008)

- History 2: Students know how to use the processes and resources of historical inquiry.
- History 2.1: Students know how to formulate questions and hypotheses regarding what happened in

the past and to obtain and analyze historical data to answer questions and test hypotheses.

- English Language Arts Standard 4: Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. Students will identify the purpose, perspective, and historical and cultural influences of a speaker, author, or director.

Materials

- Student copies of "Terminology and the Japanese American Experience" found in the introductory materials to this unit
- *Handout 3-1: Basic Interviewing Techniques: Questioning*
- Primary source documents used in Lesson 2
- *Handout 3-2: Sample Interview Outline*

Opening

- Ask students to read the document "Terminology and the Japanese American Experience." Discuss and clarify with students the importance of using one set of terms as opposed to another in honoring the Japanese Americans who were denied their civil rights during World War II. Ask students to think of other instances where the use of "correct" language is a critical aspect in communicating with respect and share those examples with their classmates.
- Explain to students that understanding the importance of words and their "overt" and "covert" meanings is critical to the oral history interviewing process.

Activities

- Share information about the Japanese American National Museum's Discover Nikkei Web site (<http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/> [accessed August 4, 2009]) and its "Nikkei Album" at <http://www.discovernikkei.org/nikkeialbum/> (accessed August 4, 2009), which collects photographs, videos, and stories of people of Japanese descent, including those individuals who were incarcerated at Amache. Explain that the Museum welcomes students to contribute oral histories to the



Nikkei Album. Thus, as they develop interview questions, there is the likelihood that they will be using them in an interview with a former Amache resident and sharing that interview with people on the Web.

- Distribute *Handout 3-1: Basic Interviewing Techniques: Questioning*. Ask students to review the information and identify the important aspects of the information they have read.
- Ask students to develop their own open-ended questions that they might ask a potential interviewee. Direct students to share their questions with a partner and then with the class to clarify the questions.
- Ask students, working in pairs, to use the primary source documents from Lesson 2 to write a series of open-ended questions that will be used with Japanese American interviewees. When pairs of students have completed their questions, ask them to work with another pair to review the questions to make sure they are clear and open-ended.
- When students have completed their editing, ask them to order the questions in a logical manner to use with their interviewees. Share those lists and use them to develop a class set of questions. Use either the white board, a computer, or chart paper to compile the list.
- As a class, decide the content and order of the questions to be used when Japanese Americans from Amache are interviewed. [NOTE: When doing individual oral histories, students would research the background and context of the interviewee and develop a unique set of questions for each interview. Because students are conducting interviews with individuals about a specific, commonly shared time in their lives, developing a master set of questions to be asked is an efficient and effective way to insure that the end goal—that of understanding the Japanese American experience in Amache—will be achieved. This does not, however, preclude students from asking follow-up questions that may lead them in a direction that veers away from the common set on the list. In fact, students should be encouraged to ask divergent follow-up questions and be given strategies

for returning to the prepared list when the digression is complete.] The teacher should collate and distribute a completed list of questions to students prior to their interviews of Japanese Americans who lived in Amache.

- After the questions have been generated and ordered, as a class and to the extent possible, place the questions in chronological order to create a timeline that can be used as a guide for organizing the interview. Distribute *Handout 3-2: Sample Interview Outline* as a model of one way in which students might organize their interviews.
- Inform students that they will be conducting practice interviews at home tomorrow evening, so this evening they will need to contact a friend or relative and make arrangements for that interview. Students will also be asked to prepare questions for this interview tomorrow, so they need to be doing the research necessary to conduct a meaningful interview.

Extension

- Students can continue to review oral histories done by others and develop additional open-ended questions they might like to ask the person being interviewed. Here are two sites that may be helpful:
 - Denshō: The Japanese American Legacy Project <http://www.densho.org/> (accessed August 4, 2009)
 - Japanese American National Museum's Discover Nikkei Web site <http://www.discovernikkei.org/interviews/> (accessed August 4, 2009)

References

- Brooks, Michael. "Long, Long Ago': Recipe for a Middle School Oral History Program." *OAH Magazine of History* (Spring 1997).
- Hartley, William G. *Preparing a Personal History*. Salt Lake City: Primer Publications, 1976.
- Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2002.

Basic Interviewing Techniques: Questioning

Handout 3-1

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Ask open-ended questions that can be developed at length by the interviewee, then follow up with subsequent questions designed to fill in areas needing amplification or clarification. Examples of open-ended vs. closed-ended questions are:

OPEN-ENDED	CLOSED-ENDED
What do you remember about your grandparents?	What was your grandfather's name?
Why did you decide to become a lawyer?	Where was your first law office?
When your children were all young, what was a typical housewife's day like?	How many children did you have?
How did the Great Depression affect the family?	How much money did you receive for the family home?
How did you feel at the time about the New Deal?	Did you like Franklin D. Roosevelt as President?

- Using a broad, open-ended question as the very first question has great value and is of critical importance in setting the tone for the entire interview. Ask an opening question that will be both enjoyable and easy for the interviewee to answer at considerable length. The interviewee should be permitted to "run" with the question *without* interruption for as long as he or she wishes. Only after the interviewee has definitely concluded his or her reminiscences concerning the initial question should follow-up questions be asked.
- Because the initial portion of the interview is so significant in setting the tone for the entire interview, resist the temptation to interrupt. This is NO easy task. In response to a beginning question that asks for recollections of his childhood, an interviewee may begin: "Well, I was born in a small town in Pennsylvania, and when I was young we moved to Florida." Such a beginning spawns a host of "who, what, where, when, and why" questions that could be asked at this point, such as, "What was the name of the town in Pennsylvania?" If interrupted and asked a specific question at this point, the interviewee may conclude that his or her role is to answer closed questions as if completing a questionnaire. Rather than asking any question, regardless of its relevance, simply write down on a notepad such reminders as:

Born small town Pa. Where?	Recollections of trip?
Parents, why in Pa?	How traveled?
What recall of town?	Why Florida? When?
Why leave?	Initial impressions?

Adapted from Hartley, William G. *Preparing a Personal History*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Primer Publications, 1976.

Sample Interview Outline

Handout 3-2

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Jane Ueno

February 18, 1998, 1:30 p.m. | 249 Smith Place, Denver, CO

1. **Describe self and family before going to Amache**
 - Conditions in the processing center before leaving for Amache
2. **Trip from California to Amache**
 - Length of travel
 - Mode of transportation
 - Conditions as travel took place
 - First sight of Amache
 - Assignment of living quarters
 - Conditions of the camp upon arrival
 - Your thoughts at this time
3. **Daily life at Amache**
 - Describe where you lived (for example, next to administrative building)
 - Describe the camp director, M. Peterson
 - His relationship with you and others in the camp
 - Describe the other administrators in the camp
 - What responsibilities did they have
 - Their relationships with the internees
 - Describe the MP guards who patrolled the camp
 - Their relationship with the internees
 - Describe other children in the camp and your relationship with them
 - Daily routine on weekdays
 - Daily routine on weekends
 - Work expectations of you by your family
 - Punishments: what, why, how, when, who
 - Meals: describe
 - Fun, play, recreation: describe
 - Clothing
4. **Routines for boys and girls**
 - Different routines? Describe how and why
 - Contact allowed between boys and girls
 - Specific policies for siblings
 - Affect on you and your brother, etc.

Adapted from: Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002, p. 104.