

Practice Makes Perfect

Time

1 class period

Overview

This lesson gives students the opportunity to practice an oral history interview in a low-stress, friendly environment. Like any skill, conducting effective and meaningful oral histories requires practice, thought, and deliberation. Skilled interviewers combine a deep knowledge about their subject and the context of his/her life with a facility in asking questions that result in an interview that is both informative and captures the essence of the interviewee. Students will experience working with the physical aspects of oral history interviewing in addition to the intellectual skills involved in questioning an interviewee.

Objectives

- Students will conduct a five-minute oral history of a friend or family member.
- Students will gain experience with the physical (arranging an interview place, operating the equipment used in taking oral histories, etc.) and intellectual processes of an oral history interview.

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 Japanese Americans incarcerated at Amache, Colorado?

Guiding Question(s)

- How does the practice—the physical and intellectual aspects—of conducting an oral history help one become a more effective interviewer?

Colorado Model Content Standards (2008)

- History 1: Students understand the chronological orga-

nization of history and know how to organize events and people into major eras to identify and explain historical relationships.

- History 1.3: Students use chronology to examine and explain historical relationships.
- English Language Arts Standard 5: Students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. Students will paraphrase, summarize, organize, and synthesize information. Students will use information to produce a quality project.

Materials

- Student copies of Paula J. Paul's article "Characteristics of a Good Interview," *OAH Magazine of History* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1997) at <http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/oralhistory/paul.pdf> (accessed August 4, 2009).
- *Handout 4-1: The Interview Before the Interview: Preparation*
- Each pair of students should have one set of interviewing "hardware"
 - Audio recorder
 - External microphone
 - Extension cord
 - Labeled 60-minute cassette tapes (recommended for spoken word: Type 1 (low noise, high output)
 - Batteries
 - Agreement forms
 - Topic outline
 - Questions
 - Pencil and paper
 - Rubber bands
 - Camera
- *Handouts 4-2: Oral History Forms* (two copies of each form per student)
 - *Handout 4-2a: Oral History Donor Form*
 - *Handout 4-2b: Biographical Information Form*
 - *Handout 4-2c: Interview Information Form*



Opening

- Distribute to students the downloaded and printed copies of “Characteristics of a Good Interview.” Ask students to think about the criteria for a good interview and the part played by the interviewer in making it so.
- Conduct a brief discussion about the criteria and explain to students that in class today they will have their first opportunity to practice doing an oral history interview.
- Students will use these components to assess their abilities as oral historians.

Activities

- In preparation for the upcoming practice interview, students should pair up. Each pair will have the opportunity to be both the interviewer and the interviewee.
 - Students should develop three to five open-ended questions to ask their partners about an event (experience in school, neighborhood, etc.).
 - Give students time to review their questions making sure they are open-ended.
- Distribute *Handout 4-1: The Interview Before the Interview: Preparation* and two copies per student of *Handouts 4-2: Oral History Forms*
 - Discuss with students the importance of completing these forms and how the information they contain will help researchers in the future.
 - Ask for any questions students may have regarding the way these forms should be completed.
 - Students will use one set of the forms with their practice interview today and one set for their interview of a family member this evening.
- Demonstrate the physical aspects of an oral history interview, showing and explaining how equipment should be used and placed for optimum results.
 - Distribute sets of equipment to pairs of students and ask them to set up for their interviews. The teacher should arrange for several places where each pair can go and have the quiet conditions needed to clearly conduct and record the interview.
- Each student will interview his/her partner and vice versa.
 - After the interviews have been completed, students should listen to the interviews together as a pair and critique and reflect on each interview using the characteristics described in “Characteristics of a Good Interview.”
 - If time permits, students can trade partners and interview others in the class, repeating the process from beginning the interview through the critique and reflection.

Closing

- Ask the class to return, and as a group, discuss and debrief students on the experience of doing an oral history interview.
 - Questions that might be asked include:
 - What challenges did you face and how might you overcome them?
 - What came easily? Why?
 - When you do your interview this evening, what will you change from the one you did in class today?
 - Ask students for questions they might have about the assignment tonight, which is to conduct a five-minute interview of a family member or friend.
- Explain that all students will be expected to conduct a five-minute oral history interview that evening and bring back the tape and their supporting materials to the next class meeting.

References (Highly Recommended)

Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2002.

The Interview Before the Interview: Preparation

Handout 4-1

24

After you have organized the interview setting, you will want to ask the interviewee if he or she has any questions before the interview begins. This is a good time to review the language in the Oral History Donor form and to let the narrator know he or she will be asked to sign it as soon as the interview is over. Some interviewers also take this time to ask the narrator to fill out a biographical information form to keep a record of the person's name, address, and other particulars. If using tape, always make sure the leader, or blank beginning few inches, has moved past the recording heads because sound does not record on a leader. If more than one tape is used, identifying information for each side and each additional tape should include name of interviewer, name of narrator, name of project, and date of interview.

After an equipment sound check, the interviewer will want to begin with a recorded introduction such as:

The following interview was conducted with _____ (name of narrator) on behalf of the _____ for the _____ Oral History Project. It took place on _____ (date) at _____ (place). The interviewer is _____ (name).

The interviewer should always put an introduction on the tape or disc before starting the interview. This should include:

- Name of narrator
- Name of interviewer
- Place of interview
- Date of interview
- Name of oral history project
- Name of repository
- Tape number (if more than one tape is used during the interview)

This is usually done in the interview setting and is a signal to the narrator that the interview is ready to begin. Several additional minutes may be left blank at the beginning of the first tape if the interviewer wishes to add summary information about the content of the interview after it has been completed.

Adapted from Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002, p. 67.

Oral History Donor Form

Handout 4-2a

25

I, _____ (name of narrator/interviewee), hereby give to the _____ (designated repository) as a donation this interview recorded on _____ (date). With this gift, I hereby transfer to the _____ (designated repository) legal title and all literary property rights to the interview, including copyright.

I understand the interview may be made available for research and such public programming as the _____ (designated repository) may determine. This may include use of the interview material in live or recorded programs for radio, television, cable, or any other forms of electronic publishing that is not for profit. The interviews may not be broadcast, cablecast, or electronically published for commercial purposes without my written consent.

Narrator's signature _____ Date _____

Address _____

City, State, ZIP Code _____

Interviewer's signature _____ Date _____

Address _____

City, State, ZIP Code _____

Biographical Information Form

Handout 4-2b

26

Name _____

Address (home) _____

Address (work) _____

Telephone (home) _____ Telephone (work) _____

Email _____

Birth Date and Year _____

Birthplace _____

Profession _____

Spouse or Closest Living Relative _____

Maiden Name (if applicable) _____

Biographical Information (Please include the names of parents, siblings, spouse, and children if applicable to the oral history interview.)

Form Filled Out By _____ Date _____

Interview

Information Form

Handout 4-2c

Narrator's Name _____

Address _____

Interviewer _____

Address _____

Interviewer Background Information _____

Date of Interview _____

Place of Interview _____

Length of Interview _____

Number of Cassettes _____

Oral History Donor Form Signed _____ Date _____

Unrestricted _____

Restricted _____

Transcript Reviewed by Narrator _____ Date _____

Abstract of Interview _____
