

LESSON 8:**INTERVIEW A FAMILY OR COMMUNITY MEMBER: TAKING ORAL HISTORIES****Objectives**

Students will gain an understanding and respect for elders/others by learning about the experiences of a member of their community. Students will also gain practice interviewing, asking questions, and taking notes. Students will create a piece illustrating what they learned from the interview.

Key Theme

Everyday people have their own unique experiences that add to our knowledge of the American history. The sharing of stories adds to our understanding of the people in our lives and our communities.

Grades

3-12

Time

Three class periods

Materials

A family or volunteer community member, index cards for questions, pen and paper or writing notebooks for taking notes. Optional: Tape recorder and cassette tapes or video camera.

Standards

California History-Social Science Content Standards, Language Arts Content Standards.

Procedure

This lesson contains two different ways of conducting oral histories: students interviewing as a group in the classroom and students individually conducting interviews at home for homework.

Interviewing Techniques (for both types of assignments)

1. Anticipatory Set: Discuss history and oral history and why it is important. Also discuss different ways we learn about history, i.e. people, books, museums, etc. By talking with other people, oral history interviews are one way that we can interact with and learn from people from different generations. History is not just told through important events, but also on how these events affect the people in our communities. Everyday people have their own unique experiences that add to our knowledge of the history of the times. The sharing of stories adds to our understanding of different times and the people in our lives.
2. Parent Preparation: You may choose to send a parent letter home prior to the discussion, informing families of the lesson, either the class interview or homework interview or both. Parents may want to volunteer to do an interview with the class.

3. **Preparing Questions:** Have the class brainstorm a list of open-ended questions to be asked of the potential interviewee. Demonstrate the difference between open-ended and closed-ended questions. Close-ended question: Did you like your journey to America? Open-ended question: Describe your journey to America. What were some of your feelings during your journey? You may want to edit the list prior to distribution. Sample questions:

What was life like for you as a child?

What was it like to move from _____?

What are some of your fondest memories of _____?

What were some of the difficulties you faced?

4. **Model for students good interviewing techniques** by conducting a "mock" interview with a student. You should demonstrate being a good interviewer and interviewee as well as a bad interviewer with a student volunteer. Remind students about speaking clearly and slowly to be understood by the interviewee and by the tape recorder (if taping the interview). Students should keep noises and distractions to a minimum and give the interviewee their attention. Students should also take notes of new information that they learn. If the students do not tape the interview they should write down the interviewee's responses as accurately as possible.
5. **Check for Understanding:** Have students take notes regarding the interviewee's answers during the interview and ask questions after the mock interview. Discuss the students' notes and questions that came up during the note-taking process.

Group interview

1. Chose a person from the community that the class can interview. The chosen person might be a student's family member who is an immigrant, a relative of an immigrant that they know personally, or someone from the community that students may or may not have contact with who can shed light on the immigration experience. Based on their comfort level, the visitor can discuss their personal experiences around immigration and how it affected their lives, as well as how their life has changed since moving to the United States.
2. Introduce the guest to the class. The guest or the teacher can call on the students as they raise their hands to ask questions. Students should take turns asking the questions that they have prepared. An index card might contain a list of five to ten questions that he or she would like to ask the person regarding their immigration experience. In advance have students consider and come up with a logical order for their questions so the interview flows well. The goal of the group interview is to find out as much information about the person's experience with immigration. The following are possible questions:
 - Where and when were you born?

- When did you move to the United States?
 - Why did you move to the United States?
 - How did you feel when you came to the United States?
 - What were your first impressions of the United States?
 - What were some of the funniest, scariest, and saddest moments of your immigration experience?
 - Did you face any challenges as an immigrant?
3. Throughout the interview, the teacher should help direct the students' questions making connections to previous inquiries or information that was presented before. The teacher may want to point out issues, like immigration policies, if they come up during the interview.
 4. Ask for comments about the interview. What some things that the students liked about the interview? What are some things they learned? Have the class thank the guest for their time.
 5. Give students the time to work on their notes of what they learned from the interview.
 6. Have students share some of the information that they learned during the interview. Write down their ideas on chart paper.
 7. Then ask "What are some ways we can tell share this information with others?" One way could be to organize into a written narrative story. To tell the story, what order would make sense?

Interview as Homework

1. Assign students to interview a community member. Teachers should decide on how this assignment will be completed. You may want to set a minimum number of questions or time students spend with a family or community member. Or teachers might want to decide on a theme like "Immigration" and students will need to ask as many questions and follow up questions to adequately tell the story of someone's immigration process.
2. Teachers should also decide on how students are to record their interview. Students might take notes and write up their interview as a narrative of their interviewee's life. Or you may want them to record their interviews and transcribe them. Teachers should decide on how much time students will have to complete this assignment, so that students can make arrangements to meet with their interviewee.
3. After students conduct their interview, they should also spend some evaluating the process. These sample questions can help to assist students in evaluating their interviews:
 - Did your questions yield information relevant to the interview topic?
 - Were the bulk of the questions open ended?

- Did you avoid asking leading questions?
 - Did you take the proper notes?
 - Did you have the proper equipment?
 - Did the interview yield the information sought? Why or why not?
 - What might the interviewer do differently next time?
4. Summarizing the interview: Students can present information gathered during their interview in a number of ways. Some of the possibilities:
- Scrapbook - a collection of real or created materials about the person's life
 - Video – student's interpretation and reflections of the interview
 - Book jacket cover - cover artwork, what "the book" is about, about the author, reviews
 - Visual Timeline - illustrate key events and important information
 - Web Page – student's own design and format
 - Power Point Presentation – student's own design and format
 - Dramatization - student(s) can role-play parts of the interview
 - Storyboard or comic book – illustrate aspects of the person's life and experiences
 - Narrative story – story of the person's life without the questions
5. Follow up: Have a class discussion of the interview process. Have students share their feelings surrounding the interview. What are things they learned? What was unexpected? Are there things that they would have done differently?

Extension

Upon seeing presentations, students can choose another format to present their interview information.

Source: *Boyle Heights: The Power of Place Teachers Guide*. Los Angeles: Japanese American National Museum, 2002, p. 39-43, 81-87.

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