

HearSay: Oral History Project

Project Summary

HearSay is an exhibition featuring projects that seek to revise or expand upon traditional notions about identity and place through oral histories, personal memoirs, and independent narratives. In that spirit, this project plan guides students through investigating the past of someone close to them. Students, then, reinterpret that story into a creative re-telling of a personal history by creating an artist's book.

The lesson has three primary parts. The student will:

- Choose a relative or adult, and conduct interview(s) with them about a particular event or memory from their life.
- Create an artist's book about the story.
- Add written elements to relay the story as told by the interviewer. (For grades under 5.)
- Write an artist's statement to accompany the work; include a narrative re-telling of the subject's story as told during the interview process. (For grades 5 and above.)

What is Oral History? (Courtesy of Dr. Julia Brock)

According to the Oral History Association, "Oral history is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events." Oral historians often seek answers to their personal research questions; but good oral historians also ask questions of broader interest. Frequently, they turn their interviews over to a library or archive, or place them on a website where the information can be made available to other researchers.

Oral history follows in the pathways constructed by oral tradition—stories are told through the spoken word before they are written down. However, the two are quite different. Oral tradition typically involves storytellers passing on tribal history, legends, and folklore. They impart tales heard from earlier storytellers, or occasionally events witnessed firsthand. In contrast, oral history involves an exchange between a trained interviewer who asks questions and elicits answers from people who lived through the events described. While oral history is communicated through the spoken word, most professional oral historians produce written transcripts as the primary means of preservation.

Materials

Decorative papers, fabric, or other material to serve as a book cover (measuring approximately 11" x 15")

9" x 12" drawing paper, 80-lb (5 sheets per student)

12" ruler (one per student)

Light duty 3-hole punch

Graphite pencils, drawing material, collage material

18" binding thread per student (examples: embroidery thread, yarn, nylon cord, butcher thread)

Oral History Project Grades 6-12

Part 1: Oral History and Project introduction.

Materials needed: samples of book arts; Smartboard/video projector or TV; video of oral history interview; chart paper and marker

Hook: Introduce the students to book arts by showing examples of artists' books to give a full perspective of the project. Show examples of book arts that have been produced to record/commemorate a subject

Continued Hook: Introduce the students to the oral history interview process. Show a video of an oral history interview to give students a framework while practicing.

Select oral history videos, courtesy of the Museum of History and Holocaust Education:
<http://vimeo.com/channels/793602/page:1>

Questions for discussion: What elements of interviewing did you see in that video? How did the interviewer conduct her/himself? What sorts of questions did the interviewer ask?

Procedure:

1. On the chart paper, generate a list to be posted in the room for later reference.
2. Have them practice in class with each other.
 - a. Recommended – 6th through 8th grade, assign partners; 9th through 12th grade, personal choice of partners
3. Quick debrief
 - a. Personal response – what worked, what didn't work
 - b. Suggestions
 - c. Questions
4. Transition – from peers to adults: have students generate a list of adults that they'd like to interview.
5. Give students a Preliminary Interview worksheet for each adult they've listed. For homework, students should contact their potential subjects and fill out a worksheet on each one.
6. Review Preliminary Interview worksheet with students for potential questions.
 - a. Vocabulary integration on question 6 – poignant; what does this word mean? Student responses first – if no correct response, use in a sentence and have students guess based on context clues. Once the definition is clear, have the students generate examples of a poignant moment in their own lives.
 - b. Continue with remaining questions.

Part 2: Interview subject selection.

Procedure (continued):

7. Based on the answers to the Preliminary Interview worksheet, guide students through selecting an adult for their full interview.
8. Adults should be chosen for their personal experience during a particular time period (for example: an 8th grade student could choose to interview a parent who grew up in Georgia and who has firsthand experience of a certain time period or event in Georgia's history; a 10th grade student doing a project about war could interview an older sibling who is in the military or a parent with strong memories of the Vietnam War era).
9. Have students develop a secondary set of interview questions. Each student should have at least 15. Basic rules for question development:
 - Write questions that will gather:
 - facts (years, locations, dates)

- personal stories (where the subject was at a certain time)
 - images (what did a certain place look like, what were people wearing)
 - personal opinion (how the subject felt about the event)
 - Develop a logical order for the questions. Review with students prior to interview to help them find a progression that will help draw out and build upon the interviewer's story.
 - Ensure that questions are simple, open-ended, and neutral (for example: ask "What do you think of Obama's presidency?" over "Isn't Obama the best president ever?").
 - Consider sensitive ways to word questions that may be personal or difficult for the subject.
10. Have students conduct interviews. Make sure they take notes. Recordings can be suggested if equipment is available. Basic rules for the interview:
- Explain the purpose of the interview in advance.
 - Be open to following interesting leads during the interview, but keep the overall goals in mind.
 - Do not argue with a subject, even if what they say is offensive or "old fashioned". Simply listen to their story, and ask for more details in a neutral manner.
 - Respect any request to exclude information or avoid a subject.
 - Allow time for the subject to answer questions—silence is OK.
 - Follow up with a thank you, and ask if the subject would be available for follow up questions if necessary.
11. Multiple interviews may be required for older students.

Part 3: Bookmaking, Basic process.

Hook: Provide written instructions that students can refer to during this process. Have pre-made books for students with dysgraphia or those in need of visual-motor accommodations.

Procedure:

12. Fold five sheets of 9" x 12" drawing paper in half to 6" x 9" to create the book's pages. (Dimensions may vary depending on materials used.)
13. Trim material for the cover to 10" x 14" and fold in half to 7" x 10". (Dimensions may vary depending on materials used.)
14. Using the folded edge, measure for the three holes on both the internal pages and cover material.
 - a. The cover's holes should be 2-1/2" from the top and bottom edges and in the middle at 5".
 - b. Internal pages should have holes 2" from the top and bottom edges and in the middle at 4-1/2".
 - c. Use a paper punch to create holes where measured directly on the fold.
15. Bind the book. Line the internal pages and cover material up using the punched holes. Holding the book open, stitch the pages together.
 - a. Run thread through the center hole from the book's outside leaving extra.
 - b. On the inside of the book, thread through the upper hole.
 - c. On the outside of the book, thread through the lower hole.
 - d. Thread back through the center hole from the inside.
 - e. Tie off the thread at the bottom of the book.

16. Embellish the book. Retell the story from the interview process in the book using visual imagery (found images, drawings, cut paper, print transfers, collage, page alteration, and/or writing).
17. Optional: Students can select alternative papers and materials for their book's pages and covers that relate to the story gained from the interview (examples: fabrics, recycled materials, etc.). Help students think through their material selections to ensure that the choices relate to interview and have the desired malleability.
18. Optional: Students can elect to create alternate forms of books that suite their creative visions (accordion books, altered found books, etc.). Instructions for alternate book formats can be found online.

Part 4: Artist Statement and Interview Narrative.

Procedure (continued):

19. Have the students write a statement describing the interview process, story, and creative selections made for their books.
20. Optional: Have students present statements and books to peers.

Common Core Standards

Language Arts, Literacy in History/ Social Sciences

- RH.6-8.2, RH.6-8.7
- WHST.6-8.2, WHST.6-8.4
- SL.6-8.1, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1
- RH.9-10.2, RH.11-12.2
- WHST.9-10.2, WHST.9-10.4, WHST.11-12.2, WHST.11-12.4

Georgia Performance Standards

Visual Arts (please note that holding a group critique expands these standards)

- VA6-8MC.1, VA6-8CU.2, VA6-8PR.1, VAPR6-8PR.2, VA6-8C.1, VA6-8C.2
- VAHSVAMC.2, VAHSVAMC.4, VAHSVACU.1, VAHSVAPR.1, VAHSVAPR.5, VAHVAAR.1, VAHSVAC.1, VAHSDRMC.2

Question Set: Preliminary interview homework

Use this series of questions to find an appropriate subject for the project. How the interviewee answers will drive the subject of the main interview.

1. What year were you born?
2. Where did you grow up?
3. What was your neighborhood like?
4. What was your household like?
5. Where did you go to school?
6. What is the most poignant historic event that you remember?
7. Where were you when it happened?

8. How did you hear about it?
9. How did you respond?
10. How did it impact your life?

Event specific questions can be substituted if the student is looking for information on a particular subject. Example: *Civil Rights Movement*

1. What year were you born?
2. Where did you grow up?
3. What was your neighborhood like?
4. What was your household like?
5. Where did you go to school?
6. What do you remember about the Civil Rights Movement?
7. How did you hear about it?
8. How did it impact your neighborhood?
9. How did you respond?
10. How did it impact your life?

Oral History Project Grades 2-5

Part 1: Project Introduction and Interview Process.

Materials needed: samples of book arts; Smartboard/video projector or TV; video of oral history interview; chart paper and marker

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Continued Hook: Introduce the students to the oral history interview process. Show a video of an oral history interview to give students a framework while practicing. Select oral history videos, courtesy of the Museum of History and Holocaust Education:

<http://vimeo.com/channels/793602/page:1>

Questions for discussion: How did the interviewer act in this video? What sorts of questions did the interviewer ask? On the chart paper, generate a list to be posted in the room for later reference.

Procedure

1. Provide the Preliminary Interview worksheet.
2. Have them practice in class with each other.
3. Provide students with another copy of the interview worksheet and assign them the homework to choose one adult from their household (example: parent or guardian) to interview.

Part 2: Bookmaking, basic process.

If necessary, prepare books in advance for students or acquire ready-made journals for manipulation, particularly for those with dysgraphia or in need of visual-motor accommodations. As needed, provide written instructions that students can refer to during this process.

Procedure (continued)

4. Fold five sheets of 9" x 12" drawing paper in half to 6" x 9" to create the book's pages. (Dimensions may vary depending on materials used.)
5. Trim material for the cover to 10" x 14" and fold in half to 7" x 10". (Dimensions may vary depending on materials used.)
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 - b. On the inside of the book, thread through the upper hole.
 - c. On the outside of the book, thread through the lower hole.
 - d. Thread back through the center hole from the inside.
 - e. Tie off the thread at the bottom of the book.

Part 3: Book decoration.

8. Students retell the story from their interview process in the book using images, drawings, cut paper, and/or collage.
9. Have students include age-appropriate writing to narrate their stories. (grades 2 – 4)
10. Write an artist's statement to accompany the work, include a narrative re-telling of the subject's story as told during the interview process. (grade 5)

Common Core Standards

Language Arts, Literacy in History/ Social Sciences

- SL.2-5.5, SL.2-5.1
- W.2-3.8, W.2-5.3, W.2.3

Georgia Performance Standards

Visual Arts

- VA2-5MC.1, VA2-5MC.3, VA2-5PR.1, VA2-5PR.2, VA2-5PR.4a, VA2-5C.1a, VA2-5C.2

Interview Questions

When you were my age...

1. Where did you live?
2. What was your neighborhood like?
3. What did your house look like?
4. What was your favorite color?
5. What was your favorite toy?
6. What was your favorite food?
7. What was your favorite hobby?
8. Who was your hero?