

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Oral History Interview Questions Worksheet

Oral history is an interview that records a person's recollection of experiences, thoughts, and feelings about a specific event or a period of time. By showing how national or international events affected the lives of individuals, oral history adds a personal dimension to the study of the past.

Collecting oral history interviews is a way to discover your own primary sources. Members of your family and community can surprise you with a wealth of information and insights into major events of our times. These guidelines will help you organize an oral history interview.

Preparation

First choose your subject. Whom would you like to interview? Consider the following points:

- What historical information could be obtained from this person?
- Would this person be willing to participate?

Think about how you will record your subject's words. If possible, obtain a recorder and get your subject's permission to record your interviews. If students aren't able to locate and use one, they should take detailed notes of the interview.

Planning the Interview

- Write an introduction to your interview. Introduce yourself if necessary, and include an explanation of this project and its purpose.

- Gather the following basic information from the interviewee: Full name, birth date and birthplace, and occupation. Write three warm-up questions to follow this basic information.

- Write at least six questions to help you get stories and details about the event or time period you are studying.

- Prepare some follow-up questions. These questions should help you to clarify and expand upon the information from your interview.

Conducting the Interview

- Make an appointment with your subject and be on time.
- Explain to your subject that you will be using the information for a class project.
- If you record the interview, be sure your subject agrees to it.
- Bring along your notes to help you guide the interview. Your subject may wander off with an interesting story. Continue with it as long as it adds to your understanding of the topic. If it does not, politely return to your list of questions.
- When your interview is finished,
- Be sure to write your subject a thank-you letter.

INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM

Project name:

Date: _____

Interviewer:

Tape number: _____

Name of person(s) interviewed:

Address:

Telephone number: _____

Date of birth: _____

By signing the form below, you give your permission for any tapes and/or photographs made during this project to be used by researchers and the public for educational purposes including publications, exhibitions, World Wide Web, and presentations.

By giving your permission, you do not give up any copyright or performance rights that you may hold.

I agree to the uses of these materials described above, except for any restrictions, noted below.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date: _____

Researcher's signature:

Date: _____

Restriction description:

Tips for Oral History Interviews

An interview is not a conversation. The whole point of the interview is to get the narrator to tell his or her story. Limit your own remarks to a few pleasantries to break the ice, then brief questions.

Ask open-ended questions, ones that require more of an answer than "yes" or "no." Start with "why," "how," "where," "what kind of. . ."

Ask one question at a time.

Ask brief, understandable, and clear questions.

Start with questions that are not controversial; save the sensitive questions, if there are any, until you have become better acquainted. A good place to begin is with the narrator's youth and background.

Don't let periods of silence fluster you. Give your narrator a chance to think of what he or she wants to add before you hustle him or her along with the next question.

Don't interrupt a good story because you have thought of a question, or because your narrator is straying from the planned outline. If the information is pertinent, let him or her go on, but jot down your questions on your notepad so you will remember to ask it later. Be willing to let the interview wander – but if you're not getting interesting material, put it back on track with a question.

Be accurate: After the interview, confirm the spelling of names or places used by the subject. Write the spellings in your notebook.

Be respectful.

Try to establish at every important point in the story where the narrator was or what her role was in this event. Like, "Where were you when you heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor?" It is important to ask about their perception of these events: "How did hearing about this event affect you?" or "What did you think this event meant?"

End the interview at a reasonable time.

Thank the person you interviewed. You might even wish to send them a note or a copy of your final report.