

ORAL HISTORIES

Wisconsin Survivors of the Holocaust

EDUCATION MATERIALS FOR GRADES 5–8

Enduring Understanding

Oral histories are more than a traditional way of preserving history. Often passed down through generations, these stories are meaningful primary sources that help paint a more complete picture of the events of the past through the eyes of the people who lived it.

Essential Questions

- How do oral histories complement other primary resources such as letters, photographs, journals, etc.?
- What similarities do oral histories have with diaries and journals? How are they different?
- Why might oral histories tell a different story than other primary sources and what can we do when sources disagree?
- What makes oral histories unique among primary resources? Why?

The Student Will

- Demonstrate an understanding of the similarities and differences between oral histories and other primary sources.
- Compare and contrast listening to oral histories with reading the transcripts.
- Analyze written and recorded oral histories and reflect on their differing emotional impact.
- Create an original oral history project.



PERFORMANCE TASKS

Reading vs. Listening

1. Break students into groups of 3–4
2. Assign or have students choose roles:
 - a. Notetaker (can be more than one)
 - b. Presenter
3. Have each group choose a different oral history to listen to and discuss the questions that follow. (Click the links to open a web page where you can play the audio.)

Anti-Semitism - Fred Platner

[A teenager's Gentile friends turn against him](#)

- What happened to Fred? How would you feel if this happened to you? How would you react?

Ghettos - Magda Herzberger

[Living conditions in the ghetto in Cluj, Romania](#)

- What happened to Magda? Would you have believed the guards? Why or why not?

Hiding - Herb DeLevie

[Living under a rule of silence while hiding in Holland](#)

- What happened to Herb? Why do you think he and the others lived like that? What do you think it was like?

Escapes - Fred Platner

[Forced laborers break away from a Polish labor camp](#)

- How did you feel listening to this story? What do you think it was like for Fred to run for his life?

Resistance - Harry Gordon

[Why resistance was futile in the camps](#)

- What was happening to Harry? Why do you think no one resisted? What could have happened?



Liberation - Henry Golde

[Witnessing pandemonium at the Theresienstadt liberation](#)

- What was Henry witnessing? How do you think he felt? Look up “pandemonium.” Why do you think he used this word?

Postwar Life & Immigration - Cyla Stundel

[A survivor's kindergartner comes home in tears](#)

- If this had happened to someone in your classroom, what might you have done to help? Why did the woman downstairs make such an offer?

4. Each group should do the following:

- Summarize the oral history (what happened to the survivor?)
- Reflect on what it must have been like for them
 - o How did they react to the situation? What might you have done?
 - o How do you think they felt? How would it make you feel?
- Respond to the oral history
 - o How does hearing their story make you feel?

5. Have each group present their work to the class.

6. Next, have students switch survivor stories with another group.

7. Hand out printed copies of each story. (Click the story links above to access transcripts of each audio segment.)

8. Have students read each survivor story in their group and follow the questions in steps 4 and 5.

9. Ask: “What was different about reading the story versus listening to it?”

10. Ask: “Did you feel any different about one story or the other? Why do you think that is?”



Creating an Oral History

Pre-Interview

Oral histories are primary sources historians use to gain personal stories of events from the past. These histories are a recollection of people, experiences, emotions, and thoughts from a specific time or event in history. Use the following guide to help shape your interview questions.

Content Questions

- Discuss the type of interviews you would like to do (subject matter, time period, etc.).
- What historical information are you looking for?
- What type of person do you want to interview?

Suggested Activities

- Research the culture of the person you will be interviewing. Consider:
 - Respect for traditions around sharing of information. Some religious practices and cultural traditions may be sacred and/or private and may not be discussed in the interview.
 - Specific greetings and salutations. (Mr., Ms., Mrs., Dr., etc.)
- Share your questions with your subject before the interview so they can be comfortable answering (or declining to answer certain questions).
- Your interview subject may wish to review the transcript before final publication. You should agree to this, since it can help you:
 - Ensure that traditional knowledge is treated appropriately or removed at the request of your subject.
 - Anticipate any potential conflicts regarding privacy.

Designing and Conducting the Interview

- Introduction: Create a script that you will start the recorded interview with. You need to introduce yourself, the interview subject, the date, the location the interview is taking place, the purpose of the interview, and an explanation of the project.
Example: This is [first, last name]. Today's date is [month, day, year]. I am at [location, city, state, at the house of]. I am interviewing [first, last name] about [theme/topic] for [class or project name]. Also with us is [first, last name] who is [job they are doing to aid in the preservation of interview].
- Gather biographical background of the person you are interviewing: full name, birth date, birthplace, and occupations. Write three warm-up questions to ask based on this biographical information to uncover more information.



- Write four open-ended questions that provoke stories and narratives to assist in gathering information or details about the event, time period, or experience you are researching.
- Write potential follow-up questions to clarify or expand on information from your subject.
- Make an appointment and be on time.
- Consider bringing a culturally appropriate gift.
- Explain to your subject what the project is about and why you are interested in learning more on the topic.
- Let your subject know how their information will be used and disseminated.
- Make sure your subject agrees to be recorded and signs the release.
- Bring your notes and other information along to guide the interview. When your subject strays away from your theme or questions, use your notes to return to the original question.
- If unclear about a response, repeat what you understood them to say to verify it is correct.
- Make sure you thank your subject for their time and express how appreciative you are of what they shared with you.
- Share a timeline detailing steps to publication, including time necessary for transcript review or privacy concerns.
- Send a thank you letter upon your return home.

Adapted from: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Park City Museum. Engaging Students with Primary Sources.



Social Studies Standards Alignment

Completing the performance tasks can help meet or exceed the following select social studies standards and learning priorities for grades 5-8 (m):

INQUIRY

Standard SS.Inq1: Wisconsin students will construct meaningful questions that initiate an inquiry.

- Inq1.a: Develop questions based on a topic
- Inq1.b: Plan an inquiry

Standard SS.Inq2: Wisconsin students will gather and evaluate sources.

- Inq2.a: Gather diverse sources (electronic, digital, print, and other mass media) applicable to the inquiry
- Inq2.b: Evaluate sources

Standard SS.Inq3: Wisconsin students will develop claims using evidence to support reasoning.

- Inq3.a: Develop claims to answer an inquiry question
- Inq3.b: Cite evidence from multiple sources to support a claim
- Inq3.c: Elaborate how evidence supports a claim

Standard SS.Inq4: Wisconsin students will communicate and critique conclusions.

- Inq4.a: Communicate conclusions

Standard SS.Inq5: Wisconsin students will be civically engaged.

- Inq5.a: Civic engagement

BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

SS.BH1: Wisconsin students will examine individual cognition, perception, behavior, and identity (Psychology).

- BH1.a: Individual cognition, perception, and behavior
- BH1.b: Personal identity and empathy

SS.BH2: Wisconsin students will investigate and interpret interactions between individuals and groups (Sociology).

- BH2.a: Relationship of people and groups



SS.BH3: Wisconsin students will assess the role that human behavior and cultures play in the development of social endeavors (Anthropology).

- BH3.a: Social interactions

ECONOMICS

Standard SS.Econ1: Wisconsin students use economic reasoning to understand issues.

- Econ1.a: Choices and decision making

HISTORY

Standard SS.Hist1: Wisconsin students will use historical evidence for determining cause and effect.

- Hist1.a: Cause
- Hist1.b: Effect

Standard SS.Hist3: Wisconsin students will connect past events, people, and ideas to the present; use different perspectives to draw conclusions; and suggest current implications.

- Hist3.a: Connections
- Hist3.b: Perspective

Standard SS.Hist4: Wisconsin students will evaluate a variety of primary and secondary sources to interpret the historical context, intended audience, purpose, or author's point of view (Historical Methodology).

- Hist4.a: Historical context
- Hist4.c: Purpose
- Hist4.d: Point of view (POV)

