Oral history projects can bring history to life in elementary (K-6) classrooms in ways that no other assignment can. These projects can be short (an activity lasting one class period) or long (a project stretching over a month or more). In this How To Do It, you'll learn about planning, teaching, and assessing oral history projects; but first, a bit of background.

What is oral history?
In its simplest form, oral history is storytelling. Anyone who has sat in a grandmother's kitchen and asked about the “good old days” has done a form of oral history. Historians use oral histories as raw ingredients for further study, debate, and analysis. The final product is a deeper understanding of one period of history.

When your students sit down with an adult and ask about the past, they will practice the essence of the craft—asking thoughtful questions that will encourage others to tell about their life experience (from their own perspectives), listening to those stories unfold with a careful ear, and then thinking about what the words might mean and discussing what they have discovered with other students of history.

Why use oral history in the elementary classroom?
Oral history projects can help elementary students . . .

- **Learn historical content.** Through oral history, students hear about historical events from people with memories of (and opinions about) what those events meant at the time. Students extend their knowledge of history beyond what is in their textbooks by learning about the everyday people who don't appear in such books, uncovering the ways in which major historical events reshaped their own communities, and gathering evidence about history that is too recent to appear in books.

- **Learn related disciplines.** An elementary lesson in economics, geography, or anthropology comes to life when it is translated into questions for an interview, such as: “When ordering stock for your store, how did you know how much customers would buy?” “Where have you and your family members lived?” “How was the farm work shared among the family members?” Likewise, after an interview, you can guide students in analyzing what they have heard, using all the tools of the social studies: “Let’s make a time line that shows the sequence of events in Ms. Jefferson’s life.” “How does the movement of Mr. Parker’s family during the Great Depression compare to what we read in our textbook about the Dust Bowl?”

- **Feel a personal connection to the past and to the life of their community.** When students sit down to talk to an older person in their community about the past, history ceases to be a random sequence of names and dates. It becomes something that happened to (and because of) real people like themselves—people with feelings, hopes, and aspirations much like their own. Oral history allows students to understand the past in a first-person way and to gain a palpable sense of the joy, pain, sorrow, fear, and hope that others experienced as history unfolded.

- **Learn research skills.** Oral history is one valuable historical research tool among many. Students should have some background knowledge about an historical event before an interview (which the teacher helps provide). During the interview, they should follow simple guidelines (for asking questions and taking careful notes or operating a small audio or video recorder). After the interview, students can compare a story with other historical evidence (such as excerpts from a primary documents) and other perspectives (such as those of a different witness to the same event). Comparing the information they learned from their interviews to that gleaned from other historical sources helps students to develop analytical skills. With guidance from the teacher, they can craft their own historical interpretations. They can learn to be tentative in their conclusions, experiencing for themselves that the search for “historical truth” can be a challenging exercise.

- **Develop basic writing skills.** Students can write about an interview in many ways: making a journal entry, composing a report, or creating a shorter work (such as a timeline or a caption to a drawing). For example, when drawing a picture and writing a caption to depict an event from the past, a student must think about everything learned so far about that event, decide what is crucial to report, and communicate the main story. Tracing a drawing from a textbook is nothing like hearing an older person tell about an event from the past, imagining it in one’s own mind, then drawing an original sketch of it and composing a brief but informative caption. First graders can complete this assignment with amazing results. I have found that students, young and old, do some of their best writing when given an oral history assignment. This may be because they have another person’s words and a story that they care about to inspire them.

- **Develop critical thinking skills.** Doing oral history raises important questions about what matters about the past. By focusing on everyday people, oral history challenges the assumption that the only important stories about the past are those that are told by or happened to “powerful” and “important”
people like presidents, generals, business leaders, and activists. By bringing the voices of everyday people to bear on historical questions, oral history projects give teachers and students the chance to think critically about what “counts” as history. Whose history is often told and whose is neglected?

Oral history also supports critical thinking by introducing contradiction into the historical record. For example, if you ask twenty people of various races and economic classes what it was like to live in the South under segregation in the 1950s, they will invariably tell you twenty different stories. Many of these stories will seem in conflict with one another. Despite their differences, however, each of these stories may be accurate from the perspective of the teller. Oral history then, questions the idea that there is a single “correct” history to be uncovered. Students may have to grapple with contradictions between what their textbook states about an event and what their interviewee reports. They may struggle to understand how two people could recall such completely different experiences surrounding the same event from the past. Students then have to evaluate what they have been told and decide what it might mean for their understanding of the past.

**Feel included.** Oral history can allow students with less well-developed reading and writing skills to learn a great deal about the past and produce successful, motivating projects. Often, students who do poorly on library research-based assignments in my classes have outshone their peers as interviewers, in part because interviewing relies on a substantially different set of skills than does meticulous research in a library. Oral history projects that allow students to interview family members or people in their own communities can also help international students and recent immigrants share their own experience and inform their classmates about their own culture, perhaps easing the transition to American schools. For native-born students, interviewing the elderly gentleman next door, the head of the public library, or the school custodian (people who were born abroad) can open their eyes to the great cultural diversity that makes up their society.

**Develop valuable interpersonal skills.** Oral history entices students away from the Internet, video games, and television and into the presence of living, breathing human beings. Good interviewers have to be outstanding listeners. Older students can be challenged to ask thoughtful follow-up questions. Interviewers must also be carefully attuned to the messages they are sending with their own body language, tone of voice, phrasing, and vocabulary. The goal is to put another person at ease and establish a relationship of trust and mutual seeking.

**Oral history and the curriculum in grades K-3**

Oral history can deeply enrich the classroom experience, even if teachers don’t have time to launch a full-scale oral history project.

The K-3 social studies curriculum in many states is centered on the world that is familiar to young learners. A few of the oral history topics that address these curricular areas are listed below, each followed by a few suggested interview questions that an elementary student might pose to an adult.

1. **Family**
   - Who were the members of your family when you were seven years old?
   - Describe your family’s home when you were my age.
   - What were the chores around the house, and who did them?

2. **Food**
   - What foods did you enjoy as a child?
   - Who did the cooking in your family when you were growing up?
   - Tell me about a memorable holiday meal from your childhood.
   - What is different between the way people cooked when you were a child and the way food gets prepared in your own home today? Are the utensils in the kitchen any different now?

3. **Shelter**
   - Describe the neighborhood you grew up in. How has it changed since then?
   - How is the home you live in now different from where you grew up?
   - How have appliances around the home changed since you were a child?

4. **Vocations**
   - What did your parents do for a living? Did they like their work?
   - When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
   - Tell me about your first job.
   - Tell me about your current job (which can include homemaking).
   - Describe a typical day at work.
   - How did you decide what you wanted to do for work?
   - What do you like best about your job? What do you like least?

5. **Communication**
   - Have communication devices (telephone, television, Internet) changed since you were young?
   - How did you communicate with distant relatives when you were a child?
   - Do you have any letters or photographs from your childhood that I could see?

Incorporating oral history practices in the early elementary grades should be basic, but there are ways to introduce young students to oral history methods and involve them in simple research projects.

**School-based projects.** In primary grades, it makes sense to start the process of oral history in small ways—first inviting students to interview each other, then adults with whom they are comfortable. The school itself might provide an ideal setting for a small oral history project. For example, second graders could study multiple roles in families, work places, neighborhoods, and communities. The class might create a list of roles within the school and then find an interviewee for each role. Teams of students could develop questions and then interview adults about how their responsibilities have changed over time. (Does the school still have a typewriter in the main...
office? Do the cafeteria staff use a microwave? Does the physical education teacher demonstrate full sit-ups? Does the school nurse carry a cell phone? Students could share what they learned in a bulletin board display, group presentations, a short book about the history of the school, or simple class discussion.

Students might also interview school personnel about historical events that are within their living memory such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War era, or the advent of the home computer. Even if people were not directly affected by an event or major change in society, they will have memories of the occasion and how they personally reacted to it. To help students get the most out of their interviews, start with some background research—reading from their textbook, doing guided research in the school library, and visiting teacher-selected Internet sites on key topics.

Follow background research with question-writing sessions. Students can brainstorm questions that they would like to ask their interviewees about the events that they have studied. For young students, interviewing in groups can often be less intimidating than on-on-one sessions. Allow students to team up in groups of two or three. Each should be ready to ask two or three questions, written ahead of time. While one student is asking a question, the others can make sure the tape or video recorder is working well. They should listen to the interview unfold and jot down any follow-up questions that come to mind. By sharing responsibility for the interview, from operating a tape cassette to asking questions, students can all take an active role without feeling "on the spot."

**Interviewing guest speakers.** Young children enjoy hearing from guest speakers in their community, whether on a field trip, in an assembly, or in the classroom. Teachers can use these opportunities to teach interviewing skills that students can apply to oral history. In discussing community services in a kindergarten class, for example, you might invite a firefighter, animal control officer, librarian, or nurse to come to your class. While students are learning about historical events like the Vietnam War, you might invite a veteran to discuss some of his or her war experiences. You might invite a panel of speakers with a wide range of ages to discuss what life was like when they were children so that students could see the changes in technology, neighborhoods, schools, and childhood activities across the years. Talk about good interviewing techniques before the speaker arrives. Help them prepare good, open-ended questions and think about the need for attentive listening.

Here is an activity: Ask students to write questions in three separate categories. Factual Questions invite the interviewee to share factual details. For example, "When and where were you born?" or "What was the name of your school?" Descriptive Questions ask the interviewee to fill in details about his or her life. For example, "Describe a typical day of school when you were seven." or "How did you divide up the chores that needed to be done around the house?" Evaluation Questions urge the interviewee to evaluate, explain, or discuss the meaning of events from his or her past. For example, "What relative had the greatest influence on your life when you were my age?" or "Why do you think people were so upset when President John F. Kennedy was killed?" "How did you feel as you watched the astronaut take his first steps on the moon?"

Encourage students to avoid "yes-or-no" questions, which only require a one-word response. Asking, for example, "What did you like best about school?" is likely to yield a more interesting and fuller response than, "Did you like school?"

Students may want to brainstorm questions in groups and then critique these questions—eliminating yes/no questions and making sure that there are several questions in each category. Students should also think about prioritizing their questions by placing a star next to the two or three questions whose answers they are most interested in hearing. With this preparation, students will be able to make the most of the guest speaker's visit by asking well-thought-out questions with confidence. Interviewing people they don't know in the safe environment of their classroom is good practice for bigger challenges.

Themes drawn from the curriculum, such as the relationship between people and their government (stories about voting, for example), changes in families (stories about when families moved, added new members, etc.) or the ways in which life was different in the past (memories of childhood in different eras or stories about life before technological innovations like computers, televisions, or cellular phones, for example) could form the basis for these oral history narratives.

**Using pre-recorded interviews.** Not every recorded interview goes well, and that is to be expected. But if one group of students produces an excellent recorded interview this year, it could be used as a classroom resource next year. Make it available at a listening station for students to hear before they plan their own interview questions. Or use the tape as the basis for other assignments, such as:

- a writing activity (write a letter to the interviewee asking two more questions that could have been asked, or write and illustrate part of the interviewee's story as it might appear in a magazine);
- a role-playing activity (write and act out a short play in which you reenact an event in the interviewee's life, or imagine that you are one of the people whom the interviewee mentioned in the interview, then discuss how that person might recall the same event, from her or his point of view);
- an art project (create a mural with groups of students drawing or painting different stories from the interview, or illustrate a timeline showing significant events in the interviewee's life overlaying landmark events in American history).

This tape could be the beginning of an archive of classroom oral histories that you can use in future years.

**Listening stations.** Pre-literate students can benefit from oral history materials. If you don't have a tape produced by last year's class, ask a school or public librarian or call your state or county historical society and ask if you can borrow a tape. In the classroom, set up a listening station where students can operate a simple tape recorder to hear (maybe through headphones,
Understanding other cultures. While the primary curriculum deals mostly with the familiar, the curriculum in grades 4-6 challenges students to broaden their worldview to include people as far away as China, Chad, and Chile. Oral history can help build bridges between students' familiar world of home and family and the seemingly distant lives of people who seem at first "foreign" in one way or another. Invite guest speakers who grew up in other countries, other parts of the United States, or who have traveled extensively. Connect the experiences of these guests to the curriculum. How has the world changed from their perspective? Students will be motivated to read about the topic beforehand, prepare good questions, and act with courtesy and interest if they know a guest speaker is coming.

Communities in transition. Oral history can help students understand the issues at stake in communities that are rapidly changing. By conducting interviews with family members about changes over time (the influx of people from other states, immigration from foreign countries, deindustrialization, and the increased availability of new products, entertainment, literature, art, and ideas through television and the Internet), students can not only understand the historical changes in their neighborhoods, but also begin to make sense of the changes that they are seeing in their own lifetimes—changes that might otherwise seem, on one extreme, irrelevant to people their age or, at the other extreme, confusing, frightening, or overwhelming.

Interdisciplinary topics. Students in elementary grades might benefit from combining an oral history project in social studies with other kinds of classroom activities. In social studies lessons, students could plan interviews with guest speakers from park services, farmers, or environmental groups—asking them about changes in the landscape during their lifetimes—while simultaneously learning some science. Students can see firsthand the ways in which different academic disciplines approach a problem. What changes have occurred in your community over the last 20 years? Have roads been built? Factories shut down? New neighborhoods sprung up? Farmland diminished? Immigrants set up new businesses? These are all topics that upper elementary students can understand to fair degree, and with a little help, they can formulate some interesting questions to discuss with a knowledgeable adult.

Critical thinking. Students often have trouble resolving conflicts between what their interviewee said and what they have learned from other interviews or written sources. When in doubt, they often believe a written source over an oral source, assuming that the interviewee must be wrong. When two accounts tell dramatically different stories about the same event, students will assume that the conflict must be because one person or the other was lying or being intentionally deceptive.

This can be an excellent opportunity to talk about historical objectivity in all kinds of sources. Why, for example, might their textbook have neglected to mention something that
How to Conduct an Interview

Preparing for the interview
With guidance from your teacher, read about the historical topic at hand. Plan the questions you want to ask. Start by writing out three research questions that your group could ask the older person whom you will interview. Think of things which the person might be able to tell you about. Ask for his or her first-hand experiences. Write questions that will require more than a Yes or No answer. For example, question B will get you a better result than will question A:

A: Did you have chores to do as a child?

B: Tell me about the chores you had to do as a child.

Try to compose your questions to be like example B. When your questions are complete, test each of them with a partner. Play the role of the interviewer and then play the role of the adult. Are the questions clear and easy to understand? Are they worded in a way that is easy for you to say?

Using a tape recorder (or video recorder)
Practice using a small tape recorder in class. One of you should pretend to be the adult who remembers the past. The other should act as the interviewer, who operates the recorder. Here is a brief checklist of things to do when making a sound recording.
1. Make sure you that have a blank cassette and that the recorder is working.
2. Bring a second tape and spare batteries for the recorder, or plug the power cord into the wall.
3. Label the tape with the date and topic of your interview, and the name of the adult.
4. Set the microphone as close as possible to the adult or use a “clip-on” microphone. Try to station the interview away from other noises, such as the hum of a refrigerator or traffic noise from the street outside a window.
5. Speak directly to the adult and listen carefully to what he or she says.
6. Once the tape player is rolling, don’t fuss with it. Pay attention to the person talking, not the machine.
7. Leave the recorder on to make an uninterrupted recording of the session.

Practicing good manners
Here are some pointers for good interview manners:
► Be on time.
► Be prepared. Have your questions and tape player ready.
► Be polite. Say please and thank you and address people formally (using Mr., Ms., Dr., and so on).
► Introduce yourselves and explain what the interview is for.
► Don’t rush. Ask your prepared questions one at a time. Be patient when answers take a long time.
► Do not argue with or correct the adult. Oral histories are not always accurate. But they do provide important information about feelings and impressions. Be happy with whatever you get.
► Avoid using expressions such as “I see” or “uh-huh,” which are likely to be distracting to students who listen to your tape later on.
► End your interview by thanking the person being interviewed.
► After the interview, send a thank you letter.

Conducting the interview
1. Introduce yourself to the adult, and thank him or her for agreeing to speak with you.
2. Ask the person if you can tape record the conversation and have him or her sign a Release Form so you can share the information you collect with others. Briefly describe the research project your group has chosen.
3. Now it is time to turn on the tape recorder or videocamera. Introduce yourself, speaking into the tape. Give your name, age, the class and school you attend. Give the full address of where you are, including what state you are in.
4. Begin the interview by asking where and when the person was born.
5. If the speaker strays from the topic, try to refocus by asking one of your prepared questions.
6. Ask follow up questions.
7. It is okay to end early, if you have asked all of your questions, but do not run over time.
8. If you need to change tapes or put in new batteries, ask the adult to pause until the tape player is running again.

Asking follow-up questions
Listen carefully while the adult is talking. Often, what a person says may suggest a follow-up question for you. Jot it down quickly. That way, you can ask the follow-up questions at a pause in the interview, without interrupting the person. Be sure to say “thank you” at the end of the interview.
their interviewee discussed in great detail? Is it necessarily true that conflicting accounts are the result of deception, or could it be the result of error or simply of two people having different perspectives on the same event? Ask students to recall an argument they have had with Mom or Dad. A nine-year-old may remember an event very differently from his or her parents ("Just how did that lamp get broken?"). By looking at a personal example, students can see how two people might remember the same event very differently depending on their perspective and the assumptions they make. Each person can be telling the truth from their perspective, believing that they are giving an accurate and complete account, but their two accounts may differ dramatically.

Ten questions for planning an oral history activity
A little planning will avoid a lot of frustration later and help to ensure that your students get as much as possible out of an oral history activity. Because a large oral history project can require a major commitment of time from teachers and students, it's important to take the time in advance to consider issues that can arise and how you will deal with them.

1. What are your goals?
Thinking about the goals for the project early on can help you choose an appropriate scope for your project, set a timeframe for its completion, and select the readings, guest speakers, and in-class activities that will make it a success. By thinking about what you want students to get out of the project in the early planning stages, you can make sure that you spend your time and energy achieving those goals instead of trying to "do everything."

There must be a strong link to the curriculum for any oral history project. One of the most challenging and creative things a teacher can do is to imagine links between a unit of study and the historical experiences of the adults in a child’s world. Some of the more obvious topics for interviews were listed earlier, under “incorporating oral history into the curriculum” for K-3 and for 4-6.

2. How will you manage the time involved?
Oral history projects can be very time-consuming. In addition to your planning time, your class may need to learn about the topics or time periods at hand, conduct background research, find interviewees, learn oral history techniques, practice interview skills, conduct interviews, listen to their recordings and perhaps transcribe pieces of them, discuss their findings, and produce some sort of final project. You will probably want to create a time line to help you fit all of these steps into the year's curriculum. An in-depth oral history research project could involve class time and homework assignments spread out over several weeks from start to finish, but the rewards of such a project in terms of both historical understanding and student confidence are immeasurable.

On the other hand, a teacher with little time for an involved project could plan other options such as using already-recorded tapes to supplement written sources or inviting a guest speaker to be interviewed by the whole class. These kinds of activities can be easily worked into existing lesson plans and, while they don’t take up much time, they do enrich students’ understanding of and connection to the past in significant ways. You'll need to decide about the time commitment you can reasonably make and then plan ahead to manage the steps involved in your project accordingly.

3. How will you teach your students about interviewing?
Many students will eagerly jump at the chance to use a tape recorder and interview an adult. But even in a group setting, some young children can be intimidated by it all. In individual interviews, students sometimes worry that the interviewee will dislike them, that they won't think of good questions, or that the interview will be plagued with awkward silences. Training can go a long way toward alleviating those concerns and giving students the confidence and skills that they will need to produce high-quality interviews.

During an interview, students can ask follow-up questions, but they should not challenge an elder about the truthfulness of his or her story or disagree with a stated opinion. The work of sifting out tall tales from accurate recollections, opinion from fact, can come later, in the classroom, with guidance from you. Besides, it is a good thing to record an interesting folklore or a legend, told by an elder, just so long as we remember to think critically.

4. Will your students work alone or in groups?
Given students' concerns about interviewing adults and given that oral history projects can be time consuming, it often makes sense to allow students to work together and share the burdens of research, question-writing, and interviewing. If you decide on a group project, you'll want to consider whether you want each student in the group to interview someone individually and then complete a group project about all of their interviews or whether you will allow students to conduct their interviews as a group. Will you permit any students to opt out of conducting their own interviews and, instead, read an interview or take on added responsibilities for their group's final paper? By thinking about what parts of the oral history experience you want everyone to have and what parts you want students to do in collaboration with others, you'll be able to set fair and consistent group work policies right from the start.

5. Will students choose their own interviewees?
Elementary school students will likely be interviewing people that you handpick or they will interview people whom they already know such as their parents, grandparents, neighbors, and other well known and trusted adults. Interviewing family members and family friends can be a very valuable experience for students—they can learn a great deal of history from their relatives. Moreover, connecting historical events to someone they know well can bring those events vividly to life. Students will also likely be less intimidated by interviewing someone they know well and so a project centered on interviewing family or adult friends can be a great introduction to oral history. If you want students to conduct interviews on specific topics, however, especially topics for which they may not know appropriate people to interview, you will need to handpick interviewees for your students. For young students, it would be most appropriate for interviewees to come to the
school so that students could conduct interviews during school hours. Whether you or the students choose the interviewees, you'll want to clearly define the criteria for interviewees in the project: Does the person need to be over a certain age? Does s/he need to remember particular events? Can s/he be related to the student?

Use a letter to inform interviewees about the project in which they are participating, including the possible uses of their recorded interview (such as playing tapes in class, creating a mural or play from their stories, the teachers saving tapes from year to year to use with future students). Provide each interviewee with a letter that they can sign to indicate their informed consent for the recording and for the subsequent use of the interviews. (A sample release form is shown here. Ask your principal if anything should be added to it before using it).

### SAMPLE

In view of the historical value of this oral history interview, I ______________________ (name of older interviewee) knowingly and voluntarily permit these students, ______________________ (name of student interviewers), of ______________________ (name of class and school) to use the full use of this information for educational purposes. This tape may become part of a classroom collection of oral history tapes, to be used this year and in the future.

Signature ______________________ (signature of the older interviewee)

Date ______________________ (date of interview)

6. What will happen to the tapes after they are collected? Too often, students record wonderful oral histories and then wind up throwing the tapes in a dresser drawer or taping the latest CD over them accidentally. Consider ways of preserving your students’ work by creating an archive in your school library or donating the recordings to an organization that can preserve them and make them available to future researchers. If you plan to make the tapes available to outside researchers, you will need to be sure to have students and their interviewees sign a legal release form, giving you permission to make the recordings available to others. See, for example the How To portion of the Southern Oral History Program’s site from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (http://www.sohp.unc.edu/forms/). If you decide to archive the original tapes in your classroom, you may want to make arrangements to dub “working” copies for students to use in crafting their papers or other projects, as well as copies to offer to interviewees as a “thank you” for participating in the class project.

7. What will you do about equipment? Hand-held tape recorders are inexpensive and easy to use. (Writing notes will not allow students to quote their interviewee verbatim in later projects, and will not preserve the unique flavor of the spoken word—a critical part of oral history. Also, young students may not have the writing and note-taking skills to take notes successfully.) Can your school provide tape recorders on loan? Can students use their own tape recording equipment? Typically, the best recording quality will be achieved by using a tape recorder with some form of external microphone and by recording on high-quality 90-minute tapes. Particularly if you plan to archive the recordings, you may want to obtain quality chrome tapes so that students don’t use the 90-cent bargain variety, which often produce poor-quality recordings and tend to break upon repeated listening. Incorporate tape recorders into your training sessions. If you want to incorporate video in a project for grades 4-6, you will need to secure video equipment, including a tripod, and help students learn to use it well. (But that is a topic for another time.)

8. What will students do with the raw material? It can be tempting to ask students to transcribe their full interviews, but transcription is an art unto itself and is very time consuming. Full transcription is not a realistic option, unless you have some adult volunteers who would be willing to transcribe interview for the students to use in written form. An alternative is to ask students to transcribe just one interesting section from each interview, or to ask them to create a “tape log” in which they listen to their tapes while jotting down the topics covered. Students could be asked to create one or two illustrations, with short captions, that bring out key ideas from the interview. These activities can be fun for students and give them a taste of transcription without requiring hours of work.

9. What will be the final product? Will students just record the interview, or will the tape be used as a basis for other lessons and activities? Can students in your class work well collaboratively? Be creative in thinking about possible related assignments. Students could produce exhibits that incorporate photos, research documents, and excerpts from their interviews; write and perform a dramatic performance based on their interviewee’s stories; or develop a slide show or oral presentation in which they play some excerpts from their interview and discuss them with the class. Artistic students could create a visual art project that incorporates interview themes. Older students could create a documentary film or a website to share their research with a broader audience. You might create a long list of possible “end projects” and allow each student or group to choose.

10. How will your class give something back to the community? Oral historians are acutely aware that our interviewees give us a tremendous gift when they invite us into their lives and share their stories with us. It’s important for us to acknowledge that gift, treat it with respect, and, when we can, give something in return. Will your students write thank you notes? Send copies of tapes to their interviewees? Will the class invite interviewees to hear see their final projects, or to attend a class performance or slide show in the community? This is an opportunity for you to model appropriate behavior for researchers while also building good will in the community.
Consider community resources

As you seek answers to all of these questions, try to connect with historians in your community and with other teachers doing similar projects. You may be surprised by how generous members of county or state historical societies or teachers at a community college can be with their time and expertise. (See suggested links and resources, at left.)

Conclusion

Oral history is both a critical methodology for the historian and a valuable pedagogical tool for the social studies teacher. Through oral history projects, students can reap tremendous rewards both academically, socially, and emotionally, and teachers can enjoy watching students grow to care about an older adult. These kinds of projects require some careful planning and creative thinking on the teacher’s part, but they are well worth the time and effort.

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The Ten Thematic Strands in Social Studies

- CULTURE
- TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE
- PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS
- INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY
- INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS
- POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE
- PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND CONSUMPTION
- SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY
- GLOBAL CONNECTIONS
- CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES


Suggested background readings


