



Oral History

Grade: 6-8

Time: 1-3 class periods

Goal: Students will explore how historians use oral histories to understand people, events, and places from the past. They will critically analyze two different recorded histories and make connections between the two as well as to their own lives.

Big Idea: Oral history is a tool that can help us learn more about people, places, and events.

Objectives:

Students will:

- Understand that oral history is an example of a primary source.
- Use information from oral history recordings to illustrate what the past might have been like.
- Compare and contrast two different oral histories.
- Realize that perspectives and memories of events can change over time.
- Conclude that all of us have stories to tell and perspectives to share.

Essential Questions

- How do historians learn about the past?
- How does the past inform us about the present?
- How does our understanding or memory of an event change over time?
- What is the difference between oral tradition and oral history?

Materials

- Audio recording: Gladys Wehbe
- Audio recording: Neville Gardner

Vocabulary

- Oral history: collecting and studying historical information through the use of audio, video, and transcriptions of interviews.
- Immigrant: a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign count
- Oral tradition: a form of human communication where knowledge, art, ideas, and stories are received, preserved, and transmitted orally from one generation to another. Can be speech, song, folktales, changes, or prose.



Procedure

- Teacher preparation
 - Listen to the audio clips and read over the material to become familiar with the lesson
- Introduction
 - Ask students if they know any childhood stories about their parents or grandparents.
 - Instruct students to share stories with someone sitting next to them.
 - Ask a few students to share their stories with the class.
 - Ask students how they know about those stories if they were not alive when those stories happened. Reinforce that information is often received through stories that family members tell each other – this is called the **oral tradition**.
 - Connect the exercise to the work of historians. Explain that historians learn about the past by asking people to tell them stories about it. These stories are called an **oral history**. Historians are looking for evidence.
 - How are oral history and oral tradition different? Which is a primary source?
 - Oral tradition: cultural, family, story-sharing, folklore
 - Oral history: historians interviewing to collect evidence and information to learn about the past, doesn't connect to them personally

Activity

- Listen and Discuss
 - Explain the lesson to the students – they will explore two different oral histories in order to learn what life was like for two immigrants in Northampton County.
 - Meet Gladys Wehbe. Gladys moved from Beirut, Lebanon and settled in Pennsylvania.
 - Neville Gardner moved to Pennsylvania from Northern Ireland in the 1970s.
 - Distribute transcripts. Play recording samples.
 - Ask students what they learned about Gladys and Neville. Record their observations. Clarify any vocabulary or phrases – both speakers have accents. Neville's recording quality is poor and may need clarification.
 - Play the recordings again. Did the students catch anything else? Record any other observations.



The Sigal Museum | Northampton County Historical & Genealogical Society

342 Northampton Street | Easton, PA 18042 | 610-253-1222

sigalmuseum.org | nchgs.org | info@northamptonctymuseum.org

- Reflect on Gladys' and Neville's experiences. Have students explore what it might have been like to be "in Gladys' or Neville's shoes" using the following guiding questions:
 - Where is Lebanon?
 - Where is the Mediterranean?
 - What is it like to live in Lebanon, according to Gladys?
 - Where is Ireland?
 - What kind of experience did Neville have growing up?
 - What do you think it would be like to not have a phone or a fridge?
 - Neville uses words that may be unfamiliar to us. Can you figure out what they mean based on context? (i.e.: flat, larder)
 - How are Gladys and Neville alike? How are they different?
 - How can these oral histories tell us more about American history? Immigration?
- Wrap Up
 - Writing Activity
 - Have students write a short reflective paragraph on the oral history interviews. Did they connect with either of their experiences? How are their experiences similar or different? Did any of the students come from another country? What was their experience like?
 - Encourage students to share their thoughts or writing with the class.
 - Final question to the class: How can we apply this to our everyday life?

Extensions

- Oral History at Home
 - Have students interview a family member about growing up. Come up with questions together as a class. Students can utilize audio or video to record their interview.
- Oral Tradition at Home
 - Have students ask their families for a story or about an heirloom that has been passed down through a generation. Share with the class – why is it important to the family?



Transcripts

- Gladys Wehbe

I grew up in Lebanon. I grew up in the city, Beirut. I went to what they consider an elite Catholic school. I am the oldest of five other children, oldest of six. I am, we are girl-boy-girl-boy-girl-boy. That's how we came. We all graduated, and we have three living in the U.S. and three living over there. We grew up in an environment where everything was religious, Catholic. Or Orthodox, because my parents were Orthodox. But we went to Catholic school, so everything had to be by the book. You respect your elders. You're polite to the elders. If you're on the bus and an older person walks in, stand up, let them sit down. You walk in and you say good morning to anybody, to everybody you see. This is the way we were brought up. And I'm sure everybody in our generation will tell you the same thing. We had two homes – one home in Beirut, which was like a condo-style because it's a city, big city, and one home by the ocean in a town called Berbara, B-E-R-B-A-R-A, like Barbara, B-E-R. I'll show you pictures here. So, we went to the summer home one weekends, on holidays, and we enjoyed the peace and quiet there by the beach, because it's right by the Mediterranean. In Beirut, we were, like, on the fifth story, you know how it is in condos and stuff. We went to the schools in Beirut, so that was our business area, our biasness environment.

- Neville Gardner

My dad always wanted to be a writer... you just had to go get a job because no one had any money. I mean, no one had any money! My parents never had a car. Never had a phone. We didn't have a fridge until I was 15, so like the milk was in a bottle of cold water outside the back door. We had a larder, that vegetables and potatoes and things stayed in but I mean if you were gonna have meat for dinner, you got it that day. The little village I lived at had like a green grocers and butchers and a home bakery and you basically went and got the stuff, made the dinner that day. It was truly different. For me, I went to primary School. I think when I was growing up, I had entrepreneurial ideas at the time because you know, people say, "Oh you're an only child, you must've been spoiled," well, you know, there wasn't anything to spoil me with because we didn't have anything. When I went to primary school, to me that was a great adventure because I got to take



The Sigal Museum | Northampton County Historical & Genealogical Society

342 Northampton Street | Easton, PA 18042 | 610-253-1222

sigalmuseum.org | nchgspa.org | info@northamptonctymuseum.org

a bus because there were no school buses in Ireland. I got on a public transport bus. My mother rode her bicycle to her job every day. She shared an apprenticeship and a department store in Belfast called “Gurwitz’s,” which was a Jewish department store in Belfast. It was in the retail trade, so she learned how to dress windows, how to buy for her department, accounting, bookkeeping, and in those days, that was how people did things. Then her mother got ill and so my mom had to find a job where she could come home at lunchtime every day to make sure her mother was okay, because her mother lived in another flat, very close to where we lived.