

# Learning with Oral History



## What is Oral History?

Oral history is the collecting and recording of personal and group memories and experiences. Listening to these life stories can tell us a lot about the past – how people used to live and what was important to them. We all recall and recount events in our lives, whether it is a grandparent talking about their childhood or a child talking about what they did in the holidays.

Oral History is a resource that can be used across the curriculum with all age groups. As well as providing historical context, it can provide a unique insight into the past and enables children to empathise with people's histories by making direct links between their own lives and values, and those of previous generations. There are many ways that Oral History can support learning in the classroom:

### History

- ▶ Investigate and compare similarities and differences between their own lives and lives of people in the past.
- ▶ Develop historical vocabulary.
- ▶ Develop an understanding of chronology.
- ▶ Find out more about the past through a primary source.

### Literacy

- ▶ Develop speaking and listening skills.
- ▶ Develop research and note taking skills.
- ▶ Devise and ask questions and respond.
- ▶ Recordings can be used to develop factual and creative writing exercises.

### Geography

- ▶ Recordings can support study on particular parts of the world.
- ▶ Investigate cultural / global differences.
- ▶ Support study of the local area.
- ▶ Impact of changes in the environment of various populations.

### PSHE and Citizenship

- ▶ Develop a respect and understanding of other people, cultures and generations.
- ▶ Develop an understanding of right and wrong and the ability to handle moral dilemmas in a responsible way.
- ▶ Show sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others.
- ▶ Challenge stereotypes.
- ▶ Enhance a sense of identity and belonging.
- ▶ Promote communication skills.

### ICT

- ▶ Develop online research skills
- ▶ Present work / findings – combining sound, text and images (in Powerpoint for example)
- ▶ Produce articles, website blogs etc.

### Religious Education

- ▶ Develop an understanding of different faiths
- ▶ Investigate and compare different religious cultures, customs and practices

Oral History can support other curriculum areas such as Science, Art, Drama and DT, as well as supporting SEAL outcomes. In general, children will gain organisational skills; thinking skills; engaging and responding skills and the rare opportunity to converse with an adult, perhaps who is unfamiliar to them.

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## Activity: Collecting Oral History

### Interview Guidelines you can use with your Students

#### Finding people to interview:

- You could interview someone you know, such as a family member, a friend or a neighbour.
- You could write an 'appeal' outlining who (or what memories) you are searching for and send it to your local paper or community centres/groups.
- You could contact local interest groups, lunch clubs, places of worship, day centres, etc.

#### Equipment:

- Most schools have video or audio recorders available which are suitable for oral history projects. Whatever equipment you have access to, make sure that it is easy to use and that you understand what to do. Try to use a device which records PCM WAV (.WAV) files as this is good quality and a widely used format.
- Practice recording and playing back before the interview. Make sure everything is working properly, including the batteries (spare ones are a good idea).

#### Before the interview:

- Think about what you want to know. Think about 'topics' you want to cover. Rather than preparing specific questions, you could prepare prompt cards to refer to if you need to on the day.
- Practice with a friend, take turns to be the interviewer.
- Prepare consent forms which include information on how the interviews will be used.

#### The interview:

- Choose a quiet place without background noise.
- Sit where you are both comfortable and can see and hear each other properly and where you can reach the recording equipment easily.
- It is a good idea to do a test recording to check the equipment and make sure that the interviewee can be heard well on playback.
- At the start of the recording, introduce yourself and the project and say who you are interviewing (or get them to say their name) and the date.
- Some people find it useful to look at or show you objects and photographs.
- Try to ask 'open' questions - questions which require more than a 'yes'/'no' answer.
- Try not to interrupt during the interview - let the interviewee do most of the talking. Nod and make eye contact to show you are listening.
- Don't be afraid of quiet moments - your interviewee may be thinking.
- Recalling happy and sad events can make people upset. If this happens, ask if they would prefer to stop, or pause the interview, or this may be an important part of their story and they may wish to carry on.
- If they are willing, you could take a photo of the interviewee to go with the recording.

#### After the interview:

- Remember to thank your interviewee for talking to you - A thank you letter afterwards is a good idea.
- Ask them if they would like a copy of the recording. You should also inform them how it will be used.
- Don't forget to label and date the recording and if possible make a backup copy of it.
- You could use the recording to create an assembly, talk or exhibition. It could inspire creative writing or a newspaper report. Listening back to the interview is a useful learning experience, as is editing the material.

[www.howwasschool.org.uk](http://www.howwasschool.org.uk)

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#### Resources

You will find many examples of audio and video clips on the How Was School? website:  
<http://bit.ly/1hlpA6c>

#### Oral History website links

You will find a list of useful links here:

<http://bit.ly/1hlq1gC>