

Projects

Oral Testimonies

Project Objective: Learn proper techniques for doing an oral testimony interview while documenting the story of a member of the student's community. The interview should be approximately 30 minutes long and cover some sort of local or national historical event. Once the interview is over and recorded, transcribe the interview so that there is a written copy of the interview.

Materials

High-quality video/audio recorder. A phone can be used only if a stand is available.

Directions:

Students should find a grandparent, parent, close family friend, or someone that he/she already knows well to interview. Students should get consent to do the interview by asking this person if he/she is willing to do the interview, and students should inform the interviewee about the purpose and later uses of the interview. Before the interview, students should talk with the person being interviewed about what he/she wishes to talk about on tape.

Once you know who you are interviewing, come up with a game plan. Write out a series of questions to keep the interview on track and progressing. Make sure that they are not simple yes/no questions. They should be essay-like questions to keep the interview going. This interview only needs to be 30 minutes long so try and keep to only one topic. During the whole process, make sure to be courteous to who you are interviewing. Confirm when you are meeting, show up on time and thank them when the whole process is over. For the interview, find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.

Start by saying who you are, the date, and why the interview is taking place. Then have the person being interviewed introduce themselves, including their age and where they are from. From there, start with basic questions; an example would be how long they have lived in various places or basic information about their family.

When conducting the interview, remember to:

1. Have a list of topics in mind, not specific questions or a specific sequence. You may, however, want to have a start-up list of questions to get the person you are interviewing and yourself comfortable before you change to your topic list.

2. Ask easy questions first, such as brief biographical queries. Ask very personal or emotionally demanding questions after a rapport has developed. End as you began, not with bombshells, but gently with lighter questions.
3. Ask questions one at a time.
4. Allow silence to work for you. Wait.
5. Be a good listener, using body language such as looking at the interviewee, nodding, and smiling to encourage and give the message, "I am interested."
6. If necessary, use verbal encouragement such as "This is wonderful information!" or "How interesting!"; Be careful, however, not to pepper the interview with verbal encouragement such as "uh-huh", said at the same time that the interviewee is speaking. This will make transcribing the interview afterward very difficult.
7. Ask for specific examples if the person being interviewed makes a general statement and you need to know more. Or you might say, "I don't understand. Could you explain that in more detail?"
8. Ask for definitions and explanations of words that the person being interviewed uses and that have critical meaning for the interview. For example, ask a horseman what he means by the shaft of the buggy. How was it used? What was its purpose?
9. Rephrase and re-ask an important question several times, if you must, to get the full amount of information the interviewee knows.
10. Unless you want one-word answers, phrase your questions so that they can't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." Ask "essay" questions that prompt long answers whenever you can. Find out not only what the person did, but also what she thought and felt about what she did.
11. Ask follow-up questions, and then ask some more.
12. Be flexible. Watch for and pick up on promising topics introduced by the person being interviewed, even if the topics are not on your interview guide sheet.

Belt Buckle Project

Project Objective: Learn proper methodology in using a historical artifact as a primary source. Understand how to ask questions about historical objects and engage in primary source analyses using the belt buckle depicted in the app.

Directions:

Using the belt buckle in the narrative of the app and the images and texts on the website, www.texasliberators.org, ask students to consider two different approaches to using the historical artifact.

Materials:

- Chicago/Turabian style sheet to ensure proper historical citation:
http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html
- Primary Source analysis guidelines
<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/>
<https://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/history/resources/study/primary/>
<https://www.bowdoin.edu/faculty/s/smcmahon/courses/critical-analysis.shtml>

Instructions:

Start with a physical examination of the belt buckle. Complete this worksheet using the belt buckle as the artifact in order to begin formulating questions you might be able to ask and answer:

https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/artifact_analysis_worksheet.pdf
using this object as historical evidence

Choose one of the two questions below to explore different approaches to using a primary source for historical analysis.

Compare and Contrast:

1. Compare and contrast the ideologies of the average German soldier and a member of the SS based on the mottos inscribed on their belt buckles.

Standard German Army – Gott mit uns “God is with us”
SS – Meine Ehre heißt Treue “My honor is called loyalty”

Creative

2. Imagine you are an American soldier who finds a belt buckle and wishes to send it home as a souvenir. Write a letter to your loved ones explaining what the item is and why you are sending it home. Cover details such as where and how you found it as well as how it comments on the nature of the war.

Letters Home Project

Project Objective: Learn proper methodology in using a historical artifact as a primary source. Understand how to ask questions about historical objects and engage in primary source analyses using the one of the soldiers’ letters featured in the app.

Directions:

Using the one of the letters featured in the narrative of the app, ask students to consider two different approaches to using the written document.

Materials:

Chicago/Turabian style sheet to ensure proper historical citation:

http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html

Primary Source analysis guidelines:

<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets>

<https://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/history/resources/study/primary/>

<https://www.bowdoin.edu/faculty/s/smcMahon/courses/critical-analysis.shtm>

Instructions:

Start with a physical examination of the letter. Complete this worksheet using one of the soldiers' letters as the artifact in order to begin formulating questions you might be able to ask and answer using this written document as historical evidence:

https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf

Choose one of the two questions below to explore different approaches to using a primary source for historical analysis:

Close Reading:

1. In what ways does this letter help us to understand the experiences of the soldiers and survivors in Dachau? What questions would you like to ask the soldier who wrote this letter? What does this letter tell us about the Second World War? What does it tell us about the Holocaust? How does this letter help us make sense of what the soldiers saw and experienced during liberation?

Creative:

2. Pretend you are a soldier/nurse/medic and you are sent help in the liberation of a concentration camp. Write a letter home describing what you are experiencing. Using the letters in the app as your inspiration, to whom would you address the letter? Consider what would you would say and how you would say it. What would you reveal? What would you keep to yourself?