

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Oral History Interviews

Oral history is an interview that records a person's recollection of experiences, thoughts, and feelings about a specific event or a period of time. By showing us how national or international events affected the lives of individuals, oral history adds a personal dimension to our study of the past.

Collecting oral history interviews is a way to discover your own primary sources. Members of your family and community can surprise you with a wealth of information and insights into major events of our times. These guidelines will help you organize an oral history interview.

### Preparation

First choose your subject. Whom would you like to interview? Consider the following points:

- What historical information could be obtained from this person?
- Would this person be willing to participate?
- How much time will you need to complete your project?

Think about how you will record your subject's words. If possible, obtain a tape recorder and get your subject's permission to record your interviews.

### Planning the Interview

- Write an introduction to your interview. Introduce yourself if necessary, and include an explanation of this project and its purpose.

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- Write three warm-up questions. The questions might include questions about the person's age, place of birth, or occupation.

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- Write at least six questions to help you get stories and details about the event or time period you are studying.

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- Prepare some follow-up questions. These questions should help you to clarify and expand upon the information from your interviews.

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### **Conducting the Interview**

- Make an appointment with your subject and be on time.
- If you use a tape recorder, be sure your subject agrees to it.
- Bring along these notes to help you guide the interview. Your subject may wander off with an interesting story. Continue with it as long as it adds to your understanding of the topic. If it does not, politely return to your list of questions.
- When your interview is finished, explain to your subject that you will be using the information for a class project. Ask your subject how he or she would like to be referred to in the report or if he or she wishes to remain anonymous.
- Be sure to write your subject a thank-you letter.