

**Teacher's Guide
for
ORAL HISTORY**

**by Lynn Ruehlmann
Storyteller**

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Students can gain an enormous amount from a unit on Oral History. They hear stories from family members or community members that they might otherwise never know. They experience a connection between what they hear and what is written through learning the process of interviewing people, recording what they hear and shaping the material into a written or told story.

Bibliography

These are some books to consult if you are interested in exploring the use of oral history storytelling.

Davis, Donald. Telling Your Own Stories: For Family and Classroom Storytelling, Public Speaking, and Personal Journaling. Little Rock: August House Publishers, Inc. 1993.

Ledoux, Denis. Turning Memories into Memoirs: A Handbook for Writing Lifestories. Lisbon Falls, Maine: Soleil Press. 1993.

Maguire, Jack. The Power of Personal Storytelling: Spinning Tales to Connect with Others. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnum. 1998.

About Storyteller Lynn Ruehlmann

Lynn has been a professional storyteller since 1990. She has taught storytelling at Old Dominion University, won a Folio Award for Best Actress in a Comedy, and Artist of the Year from Young Audiences of Virginia.

Her recording of "Spy! The Story of Civil War Spy Elizabeth Van Lew" won two national awards.

The process:

1. Brainstorm with your students who they can interview:

Family members: parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles

Community members: teachers; people who own businesses in their community (restaurants, drug stores, grocery stores, craft stores); church members; people who work in construction (plumbers, electricians, carpenters)

2. Discuss what should be the focus of their interviews

Does the class want all the interviews to be connected? If so, do they want to concentrate on a specific time period, a specific issue, or a specific theme? Have them brainstorm questions to ask.

3. Here are possible questions for them to ask depending on the decisions made above:

Childhood Playtime:

What games did you play as a child?

Were your toys hand made?

Did you have a favorite blankie or stuffed animal that you slept with?

Did you play alone or with family or neighbor children?

Transportation:

Do you remember learning how to drive?

What was your first car?

Did you ever take a long trip?

Did you ever have an accident?

Have you made a long trip on a bus or train?

Have you ever flown? What was it like?

Events:

Do you remember your first date?

Did you ever get lost?

Did you ever have a disaster trying to cook something?

Did you ever get locked out of your house or car

Celebrations:

When you were a child, how did your family celebrate your birthday?
What kinds of presents did you get?
What is the best present you ever received?
Did you believe in Santa? When did you "learn about" Santa?
Did your family decorate a tree?
How did your family celebrate Thanksgiving?

Jobs:

What was your first job?
What kind of a boss did you have? Did you think he or she was a good boss or a bad boss? Would you have the same opinion about that person now?
Did you change jobs often?

Home:

Did your house have an outdoor privy?
What kind of stove did you have?
What kind of meals did your mother cook?
Did everyone eat dinner together?
If you had siblings, who squabbled with whom?
How many people slept in the same room?
Did the family have special home remedies if anyone was sick?

4. Once the students have had their interviews, have them write them out. If they had a long interview, they can edit-choose their favorite or richest parts of the interview to write out.
5. Copy the results and give a copy to the interviewee. They will truly appreciate having permanent records of their memories. Collect the results from the whole class and put them together in a binder for everyone, including visitors to view. If there are photographs or artwork available, they can add an especially poignant touch.