



Conducting Oral Histories about September 11th

9/11 Tribute Center Curatorial Department

Grade level: 5 - 12

Number of class periods: 2

Objective

Students learn how 9/11 changed people's lives by conducting an oral history

Discuss with students the difference between oral histories and the history we read in a book. Talk about the connection they will feel by listening to another person's story.

Common Core Standards

Comprehensive Common Core Alignments at end of lesson plan.

- Reading Standards for Informational Text 8
- Writing Standards 1, 4, 9
- Speaking and Listening Standards 1, 4

Resources

- [Informational materials on the events and aftermath of 9/11](#)
- [Parents, guardians, teachers, other members of the local community, or a member of the 9/11 community](#)
- [Writing implements, audio or video recording device for documenting interview](#)

Preparation

Talk with students about why you think 9/11 is significant to their lives and what you hope they will learn by studying 9/11. Give very basic information about what happened on 9/11 and suggest resources for research. Most students were not alive before 9/11 so it's difficult for them to comprehend how our lives changes as a result of 9/11. Ask them to suggest what they think some of the changes may be. Ask them to think about both negative and positive changes that resulted from 9/11. Follow up with same discussion after they have conducted and presented their oral histories.

Activity

Conducting an oral history may be done both in class as a group project, or at home, as homework. Some interviewees may speak more openly in one-on-one interviews but other people may be equally open speaking to a group of students in a classroom.

Preparation for Conducting an Oral History

1. **Do research** in school or library with your partner to **get background** on the topic.
2. **Determine the focus of the interview** –Are you interested in the facts of the day of September 11, 2001 itself? Interested in how the person responded to the attacks? How the person connected with other people as a result of responding to the attacks?
 1. **Identify the person** you will interview to get first-hand information about the topic.
 2. Ask the person if they would be willing to take **30 – 60 minutes** to talk with you.
 3. **Set up a time and place** to conduct the oral history.
 4. **Obtain a recording device** if recording the oral history. Check the memory card or audio tape for available space and the batteries. Test the equipment.
 5. **Make a list of 5 main questions** you would like to have answered.



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Oral History Session

1. **Begin the interview** and the recording by making the subject comfortable (minimize noise – close the door, turn off cell phones).
2. Ask the interviewee to **sign a release form** – obtain contact info for the interviewee and let interviewee know the purpose of the recording – Paper? Presentation?
3. **Be a good listener and don't interrupt** the person speaking – show interest by looking at the person and responding appropriately (verbally and nonverbally).
4. **Don't rush the questions**, give person time to think and reflect.
5. **Add a question in response to what someone is saying**. This is always key but especially important given the potentially emotional 9/11 stories students will hear.
6. **End the interview tactfully** – Wait until speaker has ended the story. If time is an issue, alert interviewee 5 minutes before the ending point.
7. **Thank the interviewee**. Label the tape. Write down any key points that you remember made an impression on you during the interview.

Sample Questions for September 11th Interview

1. What is your name, where do you live?
2. Had you ever visited the World Trade Center in NYC before September 2001?
3. Where were you on the morning of September 11th?
4. How did you first hear about the attacks? What did you do when you heard?
5. Did you visit the site of the World Trade Center after the attacks? Why?
6. How do you feel your life has changed as a result of September 11th?
7. How do you feel the world has changed as a result of September 11th?
8. Why do you think young people should learn about September 11th?

Assessment/Reflection

After students present their oral histories to the class in written or oral format, ask all of the students to go back to the preparatory discussion questions. Ask them to think about both negative and positive changes that resulted from 9/11, and to write a reflection that includes both what they learned from their particular oral history interviewee and from the classroom discussion.

Common Core Alignments

These standards were written for the 9-10th grade level. However this lesson can be easily adjusted for use in both higher level classes and classes as young as 5th grade while still corresponding to the following Common Core Standards with grade level equivalents. Student assessments and expectation may vary depending upon grade level and ability.

Reading Standards for Informational Text (Grades 9-10)

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Standard 8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

- Using the information gained during research, students should be able to analyze the information gained during the interview to assess it for validity and draw out relevant information for their presentation or project.



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Writing Standards (Grades 9-10)

Text Types and Purposes

Standard 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- Students will practice and demonstrate these skills in recording, transposing, and analyzing the interview for the subsequent presentation or project.

Production and Distribution of Writing

Standard 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3)

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

Standard 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

- Students will be expected to perform research to familiarize themselves with 9/11 before conducting the interview and to use their research in reflecting upon the results of the interview.

Speaking and Listening Standards (Grades 9-10)

Comprehension and Collaboration

Standard 1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- Each student will conduct at least one oral history. Through interviewing a variety of people, each student not only holds a discussion with someone whose ideas differ extremely from the students' own experiences, but the students will be able to hear the viewpoints from a number of other people during a presentation of findings to the class or through sharing projects.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

Standard 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

- Students will practice and demonstrate these skills both in interviewing and in presenting their collected oral history to the class or in a project.