
This sheet will explain:

- What oral history is.
 - How to use oral history in a variety of curriculum areas.
 - How to develop your own oral history project.
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How can I use oral history in school?

Oral history is an exciting resource that can be used with different age groups to support learning across the curriculum. Taking part in an oral history project enables children and older students to develop a wide range of knowledge, skills and understanding and offers schools the opportunity to develop links with the wider community.

What is oral history?

Oral history is spoken history. It gives children an opportunity to learn about the past through the first hand accounts of the people who actually experienced it. Oral accounts of the past can take different forms, from stories, songs and edited recordings, to interviewing people directly about their experiences of a particular time or event.

Things to consider

Find an appropriate starting point: this could arise from your History Scheme of Work, or relate to an anniversary or festival connected with your school.

Discuss the value of oral history with the children/students: setting oral history in the context of other sources of historical evidence, such as photographs, books and artefacts will enable children to discover its unique characteristics.

Identify who you will interview: a starting point may be to contact people who already have connections with the school, such as friends or relatives. If you are seeking to establish links with the wider community, you could start with your local newspaper, radio station or library. It is also worth contacting local organizations that represent particular cultural, ethnic or religious groups.

Prepare questions with the children/students carefully: encourage questions that are open-ended. Remind the children that their questions are a *framework* to guide their interviews and need not be stuck to too rigidly.

Using the tape recorder and carrying out the interview: check that the equipment works. It is useful if the children/students can practise interviewing in pairs or small groups beforehand to ensure that they are confident about asking questions and taping interviews. Find somewhere as quiet as possible in your school for the interviews to take place. It is useful if the children/students tick off replies to their questions, as it will help keep their interviews on track.

After the interview: recordings could be used alongside other sources of historical evidence to support a range of activities. For younger children these might include group or whole class discussions, sequencing activities, role-play or drawing. For older children and students, extracts of the recordings could be transcribed and analysed, used to support presentations and displays, or used as a stimulus for work in drama, art or literacy. Depending on the amount of time you have available, the recordings could also be used to develop a school archive or booklet. You could even consider depositing copies of any interviews you make with the East Midlands Oral History Archive for future generations to enjoy!

Oral history extracts

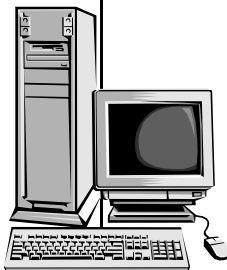
'We used to save the cigarette cards and have games with them – you'd set one card up against a wall & the others you'd use to skim & hit it down.'



'I used to go two days a week to the woodwork school...I drew my first wages before I was thirteen.'



'I was born in 1905... there was ten cottages. They were small, run right up. No taps inside, no toilet out the back you'd just got a kind of a sink and a bowl.'



Oral history and learning

There are many benefits of using oral accounts to support classroom learning:

History: speaking about their own past and listening to others' memories actively involves younger children in developing their understanding of the passing of time and its associated language. Sometimes it is the way that something is said, rather than *what* is said, that is important. Oral accounts can be used with older children and students to compare different points of view, to evaluate different sources of evidence, and to investigate events from different times in the past.



Literacy: oral history provides opportunities for children to develop their speaking and listening skills. Oral accounts can be used to investigate the differences between written and spoken language and are a valuable resource for exploring different accents and dialects. Carrying out their own interviews provides opportunities for children to devise and ask questions, and to listen and respond to what they have heard. Oral history can also be used as a stimulus for work in drama.

Geography: oral evidence can be used in conjunction with maps and other documents to support the study of settlements, the local area and the impact of changes in the environment on 'ordinary' people.



Religious Education: oral recordings of people from the different faith communities provide many opportunities for children and young people to develop an understanding of the customs, practices and stories associated with them.

PSHE and Citizenship: oral accounts can be used to enhance children's and older students' understanding of a wide range of issues, from the importance of respecting the differences between people, to understanding what a democracy is and the role of the government. Oral history can also be used to enhance a sense of identity and belonging, and to promote communication skills.



ICT: children and young people can develop a range of skills in ICT through oral history projects, from research using CD ROMs or the Internet, to taping and editing their own recordings. Organising and presenting their work can also involve children and older students in developing other skills in ICT, for example, learning how to combine sound, images and text using a multimedia software package. There are further opportunities to extend learning in ICT through developing oral history projects with family and other community groups to produce a booklet, newsletter, or even a school website.