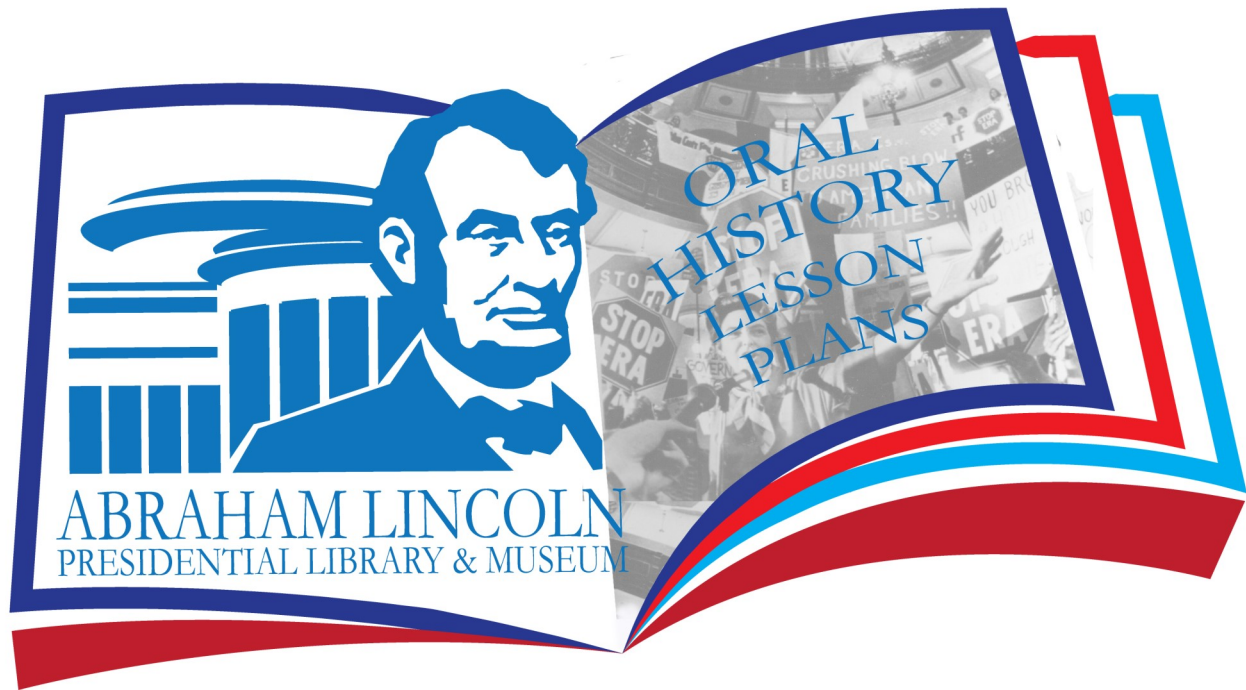


Doing Oral Histories:

Guiding Students Through a Successful Interview



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Grade Levels: 9-12

Purpose: This lesson plan is designed to help high school teachers instruct their students to conduct high quality oral history interviews. At the end of this exercise, students will be able to conduct an oral history interview as part of a class project.

Objectives: Upon completing the activities presented in this Resource Guide, students will:

- Understand the process of conducting an oral history interview.
- Recognize the “dos” and “don’ts” of conducting an oral history interview.
- Develop thoughtful questions that will deepen inquiry into a given historical subject.
- Conduct a successful interview, eliciting insightful responses from their interviewee.

Materials:

Equipment needed consists of audio or video recording equipment to be selected by the teacher. Associated items, including the media on which to store and preserve the Interviews (for example: thumb drives, SD cards, CDs, or DVDs) as well as computer hardware and software, will also be required.

Illinois State Learning Standards:

High School

SS.IS.2.9-12. Explain how supporting questions contribute to an inquiry.

SS.IS.3.9-12. Develop new supporting and essential questions through investigations, collaboration, and using diverse sources.

SS.H.8.9-12: Analyze key historical events and contributions of individuals through a variety of perspectives, including those of historically underrepresented groups.



Early High School:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4

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.

Late High School:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

C3 Standards

D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.

D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

Background Information:

Learning how to conduct a good oral history interview is not difficult, but requires developing a few basic principles and skills. These skills are explained in the video and PowerPoint presentation that are provided as part of this lesson plan.

[Link for the Video](#)

[Doing Oral Histories PowerPoint](#)

Once the student learns the basics, there are few projects that they will enjoy more during their high school years, all while developing a more in-depth understanding about a specific aspect of their nation's history. Put simply, this exercise, if done well, will make history come to life.

Release Form/Deed of Gift:

Before beginning a class oral history project, teachers will need to develop a Release Form/Deed of Gift specific to that project. While a Release Form Template is provided, teachers will need to tailor the form to their specific needs, keeping in mind any specific guidelines their school or state may have. They should make sure the Release Form addresses how the interview might be used once completed and whether or not 1) the interviewee will receive a copy of the interview and 2) how the interview might be preserved and archived.

Lesson Procedure and Suggestions:

Once the teacher decides to have students do an oral history interview, the first step in designing the project is to select a topic or theme. Will students be interviewing relatives about historical events such as the JFK assassination or 9-11? Will they be interviewing veterans about their wartime experiences? Will students be interviewing people involved in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and '60s? Or perhaps students will conduct interviews about a subject of local interest to their community? Once that is accomplished, we recommend you proceed in the following order.

1. Have the class watch the *Doing Oral History* presentation while following along with the PowerPoint slides.
2. The class should discuss what they learned from the video. They will also discuss their upcoming project.
3. Select the equipment to be used.
4. Review the additional resources, particularly the Sample Outlines, Biographical Forms, and the Release Form provided. *Teachers should tailor these documents, especially the Release Form, to fit the specific needs of their class.*
5. Instructors may want to have their class watch or listen to some of the interview examples provided.
6. Students select their interviewees, with the teacher's guidance and approval.
7. Classroom instruction and homework assignments should be structured toward the goal of familiarizing students with the background material for their interview.
8. Students conduct their pre-interview.
9. Classroom session where students watch/listen to some of the interview examples, followed by a teacher leading a discussion on:
 - a.) Interviewing techniques
 - b.) The interview process, including getting a signature on the Deed of Gift
 - c.) Developing the interview outline/questions
 - d.) A review of the equipment to be used
 - e.) What will be done with the interviews after they are recorded
10. Students conduct their interview.
11. Teacher collects the interviews.
12. Students give a presentation or write a paper on what they have learned in the process of conducting an oral history interview.

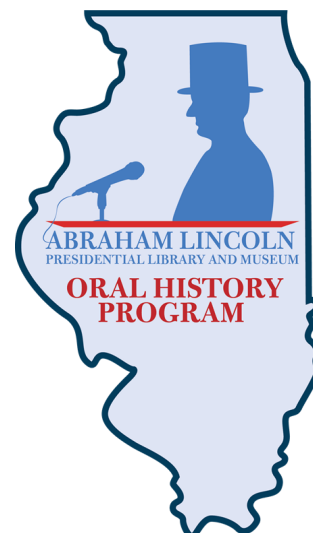
The above is merely a suggested path. The possibilities are endless, and we trust to teachers' creativity and enthusiasm to create a rewarding and enriching project.

Resources for the Lesson:

- **Basic Biographical Form:**
[Click Here](#)
- **Biographical Form for Veterans:**
[Click Here](#)
- **Basic Outline:**
[Click Here](#)
- **Outline for Veterans Interviews:**
[Click Here](#)
- **Release Form Template:**
[Click Here](#)

Additional Resources:

- For equipment suggestions, see <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/askdoug/>
- To learn more about how to do oral histories, see:
 1. Oral History Association's Principles and Best Practices at <https://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices-revised-2009/>
 2. *Doing Oral History* by Don Ritchie
 3. *Oral History Projects in Your Classroom* by Linda P. Wood & The Oral History Association
 4. *The Oral History Manual* by Barbara W. Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan



Interview Examples:

The following interview excerpts give examples of good interviewing techniques and the importance of letting the interviewee be the star of your interview.



Ellyn Bartges

(*Family Memories*) talks about the importance of Title IX in her life.

Ellyn's interview excerpt illustrates the value of providing a bit of context for the interviewee (reading the text of Title IX), and especially of using short, concise questions, listening closely, and not interrupting too quickly.

Interview: [Title IX Opens the Door](#) (2:15)

Gene Jaeger

(*Veterans Remember – WWII*) explains the ideal beach conditions for LST operations.

In this case, I persisted in getting a more detailed description about landing an LST on a contested beach, and Mr. Jaeger definitely delivered, to the point where the listener can easily envision the action. The clip also illustrated some good follow-up questions – the kind of questions that will come up when you listen closely. You'll also notice a couple of places where I interrupted Mr. Jaeger too quickly.

Interview: [Ideal Conditions](#) (5:36)



Shirley Birkovich

(*Sports Stories – Baseball*) talks about how she learned the game of baseball.

This interview excerpt illustrates the importance of establishing a comfortable rapport with your interviewee before you start, and also the value of asking specific, singular questions.

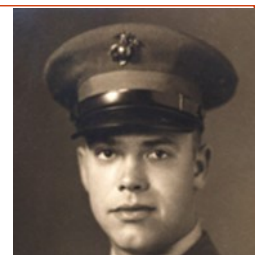
Interview: [Learning the Game of Baseball](#) (5:34)

Warren Musch

(*Veterans Remember – WWII*) talks about landing on the beach at Iwo Jima.

By asking a straight-forward question about Warren Musch's uniform, I got a level of detail that listeners otherwise would never have learned. Using photos, maps, articles, or, in this case, his uniform, gives depth and interest to an interview.

Interview: [Lt. Musch's Uniform](#) (1:33)



Howard Peters

(*Illinois Statecraft – Gov. Edgar*) talks about a life-changing moment in 2nd grade.

This excerpt illustrates the importance of doing a pre-interview meeting. I knew about Howard's story involving his teacher, Ms. Felton, and he was ready and prepared to tell it.

Interview: [Howard Peters in 2nd Grade](#) (8:26)

Gary Sigler

(*Veterans Remember – Vietnam*) tells about a typical meal for prisoners in the Hanoi Hilton.

This far into the interview, Gary knew I was looking for as much detail as he could provide, so when I asked about a typical meal, he described it at great length. It also illustrates the value of not interrupting too quickly.

Interview: [Typical Hanoi Hilton Meals](#) (3:33)

