

Oral History

Project Outline



Age Range: KS3 | Cross-Curricular

Learning Outcomes: Students will explore the relevance and reliability of oral history interviews as historical sources, consider how oral history differs from other evidence, plan and prepare an oral history project, and interpret and present the information they discover.

Resources: ❖ Resources Pack ❖ Brighton's Finest Play – Homelessness and Addiction

BHT Heritage found that the voices of people who had experienced homelessness were largely missing from historical archives and the media, and were therefore hidden from history. Using a time frame of 1984 – 2014, BHT Heritage conducted an oral history project which enabled people with experiences of homelessness, addiction issues and poor mental and physical health to share their stories, memories and unique viewpoints.

Activity 1: What is oral history?

- Initial questions to be discussed as a class – capture answers on a whiteboard:
 - How do we learn about things that happened in the past?
Encourage students to consider books, newspapers, maps, diaries, photographs and film footage
 - Discuss each of the above sources – are any of the sources 'better' than another source at equipping us with information?
- Option: Split class into groups of four or five – hand each group a different source relating to a particular topic and ask them to pull out all the information they can from their source and capture. Discuss as a class
- Ask whether any of the students know how their parents met, or what their first word was. How do the students know this information?
- Explain that memories, stories and personal experiences are often lost with the passing of a generation, and by capturing this information history is preserved for the future. Capturing people's pasts through audio or video recording oral history interviews presents a more rounded, three-dimensional view which can be more appealing and understandable

Activity 2: What can we learn?

- Split class into groups and hand each group the interview transcript extract in the Resources Pack. Ask students to discuss what they learn about the person from the extract. What information is missing?
Encourage students to consider gender, age, feelings and emotions, cultural background, social status
- Feedback as a class and capture answers on a whiteboard
- Now play 'Oral History Interview Extract 1' in the Resources Pack and ask students to discuss:
 - Whether we learn more from the audio clip of the same account
 - Whether the audio record enriches the source in any way



Activity 3: Is it reliable?

- Option: Listen to 'Oral History Interview Extract 2'. Ask half of the groups to consider why oral history is a reliable historical source, and the remaining groups to consider why it is an unreliable historical source. Discuss as a class
- Option: Split class into pairs. Explain that they are going to talk to their partner about a particular event for 30 seconds and then swap over. Provide a topic which requires them to test their memory, for example:
 - First day at school
 - Learning to swim
 - The first holiday that they can remember

Encourage students to talk about when it was, who was there and how they felt

- Ask students whether that was an easy or difficult task, and why
Encourage students to consider passage of time, selective memory, 'false' memories, recounting what they think the interviewer wants to hear, remembering several events as one
- Explain that oral history personalises the past and helps to conserve the local community's heritage but is open to debate, analysis and interpretation

Activity 4: Mastering the interview!

- Split class into pairs. This time the students will talk about a topic which is more present, for example:
 - Something that really interests them
 - What they did yesterday

Hand one of the students the 'good interviewer' prompt sheet and the other student the 'bad interviewer' prompt sheet from the resources pack. Ask the students not to confer about what is on their sheets. Students should take it in turns to 'interview' each other, following the prompts they have in front of them

- Discuss as a class how the interviewees were made to feel by the interviewers
- Now ask students to consider other factors which might affect the quality of an oral history interview

Encourage students to think about equipment required, background noise, ensuring that the interviewee is relaxed, and asking open-questions

Activity 5: Plan and prepare!

- Oral history offers a valuable opportunity to uncover history relating to marginalised groups and themes. As a class discuss possible themes for the students' own oral history project – this could tie in with the national curriculum or could explore the experiences of the local community. For example:
 - Capturing the voices and experiences of people in your local community who identify as disabled, LGBTU or from an ethnic minority
 - Researching the area around the school and how this has transformed over time

- Exploring a local festival or event and how it impacts on the local community
- Split class into groups and ask the students to identify and capture 'burning questions' for their interviewee/s. What do they want to find out? Discuss as a class
- Agree how many questions the students will ask the interviewee/s, identify sub-themes, decide who will conduct the interview/s and what equipment will be needed
- In groups, ask students to consider who they could interview to learn about the past. Students should research possible interviewees by searching on the internet and contacting local groups, clubs or charities
- Conduct the interview/s! A Dictaphone, video camera or iPad should be sufficient, but do test your equipment beforehand

Activity 6: Presenting your discoveries!

- The students must now decide how they wish to use the information that they have obtained. As a class read through Brighton's Finest play to demonstrate how information extracted through oral history can be interpreted and presented in different and creative ways to bring the past to life and enable us to relate to other people's experiences
 - Before reading the play, explain to the students that it covers some sensitive topics
- If appropriate, students should watch the Brighton's Finest play performance (URL can be found in Resources Pack)
- Review the information that was collected during the interview/s. It's a good idea to write a summary of each interview and transcribe the interview in full so that information can be extracted verbatim
- Discuss as a class how the information could be presented for other students, parents or the local community. Activities could include:
 - A school exhibition, with extracts, photographs, audio and/or video clips
 - A website project
 - Piecing together a story from the information that was learnt, either independently or as a class
 - Creating a play, using verbatim extracts from the interview/s

To find out more about the BHT Heritage Oral History Project please visit:

www.bht-heritage.org.uk

To find out how to support BHT please visit:

www.bht.org.uk

Resource Pack

Prepared: June 2015



Combating Homelessness, Creating Opportunities,
Promoting Change

Activity 2: What can we learn?



“When I was on the streets for that consistently long period of time it was like I said, I felt like a non-person at the time. You know, I felt dirty, I felt...just non-existent really. It was horrible...you’ve got nowhere to go, you don’t know what’s happening from one minute to the next, you’re always in danger, you never feel safe. I’ve put myself at risk consistently, I don’t think I ever really slept when I was outside because you can’t...it just drained every mental resource I had really and it was like, I felt like I was living on the edge all the time; consistently living on the edge, never able to relax, never able to just be. Yeah, and I forget that sometimes just how degrading it was really, it was very degrading”

BHT Client

Activity 2: What can we learn?



To hear Vanessa's experience:
bht-heritage.org.uk/ohpost/vanessa-yuill/



To hear Trevor's experience:
bht-heritage.org.uk/ohpost/trevor-ball/

Activity 4: Mastering the interview!



You are a **BAD** interviewer

Start the interview with your question:

“So tell me about.....”

Choose topic:

- Something that really interests you
- What you did yesterday

While the interviewee is talking:

- Avoid eye contact
- Cross your arms and legs
- Tap your feet or fingers
- Pretend to blow your nose
- Say ‘yes’ and ‘uh-huh’
- Interrupt with irrelevant questions

You are a **GOOD** interviewer

Start the interview with your question:

“So tell me about.....”

Choose topic:

- Something that really interests you
- What you did yesterday

While the interviewee is talking:

- Maintain eye contact
- Keep still
- Smile
- Maintain open body language
- Nod
- Listen carefully – only ask follow-up questions when the interviewee has finished speaking



Activity 6: Presenting your discoveries!



‘Brighton’s Finest – Homelessness & Addiction’ A play by Laura Maloney

bht-heritage.org.uk/resources/#brightons-finest-youtube
(Infrequent use of strong language)