

An American Perspective on Japan: Oral History Memoirs of American Experiences in Japan

The WWII Veteran, the Japanese War Bride, and the American Teacher Abroad

Purpose:

To have students learn the process of producing an oral history/documentary

To have students analyze and synthesize information and memoirs as a valuable tool for exploring the past using primary resources

To have students see how experiences from the past have influenced people's lives since that time

To have students differentiate facts of historical times/events from personal "memory" as an individual's way of interpreting and narrating their experiences

To have students learn how to conduct a good interview

To have students use technology in a meaningful way

To have students exposed and engaged in an enriching and challenging long-term project

Essential Questions:

Students are to ask journalistic style questions; who, what, when, where, why and how. This is to ascertain the significance of interviewing people who have experienced life during a major historical event(s).

a) What is the importance of remembering a personal memoir of an historic event?

b) How can studying historical events through oral history memoirs help students to understand the crucial roles of perspective and interpretation?

c) How can students use oral history memoirs as primary sources of information and further learning opportunities?

d) Why is it important to document oral history memoirs for future generations?

Rationale:

Expose students to primary source research

Expose students to the idea that History really is alive and that everyone is a part of the historical perspective

Expose students to community members, historical societies and professors of History to expand their learning opportunities and experiences

Expose students to higher level thinking and problem solving skills associated with research investigative practices

Materials:

Handouts:

“How to do oral history projects”

“How do I publicize my oral history project?”

“What did you do in the War Grandma?”

“American Memory Viewer Information”

Book:

“Creating History Documentaries” by D. Escobar

VHS/Digital Camcorder

Tape recorder

Microphone(s)

VHS blank tapes

Cassette Tapes

Websites:

www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/educational/yag/taghow.html

www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/into.html

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amviewer.html>

<http://storycorps.net/about/>

www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/05/17/1021544073035.html

www.youth.net/memories/welcome.html

<http://timewitness.org>

www.intnl.doshisha.ac.jp/projects/sarah/

Activities:

1. Have students do pre-interview tasks;

- a) Familiarization of WWII in the Pacific Theatre with pre and post war attitudes towards Japan and the Japanese people
- b) Develop questions based on meaningful content; chronology of events, themes, key figures and issues of the period; also work on listening techniques as well as how to follow up with effective further questioning to illicit more in-depth responses and interesting conversation
- c) Familiarization with interviewing techniques, with practice and debriefing; identify strategies that work well and those that need improvement
- d) Contact subjects and set up interviews-45mins to 1 hr. is a good length for one session, taking into account where the interview can take place without distractions

2. Show students the value of the use of Props during an interview: Copies of old newspapers, photos, articles, letters, etc can help start or deepen memories and make the interview more interesting.

3. Release/Permission forms:

Have the interviewees sign a form granting permission to use the interview. Contact appropriate school officials for District Policy on this matter

4. Equipment:

Students need to practice extensively with the equipment so they are comfortable, confident and capable of using it effectively.

5. Have students conduct interviews/review interviews

6. Students then check interviews for accuracy of content in relationship to historical accuracy before presentation of the final project. This is the part that takes the longest and is the most tedious. Students may need help with this step.

7. Have students write thank you letters to all participants/interviewees in the project and invite them to the “airing” of the presentation.

Assessment:

The completed product of the audio/video taped interview, which is edited and relevant to the topic(s) pertaining to WWII and

Japan will be the major basis of assessment. Also a portfolio of prepared questions, props, and other pertinent research notes relating to the topic(s) and interviews will be used. Basic transcriptions of the interviews along with verified accuracy of historical content will be used for authenticity

GRADE: The target grade is 8th, but these students are identified GT. This lesson and project is easily expanded into high school History classes as well as possibly AP History classes. NOTE: This project would also be pertinent to the Korean and Vietnam Wars with the same format and types of interviews. In fact, all three time periods and conflicts could be done and a comparison study of veterans, war brides and subsequent teachers abroad in the various countries interviewed for their personal perspectives during those times.

Standards:

Reading Language Arts: 8th Grade

Reading Applications: Informal, Technical and Persuasive Text 2&7

Writing Processes: 1-17

Writing Applications: 2 & 4

Writing Conventions: 1-8

Research: 1-8

Communication: 1,3,4,5,6,7,8a-e

Social Studies: 8th Grade

People in Societies: 2&6

Government: 5

Social Studies Skills and Methods: 1-5

Nancy Clendenen

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614-488-1787