

Making Connections:

How Oral Histories Connect Us to the Past, Present and Future

A WebQuest for 5th -8th Grade Social Studies

Jeanne Williams - 2006

Last updated September 1, 2011



[Ben Burnside pointing himself out in a historic photo of forest fire wardens.](#)

How does learning about someone's life experiences connect you to them, to your family and to your community?

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#1 Introduction

What do you think of when you hear the word "History"? You may think of studying your Social Studies book to learn about national leaders, historical events, dates and places. If you do, you are right, most people think of history in this way. However, Oral Historians think about history in a different way. Oral Historians gather, interpret and preserve the memories of everyday people. Why is this important? It is important because oral histories of everyday people are valuable as sources of new knowledge about the past. They balance out and give a human side to what you may learn in your Social Studies textbook. In this way, **everyone** contributes to history!

You may have never thought about how the people in your life fit into history. In this project you will find out just that – you will become an Oral Historian!

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#2 Task

Your task is to design, conduct, preserve and present an oral history interview.

- You will work both individually and in groups of four.
- You will design your oral history interview by researching and gathering information individually.
- You will then come together in your group to compile, critique and select questions to be used in your oral history interview. You will conduct and record your oral history interview on a digital recording device. Include a photograph of your interviewee.
- After interviews are completed, the general subject matter of each interview will determine what group you will be in to complete your final project and presentation.
- As a group you will develop a Windows Movie Maker presentation that compiles the oral histories conducted by the group members. Include in your presentation a photograph and digital recording of yourself answering your WebQuest question: **"How does learning about someone's life experiences connect you to them, to your family and to your community?"**

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#3 Process

This section describes how you will go about accomplishing your task. Remember that through completing this task, you will be answering your WebQuest question: **"How does learning about someone's life experiences connect you to them, to your family and to your community?"** The following questions may help you focus and reflect on your task:

How have the hardships, rewards, world and everyday events this person has experienced:

1. affected him or her?
2. affected his or her descendents?
3. changed his view of the world?
4. connected him or her to family?
5. connected him or her to their community?

How does knowing about the hardships, rewards, world and everyday events this person has experienced:

1. affected you?
2. changed your view of the world?
3. connected you to family?
4. connected you to your community?

1. You will be assigned to a group of four students.
2. Each group will explore oral history websites in order to gain an understanding of how an oral history is conducted. Make note of questions and protocol.

[Using Oral History Student Lesson](#)
[Story Corp Do-It-Yourself Guide](#)
[Step by Step Guide to Oral History](#)
[History Matters](#)
[Grandparents/Elders Project](#)

3. Each group member will listen to at least two audio oral accounts and read at least one transcribed account. You will find links to those accounts below in "Related Links".

[Related Links](#)

4. After listening and reading your chosen accounts, ask yourself:
 - What questions came to mind about the person being interviewed as you listened to or read their account?
 - What questions do you wish the interviewer had asked?
 - Do you have a burning desire to ask this person a question about their life?
5. Make a list of your questions.
6. Using these lists, the information obtained from the oral history websites and keeping in mind your WebQuest question, group members will work together to compile a list of interview questions. Your group's list should have at least 10 questions in addition to basic information questions.
[Complete a Group Evaluation now!](#) Each groups member will click on the link and print out one evaluation form for each group member. Mark them "Evaluation # 1". Complete one for each group member and turn them in to your teacher.
7. Choose an interviewee. The person you choose to interview:
 - must be a resident in your community (neighborhood, town, school district, county).
 - can be a family member, friend or neighbor.
 - must be someone you admire.
 - must be at least 25 years older than you.
8. Conduct and record your interview on a digital recording device. Take or borrow a photo of this person. You may request to borrow a photo of your interviewee as a child or other time in their life (Hint: the event shown in the photo might be a source of questions for your interview).
9. The class will survey the general topics of their interviews to find similarities. Based on those similarities the class will form new groups to begin work on their Word Movie Maker presentations.
10. Decide on your group roles:
 - **Artist:** This person will choose photographs from the Library of Congress that appropriately represent the interviewee's topics of discussion.
 - **Technician:** This person will create the actual Movie Maker presentation.
 - **Librarian:** This person will insure that all sources are cited correctly.
 - **Reporter:** This person will present the project to the class by writing an introduction that accurately gives an overview of the project. In addition, the reporter will write script that will be used in the transition from one interview to the next.

Prepare your group's presentation using selections from all interviews. All group members must work together to insure that they are representing other group members interviews appropriately.

[Complete a Group Evaluation now!](#) Each group member will click on the link and

print out one evaluation form for each group member. Mark them "Evaluation # 2 ". Complete one for each of your group members and turn them in to your teacher.

11. Prepare your individual answer to your WebQuest question. Record and include it in your Word Movie Maker presentation along with a photograph of yourself.

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#4 Evaluation

You will receive an evaluation from your teacher and from group members as well. Group members will evaluate their peers twice during the project by clicking on the group evaluation form link in the Process section of this WebQuest. The comments on these forms will be anonymous, so you may feel free to provide constructive criticism.

In addition, each person will receive an evaluation for the various steps within this WebQuest. The links to the Rubrics for each step are below. Keep these rubrics in mind as you work on your task. They will help you focus on what is expected from you as you work.

Rubrics

[Interview Rubric](#)

[Digital Storytelling Rubric](#)

[Answering Your WebQuest Question](#)

[Letter to Future Self Rubric](#)

[Group Evaluation](#)

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#5 Conclusion

Compose a letter to your "future self" describing how you feel about the hardships, rewards, world and everyday events you have experienced and how you think they will affect your future. Be sure to include the insights you have gained through your task.

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#6 Credits and References

Designed by Jeanne M. Williams, 2006, Elementary Teacher at [West Greene School](#)

[District](#) in partnership with [Teaching with Primary Sources at Waynesburg University](#).
Last updated September 2, 2011.

Template created April 2006 by Amy Martin, [Teaching with Primary Sources at Waynesburg](#) based on a template designed by Lisa Bradshaw, [Teaching with Primary Sources - Colorado](#).

Many ideas for webquest content and worksheets were adapted by permission from [Teaching with Primary Sources - Northern Virginia Partnership](#).

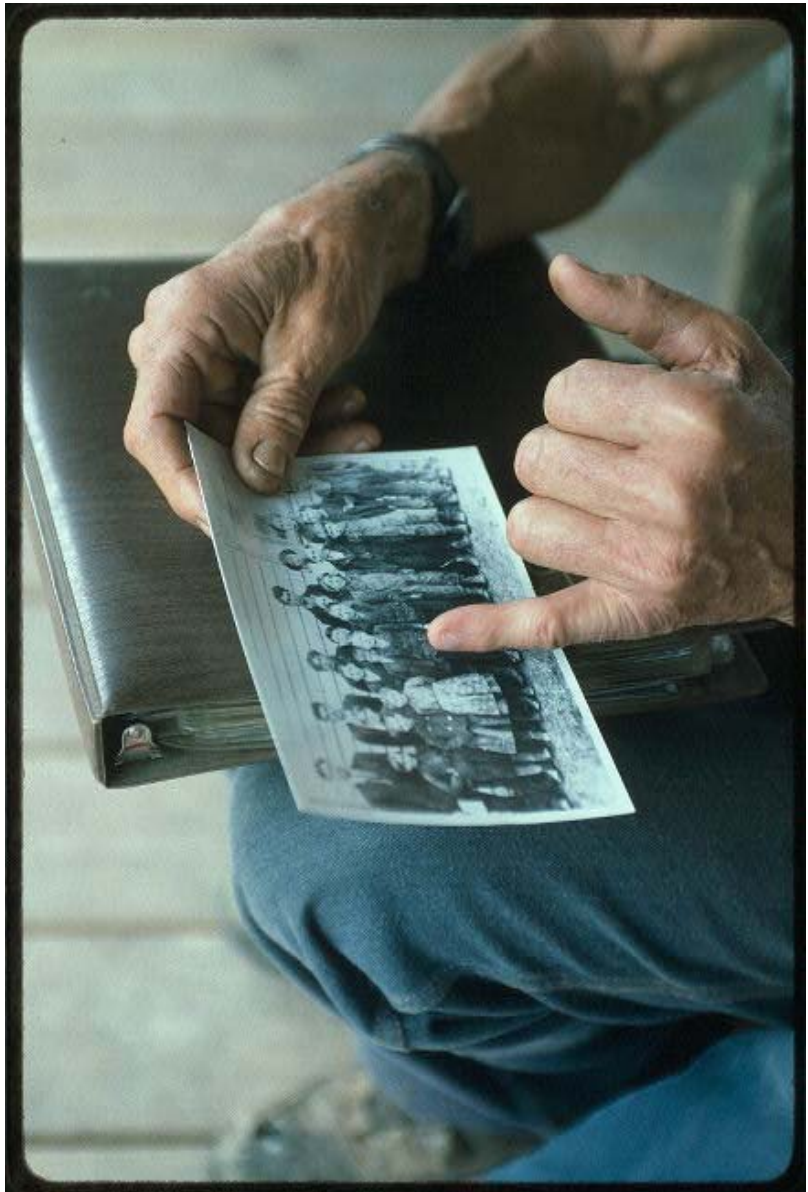
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#7 Introduction for Teachers

Designed by Jeanne M. Williams.
Last updated September 2, 2011.

This lesson was developed as part of [Teaching with Primary Sources at Waynesburg University](#), a federally funded professional development program to assist educators in using [Library of Congress](#) primary resources to support student learning. This WebQuest was designed as an introduction to a unit on Greene County History, a requirement in some

grade levels within the West Greene School District. It is designed to assist students in finding historical value in and therefore a connection to their community. It could easily be used as part of any History class to demonstrate History on a personal level. To introduce this WebQuest, you may want to show the class the photograph at the top of this Web page. Ask the students to brainstorm a list of things that it represents to them.

List the following information:

School District and State: West Greene School District, Pennsylvania

Textbook Publisher/Title/Date/Level: Greene County History is a required course of study in West Greene School District although a specific textbook is not used.

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#8 About the Learners

This WebQuest is designed for fifth through eighth grade social studies classes and addresses several language arts objectives as well. In addition, it includes technology skills objectives. By reducing or increasing the number of primary source documents analyzed and the number of interview questions used, it could be adapted for higher or lower grades. Additional teacher assistance may be needed in third and fourth grade.

Students will need to be instructed in the use of a digital recording device and Word Movie Maker.

Students of different ability levels may be more suited to a particular group role. Group members should be assigned to a task appropriate to their ability level.

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#9 Pennsylvania Academic Standards

The student will:

1. Classify the components of effective teamwork and leadership. (Family and Consumer Science 11.2.6 C)
2. Understand chronological thinking and distinguish between past, present and future time.
 - Calendar time
 - Time lines
 - Continuity and change
 - Events (time and place) (History 8.1.3 A)
3. Develop an understanding of historical sources.
 - Data in historical maps
 - Visual data from maps and tables
 - Mathematical data from graphs and tables
 - Author or historical source (History 8.1.3.B)
4. Understand fundamentals of historical interpretation.
 - Difference between fact and opinion
 - The existence of multiple points of view
 - Illustrations in historical stories
 - Causes and results (History 8.1.3 C)

5. Understand historical research.

- Event (time and place)
- Facts, folklore and fiction
- Formation of a historical question
- Primary sources
- Secondary sources
- Conclusions (e.g., storytelling, role playing, diorama) (History 8.1.3 D)

6. Demonstrate after reading understanding and interpretation of both fiction and nonfiction text.

- Retell or summarize the major ideas, themes or procedures of the text.
- Connect the new information or ideas in the text to known information.
- Clarify ideas and understandings through rereading and discussion.
- Make responsible assertions about the text by citing evidence from the text (Reading, Writing, Listening Speaking 1.1.3.G)

Key Vocabulary: Oral History, community, experience

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#10 Process for Teachers

Instructions for teachers are found after each section.

This section describes how you will go about accomplishing your task. Remember that through completing this task, you will be answering your WebQuest question: "How does learning about someone's life experiences connect you to them, to your family and to your community?" The following questions may help you focus and reflect on your task:

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How does knowing about the hardships, rewards, world and everyday events this person has experienced:

1. affected you?
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connected you to your community?

The first section is designed to focus students on their task. You may want read it out loud to the class.

1. You will be assigned to a group of four students.

Create heterogeneous groups of mixed gender and ability.

2. Each group will explore oral history websites in order to gain an understanding of how an oral history is conducted. Make note of questions and protocol.

[Using Oral History Student Lesson](#)
[Story Corp Do-It-Yourself Guide](#)
[Step by Step Guide to Oral History](#)
[History Matters](#)

Grandparents/Elders Project

Group members will work together to explore the websites.

3. Each group member will listen to at least two audio oral accounts and read at least one transcribed account. You will find links to those accounts below in "Related Links".

4. After listening and reading your chosen accounts, ask yourself:

- What questions came to mind about the person being interviewed as you listened to or read their account?
What questions do you wish the interviewer had asked?
Do you have a burning desire to ask this person a question about their life?

5. Make a list of your questions.

Students will work individually.

6. Using these lists, the information obtained from the oral history websites and keeping in mind your WebQuest question, group members will work together to compile a list of interview questions. Your group's list should have at least 10 questions in addition to basic information questions.

Complete a Group Evaluation now! Each groups member will click on the link and print out one evaluation form for each group member. Mark them "Evaluation # 1". Complete one for each group member and turn them in to your teacher.

Students will work in their groups.

7. Choose an interviewee. The person you choose to interview:

- must be a resident in your community (neighborhood, town, school district, county).
- can be a family member, friend or neighbor.
- must be someone you admire.
- must be at least 25 years older than you.

8. Conduct and record your interview on a digital recording device. Take or borrow a photo of this person. You may request to borrow a photo of your interviewee as a child or other time in their life (Hint: the event shown in the photo might be a source of questions for your interview).

Students will work individually.

9. The class will survey the general topics of their interviews to find similarities. Based on those similarities the class will form new groups to begin work on their Word Movie Maker presentations.

Have a class meeting. List the general topics of the interviews. Form new groups according to topic.

10. Decide on your group roles:

- **Artist:** This person will choose photographs from the Library of Congress that appropriately represent the interviewee's topics of discussion.
- **Technician:** This person will create the actual Movie Maker presentation.
- **Librarian:** This person will insure that all sources are cited correctly.
- **Reporter:** This person will present the project to the class by writing an introduction that accurately gives an overview of the project. In addition, the reporter will write script that will be used in the transition from one interview to the next.

Prepare your group's presentation using selections from all interviews. All group members must work together to insure that they are representing other group members interviews appropriately.

Students work together on their Movie Maker project.

[Complete a Group Evaluation now!](#) Each group member will click on the link and print out one evaluation form for each group member. Mark them "Evaluation # 2 ". Complete one for each of your group members and turn them in to your teacher.

11. Prepare your individual answer to your WebQuest question. Record and include it in your Word Movie Maker presentation along with a photograph of yourself.

Students work individually.

In lower grade levels you may want to modify the WebQuest by having students scan and paste photos into a document and presenting it orally.

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#11 Resources for Teachers

Additional websites:

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[Step by Step Guide to Oral History](#)
[History Matters](#)
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Materials needed:

Digital recording devices, Word Movie Maker, possible digital camera

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#12 Evaluation for Teachers

Students will receive 2 grades for this project. The first grade is based on their group participation. It combines the the Rubric scores from group member evaluations and teacher evaluation.

[Group Evaluation](#)

The second grade is based on individual work. It combines the Rubric scores from the following evaluations.

[Interview Rubric](#)

[Digital Storytelling Rubric](#)

[Answering Your WebQuest Question](#)

[Letter to Future Self Rubric](#)

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#13 Conclusion for Teachers

Compose a letter to your "future self" describing how you feel about the hardships, rewards, world and everyday events you have experienced and how you think they will affect your future. Be sure to include the insights you have gained through your task.

This concluding task is designed to help students sum up their experience working on this project. It is hoped that through this process the students have found new value and therefore a connection to their community. This should be reflected in the letter to your "future self".

An optional activity may be for the class to put together a time capsule to be opened upon the classes imminent graduation.

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