

ORAL HISTORY IN THE CLASSROOM

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Recommended grade level: High school

Curriculum fit: Social Studies, History, English, some interrelated arts.

Objective: To facilitate learning through the use of primary sources.

Materials: Subject indexed audio excerpts of interviews from the Studs Terkel archives.

Sample Lesson Plan: Students listen to selected excerpt. (Our website can provide context or links to context on the time period to which the interviewee is referring.) After hearing the selected interview, teachers can choose to focus on one of the following types of lessons:

1. Evaluating the process of the interview.

- How did Studs get this person to tell their story?
- What types of questions do you think he asked?
- What kind of equipment do you think he used?
- How many ways can we record interviews?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of different methods?
- What kinds of things do you think an interviewer should avoid doing?
- What can an interviewer do to keep his or her subject on track?

2. Evaluating the content of the interview.

- What was the subject of the interview?
- Describe the person being interviewed.
- What was his or her relationship to the subject being discussed?
- How much of what the subject said was fact?
- How much was opinion?
- What factors do you think helped to form their mindset?
- What does this interview tell us about the time period?
- What specific details does this personal account highlight?

3. Doing Oral History.

- Students have stories to tell about their own lives. In the classroom they can prepare questions and interview one another.
- Choose a subject or have the class choose a subject that correlates to the subject that Studs discussed.
- Have the class suggest questions for the interview, based upon the chosen subject. Questions should be open ended, as to avoid yes/no answers.
- Post or print the final list for students to use.
- Leave room for the students to add a question if they wish.
- Have students interview one another. You may choose to have them do this as homework, as it will be easier for them to record materials if they are not in the classroom.
- Have each pair present their interview and/or summarize the information they gathered.

- Lead a discussion that allows students to synthesize the themes presented.
- If you chose to follow the same subject that the Studs Terkel excerpt focused on--- compare and contrast the information that you gathered with the information he collected. How have things changed/ stayed the same? Why?