

## Create a Class Project

# CONDUCT YOUR OWN ORAL HISTORY

(In the Spirit of “Person-to-Person” History)



The words in the Tribute Center are all based on oral histories that were collected and preserved. You can also conduct an oral history and perhaps you will discover another aspect to the September 11th story that you did not know about before.

## Steps for Conducting Oral History

### Preparing for the Interview



- 1 Identify a friend, family member, or community member who has a connection to or memory of September 11th.
- 2 Write down the questions you want to ask. Make sure they cannot be answered with a simple yes or no.
- 3 If possible, tape-record your interview. If you cannot, write down each answer before asking the next question. You can also work with a partner. One person writes down the answers while the other is planning the next, appropriate follow-up question.

### During the Interview

- 1 Try to ask brief questions that do not have many parts. Listen to the answer. Then ask a related follow-up question.
- 2 You may need to ask interviewees to describe how they felt, or what they saw. Ask questions even though you may already know the answer because the interviewees might remember new details or explain their feelings with more insight.
- 3 Having a period of quiet and silence is good. It allows interviewees to gather their thoughts and remember additional details.
- 4 Your facial expression and signs of interest are very important in keeping a conversation going. The interviewee should never feel that you are bored.

### After the Interview

- 1 After the interview, write down the words recorded on the audio tape or, if this is too difficult, write down the main ideas. Review your written notes and add anything that you might have forgotten.
- 2 Identify some main ideas from your interview. Select specific quotation(s) from your interview that reflect these main ideas.
- 3 Share these main ideas and quotation(s) with your class.
- 4 Conduct some research to learn more about those main ideas.

### Sample Questions

- What kind of work did/do you do? What was a typical day like...?
- Can you tell me about your connection to 9/11? Or, what do you remember about that day?
- What can you recall about...? Smell, feel, sounds?
- Where were you when...?
- How did you feel about...?
- What choices did you have to make?
- And then what happened?

### Questions based on a photograph

(show the interviewee a related photograph and ask...)

- What can you tell me about this image?

### Follow-Up Questions

- That is interesting.
- Can you tell me more?
- What are some of the details to that story?

### Summary Questions

- Is there anything you wanted to talk about that we didn't get to?
- Is there anything that I missed that would help me better understand the subject?
- What do you think about that experience now? Have your feelings and thoughts changed over the years?
- Always ask if you can follow up if you have another question later.

Adapted from St. Andrew's Episcopal High School, Interview and Transcription Workshop: Creating a Usable and Permanent Record <http://doingoralhistory.org/>

Additional Resources: Want to learn more about conducting oral histories?

For ideas on how to use oral histories in the classroom visit the Library of Congress's Learning Page: Using Oral Histories. The page features lesson plans and information for teachers and students including ideas about conducting oral histories. <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/oralhist/ohhome.html>

For direct student use <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/oralhist/ohguide.html>

High school and college students interested in more in-depth explorations of the oral history process can read about Oral History Guidelines on the Oral History Association's website at [http://alpha.dickinson.edu/oha/pub\\_eg.html](http://alpha.dickinson.edu/oha/pub_eg.html). The site discusses issues such as the responsibilities of the interviewer to the interviewee and purposes of the interview.