
TAKING ORAL HISTORIES

Lesson 1: Viewing the Sonoma County Survivor Project Exhibit

Learning Objective: This lesson will focus student attention on oral histories and photos of individuals and cultures that have lost human rights. Students will compare and contrast first-hand accounts of dramatic losses of human rights. The teacher will assess student knowledge of interviewing and access students' background knowledge of oral histories. They will start to get a vision of what they will be creating at the end of this unit, inspiring increased interest in the topic.

Time Required: 2 lessons, 45 minutes to 1 hour each

Materials Needed:

- The Sonoma County Survivor Project Exhibit, viewed at www.listeningforachange.org.
- Overhead transparency of Shiro and Mei Nakano, Japanese American Internment Camp Survivors
- Essence of Acceptance video: Segment One
- Copies of Student Declaration of Human Rights, completed in Section 1 of The Essence of Acceptance, class set (If you did not do this activity, use The Universal Declaration of Human Rights)
- Class set of copies of Who Am I?, survivor biography sheet
- Transparency of Human Rights Oral Histories sheet
- Excerpt from an Interview with Lynda Wright by Studs Terkel, one copy per student (for homework)
- Reflection Journals (for homework)

Key Vocabulary: exhibit, oral history, tradition, autobiography, Holocaust, survivor, victim, Cambodia, Khmer Rouge, Pol Pot Regime, Japanese American, interned, internment camps, significant, memoirs, biography

Part 1

Lesson Sequence:

- Tell the class it is beginning the second section of ESSENCE OF ACCEPTANCE, Taking Oral Histories.
- Put the transparency of Shiro and Mei Nakano, Japanese American Internment Camp Survivors on the overhead projector. Ask one student to be Mei, and another to be Shiro. Have them read their parts aloud to the class.

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- Ask students to share their thoughts, reactions and questions to this excerpt of an oral history. Define the term oral history for the class:

Oral history: Historical information that is obtained through interviewing people that have led significant lives.

- Explain to students that you will be taking an oral history of someone in your community to compliment your current content study, and that today you are going to take a look at some short oral histories that are part of an exhibit called “The Sonoma County Survivor Project”. Share the background of this project with them:
 - Founded in 1990 by Phyllis Rosenfield and Lisa Slater.
 - Originally a project designed to take oral histories and photographs of local Holocaust/Shoah survivors, Cambodians who suffered under the Khmer Rouge, and Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II.
 - The intent of the project is to make people aware of human rights abuses and the lessons learned.
 - Has been displayed all over the state and community.
- Watch the video segment 1 (approximately 8 minutes).
- Explain to students that as they view the exhibit/website, they will be looking for some information to share with the class when they return. At the exhibit, they need to:
 - View the entire exhibit/website, first.
 - Complete the Who am I? worksheet. They should record information and thoughts for one Japanese American Internment Camp survivor, one Holocaust survivor, and one Cambodian Pol Pot Regime survivor.
 - When reflecting upon what human rights have been lost, they should refer to Student Declaration of Human Rights (or the UDHR if you did not complete this lesson in Section 1).
- Pass out “Who Am I?” sheets and Student Declaration of Human Rights. Allow students to view the exhibit/website at during class time or for homework.

Note: “Who Am I?” sheets will be needed for the following day’s lesson.

Homework:

In your Reflection Journal, write about the oral histories that you found the most memorable. Why did those peoples’ stories stay with you? What do you feel like you have to learn from people that have suffered losses of human rights?

Part 2

Lesson Sequence:

- Ask students to take out the “Who Am I?” worksheet that they completed in the first part of this lesson.
- Ask students to share what human rights losses were seen (#3 on their paper). Record these on the board or overhead.
- Discuss with students the range of human rights losses that exist in this one group of local people. Does this surprise them? Do they know of anyone that has had similar experiences?
- Ask students to share their questions and what they thought was interesting about the exhibit (#4 on their sheet). Ask them:
 - What were your thoughts as you were viewing the photographs of the survivors?
 - Why do you think that they are called survivors instead of victims?
 - Which of their thoughts struck you as significant?
 - What additional information about their lives did you find yourself wanting to know?
 - How could you tell that the words written beneath each photograph were the actual words of the survivor? What is the effect of reading their exact words?
- Put a transparency of Human Rights Oral Histories on the overhead projector or copy the chart onto the board. (You will copy this chart for the last lesson in this section, so be sure to write legibly.)
- Ask the students to describe and share what they know about oral histories. Take notes on the chart in the column entitled “What We Know”. Prompt them with questions such as:
 - What is oral history?
 - When in history have oral histories been commonly used, and for what purpose?
 - What cultures have a tradition of oral histories?
 - When have you heard an oral history?
 - What relevance do oral histories have for us as students?
 - What is the difference between a biography and an oral history? A memoir and an oral history? An autobiography and an oral history?
 - How does one get an oral history?
 - How could oral histories help our understanding of what we are studying?

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- Return to your chart on the overhead. Ask students, “What do you want to know about taking oral histories?” Record their responses in the column entitled “What We Want to Know”.

Note: The completed transparency of Human Rights Oral Histories will be used in the last lesson of this unit.

Homework:

Read excerpt from an interview with Lynda Wright by Studs Terkel. In your Reflection Journal, respond to the questions at the bottom of the page.



Target Question: (for assessment purposes)

What is an oral history?