

LESSON 13

TOPIC

Oral History



TIME

Varies depending on length of the projects

MATERIALS FROM THE TRUNK

Video - "Quilts in Women's Lives"

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will form lists of relevant questions for an interview.
2. Students will be able to acquire information through the form of oral interviews.
3. Students will be able to assess the value of oral history as a source of historical evidence.

BACKGROUND AND PREPARATION

Oral history is a good inter-generational activity. Many of the topics in this trunk lend themselves as topics for oral history interviews. Many families have quilts and many families have members that remember the Great Depression or World War II.

The idea of this exercise is to have the students ask questions of older adults, encouraging them to share their memories. The interviews can be turned in as a written report or can be presented orally to the class.

The first step is to pick a topic that is suitable for class research. After the topic is selected it is important that the students research available primary and secondary sources on the subject. It is easier to interview someone if you know a little something about the topic in advance. If the class has been participating in the activities in this trunk they may have enough background information to interview a local quiltmaker.

The best way to be prepared for an oral interview is to begin with a list of questions, so encourage the students to have a written list of questions they plan to ask. Explain to them that the questions are a starting point and the person they are talking to might go off on another subject, which is fine. The questions are mainly for ideas. The students might generate the

questions individually or as a group, or you might give them the following list. The best questions are the open-ended questions, those that cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no."

One option is for the class to interview an individual who comes to visit. A quiltmaker would probably be pleased to visit the class and be interviewed about her life and her quilts. Another classroom guest might be someone with memories of the Depression and World War II.

Interviews can be audio or video taped at home if the children's parents want to help. It should be noted that it is very difficult to conduct an interview on video tape. Many people are intimidated by video and do not give a good interview. The students can also record an interview simply by taking notes. If a classroom interview is conducted it might be helpful to tape it and play it back. The students can then write a summary of what was learned.

Suggested Questions:

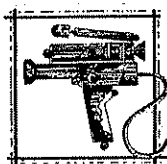
For a quiltmaker:

- For what special occasions do you make quilts?
- Where do you get the fabrics to put in your quilts?
- What are your favorite patterns?
- How old were you when you learned to sew?
- Who taught you to sew?
- What kinds of contests do you enter your quilts in? Do you enter quilts in the fair?

For someone who remembers the Great Depression or World War II:

- Did you ever have clothes made out of feed sacks? What kinds of clothes? How did you feel about these clothes?
- During the war what kinds of things were hard to find?
- During the Great Depression what did you do for fun that did not cost money?
- Who in your family made quilts back then?

ACTIVITIES



1) Show the class a portion of the video "Quilts in Women's Lives." This video is aimed at an adult audience but younger audiences can respond well to the final segment on Hortense and Christine Miller (this segment approximately seven minutes). You will have to preview the video in advance to find the final segment.

2) Discuss with the students what they learned from this tape about quiltmaking and these two particular quiltmakers. Discuss the fact that this tape was taken from an interview with the two sisters. Is there a lot that can be learned by interviewing someone? Discuss the value of oral history as historical evidence. The class might develop a list of advantages and disadvantages

to this research technique. Advantages might be that certain information not found anywhere else can be collected through oral interviews, or that history can be told from a personal point of view. Disadvantages may include that the collected information is subjective, or that the person being interviewed may not remember everything you want to know.

3) Design a class oral history project.

ASSESSMENT

Levels of Achievement

For Objective 1

- a) Students formulate one or two relevant questions.
- b) Students formulate three to five relevant questions.
- c) Students formulate more than five relevant questions.

For Objective 2

- a) Students conduct interviews, but are unable to process information gathered.
- b) Students form general outlines of the information gathered from oral interviews.
- c) Students demonstrate a fuller awareness and understanding of interview content.

For Objective 3

- a) Students recognize either an advantage or a disadvantage of oral history.
- b) Students recognize both an advantage and a disadvantage of oral history.
- c) Students conclude that the best use of oral history is in conjunction with other historical sources.