



**LESSON PLANS ON AGING ISSUES:**  
*Creative Ways to Meet Social Studies Standards*

**Participation in Government**

**INTERVIEW OF AN OLDER ADULT**

Ithaca College Gerontology Institute  
[www.ithaca.edu/aging/schools](http://www.ithaca.edu/aging/schools)

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## Interview of an Older Adult

### Introduction

This lesson is recommended to help students prepare for their assignment to interview an older adult. The interview can have a strong impact upon students. Most students come away realizing their “shared humanity” with older people. In addition, many begin to understand their grandparents or older relatives better and form a foundation for meaningful future relationships. Students should choose their interviewees before they begin this lesson.

### Objectives

Students will:

- develop a relationship with an older friend or relative
- make a connection between historical events and the lives of older people
- develop interviewing and note-taking skills

### Key Terms

interviewer, interviewee, negative attitudes, discrimination, perceptions

### Materials

Handout: Historical Context

Handout: Instructions for Interview Assignment

### Lesson Steps

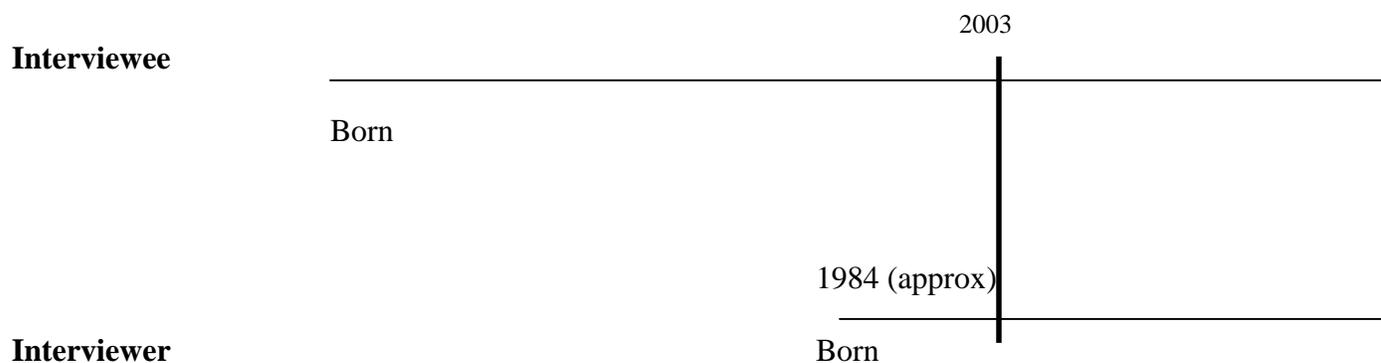
1. Students should begin by determining what year their interviewee would have been the same age as the students are today. Distribute the Historical Context handout and allow students to add their own ideas about important local events of each decade. Students should think about the impact of the events that occurred when the interviewee was high school age.
2. Distribute the interview assignment and discuss any questions students might have. Review the questions for the interviewee and stress that students need not be rigid about sticking to the questions. If something mentioned particularly interests the student, he or she should feel free to insert more questions based on earlier answers. Discuss the value of open-ended questions.
3. For question #9, have the students decide upon one question that they would all like to ask.
4. If time is available, for practice have students spend ten minutes in pairs interviewing each other, taking notes, and reporting back to the class about their interviewee.

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Many of the ideas for this lesson originated from: The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, Aging Research and Education Center. (2001 Edition). *Positively Aging®: Choices and Changes*. San Antonio, Texas, U.S.A. (Funded by the National Institutes of Health - Science Education Partnership Award, grant #R25-RR-12369 with National Center for Research Resources, National Institute on Aging, and National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research). <http://positivelyaging.uthscsa.edu>.

### Extension Activities

- Have students create a lifeline describing the interviewee's life. Then ask them to juxtapose their own lifelines -- and possibly the lifelines of their parents.



- As a class, have students collect “Words of Wisdom” from the interviews and make a poster for display.
- Have students take pictures or videotape their interviewees for classroom sharing of their experience.
- Have students research selected biographies of important figures in recent U.S. history (videos or books). Then have them write a short biography of their interviewee.

Handout

## Historical Context

Before beginning the interview of their older friend, students need to familiarize themselves with national events, trends, and presidents of the 1900s.

### Important Events:

- ◆ 1900-1920
  - Development of big business
  - Development of transportation
  - Panama Canal
  - Airplane invented
  - One room schools
  - First automobiles
  - World War I in Europe
  - U.S. entry into World War I
  - Flu epidemic
  - Armistice Day
  
- ◆ 1920-1930
  - Women vote
  - Prohibition
  - Flappers
  - Progressive Era
  - Stock Market Crash
  
- ◆ 1930-1940
  - Great Depression
  - New Deal
  - Radio popular
  
- ◆ 1940-1950
  - Pearl Harbor
  - Draft and World War II
  - Atomic bomb
  - V-E Day and V-J Day
  - Cold war and anti-communism
  
- ◆ 1950-1960
  - Sputnik
  - Fear of nuclear war
  - TV becomes common appliance
  - Elvis Presley popular

- ◆ 1960-1970
  - Vietnam
  - Civil rights
  - Great Society Programs
  - John F. Kennedy assassinated
  - Martin Luther King assassinated
  - Neil Armstrong first man on moon (Apollo missions)
  - Beatles popular
  
- ◆ 1970-1980
  - Arab oil embargo
  - Inflation
  - Gas Shortage
  - Drug use more widespread
  - Computers become more common
  - Watergate
  - Richard M. Nixon resigns as President
  
- ◆ 1980-1990
  - John Lennon shot and killed
  - Bell telephone system divided into smaller companies
  - Sally Ride-first female astronaut
  - Space shuttle Challenger explodes
  - AIDS virus
  - Ruptured Exxon tanker spills oil
  - Texas elects first woman Governor since Reconstruction
  
- ◆ 1990-2000
  - Nelson Mandella-apartheid ends in South Africa
  - Persian Gulf crisis
  - East and West Germany reunited-Berlin Wall taken down
  - Soviet Union dissolved
  - First wave of “baby boomers” turns 50
  
- ◆ 2001-2003
  - Collapse of the World Trade Center in New York City
  - War with Iraq

U.S. Presidents from 1897-2002			
1897-1901	William McKinley	1961-63	John F. Kennedy
1901-09	Theodore Roosevelt	1963-69	Lyndon B. Johnson
1909-13	William H. Taft	1969-74	Richard M. Nixon
1913-21	Woodrow Wilson	1974-77	Gerald Ford
1921-23	Warren Harding	1977-81	Jimmy Carter
1923-29	Calvin Coolidge	1981-89	Ronald Reagan
1929-33	Herbert Hoover	1989-92	George Bush
1933-45	Franklin D. Roosevelt	1992-2000	Bill Clinton
1945-53	Harry Truman	2000-	George W. Bush
1953-61	Dwight D. Eisenhower		

## **Instructions for Interview of Older Adult**

Using the questions below, conduct an interview with a person at least 65 years of age. Feel free to add questions of your own whenever one occurs to you.

**The report of your interview should meet the following criteria:**

1. Typed and double-spaced if possible; if not possible, please write neatly in pen.
2. Include the questions in your report in a format that enables the reader to know what the person you are interviewing is referring to.
3. Discuss your personal reaction to the interview in three paragraphs at the end of your report.

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### **Questions for Interview of an Older Adult**

1. Please tell me about your childhood, family and school life.
2. Do you consider yourself old? At what ages (or stages) did you notice that you were getting older?
3. What is the most important historical event or period of time that you have lived through? How did it influence you personally?
4. What is the biggest change you have seen in how people conduct their everyday lives?
5. What have been the best years of your life so far? What are your plans for the future?
6. How are young people today different from when you were their age?
7. What advice would you give young people to help them prepare for their old age?
8. Have you ever experienced any negative attitudes or discrimination because of your age? Please explain.
9. Class question. (What do you, as a class, want to know about older adults? Discuss in class and write before the interview.)
10. Student question. Based on what you've learned, ask at least one more question; what else would **you** like to know about this person's life?

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**After you describe the interview, discuss your reaction (three paragraphs).**

1. What did you learn? Did anything surprise you?
2. How did you feel during the interview?
3. What changes (if any) have occurred in your perception of older adults? (What did you think before? What do you think now?)