



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

U.S. History

WITNESSES TO U.S. HISTORY

Ithaca College Gerontology Institute
www.ithaca.edu/aging/schools

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Witnesses to U.S. History

Introduction

This lesson plan is a project designed to run throughout the second half of a U.S. history course. It was designed for an 11th grade U.S. history class, but can be adapted to other high school grades. The lesson plan introduces the idea of oral history as a way to better understand different historical periods. Throughout the semester, pairs of students will interview and present oral histories on different periods in recent U.S. history so that oral history is integrated into each period.

- The Great Depression and New Deal
- World War II (Pearl Harbor, combat in Europe or Japan, use of the atomic bomb)
- Korean War
- Post War America (1945-50)
- The 1950's
- Worker at Endicott Johnson Corporation 1930-1960 (relationship between labor and management)

Students use the interview guide below. They supplement their interviews by finding four primary sources on the INTERNET related to the time period. Finally, they write a paper on the impact of the experience on them personally and they give a three to five minute presentation in class.

The project should be completed outside of class and be due on the day before the exam for the unit.

Objectives

By interviewing an older adult and preparing a written and oral report of the interview, students will be able to:

- Examine another person's first hand knowledge and personal perspective of events, people, and time periods since the 1930's
- Evaluate oral histories as a source of knowledge about the past
- Understand the role older adults can play as witnesses to history
- Analyze their own personal views about older adults in the U.S.
- Gain skill and confidence interacting with older adults to collect information
- Gain time management skills
- Develop and practice partnership/teamwork skills
- Develop and practice communication skills.

Materials

Handouts: Student Project Instructions
Interview Guide
Web Site Information Sheet

Key Terms

Oral history (other terms depend on the time period chosen by the student).

Teacher Preparation

1. Prepare approximate schedule of when topics will be covered during the school year to review with students.
2. Many students will choose relatives or friends to interview. For students without an older adult connection, the teacher should contact the local senior citizens center, VFW Post or retirement community – or any group that offers a gathering place for older adults. Provide them with a copy of the student assignment and ask for their help in arranging interviews. Most will be very receptive to the idea.
3. If the student is interested, and the interviewee willing, students may record or videotape the interview. Check for permission from the library/media center for students to use the equipment.

Lesson Steps

1. When starting the unit on the Great Depression and New Deal, bring up the idea that there are people alive today who lived through this time. Review the term “oral history” and its positives and negatives. Hand out interview project assignment; review and discuss.
2. Set due date for those who plan to do interviews for this unit.
3. For each successive unit, remind students of the interview project and give a due date.

Assessment Plan

Each pair of students will hand in written requirements (see the project instructions below) on the day they give the 3-5 minute report to the class of their experience. This project will be graded on the basis of 100 points and will count as a double grade.

PROJECT: “Making Recent History Come Alive”

Interview with a Witness to History

Handout

Student Instructions for Witnesses to History Project

Purpose: From this point on in our study of US History and Government, there are people alive today who lived through the times listed below. The purpose of this project is to have these time periods become more “real” for you by interviewing someone who lived during the time. The time periods are:

- Great Depression and New Deal
- World War II (Pearl Harbor, combat in Europe or Japan, use of the atomic bomb)
- Korean War
- Post War America (1945-50)
- The 1950's
- Working at Endicott Johnson Corporation 1930-1960 (relationship between labor and management)

Requirements: With a partner, you will do the following:

1. Select **TWO** time periods from above.
2. Arrange an interview with an older person who lived during the time. This may be a relative or an older person you already know. Alternatively, check with your teacher about senior citizens' groups participating in the project.
3. Use the question sheet as a guide for your interview. You may video or audio tape the interview if the person is open to the idea. This may be handed in as the record of the interview. **Both you and your partner must be present at the interview.**
4. Supplement the interview by finding four primary sources on the INTERNET that pertain to the time period. Complete the web site information sheet for each.
5. Discuss the analysis questions together. In a typed, double-spaced, 12 font paper, do each of the following:
 - a. Describe/explain the impact of this experience on you and your partner. For example, were you surprised by anything? Did any stereotypes change?
 - b. Based on this experience, discuss what older people can offer to younger people and to society in general.
6. Prepare a 3-5 minute oral presentation for the class.

In conclusion, the completed project will include all of the following:

- **record of interview**
- **written analysis**
- **site information sheet for FOUR primary sources**
- **oral presentation in class**

This project is based on 100 points and will be a double grade.

Due Date: The written product and oral report will be given on the day before the unit exam for the unit selected.

Interview Guide

Time period chosen: _____

Name of person interviewed: _____ Age _____

The questions below are a guide. If you ask other questions or the person talks about other things, incorporate these into the record of the interview.

- 1. Please tell us about yourself.

- 2. What memories do you have about the period of _____? Anything about important people/events of the time? How do you feel about these person/events? What was public opinion at the time? What was **your** life like at this time? Any personal experiences you particularly remember? *(Students: Use these questions to get into a conversation with the person.)*

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3. What are your memories and opinions about the following during that time period?

Family life?

Minorities?

Women?

Schools and education?

Web Site Primary Source Information Sheet

Supplement the interview by finding four primary sources on the INTERNET that pertain to each time period and complete the information for each.

1. Website address: _____

Title of primary source: _____ Date of source : _____

Description and reaction to information presented:

2. Website address: _____

Title of primary source: _____ Date of source : _____

Description and reaction to information presented:

(OVER)

