

RECORDING A CHANGING NATION

Lesson Extension: Continuity and Change Over Time

Duration: 90 minutes over three class periods

As written this extension activity will take three class periods but they need not be consecutive. Consider how to break this activity into chunks that align with your existing curriculum.

Grade Level: 6th-12th grade

About this Resource:

This activity uses a Jigsaw structure, requiring that students have access to a set of oral histories from the same time and place documented in the NEA photographic survey of your choosing. If an NEA photographic survey was not conducted in your area, consider using a survey from a neighboring area or one whose influence you feel in your own area.

Materials:

This activity will require access to print or electronic reproductions of oral histories from your area. NEH's Oral History Teacher's Guide provides resources of accessing oral histories. You can find it [HERE](#). Additional resources may be available through your city or county library and the Library of Congress.

Preparation:

Based on your knowledge of your students, identify ideal group size for a reading assignment. Accessing oral histories from the place and time period depicted in the photographs you selected for the Visual Analysis, excerpt as many oral histories as the number of groups in your classroom. Include biographical and demographic information for the speaker whenever possible.

Oral history excerpts should be short enough to assure basic comprehension within the first reading. If you prefer to use a longer or more complex oral history, consider conducting the reading of that text during the class period BEFORE the one set aside for this extension activity. You may find that students respond best to recorded oral history interviews.

Each small group should have access to a different excerpted oral history.

Session 1 Protocol (50 minutes):

After each step of the protocol below, bring students back together so that they may share their discoveries and you can document a growing list of questions in a space accessible to all (whiteboard, Jamboard, etc.).

1. *Pre-read:* Working with a partner, pre-read the excerpted oral history. Note whether this interview was conducted in the same place and during the same time depicted in the photographs.
2. *Read:* Oral histories are interviews between a researcher and a person who experienced a historical event or time period deemed important by one or both. Before the 1960s and 70s,

oral histories were most frequently conducted with leaders or other prominent figures, leaving gaps in the historical record of the lives of everyday people as well as preserving only particular perspectives for the future. Social movements plus technology motivated historians to begin deliberately documenting the lives of more Americans.²

- What biographical or demographic information for the speaker was provided?
 - When was the oral history taken? By whom? How does this compare with the photographs?
 - Read the excerpt of the oral history in order to gather ideas about the speaker's opinions and life experiences.
 - What big ideas does the speakers reflect upon? Circle or make a list of issues/themes. These might include work, family, community, faith, etc.
 - Which sentence from the oral history best captures your takeaway understanding of this person or their time? Underline it to share with your classmates.
 - What question would you ask this person in order to better understand their experience?
3. ***Pair:*** Speak with a group that read an oral history different from the one that you read. Share the big ideas as well as the phrase or sentence you underlined.
- What ideas from the oral histories connect with one another? What's similar? What ideas from the oral histories connect with the photographs?
 - What ideas from the oral histories challenge or conflict with one another? What ideas challenge the way you think about that time or place?
 - How might your understanding of the time or place be shaped by the interviewer and/or photographer?
4. ***Share:*** Speak with the whole group, sharing the connections, challenges and conflicts you uncovered when you compared the oral histories. Discuss the following:
- What new ideas do you have about the time period or place? Note 2-3 surprises or new ideas.
 - What questions do you have? What do you not yet understand?
5. ***Connect to Today:*** Discuss with your classmates how the content of these histories is similar to or different from your community today.
- What issues/themes seem similar to things happening in your community today? What makes them similar?
 - What's different? Has something changed? What might have caused that change?
 - What questions do you have? What do you not yet understand?

Formative Assessment Points: Step Three provides an opportunity to gauge students' understanding of local history. The questions they formulate at the end of this step might drive a short research project or, alternatively, guide your selection of additional primary source documents for discussion (i.e. maps documenting human migration patterns, etc.).

Step Four offers an opportunity to scaffold students' understanding of how present-day issues have evolved or grown out of issues of the past. Consider collecting conjecture in Task B, then conducting a quick online research project to check those ideas. If this step is difficult, consider offering students a tree diagram. The theme/issue of today might be situated on the trunk of the tree (ex: interdependence of community members, mutual support). The roots might be causes from the past (ex: immigrant

neighborhood, small business district, discrimination, etc.). The leaves might be symptoms of that theme/issue (ex: people shopping at small businesses even though prices might be slightly higher).

Session 2 Protocol (20 minutes):

This section of the extension activity invites students to act as historians by planning, organizing, and facilitating an oral history interview. Challenge students to consider who in their lives today might be able to offer insights or answer their questions. If this is the first time your students have conducted oral histories, consider showing them the video available from the Smithsonian Institution Archives. You can access it here: <https://youtu.be/pxrkkhLExxw> [Oral History at Home — Five Easy Steps](#)

1. *List Potential Interviewees:* Consider who in your community might have an opinion about the issues/themes that you identified. Make as long a list as you can.
2. *Review Your List:* Whose voice might have been inadvertently left off?
 - Who might you have overlooked? Add those names.
 - Do you have multiple generations represented? If not, who might you have overlooked? Add those names.
3. *Choose an Interviewee:* Of all the people on this list, to whom do you have access? Who might you be able to interview?

Real-World History Homework: This assignment requires students to apply their growing understanding of the past to their community today, conducting an oral history interview and documenting their community to create one part of a class-wide exhibition of learning.

1. *Conduct an Interview:* Using the materials here on how to conduct oral histories [<https://edsitement.neh.gov/teachers-guides/oral-history-educational-experience>], conduct interviews with two of the people from your list: one elder and one person your age or someone you consider a peer. Ask them about the themes you identified from the original oral histories.
2. *Visual Documentation:* Review your thinking so far in search of issues/themes that arise again and again. Take five photos of your community that document how those issues/themes appear today. Choose one photo that you feel is most representative.
3. *Describe Your Photo:* Create alt-text, or text that describes your photograph to someone who cannot see it (ex: someone using a screen reader). Consider what features captured in the photo you would want all viewers to be able to “observe” and whether some additional information would help them understand those features.
4. *Create a Label:* Harvest one quote from the interview with an elder and one quote from your peer to create a two-line label for your photograph. The label should link the past to the present and clearly state the issue/theme depicted by your photograph. If it’s challenging to get started here, look for quotes from your oral histories that sound like parts of a conversation between the two interviewees.

Session 3 Protocol (20 minutes):

Reflect: Look at your work and that of your classmates, considering these as time capsule to be passed to the future:

- Which is easier to discover: things that have changed or things that have stayed the same? Why might that be?
- What new ideas do you have about how information is conveyed across time or between people?

Formative Assessment Point: Step Seven provides an opportunity to revisit strategies explored in the “Photographer’s Choices” extended analysis.

Summative Assessment Point: Step Seven provides an assessment point in the form of an exhibition of learning. Consider submitting your students’ work to a local historical society.