

Voice of Witness Tiered Curriculum

The Voice of Witness Education Program has developed a curriculum that offers three different levels of involvement. This new, tiered approach allows teachers to determine the depth to which they want to incorporate oral history into their curriculum. Using the Common Core curricular standards for middle and high school students, we have created three rigorous approaches. This curriculum seeks to increase literacy, critical thinking, communication, and community building through amplifying unheard voices and allowing students to participate directly in the oral history process. The Voice of Witness curriculum will help students to become ready for the academic challenges and opportunities they will face in middle and high school. Although this sample curriculum focuses on the title *Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives*, it can be adapted to any of the books in the Voice of Witness series. For more information, please visit <http://www.voiceofwitness.org>.

.....

Tier One: *Underground America* & Five-Paragraph Essay

In this approach, students will investigate the differences between mainstream media and oral history, and evaluate the importance of storytelling and its place in creating and documenting history. Students will read narratives from Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives, a Voice of Witness title featuring stories from undocumented immigrants in the United States, and conduct informal interviews with family members in order to create a Family Stories project. Ultimately, students will craft a five-paragraph essay fusing what they learned reading Underground America and the discoveries they made in their Family Stories project.

(Week One)

1. Teachers will introduce students to the concept of oral history (why? how?) and students will read narratives from *Underground America* (or any other VOW book).
2. Teachers will facilitate a discussion/activity with students that compares and contrasts oral history (history from the bottom-up) to mainstream media stories.

(Week Two)

3. Teachers will draw on other sources (novels, short stories, plays, nonfiction, poetry) around the subject of immigration in America.
 - Suggestions for alternate sources: *Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario, *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, etc.

(Week Three)

4. Students will conduct a Family Stories project, through which they facilitate discussions and dialogues with their family members about the family's history. Use the following questions as prompts:
 - When did our family first come to the U.S. (or to the surrounding area)?
 - What propelled our family to immigrate to the U.S. (or to the surrounding area)?
 - What challenges and triumphs have our family faced?

(Weeks Four & Five)

5. Based on their Family Stories project, students write a five-paragraph essay about their family's history. Use the following questions to guide the student essays:

- During your Family Stories project, what did you find most interesting or surprising?
- Why should other people know about your family's story?
- Based on your discussions with your family members about your history, are there any changes you would like to see for future generations?
- Were there any similarities between your family's story and the narratives you read in *Underground America*?
- In your opinion, what are some of the most important issues that immigrants in the U.S. are facing today?

Tier Two: Intro to Oral History, Partner Interviews, & Five-Paragraph Essay

In this approach, students will learn the whys and hows of oral history, and evaluate its place in creating and documenting history. Students will read excerpts from Voice of Witness title Underground America and learn oral history interviewing techniques, putting them to practice in a group interview with a guest speaker. After they're comfortable with the oral history interviewing process, students will be paired up to conduct 15-minute partner interviews. As a final project, students will craft five-paragraph essays based on what they have learned about the importance of storytelling and their experience interviewing their partners.

(Week One)

1. Teachers will introduce students to the concept of oral history (why? how?) and students will read narratives from *Underground America* (or any other VOW book).
2. Teacher will facilitate a discussion/activity with students that compares and contrasts oral history (history from the bottom-up) to mainstream media stories.

(Week Two)

3. Teacher will give a lesson on open-ended questions, interviewing techniques, and active listening.
4. Class will invite a guest in for a model group interview (could be someone with an immigration story). Each student will have prepared 2-3 questions, based on the discussion about interviewing techniques. This will familiarize students with the process of oral history interviewing.

(Week Three)

5. Students will create one-paragraph autobiographical sketches, and then will be paired up with another student in the class. Once they're paired up, students will conduct 15-minute practice interviews with each other. Teacher can decide whether or not these interviews should be recorded, or whether students should jot down notes throughout the interview.

(Weeks Four & Five)

6. Students will write five paragraph essays about the importance of personal stories using the following prompts:
 - a. *Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover*: In your interview, did you learn anything about your narrator that surprised you? Did you have any judgments about your narrator that you realized were untrue or inaccurate?
 - b. *Personal Stories as History*: Did you learn anything about culture or society through your interview with your narrator? How can interviewing one person teach us about the world around us?

c. *Comparing/Contrasting Oral History and Traditional Media*: Now that you've completed an interview, what are some of the differences you notice between what you learn from a personal story and what you learn in the media (news, radio, magazines, billboards, etc.)? For example, if you interviewed someone about immigration, what did you learn that you haven't heard through mainstream media? What do you learn in front-page news stories that you may not learn in an oral history narrative? Why do you think these differences exist?

Tier Three: Full Oral History Project & Five-Paragraph Essay

In this approach, students will learn the whys and hows of oral history, evaluate the importance of storytelling, and consider its place in creating and documenting history. Students will research mainstream media sources and compare/contrast them to oral history narratives. For example: what does one learn about immigration through the television news? How is this different from what one learns through reading a narrative from Underground America?

Students will identify narrators and conduct 30-minute recorded interviews. Once their interviews are complete, students will select 10-15 minutes of their interviews to transcribe and edit into a polished narrative. Following the completion of their narratives, students will craft five-paragraph essays fusing their knowledge of oral history and its impact, the narratives they read and discussed from Underground America, and what they learned through the interview/transcription processes. Possible topics for five-paragraph essays include: character analysis, oral history/mainstream media compare and contrast, and a thematic response to immigration issues in the United States.

(Week One)

1. Introduce students to the concept of oral history (why? how?). Students will read narratives from *Underground America* (or any other VOW book).
 - See Voice of Witness oral history framework; *The Power of the Story* pages 16-17.
2. Facilitate a discussion/activity with students that compares and contrasts oral history (history from the bottom-up) to mainstream media stories.
3. Teacher will give a lesson on open-ended questions, interviewing techniques, and active listening.

(Weeks Two & Three)

4. Students will identify potential narrators, select someone to interview, compose a list of 10-15 questions, and complete a 30-minute recorded interview.
5. Students will transcribe 10-15 minutes of their interview (after selecting a portion that's most powerful, or that reveals an "aha!" moment).
6. Students will edit their transcriptions into a polished, first person narrative.

(Weeks Four & Five)

7. Following the completion of the narrative, students will write a five-paragraph essay (character analysis from the book, compare/contrast paper using *UA* and a mainstream media source on immigration, thematic response to *UA* and immigration issues in the US).
 - Character analysis from *UA*: From a narrative in the book, what specific details about a characters' story impacted you the most and why? What are the character's thoughts, opinions, or feelings and what do they reveal about the character? What

aspect of the storyteller's identity is illuminated in the narrative? How does the storyteller interpret the events of the situation?

- Compare/contrast paper using *UA* and a mainstream media source on immigration: What do the stories offer that is not part of the historical narrative "Tool Kit" (media sources/news/textbooks/blogs, etc.)? How does *UA* differ from the mainstream media source? What is one of the main issues you see regarding immigration in *UA*? Is that issue widely discussed in mainstream media? Do you think *UA* or other personal narratives should be included in mainstream media? Why or why not?
- Thematic response to *UA* and immigration issues in the US: What are the major issues illuminated in the *UA* narratives? How do they connect to the immigration issues in the US? How are the major issues in the *UA* narratives disconnected from immigration issues in the US? What does this story teach us about the human condition? In what ways can this story transform one's understanding of humanity?

The five-paragraph essay will draw upon both the oral history curriculum as well as traditional, standards-based grammar and language goals.

8. OPTIONAL: Teacher can compile students' narratives into an anthology, and organize a final presentation/culminating event for the end of the session.