

RESOURCE GUIDE

Listen Up: How to Plan Your Oral History Project

Table of Contents

A. Examples of oral history and project toolkits	2
B. Choosing an oral history project	
1. Interview Project	3
2. Project proposal form	4
3. Oral history planning sheet	5
4. Oral history project checklist	6
5. Course timeline	7
C. Assessing and organizing an oral history project	
1. Grading	8
2. Sample editing and reflection activities	9
3. 1 st quarter project rubric	12
C. Beginning the project	
1. Narrator contact checklist	14
2. Sample release form	15
3. Tips for transcribing	16

EXAMPLES OF ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS

Oral history projects can range from student-led school efforts, to community-wide engagement, to national publications. Below is a diverse list of oral history projects that inspire us as educators.

111th and Roberts: Where Our Stories Intersect: Amos Alonzo Stagg High School in Palos Hills, Illinois published a book of oral histories in 2016 from their school community after a year-long “Stagg VOW” elective course. Their course is ongoing with new students every year and now includes a podcast created by the students.

- <http://www.staggvow.com/>
- <https://soundcloud.com/staggvow>

California Immigration Oral History Project: Matthew Colley, a California Studies teacher at Oakland Technical High School, created a website to showcase the oral history narratives his class gathered from immigrants in the U.S.

- <http://matthewcolley4.wixsite.com/oralhistoryproject>

Densho: A grassroots organization dedicated to preserving, educating, and sharing the story of World War II-era incarceration of Japanese Americans in order to deepen understandings of American history and inspire action for equity.

- <http://archive.densho.org/main.aspx>

OG Told Me: Pendarvis Harshaw is a photographer and journalist who was born and raised in Oakland, California. In 2011, Pendarvis started a project called “OG Told Me,” in which he photographs and interviews elder black men in Oakland.

- <http://www.ogtoldme.com>

StoryCorps: StoryCorps’ mission is to preserve and share humanity’s stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world.

- <https://storycorps.org/#popular-stories>

Tennyson High School: Charlie Stephen’s English and Literature class at Tennyson High School conducted oral histories from immigrants in their community of Hayward, CA.

- <http://voiceofwitness.org/education/student-work/oral-history-and-english-literature/>

Voice of Witness: Voice of Witness (VOW) is a non-profit that promotes human rights and dignity by amplifying the voices of people impacted by injustice.

- <http://voiceofwitness.org/>

TOOLKITS

Where Our Stories Intersect: An Educator’s Toolkit for Starting Conversations About Empathy and Outrospection

- <http://voiceofwitness.org/education/student-work/stagg-vow-class/>

The Power of the Story: The Voice of Witness Teacher’s Guide to Oral History

- <http://voiceofwitness.org/education/curricula/the-power-of-the-story/>

Interview Project: What are the stories not being told in our community?

Group Roles:

Each of the five members of your group will have a specific role. Your role will remain the same for the entire quarter and each role will have specific tasks and responsibilities throughout the production of your project. Although you will have a designated role, it is expected that each member take on multiple responsibilities while working on the project. For example, **it is mandatory that each member conduct at least one interview in addition to your assigned role.** At the end of the quarter, you will be asked to justify your contributions to the group. Your ability to articulate and substantiate your individual work will be part of your project grade.

- **Publicist:** The publicist is the group's connection to the outside world. Responsibilities of the Publicist include but are not limited to: Publicizing aspects of your work in progress to the school community, district, media outlets, and communicating progress to the class as a whole, posting project updates on Google Classroom, etc.
- **Beat Reporter/Researcher:** The beat reporter is the group's eyes and ears and looks for story leads to help answer the group's essential question. Responsibilities of the Beat Reporter include but are not limited to: Researching potential narrator's for your collection, conducting preliminary interviews, and identifying what audio elements, video elements, print elements, or people will benefit your project.
- **Story Collector(s):** The Story Collector provides the material for the collection of stories. The Story Collector conducts the majority of the interviews, takes photographs, records audio, and captures any other media needed for the project.
- **Editor:** The Editor must take all of the collected material and create a cohesive final product. In many ways the Editor is the leader of the group in terms of project vision and delegation of tasks to ensure all members are working together equally, but the Editor should also possess the technical skills to piece everything together in an effective manner.

Process:

At the beginning of the project, you will submit a proposal including your essential question, potential (kinds of) narrators, ideas, resources to pursue, interview questions, timeline, and outlined responsibilities for each group member. After the proposal is submitted and reviewed, we'll have a short group meeting to discuss any revisions and your group will begin.

At various points throughout the quarter, we will check-in. This will be an opportunity for each group to share successes, lessons learned, and pose questions to other groups.

As a class, we will also have activities geared toward enhancing the work you are doing in your groups. For example, practice interview day, examples of similar projects, reading edited interviews, etc.

Project Proposal Ideas

Please fill the proposal form out in as much detail as possible. You only need to turn in one proposal per group. Please do not alter the question headings in anyway.

Group Members (please type all group member's first and last names):

Essential Question (One concisely worded question about the school community that you will seek to answer through your project):

Rationale (Explain why your group chose this question and what you hope to learn):

Potential Interview Subjects (Whom do you have in mind to interview at this point? You may list specific people or even types of people such as "a freshman" or "a transfer student", etc. Remember your project should include at least 4 different interviews.):

Tentative Group Roles (Assign roles to your group members based on their strengths. These roles may change as the project unfolds, but you should set out a tentative plan):

Interview Mediums (What different interview mediums does your group plan to use. Will you just record audio and transcribe the interview in writing like *High Rise Stories* or *Working?* Or will you try to incorporate video like *This American Life's* "John Smith" or edited audio with other sound effects like the *NPR* report on slut shaming online?):

How can we help you? (List any resources/instruction/examples or support you would like us to provide your group/the class):

ORAL HISTORY PLANNING SHEET

Choice 1 name:	Why would this person be good to interview?
Choice 2 name:	
What do you think will be hard about this interview?	
What are you going to do to make it easier?	

- Do you have a recording device you can use to conduct your interview, or will you need to borrow one?

Tonight, talk to one of the people you would like to interview, and write down dates and times during which you could conduct your interview. Plan for about an hour to set up for and conduct an interview.

	Date:	Time:	Place:
Interview option 1:			
Interview option 2:			
Interview option 3:			

- The next time our class meets, you will make a schedule with classmates so that each of you will get adequate time with the recorders.

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT CHECKLIST

	Decide who you will interview
	Write questions to guide your interview
	Conduct your interview
	Transcribe your interview
	Brainstorm follow-up questions
	Follow-up interview
	Add to your transcript
	Select the best stories (with a yellow highlighter)
	Proofread your selections
	Clarify with brackets
	Peer edit (more than one student)
	Adult/teacher edit: do you need a few more follow-up questions?
	(Reinterview)
	(Type responses right into first draft)
	Print out draft (with reinterview info, if necessary) and take to interviewee for fact-checking
	One more adult/teacher edit
	Save as final draft
	Print final draft and hand in recording, transcript, and final draft

FROM: WHERE OUR STORIES INTERSECT (P.41-44)

Class Timeline and Components:

Semester 1

8/17-9/4

Unit 1: Who are we and what do we want to accomplish?

*First quarter project proposals due Friday, September 4th

9/7-9/25

Unit 2: How do we start a conversation?

*Special Guest Facilitator: Audrey Petty editor of *High Rise Stories*

*Practice interviews with Stag staff and alum

*Narrator and Question prep for first quarter project due Friday, September 25th

9/28-10/30

Unit 3: How do we tell a story?

*Special Guest Facilitators: Cliff Mayotte & Claire Kiefer from Voice of Witness

*First quarter projects due! Presentations Monday, Oct 26th-Friday, Oct 30th

11/2-12/4

Unit 4: What do we want to know about our community?

*Potential Field Trip(s): Class exchange and/or trip to 826Chi writing workshop

*Proposal for 1st semester final project interviews due Friday, November 13th

12/7-12/21

Final Project Work

*Edited interviews for final exam due Thursday 12/10

*Final Conferences 12/15-12/21

*Reading of interviews and rankings must be completed over winter break

Semester 2

1/6-1/15

Unit 5: Who are we as a community?

*Potential Field Trip(s): 826Chi Writing Workshop?

*Roundtable discussion of winter break reading January 7th-8th

1/19-2/19

Unit 6: How do we share our stories?

*Potential Field Trip(s): Art Institute? Museum of Contemp Art?

*Final Drafts of Team Assignments due Friday, February 5th

*Revisions of Team Assignments due Tuesday, February 16th

*Roundtable on story order in our book: February 17th-18th

2/22-4/1

Unit 7: What do our stories say about us?

*Potential Field Trip(s): Quimby's or U of C Bookstore?

*Editor Bios due Monday, March 14th

*All finalized interviews and bios due for publication Thursday, March 24th

4/11-5/13 **Unit 8: How can our stories make an impact?**

*Potential Field Trip(s): Book promotion events?

*Task group work due Friday, April 29th

*Final Conferences 5/9-5/12

*End of class celebration 5/13!!!!

Class TimeLine and Components Continued:

In addition to the components mentioned above, we'd like to incorporate some "fun" activities that we make space for on specific days. Listed below are a few of the ideas we came up with:

Story Sharing Mondays

Out of Your Comfort-Zone Fridays

Weekly Reflections

Grading:

Because the class is aimed at creating an authentic real-world experience of publishing a book and includes the additional goals of increasing civic engagement and empathetic community connections, you will notice that there are not traditional assignments such as worksheets, exams, or even a traditional amount of "homework."

To mirror the unique philosophy and goals of the course, we have created a skills-based approach to grading that relies heavily on reflection and growth rather than just collecting arbitrary "points." The grading for the course will be broken down into the following categories:

18 Weeks Grade Categories (80% of total Semester Grade):

10% "Class Participation" — Includes participation in online class discussion posts, group participation in assigned task groups, and participation in class discussion and roundtables.

10% "Journals" — Includes weekly written reflection assignments submitted online as well as group work and personal reflection components.

80% "Projects" — Includes quarterly group projects as well as individual tasks and project proposals.

"Final Exam(s)" (20% of Total Semester Grade):

As stated above, this class will not have "tests", instead your final exam grade will consist of both a written component related to the components of the book we are producing as well as a reflective one-on-one conference where you will have an opportunity to provide examples and reflection on your growth as it relates to the particular tasks and skills focused on in each semester.

Sample Editing and Reflection Activities to Prep for Story Publication

1. Editing Oral History Stories for Publication

Assignment: Please choose any 5 interviews to read that are not your own interviews and not ones that you have read or seen before. Ideally we'd like you to read at least one interview from each sub-folder category (students, staff, alum, etc.). After reading each one, please answer the following questions. Your answers should apply to your impression of all 5 interviews overall. You do not need to specifically name each interview in your answers to questions 2-6, but should refer to specific characteristics.

1. List the 5 interview narratives you read (list them by the title given and/or the specific name of the person interviewed):
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
2. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "it was difficult to get through and felt like reading something assigned for school" and 10 being "it was amazing, riveting, and I couldn't put it down!"), how would you rate your overall experience reading all 5 narrative interviews? Explain your rating.
3. What specific aspects of the narrative interviews kept you engaged/wanting to read?
4. What specific aspects of the narrative interviews do you feel could be improved or removed to make the narrative more readable/interesting?
5. Do you feel the narrative interviews you read demonstrate what we have discussed makes a "good story"? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel the narrative interviews you read are ready for publication? If not, what specific steps do you feel we need to take in order to get these narrative interviews ready?

2. Peer Edit Workshop

1. **First read through**--read as though you are an outsider to the Stagg community reading our book. Don't worry about editing anything, just read for the story. Then answer:
 - a. Was the story engaging? Why? What specific parts were the most interesting?
 - b. Was anything in the story confusing (especially think about someone that doesn't know anything about Stagg or someone no longer in high school).
 - c. Was there anything you wanted to know more about? Think about needed detail or perhaps needed follow-up questions.
 - d. What was the "empathic connection" moment in the story?

2. **Second read though**--read looking specifically at organization. Then answer:
 - a. Does the story flow well? Is it arranged in a logical order that is easy to follow?
 - b. Are there any areas that are repetitive or portions that are redundant? Cross out anything you feel could be taken out.
 - c. Are there areas that would benefit from follow-up questions? Write follow-up questions you had in mind.

3. **Final read through**--read as an editor looking carefully for grammar, spelling and sentence structure issues. Make your edits right on the story.

Overall Reflections:

1. What are your thoughts on the order/groupings of the stories and the names of the chapters? Do the stories seem to fit well in each chapter? Would you move any stories around or come up with any other chapter? Are there some stories that don't seem to fit in any category?
2. How does it work having reflections for some stories and not all? How do the voices of the reflections work in the book? Are there some that should be cut? Are there some that work particularly well?
3. How do the survey responses fit into the book? Do you like their placement? How do you feel they help contribute to our overall purpose? Which responses can be removed? Whose voice is missing? Be specific.
4. How do the story titles and subtitles work overall? Are there stories where the title and subtitles are particularly well done? Are there stories that need to be changed?

3. V.O.W. Round 4 Draft Reflection Directions: As you read each story, place it in either the green, yellow or red light column depending on how much work you feel still needs to be done in order to make it publication ready. After each story you place, be sure to make a brief note as to why you put it there next to it.

<p>Green Light It's ready to publish with only one more quick edit job for grammar!</p>	<p>Yellow Light It's almost there but may still need editing work for flow, format and more obvious grammar issues.</p>	<p>Red Light It needs major editing work or does not seem to fit the formatting, tone, purpose, etc.</p>

Voice of Witness Class 1st Quarter Project Rubric

Presentation Elements:

	A	B	C	D	X
Introduction	The introduction introduces and explains the group's essential question and background of the project in a clear, creative and engaging manner.	The introduction introduces and explains the group's essential question and background of the project in a clear manner while attempting to creatively engage the audience.	The introduction introduces and explains the group's essential question and background of the project, but the explanation may be unclear at times or may lack creativity or engagement.	The introduction introduces the group's essential question and background of the project, but the explanation may be incomplete or unclear. The introduction lacks creativity or engagement,	
Interview Excerpts	Interview excerpts from 5+ interviews are shared in a creative manner. The excerpts demonstrate a superior understanding of the elements of a "good story" as well as a superior mastery of the skills of interviewing, transcribing and editing.	Interview excerpts from 5+ interviews are shared in a creative manner. The excerpts demonstrate a solid understanding of the elements of a "good story" as well as a solid mastery of the skills of interviewing, transcribing and editing.	Interview excerpts from 4+ interviews are shared in a manner that attempts creativity. The excerpts demonstrate an adequate understanding of the elements of a "good story" as well as an adequate mastery of the skills of interviewing, transcribing and editing.	Interview excerpts from 3+ interviews are shared in a manner that lacks creativity. The excerpts demonstrate a deficient understanding of the elements of a "good story" as well as a deficient understanding of the skills of interviewing, transcribing and editing.	
Conclusion	The conclusion shares specific, thoughtful reflections on the interview/project process as well as the insights about the Stagg community gained from the project while bringing the presentation to a powerful and meaningful close.	The conclusion shares specific, thoughtful reflections on the interview/project process as well as the insights about the Stagg community gained from the project while attempting to bring the presentation to a powerful and meaningful close.	The conclusion shares reflections on the interview/project process as well as the insights about the Stagg community gained from the project, but these reflections may not be specific and lack the depth of thought expected. The conclusion brings the presentation to a close, but it may lack needed power/meaning.	The conclusion fails to share reflections on both the interview/project process as well as the insights about the Stagg community gained from the project. The reflections shared may lack needed explanation and/or clarity. The conclusion fails to bring the presentation to a clear close. .	
Presentation	The presentation meets the length requirements, is well-organized and thoughtfully incorporates appropriate multimedia elements to successfully engage the audience.	The presentation meets the length requirements, is organized and incorporates appropriate multimedia elements to attempt to engage the audience.	The presentation meets the length requirements, is somewhat organized and incorporates multimedia elements, but it may fall short in terms of engaging the audience.	The presentation falls short of the length requirements and is disjointed. It incorporates multimedia elements, but these elements are not appropriately chosen and serve as a distraction rather than a tool to engage the audience.	
Practice/ Poise	All members of the group equally share presentation roles. All members of the group appear prepared and confident, speaking clearly with an appropriate pace, tone and volume to successfully engage the audience.	All members of the group share presentation roles. Most members of the group appear prepared and confident, speaking clearly with an appropriate pace, tone and volume to attempt engage the audience.	Most members of the group share presentation roles. Only some members of the group appear prepared and confident, speaking clearly with an appropriate pace, tone and volume to attempt engage the audience while others seemed rushed, visibly nervous and/or unprepared.	Some members of the group share presentation roles. The presentation is marred by awkward silences. Many members of the group appear rushed, visibly nervous and/or unprepared.	

Project Elements:

	A	B	C	D	X
Project Folder	All required elements (transcribed interviews, edited interviews, final presentation format and presentation outline) are comprehensively and thoughtfully completed and shared in one group project folder via the google drive.	All required elements (transcribed interviews, edited interviews, final presentation format and presentation outline) are completed and shared in one group project folder via the google drive.	All required elements (transcribed interviews, edited interviews, final presentation format and presentation outline) are completed, but may lack needed thought/detail and they may not all be shared in one group project folder via the google drive.	Most required elements (transcribed interviews, edited interviews, final presentation format and presentation outline) are completed, but many lack needed thought/detail and they are not shared in one group project folder via the google drive.	

Individual Reflections and Contributions:

	A	B	C	D	X
Completed Reflections	All typed reflections are honestly and thoughtfully completed using the proper evaluation labels along with clear, specific and concrete support.	All typed reflections are honestly completed using the proper evaluation labels but may lack needed thought or depth of specific and concrete support.	All typed reflections are completed but may be lacking proper evaluation label or needed thought or specific and concrete support. There may also be minor discrepancies in your explanation of your group members' contributions.	Most typed reflections are completed but may be lacking proper evaluation label or needed thought or specific and concrete support. There may also be more significant discrepancies in your explanation of your group members' contributions.	
Assessment of Personal Contributions	Your individual reflection illustrates a fair and honest understanding of your contributions to your group when compared to the reflections your group members have completed about your contributions. There are absolutely no discrepancies about your contributions and work.	Your individual reflection illustrates a fair and honest understanding of your contributions to your group when compared to the reflections your group members have completed about your contributions. There may, however, be a few minor discrepancies about your contributions and work.	Your individual reflection illustrates an understanding of your contributions to your group when compared to the reflections your group members have completed about your contributions. There may, however, be some discrepancies about your contributions and work.	Your individual reflection illustrates a poor understanding of your contributions to your group when compared to the reflections your group members have completed about your contributions. There may be significant discrepancies about your contributions and work.	
Overall Personal Rating	Excellent	Adequate	Adequate	Deficient	

NARRATOR CONTACT CHECKLIST

When first making contact with potential narrators, you should ask them the following:

- What is their contact information: full name, telephone number, and email address?
- Would they mind being recorded via an audio or video recorder?
- Are they able to come to the school or meet off campus?
- What are good dates and times for the interview?
- What is the best way to follow up with them after the interview?

Record these details and submit them to your teacher for approval.

PHONE CALLS: Before you call, role play with a partner (who “answers” the call), stating your name, what school/neighborhood group you are with, the goal of the project and how they might be able to participate/how you need their help. Then, make the real call. If you need to leave a message, speak slowly and clearly, and leave your contact email or cell phone number twice.

EMAIL: Clearly state who you are, which organization/school you are from, and what the goals and intentions are for your project. If you have links to your school be sure to include those. Have another person proofread the message before you send it.

FOLLOW-THROUGH: Sometimes people will need more than one email or phone call. Be persistent, though do not harass. Following up with an email shows that you are serious. If you make an appointment to meet someone, either for an initial visit or interview, be sure to show up on time. This shows respect for the person you would like to interview. If you know you will be late or need to cancel, communicate this as soon as possible. After the meeting or interview, always thank your narrators for the opportunity.

CONTACTING NARRATORS YOU ALREADY KNOW: If you are planning on conducting an interview with someone you already know (friend, family member, peer), follow the same basic procedures as the ones listed above. The formality of the process will enable both the interviewer and the narrator to focus on the details of that working relationship, which will facilitate a more authentic oral history experience.



SAMPLE RELEASE FORM

I, _____ (full name) hereby give permission or Voice of Witness to record, transcribe, and consider this interview for publication.

I understand that I have complete control over how my interview can be used, and can choose to remain anonymous if the interview is used in any form. (This includes, and is not limited to, text or audio excerpts of the interview in newspapers, magazines, and the internet).

I will receive a transcript and/or recording of my interview from Voice of Witness for my personal use upon my request.

I understand that Voice of Witness will not publish anything without my consent, and will do everything to protect my privacy. They will not share my identity or personal information with anyone else.

If I do not speak English, I will be provided with an interpreter who will explain this consent form in my language.

Signature

Date

Address

City, State, Zip

Phone #

Other way of getting on contact

TIPS AND ADVICE FOR TRANSCRIBING AN INTERVIEW

There is no getting around it: transcribing is a time-consuming process. Make sure you give yourself plenty of time to write out everything you need. A general rule of thumb: it usually takes about four to five hours to transcribe an hour of audio.

PREPARATION

Find a quiet place to work with your recorder or computer (if you have downloaded your interview), earphones and/or notepad.

TRANSCRIPTION METHODS

There is no standard method for transcription. Some people press play, listen to six words, press pause, write down the words, and repeat. Others will listen to the whole tape, taking as many words as they can, and then return to the beginning and go through more slowly, filling out their initial notes. In both approaches, make sure you record the time-code periodically (every few minutes) so that you have an easy reference point later between the hard copy transcript and the audio files.

Your transcript should include the interviewer's questions, even though you will probably edit them out later. If you want, you can note other aspects of the interview in brackets within the text. For example, if the interviewee begins to cry at some point, it might be prudent to include [begins crying] in the transcription. Later, when you edit, you can decide if this should be part of the narrative.

TOOLS

Transcriptions can be done simply by playing a recording on audio playback software and typing into a word processing application on your computer. There are also many available types of software online specifically for transcription.

Website: <http://transcribe.wreally.com>

- Cost: Free for 7 days, then \$20/year
- Works with speech to text software
- Auto-saves after every keystroke to local browser
- Works offline
- Best for: Regular transcriber who seeks ease of use and doesn't need highly modifiable features

ACCURACY

The foremost concern when transcribing an interview is accuracy. This means that you will have to listen to some sections a few times to get them right. It is important to keep the speaker's word usage, syntax, and idiosyncrasies intact. It is also important that you watch your grammar, so that the sentence maintains its original meaning. Some examples:

If the speaker says:

I ran from house to house—everyone's house, even Ray's. Couldn't find a cornbread recipe.

You might be tempted to type:

I ran from house to house—everybody's house, even Ray's. Couldn't find a cornbread recipe.

or:

I ran from house to house, everyone's house, even Ray's, couldn't find a cornbread recipe.

If you hear “everyone,” don't type “everybody.” If you are not sure what you are hearing, rewind and check it again. If you are not sure about how to punctuate a sentence, use periods to separate thoughts. Even if it is incorrect, readers will get the idea.

FORMAT

Transcripts follow a strict format:

- Single-spaced, typed
- 12-point font, Times or Times New Roman
- Names of interviewer and interviewee written out and in bold for first question and response
- Initials of interviewer and interviewee only in bold for additional responses
- Only internal dialogue or thoughts in quotation marks
- Include all laughs, coughs, etc.

Example:

Lisa Morehouse: What memories do you have of Vietnam?

Viet Nguyen: Umm, *(coughs)* I don't have many clear memories of Vietnam, mostly of school.

LM: What do you remember about school?

VN: Well, before the, my dad had been working against the Communists before the war, they had a house, land, and so after the war I went to a Communist school, learned speeches and stuff, so that it appeared that our family was compliant, going along, and I remember thinking, “Why do I have to wear this uniform, learn these songs?”