**TOPIC: ORAL HISTORY**

**Discipline**

History, Journalism

**Grade Level**

6 – 12

**Type of Activity**

Research, Writing, General

**Objectives**

* Students will learn the value of oral history
* Students will learn how to write interview questions.
* Students will conduct an interview (or interviews).
* Students will learn about and make a deeper connection with a family member or a member of her/his community.

**Overview**

*Travels with Charley* describes John Steinbeck’s journey across the United States “in search of America.” Along the way he meets and talks with people from different areas of the country. The dialogue presented in *Travels with Charley* is, most likely, not a verbatim recording. However, it does serve to convey the overall meaning of conversations Steinbeck had and to demonstrate the themes he presents in his writing.

In this activity, students will learn a bit of someone else’s life story through interviewing a family member, or close friend of the family. Teachers can choose to focus students on a similar topic (e.g. immigration, the Cold War, the 1960s, etc.), or allow students to decide what kind of history they will be collecting. If possible, encourage students to video or audio record their interview(s).

**Materials Needed/Preparation**

* Decide what topic limitations, if any, will be given.
  + Consider guiding students towards themes found in *Travels with Charley* (see **TOPIC: TRAVELS WITH CHARLEY – DISCUSSION BY SECTION**).
* Set deadlines for the different milestones of the project. If doing this project over a period of weeks, consider sending a handout home for signature.
* Choose several short examples of oral history to play for students (several possible sources are listed below):
  + NPR’s “Story Corp” (<http://www.npr.org/series/4516989/storycorps>)
  + Duke University’s “Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Segregated South” (<http://cds.aas.duke.edu/btv/openingpagered.html>)

**Estimated Time**

* 2 periods for preparation/introduction
* 1-2 weeks for interviews to be done

**Procedures**

* Introduction
  + What is oral history?
    - Recording an interview with someone who tells the story of an event he/she has experienced. Recording folk tales, legends, etc. that have been passed down through the generations.
  + Value and purposes of oral history
    - Oral history captures the personal story and perspective of historical events.
  + Listen to examples.
  + Handouts:
    - Project description/requirements
    - Checklists with due dates
* Guided Practice
  + Assign students a partner. As partners, have students:
    - Develop a practice topic.
    - Write practice questions for this topic.
    - Practice interviewing with partners in class.
* Milestones
  + Submit a list of desired topics; one will be approved by the teacher.
  + Submit a list of interview questions for review by the teacher.
  + Schedule interview(s).
  + Conduct interview(s).
  + Submit written transcript(s)/notes of interview(s).
  + Submit recording of interview(s).
    - Optional

**Post Activity/Takeaways/Follow-up**

* Post Activity
  + Have students give an oral report on what they learned from their interview.
    - If applicable, have students focus on how their interview relates to themes in *Travels with Charley*.
* Takeaways
  + Students should understand that history is not found only in textbooks.
  + Students can gain a stronger connection to the themes found in *Travels with Charley* and how those themes connect to their own lives.
* Follow-up
  + If possible, discuss how two different student interviews create different perspectives on the same historical period or event.
  + Compare what students have learned/heard with what they have read about a period or event in history.
  + Discuss the experience of interviewing a person.

**Assessment**

* Evaluate student oral or written reports.
  + When assessing student work, take into consideration individual student progress in oral and written presentations.
* As this is a multi-stage activity, student progress should be monitored.
  + Students should be keeping on schedule.
  + Student questions should be well thought out and thorough.

**Standards Met**

Common Core State Standards Met

* Writing Standards 6-12
  + Text Types and Purposes: 2, 3
  + Production and Distribution of Writing: 4, 5
  + Research to Build and Present Knowledge: 7, 8, 9
* Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12
  + Text Types and Purposes: 1
  + Production and Distribution of Writing: 4, 5
  + Research to Build and Present Knowledge: 7, 8, 9