

# Analyzing Oral Histories

GRADES 6-12



## Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 6-12. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 60 minutes.

Oral histories provide information about the stories of people whose stories we do not often hear. In this lesson, participants will have the opportunity to closely examine excerpts from oral histories and take on the role of historian, learning about a specific event in history or an aspect of Navy life. They will do this by analyzing oral histories in which all participants recount a singular event or experience.

Participants will discuss what information can be gained from oral history interviews and make connections to their own lives or information they have learned before.



## Objective

Participants will be able to identify considerations one should take when analyzing oral histories to learn about the past.



## Materials

- Oral History Video clips
- Oral History Analysis Worksheet (1 per each participant)



## Inquiry

Ask participants to think of a favorite memory and write it down. Have them discuss how they like to share that memory with others.

- What are some written materials connected to that memory? (journal/diary entries, menus, tickets, cards, text messages, tweets?)
- Are there any photos connected to that memory?
- Is there a video connected to that memory?
- Would people be able to tell why that memory was special to you from photos, written material, or videos?
- What is another way people in this room could learn about that memory?
- What can a historian gain from hearing from an individual who experienced a particular event?



## Investigation

Let participants know that they will be learning about a particular topic using oral histories. Define oral histories. Separate participants into groups of three. Let participants know that they will be listening to oral history excerpts on the same topic (no longer than three minutes per narrator), and they will be making connections to information they have learned before or to their own lives. They will then share their findings after listening to one narrator with their peers. Hand out “Oral History Analysis” worksheet and transcript packets. Have participants read through the oral history transcripts and answer the questions on their worksheet.



## Activity

### Comparing Information in Oral History Excerpts

This activity is a continuation of the investigation. Have participants form a group with peers who read the other two excerpts and share the information on their worksheets with each other.

- What did the oral history excerpts have in common?
- What were noticeable differences in the oral history excerpts?
- What questions do you have about the topic after listening to the three narrators?

After students hear from their peers, ask them the following:

- What can oral histories tell us about the past?
- What was challenging about this process?
- What could potential next steps be as a historian?



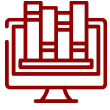
## Lesson Connection

To have participants conduct their own oral history interview to learn how a particular event impacted someone in their lives, please see our lesson: **Conducting an Oral History Interview.**



## Background

Oral histories are a type of primary source in which a narrator is interviewed by an interviewer with the goal of adding to a historical record. Oral histories are usually recorded as audio or video, but are sometimes transcribed to make the oral histories easier to use for research. During the interview, the interviewer asks questions to learn more about the narrator's experience in relation to an event or time period. Oral histories provide opportunities for narrators to share their experience, but can also allow a researcher to receive answers that might not be found in other primary sources. The interviewer can also directly communicate with the person who experienced that moment in history and ask follow-up questions. Oral histories can be used to capture stories of people who are often excluded from other sources. Oral histories, like many primary sources, reflect personal opinion offered by the narrator. In addition, narrators are often discussing events that happened years in the past, and they may not remember certain details. Due to this subjective nature, oral histories may be used alongside other primary sources to gain more of an understanding of history.



## Additional Resources/References

For access to more oral histories:

<https://www.loc.gov/vets/>



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## ACTIVITY: ORAL HISTORY ANALYSIS SHEET

Directions: Fill in the chart below by reading or listening to the oral history account. Identify any information similar to the other accounts, any information unique to that account and any potential bias.

<p><b>Summarize:</b> Write a four to five-sentence summary of the events described in the oral history.</p>
<p><b>Identify Quote:</b> Select one quote from the oral history that you find interesting or important. Why did you select this quote?</p>
<p><b>Connect and Reflect:</b> Share a connection between anything you heard from the oral history to something you have learned about in school or personally experienced. What did this account remind you of?</p>
<p><b>Ask a Question:</b> Create a question you would ask your narrator if you were to conduct an oral history interview with them.</p>