Oral History – Learning History to Learn About Ourselves

Framing this Unit

Oral histories tell us about ourselves and our history and give us a personal glimpse into historical events. We will learn how to record a meaningful oral history of a family member and create a 3-5 minute edited video with a written reflection, describing how our family history influences our lives today.

Discussion

- What word comes to mind when you hear the word “story”?
- What kinds of stories do you like to tell?
- Do you have people in your family who like to tell you stories?
- Does anyone tell you stories about their life?
- What do you learn from stories about someone’s life?
- How does learning from a personal story differ from learning from a history book?
- What does the person telling the story benefit from the experience?
- What does the person listening to the story benefit from the experience?
- How does it feel when someone wants to hear your story?

Group Activity

Listen to a selection of oral histories to become acquainted with the genre, for example from the Centropa and Storycorps websites.

- Did you find the interviews interesting?
- What was your favorite part?
- What was the story's main message?
- Do you think that the interviewees liked sharing their story?
- What did you learn from these interviews about how you would like to record your family’s oral history?

Listening suggestions:

- Ernest Galper – Growing Up Religious
- Piroska Hamos – Life on the Danube
- Marvin Goldstein and Eric Goldstein

Learn how to interview and practice

Watch the video from the Storycorps website “Four Tips for an Effective Interview.”

In pairs, write five questions based on the guidelines presented in the video and these sample questions. Then interview each other, record it (audio or video) and reflect on what you have learned from the process.
What made the interview successful? What were some problems with the interview?

Creative Activity

Create

Conduct an interview with a family member based on the guidelines you have learned and practiced. Create a 3-5 minute clip from the material you recorded. Consider including captions and photographs.

Reflect

Write an essay about how your family's history and experiences influence your life today.

Share

- Organize a “museum walk”: Computers are set up around the room, each with an interview ready to be watched. Photographs can be displayed near the computers. Walk around the room and watch the interviews. Set up a post-it wall to share people's insights or take-aways.

- Post the interviews on a shared website such as Google Slides, Wix, or Padlet.

How did it go? Let us know! learning@nli.org.il