



# *1st State Stories*

Oral history can be used in numerous ways in the classroom to meet the Delaware Department of Education's content standards in Social Studies and English Language Arts for grades Kindergarten through twelve.

For Social Studies, the core disciplines of civics, economics, geography and history each contain four standards that apply to each grade cluster. For Language Arts, the standards pertaining to writing, reading and research directly connect to the process of oral history along with the written, audio and visual end products.

"Learning by Listening" suggests activities, projects and lessons using oral history, divided by grade cluster, which may be incorporated by educators and home schoolers into their curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to review the curriculum for their grade and from all clusters for a full range of topics. Teachers of home schooled children should have even greater flexibility to incorporate and build upon these oral history lesson plans.

## **Learning by Listening: Oral History in the Classroom**

Citizenship education is the driving objective behind Delaware's Social Studies standards. Oral history is a highly effective tool for teaching children how individuals past and present, in communities everywhere, have interacted with others and exercised their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Students can learn first hand how every person has a role in shaping history.

The text of the Delaware Social Studies Content Standards can be found at:  
[www.doe.state.de.us/Standards/Social\\_studies/ss\\_toc.html](http://www.doe.state.de.us/Standards/Social_studies/ss_toc.html)

### **Civics**

Government  
Politics  
Citizenship  
Participation

### **Economics**

Microeconomics  
Macroeconomics  
Economic systems  
International trade

### **Geography**

Maps  
Environment  
Places  
Regions

### **History**

Chronology  
Analysis  
Interpretation  
Content

Follow this link to the English Language Arts Content Standards:  
[www.doe.state.de.us/Standards/English/ELA\\_toc.html](http://www.doe.state.de.us/Standards/English/ELA_toc.html)

### **Language Arts**

Written and Oral Communication  
Reading: Construct, examine and extend meaning of text  
Research: Access, organize and evaluate information  
Reading: Connecting Self to Society and Culture

# Activities, projects, lessons

## Grades 4-5: Citizen Kids

**Conducting group interviews:** Older elementary-aged children have limited access to adults outside their family and may not be at ease communicating with unfamiliar adults. For this reason, many of the projects for this cluster suggest group interviews, which is not typical oral history methodology but which will introduce students to the process. The students should be able to draft their own questions and help to plan an orderly question and answer session. For example, each student might have the opportunity to go to the interviewers “desk,” read one question and practice being a good listener. The teacher can arrange for the media specialist or other volunteer to record the interview (video or audio) so that it can be reviewed later. Students should be expected to take good notes and be able to write and/or discuss the responses. They can also write letters to make contact with the interview candidate and write thank you letters afterward.

**Focused/At home interviews:** If students in this cluster have access to recording devices, they can be encouraged to learn to use them under adult supervision. If not, interviews at home should be a combination of conversation and written notes taken by students. This makes the interview process somewhat awkward, but since familiar adults should be the subjects they should have more patience with the process. The adult to first answer the question orally, then be prepared to repeat certain details depending on which information the student feels is most important and interesting. Students should collect copies of photographs or objects that help to illustrate what they have learned.

**Safety Note:** At this age level, group interviews and interviews with family members are emphasized. Adult guidance is both essential for a quality educational experience and necessary for the child’s protection. Older elementary-aged children should be supervised if they are in close contact with an adult outside of their immediate family, but should be able to communicate their questions to the interviewee without much help if they have planned the interview well. Teachers should emphasize safety points to parents or guardians in regard to any related assignments to be completed outside of school.

## **Invite someone from each branch of government—judicial, legislative and executive—to your class to conduct a “group” interview.**

Students should have already reviewed the structure of the U.S. and State government and learned the basic function of each of the three branches. Identify a representative from each branch to invite to class and research their background and position. Alternatively, the “interviews” may be arranged as part of a visit to the state government complex in Dover. Students should be able to brainstorm a list of questions as a group

Variation: The interview may be conducted in written format. Students can draft a paragraph stating their focus or theme, along with their list of questions and a letter of request, and then send them to the politician (the teacher should get the politician’s agreement to participate in advance). The responses can be divided and then read and analyzed in directed small groups.

Activity extension: After the interview, students can write an essay on the three branches of government using specific examples from the interviews as well as the background research done in class.

### **Topics and questions:**

For this grade cluster, questions should focus on the structures of government as described in the US and State constitutions and the responsibilities and powers of the judicial, legislative and executive branches. Questions ideally will reveal that governments must follow rules in regard to how it treats citizens and that citizens have responsibilities as well.

- \*Tell us about your responsibilities as a judge, legislator, member of executive branch?
- \*How do you work with the other branches of government?
- \*What do you think is your most important job and/or biggest contribution to the state as a leader?
- \*What are some of the limitations to your powers (or what can’t you do)?
- \*In what ways are you responsible to the average citizen in our state?
- \*What is the most difficult part of your job and why?

**Standards:** Social Studies-Civics; Social Studies-History; Language Arts-Written and Oral Communication; Language Arts-Research; Language Arts-Reading, Connecting Self to Society; Language arts-Reading, Examine meaning of text.

## Students will “interview” parents or family members at home to discover their views on citizenship.

Students should review the Bill of Rights and have a working knowledge of the document. Beginning with the “Citizenship Interview” below, students can interview an adult at home about civic responsibility. The group might make predictions about what the adults’ responses will be or the students might answer the questions themselves as if they were adult citizens. For this grade cluster, particular emphasis can be placed on how adults put these rights and responsibilities into action in community organizations and by asking about situations where they feel their rights were protected (or not).

Once the responses are collected, graph the data as a class. Discuss which rights, responsibilities, and privileges are most important to the adults. Review the rules students have at home, why these are important to families and why following rules and laws is important. Talk about ways that adults work together in groups and share responsibility. How can students work together? Consider working on a cooperative class project.

### Questions and topics:

For this grade cluster, questions should focus on discovering the responsibilities, rights and privileges that adult Americans enjoy. They should also explore ways that adults work together in groups to accomplish goals.

\*What is the most important right you have as an American citizen (pick one) as promised in the Bill of Rights?

\_\_\_ Freedom to practice your own religion

\_\_\_ Freedom of speech (including freedom of press and freedom of assembly)

\_\_\_ Right to privacy (no illegal searches or seizures)

\_\_\_ Right to fair and speedy trial and legal representation (lawyer)

\_\_\_ Right to bear arms (own a gun)

\*On a scale from 1 to 10, how important is it to you to respect other people’s opinions and property and to have them respect yours?

\*On a scale from 1 to 10, how important to you is your responsibility to vote in elections?

\*On a scale from 1 to 10, how important to you are the privileges you have as a citizen, such as driving?

\*On a scale from 1 to 10, how important to you is following the laws and rules set by the government?

\*What do you feel are 3 to 5 of the most important rules we have at home? Why is each of these important to our family?

\*Name one group you participate in and its main purpose or goal (example: volunteer fire department, sports league, church group)? What is your job in this group? How do all of the members of the group work together and each take responsibility for what needs to be done?

\*Tell me about a time when one of your basic rights was protected or a time when you feel they were not.

**Standards:** Social Studies-Civics; Language Arts-Written and Oral Communication; Language Arts-Research; Language Arts-Reading, Connecting Self to Society

# **Students will interview an older person they know about the family economy in the past.**

Adults enjoy talking about their childhood and how they participated in the family economy as children and adolescents. Any adult would be a good interview candidate, but older adults generally had childhood experiences that are significantly different from those of children today. Most families, especially those that faced economic challenges, devised creative ways to make ends meet and made difficult choices about money. Students will explore these activities and choices in order to begin to understand their own place in the family economy.

Activity extension: As a class, graph or chart the information collected by several students and analyze to see what choices and priorities various families might have had in common.

## **Topics and questions:**

- \*Tell me about what your parents did for a living when you were a child.
- \*Were either of them ever out of work or did they change jobs? How did your family act when that happened?
- \*How did your family fill its basic needs for food, clothing and a place to live? What kinds of things did your family do without at times?
- \*Describe how your mother helped to provide the family with what they needed (even if she didn't work for money).
- \*Tell me about how you and your brothers/sisters helped the family out, whether by earning money or working around the house.
- \*How was the way your family lived and provided for their needs different or similar to your neighbors? To others in the rest of your family?

**Standards:** Social Studies-Economics; Social Studies-History; Language Arts-Research; Language Arts-Written and Oral Communication

## **Invite a local business person from a company that makes something or provides an essential service, preferably on a national or international level, to be interviewed by the class.**

The business should offer products or services that children can understand. The ideal business person would represent a company that has been in business for 20 or more years, and which has evolved to meet different economic demands. In this way, the class can ask “then and now” questions that will show difference in business practices over time. Encourage the interview candidate to bring products, print advertising copy/catalogs, or even multimedia information along with them. A map would be useful when discussing trade regionally and internationally. These resources will enable the interview to take on a “show and tell” format for the group interview.

Variation: The class could invite two individuals from the same or similar business, one a current employee and one a longtime or perhaps retired employee.

### **Topics and questions:**

- \*Tell us about what your company/business makes or what they provide for customers?
- \*What made your product or service valuable to customers in the past? Now?
- \*How did your company/business get bigger (or smaller) over the years and why did that happen?
- \*Tell us about a time when demand for your product/service slowed down and how your company responded.
- \*How do you use banks and other financial services in the management of your business?
- \*How has the government been involved in regulating your business and/or assisting it during difficult times? What are the advantages and disadvantages?
- \*What are the biggest challenges in getting your product to the people who need it?
- \*Tell us about how your products or services are used in other places in the United States. In the rest of the world?
- \*How does your company/business use people or resources from other places?
- \*How has your business had an economic impact on other countries/places?

**Standards:** Social Studies-Economics; Social Studies-History; Social Studies-Geography; Language Arts-Research; Language Arts-Written and Oral Communication

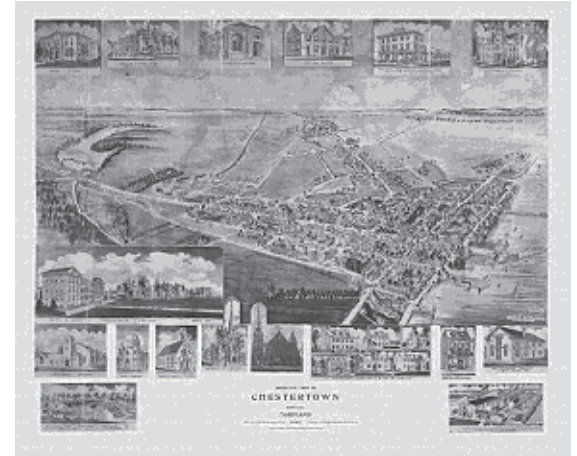
## Invite a long-time resident to talk about changes to the community and create mental maps of the community then and now.

In contrast to the preparation for this interview for grades K-3, students should not review current and historic maps in advance. Instead, challenge students to create a current map of their community—including landmarks, buildings and businesses—from memory. Conduct the interview using the questions below and those developed by the class. Ask the students to create a “historic” map of the community based on the information they learn.

Then, review current maps of the area and old maps (local historical societies may have old maps that include names of property owners and types of businesses).

Compare their mental maps to the actual maps and discuss the differences. Special attention should be given in the interview to physical changes to the landscape and land use.

Activity extension: At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, “Birds-Eye” view maps were very popular. These were overhead depictions of streets and buildings with larger drawings of important buildings and places around the border. Each student in the class could be asked to draw one of several buildings (from the past or present) to create their own “Birds-Eye” interpretation of their town.



### Topics and questions:

- \* When did you live here and how old were you?
- \* Tell us what life was like in our community back then.
- \*What did the houses, buildings and streets look like? Transportation?
- \*What kinds of businesses were here?
- \*Where did families live, work and go to school? What did you do for fun?
- \*Were there people from different cultures living here then?
- \*Name some places and buildings that used to be here and are not any more (and when)?
- \*Was there more or less open space (for farming or just undeveloped) when you lived here? Why did that change?
- \*Was there a town water supply then? Sewer? Streetlights? Sidewalks? Paved roads?

**Standards:** Social Studies-Geography; Social Studies-History; Language Arts-Research; Language Arts-Written and Oral Communication

## **Students will conduct a focused interview with an adult family member or friend about what characterizes Delaware, “Delmarva,” Wilmington, Philadelphia, etc. as a place or region.**

Most people identify places and regions with certain characteristics that relate to culture, the land/environment, business/industry, density of settlement, etc. This identity can create strong emotional ties as well. Students should choose an adult with a strong connection with a region or place, such as those suggested above, because of a family history or extended residence in that area. Students should ask questions that help them understand the characteristics of region that make them unique and special to their family member. They should also ask to see photographs and objects that represent the place. The personal opinions and experiences derived from the interview can be combined with facts students will research about the region (such as population, topography, climate, land development, primary businesses, etc.).

Activity extension: The information gathered in these interviews could be incorporated into a special day or series of days, “What makes Delaware unique.” Students could bring in an object or photograph for a “show and tell,” create a picture or poster display to share their information, or share a local tradition with the class. Plan a visit to a site or museum that focuses on local or regional history.

### **Topics and questions:**

- \*Why do you feel so connected with Delaware?
- \*What do you think makes Delaware unique (such as food, land, places, businesses, traditions)?
- \*What one place do you think most represents Delaware? Tell me why and describe it.
- \*Tell me about the kinds of people who live in Delaware?
- \*How has Delaware changed since you lived here? Is it still the same place you remember and do you think it will be when I am an adult? Why or why not?
- \*What makes Delaware different from the surrounding regions?
- \*Show me any pictures or objects you might have that represent that place and tell me about them.

**Standards:** Social Studies-Geography; Social Studies-History; Language Arts-Research; Language Arts-Written and Oral Communication

## **Interview a family member or close friend about what they think is the “most important” time in their life. It could be a single day, an event, a certain age, or a time span they think back on as significant.**

Finding out who, what, where, when, why and how is an important part of this project, but the interviewee’s opinion and why they feel that way are what will make this interview unique. To prepare for the interview, students should ask an adult, “What was the most important time in your life?” After some thought, the adult should give a simple answer, such as: my childhood, my wedding day, the day you were born, my time as a soldier, my college years, the day I participated in \_\_\_\_\_, when I met \_\_\_\_\_. Then, the student may take some time in class or with another adult to think about good follow up questions

This project is driven by the person rather than the questions and is more in keeping with a traditional oral history than many of the group interviews suggested above. It can potentially be very interesting and fun. To help prepare students for the interview, you could practice good listening skills or teach them to write down a word that helps them remember something they want to ask more about. The end result of the project might be a poster project, collage or picture that students can interpret for their classmates.

Variation: A person involved in a key historical event that the class is studying may be invited for a group interview. Students can compare the first-person account to other documents (newspaper accounts, photographs, history books).

### **Topics and questions:**

The following general questions are only a guideline for the kinds of information students should try to discover:

- \*How old were you at this time?
- \*Where did it happen?
- \*Who were the other people who were there?
- \*Tell me about what happened. Help me to know what it was like to be there.
- \*Why do you feel this time is so important to you now?
- \*What do you think kids can learn from what happened to you?
- \*How many times have you talked about this before?
- \*Can you show me any pictures or other things that help you remember this time in your life?

**Standards:** Social Studies-History; Language Arts-Research; Language Arts-Written and Oral Communication