



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

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

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 6-8: Students in Society

Interview techniques: Students in this grade cluster should be able to plan and conduct their interviews independently with some classroom instruction in advance. For this reason, these project ideas target content areas that may be covered from the Social Studies and Language Arts curriculum rather than specific questions. Students have the opportunity to gather information directly from knowledgeable individuals rather than from books alone, providing a more meaningful educational experience.

If practical, students should be encouraged to record their interviews using audio technology as an introduction to traditional oral history methodology. Schools could make inexpensive voice recorders available for student use. Training in the use of this equipment and transferring it to a computer could be provided by the school's media specialist, along with the use of software programs and digital photography. Many youth may already have some of these skills and their own equipment. A shortened presentation of the how-to section of this website, "Finding First State Stories" would provide a useful introduction to these techniques. This age group should be able to conduct a simple single-interview project, including background research, interviewee contact, question development, interview/conversation, collecting documentary materials, follow up and indexing, on their own.

Safety Note: Students in this grade cluster are more independent, have good communication and technology skills, and are capable of conducting a good interview on their own. Nevertheless, it is still advisable for teachers and parents to be involved in the child's contact with adults outside their immediate family. While interviews in public places are generally discouraged because of distractions and noise, these may be suitable meeting places for this age group if students plan to take notes instead of or in addition to a voice recording. Alternatively, a quiet but not isolated room in a library or at school may be a good choice for audio or video recording. Students also could conduct an interview at home with an adult present (but not participating) or an adult could travel to the interviewee's residence and provide supervision (without participating). Teachers should emphasize these safety points to students and parents as a part of any assignment to be completed outside of school.

Interview a state legislator, prosecutor, or police officer about the role of government in making and enforcing laws and regulations.

Depending on the interview subject, the emphasis may be more on regulations and taxes or the enforcement and prosecution of law breakers. Students should develop questions that attempt to discover the interaction between the various branches of government (judicial, legislative and executive) as well as the structure and function of local, state and federal government.

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

Interview an individual who was involved in the civil rights movement or someone who has advocated for the rights of minorities.

Students should have an understanding of the concept of majority rule and the protections provided to all Americans (including minorities) described in documents such as the Declaration of Independence, US Constitution, Bill of Rights and the Federalist Papers. Questions should focus on the arguments that the interviewee and others in their group used to advocate for their rights, the actions that they took and the results that they achieved. Personal viewpoints and opinions on the status of minority right then and now are valid and revealing.

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

Interview someone who has served in the military, worked in public service or someone who has served jury duty for an important or complicated trial.

Students should question the interview subject about why they chose to exercise this responsibility and the sacrifices it required; how they feel their participation as a citizen was important to protecting the rights of Americans (such as political freedom, economic freedom and property rights, protection of privileges); and how they perceive individuals who do not exercise their responsibilities as citizens. Students could write a persuasive essay based on their interview to encourage other teenagers to exercise their responsibilities when they are able.

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

Select a current political issue that is being debated locally or nationally. Create a questionnaire and interview family and neighbors about the issue.

Students should research the position of politicians or appointed officials who have a stake in the issue to get an idea of the various “sides” of the debate. They should also research and ask questions about any related legal or regulatory issues, as well as moral and ethical concerns. As a final product, the student might choose to advocate a specific viewpoint in a letter to the editor in the local newspaper or share all opinions with an appropriate political leader.

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

Interview a local small business owner about how government regulation and financial issues affect how their business is conducted.

In addition to basic information about the business, students should ask about the burden of taxes, fees and licensing on doing business, in addition to specific regulations regarding employees and the product/service they sell. The role of financial planning and banking should be explored also. These factors should play into a discussion of how the business functions for better or worse in a market economy (costs, supply and demand, price levels). Based on what they learn, students might analyze whether this type of business is one they might consider operating, and why or why not.

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

Interview an older family member about their role in the family economy when they were a teenager.

Students should ask about whether teenagers in the past held jobs and whether all of their earnings were kept; how they paid for recreation and other nonessential items and what their level of responsibility was to the rest of the family. The cost of various items and the wants of teenagers then versus now should also factor into the conversation. Students could argue teenagers had it better then or now based on their interview.

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

Interview a representative of a business involved in international trade.

Ask about the ways in which the business is dependent on businesses, people and resources from other countries and how trade benefits those countries. What is the role and impact of U.S. government policy and regulation on how they conduct business? How do foreign policies and regulations affect how they conduct business? Students may conduct outside research to fully understand the differences between our economy and the economy of the other countries discussed and present a comparative analysis.

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

Interview a biologist, natural resources or wildlife expert about changes to the environment.

Students may begin by asking questions about the impact of human activity and development on the land in recent history and the projected impact into the future. How have these changes impacted the use of the natural environment for economic reasons and as a place to live? How do these changes compare to changes over the course of hundreds and thousands of years? Based on this interview, students could create a map with overlays or series of maps that show changes to the land and uses of the land over time.

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

Interview an adult about what characterizes “Delmarva” as a place or region.

Many people still strongly identify with this region as a distinct culture. Consider the commonalities that might have created this identity, including geography, economic activity, traditions, political ideology, religion, language/dialect. Students should ask the interview subject whether this identity is still intact and, if not, what has changed the perception. Students should use background research to discover why the region may have had its own unique identity historically.

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

Analyze an interview from the Federal Writers Project’s “Slave Narratives,” one of the earliest forms of oral history.

Compare the information contained in these written interviews to other historic documents, history texts and artifacts on the Civil War and Reconstruction time period. Consider the fact that these oral interviews were edited and the authors used literary techniques to dramatize and possibly change/distort the information given by the subjects. Evaluate the narratives’ usefulness as a source of history. The interviews can be found online: *Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938*, Library of Congress, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

Standards: Social Studies-History; Language Arts-Research; Language Arts-Written and Oral Communication; Language Arts-Reading, Examine meaning of text