



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 9-12: Adolescents in America

Interview techniques: Students in this grade cluster should be expected to plan and conduct their interviews and create final projects independently. Teachers—in cooperation with the school media specialist—may choose to provide some in-class instruction in oral history methodology using the how-to section of this website, “Finding First State Stories” or advise students to print and study the PDF version of this guide. At this level, it will be essential that student consider their end-product when planning their project. The emphasis for this highest grade cluster is on the entire process of oral history documentation rather than just the subject matter. In addition to the project ideas developed from the Social Studies and Language Arts curriculum, students and teacher can review the “Purposeful Projects” section for ideas targeted at local researchers and organizations. Many classroom projects can be developed into presentations for media and technology competitions, History Day competitions, or projects for Eagle Scout or Girl Scout achievements. See below for some ideas for interpretive presentations.

Presentation ideas: (provide link to “Finding First State Stories” or repeat here)

Interactive exhibition: A museum-type exhibition, small or large, would include text panels with interpretive text, photos and graphics, along with written or push-button audio excerpts from interviews. Interactive components invite the viewer to match faces with stories or create a vignette setting that offers an interpretive window onto the topic.

Interpretive booklet or “newspaper:” Similar in content to a traditional research paper, this booklet would incorporate photographs, documents, side articles and graphics for a more visually interesting presentation. A variation on this idea would be to create a fake newspaper or news magazine focused on the chosen topic, making use of quotations, photographs and other various materials.

Dramatic presentation or reenactment: Using the actual words of an interviewee, the presenter adopts one or more personas in order to present a dramatic interpretation.

Photo essay: This kind of interpretation could combine the words of interviewees with a series of photographs that document the places, events, and people that are the focus of the presentation.

Non-traditional research paper: An ordinary research paper can become extraordinary if it adopts a “behind-the-scenes” approach to a major event or a “window” to interpreting an aspect of culture or everyday life. A storytelling approach might enable a topic often studied at a distance to “come to life.”

Video documentary: This format would compile excerpts from your videotaped interviews, commentary and footage of printed materials to create a thematic documentary.

PowerPoint presentation: In this type of presentation, slides of documentary materials and photographs could be used along with interpretive text and audio excerpts supporting a thesis.

Radio broadcast: This NPR-type audio presentation would include introductory information and interpretive commentary, along with appropriate portions of your audio interviews.

Safety Note: Students in this grade cluster are generally quite independent, have good communication and technology skills, and are capable of conducting a good interview on their own. Older students can make contact with interview subjects and provide their own transportation to the interview. Nevertheless, it is still advisable for teachers and parents to be involved in the child’s contact with adults outside their immediate family. At minimum, a responsible adult should be aware of the location, time and duration of an interview, and approve of the interview subject and the interview site. Teachers should emphasize safety considerations to students point as part of any assignment to be completed outside of school.

Interview a prosecutor or defense attorney regarding a specific case/ cases involving a controversial point of law.

Question them about the process of bringing the case to court, including the roles of law enforcement, prosecutors, lawyers, judges and jury. Ask them to discuss their argument in terms of the rights of society, the victim and the accused. What role did political or public pressure play in the case? How did legal tradition, precedent and interpretation of the law factor into this case?

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

Interview a public official, social worker, and/or social activist regarding a socio-economic issue such as homelessness.

The interview should attempt to get a complete picture of the government, nonprofit and charitable agencies involved in a complex issue as well as the laws, regulations and rights of the individuals in question. Students should pose challenging questions about the responsibility of government and individual responsibility and the impact of factors such as mental illness, drug abuse, budget constraints and community support/opposition. Explore the root causes of the issue.

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

Interview a number of adults on a controversial Supreme Court decision.

Create a standard set of questions and conduct a series of short interviews designed to learn individuals' opinions on the issue and the perceived impact they feel it has on them and the community. Students should expect personal experience to factor into the formation of opinions and should take time to fully explore this when asking life history questions. Religion, ethnicity, age, political affiliation, residence and other factors should also be noted and considered.

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

Interview a parent or another adult about the impact of government on their daily life.

Include topics such as services (health, education, libraries, public works, parks), protections (police, fire, regulatory agencies, legal system), regulations (permits, tax assessment), etc. Which functions do they perceive as most essential and non essential? How do they feel about their rights and responsibilities as a citizen to the government? A thorough list of questions will be essential to a good interview.

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

Interview the local leader of a political organization.

Most communities have a number of civic or politically affiliated organizations that take an active role in elections and public policy. By questioning a member of one of these organizations about their purpose, activities, and the people they serve, students can learn how the American political system works. Suggested groups include local Democratic/ Republican Central Committees, League of Women Voters, political action committees, public policy commissions, representatives of third political parties, and citizens' groups.

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

Interview a family member about their economic history.

Consider historical events such as the Great Depression, World War II, the post-war boom, and the economic recessions and boom periods of recent years in your questions. Other factors to consider would be inflation, unemployment, business cycles and government monetary policies. Personal economic circumstances such as job choice, education, marriage and children and retirement also play a role.

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? How do these policies affect American workers? 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 or hold a mock debate.

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

Interview peers online about what life is like for teenagers in other cultures throughout the world.

Individual students or an entire class can initiate a cultural exchange with a group of peers in another country or through the international school system (where students have often lived in several countries along with the country of their birth/nationality). Interviews can take place via live video, audio, or instant messaging. Students should ask questions that allow them have a full understanding of the community, including the natural environment, economic activity, the diverse aspects of culture, politics, and attitudes toward America. History and basic geographical data can be obtained from background research. A revealing comparison of the cultures can be presented in a variety of formats.

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

Interview a person who has been involved in a pivotal event, movement or time in American history.

This could focus on local, regional or national history, but should involve a topic that was documented in newspapers and other sources and included in history texts. As students conduct background research and develop their questions, they have the potential to reveal new information or insights about a historical event. On their other hand, their research should enable them to critically examine their interview and analyze the merits of their oral history against other primary and secondary sources.

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

Interview a person about everyday life during a particular time in American history.

Students will identify an interview subject and ask to interview them about daily life during a particular time period. The interview could be general or could focus on work, family, leisure activities or local events. In preparation for the interview, students should conduct research to have an understanding of events and other historical factors which may have affected daily life (including local history). Questions can focus on the individual's reaction to these events, but should also reveal ordinary activities of everyday people. This should reveal another layer or perspective on history that may not be found in standard texts.

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