



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 K-3: Children and the Community

Conducting group interviews: Young children have limited access to adults outside their family and most are not completely comfortable 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. Teachers should plan to conduct the question and answer session in an orderly fashion. 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 who are able to read and write could be asked to take “notes” or write answers next to the prepared list of questions.

Focused/At home interviews: Students in this cluster will not have access to recording devices nor will they be able to use them on their own. For this reason, interviews at home should be a combination of conversation and written responses from adults. Take-home questions should ask the adult to first answer the question orally, then write down a summary of the answer (or assist an older child with writing it down themselves). The students can choose which part of the response they feel is most important and interesting. Students may 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. Young children always should be supervised if they are in close contact with an adult outside of their immediate family and will likely need adult assistance to conduct a meaningful interview. Teachers should emphasize this point to parents or guardians for any related assignments to be completed outside of school.

Invite a local or state representative or an appointed official to your class to conduct a “group” interview.

Teachers may present a brief biography of the politician. Then, each class member can suggest ideas of what the focus of the interview could be, based on the interests of the students and/or the expertise of the politician. Take a vote to see which topic or topic(s) will be the focus. The students can then create an “invitation” with the date and time of the interview, and the general subject of the interview.

Brainstorm a list of questions based on the topic, not forgetting the basic life and work history questions. The teacher can develop an outline of these questions to see which areas may have been left out.

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, each child is given the assignment to write a paragraph (or list reasons) as to whether they would like to hold an elected or appointed office and why or why not based upon what they have learned.

Topics and questions:

For this grade cluster, questions should focus on the process of selecting leaders through election and the responsibility elected officials have to the people. Questions ideally will reveal that the idea that elected and appointed officials have authority, demonstrate responsibility and give/receive respect is a foundation of American society.

- *How does a person get elected to office? How is running for office different now than it was in the past?
- *What is the difference between being appointed to office and being elected?
- *After the people elect you, what do they expect?
- *Do you always do what people want? Why or why not?
- *How is what people expect from an appointed official different from an elected official?

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 and chart the results as a class.

A set of simple questions called a “Citizenship Interview” will be given to and developed by students to ask an adult at home. Review and discuss the questions in class. 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.

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.

Citizenship Interview:

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?

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 young children can understand or which can be shown and/or explained to them easily. The ideal business person would represent a company that has been in business for 20 or more years, and which has perhaps 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?
- *How does your company/business make money? Sales for cash money? Trading goods or services? Other?
- *In what ways (such as media advertising) does your company/business tell customers about what you sell or do? What way works the best? Has it changed over time?
- *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?

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

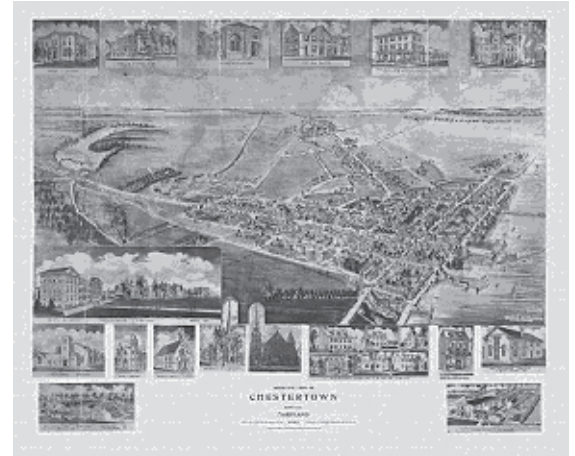
Invite a long-time resident of an area most students are familiar with, such as the town where their school is located, to talk about changes to the community.

Prepare for the interview by reviewing current and historic maps of the area. Local historical societies may have old maps that include names of property owners and types of businesses that will allow students to see in general how the “landscape” of their community has changed. Help them to find buildings and landmarks that still exist and note what buildings were not there in the past. This information may also help them to develop questions for the interview. Ask the resident (or another person or a local historical society) if there are photographs that can be shared with the class.

Activity extension: At the turn of the 19th-20th 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)?
- *Why do you think our community changed?



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

Students will conduct a focused interview with a friend or family member born in a different country or a close connection with their ethnic/cultural background.

Most families identify in some way with their ethnic or cultural background, or a place that their family is from—even within the United States. This identity might be associated with one culture (ex. Italian), many cultures represented within a city (such as Philadelphia), or a unique region (ex. Delmarva Peninsula). In any case, this identity is closely associated with place and creates strong emotions. Students should ask questions that help them understand the aspects of the culture and/or region that make them unique and special to their family member. They should also ask to see photographs and objects that represent the culture and place.

Activity extension: The information gathered in this interview could be incorporated into a family tree project or project exploring cultures around the world. Students could bring in an object or photograph for a “show and tell,” create a picture or poster display to share their information, dress in traditional costume, perform a song or dance, or share some ethnic food for a “culture day.”

Topics and questions:

- *What culture or place does your family feel most connected with and why?
- *What traditions do you still practice that are from that culture (such as holiday traditions, food, music)?
- *Tell me in detail about the traditions that are most important to you.
- *How long has it been since your family lived there/how long have they lived there?
- *Describe what the place is/was like, including the land, buildings, people, and businesses (or how was it described to you by parents or grandparents).
- *Why did your family leave (or why have they stayed)?
- *How is your home now different from that place/culture (or how has it changed over the years)?
- *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