

## 5 Writing Oral History

Interviewing someone who has experienced an historical event or era can provide students with an interesting first-hand account of the past. Older generations, whether they are parents, family friends, neighbors, or community members can often bring new and varied perspectives to students' understanding.

### **Instructions:**

1. Students first learn about an event or era they are interested in. This means reading as much as possible to best understand the context of the time.
2. Next, students generate a variety of general and specific questions. General questions might include such phrases as:  
  
"Tell me about your experience..."  
  
"How did you feel about...?"  
  
"What do you recall about...?"
3. Instructions for the students: When the subject of the interview is first contacted, the interviewee should be told the purpose of the interview and the topics to be discussed. Consider offering to send questions to the subject prior to the interview and also ask if the subject has any documentation, artifacts, or pictures that might assist with the research and interview. If the interview is to be recorded, permission should be obtained prior to the interview. Set a time, date, and place for the interview.
4. Remind students to be polite and listen carefully when conducting their interviews. They can ask for examples and stories as illustrations. If recording the interview, they need to take notes to help construct their interpretation while they listen to the recording.
5. Write a thank you note to the interviewee.
6. In writing the interview, first introduce the interviewee and provide background information to the readers including the setting, date, and place of the interview. Organize the interview either as a continuous narrative describing events in chronological order or by subject, or in a question-answer format.
7. After the interview, students should write a paragraph reflecting on what they have learned from the interview, including what surprised or interested them the most.