

Immigration Oral History Project

USE RUBRIC on RCAMPUS

“Civilization is a stream with banks. The stream is sometimes filled with blood from people killing, stealing, shouting and doing things historians usually record, while on the banks, unnoticed, people build homes, make love, raise children, sing songs, write poetry, and even whittle statues. The story of civilization is the story of what happened on the banks. Historians are pessimists because they ignore the banks for the river.”

-Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*

Introduction: Much of what we study in history is what is considered "traditional" history; that is, it is the history of major political figures, important historical events, and significant historical trends. Now it's your turn to help create the history that occurs on the banks of the river—the story of everyday people, the story of immigrants. History is not an objective account of the past to be indelibly carved into the brains of American citizens; rather, history is an ever-changing palette of events as people react to the contexts and cultures they find themselves immersed in. By considering the lives and thoughts of less politically and socially prominent individuals, students have the opportunity to re-examine their own beliefs and assumptions about contemporary American life.

What is an Oral History?

Oral histories are created when one person (the interviewer) interviews another person (the interviewee) about a specific time period in that person's life or a specific topic they can recall. The interviewer takes the interviewee's responses and creates a text of the interviewee's words told through the point of view of the interviewee. This is not an exact transcript of what the interviewee says. The interviewer must edit the transcript—moving parts around, taking parts out, and even adding words here and there (with the interviewee's permission). The final piece of writing should capture the voice and spirit of the interviewee.

Steps to Completing the Oral History

- Select a person you wish to interview
- Obtain their permission
- Set up an interview time and location; set aside more than enough time
- Do some research on the place that where the immigrant is from
- Create questions to guide your interview
- If possible, record the interview
- Write the answers to the questions clearly in order

The overall goal is to have an organized, descriptive story of this person's experience, in his/her own words. Do not add many words of your own, other than those needed for transitions, or to combine sentences, or other grammatical needs.

Guiding Questions for Immigration Oral History Interview

Old Country

- 1) Where did you come from and when did you come?
- 2) How old were you at that time?
- 3) What was the reason you came to the United States?
- 4) What were the conditions in the country when you left?
- 5) Who decided you would come here? Did you want to leave?
- 6) How did others in your home country treat you when they knew you were leaving?
- 7) What was your old country like? (customs, climate, food, childhood/special memories, language)
- 8) Did you leave anyone or anything behind? If so, would you like to tell me more about it?
- 9) Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your old country?

Journey

- 10) What was it like traveling to the US?
- 11) How did you get here? (Car/boat/train/plane/other way) How long did it take?
- 12) Do you have any interesting stories that happened while you were traveling?
- 13) Did you travel with anyone and if so, who?
- 14) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the journey?

Arrival

- 15) Where did you go when you first arrived and what was it like? How did it make you feel?
- 16) Was something unusual or a special event going on when you first came?
- 17) Where did you finally settle down and why?
- 18) What did you think the US would be like? Was it what you expected? Why or why not?
- 19) Did you know anyone here, family or friends, and if so whom?
- 20) Did you know English? If not, how did you learn it and adjust to the new language?
- 21) Was it easy or difficult to find a job?
- 22) Is there anything else you would like to say about your early days in your new country?

New Country

- 23) What are the big differences between your old country and the new country? (house, food, climate, housing, what you owned, clothing, manners, etc.)
- 24) Were you treated differently here than from your old country? If so, how?
- 25) Are you treated any differently today than from when you first arrived??
- 26) Have you been back to your home country? If so, what was that like? Did anything change?
- 27) What do you keep of your home country? Do you still know and use the language, and special customs, foods, manners, others things like that?
- 28) What do you miss about your old country?
- 29) What were your hopes for yourself (and/or your family) when you came here?
- 30) Were your expectations of the US met? Was your dream of the US the same as the reality?

Papers must have:

1" margins

Font of 12 point Times New Roman

Name, Teacher, Class, and Date in the upper left hand corner.

Your last name and page number in the upper right hand corner (header) of every page

See this [SAMPLE](#) and these [RULES](#)

Works Cited Page formatted like the sample above.

Rules for your sources are:

How to cite a personal interview:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/09/>

How to cite a website:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/08/>

If your paper is written by hand you need to follow all rules above that apply to your hand-written paper (obviously the font type and size do not apply). You also must still submit via Turnitin.com using a computer at home or at school.

Requirements for Immigration Oral History Narrative

- Text must be 2-3 pages (12 pt font, Times New Roman, 1" margins, double-spaced)
- Your introduction should show some knowledge/understanding of the person's country of origin

Oral History: Q&A Sample and Passage

Q: So you really weren't that excited to be coming here?

A: Well, no, not really. I mean, think about it. Would you be? I mean, you live in one place your whole life and then suddenly your parents tell you, "Look, we've decided it's best for all of us to move to America. Your father has a better job and we'll be much happier there."

Q: Why didn't you want to come here?

A: Well, all of my friends were in Taipei. They were all that mattered to me. I mean you spend most of your younger years in school, so it only makes sense that you'd miss your friends when you have to move away so far. Uh, I guess I might've been somewhat selfish. I mean my father did get a better job when he got here, but for the rest of us in my family it really was difficult. I think I was 12 at the time . . . yeah, 12. I started in middle school here, yeah, and it was a pretty awful experience. It's not like middle school is normally a great time in your life anyway, is it? But coming here at that time and not knowing English all that well, well that certainly didn't make it any easier for me. I was lonely here.

Q: Why were you lonely?

A: Uh, it took me a long time to get to know people. In my school I really didn't know anyone else who was from Taiwan. Most everyone else had either grown up here or they were from Mexico, yeah mostly they spoke Spanish or English. But no one spoke Cantonese —that was the only language I knew then.

Interview Transformed into an Oral History - (shortened version)

No, I wasn't all that excited to be coming here. I mean, think about it. Would you be? I mean, you live in one place your whole life and then suddenly your parents tell you, "Look, we've decided it's best for all of us to move to America. Your father has a better job and we'll be much happier there." At that time, all of my friends were in Taipei. They were all that mattered to me. You spend most of your younger years in school, so it only makes sense that you'd miss your friends when you have to move away so far. I guess I might've been somewhat selfish. My father did get a better job when he got here, but for the rest of us in my family it really was difficult.

I think I was 12 at the time . . . yeah, 12. I started in middle school here and it was a pretty awful experience. It's not like middle school is normally a great time in your life anyway, is it? But coming here at that time and not knowing English all that well certainly didn't make it any easier for me. I was lonely here. It took me a long time to get to know people. In my school I really didn't know anyone else who was from Taiwan. Most everyone else had either grown up here or they were from Mexico, and mostly they spoke Spanish or English. But no one spoke Cantonese —that was the only language I knew then.

