

## #MyArmenianStory Guide for Teachers

*Oral History Brings History to Life and Life to History*

### What?

Students conduct and transcribe an oral history interview with a family or community member and deposit it with the USC Institute of Armenian Studies #MyArmenianStory digital archive. They then synthesize, analyze, and present the information through a creative medium of their choice, while reflecting on the process and outcome.

### Who?

Upper Middle School – High school – College

### Estimated Time

Several weeks – one semester. This project consists of several components which can be used together as a semester long project or implemented independently as standalone units.

### Standards

Common Core Social Studies/Armenian Language Arts Standards

### Why?

Oral history provides students of all ages with meaningful opportunities to engage with their family and community and to intimately learn about the experiences worldwide. Oral history brings the Social Studies and Armenian Studies curricula to life as students realize that they are surrounded by, and are part of, the creation of history. The process for conducting oral history interviews is just as important because it serves as a conduit for intergenerational bonding, discovery, and connection.

### Oral history...

- fosters interactive, student-centered, and affective teaching
- supports cognitive development & Common Core in a creative and motivational fashion
- provides context of a personal biography to a random set of statistics, dates, and facts
- engages students in identifying and interpreting primary historical sources
- serves as a link from the immediate present to the immediate past in a very understandable and human way, helping students develop empathy



- engages students in analysis of cause and effect relationships and multiple causation
- develops strong language skills by raising sociolinguistic awareness and highlighting the importance of language as a tool for communication
- encourages students to consider multiple perspectives and competing historical narratives
- encourages historical (and higher-level) thinking as students develop questioning and interviewing strategies; make judgments about the point of view of the person(s) interviewed; and analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the information from the interview

## How?

Any part of this guide can be adapted to fit the social studies, history, or Armenian Studies curriculum.

### Part I: What is Oral History?

1. Ask students to write down a response to the question: **What is history?** This could be in one word, quick responses, or a paragraph response to a writing prompt. Have students share responses in a class discussion. See where students have similar ideas about what defines history.
2. Follow up questions: **How do we know what happened in the past? Who writes history?**
  - a. There are many ways we know about what happened in the past (journals, objects, legal documents, photos, letters). Discuss the students' answers and how they relate to what we know about the past.
  - b. Point out that historians look at a lot of different topics when they study history. They might study politics, wars, big national events, important things we might see on the news. But, historians also study the everyday lives and activities of "regular" people.
  - c. For upper high school grades and college students, the discussion can focus on historiography and notions of what makes good, proper history.
3. All of these ways we know what happened in the past are considered primary sources. **Where do you usually go if you want to learn something?** (common answers: books, internet, Wikipedia) These are all considered secondary sources. Primary sources are first-hand accounts of an event or moment in time and are in their original form. Secondary sources are books or articles that use a variety of primary sources to provide commentary on an event, but these are created by people who do not have first-hand knowledge of the event.
4. One way we know about the past is by doing oral history. What is oral history?

Oral history is the systematic collection of living people's testimony about their own experiences. Oral history is not folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor. Oral historians attempt to verify their findings, analyze them, and place them in an accurate historical context. Oral historians are also concerned with storage of their findings for use by later scholars.

## Part II: Why is oral history important? How does it add to history?

5. Discuss as a class why oral history is important. Emphasize that it is important to understand **people's stories and their experiences** related to an event.

We all have stories to tell, stories we have lived from the inside out. We give our experiences an order. We organize the memories of our lives into stories. Oral history listens to these stories. Historians currently recognize that everyday memories of everyday people, not just the rich and famous, have historical importance. If we do not collect and preserve those memories, then one day they will disappear forever.

6. **Oral history accounts add the life to the facts.** And they give voice to people, regular people, who often aren't involved in writing history.
7. Review publicly available segments from the #MyArmenianStory archive and follow up with the following questions: ***After reviewing the example, why do you think oral history is important? How does it add to historical accounts? Do you understand the facts differently after listening to the oral history account?*** Sometimes statistics and numbers are difficult to relate to. But we might be able to relate to an account of someone's life as told in their own words.

## Part III: Doing Oral History

8. Explain to the class that they will be conducting some of **their own oral histories** to learn about the **Armenian experience**.
9. Advise students to think of the person they wish to interview. Students may want to brainstorm with their parents or caregiver to determine someone they would be able to interview, such as a grandparent, neighbor, or family friend.
10. Have the student determine what they hope to discover about the person's life. In **preparation for the interview**, the student should research the following:
  - a. Historical and significant events
  - b. Social and economic conditions
  - c. Culture and other interesting information about the time
  - d. Appropriate linguistic skills based on which language(s) they'll be conducting the interview
11. Have students review the **#MyArmenianStory Guidelines, Interview Guides, and FAQs** in detail.
12. Review **best practices in interviewing**; watch/listen to several sample oral history recordings; conduct mock interviews in class.
13. Students should set up an appointment with the interviewee. They should be prepared with recording equipment and the question guides.
14. Students can ask the interviewee if they have any letters, photographs, or objects that they would like to share and use these for their final product in class.

15. Students may be asked to transcribe the interview. The process of transcription offers new insights on the content in a written medium.

#### Part IV: Analysis and Reflection

16. Students are given a choice in the **creative medium** (interpretive paper, PPT presentation, newspaper article, digital history videos, podcast, portfolio, etc.) with which they would like to present their findings and analysis of their interview. The **analysis** may focus on:

- a. A summary of their findings
- b. What were some of the most interesting things they learned
- c. What they found out that was surprising
- d. What the stories of the interviewee tell us about a certain time period or event
  - i. Perhaps discuss how what they learned from the interview conflicts with what they know or what they have learned about in school
- e. Further questions they would ask if they could go back to learn more and clarify some points

17. After the whole class presents their findings, you may want to **discuss and reflect** on some themes, such as:

- a. the constant movement and migration
- b. the process of adaptation and integration
- c. the common threads and unique elements of the various interviews
- d. intersectionality of identities
- e. the value of oral histories as primary resources

18. Students should carry out a series of **reflections** throughout the process at various stages. The reflections can cover sociocultural, sociolinguistic, and historical observations. For example, students can journal about their expectations before the interview, the experience during the interview, and how their oral history interview reflected or changed their thinking about central themes. Encourage students to compare and contrast themes, perspectives, and experiences based on the oral history projects.

19. **Share** students' oral history projects with the larger school community by organizing an oral history viewing/listening event.

**Teaching guide developed by the USC Institute of Armenian Studies.**

**The following sources were drawn on to create the teaching guide:**

Step By Step Guide to Oral History, by Judith Moyer

[http://dohistory.org/on\\_your\\_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html](http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html)

Teaching Tolerance, Oral History Project

<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/student-tasks/do-something/oral-history-project>