

Oral Histories--The Stories of Life

Summary

This lesson plan introduces students to the life story as a form of documentary expression. Students are introduced to a variety of life stories from members of minority communities in Utah.

Time Frame

5 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Small Groups

Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning, Communication, Character, Social & Civic Responsibility

Materials

Whole lemons--1 per group of 3 or 4 students

Large brown paper grocery bag

copies of the oral history stories of William Price and Frances Leggroan Fleming from Missing Stories--1 each per student

single copy of the interview with Howard Browne, Sr., from Missing Stories

Background for Teachers

Teachers should have an understanding of the process of oral history and how oral history tells the story of an individual's life. Teachers should be familiar with the life stories used in this lesson plan, ones taken from the publication, Missing Stories.

Student Prior Knowledge

no prior student knowledge is needed.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

Understand and recognize the unique characteristics of individuals.

Understand that an oral history describes an individual's life.

Know and understand that when we read oral histories we learn things about the individual and the time in which he/she lived. These stories help us to appreciate another human being.

Read, discuss, and interpret oral histories.

Understand that conflicts are a part of human life that involve a problem or a struggle.

Complete a story map.

Participate in a class discussion on how individuals dealt with and resolved conflicts they faced in their lives, and compare and apply this to their own lives.

(optional/for more advanced students) Create an oral history from a real-life interview.

Instructional Procedures

Lesson One:

Introductory Activity: "Lemon Tales"

Seat students in groups of three or four. Begin with an individual free-write on the topic: "What would

you write about if you were writing your autobiography?" Be sure students understand the purpose of an autobiography. Allow students time to share their work.

Give each group a lemon. Ask each individual to answer the following questions:

What are lemons used for?

Describe your group's lemon without using "yellow" or "sour."

What does your lemon smell like? Feel like?

If you were a lemon, where would you have been born?

If you were a lemon, what experiences might you have had before arriving in this classroom?

If you were a lemon, how might those experiences shape how you see yourself?

If you were a lemon, how did your experiences shape your characteristics, or vice versa?

Working with their groups students will name their lemon, look it over carefully, then place it in a brown paper bag. After all the lemons are collected, a representative from each group will be asked to identify and retrieve its lemon from those in the bag.

Each student will explain how they knew it was their lemon. The intended purpose is to elicit the concept that, although each lemon is similar to other lemons, each has unique markings and characteristics that make it an individual.

Using their notes and group discussion as a framework, the groups will write a brief life history of their lemon. Students should be prepared to share these with the class.

Lesson Two: Oral Histories

Begin by telling the class that just like every lemon, every individual has a story to tell. Ask the class to respond to the question, "How do people share their life stories?" Elicit responses of biography, autobiography, interviews, etc. Talk about similarities and differences of each.

Show the class the book Missing Stories and explain that the book is a collection of oral histories of the minority peoples of Utah. Ask, "What would you expect to find when reading this book?"

Present the literary concepts of "setting", "conflict", and "resolution".

As a class read the oral history of Howard Browne Jr. (pp 81-87) from Missing Stories.

After reading the story decide as a class the following:

What was the setting for the story (both in time and place).

What were the conflicts/struggles in the story?

What were the resolutions of the conflicts, how and why did they happen?

Lesson Three and Four Begin class by reading the story of Frances Leggroan Fleming (pp 70-73). As the story is read, emphasize (and point out) the setting, conflict and resolution in the narrative. Use the [story map](#) to help students follow the story and track the narrative elements.

Do the same with the reading of William Price's story (pp 91-95).

The stories can be read on the same day or on two separate days. Students can fill out the story maps as they read the stories or after they have finished. The most important thing to do is to discuss with the students the narrative elements of the story so that they understand how an oral history is conducted and what can be learned from sharing stories. Take time in these two lessons to make sure each student understands the narrative elements of storytelling.

Activity Five

There are two activities the class can engage in this last lesson: 1. Students can create an oral history of an unknown person from looking at his/her picture. OR 2. Students can interview an older family member to create an oral history of their own. Before engaging either project, discuss with students the question they would ask when conducting an oral history. Comprise a list of questions as a class and these will be the questions to either ask their subject (friend or family member) or to answer about their subject (looking at a picture).

Strategies for Diverse Learners

This lesson plan is adaptable for students of various levels. More advanced students can conduct an

oral history project and conduct an oral history interview and report to the class their findings.

To help students conduct oral histories with friends/family or community members use the lesson plan (on this site) "Our Family Stories: What Can We Learn From Them?" as a model.

Bibliography

Kelen, L.G, & Stone, E.H. (2000). Missing Stories: An Oral History of Ethnic Minority Groups in Utah. Utah State University Press. Logan, UT.

Authors

[Mary Gould](#)

[JOANN PRICE](#)