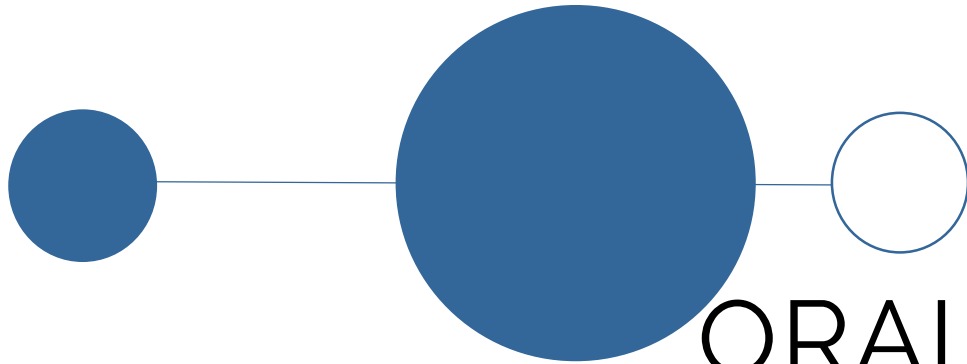


IRISH VOICES OUR STORIES SHARED

LEARNING RESOURCE

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
PREPARATION





“People were in tears... tricolours flying over Trafalgar square.”

ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEW

PREPARATION

CLASSROOM WORKSHOP

OBJECTIVE

Students will research a cultural event and conduct an interview about the event. They will prepare appropriate questions for the interview and practice asking interview questions with their classmates.

PREPARATION

In the Irish Voices project we interviewed a wide range of people who had experienced the St. Patrick's Day Parade in London. This ranged from politicians, organisers, voluntary committee members, performers and people who simply came along to enjoy the Parade.

For your Oral History project you could similarly consider different people you may want to interview. These are a couple of options for this workshop:

Activity Option A: Interview a member of your local community who plays a key role in a cultural event. The community member can be invited into the class.

The first option enables the class to deepen their understanding of a specific cultural event. Identify a member of the community with experience to share and invite them to visit the group. Students can research into the background of the person as well as the event.

ORAL HISTORY

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Activity Option B: Students may interview a family member or friend

The second option, allows students to capture testimonies that are less likely to be noted in official records. It will build a collage of different cultural practices and events across the different students and their families.

For Activity Option A – ask the interviewee to supply biographical information in advance, including anything on their role in the community. This could include photographs, public information on their role and work, quotes, newspaper reports. Students can then be split into two groups. The first group has a task, as described above and the second group may take the biographical information and write a profile of that person.

For Activity Option B – students can undertake their own independent research about the cultural event their family member will be speaking about. However, it is preferable to leave questioning the family member until the interview itself.

ACTIVITY TIME : 1-2 HOURS

ACTIVITY ONE PRACTICE INTERVIEWING

Initially the students will interview each other on a general theme, to experience both composing and answering questions.

- Decide within the class on a theme that students will all easily be able to talk about e.g. favourite hobbies, holidays, school, or you could keep to the theme of cultural and family celebrations or events.
- Once you have identified a theme, list a number of sub-themes. For example, if you chose the theme: school. Your sub-themes might include: favourite subjects, extracurricular activities, friendships and so forth.
- Ask students to choose one of the sub-themes and to individually compose around 6-10 questions, including both general and more specific questions about that sub-theme.
- Divide the class into groups of 3, with each student taking it in turns to play the roles of interviewer, interviewee and observer. You may wish to have a set time for each interview.
- Ask the students to think about what questions they ask, and how effective the questions were. How did it feel to be the interviewee? Leave a couple of minutes after each interview for discussion, including for the observer to provide feedback on what was successful and anything they think could have been done differently. Then the group of 3 change roles.
- Share any feedback across the whole class group.

ACTIVITY TWO RESEARCHING FOR INTERVIEW

Explain that the students will be interviewing a community member or someone they know personally about their experiences of a cultural event and how it has changed over time.

- Split the students into groups of 4-5 and give each group source materials about the event they will be interviewing on e.g. text books, news reports, photographs, websites.
- Ask each group to write a short research report about the event using the headings: who, what, when, where and why?

ACTIVITY THREE PREPARING & PRACTICING

Students use the research developed in the previous activity to generate interview questions. They will practice asking the questions and using equipment to record an interview.

- Plan the practicalities of the interview. Where will the interview take place? How will you make the interviewee comfortable? What resources do you need?
- How will you record the interview? There are many different options – audio or video recorder, MP3 player, mobile phone, tablet or just take notes. Ensure that students are familiar with the selected equipment and know how to check battery life, recorder memory, create a record and most importantly, safely save and backup their interview.
- Students should identify a sub-theme and compile a list of questions that they will ask the interviewee. Ask students to think carefully about what they want to find out: what are the gaps in the documentary information they researched? Consider the order of questions. Remember to start with a general question: “Can you tell me about...?”, then to follow on with more specific questions.
- Listen to an interview introduction from the [Oral Histories](#) on the Irish Voices website. The interview starts with introductions and some general background information on the interviewee. Include this in your interview plan.
- In small groups, practice asking and recording the interview questions. Are the students confident with the recording equipment and asking questions? Did they listen to the answers and ask follow up questions? Did they maintain eye contact?



“They had to be political, they had to be celebratory, they had to be everything.”

Start with an open question about the theme, such as: “Tell me about your first St. Patrick’s Day Parade”. Then, listen to what the interviewer talks about and use follow up questions to add depth to the theme. Having a list of questions provides a safety net of knowing what you will be asking. However, avoid using it as a script, as you may not listen so intently.

Think about what kinds of questions might encourage descriptions, comments or opinions. Can you describe the event? What did it sound like? Look like? What sort of person was he?

Tell the interviewee at the beginning that you are interested in stories as well as the facts.

Ensuring you are familiar with the recording equipment means that your attention is free to focus on the interviewee and on active listening. Even if students know the equipment, it is worth practicing for an interview situation.

Suggest that students ask if the interviewee is willing to share additional information such as photographs, programmes, artefacts, letters, prints of emails, documents, etc. These can often be excellent prompts to descriptions in the interview. On the Irish Voices website, listen to [Jacqui discuss a photograph with Annie Whyte](#) or listen to [John Connolly describe the Parade banners](#) that he keeps safe at his home.

TIPS

&

TEACHERS

NOTES

USEFUL RESOURCES

IRISH VOICES AUDIO CLIPS

The introductions for the interviews with [Terry Stewart, Sean Hutton or Michael Sills](#)

The audio clips under the following themes headings on the Irish Voices website relate to interview questions using photographs and objects:

Theme: [Culture –Floats - Annie Whyte](#), Theme: [Culture-Traditions – John Connolly](#)

BOOKS

Thompson, Paul (2000), *The Voice of the Past*, Oxford University Press

WEB RESOURCES

The Oral History Society website – Advice / Getting Started, Legal and Ethical www.ohs.org.uk

Heritage Lottery Fund – Oral History <http://www.hlf.org.uk/oral-history>

University of Leicester – Online training resource for community historian/ Oral History section www.le.ac.uk/departments/history/outreach/besh/contents

The East Midlands Oral History Archive – Information sheets <http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/training/infosheet.html>

The Oral History Association's principles and best practices in oral history www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/



ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WORKSHEET

EVENT RESEARCH REPORT

Who

What

When

Where

Why

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW QUESTION LIST

QUESTIONS

MY NOTES

1.	
2.	
3.	
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