

***Detroit 67: Perspectives***  
**Class Oral History Project**  
Grades 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>



Image from Detroit Historical Society Digital Collection

**Purpose:** Class project to be used to introduce students to oral history and how to conduct an oral history interview. This lesson may be used independently in class, or in conjunction with a class visit to the *Detroit 67: Perspectives* exhibition on display until 2020.

**Objective:** Students will understand what oral history is and why it is important to historical record. Students will select people to interview, develop appropriate questions to the topic, conduct interviews, and analyze the results of the interview.

**Grade Levels:** Middle School—High School

### **INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURES:**

#### **Introduction: What is Oral History?**

1. Ask students to define, ‘*What is history?*’ This could be in one word, quick responses, or a paragraph response to a writing prompt. Share responses in class discussion, point out similarities about what defines history.

2. Follow up questions:

a. *How do we know what happened in the past?*

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. *When you want to learn about a particular topic, where do you source your information?*

Common answers: books, internet, Google, newspaper. Explain the use of primary and secondary sources. For example, the person who wrote a book on Detroit history used primary sources to get his or her information. These primary sources can include journals, photographs, letters, birth certificates, census, tax records, objects and even oral histories!

**Activity:** Have students review and complete *Primary & Secondary Sources Worksheet* (attached)

3. So, what is oral history?

#### **Background Information**

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. In oral history projects, an interviewee recalls an event for an interviewer who records the recollections and creates a historical record. Oral history, when done, gives one a sense of accomplishment. Collecting oral history, we have a sense of catching and holding something valuable from the receding tide of the past. Oral history depends upon human memory and the spoken word. The means of collection can vary from taking notes by hand to elaborate electronic aural and video recordings.

Source (Oral History Background info):

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

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

4. Discuss why oral history is important. Emphasize that it is important to understand people's stories and their experiences related to an event.

### **Background Information**

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. Oral history is the systematic collection of living people's testimony about their own experiences. 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, those stories, then one day they will disappear forever.

Source (Oral History Background info):

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

5. **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.

**Example:** During the unrest in 1967, Tonia Blanding, 4, was shot on the corner of 12th and Euclid. National Guardsmen had fired at her home after hearing sniper fire from a nearby apartment building.

a. Same fact, but this is an oral history account that gives a personal face to recorded fact:

"I was in on the incident where the little girl was killed. She was four years old. We were come up on 12th Street, and we're being sniped. We had sniped shots fired at us. So we ducked in the driveway, Gino, my partner, was across the street... and I hear this truck coming, and I could hear this noise, tremendous noise, and I thought it was garbage trucks. They were pushing cars out of the street, you know, to open the streets up because they were abandoning cars and everything else. And it was a tank... Boy, when that guy starts shootin' out that window again [mimics sound of tank, gun shots]. Pow! The whole corner of that building came off. The windows were flying all over, the road was flying all over. And then the guy says, 'commence firing,' and then another bunch of rounds went off, 50 caliber, not 25 or 30 caliber. Fifty caliber, and it ruined the whole corner of the building, and that's when that little girl was laying on the porch, killed. Four years old.."

-- Richard Viecegli, recalling the sniping and tanks in Detroit during 1967.

Source: Detroit 1967 Oral History Archive, Richard Viecegli, Recorded 8/12/2016

<http://detroit1967.detroithistorical.org/items/show/402>

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?

### Part III: Doing Oral History

6. Explain to the class that they will be conducting some of their own oral histories to learn about a specific time-period of Detroit history or perhaps participate in the Detroit 67 oral history project. Depending on the topic of study in your class, identify a time period or topic you would like your students to focus on. Topics could also be geared to local Detroit history.

#### Possible American History topics

WWII

Life in the 1950s, 60s, or 70s

Life in Rural/Urban America

Vietnam or Korea War

Life on the Home Front

Stadiums)

#### Possible Detroit History topics

Sports (Tigers, Red Wings, Lions)

Life at Home

Food (cultural or ethnic foods)

Transportation (Plane, Train, Car)

Entertainment (Concert Venues,

School (Middle, High School, Colleges)

Auto Workers

Detroit in 1967

Detroit Neighborhoods

Detroit Immigrant Populations

7. Advise students to think of a person they wish to interview (35 years or older). 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.

*NOTE:* Some students may not have relatives in the area or may not be close to their neighbors, and some students may be new to the country. In this case, you may want to identify a list of possible people in the community who might be willing to be interviewed. Other teachers in the school may be able to help identify some sources.

8. Have the students 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 noteworthy events,
- b. Social and economic conditions,
- c. Culture and other interesting information about the time.

**See attached interview field kit.**

9. Students should establish 3-4 informational questions, such as full name, age, date of birth, occupation, where they lived, etc. They should develop 4-5 questions based on events of the time period and 3-4 questions regarding what their personal and family life was like as they were growing up. Additional questions are also welcomed and may come up during the interview.

**See attached interview field kit.**

*NOTE:* It is very important that students phrase their questions, so they get a descriptive answer versus a "yes" or "no" answer.

10. Have students develop their interview questions ahead of time and bring them to class for review.

- a. Also hold “mock” interviews between students to practice interview skills and questioning before the actual interview occurs.

11. Students should set up an appointment with their interviewee. They should be prepared to record the interview and take notes. Students need to obtain permission to do both— a “Interview Release Form” provides all the vital information for doing this. Students should make two copies, one for the interviewee and one for the interviewer.

NOTE: See **attached interview field kit** for equipment information and sample interview release forms.

#### **Part IV: Analysis**

12. Students should transcribe their interview in Q & A format, so they will have direct quotes. If possible or applicable, students may also write an essay report which will include direct quotes from the oral history, and will include some analysis of the students’ findings.

- a. Analysis may focus on condensing of facts, such as,
  - i. A summary of their findings,
  - ii. What were some of the most interesting things they learned
  - iii. What they found out that was surprising
  - iv. What the stories of the interviewee tell us about that time period

Students may perhaps learn information in their interview that conflicts with what they know or what they have learned in school...discuss with students where they should go to find more information.

13. As a class discuss some of the technical aspects of doing an oral history.

- a. What questions were effective and led to interesting answers and stories?

Which

questions weren’t as effective?

b. Was it hard to keep interview subjects on the topic? What strategies worked to pull the person back to the focus of the interview?

- c. What good follow-up questions did you ask?

d. What might have made the interview more productive?

*Lesson Plan developed by the  
Education Department at the Detroit Historical Society.*

The following sources were drawn on to create the lesson plan:

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)

Detroit 1967 Oral History Archive, Richard Viecegli, Recorded 8/12/2016  
<http://detroit1967.detroithistorical.org/items/show/402>

### **RESOURCES**

For further information on doing oral history:  
[http://dohistory.org/on\\_your\\_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html](http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html)

#### ***Examples of oral history projects online:***

- Rutgers Oral History Archive <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/>
- Library of Congress, American Memory, Life Histories from the Federal Writers' Project <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaintro/exhome.html>
- Archives of American Art, Oral History Collections  
<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/>



## What are Primary and Secondary Sources?

Primary sources: Materials that were created at the time the event occurred or materials created by those who experienced the event. These materials include letters, speeches, diaries, newspaper articles from the time period, interviews with people who were around when the event occurred, documents, photographs, and artifacts such as tools, weapons, clothing from the time period.

Secondary sources: Materials that were created after the event. These materials might tell you about an event, person, time or place, but they were created by someone not from the time period. Secondary sources can include history books, school textbooks, encyclopedias, History magazines, websites, and documentaries.

---

Test your knowledge! Are these primary or secondary sources? Circle the correct answer.

1. A biography of Theodore Roosevelt written in 2001

Primary      Secondary

2. Photographs of Civil War soldiers in their camp

Primary      Secondary

3. Letters written by Abraham Lincoln

Primary      Secondary

4. A documentary on PBS about World War II

Primary      Secondary

5. A newspaper article from 1912 about the sinking of the Titanic

Primary      Secondary

6. A speech given by Martin Luther King

Primary      Secondary

7. A magazine article about the War of 1812

Primary      Secondary

8. An interview you had with a Vietnam War veteran

Primary      Secondary

9. Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography

Primary      Secondary

10. A newspaper article from 1991 about the 50th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack

Primary      Secondary





## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT FIELD KIT

### Conducting and Preserving Interviews



## PREPARING FOR AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Although it seems like sitting down and recording an interview is a “no-brainer,” taking the time to prepare will ensure the experience is positive for both you and the interviewee. Here are recommended steps and tips for preparing for an oral history interview.

- **Prepare for each interview by knowing as much as you can about the person you’ll be interviewing.** At a minimum, take some time to learn about the history in the time period or topic you chose, so you can shape your questions to better capture the history your interviewee lived.
- **Set up the appointment for the interview.** Confirm the appointment and keep the appointment. Arrange to conduct the interview in a place and time most comfortable for the interviewee, away from noise and distractions.
- **Know your recording equipment thoroughly.** Make sure your equipment is in working order before you arrive at the interview. Test it again on site, with the interviewee and you both speaking on the recording to be sure you are both clearly audible. Bring extra batteries, memory cards, etc.
- **Review the list of questions for the interview.**
  - The simplest questions, like biographical data, should be at the beginning and the most complex or sensitive questions at the end.
  - Ask simply structured, single-topic questions. Compound questions (strings of questions linked together with “and”) are harder to answer.
  - Ask open-ended questions rather than questions that can be answered by yes or no. You want to encourage the fullest response possible to each question.
  - Do not ask leading questions. For example, you should not ask, “Do you feel that President Nixon was extremely secretive?” Instead, try: “What type of attributes did you remember President Nixon having?”
- **Send the interviewee a list of your questions ahead of time:**
  - The point is to give the interviewee time before the interview to think about people and events that may not have occurred to him/her in a long time.
  - Be sure to explain that the questions are only a framework, and that other questions may occur to both of you during the interview.
- **Be aware of your personal appearance before you go to the interview.** Your attire tells the interviewee something about how you view him/her and the interview itself.
  - Casual clothes can suggest a more informal atmosphere, but they can also suggest a lack of care or respect to some interviewees; businesslike clothes can

suggest a more formal, purposeful atmosphere, but can intimidate some interviewees.

- Try to match your appearance to what will best put the interviewee at ease with you and the interview process.

- **Know your ethical responsibilities as an interviewer.**

- Be prepared to answer any questions the interviewee may have about the interview or the research project.
- Be familiar with the information in the "informed consent" form that explains the interview process and the rights and responsibilities of both parties. The interviewee should sign the informed consent form before beginning the interview. Have two copies on hand so you can leave one with the interviewee.

***Be prepared to comply with any, and all, restrictions the interviewee requires. If you cannot comply, do not conduct the interview.***

- Have the interviewee review and sign the "Interviewee Release Form" that states what will be done with the interview, etc. Have two copies on hand so you can leave one with the interviewee.

- **Let the interviewee suggest the interview location**, whether that is their home or office or another location. Make sure the place chosen is quiet and away from outside distractions. Background noise can destroy an interview by making the recording unintelligible.
- Recording equipment can be as complex as professional grade digital recorders or as simple as voice memo applications on smart phones. ***Please use the highest-quality recording equipment available to you.*** No matter what equipment you use, be sure that you record in the highest quality available on the device.

## CONDUCTING AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

As an interviewer, your role is to put the interviewee at ease. You will also have to make sure your recording equipment is working. Here are some tips for making the most out of your interview:

- **If the oral history is audio only, ask if you can photograph the interviewee** so you can include the image with the interview for a more complete historical record.
- **Place the audio recorder and microphone between you and your subject on a solid surface.**
  - Do not hold the microphone in your hand; use a microphone stand or a clip-on mic
  - Be aware that moving objects on the table, shuffling papers or fidgeting (if the microphone is on the person) can cause noises that obscure the conversation.
- **Some people are nervous about being recorded.**
  - Be sure the interviewee understands before the meeting that you wish to record the interview.
  - Let your interviewee hear or see the playback when you test the equipment.
  - Never start recording until the interviewee is ready to begin, and never record without that person's knowledge.
- **Start your recorded interview with a statement of the names of yourself and your interviewee(s), the date and the location.** This helps put the interviewee at ease with being recorded and gets the basic information about your subject up front in the interview.
- **Focus on the interviewee, and give the machine only the minimum attention necessary to be sure it is recording smoothly.**
  - Do not turn off the recording during an interview unless the interviewee asks you to, or the interviewee is called away (by a phone call, for example).
  - The only other time to turn off the recorder would be if the interviewee becomes upset (for example, becomes tearful remembering the death of a close family member) and needs a moment to regain composure.
- **Speak at a slow pace, and speak clearly.**
- **After you ask a question, stop and wait for the answer, even if you have to sit in silence for several seconds.** Interviewees often need several moments to think about the questions you ask. Give them quiet time; do not feel you need to leap in right away with a rephrased or different question. The silence is not really as long as it feels!

- **Once the answer comes, do not cut off or talk over an interviewee.** Some people do like to go on and on, but let them talk to the end of their strand of thought and wait for an opening patiently. Cutting them off gives the impression that what they're saying isn't important to you, or that you are hurrying through the interview.
- **When you are audio recording, verify verbally when people make gestures or point out something.** For example: "The fish was this big." Interviewer: "About eighteen inches." Or "The bandstand was over there." Interviewer: "Across the street by the pond."
- **Keep alert for cues from the interviewee that he/she will expand on a topic if you let them know you want to hear it.** For example, if an interviewee says, "Oh, that wasn't much of a problem, although I can think of several times where it was," it is a cue to say, "Would you like to tell me about those times?" This not only shows you are listening and enhances rapport with the interviewee; it can also give you good material the interviewee won't volunteer otherwise.
- **Keep alert for clues that the interviewee is uncomfortable with a question or line of questioning.** This is more often clued in by body language than verbally. Let the interviewee know before the interview that he/she has the right at any time to refuse to answer a question, and that it will not offend you.
- **Be alert to your own responses to an interviewee's remarks, taking care not to sound judgmental, impatient or disrespectful.** Even if you come away with nothing that you feel is of benefit to your project, you can consider any interview a success if you have maintained a positive, polite, professional stance throughout the interview.
- **Keep alert for signs that the interviewee is getting tired.** Interviewing is a tiring process; it is emotionally and intellectually challenging for both you and the interviewee. If the person is showing signs of weariness, it is better to stop. You can always reschedule and continue the interview another time.

## INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

Before you head out for your interview, use this checklist to ensure you have all the equipment and materials you need.

- ☐ Recording equipment
- ☐ Memory cards (if needed)
- ☐ Extra batteries/charger
- ☐ Microphone
- ☐ Table stand for microphone (if needed)
- ☐ Two copies of interview questions (one for you; one for interviewee)
- ☐ Two copies of the Informed Consent Form (one for the interviewee to sign and return to you; one for the interviewee to keep)
- ☐ Two copies of the Interviewee Release Form (one for the interviewee to sign and return to you; one for the interviewee to keep)
- ☐ A notebook or notepad (for taking notes, as needed)
- ☐ Pens (not pencils) for signing forms
- ☐ Contact information for interviewee (in case you get lost, run late, etc.)
- ☐ Address of interview location

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Each interview session will be unique. The following is an outline (not a script) to help guide you through the conversation. Tailor the questions towards your oral history topic or theme. Also, alter the questions as you and the interviewee see fit during the interview process.

- **Introduction**

- Begin the recording by stating the interviewers name and organizational affiliation (if any), the interviewee's full name, the date and the general location in which the interview is being conducted.
- Please do not disclose private information such as home addresses or phone numbers.

- **Biographical Details**

- Where and when were you born?
- Who are/were your parents and what are/were their occupations?
- Who are/were your siblings? Names and genders?
- Where did you live in July 1967? (street address or general intersection)?
- What were you doing in 1967 (working, a student, etc.)? What was your family doing that year?
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- **Geographical Details**

- What do you remember about Detroit in the mid-1960s?
- What was your community/neighborhood like?
- Where did your family shop?
- What did you do for entertainment?
- How would you describe the relationship between the people in your community/neighborhood and city government? The police?
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- **Topic Specific Questions**

- How did you first hear about the unrest that became the riots/rebellion/uprising?
- How did you and/or your family react during the event?
- Some people describe the event as a “riot,” while others refer to it as a “rebellion” or “uprising.” What term do you think best describes the unrest of July 1967?
- Do you have any particular moments or memories you would like to share?
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- **Reflections**

- How did your experiences during the unrest affect your life?
- What was the impact of the unrest of July 1967 on you, your family?
- What was the impact of the unrest of July 1967 on your neighborhood, the city?
- What message would you like to leave for future generations about your memories of Detroit before, during and after the unrest of July 1967?
- Is there anything you feel like we haven’t discussed, or should be added to this interview? If so, what?
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



## INTERVIEWEE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this project is to learn about the events of **[Name Topic/Theme]** from the many perspectives of the people who lived through them. Interviews are a significant part of this project. You were asked to be a part of this project because you are a person (or the child of a person) who was living at **[this particular time and place]**.

### Interview information

If you participate in this project:

- Your interview will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour.
- You will be asked questions about your background, your education, your career, your memories and your thoughts about **[Name Topic/Theme]**.
- Your interview will be audio or video recorded. A transcript will be made from the tape. You will be given a copy of the audio or video file and the transcript once it is complete.
- You will be asked to be photographed. You may choose not to be photographed.

### Your rights

- Your participation in this project is voluntary.
- You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.
- You may stop your participation at any time during the interview.
- Your contact information such as address and telephone will not be disclosed to the public.

Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to the use of my name.

Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to be photographed.

Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to the use of the audio and/or video and the full transcript in for the purposes of student research at **[name of schoool]** in **[name of city, state]**.

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and I understand it. I have been encouraged to ask questions and I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this student project and I have indicated above my choices for participation or not in the certain activities of this project. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this consent form.

Name: (Please print)			
Telephone:			
Address:			
Signature:		Date:	

## AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING LOG

Name of Contributor/Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Organization/School affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

Recording format (please check)

VIDEO type:

☐ DVD-R

☐ Flash Drive

☐ File Sharing Service

AUDIO type:

☐ CD-R or DVD-R

☐ Flash Drive

☐ File Sharing Service

DIGITAL FILE type

☐ WAV

☐ MPEG4/H.264

☐ DNxHD or DV

Estimated length of recording (in minutes) \_\_\_\_\_

Date of recording \_\_\_\_\_

Location of recording (City, State) \_\_\_\_\_

Please log the topics discussed in the interview in sequence. You may estimate the minute marks. Example below:

Minute Mark	Topics
1:00	introduction
2:30	grew up on Pingree Street
4:50	was a teenager in 1967
10:00	experience during the uprising
22:40	impact of the event on neighborhood/city
26:00	message for future generations

Minute Mark Topics


(add additional sheets as needed)

## TRANSCRIPTION TEMPLATE

[Name of Project] Oral History Project

[Organization Location]

**[Interviewee Name]**

Interviewed by

[Interviewer NAME]

[DATE]

[City, State]

Brief Biography: [SAMPLE:] Alee M. Darwish was born May 20, 1955 and grew up in Highland Park, MI where he lived during the 1967 disturbance. Darwish worked for the Ford Motor Company for thirty-two years. Darwish identifies as Muslim and Arab American. He currently lives in Dearborn, MI.

Interviewer: [SAMPLE:] Mohammad Beydoun is an undergraduate student at Wayne State University

Description: [Interviewee name] Interview

Access: No restrictions.

Abstract: [SAMPLE:] In this interview, Darwish discusses growing up in a multi-ethnic community in Highland Park and the causes and effects of the 1967 disturbance, including the closing of the Highland Park Ford Plant and race relations. He also discusses changes in the Muslim and Arab-American community in Detroit since the 1960s.

Cite As: [Interviewee Name] oral history interview, [date, location].

Subjects: [SAMPLES:] 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division—US Army  
1967 riot—Detroit—Michigan  
Arab American community—Detroit—Michigan

Added Author: [Interviewee last, first] interviewee.

Original Format: [SAMPLE] M4A on iPhone; converted to WAV; 1hr17min

Transcription: [YOUR NAME]

Transcript of interview conducted [DATE] with [INTERVIEWEE] in [CITY,  
STATE]

[Start of Track 1]

[INITIALS OF INTERVIEWEE:]

[INITIALS OF INTERVIEWER:]

[REPEAT INITIALS EACH TIME EACH PERSON SPEAKS]

[TIME STAMP END OF INTERVIEW ##:##]

[End of Track 1]