CONTEMPORARY JEWISH MUSEUM

Stories of Survival:

Creating and Exploring Oral Histories in the Classroom

A resource and how-to guide for teachers,

including simple user-friendly technology suggestions for student projects

Contents:

Introduction

Oral histories, first-person accounts, and interviews are primary sources—key material for teaching and learning about history through the firsthand experiences of those who participated in events of the past or present. Unlike the secondary sources we find in textbooks, primary sources offer first-person narratives and historical perspectives that can be examined, interpreted, and used as a tool for a more personal, empathetic, and enduring understanding of history. Using oral history projects in the classroom also offers opportunities for students to build self-awareness, as well as to develop speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills.

Over the last four years, the Contemporary Jewish Museum (CJM) has worked in close collaboration with StoryCorps, a national oral history project dedicated to capturing and sharing the stories of ordinary Americans. The two organizations have copresented several teacher workshops designed to help educators create and teach with oral histories in their classrooms. Throughout the course of our work together, we have heard from teachers that oral history projects—the stories of family members, immigrant histories, reports from victims of national disasters like Hurricane Katrina, and in particular, the firsthand accounts of survivors of the Holocaust and other genocides—play a significant role in teaching practice across both curricula and grade levels. Simultaneously, the CJM has been exploring the variety of ways technology—ranging from online gaming to Instagram to blogging—can be used as a teaching tool in both the Museum and the classroom setting. Expanding upon this theme, the CJM will launch the Jewish Education and Technology (JET) Institute beginning in summer 2013, a weeklong workshop that brings together Jewish day school teachers and technology thought-leaders to hone best-practices for integrating technology and teaching.

This Educator Resource brings together guidelines for using oral histories in the classroom as a teaching tool, lesson plans for teaching students to develop interview questions and techniques, and a how-to-guide for utilizing simple technology—particularly smart phones, iPads, or computers—to compile and share a class oral history project.

About the Contemporary Jewish Museum With the opening of its new building on June 8, 2008, the CJM ushered in a new chapter in its twenty-plus year history of engaging audiences and artists in exploring contemporary perspectives on Jewish culture, history, art, and ideas. The new facility, designed by internationally renowned architect Daniel Libeskind, is a lively center where people of all ages and backgrounds can gather to experience art, share diverse perspectives, and engage in hands-on activities. Inspired by the Hebrew phrase "*L'Chaim*" (To Life), the building is a physical embodiment of the CJM's mission to bring together tradition and innovation in an exploration of the Jewish experience in the twenty-first century. To learn more about the CJM, visit thecjm.org. For information on programs for schools and teachers, please contact schools@thecjm.org.

About StoryCorps StoryCorps is an independent nonprofit whose mission is to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives. Since 2003 StoryCorps has collected and archived more than 45,000 interviews with nearly 90,000 participants. Each conversation is recorded on a free CD to share, and is preserved at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. StoryCorps is one of the largest oral history projects of its kind, and millions listen to our weekly broadcasts on NPR's *Morning Edition* and on our Listen pages.

The Contemporary Jewish Museum is the first museum in the country to host a StoryCorps booth. [Make an interview reservation](#) to record your own stories at StoryCorps's recording booth on-site at the CJM. To contact StoryCorps San Francisco, email Natalia Fidelholtz at nfidelholtz@storycorps.org or Sophia Simon-Ortiz at ssimon-ortiz@storycorps.org, or call 415.655.7869.

Online Resources for Oral History Projects

While there are a multitude of online resources for oral history projects, below is a collection of some CJM and teacher favorites.

General Resources

Oral Histories in the Digital Age A project of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, this website offers resources for best practices, technical assistance, and essays and blog posts related to topics ranging from ethics to legal issues to microphones.

ohda.matrix.msu.edu

StoryCorps Resources

StoryCorps Education Site This web page offers free lesson plans and teacher resources for using oral histories in their classrooms. The page includes materials developed by StoryCorpsU, "an interactive, standards-based, college-readiness program that uses StoryCorps content and interviewing techniques to enhance students' skills in the areas of speaking, listening, writing, and critical thinking, while also fostering their self-awareness, social awareness and school connectedness." The "Introduction to StoryCorps" lesson plan helps students consider the power of stories as a teaching tool, and hones their question-development and interviewing skills.

StoryCorps Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Guide Developed to help individuals record interviews on their own, this guide provides useful tips for interview locations, techniques, and questions, as well as suggested technology for recording and sharing interviews.

StoryCorps Great Questions This comprehensive list of ideas for questions is sorted by topic, ranging from love to religion to war.

StoryCorps Listen Page This page archives audio clips aired on weekly NPR broadcasts; visitors can search by category in the menu on the right.

StoryCorps Animations Page This page provides links to StoryCorps interviews that have been turned into animated shorts.

Women's History Resources

Online Oral Histories from the Jewish Women's Archive This archive contains written stories and images of artifacts, featuring accounts from women activists, survivors of Hurricane Katrina, and region-specific stories. It also contains an option to contribute new oral histories.

jwa.org/oralhistory

In Our Own Voices: Conducting Life History Interviews with American Jewish Women, a How-to from the Jewish Women's Archive
This comprehensive resource contains a step-by-step guide for creating professional-quality interviews, introductory essays by leading scholars of Jewish women's history, hundreds of sample questions, and bibliographic resources on American Jewish women's history.

jwa.org/stories/how-to/guide

Holocaust-related Resources

The Shoah Foundation The University of Southern California's Institute for Visual History and Education, includes information on professional development for educators and offers comprehensive curricula available for purchase.

sfi.usc.edu/education

IWitness An online application from the Shoah Foundation, IWitness features more than 1,200 video testimonies and interactive, customizable lesson plans.

iwitness.usc.edu/SFI

Jewish Family and Children's Services Tauber Holocaust Library and Education Program This site provides access to an oral history archive, as well video and text-form testimonies, searchable by theme.

tauberholocaustlibrary.org/oralhistory/index.html

StoryCorps Clips related to the Holocaust:

> Eric Lamet remembers reuniting with his father in Italy, where Eric and his mother lived as Jewish refugees during WWII.

> Debbie Fisher remembers her father, an Auschwitz survivor.

> Yvonne Powell tells her son, Gordon, about the Jewish family that lived downstairs from her in Germany, during World War II.

Human Rights-related Resources

Voice of Witness An organization that illuminates human rights issues through oral history, Voice of Witness provides books of oral histories, and offers a curriculum guide as well as professional development services for teachers.

voiceofwitness.org/teachers

StoryCorps®

Interview Tips
Developed by StoryCorps San Francisco at the Contemporary Jewish Museum

- Use your question list, but remember these are just suggestions to get you started.

- "What" and "where" questions are good places to start.

- Ask open-ended questions, rather than yes-or-no questions.

- Use short sentences. Try not to combine two ideas. For example, it's best to ask, "How did you feel growing up during the Depression?" and then later, "Did you feel your family was struggling?"

- Trust your instincts. When you hear something that moves you, ask more questions. Emotional questions like "how did this make you feel?" or "what were you thinking when that happened" often elicit thoughtful responses. Don't be afraid to ask. Real moments are the best moments.

- Sometimes your storyteller will need "permission" to explore a certain topic; you can simply say, "Tell me more."

- Check in with the storyteller if he or she becomes overcome with emotion or seems uncomfortable talking about something—"I see that this is pretty upsetting to talk about. Do you want to take a break, or do you feel like continuing?"

- Avoid saying "uh huh" or interrupting. Instead, use visual cues like nodding your head to encourage the storyteller to keep going.

- Look at your storyteller's eyes, not the microphone. Stay interested and engaged.

- Be yourself; you can laugh or even cry with your storyteller.

- Be curious and honest and keep an open heart. Great things will happen.

StoryCorps®

Great Interview Questions for the Classroom List
Developed by StoryCorps San Francisco at the Contemporary Jewish Museum

Great Questions about Identity

How do you identify?

What community/communities do you identify with?

Can you remember when you first learned that you are _____? What was that like for you?

Do you know where your family came from? If yes, what do you know about that history?

Can you tell a story about what your parents' or your elders' experiences were like?

What kinds of cultural traditions do you observe in your family?

What efforts have you made to maintain your cultural traditions?

Great Questions about Your Community

Where did you grow up? What was it like?

Describe the community where you grew up/live now. How have those communities shaped you?

How long have you lived in _____?

How has it changed over those years?

What was it like when you grew up/first moved here?

What do you miss most about the way it used to be?

Who are some of the great characters from here?

Do you remember any great stories or legends about your town?

What aspects of your community have made the greatest impressions on you?

What political organization/s do you belong to?

What social organization/s do you belong to?

What cultural organization/s do you belong to?

What are the greatest challenges that you see in your community?

Great Questions about Social Movements

Can you talk about how your family or you participated in the _____ Movement?

How, if at all, has the _____ Movement affected you personally?

Can you talk about any barriers your parents or you have faced in education, housing, health, work, entertainment, shopping, or otherwise?

Do you have any stories that illustrate any barriers you currently face because of your identity? Do you have any stories about how things have changed for the better? Or any stories that show how things have not changed?

Are there any organizations or institutions that your family belonged to that you would like to talk about? Can you tell us stories about those traditions or institutions?

Are you satisfied with the education you have received? The resources you've had access to?

Great Questions about Working

What do you do for a living?

What did you think you were going to be when you grew up?

What lessons has your work life taught you?

Why do you do what you do for work?

What led you or inspired you to do the work you do?

If you could do anything now, what would you do? Why?

What are you proudest of in your work?

Step-by-Step Guides for Student Projects, Created by Classroom Teachers

What are the best tools for recording and sharing oral histories in the school setting? Three educators weigh in with their recommendations and how-to tips.

Rabbi Rebecca Milder, founding director, Jewish Enrichment Center in Hyde Park, IL, suggests using a smartphone and QR codes to record and share audio or video:

What is a QR code?
A QR code is a kind of barcode that's read by smartphones. You scan the QR code box, and the embedded code takes you straight to a website, video, map, or even just text. "QR" stands for "quick response," because the code is a quick way to bring people to the content you've created.

What do you need to make and use a QR code?
You can easily create content to embed in a QR code by using your own smartphone to make audio recordings, snap photos, or make videos. After you've created your content, you'll need a web-based home for your content, i.e., a site that holds your content and is the online "place" where the code takes people. A YouTube channel (it can be private) is great for videos, while a website (a no-cost blog is fine) works well for photos and audio recordings.

Once you've created your content and given it a home, you'll make a QR code. There are plenty of QR code generators available for free on the web—for example, qrstuff.com.

When folks are ready to access your content, they'll scan your QR code. To scan a QR code, they'll need a scanner app on their smartphones. Scanner apps can be downloaded from the app store/market on your smartphone (search for "scanner" or "QR reader"). Open the app, point the phone's camera to the QR box, and the scanner brings up the content you've created. When I put up QR codes in my building, I post an information page (like this one) nearby about how to download a scanner app.

What can you do with a smartphone and QR codes?
At the Jewish Enrichment Center, we used smartphones and QR codes to record stories about the Shema, a prayer that connects Jews across space and time. We collected stories from several generations of Jews, in print and as audio recordings. To share the stories with our community, we created a gallery-style installation of the stories with pictures of the storytellers. We included audio stories as QR codes. A picture of our installation can be seen here QR codes are an easy way to add richness to a story, by sharing pictures, maps, and audio stories.

Getting started
One of the easiest ways to record a story is to use the voice memo app on a smartphone. On an iPhone, the app is located in Utilities. Record your incredible story. Once you've made a recording, your iPhone will automatically sync the recording into iTunes, or you can upload the recording manually from within the voice memo app. Next, you'll most likely need to change the file from an MP4 format (which is standard for iTunes files) into an MP3 format (which many websites prefer for audio files). In order to change your file into an MP3 format, right-click on the file (in iTunes), then choose "Create MP3 Version." Now your file is ready to upload into a website or blog post.

If you've made a video, you can send the video directly to YouTube from your smartphone. You'll sign in to YouTube using a Gmail account, or you can open a new YouTube account. You can also upload a video from within the YouTube site: click on "Upload" and select your file, or drag and drop the file onto YouTube. Once your video is uploaded, you can choose to keep it unlisted, which means that only people who have the link will be able to see your video. To keep a video unlisted, click on "Edit," and under Privacy settings, choose "Unlisted."

Once your content has a home on the web, create a QR code for your content. The QR code generator will give you the option of downloading your new QR code, which I recommend, so that you can save the code on your computer. Paste the code into a Word file, or print it out separately so it can be incorporated into your visual display or print materials as you'd like.

Advantages to using a smartphone and QR codes
QR codes give you a chance to take a static picture on a wall and give it a voice: a family member speaking about a photo, or telling a story about a document, or a child explaining a project. In addition, QR codes let you add even more dimensions of a story—another picture, a second audio story, a video of a speaker—without taking up a lot more space. Furthermore, if you include QR codes on a handout, folks can access your content on their own schedule—a huge plus for busy families. Finally, since many people have smartphones, you don't have to be the sole creator of content; families can capture stories in the moment, then send them to you to share easily with the community through QR codes.

Noah Cohen, technology teacher, Wornick Jewish Day School in Foster City, CA, suggests using "VoiceThread:"

What is VoiceThread?
VoiceThread is a collaborative, web-based presentation tool. You can upload pictures, Power Points, or any file types and make comments on them with video, voice, text, and/or graphics. You can share what you have uploaded with anyone, and they can respond to what you have said, start a new line of comments, even review everyone else's responses. voicethread.com

What do you need to use VoiceThread?
You can create a free account, but it's limited to a total of 30 webcam minutes, or 75 MB of data. Additionally, purchase an educator's account, which allows for 50 student licenses and costs $15/month, or $79/year.

What can you do with VoiceThread?
Second grade students have used VoiceThread to recite speeches they have written about modern day heroes. First, a picture of each student's hero was uploaded to VoiceThread. Next, students wrote, practiced, then recited a speech that was recorded on a laptop using VoiceThread. If students made mistakes, they simply rerecorded. Finally, this VoiceThread was shared publicly with parents. When a parent clicked on the link he or she received, each slide of the VoiceThread automatically arrived on the screen, along with each student's videotaped speech regarding his or her hero. Commenting can be disabled, or enabled to allow parents to respond to the original presenter. Likewise, the original presenter can respond to any and all comments with his or her feedback.

VoiceThread Mobile
VoiceThread is a free, downloadable application for iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch. It is not available yet (3/29/13) as an Android application. The mobile version works much like the web version. Text, audio only, or video and audio files must be commented directly into VoiceThread; they cannot be edited on the mobile device for upload later.

Getting started
Users need any web-enabled desktop computer or laptop with microphone and video camera, or a smartphone. This can be a Mac, Windows PC, Linux computer, or Google Chromebook.
These are the minimal steps needed to create your first VoiceThread:
- Login to your account.
- Select "Create," then "Upload" to place your file(s) into VoiceThread.
- Click "Comment," which allows you to record information about what someone sees on the screen. Rerecord as needed.
- Click "Share" to allow users to see and comment on your presentation. Users will receive email notifications when you are finished sharing.

VoiceThread advantages
The software is very easy to use and manage. The interface is very intuitive, and the support videos (actual VoiceThreads) are very brief, direct, and user-friendly. You can start using VoiceThread for free, deciding to pay the nominal cost if you use it more extensively. Anyone wishing to comment does not need a VoiceThread account per se, they simply need a computer to see the presentation in the first place. Comments can be made in a variety of formats:
- video recording via computer or smartphone directly into the VoiceThread
- uploading a prerecorded comment to VoiceThread
- recording voice only
- calling in to the particular VoiceThread using a VoiceThread-supplied phone number

Nicholas Walker, middle school social studies teacher, Yavneh Day School in Los Gatos, CA, offers tips for using iPads, iPhones, and iPods and sharing via a wiki:

What is a wiki?
A wiki is a website that allows users to change or add content over the web. Wikispaces (www.wikispaces.com) is a great website for this purpose. This website provides a free wiki, which is basically a personalized web page where you can edit text, images, videos, and other elements, as well. The best aspect is that teachers and their classes qualify for a free Plus account, which allows for an infinite number of editors or viewers to the page, two gigabytes of total storage on your wiki, and a size maximum of twenty megabytes for each file that you store. Also, this website has an excellent management tool that allows you add any number of students as editors to the page and their family members as viewers via their email addresses.

What do you need to use a wiki?
Signing up for the account only requires a computer with Internet access, and an email address.

Wiki advantages
There are many options when it comes to sharing the students' oral histories online via a blog, wiki, social media website, or other form of website. Being that many school budgets are limited and that most parents want to maintain some level of privacy for their student on the Internet, cost and security are important factors in determining which method a teacher will use for sharing student videos online. A wiki can be open to invited viewers only, keeping it private from unwanted viewers or editors. Also, because students have the ability to be editors, they can upload the videos they edited from their own computers rather than compiling them to a central location as well as contribute their own personal design ideas to the wiki. However, if there is concern about students harming the page itself or the work of others, the teacher can always serve as the central gathering point for the videos and as the chief editor. The latter method does make the editing activity less engaging for the students and puts more work on the shoulders of the teacher. Another great element of Wikispaces is that it is easy to use. Signing up for the account only requires an email, it supports a multitude of file formats, and the website walks you through a step-by-step tutorial on how to edit the site. Likewise, it has a user-friendly interface for uploading the videos and editing the page itself once the tutorial has finished.

Getting started
Recording, uploading, and editing your oral history interview
Many students can easily access some sort of device with a video recording function. iPads, iPhones, and iPods all have a user-friendly video recording system that is already installed. Once your students have conducted their interviews, it is time to upload them to a computer. Either a Mac or PC computer or laptop will work for extracting the videos.

Nearly every Mac or PC computer comes with some sort of editing software for videos. Typically PC users will have Windows Movie Maker, and Mac users will have iMovie. Each program offers its own benefits. iMovie does have a slight edge in terms of quality and the ability to add music and pictures. Students who have strong skills in the use of technology will likely prefer iMovie's editing abilities and fancy interface. However, Windows Movie Maker is extremely user-friendly, does offer some nice editing abilities, and will generally be able to do anything you need it to in terms of editing, just without all the bells and whistles. Once you have finished editing, save your finished product in a user-friendly format such as a Windows Media Video (.wmv) or Quicktime (.mov) in an appropriate location on your computer. From here, your video can be easily transferred from one computer to another, or shared online.

Sharing online with a wiki
Once you create your wiki account, you can personalize the page in which you will place your videos. Wikispaces gives you the option of selecting one of its templates or beginning with a blank page. Choose whichever works best for your oral history project. Once you arrive at the editing page, you can add text virtually anywhere on the page in a similar manner to other text based programs, which is great for presenting contextual information for your videos. Consider also setting up a title for the project at this point. Videos or audio files can be added by simply uploading them from your hard drive. On the editing toolbar located at the top of the page, look for the "File" button. (It has what appears to be a green landscape scenery on the button itself for identification purposes.) Click on that button. A new screen will pop-up, used for uploading items from your hard drive into a file list. Once the item is finished uploading it will appear on the list. Click on the desired file in the list, and it will appear on your wiki. From here you can edit the video's appearance on your page such as location and size. Repeat this process for each of your videos and add text as necessary.

This resource, in which teachers highlight their tools and strategies for engaging students in generating oral history content, is a new format for the Contemporary Jewish Museum. We'd love to hear your thoughts, suggestions, and feedback on this new structure. Please email schools@thecjm.org.

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