

**TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT**  
***Life in a New England Town in the 30's***  
***Analyzing an Oral History***  
***Ginny Viteri***

**Grade -5**

**Length of class period** – 3 days (1-2 weeks with the extension activity)

**Inquiry** –What was life like for a boy growing up in Thompson, Connecticut in the 1930's? Students will describe the views and feelings of someone who grew up in the town of Thompson in the 30's in order to gain a better understanding of their local history and how life has changed.

**Objectives:** Students will read and analyze an oral history in order to gain an understanding of how life was different for people in the past. **Extension activity:** students will conduct an oral history interview on a family member, friend or neighbor over the age of 50. They will transcribe their interviews, write a reflection of their experience, and present their oral history project work to class.

**Materials:**

- Primary Source: *Memories of a Thompson Boyhood* used with permission from the Thompson, Connecticut Historical Society
- *Memories of a Thompson Boyhood* Guided Worksheet
- T-chart: Familiar/Unfamiliar

**Extension Materials:**

- Oral History Assignment Guidelines and Questionnaire

**Activities:**

**Days 1**

- What is an Oral History? Have a discussion with the class about the features and purpose of an oral history. Emphasize that an oral history is a collection of personal stories typically done with a person who has led an ordinary life.
- Introduce the primary source. (Optional: historical background on the time period).
- Introduce the Guiding Question: What was life like for the narrator growing up in Thompson in the 1930's?
- Have the students work in pairs or groups of three.

- Distribute a copy of the primary source, *Memories of a Thompson Boyhood* and the *Memories of a Thompson Boyhood* Guided Worksheet to each pair or group.
- Explain that the students will have two days to read the oral history and complete the guided worksheet. Review the questions on the guided worksheet

## Day 2

- Students will finish reading the oral history and completing the guided worksheet

## Day 3:

- Introduce the Guiding Question: What about the narrator's life was familiar to you? What about the narrator's life was unfamiliar?
- Whole Class sharing and discussion on the *Memories of a Thompson Boyhood* Guided Worksheet. Students will contribute to a class T-Chart.
- Draw conclusions about how growing up in Thompson in the 1930's was similar and how it was different to growing up today.

## Extension:

- Distribute the **Oral History Assignment Guidelines** and review the directions and questions. Encourage the students to use these questions as a guide and to feel free to add or take away questions depending on the person they are interviewing. They will have a lot of questions. This will take a full period.

## Assessment:

- Teacher will assign a grade to the *Memories of a Thompson Boyhood* Guided Worksheet.
  - 95: All questions well documented with details
  - 85: Most areas well documented with details
  - 75: Some areas not covered
  - 65: Very little documentation in many areas
- Teacher will assign a participation grade to each students for task commitment and discussion participation.

**Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –**

**2.1.1-2 –Access and gather information from a variety of primary and secondary sources including electronic media.**

**2.3.6- Create written work to describe historical events, people, and or places using evidence.**

**3.2.4 – Describe views and feelings of people in the past using personal experience and outside readings.**

*Memories of a Thompson Boyhood*  
Guided Worksheet

The narrator of this oral history shares many details about his early life in Thompson during the Depression. As you read consider the following:

Family: Who did the narrator live with? What was their home like?

Making a Living: What did the narrator's parents do to make a living? How much did things cost?

Food and Clothing: What foods did the narrator eat regularly? Where did he get his clothes?

Free Time: What kinds of things did the narrator do for fun?

Education: Did the narrator attend school? What was school like?

Neighbors: Neighbors were important? How did the narrator feel about his neighbors? How did they help each other?

Holidays/Traditions: What was Christmas like? Did the narrator describe any family traditions?

**Summer:** What was summer like growing up in Thompson in the 1930's?

Final thoughts: What story did you enjoy reading the most? Why?

What aspect about the narrator's life surprised you the most? Why?

**Analyzing an Oral History  
T-Chart**

| What is familiar about the narrator's life | What is unfamiliar about the narrator's life |
|--|--|
|  |  |

## Oral History Assignment Guidelines

You will be conducting an oral history interview of a relative, friend, or neighbor who is over 50 years of age. You may also want to consider a member of your church. Oral histories allow us to get the inside scoop on a different period of history. We will also have the opportunity to transcribe these oral history responses into written transcripts that will preserve that person's unique story. I suspect you will have some, "Really?" "Wow" and "I never knew that about you" moments. You can use the questions on the following pages as a guideline for your interview.

Don't feel too much pressure to cover them all. Let the interview unfold and focus on listening to the person as they tell their story. You can record their responses directly on the questionnaire or record the interview. You may conduct the interview over the phone if necessary.

Remember to thank them both before the interview and after for taking the time to speak with you. Please let them know that we will be presenting them with a final copy of the finished product.

These interview should be completed by \_\_\_\_\_

## Oral History Questions

Name of student:

Name of person interviewed:

## Early life:

1. Where and when were you born?
2. What was your life like when you were young?
3. Who were the people in your family? Brothers? Sisters?
4. What school subjects or activities did you enjoy? Did you play any sports or instruments?

5. Tell me one interesting story about your young life?

Adult life:

1. Did you go to college?

2. What did you or do you do for a living? What did you like about it? What was hard?

3. Tell me about how you met your (wife/husband) or about a special friendship that you have had in your life?

4. Do you have any children? Tell me about them.

5. Have you traveled at all? Where have you been? What is your favorite vacation memory?

Other questions:

1. What is your favorite holiday or family tradition? Why?

2. What would you say is the thing that you are most proud of in your life? What is your greatest accomplishment?

3. If you could give me one piece of advice, what would it be?

### Oral History Assignment Guidelines

As an extension to the story The Memory Box you will be conducting an oral history interview of a relative, friend, or neighbor who is over 60 years of age. You may also want to consider a member of your church. Oral histories allow us get the inside scoop on a different period of history. We will also have the opportunity to translate those oral responses into written transcripts that will preserve that

person's unique story. I suspect you will all have some, "Really?" "Wow!" and "I never knew that about you moments." You can use the questions on the following pages as a guideline for your interview.

Don't feel too much pressure to cover them all. Let the interview unfold and focus on **listening** to the person as they tell their story. You can record their responses directly on the questionnaire or record the interview. You may conduct the interview over the phone if necessary.

Remember to thank them both before the interview and after for taking the time to meet with you. Please let them know that we will be presenting them with a copy of the finished product.

These interviews should be completed by Wednesday, June 1st