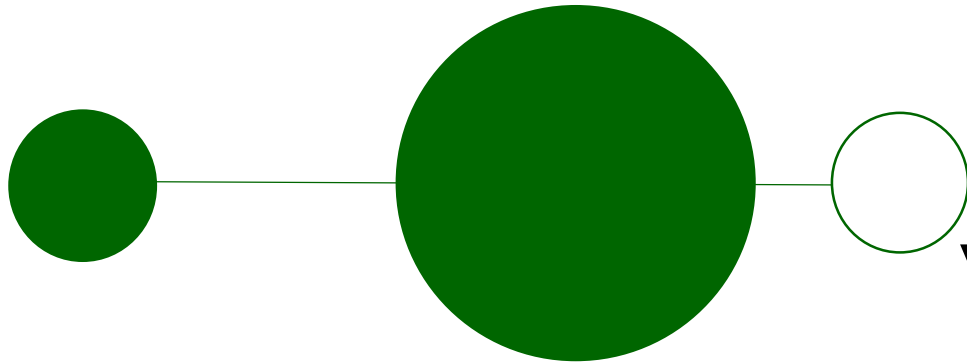


IRISH VOICES OUR STORIES SHARED

LEARNING RESOURCE

WHY DO ORAL HISTORY?

LESSON PLAN





“It’s important to
celebrate...to have a voice
for my culture.”

WHY DO

ORAL

HISTORY?

CLASSROOM WORKSHOP

OBJECTIVE

To acquire an understanding of oral history interviews; why they are important, what they are used for and to start to consider what makes a good interview.

PREPARATION

Familiarise yourself with the [Irish Voices website](#), [audio clips](#) and [themes sections](#) of the website. Have links for the relevant audio clips ready in advance of the workshop session. Have some of the additional resources listed below available for students to use as well.

ACTIVITY TIME : 1 HOUR

ACTIVITY ONE WHY DO ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS?

Divide the class into groups of 4-5 students. Ask each group to consider why we do oral history and how interviews are used as they explore the Irish Voices website.

- How are the interviews different from the documentary sources used in the project? Scan through the documents in the [clippings section](#) of the website and list the types of information contained in the documents. Listen to a couple of oral histories about the same event or theme. What different types of information can be found in the narratives? Who is talking?
- What different ways have the interviews been used by the project? You can look at how interviews have been themed for the website, selected for exhibitions, presented in the Irish Voices film, used in schools to inspire young people's creative interpretations, written on banners to be walked through the Parade or made into an audio piece played at the festival in Trafalgar Square.

Use the following suggested themes for this activity:

The first Greater London Authority backed London St Patrick's Day Parade and Festival, 2002- The documentary evidence includes the official programme for the event, a congratulations letter from Ian Duncan Smith MP, and photographs of the Parade. Audio narratives can be selected from the [Change theme – 2002 Year of Transition](#) and [Politics theme – Trafalgar Square](#).

Floats on the Parade- The documentary evidence includes a [guide produced by the GLA](#) advising on how to build a float and photographs of floats in the Parade. Audio narratives can be selected from the [Culture theme – Floats](#).

ACTIVITY TWO GROUP DISCUSSION

Working as whole group, ask students to feedback on their findings from the first activity. Open the discussion to consider more generally why we do oral history and what it can be used for. Write up the responses. Where have they heard oral histories before – documentaries on TV, museum exhibits, websites, theatre, or a natural storyteller such as a grandparent?

ACTIVITY THREE WHAT MAKES A GOOD INTERVIEW?

As a group, listen to the suggested audio clips on the Irish Voices website:

- [Michael Kearney interviewed by Evelyn Feeney](#) (between time codes: 2.44 – 7.20)
- [Alice and Denis Power interviewed by Martina Hunter](#) (between time codes: 15.34 - 20.31)
- [Malcolm McNally interviewed by Siobhan O'Neill](#) (between time codes: 17.06 – 22.50)
- [Mary Allen interviewed by Patrick Sykes](#) (between time codes: 22.26 – 26.22).

Ask the group to think about the following when listening:

- Do the people in the interview sound relaxed and at ease?
- What different types of question do the interviewers ask?
- How do the interviewees respond to these questions?
- Are the interviewers listening to the narrators? How can you tell?
- Is there anything that distracts you from listening to the interview?

ACTIVITY FOUR SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWING

Ask students to work in groups of 3 or 4 and create a list of qualities needed by a successful interviewer. Ask one student to write up the list and feedback at the end of the activity to the whole class.

Some of the qualities of an effective oral history interviewer:

- A good listener – this is the most important quality, people know if you are not fully listening. You want to listen and catch unexpected remarks that you can follow up on.
- A good rapport, friendly and makes people feel at ease
- Well prepared, has researched into the events and can ask informed, interested questions
- Empathy – is sensitive to the feelings of the interviewee, especially if they are recounting difficult or possibly traumatic memories
- Patience
- Discretion – knowing what to share and understanding when to keep something private. You should always get the interviewee's written consent before you share anything they have told you.
- Good with technology – learn to use your recording device so that you can focus to be on the interviewee not on the equipment



“You’re flying the flag, hoping the wind doesn’t blow you over!”

The documentary sources in **activity one** provide different versions of what happened, and include the voices of politicians, organisers, and celebrities. The audio narratives present a wider range of speakers, including voices that would not otherwise be heard, provide details missing in official accounts, and give the listener a more emotional understanding of events. Students could consider which sources they think look like an official record or have more 'authority'.

Why Do Oral History?

- It includes groups of people that have largely been hidden from history– these have included the working class, the unemployed, women, immigrant or indigenous populations and many more.
- It enables people to speak for themselves.
- It captures people's memories, feelings, attitudes and experiences of historical events that they have lived through.
- It adds new information and can fill in gaps in history textbooks and documentary sources.
- It may be the only way of capturing that particular history.
- It is part of a long tradition. Many people pass on their history orally, through stories and songs.
- It demonstrates how people remember events from the past and how their views might have changed over time.
- Different types of people can conduct interviews, not just historians. Interviewers from the same community or profession as the narrator can bring 'insider' knowledge.

TIPS

&

TEACHERS

NOTES

IRISH VOICES AUDIO CLIPS

Theme-Change-[2002 Year of Transition](#) – Andy Rogers, Shelagh O'Connor, Jude Woodward, Michael Sills,

Theme-Politics-[Trafalgar Square](#) – Jane Fisher, Malcolm McNally

Theme-Culture-[Floats on the Parade](#)– Pat Connolly, John Howard, Michael Sills, Vaughn Barzey, Shelagh O'Connor, Annie Whyte, John Devine

[Michael Kearney interviewed by Evelyn Feeney](#) (between time codes: 2.44 – 7.20)

[Alice and Denis Power interviewed by Martina Hunter](#) (between time codes: 15.34 - 20.31)

[Malcolm McNally interviewed by Siobhan O'Neill](#) (between time codes: 17.06 – 22.50)

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WEB RESOURCES

The Listening Project <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4j11M5vch2S7K76yHKvY0M7/the-british-library>

The British Library <http://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/oral-history>

National Theatre Introduction to Verbatim Theatre <http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/video/an-introduction-to-verbatim-theatre>

London Road at The National Theatre, Preview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSfwOlm9yel>

London Bubble - Blackbirds project on the Blitz <http://www.londonbubble.org.uk/video/london-bubble-s-blackbirds/>

Jeremy Deller – The Battle of Orgreave. Filmed by Mike Faggis for Artangel and Channel 4, aired 2002. <https://vimeo.com/77778251>

Suzanne Lacy – Silver Action at Tate Modern <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/suzanne-lacy-silver-action>