



Exploring Family History Through Folklife Interviews

Use the attached user friendly resources to facilitate the collection and analysis of family and community stories. Activities below can be used to connect students to history, civics and geography through historic events, timelines, mapping, heirloom examination and primary and secondary sources; to ELA through writing and research; and to art through creative expression of stories and artifacts collected. Whether we access video and voice recording on our phones, or through special apps like StoryCorps, we live in a technological world where preserving stories is at our fingertips. All it takes is a little effort and a little curiosity.

We suggest you do a quick review of the following resources to see which best meets your needs. Then decide how to apply them to gather and preserve your stories. Through StoryCorps you can submit your recordings to the archives at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

Always remember that exploring family history can be a sensitive subject for some people. Be respectful of persons who may not be comfortable gathering or sharing stories because of various family issues, citizenship status, adoption or foster care status, etc. Interviewing nonbiological, "chosen" family might be an option for individuals who aren't comfortable interviewing biological family.

Family History Resources

STORYCORPS

*StoryCorps' mission is to preserve and share humanity's stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world. We do this to remind one another of our shared humanity, to strengthen and build the connections between people, to teach the value of listening, and to weave into the fabric of our culture the understanding that everyone's story matters. At the same time, we are creating an invaluable archive for future generations. *At the end of this document, we've included some StoryCorps tips and questions for getting started.*

While some of these resources focus on student collection of family stories during the Thanksgiving holiday, they can be used at any time. Included are lessons for use of the StoryCorps app, available for download on cell phones for no cost.

- <https://storycorps.org/participate/storycorps-connect/>

Developed in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, StoryCorps Connect is a first-of-its kind platform that enables you to record a StoryCorps interview with a loved one remotely using video conference technology.

- <https://storycorps.org/participate/the-great-thanksgiving-listen/for-educators/>

List of ways to use StoryCorps in the classroom and how to use the StoryCorps app,

- <https://storycorps.org/participate/the-great-thanksgiving-listen/for-educators/library-of-materials/>

Printable teacher toolkit and support materials

FAMILY SEARCH

FamilySearch is the largest genealogy organization in the world. Millions of people use FamilySearch records, resources, and services each year to learn more about their family history. FamilySearch provides a free online service to access over 4 billion family names worldwide, with free 24/7 phone assistance.

- <https://www.familysearch.org/en/>

Find your family in the world's largest shared family tree with over a billion unique profiles

- <https://www.familysearch.org/discovery/>

Offers a variety of family history activities that can be done in-home/online and are designed for the whole family

- <https://www.familysearch.org/ask/landing?search=Getting%20Started&show=lessons&message=true>

Offers a variety of online tutorials for getting started with family research

MAKE FAMILY HISTORY

Mission is to encourage youth to use personal interests and talents to connect with their family and heritage. Offers a variety of activities to document family history using photos, videos, art, and more.

- <https://www.makefamilyhistory.org/>

Provides new and engaging ways to participate in family history photos, videos, art, and more.

EDSITEMENT

EDSITEment is a partnership between the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Trust for the Humanities. EDSITEment offers free resources for teachers, students, and parents searching for high-quality K-12 humanities education materials in the subject areas of history and social studies, literature and language arts, foreign languages, arts, and culture.

- <https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/what-history-timelines-and-oral-histories>

In this lesson, young students will gain a frame of reference for understanding history and for recognizing that the past is different depending on who is remembering and retelling it. They will construct a timeline based on events from their own lives and family histories. This will give them a visual representation of the continuity of time. They will also be able to see that their own personal past is different in scope from their family's past, or their country's past. Once they understand that history is made up of many people's stories of the past, students will explore how we know about events that occurred prior to our own births. Each student will interview two family members about the same event, compare the two versions, and write or dictate their own version of the story, which becomes the "official" account. In this way, they will experience the power of both first-hand accounts and historical documentation.

- <https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/my-piece-history>

What is the oldest object in your home? How did it get there and why is your family saving it? Finding the answer to these questions can put students in touch with family history and help them discover how much of our past lies hidden in "old things." In this lesson, students first examine pictures of household objects from the late 20th century and gather historical information about them from older family members, then create an in-class exhibit of historical objects from their own homes.

LOUISIANA VOICES

Louisiana Voices is an online education guide that provides rich teaching resources on Louisiana folk and traditional arts and culture and tools for researching any cultural group, while integrating the Louisiana

Education Content Standards. By finding their own traditions in the present and studying others' traditions of the past and present, students can see the continuum from past to future.

http://www.louisianavoices.org/edu_outline.html

- UNIT II: Classroom Applications of Fieldwork Basics

Students learn to plan fieldwork research collaboratively and step by step to set goals, choose methodologies and technology, identify subjects, design research instruments, develop project schedules and checklists, and the importance of testing tools and equipment and practicing interviewing.

- UNIT III: Discovering the Obvious: Our Lives as “The Folk”

Lesson 3: The Family: Louisiana Family Folklore

By exploring family folklore through naming traditions, family pictures, and family treasures, students see traditional culture in action in familiar, everyday settings. They will learn things they didn't know about their families, and they will see themselves and family members as important tradition bearers.

- UNIT V: Oral Traditions: Swapping Stories

A wide variety of oral traditions from local and historical legends to personal experience narratives, introduces students to the vitality of oral narratives. The unit draws heavily on Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana, the publication, video, and website that students will explore.

- Unit IX: The Seasonal Round and The Cycle of Life

This unit encourages students' interaction with adults and covers seasonal round customs, beliefs, traditions, celebrations, and holidays. Part 1 is designed for younger students, but older students can also use activities in Lessons 2 and 3 to acquaint themselves with the concept of the "seasonal round" and to identify traditions important to them throughout the year. Students in grades 8 and higher may use activities in Part 2 to research rites of passage, the role of older people in society, beliefs about health, burial traditions, and local cemeteries.

NATIONAL FIRST LADIES LIBRARY

The National First Ladies Library is an organization focused on preserving and promoting the accomplishments of the First Ladies of the U.S.

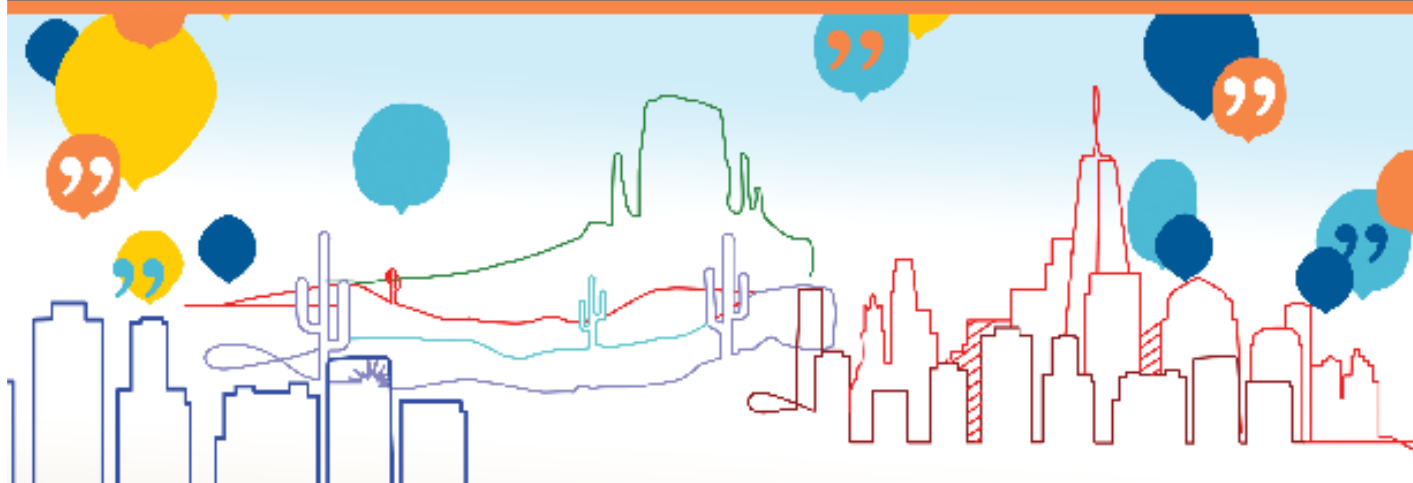
- <http://www.firstladies.org/curriculum/curriculum.aspx?Curriculum=1456>

Among many other interesting resources, this site offers dozens of free history lesson plans for educators to use – including this lesson that aims to get middle school students interested in family tree research as it relates to U.S. and world history.

Additional websites as recommended by the National First Ladies' Library

- Genealogy (General):
 1. [National Archives/Genealogy](#)
 2. [Family Search](#)
 3. [USGenWeb](#)
 4. [U.S. Immigration](#)
 5. [Immigration History Research Center](#)
 6. <https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/>
- Genealogy (African American):
 1. [History of African Americans](#)
 2. [Slave Data Collection](#)
 3. [African American Genealogy](#)
 4. [Slave Trade History](#)
- Genealogy (Native American):
 1. [Native American Indian Genealogy](#)

We hope these resources help you to begin a lifelong journey of collecting family stories and exploring heritage and genealogy. Should you have any questions or concerns about these resources, please feel free to contact Vermillionville's Education Coordinator at education.bayouvermiliondistrict.org or by calling 337.233.4077 ext. 206



10 Conversation Tips for Your STORYCORPS Interview

1 Plan Your Questions

Before you record anything, use the StoryCorps question lists to **plan your questions** (or write your own), and share them ahead of time with your partner. This simple preparation will help you get the most out of your time together.

2 Ask Warm-Up Questions

Press the record button and follow the prompts to introduce yourself and your partner. Then **ask a few warm-up questions**, like “Where were you born?” or “Can you describe the first time we met?”

3 Ask Open-Ended Questions

Avoid questions that can be answered with a “yes” or a “no.” Instead, use language like “Tell me about…” or “What was it like when…” This lets the storyteller steer you toward what is most important to them.

4 Ask Follow-Up Questions

Be **prepared to ask follow-ups** or diverge from your question list if you’re curious about something. If you’d like to hear more, try “And then what happened?” or “How did that make you feel?” or “What were you thinking in that moment?”

5 Think of It as a Conversation

Use your selected questions as a guide, not a script. If your partner goes off topic, go with it. You can redirect them to your original question later. **Think of it as a conversation**; there’s no right or wrong thing to talk about, as long as it’s meaningful to you.

6 Tell a Story

Don’t hesitate to **tell a story** about your partner, and to bring up your favorite shared memories. This can be a time to tell your partner how much they mean to you, and why you want to record with them today.

7 Set Up Context

Keep in mind that future listeners may not be familiar with the specific people and places you mention. **Set up context** where needed with questions like “Who was Uncle Steve?” and “Why was he such an influence on you?”

8 Encourage Vivid Details

Questions that **encourage vivid details** can make the story special. Invoke the senses by asking your partner to remember these details. For example: “What did your kitchen smell like when you were growing up?” or “What images stand out when you think about Granddad?”

9 Plan Some Reflective Questions

Keep an eye on the timer so that you are aware of when there are 10 and 5 minutes left. **End your interview with reflective questions**, such as “What legacy would you like to leave?” or “What advice would you give me about being a parent?”

10 Relax and Be Yourself

Enjoy the opportunity to share stories and reflections with your interview partner. **Just be yourself, be curious, and let the conversation flow.**

AFTER 17 YEARS OF LISTENING, WE KNOW WHAT MAKES A GOOD CONVERSATION: START BY ASKING GREAT QUESTIONS.

Here are some of our suggestions for getting a good conversation going. We encourage you to use the ones you like and to come up with your own. This list is in no particular order. Choose one of the categories below, or scroll through and read them all.

GREAT QUESTIONS FOR ANYONE

- Can you tell me about a person who has been kindest to you in your life?
- Can you tell me about one of your happiest memories?
- Can you tell me about one of your most difficult memories?
- Can you tell me about someone you'll always remember?
- Can you tell me about someone who has had a big influence on your life? What lessons did that person teach you?
- What do you feel most grateful for in your life?
- What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in life?
- What is your favorite memory of me?
- What are you proudest of in your life?
- Can you remember a time in your life when you felt most alone?
- If you could hold on to one memory from your life forever, which would it be?
- How has your life been different than what you'd imagined?
- How would you like to be remembered?
- Do you have any regrets?
- If you were to die suddenly this evening, what would you regret not having done? Why haven't you done it?
- When was the last time you cried and why?
- What does your future hold?
- What are your hopes for me? For my children?
- If this was to be our very last conversation, is there anything you'd want to say to me?
- For future generations of your family listening to this years from now: is there any wisdom you'd want to pass on to them? What would you want them to know?
- Is there anything that you've never told me but want to tell me now?
- Are there things about me that you've always wanted to know but have never asked?
- Turn the tables: tell the person you're interviewing what they've meant to you.

FRIENDS OR COLLEAGUES

- If you could interview anyone from your life living or dead, but not a celebrity, who would it be and why?
- What is your first memory of me?
- Was there a time when you didn't like me?
- What makes us such good friends?
- How would you describe me? How would you describe yourself?

- Where will we be in 10 years? 20 years?
- Do you think we'll ever lose touch with each other?
- Is there anything that you've always wanted to tell me but haven't?

GRANDPARENTS

- Where did you grow up?
- What was your childhood like?
- Who were your favorite relatives?
- Do you remember any of the stories they used to tell you?
- How did you and grandma/grandpa meet?
- What was my mom/dad like growing up?
- Do you remember any songs that you used to sing to her/him? Can you sing them now?
- Was she/he well-behaved?
- What is the worst thing she/he ever did?
- What were your parents like?
- What were your grandparents like?
- How would you like to be remembered?
- Are you proud of me?

RAISING CHILDREN

- When did you first find out that you'd be a parent? How did you feel?
- Can you describe the moment when you saw your child for the first time?
- How has being a parent changed you?
- What are your dreams for your children?
- Do you remember when your last child left home for good?
- Do you have any favorite stories about your kids?

PARENTS

- Do you remember what was going through your head when you first saw me?
- How did you choose my name?
- What was I like as a baby? As a young child?
- Do you remember any of the songs you used to sing to me? Can you sing them now?
- What were my siblings like?
- What were the hardest moments you had when I was growing up?
- If you could do everything again, would you raise me differently?
- What advice would you give me about raising my own kids?
- What are your dreams for me?
- How did you meet mom/dad?
- Are you proud of me?

GROWING UP

- When and where were you born?
- Where did you grow up?
- What was it like?
- Who were your parents?
- What were your parents like?
- How was your relationship with your parents?
- Did you get into trouble? What was the worst thing you did?
- Do you have any siblings? What were they like growing up?
- What did you look like?
- How would you describe yourself as a child? Were you happy?
- What is your best memory of childhood? Worst?
- Did you have a nickname? How'd you get it?
- Who were your best friends? What were they like?
- How would you describe a perfect day when you were young?
- What did you think your life would be like when you were older?
- Do you have any favorite stories from your childhood?

SCHOOL

- Did you enjoy school?
- What kind of student were you?
- What would you do for fun?
- How would your classmates remember you?
- Are you still friends with anyone from that time in your life?
- What are your best memories of grade school/high school/college/graduate school?
Worst memories?
- Was there a teacher or teachers who had a particularly strong influence on your life? Tell me about them.
- Do you have any favorite stories from school?

TEACHERS

- When and why did you decide to become a teacher?
- Tell me about your first day as a teacher.
- How is teaching different from how you imagined it to be?
- Tell me about a time when teaching made you feel hopeful.
- What are the most challenging and/or funniest moments you've experienced in the classroom?
- How would you like your students to remember you?
- Was there a teacher or teachers who had a particularly strong influence on your life? What did you learn about teaching from them?
- Looking back, what advice would you give to yourself in your first year of teaching?

LOVE & RELATIONSHIPS

- Do you have a love of your life?
- When did you first fall in love?
- Can you tell me about your first kiss?
- What was your first serious relationship?
- Do you believe in love at first sight?
- Do you ever think about previous lovers?
- What lessons have you learned from your relationships?

MARRIAGE & PARTNERSHIPS

- How did you meet your husband/wife?
- How did you know he/she was “the one”?
- How did you propose?
- What were the best times? The most difficult times?
- Did you ever think of getting divorced?
- Did you ever get divorced? Can you tell me about it?
- What advice do you have for young couples?
- Do you have any favorite stories from your marriage or about your husband/wife?

WORKING

- What do you do for a living?
- Tell me about how you got into your line of work.
- Do you like your job?
- What did you think you were going to be when you grew up?
- What did you want to be when you grew up?
- What lessons has your work life taught you?
- If you could do anything now, what would you do? Why?
- Do you plan on retiring? If so, when? How do you feel about it?
- Do you have any favorite stories from your work life?

RELIGION

- Can you tell me about your religious beliefs/spiritual beliefs? What is your religion?
- Have you experienced any miracles?
- What was the most profound spiritual moment of your life?
- Do you believe in God?
- Do you believe in the after-life? What do you think it will be like?
- When you meet God, what do you want to say to Him?

SERIOUS ILLNESS

- Can you tell me about your illness?
- Do you think about dying? Are you scared?
- How do you imagine your death?

- Do you believe in an after-life?
- Do you regret anything?
- Do you look at your life differently now than before you were diagnosed?
- Do you have any last wishes?
- If you were to give advice to me or my children, or even children to come in our family, what would it be?
- What have you learned from life? The most important things?
- Has this illness changed you? What have you learned?
- How do you want to be remembered?

FAMILY HERITAGE

- What is your ethnic background?
- Where is your mom's family from? Where is your dad's family from?
- Have you ever been there? What was that experience like?
- What traditions have been passed down in your family?
- Who were your favorite relatives?
- Do you remember any of the stories they used to tell you?
- What are the classic family stories? Jokes? Songs?

MILITARY

- When were you drafted or when did you enlist?
- What do you remember about the day you enlisted?
- How did you tell your family and friends that you were joining the military? Are there any conversations that stand out from that time?
- If you enlisted, what were some of the reasons that you joined the military? How did you choose your branch of service?
- How did you imagine military life before you joined? How did your perceptions change after serving?
- What was basic training like?
- Can you describe a funny moment from boot camp?
- What are some of the things you remember about adapting to military life?
- Where did you serve during the war?
- If you deployed overseas, how did you tell your loved ones you were being deployed?
- How did you stay in touch with family and friends back home?
- What are some things you remember most about your deployment?
- If you saw multiple deployments, how did they differ from each other? How did you change?
- Can you describe how you felt coming home from combat?
- Was there anything you especially missed about civilian life?
- Is there someone you served with that you remember fondly? Can you tell me about him/her?
- What are some fun things you and your friends did together while you were deployed?

- Did any of your military friends play pranks on each other? Can you describe a funny one?
- Did you ever get caught breaking any rules? Did you ever get away with something you weren't supposed to do?
- Did you ever learn something about a fellow service member that surprised you?
- When did you leave the military? What was that process like?
- What were your first few months out of the service like?
- Was there anything or anyone that helped you during the transition from military to civilian life?
- Do you have advice for others transitioning out of the military?
- How do you think your time in the military affected you?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What are some of your hopes for the future?
- What phrase or word will never be the same now that you served?
- When you were first discharged, what are some things about civilians that were difficult for you to deal with?
- Is there anything you wish civilians understood about military service?
- What are some habits you developed in the service that you like? What are some that you dislike?
- What are some things you miss about being in the service? What are some you are glad to have left behind?
- What has been difficult to communicate to family and friends about your military service?
- Do you have advice for other military couples?
- If you have children, what do you want them to know about your military service?
- Remembering the Fallen: What was your relationship to _____?
- Remembering the Fallen: Tell me about _____.
- Remembering the Fallen: What did _____ look like?
- Remembering the Fallen: What is one of your favorite memories of _____?
- Remembering the Fallen: How did you find out about _____'s death?
- Remembering the Fallen: What has helped you most in your grief?
- Remembering the Fallen: Do you have any traditions to honor _____?
- Remembering the Fallen: Do you have any funny stories about the two of you together?

REMEMBERING A LOVED ONE

- What was your relationship to _____?
- Tell me about _____.
- What is your first memory of _____?
- What is your best memory of _____?
- What is your most vivid memory of _____?
- What did _____ mean to you?
- Are you comfortable/ can you talk about _____'s death? How did _____ die?
- What has been the hardest thing about losing _____?
- What would you ask _____ if _____ were here today?

- What do you miss most about _____?
- How do you think _____ would want to be remembered?
- Can you talk about the biggest obstacles _____ overcame in life?
- Was there anything you and _____ disagreed about, fought over, or experienced some conflict around?
- What about _____ makes you smile?
- What was your relationship like?
- What did _____ look like?
- Did you have any favorite jokes _____ used to tell?
- Do you have any stories you want to share about _____?
- What were _____'s hopes and dreams for the future?
- Is there something about _____ that you think no one else knows?
- How are you different now than you were before you lost _____?
- What is the image of _____ that persists?
- Do you have any traditions to honor _____?
- What has helped you the most in your grief?
- What are the hardest times?

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What are you waiting for? You have the tools, so get started on this new adventure!