Construct Your Family's Immigration or Migration Story

This kit contains:

Courtesy of American Social History Project, New York

1. Teacher instructions for this project
2. **Activity 1**
   - methods and questions for conducting an oral history
3. **Activity 2**
   - methods for researching using primary sources
4. **Activity 3**
   - using evidence from primary sources to help build your story

OVERVIEW:

1. Identify a family member or friend who participated in a migration or immigration. You may also choose a family member who can tell the story of a relative who migrated in the past.
2. Identify the period of migration or immigration.
3. Research that period by reading about it in encyclopedias and other sources.
4. Conduct an oral history interview using Activity 1.
5. Investigate other primary source materials using Activity 2.
6. Sketch out your story. Add details from your research using Activity 3.
7. Write your story.
8. Send your story and resources to the Smithsonian Institution and it may be posted on the *America on the Move* website as a guest-curator themed tour!
   Contact us at stories@si.edu

This guide was written by the *America on the Move* Education Team • Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, Behring Center
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ACTIVITY 1

Methods for conducting an oral history with your family member or friend

TIPS:

Flossie and James Haggard, 1937
Courtesy of Lillian Haggard Hoge

- Write down questions that you want to ask. Make sure they cannot be answered by a simple "yes" or "no." Some suggested questions are included here.
- If possible, tape-record your sessions. If you can't, write down each answer before going on to the next question. One tip is to work with a partner. One person writes down the answers so the interviewer can be planning the next question. Write down all the answers, even the ones you might already know.
- Try to ask brief questions that don't have too many parts. Listen to the answers and ask follow-up questions requesting more details. You may need to ask interviewees to describe how something or someone looked, or how they felt. Ask questions to which you might already know the answers. You might get a surprise answer.
- Having periods of silence is good. It allows interviewees to collect their thoughts and add more details.
- Your facial expression and indication of interest are very important in keeping a conversation going. Let the interviewees know how happy you are to learn their stories.

AFTER THE ORAL HISTORY:

1. Transcribe the interview—write down what was spoken if you taped the interview. (This takes a lot of time.)
2. Analyze the interview. To make a personal record meaningful, a historian must connect each personal experience with research done from secondary sources in order to understand the experiences more fully. Make a list of key ideas or questions that you will need to research further to understand both the migration/immigration and the historic time period in which it occurred. Write those topics in the righthand column of this activity sheet.
3. Find a secondary source, a book or article that can tell you more about each of the ideas you listed.

ACTIVITY 1

Interview questions

1. Who left and why?

Name of person being interviewed .....

Starting date of your migration or immigration journey (month and year) .....

From where did you leave? .....

Why did you leave? .....

To where did you travel? Was your journey done in stages?

.....

What were your feelings on the day(s) of the journey?

.....

2. Who/what else was on the journey?

Who else accompanied you on your journey?

.....

Do you have any photographs or documents of the journey, or objects that accompanied you that we can look at, or could you describe them?

(See the questions posed in Activity 2 to help explore these sources.)

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3. Transportation used on journey

What form of transportation was used? .....

How was this different from previous transportation you had taken?

.....

What were your feelings and experiences as a result of using this form of transportation? .....

.....

4. Experiences upon arrival

When you arrived at your destination, did anyone help you to settle into a new home or community? .....

Were there any challenges that you faced when you arrived in your new community? .....

5. New experiences, new home

What was your first job? .....

What role did transportation play in this work?

.....

What were some similarities and differences between this new environment and your previous one? .....

How did the changes make you feel? .....

.....

Ideas to research further

ACTIVITY 2

Methods for researching using primary sources

In addition to your oral history, **select at least one primary resource** from each category below.

Primary resource—an original document, photograph, newspaper, or object created or used during the time period being studied.
Secondary resource—a summary of the past created at a later time period, such as a textbook or encyclopedia.

WORDS (SELECT ONE OR MORE)

— **Journal, diary, letters, etc.**

— **Work documents/documentation of daily life in new home**

— **Newspaper articles**
These can provide facts about an event, but read between the lines to see if there is a bias in how the story is told.

— **Census data, court records, etc.**
Was your family the only family migrating or immigrating at this time? Since 1790, the U.S. population has been studied every ten years. Census records provide population information about race, native-born/naturalization status, and migrations.

— **Here are websites that can help you find some historical trends.**
http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/immigration.html
http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census

IMAGES (SELECT ONE OR MORE)

— **Family photographs (of person, old home, new home, work)**
Carefully study a family photograph that relates to the migration or immigration experience. What feelings are portrayed in this photograph? Is there information in both the foreground and the background? What are people wearing or carrying or riding? What questions arise that you can research further?

— **Picture of method of transportation used on journey**
Can you obtain an image of this form of transportation? Describe the vehicle.
Use this Web resource to find related images of vehicles.
http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/onthemove
Click on "collection," click on "search by keyword," type in keyword.

— **Advertisements, postcards, etc.**

OBJECTS/ARTIFACTS (SELECT ONE OR MORE)

— **Personal objects taken on the journey, bridging old and new homes**
Including real objects in a story can add layers of meaning. Describe the objects and what they reveal about the values of the person who brought them. How were they used in the old home and then in the new one?

— **Map of journey or of new home**
By analyzing period maps, learn more about the community that the newcomer arrived in and the physical challenges in getting there.
U.S. Library of Congress, American Memory Map Collections: 1500–2004
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/gmdhome.html
Click on "transportation and communication"
U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, The National Highway System
http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep10/nhs/
Find the highways traveled by the main character in your story.

ACTIVITY 3

Fitting your story into the larger historical context

Using this sheet, write an outline of ideas.
Identify at least one important idea for sections A, B, and C.

1. Who left and why?

A. Describe why groups of people moved during this time period

B. Describe the interviewee's personal reasons for leaving

C. Include an important detail or idea gathered from primary resource materials

2. Who/what else was on the journey?

A. Describe the migrating or immigrating people at the time

B. Describe this interviewee's journey and what/who was taken along

C. Include an important detail or idea gathered from primary resource materials

3. Transportation used on journey

A. Describe available transportation at the time

B. Describe the transportation that the interviewee used

C. Include an important detail or idea gathered from primary resource materials

4. Challenges when newly arrived

A. Describe challenges most people faced; compare their expectations to the reality

B. Describe the interviewee's unique experiences

C. Include an important detail or idea gathered from primary resource materials

5. New experiences/new home

A. Describe what most newcomers found when creating a home in a new community

B. Include the interviewee's personal experience in the new home

C. Include an important detail or idea gathered from primary resource materials

6. Looking back at the journey

A. Describe the former newcomer's current role in the community

B. Include the interviewee's feelings on the journey and his or her current life

C. Include an important detail or idea gathered from primary resource materials

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Helping your students write their families' stories

Give the students the activity sheets, but encourage them to create their own questions.

In writing their stories, encourage students to share some of the background information that they found to contrast and compare how this family experience related to others in the nation. They might add this information at the end or the beginning.

Students' stories can be written from the perspective of the interviewer or from the point of view of the interviewee, possibly in first-person style.

Courtesy of the Abena Lewis Collection

For Grades 6–8

- Make the format flexible so that students can decide how to best tell their story.
- Use Activity 3 as an example outline that they may or may not choose to follow explicitly.
- Work on the importance of transitions and flow among different ideas.

FOR EXTENDED DEVELOPMENT:

Additional writing assignments:
A process paper detailing a summary of the sources used and why they were helpful.

If students deviated from the original outline, ask them to explain why they made particular changes.

Students may e-mail their finished products to the Smithsonian Institution at stories@si.edu; selected examples may be posted on the *America on the Move* website.