



Unit 2 – Oral Histories and Social History

This unit explores the role of oral history in understanding social history. *The Ties That Bind: Building the CPR, Building a Place in Canada* website is both a history and a social history project. The historical content of the website is enriched by the addition of oral histories that were contributed by the descendants of the Chinese railroad workers. The oral histories tell the social history of the early Chinese Canadian railroad workers and of later generations.

Students will use the oral histories in the website as a starting point for researching their own family social history in Canada. They will take on the role of social historians, and interview family members. They will record the interview using any available recording device or by filling in the Interview Questions sheet. Students will: learn how to conduct an interview; analyze the information collected, and interpret their findings in a final creative project.

The unit provides students with a better understanding of both the shared and the unique experiences of early Canadians, of their descendants, and of recent immigrants.

Concepts to teach and discuss about Oral History collecting:

- Oral history collecting preserves stories that have never been recorded, from everyday people and communities
- Valuing oral histories of everyday people and communities implies value in students' own stories
- Oral history collecting contributes to a broader understanding of a topic under investigation

Concepts to teach and discuss about Social History:

- Social history is the everyday experiences and beliefs of ordinary people
- Social historians study the social histories of everyday people
- Every aspect of day-to-day life – family life, recreation, work, social life, religious beliefs, and more, fall under social history
- Social historians usually have an area of specialty such as the study of one group of people (e.g. Chinese Canadians), one particular area (e.g. British Columbia), or a specific topic, such as family life

After completing this unit students will be able to:

- Define social history and formulate questions about social history topics
- Analyze, interpret, and conduct research using oral history collecting methods
- Use oral history interview techniques to gather information about social history

Recommended grade levels:

- The lesson is adaptable to the following grade levels: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Curriculum links:

- Social Studies, History, Language Arts
- Can be customized as required, for regional variances in curriculum



The unit consists of:

- Three in-class workshops
- At-home interview sessions
- At-home project assembly

Time required:

- Recommended 120 minutes; 40 minutes per workshop
- The unit is flexible depending on the amount of class time available and class size
- At-home time to conduct interviews

Evaluation based on:

- Oral history interview (e.g. design of questions, quality of interview, one question and response transcription)
- Final creative project
- Classroom participation

Materials Provided:

- Interview Guide (download)
- Interview Questions (download)
- Photo Log (download)
- Sample Interview Excerpts (download)

Equipment Required:

- Audio recorders preferred, though not mandatory (video recorder optional)
- Computer and other recording, storage, or copying devices (optional)

Procedure:

- Advance planning required before beginning the unit
- Print all documents related to this lesson and make copies
- Have students review *The Ties That Bind* website at home or during the school day prior to start of unit.
- In the event that computers are not available, website pages can be printed and circulated



Workshop 1 – Introduction

1. Introduce *The Ties That Bind* website to students, explaining what it's about.
2. Explain social history (see Concepts to teach and discuss about Social History) and oral history (see Concepts to teach and discuss about Oral History collecting), and how oral history is used to explore social history in the website.
3. Go to the website and view and/or listen to several video/audio excerpts or hand out Sample Transcript Excerpts. Discuss, as a whole group, the topics of several excerpts and ask the students to guess the questions that the interviewer may have asked.
4. Survey class about their family history in Canada.
5. Present unit to students:
 - students will become social historians, interviewing one family member about the family's history in Canada, focusing on the ancestor or living individual who made the decision to immigrate
 - students will conduct the interviews at home, using audio or video equipment, or by filling in the Interview Questions sheet
 - students will share interviews in class for peer review by one of the following methods:
 - bringing in the recording device and playing back some of the interview
 - downloading the interview to the classroom or computer lab computer and playing back some of the interview
 - reading out loud one transcribed question and response
 - students will select one question and response that they feel captures the essence of the interviews which they will transcribe (write down) and hand in
 - students will create a final project of their family history using a medium of their choice (see suggestions in Workshop 2)
 - students will be marked on the Oral History Interview (including the question and response transcription), final project, and classroom participation
6. Hand out Interview Guide and review with class.
7. Hand out Interview Questions sheet and review with class.
8. Hand out Photo Log and review with class.

Workshop 2 – Sharing

1. Students share interviews by one of the following methods:
 - bringing in the recording device and playing back some of the interview
 - downloading the interview to the classroom or computer lab computer and playing back some of the interview
 - reading out loud one transcribed question and response



2. The following questions may be useful:
 - Was there a surprising piece of information your interview generated? Why was it surprising?
 - Which questions led to relevant, interesting answers? Which questions were less effective?
 - What good follow-up questions did you ask?
 - What might have made the interview more productive?
 - Do the interviews have anything in common? Time period, common experiences, outcomes?
3. Depending on class time allotted, there may only be time for a few presentations with follow-up time for discussion/critique.
4. Collect students' question and response transcriptions.
5. Review Final Creative Project options:
 - a collage on an art board of photos taken during the interview, combined with interview excerpts and writing by the student
 - a blog on a social media network such as www.blogspot.com containing photos, interview excerpts and writing by the student
 - a short "graphic novel" biography of the family's social history, focusing on one topic only (e.g. work)
 - a spoken word poem/rap that includes interview excerpts
 - discuss additional ideas from students

Workshop 3 – Project Presentation

1. Students present projects to classmates.
2. Allow time for a general class discussion.
3. The following questions may be useful:
 - Did the interview change how you think about your family and about Canada?
 - What aspects of social history did you learn about through the interview?
 - Did your family story have anything in common with your classmates' family stories?
 - Did your family story have anything in common with the oral histories in *The Ties That Bind* website?