Title: “Talking Story”

Focus Question

What techniques are used by oral historians to preserve history?

Objectives/Outcomes

- Students will investigate how Oral History is a simple, direct method or technique of collecting information by using a set of simple guidelines.
- Students will utilize these guidelines and conduct an ORAL INTERVIEW using either audio or video.
- Students will discover that Oral History isn’t just “talking story”, but is more a form of “verbal archeology” that gathers data.

Vocabulary/historical figures

- Anthropology, Culture, Ethnography, Informant, Narrators, Interviewer, Interviewees, Respondent

Outline

- Pass out worksheet “Talking Story” to students and pass out copy of SHACC Oral History Field Guide or provide online link to Field Guide.
- Have students define academic vocabulary included in handout before presiding with activity.
- Go over the procedure with students step-by-step and answer any questions.
- Have students conduct an oral interview on a subject (person) of their choice. The interview should be a minimum of 5 minutes in length. They should write the name of the person they choose to interview and their relationship to the student on the handout before continuing and get approval from teacher.
- When student have completed oral interview, have student review their interview and answer Conclusion Questions on handout.
- Students can share oral histories with class (teacher should preview before sharing with class). Ask for volunteers. (Some students may not feel comfortable sharing personal information)

Assessment

- Student engagement and participation.
- Completion of Oral History Interview
- Completion of worksheet: “Talking Story”
“Talking Story”

**Background:**  ORAL HISTORY is a significant element of the academic discipline of cultural anthropology, collecting and cataloging personal observations about the past, and especially about relationships from observers and participants in that past.

Oral history isn’t just “talking story” - to borrow the term from Hawai’i’s Pidgin-English lexicon – but is more a form of “verbal archeology” that gathers data – which may not be available in written, previously published or documented records – about events, people, decisions, and processes. It is by definition “perceptual”.

Oral history interviews are grounded in memory, and memory is very subjective when considering and dealing with the past. How the “past event” is recalled is always influenced by the “present moment” and the individual’s psyche. Oral history can, however, reveal and help us understand how certain shared values and actions shaped surfing’s past, and how surfing’s past shapes present-day values and actions (from SHACC Oral History Field Guide)

What follows are a series of fieldwork guidelines developed to assist you in taking your first steps in becoming an oral historian. At SHACC we are obviously interested in preserving the history and culture of surfing, but you can just as easily collect family oral histories to preserve for the future.

**Procedure:**

1. Complete **Definitions** (below) by defining each of the terms before continuing with activity.

2. **Getting Started:** In attempting to become amateur **ethnologists** and conduct well thought out and at least minimally structured oral history fieldwork, the interviewer needs to have a clear grasp of what he/she is going to ask the potential informant, or interviewee. Spend some time and think about, and write down, potential questions you would like to ask before you begin. This may require a little research on your part.
3. **Tools and Techniques:** Oral history is itself a tool, or in more formal academic terminology, an *instrument* used primarily by scholars who study culture in order to gather information and requires three components:

- An **interviewer**
- An **informant,** or interviewee (the informant or subject of the interview who narrates his or her experience in his/her own voice)
- A **method of recording the narration.** This may include pencil, pen, pad or notebook, cell phone, laptop computer, electronic voice recorder, video, or digital camera. Or some combination of all of the above. For this exercise you may want to start by just using a **cell phone with either audio or video.**

4. **Before the Interview:** Here is a list of things you can do before, during, and after your interview to make your interview more successful.

- **Select who you would like to interview.** Write their **name** and **relationship** to you below:

  **Name** ____________________________________________________________

  **Relationship to you** _______________________________________________

- **Prepare for the interview** by knowing the person you’re speaking with as thoroughly as possible.

- **Know as much as you can about your informant, the interviewee.**

- **Set up the appointment for the interview,** confirm the appointment, and keep the appointment.

- **Don’t “stage” your interview, Oral History isn’t meant for a TV audience.** Keep it simple and as personal as you can.
• Know your recording equipment thoroughly, be it audio, video, or both, and make sure it’s in working order before you arrive at the interview. Audio quality is essential. Test the quality of both audio and video before you begin your interview.

• Prepare a list of questions for the interview. You need not follow the list exactly; other questions will arise during the interview, often prompted by the informant’s responses.

• If you are conducting an interview for the SHACC or another organization you should use an Informed Consent Form that explains the interview process and the rights and responsibilities of both parties. A copy of the consent form can be found in the SHACC Oral History Field Guide.

5. Starting the Interview: Follow the steps below to conduct your interview

   • Turn on or start your recording equipment. Make sure it’s working.
   • State your name, interview date, and interviewee’s name
   • Put the simplest questions first. Start with biographical data including: correct spelling of the interviewee’s name, place and date of birth, age at time of interview.
   • Save the most complex or sensitive questions for the end.
   • Ask open-ended questions rather than questions that can be answered by “yes” or “no”.
   • Ask about one thing at a time and be specific.
   • Keep a pen and pad handy to jot down a word or two during the interviewee’s response to remind yourself to follow up if needed.

6. Technical Considerations: Please review pages 28-33 in SHACC’s Oral History Field Guide for additional guidelines highlighting the areas of audio, lighting, and camera which, if followed, will vastly improve the technical aspects of your interview.

7. When you are finished, review your interview and answer the Conclusion Questions.
Worksheet: Talking Story

KEY TERMS: Define the following words using SHACC’s Oral History Field Guide (page 23-24).

1. **Anthropology** -

2. **Culture** -

3. **Ethnography** -

4. **Informant** -

5. **Narrators** -

6. **Interviewer(s)** -

7. **Interviewees** -

8. **Respondent** -
Conclusion Questions (answer with complete sentences):

1. Who did you choose to interview and why?

2. Did the interview go as you planned? Explain

3. What would you do differently the next time you do an oral interview?