

**Preserve the Baltimore Uprising: Lesson One**  
**What is Oral History and Why is it Important?**

**OBJECTIVE :**

**Students will be able to compare and contrast primary and secondary sources to identify oral history and its impact on the historical record.**

**ASSESSMENT**

**PROCEDURE**

**Drill (5 minutes):** Have the following posted on the board or written in a PowerPoint slide: *What is history?*

Follow up questions to ask: *“How do we learn about the past? Who writes history?”*

Discuss with the students that there are several ways to understand what happened in the past, like journals, objects, legal documents, photos, letters, etc. Go further to help students recognize that historians identify topics to analyze when studying historical events or aspects of life in the past. For example, they might explore politics, wars, national events, etc. For this lesson, it is most important to understand that historians also study the lives of everyday “regular” people.

Introduce today’s topic of Oral History as a way to study everyday life and experiences. Advise the class that today, they will be able to distinguish between primary and secondary sources. By comparing oral histories with various types of sources, they will be able to identify oral histories and comprehend their impact on the historical record when compared to secondary sources.

**Activity 1 MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT OF YOUR LIFE (15-20 minutes):**

Say to the students: “Ask the person sitting next to you the following question: *‘What was the most embarrassing moment in your life?’* Be sure that they limit their answer to **one sentence**.”

Once each student has identified their most embarrassing moment, have each student draft **FIVE** questions to ask their partner so they can learn more about that specific event.

Examples: *How did this event make you feel? Where were you when this event took place? How old were you when this occurred? Who else was present when this took place? What effect did this event have on your life?*

Using **WORKSHEET #1**, allow students time to ask and answer questions regarding their most embarrassing moment. They will complete **WS#1** by listing their five questions and noting partner’s answer to each question.

TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY 2 BY saying to the students: “Now that you’ve discussed your partner’s most embarrassing moment, think about the type of source you’ve just created. You now have a much clearer picture of their most embarrassing moment. The questions you created helped delve deeper into your partner’s story, and they described a personal memory. Is this a primary source? Or is this a secondary source?”

Students will presumably answer that this is a secondary source, as the event be described took place in the past and is being recounted afterward. (Since this is a first-hand account, of course, this is actually a primary source.)

Say to the students: How can we be sure? Let’s discuss the differences between a primary and a secondary source. Direct their attention to the attached PowerPoint presentation to begin Activity 2.

**Activity 2: HISTORY VOCABULARY (10 minutes):**

Say to the students: "What resources do you use when you want to learn something?"

Students will respond with answers such as "Books, my phone, the internet, etc."

Explain that these sources are **secondary sources**. Follow this by using the attached PowerPoint to define secondary sources.

Say to the students: "These secondary sources all have to get their information from somewhere, right? Where do you think these historians gain the information to create these sources?"

Students will respond with answers such as "journals, photos, letters, birth certificates, tax records, etc."

Explain that these sources are **primary sources**. Use the attached PowerPoint to define primary sources. Explain further that primary sources are first-hand accounts of an event in their original form. Reiterate that secondary sources use a variety primary sources to **provide commentary** on an event or **interpret its meaning and significance**, but they are not typically created by people with first-hand knowledge of the event.

Say to the students: "One method to learn about the past is through oral history. What is oral history?"

Students will respond with answers such as "someone recalling an event in an interview"

Using the Powerpoint, define oral history and some common examples. Afterward, discuss what oral history is NOT and be sure to include examples.

*TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY 3 BY saying to the students: "Why is oral history important?"*

Explain to the students that oral history gives "life to the facts." By telling a story from the inside out, a person gives their own experiences an order, providing organization to memories that are now being told as stories. Emphasize that memories, experiences, and stories are important because they help us understand the complexity of events. Explain that today students will examine and analyze an example of oral history told by a witness of the 2015 Baltimore Uprising.

**Activity 3: VANESSA'S INTERVIEW ANALYSIS (30 minutes):** Using WORKSHEET #2 students will complete an analysis of both a secondary source from Preserve the 2015 Baltimore Uprising and a primary source (Vanessa's interview). Student will work independently to read, annotate, and answer questions on both readings. Students will then answer three follow up questions that will help push them toward more critical thinking about the usefulness of oral histories.

**Directions:** Read the background information about the 2015 Baltimore Uprising and the interview with Vanessa Barksdale to answer the following questions. Keep in mind while you are reading the differences between the Secondary account of the Uprising and Primary account given by Ms. Barksdale in her interview.

Depending on the level of your students, you may need to adjust the amount of time dedicated to reviewing the individual questions for each reading.

Once students have finished reading and answering all the questions (1-16), use the follow up questions as class discussion and talking points:

Why is it important to have both secondary sources like the first reading and primary sources like the interview when researching historical events?

How is the information that you receive from each reading different? What can you get from one that you can't get from the other? Is it necessary for the person conducting the interview (interviewer) to have already done extensive research on the topic before conducting an interview? Explain.

**Activity 4: EXIT TICKET (10 minutes):** Once students have concluded their final discussion, ask each student to take their slip of paper that has been cut out from WORKSHEET #3 and complete the following statement in a written response:

*"I believe oral histories are important historical resources because..."*

Students will complete this statement, then place their folded half sheet into the bucket/hat/bowl/etc. at the front of the classroom. If time permits, share a few of these answers and discuss their content as a class. Advise the students that tomorrow (the next day the class meets) they will be using their new knowledge of oral history, applying it to some transcripts of witnesses of the 2015 Baltimore Uprising

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT: None

ACCOMMODATIONS/MODIFICATIONS:

RESOURCES

**WORKSHEET #1 What is Oral History? Note Sheet**

**WORKSHEET #2 Baltimore Uprising and Witness Interview**

**WORKSHEET #3 Exit Ticket Slips**

**READING SHEET #1 Baltimore Uprising and Witness Interview Transcript**

**LESSON #1: What is Oral History PowerPoint**

MATERIALS

**Computer**

**Projector**

**Pens & Pencils**

**A Bucket or Bowl to place Exit Ticket Slips in**