THE GREAT DEPRESSION AS EXPERIENCED AS A CHILD

Teacher: Paul Anthony Evans

October 2009 Teacher’s Workshop on Oral History Interviewing
Library of Congress (LOC) Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS)

College of Education and Human Services
California University of Pennsylvania
I. Standards

**Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening**

1.5.8.B. Write paragraphs that have details and information specific to the topic and relevant to the focus.

1.4.8.B. Use primary and secondary sources.

**History**

8.1.6. B. Explain and analyze historical sources.

II. Inquiry-based Learning Model (IBLM)

This lesson will follow the IBLM in the following sequence: *Ask, Investigate, Discuss, Create and Reflect*. With minor alteration, it is based on the model developed at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, pictured below:

![IBLM Diagram](image)

The steps themselves were not altered, only the order of them. The manner in which these steps will be taken is described below in the procedure (i.e. “Descriptive walk-through of activity”).

III. Descriptive walk-through of activity

For this activity, an oral history interview will be recorded and utilized as part of a broader lesson on the Great Depression. One significant purpose for using the oral history is to have the students actually hear the interview of a person who was a child during the Great Depression. This lesson is intended for pre-teen and teen-age students,
and it would be appropriate for grades six to nine. This lesson can be adapted for other grade levels as well if the teacher determines that it would be appropriate.

This lesson would begin with a discussion about the Great Depression regarding what students think and what they know. The students will use a K-W-L chart at this point so students can establish questions they can answer using their research skills. After establishing a baseline to build new student knowledge, the students will conduct limited research of the Great Depression using the Library of Congress website, as well as other primary and secondary sources.

As a student-centered inquiry activity, the teacher will guide the students in developing investigative questions about the Great Depression that are specific to the experience of a child who lived through the period. This meets the “Ask” component of the inquiry model. Questions can be quite diverse in nature. Some of those questions might be related to the kind of clothing or shoes that children wore during the Depression, the foods that they ate, and how travel might have been different from today. Other questions might relate to holidays or other special occasions and how they were celebrated, what kind of jobs people worked if they were working, and whether they might have met transient workers or people “riding the rails.” The teacher can help the students determine the order of questions according to their importance and relevance to the lesson in case the interviewee is unable to complete the interview in its entirety because of time constraints, fatigue or other reason.

The teacher will print the list of interview questions to use as an outline for the oral history interview. The teacher will contact the person he or she has selected for the oral history component of this activity to ask some general biographical questions about
the person and schedule the interview. It might be rather interesting to select two people
to interview and have the students compare and contrast their oral histories. Students will
be instructed to address any questions or concerns that the interviewee may have.

After acquiring the interview recording equipment through the school’s AV lab or
library, the teacher will test the equipment and become familiar with its operation. The
teacher may use a cassette recorder or portable digital recorder, if available. Another
option would be to use a portable video recorder mounted on a tripod if the interviewee
doesn’t mind being “on camera.” This should be determined prior to the interview, and a
record-only back-up device should be on site and ready to be employed in the event that
there is a problem with the device of first choice or the interviewee changes his or her
preference about being on camera.

The interview will be conducted at the home of the interviewee to ensure the
interviewee’s comfort level is maximized. Distractions will be minimized by silencing all
telephones of the interviewer and interviewee. We will be sure to thank the interviewee
and anyone who has helped with the process of obtaining the oral history for their time
and follow up with results or share anecdotes from the lesson with people outside the
classroom who were involved in the process.

After conducting the interview, the teacher may choose to edit it for content and
time. In the classroom, students will have pencils, paper and their K-W-L charts in their
desk so they can take notes or complete their charts. Next, students will view and listen
critically to the oral history interview. This will meet the “Investigate” component of the
inquiry model.
Students and the teacher will together ask questions about the interview. Students will be instructed to ask questions that begin with “why” and “imagine you are living during the Great Depression…” I will try to get the students to use their imaginations. Asking questions will allow the students to compare or contrast a child’s experiences during the Great Depression with experiences that they have today. Questions about foods, clothing, games or transportation should be good for provoking students’ thoughts. This will meet the “Discuss” component of the inquiry model.

Students will be asked to imagine they are living during the Great Depression and they will be required to write a journal entry from the perspective of a child who is living during the Great Depression. They will have to include at least four specific things that are different from their experiences as children today. These might be differences in clothing, heat or electricity, transportation, games or activities, school experiences, foods or anything that was stated in the oral history that differs from their present life experience. This meets the “Create” component of the inquiry model.

The teacher will collect the students’ journal entries for grading and grades will be determined using the rubric at the end of this activity. The teacher can use the rubric and assign point values according to his or her own discretion. After returning the journals to the students, students will take turns reading their journal entries aloud. The class will discuss the entries noting similarities and differences. Students will be asked to give examples of new things they have learned about childhood in the Great Depression. This meets the “Reflect” component of the inquiry model. At this point, the teacher should also reflect on the entire process to determine what can be done to improve the
experience for the students, the interviewee and the teacher. Suggestions to improve subsequent oral history projects will be recorded and filed with the learning activity.

IV. Assessment tool

The following rubric will be used to assess student learning. It can be modified as needed to suit the needs of specific circumstances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Progressing</th>
<th>Not Meeting Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry includes at least four specific things that are different from their experiences as children today.</td>
<td>Entry includes at least three specific things that are different from their experiences as children today.</td>
<td>Entry includes fewer than three specific things that are different from their experiences as children today.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry is at least five complete sentences.</td>
<td>Entry is at least four complete sentences.</td>
<td>Entry is at fewer than four complete sentences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry has no more than one error in grammar, punctuation or capitalization.</td>
<td>Entry has no more than three errors in grammar, punctuation or capitalization.</td>
<td>Entry has more than three errors in grammar, punctuation or capitalization.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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