Why Guard the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers?:
An Inquiry-based Oral History Learning Activity

by John W. Jolley

ACTION PLAN FOR INTERVIEWING (API)
Oct. 2009 Teacher’s Workshop
Cal U Teaching with Primary Sources
Instructors: Roberts / Lonich
§ I. STANDARDS AND REFERENCES

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening
1.4.8.B: Use Primary and Secondary Sources

Rights and Responsibilities
5.2.12.G: Evaluate what makes a competent and responsible citizen

§ II. INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING MODEL

1. Researching: We as a class will research the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers and the ceremony involved in guarding it.

2. Discussing: After our research phase, we will discuss the questions that we still have regarding the Guards and their responsibilities.

3. Creating: Based on our discussion, we will make a list of questions that we want answered by the guards.

4. Questioning: As a class, we will interview a member of the Guards of the Unknown Soldiers. At this time we will ask our questions.

5. Reflecting: After the interview, we will each reflect on the guard's answers and compare personal beliefs on ceremonial traditions.

§ III. DESCRIPTIVE WALK-THROUGH OF MY ACTIVITY

We will divide the class into groups to research the questions that we have about the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers and its guards. Each group will report back to the class with their facts that they have gathered. Questions that could be answered by the groups might include:

(1) How were the remains of the soldiers chosen?

(2) What are the duties and responsibilities of each guard?

(3) What are the prerequisites to be a Guard?

(4) How must the Guards act on and off duty?
After each group reports on the information gathered, we will ask each student to develop a set of three questions that they would like to ask the guard on the Tomb to further clarify the topic. These questions will be used to compile a list of interview questions that we will ask the guards. These questions will include:

1. Why do we as a Nation have and guard this Tomb?
2. What did you have to do to become a Guard?
3. Why do you and the military make such a spectacle of the event?
4. Is this duty worth what you have to personally sacrifice?
5. Tell us why you choose to take this position of guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers.

After the list is developed, students will be asked to reflect on the duties of the Guards and decide if they would choose to be a guard or even if they feel it is important. I will then compile a list of questions from the students’ questions to use in the interview which I will conduct with the Guard. All of the students will record the Guard’s responses. Chaperons will record the event with video and still photos to be used later in class.

With our plan in place, we will depart for Washington D.C. Once we arrive at Arlington Cemetery, we will proceed to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers. We will observe the Changing of the Guard and record the ceremony on video and with still pictures. After the Changing, the students and I will gather at the entrance of the
barracks to conduct the interview with the guard. Upon completion, we will thank the guard for his time and continue with our tour of Washington D.C.

Once back in the classroom, we will discuss the interview and what we have learned. Every student will write a summary of the interview and reflect on how they felt before and after the interview regarding the duties of the Guards and decide if they would choose to be a guard or even if they feel it is important. Did they change their minds? Do they have a better understanding of the reason we guard the Tomb?

§ IV. MY ASSESSMENT TOOL

The assessment that I will use will be a quiz based on the Guard’s answers to the interview questions. The following will be an example of the questions asked on the quiz.

1. How were the remains chosen to be placed in the tomb?

2. What type of training do the guards have to go through?

3. What are the requirements to be a guard?

4. How did the Guard answer the question as to why he guards the Tomb?

5. Why does the military put such an emphasis on the post?

6. How many guards are assigned to this duty?

7. Based on your reflection during class, has the interview changed your personal beliefs on ceremonial military traditions?