
Land Use Over Time: Examining Living History

Activity Overview

Students interview senior citizens about the area's history.

Objectives

Students will:

- Learn about their place through oral history
- Prepare and conduct an interview
- Communicate and compare insights and perspectives gathered from the interviews

Subjects Covered

Language Arts and Social Studies

Grades

K-2 (limited, see extensions)

3 through 12

Activity Time

Interviews: 1 hour minimum.

Season

Any

Materials

Tape player (for the interview, if desired), stationary and postage stamps

State Standards

Language Arts:

Use effective reading strategies (A.4.1, 8.1, 12.1)

Read, interpret, and critically analyze literature (A.4.2, 8.2, 12.2)

Read & discuss texts to understand human experience (A.4.3, 8.3, 12.3)

Orally communicate (C.4.1, 8.1, 12.1)

Listen & comprehend oral communications (C.4.2, 8.2, 12.2)

Participate in discussion (C.4.3, 8.3, 12.3)

Conduct then communicate research (F.4.1, 8.1, 12.1)

Background

Interviews with people who have lived in the area a long time are a valuable resource for researching land use history. When students talk to and listen to older members of the community they learn what their community looked like long before fast food restaurants and shopping malls, and how young people related to the landscape before television and computers. Chances are many local accounts have not been recorded or made available to the public, and may be lost forever.

Activity Description

Interview a senior citizen living in your community. Here is a summary of useful ideas to prepare and conduct an interview:

1. Select a person to interview. To find someone with historical knowledge or personal experiences contact your local newspaper, historical society, library, senior citizen center, and organizations, such as Rotary Club, and Jaycees.
2. Write questions you will ask during the interview. Possible interview questions are:
 - What changes in land use and land ownership did you witness?
 - How did the roads and transportation change?
 - What significant events took place in the area?
 - What stories did you hear as children from your parents, grandparents or others?
 - What activities did you do after school or in the summer?
 - Did you have a favorite place to visit? If so, where was it and what is there now?
 - What was located where the school is now?
 - Where did you go to school? What do you remember about your education?
 - What did you eat for meals? How much of your food did your family grow or raise? Did your family collect wild foods such as fruits or nuts?
3. Make an appointment convenient for the person you are interviewing. Explain what your project is about and what topics you would like to cover.
4. Take a tape recorder (optional) and writing materials to the interview.
5. During the interview, introduce yourself; ask if you may use a tape recorder.
6. Ask questions and listen attentively. Keep eye contact and show you are actively interested in the topic.
7. At the end of your interview, review your notes and ask follow-up ques-

Land Use Over Time: Examining Living History (cont.)

Social Studies:

Describe examples of land use, communities, shelters (A.4.4)

Identify human caused changes and effects (A.4.8)

Conduct land use history (A.8.4)

Compare & contrast contemporary & historical lives (B.4.4)

Compare effects of technology on people & the environment (B.4.8)

Analyze effects of significant changes (B.12.9)

tions or clarification on unclear points. Thank your interviewee and offer to show him or her a copy of your finished work.

8. After the interview, write a thank you letter.
9. As soon as possible, write a summary of your interview.
10. Present and share interesting insights learned from the interviews. Discuss the different perspectives and experiences older members of the community remember of the area's history.

Extensions

- The information collected through these interviews is a valuable contribution to the community. Create a booklet for the historical society or library. Add photographs and show family trees to embellish the booklet.
- Compare the perspectives and experiences between the older residents and today's children in the community.
- As a class project design a display, write a skit or collection of quotes to convey the findings during a prairie celebration day.
- Visit the local library or historical society to investigate the existence of diaries written by residents who lived in former times.
- Invite a senior citizen to a classroom of K-2 students for a group interview.

Additional Resources

- Brady, J. (1977). *The craft of interviewing*. Vintage.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Gubrium, J. F. (2001). *Handbook of interview research: Context & method*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Sommer, Barbara W. (2003). *The oral history manual*. AltaMira Press.

Assessments

- Based on your experience at the interview, write what you learned about conducting an interview, what went well, and what you might change.
- Develop a 5 minute presentation about what you learned about local history through the interview.
- Compare your personal experiences in your local community with your interviewee's experiences. What is the same and what is different and why?