

VOICES OF SERVICE

High School Oral History Curriculum

Teacher and Student Program Packet

For participating high schools, educators, and students ages 16 and older

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Program partners: Lakeside Veterans Wall of Honor • Lakeside Historical Society • Participating local schools

Purpose

Students prepare for, conduct, document, and reflect on an oral history interview with a veteran. The project treats the interview as both a relationship and a historical primary source. Research is required before the interview so students can ask informed questions, recognize historical references, and avoid placing the burden of basic explanation on the veteran.

Grade band	Recommended length	Culminating products
9–12	Five classroom sessions, independent research, interview fieldwork, and two follow-up sessions	Research dossier, interview guide, recorded interview, metadata sheet, reflection, and approved public materials

Archival stewardship: Original recordings and approved accompanying photographs, biographies, transcripts, releases, and documentation will be housed by the Lakeside Historical Society. Approved access copies may appear on the Lakeside Veterans Wall of Honor website and its official YouTube channel. Future QR codes at the memorial may connect visitors to veteran profile pages.

Teacher Overview

Essential questions

- Why do first-person accounts matter to our understanding of the past?
- How do memory, perspective, identity, and the interviewer's questions shape an oral history?
- How can research help an interviewer ask better, more respectful questions?
- What responsibilities come with recording and preserving another person's story?

Learning objectives

By the end of the unit, students will be able to:

- Explain the value and limitations of oral histories as primary sources.
- Locate, evaluate, and cite reliable contextual sources before an interview.
- Develop open-ended, historically informed questions and purposeful follow-ups.
- Conduct a respectful recorded interview using informed-consent and privacy procedures.
- Distinguish historical fact, personal recollection, interpretation, and uncertainty.
- Create accurate metadata, a time log or transcript excerpt, and a reflective historical analysis.

Teacher responsibilities

- Confirm that all school, parent/guardian, veteran, recording, publication, and repository permissions are complete before recording.
- Coordinate interview matching and scheduling through the program rather than asking students to recruit veterans independently unless the school approves.
- Review student research and interview questions before the interview.
- Prepare students to pause or stop recording whenever requested and to avoid pressing for traumatic, classified, medical, or private information.
- Transfer completed files and documentation through the approved program process; students should not publish interviews on personal accounts.

California Standards Alignment

This project is designed as an applied history–social science and literacy unit. Teachers should select the grade-span codes and history content standards that match the course and the veteran’s service period.

Standard	Application in this unit
CA CCSS RH.9–10.1 / RH.11–12.1	Students cite specific evidence from primary and secondary sources in the research dossier and reflection.
RH.9–10.2 / RH.11–12.2	Students determine central ideas and summarize historical context and interview content accurately.
RH.9–10.6 / RH.11–12.6	Students evaluate point of view, purpose, perspective, and how a source’s position shapes its account.
RH.9–10.7 / RH.11–12.7	Students integrate information from photographs, maps, timelines, records, and audiovisual testimony.
RH.9–10.9 / RH.11–12.9	Students compare the oral history with other primary and secondary sources.
WHST.9–10.2 / WHST.11–12.2	Students write an informative biography, contextual introduction, or historical reflection.
WHST.9–10.7–9 / WHST.11–12.7–9	Students conduct research, gather credible evidence, assess sources, and cite information.
SL.9–10.1–3 / SL.11–12.1–3	Students prepare for discussion, listen actively, ask questions, and evaluate a speaker’s perspective and evidence.
SL.9–10.4–6 / SL.11–12.4–6	Students present findings clearly and use digital media appropriately.

California History–Social Science connections

- Grade 11 United States History and Geography: use the veteran’s service period to deepen study of twentieth- and twenty-first-century U.S. history, including war, foreign policy, civil rights, migration, social change, and the home front.
- Grade 12 Principles of American Democracy: examine civic duty, public service, constitutional questions, government institutions, and the relationship between individuals and national policy when relevant.
- Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills: chronological and spatial thinking; research, evidence, and point of view; and historical interpretation.

Standards note: An oral history should support—not replace—the course’s historical content. Teachers should identify the specific California content standard after the veteran’s service period and interview themes are known.

Unit Sequence at a Glance

Session	Focus	Student evidence
1. First-person accounts	Primary sources, memory, perspective, value, and limitations	Source-analysis notes
2. Historical context	Research question, timeline, credible sources, and service vocabulary	Research dossier
3. Interview design	Open-ended questions, sequencing, follow-ups, and sensitive topics	Draft interview guide
4. Ethics and practice	Consent, privacy, active listening, mock interview, and recording test	Approved guide and practice feedback
5. Final preparation	Roles, equipment, metadata, logistics, and contingency planning	Readiness check
Fieldwork	Recorded veteran interview	Original recording and field notes
6. Documentation	File transfer, metadata, time log or transcript excerpt	Documentation packet
7. Interpretation	Corroboration, reflection, and public-history product	Final reflection or profile draft

Recommended timing

Each classroom session is designed for approximately 45–60 minutes. Research may require two or more additional class periods. The interview should normally be scheduled for 45–75 minutes, with breaks and flexibility based on the veteran’s preference.

Lesson 1: Why First-Person Accounts Matter

Learning target

I can explain what oral history contributes to the historical record and evaluate how perspective and memory influence an account.

Opening

Ask students to compare a textbook paragraph about a major event with a short firsthand account from someone who experienced it. What can each source tell us? What can neither source establish alone?

Key teaching points

- An oral history is a recorded, purposeful conversation created for historical preservation and interpretation.
- A narrator offers lived experience, language, emotion, meaning, and details often absent from official records.
- Memory is selective and changes over time. A sincere account can contain mistakes, uncertainty, compression of events, or later interpretations.
- The interviewer also shapes the source through topic selection, wording, sequence, follow-up questions, and nonverbal responses.
- Historical understanding becomes stronger when oral testimony is compared with documents, photographs, maps, timelines, and other accounts.

Student source-analysis prompts

1. Who created this account, when, and for what purpose?
2. What did the narrator directly experience? What might they know secondhand?
3. What details, emotions, or meanings does this account add?
4. What claims could be checked against other evidence?
5. What might the narrator choose not to discuss, forget, reinterpret, or emphasize?

Exit ticket

In 3–4 sentences, explain why an oral history is historically valuable even when it cannot be treated as a complete or perfectly objective record.

Lesson 2: Research Before the Interview

Non-negotiable requirement

Students may not conduct the interview until the teacher approves the research dossier. Preparation demonstrates respect, supports accurate questions, and allows students to recognize names, events, locations, vocabulary, and chronology mentioned by the veteran.

Required research areas

- Veteran's military branch and the branch's role during the service period.
- Approximate years of service and major national or international events during that period.
- Known rank, occupation or specialty, unit, duty station, ship, aircraft, base, or deployment location.
- Relevant conflict, operation, home-front development, policy, or social context.
- Geographic research using at least one map.
- A short glossary of military terms, abbreviations, equipment, or organizations likely to arise.

Minimum source requirement

Use at least three credible sources, including one primary source when reasonably available and two reliable secondary or institutional sources. Appropriate sources may include government agencies, museums, archives, service histories, historical societies, reputable books, scholarly databases, and established news organizations. Wikipedia may help identify search terms but should not be one of the final three sources.

Research dossier

Component	Requirement
Timeline	5–10 dated events connecting the service period to broader history
Context brief	Approximately 300–500 words explaining what the student needs to understand before the interview
Source notes	Citation, key facts, author or institution, and evidence of credibility
Known/unknown chart	What is established, what is uncertain, and what should be asked
Vocabulary	At least 8 relevant terms or abbreviations
Question seeds	At least 10 possible questions arising from the research

Student Handout: Source Evaluation and Research Dossier

Veteran: _____ Student(s): _____

Service period or topic: _____ Interview date: _____

Source evaluation

Source and citation	Author/institution and purpose	Useful evidence	Limitations or questions

Known, inferred, and unknown

Known from reliable evidence	Reasonable inference—not yet confirmed	Unknown—ask or research

Pre-interview context summary

Lesson 3: Building the Interview Guide

Question principles

- Ask one question at a time.
- Prefer open-ended invitations: “Tell me about...” “What do you remember...” “How did...”
- Begin with accessible life-history and background questions before moving into complex events.
- Use researched facts to orient a question without displaying knowledge or correcting the narrator during the interview.
- Avoid leading questions, judgmental wording, assumptions, and requests for classified or private information.
- Prepare questions, but listen closely enough to depart from the list when the narrator introduces something important.

Question sequence

Stage	Purpose	Example
Opening record	Identify participants, date, general location, and purpose	“Please state your name and confirm that we have your permission to record this interview.”
Early life	Establish personal and community context	“What was your life like before you entered military service?”
Decision and entry	Understand motivations and transition	“What do you remember about deciding to enlist or being drafted?”
Training and duties	Document daily experience and responsibilities	“Walk me through a typical day in your assignment.”
Historical events	Connect lived experience with researched context	“What did you understand about the situation at the time?”
Reflection	Invite meaning without imposing it	“How did your service shape the person you became?”
Closing	Return control to the narrator	“What have we not discussed that you believe future generations should understand?”

Follow-up prompts

Useful follow-ups include: “Can you tell me more?” “What happened next?” “How did you feel at the time?” “Who else was there?” “What did that term mean in your unit?” and “How did your understanding change later?”

Student Handout: Interview Question Planner

Develop 12–15 main questions. Mark the five questions that are essential if time becomes limited.

Question	Research that informed it	Possible follow-up	Teacher approval

Questions to revise

Avoid	Why	Better approach
“You must have been terrified, right?”	Leading and assumes an emotion	“What do you remember feeling at that moment?”
“Did you like the military?”	Too broad and invites a yes/no answer	“What aspects of military life were most meaningful or difficult for you?”
“Tell us about the worst thing you saw.”	Intrusive and potentially harmful	Allow the veteran to choose what experiences to discuss; never press for trauma.
“Why didn’t you...?”	Can sound accusatory and ignores historical constraints	“What options did you understand were available at the time?”

Lesson 4: Ethics, Consent, and Respect

The narrator retains agency

- Participation is voluntary. The veteran may decline any question, pause, stop, reschedule, or withdraw according to program agreements.
- Permission to record is not automatically permission to publish. Separate release and donation documentation may be required.
- Students must clearly identify when recording begins and ends.
- Do not promise confidentiality that the school or program cannot provide.
- Do not post clips, photographs, quotes, or behind-the-scenes material on personal social media.
- If the narrator discloses private, classified, medically sensitive, or potentially harmful information, do not pursue it. Notify the supervising teacher or program representative after the interview.

Trauma-informed interviewing

Veterans may discuss combat, injury, loss, discrimination, moral conflict, or difficult transitions. Students are not counselors or investigators. They should listen without demanding detail, allow silence, offer a break, and accept a change of subject immediately. The goal is preservation through consent—not extracting the most dramatic story.

Before recording

6. Introduce everyone and review the purpose, approximate length, intended preservation, and possible public access.
7. Confirm that required releases have been explained and completed by the responsible adults or organizations.
8. Ask whether any topics are off limits and whether the veteran has accessibility or break needs.
9. Confirm permission on the recording itself before beginning substantive questions.

Lesson 5: Interview-Day Procedures

Roles for a student team

Role	Responsibilities
Lead interviewer	Welcomes the veteran, asks main questions, listens, and follows up.
Second interviewer	Tracks the guide, notes names and terms, and asks approved follow-ups.
Recording monitor	Tests audio/video, watches battery and storage, and records file information.
Documentarian	Completes metadata and field notes; handles approved photographs or artifacts under supervision.

Equipment and room checklist

- ☐ Quiet, accessible location with comfortable seating and minimal interruptions
- ☐ Camera or recorder positioned and tested; lens and microphone unobstructed
- ☐ Power, charged batteries, available storage, and approved backup method
- ☐ Neutral background, stable lighting, and no confidential documents visible
- ☐ Phones silenced; water and planned breaks available
- ☐ All names, date, general location, and recording settings documented

Recorded lead-in

Sample: “Today is [full date]. We are at [general location]. My name is [student name], and I am interviewing [veteran name] for the Lakeside Veterans Wall of Honor Oral History Program. The original interview and related materials are intended for preservation by the Lakeside Historical Society. Do we have your permission to begin recording this interview?”

During the interview

- Maintain eye contact and attentive body language rather than reading continuously from the guide.
- Allow pauses. Do not fill every silence.
- Do not interrupt to correct a date or detail; make a note for later verification.
- Ask for spellings and explanations of unfamiliar terms at a natural point.
- Watch for fatigue and offer a break.
- Close by asking whether the veteran wants to add, clarify, restrict, or correct anything.

Student Handout: Interview Metadata and Field Notes

Field	Information
Narrator/veteran name	
Interviewer(s)	
Recording date and time	
General location	
School and class	
Teacher/supervisor	
Recording device and format	
Approximate duration	
File name(s)	
Release status	
Restrictions or follow-up needed	

Names, terms, and facts to verify

Time marker	Name, term, date, place, unit, ship, aircraft, or event	Follow-up source

Field notes

After the Interview

Immediate file handling

10. Stop the recording and confirm the file saved correctly.
11. Do not rename, edit, compress, upload, text, email, or post the original unless directed by the program's file-transfer procedure.
12. Create the approved working or backup copy without changing the original file.
13. Complete the metadata sheet and identify any restrictions, corrections, or follow-up commitments.
14. Transfer files and paperwork to the supervising teacher or designated program representative.

Historical verification

Students should verify names, dates, units, locations, and public historical claims using credible sources. Corrections should be documented respectfully. The goal is not to “fact-check” the veteran’s feelings or personal meaning, but to distinguish recollection from independently established context.

Required student products

- Final research dossier with citations
- Approved interview guide
- Metadata sheet and field notes
- Time log or teacher-selected transcript excerpt
- 500–750 word reflection or contextual biography
- Source comparison identifying where the interview confirms, complicates, or differs from other evidence
- Thank-you letter to the veteran, reviewed by the teacher before delivery

Public access workflow

Students should understand that preservation, review, and publication are different stages. The Lakeside Historical Society will house approved original materials. The Wall of Honor organization and its partners will determine what may be published on the website or official YouTube channel. The memorial’s single QR code may connect memorial visitors to approved veteran profiles; it should never bypass the review and permissions process.

Student Reflection and Source Analysis

Respond using specific examples from your research and interview.

What did your background research help you understand or ask that you otherwise would have missed?

What did the veteran's first-person account add that was not available in your secondary sources?

Where did memory, perspective, uncertainty, or later reflection appear in the interview?

Identify one claim or detail you corroborated. What sources did you use, and what did you conclude?

How did your wording, sequencing, or follow-up questions shape the interview?

What ethical responsibility felt most important during the project?

How should future viewers use this oral history responsibly?

Assessment Rubric

Criterion	4 – Exemplary	3 – Proficient	2 – Developing	1 – Beginning
Historical research	Thorough, accurate context; strong credible sources; clear chronology and vocabulary	Adequate context and credible sources; minor gaps	Limited context or uneven sources; important gaps	Minimal, inaccurate, or missing research
Source analysis	Insightfully evaluates perspective, memory, purpose, evidence, and limitations	Explains value and limitations with relevant evidence	Recognizes some source issues but analysis is general	Treats testimony as unquestioned fact or dismisses it without analysis
Interview questions	Open-ended, researched, sequenced, respectful, and adaptable	Mostly open-ended and informed; logical sequence	Some leading, broad, repetitive, or under-researched questions	Questions are unprepared, inappropriate, or largely closed-ended
Interview practice	Active listening, strong follow-ups, clear consent practices, professional conduct	Respectful and prepared with effective listening	Inconsistent listening, pacing, or procedures	Disregards preparation, consent, boundaries, or professionalism
Documentation	Complete metadata, careful file handling, accurate time log/transcript, clear restrictions	Documentation is complete with minor errors	Several missing or inaccurate elements	Files or documentation are mishandled or substantially incomplete
Reflection and interpretation	Uses evidence to connect personal testimony with historical context and ethical responsibility	Makes clear connections using evidence	Reflection summarizes more than it analyzes	Reflection is incomplete or unsupported

Suggested weighting: Historical research 25% • Source analysis 15% • Interview questions 15% • Interview practice 20% • Documentation 10% • Reflection and interpretation 15%.

Differentiation and Accessibility

Supports for multilingual learners and students needing scaffolds

- Provide a vocabulary bank, model questions, sentence frames, and an annotated sample source.
- Allow collaborative research roles and a co-interviewer format.
- Preview military abbreviations and unfamiliar geographic names.
- Permit bilingual interviews when the veteran, family, school, and program can support accurate consent, description, and access.
- Offer audio reflection, visual timeline, or structured outline options when consistent with course requirements.

Advanced extensions

- Compare two veterans' accounts of the same era, branch, location, or policy.
- Analyze how a veteran's recollection changes or complicates an official report or textbook narrative.
- Create an annotated digital exhibit proposal using approved materials.
- Research local demographic, economic, or political connections between Lakeside and the military.
- Produce a standards-based historical essay using the interview as one source among several.

Accessibility for veteran participants

Plan for mobility, hearing, vision, fatigue, communication, transportation, and technology needs. Provide questions or themes in advance when requested. Captions, transcripts, clear audio, accessible web presentation, and flexible scheduling should be treated as core program requirements, not optional additions.

Program Administration Checklist

- ☐ School partnership and supervising teacher confirmed
- ☐ Veteran matched and preliminary contact completed
- ☐ Student and parent/guardian requirements completed
- ☐ Veteran participation and recording permission completed
- ☐ Publication, copyright, and Lakeside Historical Society donation terms explained
- ☐ Research dossier approved
- ☐ Interview guide approved
- ☐ Accessibility and logistics confirmed
- ☐ Equipment tested and backup plan documented
- ☐ Original files and metadata transferred securely
- ☐ Veteran review, restrictions, and corrections documented
- ☐ Approved website/YouTube/publication decision recorded
- ☐ Thank-you and follow-up completed

Recommended companion forms

- Veteran pre-interview information form
- Oral history participation and recording release
- Deed of gift to the Lakeside Historical Society
- Student and parent/guardian media release
- School partnership agreement and supervision plan
- Interview metadata and restriction sheet
- Post-interview narrator review and correction form
- Digital file transfer and receipt record

Selected Professional and Educational Resources

This curriculum draws on the following authoritative guidance. Teachers should consult the current versions when adapting school or repository procedures.

- California Department of Education. California Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/finalelaccsstandards.pdf>
- California Department of Education. History–Social Science Framework and Content Standards resources. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/>
- Library of Congress. Veterans History Project Field Kit and Sample Interview Questions. <https://www.loc.gov/vets/>
- Oral History Association. Principles and Best Practices. <https://oralhistory.org/best-practices/>
- Oral History Association. Core Principles. <https://oralhistory.org/oha-core-principles/>
- Oral History Association. Oral History Classroom Guide and Educator Resources. <https://oralhistory.org/best-practices-guidelines-and-toolkits/>

Local program note: Final school procedures, consent language, file specifications, and transfer requirements should be approved jointly by the Lakeside Veterans Wall of Honor, participating schools, and the Lakeside Historical Society before student interviews begin.