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11<sup>th</sup> Grade American Literature  
Oral History and Research Project  
A Place-Based Learning Unit

**How my fellowship experience relates to this project:**

My fellowship experience included traveling to many places and discussing storytelling with many people from Carolina to Minnesota to Washington state, California, New Mexico, Alabama, and back home to Carolina. An unexpected outcome of this trip and the conversations I had along the way was the awareness of the link between a place and the stories it produces. I decided to integrate this idea into a project I had been doing for a couple years in order to make it more substantive and promote a greater understanding and respect for the people and places that my students interact with daily.

**Skills**

- Storytelling
  - Oral
  - Composition
- Research
  - Evaluation of sources
    - Bias/Reliability
    - Relevance
  - Synthesis of sources
  - MLA format, citations
  - Useful note taking
  - Logical organization of information
- Presentations
  - Eye Contact
  - Sincerity, preparedness
  - Voice

**Community relevance**

Ours is a community which suffers from a disconnect between the younger and older generations. In addition to this, the relationship between our school and the community is not as solid as it should be. While the families value what we do with their children, they don't always receive the message that we value them and the place in which we all live. I believe that valuing the stories of my students' elders will build both relationships within the community and improve the relationship between the community and the school.

## Understandings

- Good stories endure.
- Personal narratives are the product of historical and social forces.
- The oral tradition is important and must be valued.
- We are all responsible for remembering, for preserving those stories and memories that reflect our history and our values.
- Research enriches our lives if done thoughtfully and with integrity.

## Progression or tasks/skills

1. Locate an elder with a good story
  - 30 years older than you
  - The story must have taken place before 1980
  - The setting ...
2. Write interview questions designed to gain an understanding of the storyteller and context of the story.
3. Sit down with storyteller and record the story and details of interview...
4. Create a written version of the story
5. Plan presentations
  - The story
  - Brief context
  - The significance to you, storyteller, or us
- 6. Presentations**
7. Consider examples of excellent research papers
8. Develop 3-5 research questions → What are the conditions that made this story possible? → How did those conditions come to be?

### **Class will help each other formulate research questions based on presentations.**

- The time
  - The place
  - The storyteller's unique circumstances/group membership
  - **Social, political, economic, religious, artistic, cultural, geographical forces that produced the story, the experience**
9. Gather sources → Source sheet (working bibliography)
    - At least 6 sources, including storyteller
    - At least 2 other primary sources
      - Literature
      - Visual art
      - Another witness to the event or time or place
    - Identify bias
    - Evaluate relevance → Can you explain how this will strengthen your treatment of the story and/or setting?
  10. Take notes → at least 25 Note Cards
    - Paraphrasing
    - Identifying crucial excerpts

- Maintaining organization of materials
11. Organizing, outlining
    - Decide on format of final piece: commentary and research woven into narrative or a separate subtopics of the **story**, the **context**, the **significance** (to you, to the storyteller, to us)
    - Categorizing note cards according to outline
    - Create outline
      - Narrative pieces
      - Major research questions addressed
    - Organize note cards and label according to outline
  12. Draft paper, type → 5-10 pages including both the collected narrative and research gathered addressing research questions.
    - Integrating claims, text, commentary, and analysis
    - MLA Formatting
    - Academic Commentary
    - Objectivity of researcher (even coming from a subjective motivation)
  13. Revise
    - Globally – for ideas, progression
    - Locally – for presentation, for formatting, for mechanics
  14. Polish, Publish/turn in → Create a booklet containing all those pieces that meet expectations
  15. Potential extension: Host event at school inviting the original storytellers to school for a book signing and performance from oral historians (students).

### **Larger Curricular Implications**

This project provides an important introduction to the year ahead. In our course students are asked to investigate American storytelling as a reflection as well as a driving cultural force. By grounding our initial discussion of stories and their importance in their own experience and the experience of those they care about, we open up the potential to approach subsequent stories with a generosity of spirit and an inquisitiveness that would not otherwise be as possible.