

The Foot Soldier Project for Civil Rights Studies
Oral History: Finding and Documenting Foot Soldiers
Grades K-12

The Foot Soldier Curriculum is inspired by the scholarship and research of the Foot Soldier Project for Civil Rights Studies at the University of Georgia. While the lessons in the Foot Soldier Curriculum are not based on Georgia's QCC standards, they adhere closely to them. The purpose of the Foot Soldier Curriculum lessons is to provide teachers in any school system with a framework for teaching issues and events of the Civil Rights Movement.

Letters and numbers in parenthesis indicate suggested course and grade level, for example: (SS2H1) = SS-Social Studies, 2-Grade Two, H-History, 1-Skill Number. Georgia teachers can go to <http://www.glc.k12.ga.us/qcc/homepg.asp> for current standards.

NOTE: It is important to review the current standards applicable to your state and grade level and adapt the lessons accordingly.

Introduction to Oral History

The motivation behind [The Foot Soldier Project](#) is to discover and document the many "foot soldiers" of the civil rights movement who may not have been widely recognized or acclaimed. Although their efforts have not been well documented or widely publicized, their courage and contributions have nevertheless transformed our nation.

The Foot Soldier Project has collected and compiled research that includes books, historical papers, artifacts, intellectual and social histories, and documentaries. Interviews played a central role in creating the documentaries "[Foot Soldier for Equal Justice](#)" and "[Hamilton Earl Holmes: The Legacy Continues.](#)" The interviews and documents collected to complete the documentaries are examples of oral history.

Author Donald E. Ritchie describes oral history in his book, *Doing Oral History-A Practical Guide*:

"Simply put, oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews" (p. 19).

He continues:

"An interview becomes oral history only when it has been recorded, processed in some way, made available in an archive, library, or other repository..." (p. 24).

Why Collect Oral History?

History has often been written by scholars based on accounts of famous, rich, or powerful people. Oral history, on the other hand, has included interviews with ordinary people. The focus of oral history can be on an organization such as the [University of Michigan's](#) study of black-owned hospitals in Detroit. Oral history can also describe events such as desegregation or the Vietnam War. Other oral historians focus on a specific time period (as with the [WPA Federal Writer's Project](#)) or region (such as the [Southern Oral History Program](#)).

Historical documents and books cannot tell us everything about our past. They also neglect people on the margins of society - ethnic communities, disabled and unemployed people for example - whose voices have been hidden from history. Oral history fills in the gaps and gives us history which includes everyone. Ritchie describes the reason for doing oral history is "to ask questions that have not been asked, to collect the reminiscences that otherwise would be lost" (p. 46).

History is not only what is found in textbooks or on websites. History is all around us in the memories and experiences of older people. People you know may be able to remember historical events like World War II, the Civil Rights movement or the first landing of man on the moon. Unfortunately, because memories die when people do, if we don't record what people tell us it is history that is lost for ever.

Grades 9-12

History

Explain the definition of oral history and the rationale for collecting it. Discuss methods for students to conduct their own oral histories of unheralded participants in the Civil Rights Movement.

Primary Learning Objectives:

What is oral history? What are the reasons for doing oral history? What is the process of collecting oral history?

Secondary Learning Objectives:

Can I identify and interview participants or witnesses of the Civil Rights Movement in my community?

Step 1: Duration – 50 minutes

Introduce students to the life of Hamilton Earl Holmes and other "foot soldiers" in the Civil Rights Movement by watching *Hamilton Earl Holmes: The Legacy Continues*.

Step 2: Duration – 10 minutes

Read or display this quote from Herbert Holmes:

"I don't want to just look as if it's just the Holmes family. There were hundreds of people all over the South for the last hundred years who have made sacrifices to pave the way for the successes which we have. I don't think that is really appreciated."

Have students make a list of names they know associated with the Civil Rights Movement.

Step 3: Duration – 15 minutes

List and discuss the names compiled by the class. If the list is short, call attention to it and ask how the list could be longer. Also take note of whether or not local individuals are represented in the students' lists.

Step 4: Duration – 10 minutes

Hand out and review "Guidelines for Conducting Oral History Interviews." Depending on the age level, you can break the segments into separate activities as below.

Step 4a: Duration – 15 minutes

Objectives: Discuss and establish possible objectives for conducting oral history interviews in your community. Use the questions on the handout as a guide for formulating objectives. Adapt these to your grade level and community.

Step 4b: Duration – 15 minutes

Finding Interviewees: Using the handout, discuss ways of finding interviewees for an oral history interview. Review each student's list and adjust according to grade level and feasibility.

Step 4c: Duration – 10 minutes

Open-ended Questions: Review the meaning of open-ended questions. Ask the class to come up with examples of open-ended questions.

Total Duration

75-115 minutes

Assessment:

Assess for student's understanding of the definition of oral history and the reasons for conducting oral history. Depending on the grade level, assess student's understanding of steps for conducting oral history and, if using the

interview exercises, how closely the student followed the "Guidelines for Conducting Oral History Interviews."

Release Forms and Deed of Gift Forms

It is important to provide release forms to students before they conduct interviews. The "Guidelines for Conducting Oral History Interviews" handout includes sample wording for a release form. Check with the school office for your school's guidelines on release forms. The Indiana University Center for the Study of History and Memory has sample release forms and deed of gift forms at <http://www.indiana.edu/~cshm/forms.html>. You will need a deed of gift to store and use the information you gather.

Materials and Equipment

1. DVD *Hamilton Earl Holmes: The Legacy Continues*
2. The Foot Soldier Project website - <http://www.footsoldier.uga.edu/index.html>
3. Handout - "Guidelines for Conducting Oral History Interviews" from the Foot Soldier Project website
4. Article - "Teaching Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement in High School History Courses: Rethinking Content and Pedagogy" from the Foot Soldier Project website

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