



History Telling

Comparing Personal Narratives

Appropriate for Upper Elementary and Middle School (grades 4-8)

Objective: To understand that history is made up of many people's stories of past events and that their lifespan only represents a small part of history. To explore how historians learn about events that happened in the past by looking at events that happened in their own family. To compare and contrast events as told from several perspectives.

Materials:

- Pencils
- Paper
- Tape recorders (if possible)

Procedure (This project should be completed over several class periods, it may take a week or two):

- Discuss with your students the idea that history is made up of many people's stories about events that happened in the past. You may wish to read them historical first person accounts, memoirs, and historical accounts as a removed person has perceived the event.
- Discuss that each of them has a history, their families have histories, and that these fit into the great histories of the U.S. and the world.
- Bring up interviews as one way historians can learn about the recent past.
- Ask students who they could interview in their families to learn about events that have happened in their family.
- Tell your students that it will be their job to interview two family members about the same event. What events could they find out about? Examples include:
 - Asking parents, two grandparents, or older siblings about the day a student was born.
 - Asking dad and grandma about dad's first day of school, or graduation, or other life event.
 - Asking grandparents or parents about a wedding day.
 - Asking two family members about a specific event that is important to cultural heritage (bar/bat mitzvah, quincinera, confirmation, etc).
- Or, have your students interview two people in the school about a significant event in the school's history. Examples include:
 - Big snowstorm
 - The first day of school in a past year
 - The first time two teachers met each other
- Assign this project as homework (maybe give them a few nights to complete it in case they have to call a relative)
- Students should take notes and tape-record (if possible) the interviews.
- Students bring in completed interviews on the set date.
- On the day the interviews are due, put students in groups of 3 or 4.

- Have students share with their group the information they learned. They should discuss what information was similar and different from each interview.
- Bring the class back together for a larger discussion in which the interviews are compared. Ask your students to compare the two interviews: “What did these two people say that was similar? What did they say that was different? Why might this be?” Examples for reasons of similarities and differences:
 - People remember different details
 - One person’s memory might be affected by what another person has said
 - Recent events are easier to recall and therefore two people may remember them in a similar way.
- After this discussion, tell your students that historians talk to people or read accounts about events and have to look at the similarities and differences in those accounts. They then make decisions about what actually happened and “interpret” an event in an “official account.” Historians try to make their stories as accurate as possible based on the limited information they have.
- Over the next few days have your students prepare the “official” story of the event they interviewed their family members about.
- They will need to synthesize the information from the two interviews.
- They should not add information that is not in their interviews. The stories should be accurate reflections of the events.
- Once they’ve completed their official stories, you can invite the family members in to hear them and make a class book about the family events of your class.

Assessment: Evaluate students on their ability to understand that history is made up of many different people’s stories. As well as their ability to interview family members, synthesize the information, and create an accurate story of an event.