

Personal Interview History Lesson

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Objective: This lesson presents social history content and topics through the voices of ordinary people. It draws on primary sources.

Using excerpts from the Chennault Aviation & Military collection, students study social history topics through interviews that recount the lives of ordinary Americans. Based on these excerpts and further research in the collections, students develop their own research questions. They then plan and conduct oral history interviews with members of their communities.

Grade Level: 6-8 and 9-12

Standards:

- 6-8.1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- 6-8.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- 6-8.3. Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).
- 6-8.7. Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
- 6-8.9. Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.
- 6-8.7. Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.
- 6-8.8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
- 6-8.9. Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis reflection, and research.

Time Requirement: One to two weeks

Directions: Print out the PDF of the lesson and give each student a copy of the personal stories. Choose one personal narrative to read as a class. Lead the class in a discussion about what an interview is and what type of questions are asked during an interview. As a class compile a list of possible interview questions.

Assessment: Students can be assessed on their understanding of personal interview histories by conducting their own interview with a member of their family or the community in which they live.

Enrichment: Students can research additional aspects of the Vietnam War. The teacher can allow the student to present their findings to the class.

Read the following excerpts of personal interview histories from the Chennault Aviation & Military collection. As you read the personal narratives think about what questions you want to ask the person you will interview.

1. Bernice Williamson Mercer

The first time I saw Selman Field was about the middle of 1942. I was a graduating senior from Ouachita Parish High School. The secretary of our school, Mrs. Perkins, drove me out to Selman Field to see if I could place my application to work there. It was under construction at that time and they were not taking applications yet. So, I worked for a dentist for a while in the meantime, I went to work at Higgins Aircraft in Michoud, Louisiana, which is just outside New Orleans. During WW2, women filled most jobs in our country while men fought for our freedom, although some women did serve in the armed forces.

In 1945, I returned to Monroe. I took the Federal Civil Service Exam and was placed in the position of Assistant Chief Supervisor in Air Corps Supply Warehouse #1 at Selman Field. Selman Field was a town in itself. A typical day at Selman Field was arriving for work with our picture badges on, checking in at the guardhouse and catching the trolley to go to your post. On the way around the field you could see cadets marching, training, exercising, and drilling. Later on during the day the servicemen would be doing their laundry and hanging their clothes outside on a clothesline. The planes would be taking off for special training and then returning to base. Selman Field was an absolute flurry of activity.

2. Lois Carter Stephens

In 1942, I had been done with nursing school for about a year, and was employed on a surgical floor at the E.A. Conway hospital. A couple of the patients had radios and were listening each day for news of the war. It was easy to hear the ads for Army nurses, and I decided that is what I should do. I enlisted and by May 1, 1942, I was at Shephard Field Army Air Force Base where I remained until December 1942, when I was transferred along with four other nurses to the Eagle Texas Army Air Force Base. We were the first nurses there aside from a chief nurse. The hospital was small, but we were kept busy and I enjoyed the time there. My orders to go to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey to be outfitted for Port of Embarkation came in April 1944.

It's your turn to conduct an interview. You can interview someone in your family or in your community who served in the military or served their country on the Homefront during a war or conflict. Here is a list of steps to guide you through your interview process.

1. Choose someone to interview
2. Schedule a time to talk to the person you have chosen. Make sure you schedule enough time and be on time to meet them.
3. Compile a list of interview questions that you want to ask your interviewee.
4. If you plan on recorder your interview then make sure you have a fully charged device or back-up batteries.
5. When you conduct your interview make sure you let the interviewee speak without interruption.
6. After your interview is over make sure you thank the interviewee for their time.