

Types of history

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Family history

Students in Years 5 and 6 have had a range of opportunities to explore family history in previous years, retelling family stories, discussing family artefacts, and examining old family photographs or listening to stories by grandparents. In Year 3 the local community's history may have been examined through family history. In Years 5–6, students could interview older family members about the migration history of the family or family contributions to the development of a colony or state. Some families will have stories and evidence of past prominent family members. Students with family links to colonial times may be able to provide evidence from family history of life years ago such as old photographs, family documents, artefacts and memories.

If using family history in an investigation, it would be advisable to notify parents of the planned study. Some families may not wish their children to explore family history in detail. By keeping to a general approach, these issues may be avoided. It is not necessary to take the more traditional method of examining family history by using birth and marriage certificates and other family documents, so this should allay any concerns that some parents or carers may have.

Activities introducing historical concepts

- The concepts of continuity and change may be introduced in family history through activities based on comparing photographs of the changed environment of a chosen area where members of a family lived. Old family photographs of migrant families will also be excellent examples of change and continuity.
- The question 'How do I know?' can be used to reinforce the concepts of sources and evidence, for example, 'How do I know about my ancestors living in colonial times?' Sources could include paintings or drawings, official documents, diaries, letters and artefacts illustrating everyday life.
- Comparing different family experiences of migration introduces the concepts of similarity and difference. Use class discussions to draw out similarities and differences in family migration histories or display an artefact or photograph students have provided from home with a brief explanation of what it says about a family's history. A class display could be made of these items with an emphasis on similarities and differences.

Using guest speakers

Encourage students to talk to their parents and grandparents about their childhoods, particularly if these relatives migrated to Australia or took part in political activities for recognition of rights for Aboriginal peoples or women. This activity can be done informally or in a structured way, with a small number of specific questions (see the section titled 'Oral history' on page 31).

Alternatively, invite an older person to talk to the class. It is advisable to inform your guest speaker about the areas you would like them to touch on during their talk.

Local history

The value of local history

Local history is very relevant for students as it begins with their known world. It can be conducted mainly 'in the field' through observation and recording, which provides learning experiences outside the classroom for all student abilities. It is history 'unplugged', seen through students' own eyes rather than through a computer screen.

Related classroom activities could involve handling artefacts, analysing old photographs and engaging with the experiences of older people. It extends students' interest in and experience of their surroundings and helps them make sense of their world. Students in Year 5 could study the local area for its colonial history or the impact of a significant development or event. In Year 6, the impact of a significant local individual or group could be examined. A local migrant group may also have played a significant role in the development of the local area.

Local history provides excellent opportunities for developing important history skills:

- observing and recording the remains of the past
- questioning what these remains tell us about the past
- thinking about if and why these remains should be preserved

- drawing conclusions about the past from a range of sources.

Local history also provides an ideal context for teaching and learning about the concepts of change and continuity—how life in the past was different from or similar to life in the present.

The scope of local history

The scope of local history can be broad or narrow and the range of possible topics is diverse. A local history study could focus on changes and continuities in the local environment. It could be the study of a single event or major change that was significant for the wider community, such as the arrival of the railway, or it could trace a theme over time, such as the history of the environment, farming, the impact of technology or the contribution of a particular individual or group.

A study of the more recent past could involve students conducting oral history interviews. Teachers should choose the most accessible and relevant areas for study, appropriate for the abilities and interests of the students. Through local history, teacher and students can discover the story of the local area as a microcosm of wider Australian history. Local history can readily be integrated with other subjects such as Geography and English.

Local history for Years 5 and 6

Much of the Year 5 content can be studied using local history.

- A significant local historical event or development important to the wider community such as early farming, exploration, a gold rush and roads built by convicts can provide 'clues' to local history.
- The impact of a local individual or group in the past may have had significance for the wider community.
- A local individual or event may have been significant for the development of Federation.
- A site of significance may have been related to the struggle for social or political rights.
- A significant individual or group in the development of Australian society may have lived near, or come into contact with, the local area.

Clues to significant events or developments may be found in local monuments such as statues, monuments, war memorials, place names or artefacts in the local museum. Since local history can be quite varied, it can be tailored to suit your class. There are many ways to introduce a study of the local area; it is yours to create.

Teacher planning

- Decide on the extent of your study: you may wish to build on the experiences that your students had in previous years. Your local area may have a strong link to a particular period of history, such as early colonial times, or may have been a relevant area for the settlement of post-war migrants. It may not be relevant for topics such as Federation.
- Gain background knowledge: good sources of local or regional history include the local library and museum, history websites, local council, historical society, local Aboriginal Land Council, State library and perhaps older residents.
- Locate useful resources: once you have an idea of the focus for a study of the local area, you can concentrate on more specific resources that may be available, such as aerial maps, old street directories, council maps, land grant maps, old phone books, census data, old newspapers, postcards and photographs, depending on the aspect you wish to investigate. Buildings can provide valuable information, for example old houses, churches, museums, monuments and railway stations. Private documents such as letters, diaries and journals may be held in the local library or museum. There may be more resources for one particular time period and you may wish to focus on that era.

Begin in the classroom

- It is sound practice to begin with the known. What do students remember from the past few years? Ask them to identify any visual clues about the past in the local area: What have they seen that is old in the area? Provide photographs of local historic buildings, monuments, or remains to encourage discussion.
- Investigate place names and street names for clues to the early history of the area, particularly the topic you have chosen. Place and street names often preserve the names of Aboriginal groups, early settlers, significant citizens and important local, national or international events.

Beyond the classroom

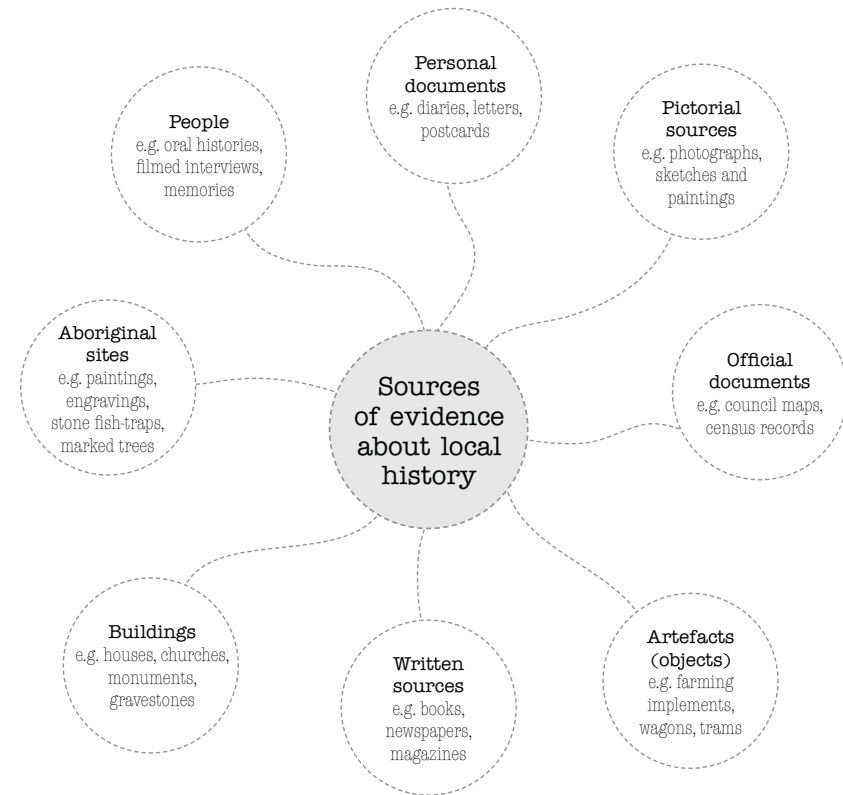
- Take the class on a short 'heritage' walk, asking students to identify historical remains they studied previously. Focus on the aspect of history you are studying, such as evidence of national events, contributions of individuals or groups, or developments of Australian society.
- Visit a local museum or heritage site. Visits to your state/territory or Parliament House will provide students with a greater understanding of the process of government.
- See 'Site studies' on page 34 for further details.

Back in the classroom

- Create a photographic display of buildings, structures or monuments that provide evidence for your topic. Why is the person, event or development important or significant, state-wide or nationally? What impact did this person or event have on the local area and Australia?
- Invite guest speakers to share their knowledge and recollections of these individuals or events. For example, a speaker from the local Aboriginal land council could tell stories about local clashes between Aboriginal peoples and early settlers; a speaker from the local historical society could tell stories about early pioneer life; a grandparent of a student could tell stories about being conscripted for the Vietnam War.
- Present the class with a selection of artefacts relevant to various phases of local history. Students could be asked: 'What am I?' 'What clues do I provide about the history of our area?' Relevant artefacts could include early farming or mining tools, an old harness or bridle, pottery, a candle holder, a migrant's battered suitcase, a certificate of naturalisation or a political poster.

Use narrative

- Focus on a local group that has contributed to the community. The teacher tells the group's story from the perspective of an individual from that group. Students question the teacher during or after the narrative.
- Set a writing exercise beginning with 'Group X contributed to our community by ...'
- Conclude with a discussion focusing on 'How do we know about our past?' Students could record a list of possible sources or display a photographic or pictorial record.



Oral history

What is oral history?

Oral history is based on people talking about their memories. It is a two-way process where someone shares their memories with an interviewer who has carefully planned what questions to ask. People are generally more interesting than documents, so oral history can help bring the past to life. One of the strengths of oral history is that it highlights for children that history involves the experiences of ordinary people. It can also be a means of increasing understanding between generations.

The value of oral history

Communication

Oral history can be an excellent way to engage students in the process of 'doing' history through inquiry learning. It encourages active student learning and gaining experience in gathering evidence through interviewing and recording. Literacy skills are highlighted through the modes of listening, reading, speaking, writing, viewing, creating and communicating. By planning an oral history investigation, students need to identify their subject, plan appropriate questions and create a text for a specific audience. They need to plan and draft their interview questions and edit for clarity of meaning. A variety of digital forms may be used.

Local identity and oral history

Oral history helps to develop students' understanding of and identification with their local area and the local community through personal contact. This is particularly important in helping develop an empathetic understanding of those different from themselves and people who have had different experiences such as Aboriginal peoples, older generations, migrants and refugees. It also emphasises that there are often different interpretations of a historical event or period and that memory is often subject to omissions and embellishments.

Historical skills

Historical skills that can be developed through oral history include:

- locating relevant subjects and seeking information from people and other sources
- comparing and contrasting sources, for example official reports and personal recollections
- detecting prejudice, bias, personal attitudes, perceptions, exaggerations and distortion
- testing information for relevance, consistency, fact and opinion
- developing an appreciation of the importance of carefully and accurately recording information and acknowledging sources.

Social skills

Oral history can help develop important social skills as well as historical skills. It requires students to design open-ended questions that will elicit information from the interviewee, rather than 'yes' or 'no' responses; to be courteous in arranging and conducting the interview; to speak clearly, and to listen attentively. Recording the interview requires students to use appropriate technology. Acknowledging the interviewee in any published account using the information gained lays the foundation for ethical scholarship.



Planning a successful oral history interview

Students can conduct interviews at home with family members or friends, or at school where guests have been invited for the purpose. Whatever the situation, the following steps are good practice.

Preparing the questions

- What topic do you want to find out about?
- Who would be a good person to interview? They will need to be old enough to have memories of your topic.
- What questions will you ask? This will depend on what you want to find out about.
- Make sure your questions are 'open' rather than 'closed' questions. A closed question is one that produces a 'yes' or 'no' answer. For example, 'Do you remember Anzac Day services when you were at school?' is a closed question, whereas 'What do you remember about Anzac Day services when you were at school?' is an open question.
- Make sure your questions are clearly expressed—don't use slang expressions.
- Where will the interview be held? It will need to be a quiet place where the interviewee will feel relaxed. Who else will be present at the interview?
- What equipment will you use? Do you know how to use it? Is it working?

Arranging the interview

- Contact the person you would like to interview (in person, by letter, email or phone) and ask them if you can interview them about your particular topic. Explain why you are doing it and what you will do with the information they provide.
- Arrange a time and a place and ask if it is OK to record the interview. Estimate how long the interview might take.
- Give the interviewee a copy of your questions a few days before the interview so they will have time to think about them. There may be some questions they may not wish to answer and this will give them an opportunity to let you know. It may also give them time to find photographs or other objects to show you.
- Once the interview arrangements are made, take time to practise your interview technique with a classmate or family member.

Conducting the interview

- Before the interviewee arrives, check your equipment and record a brief introduction with the name of the person being interviewed, your name, the date, place and topic.
- Welcome your guest and thank them for taking part in the interview.
- Ask your questions and allow time for the interviewee to answer. Don't interrupt.
- Sometimes you may not get exactly the answer you want, so you may need to ask an additional question for clarification.
- Although you will be concentrating on asking your questions and listening to the answers, try to show interest in what the interviewee is saying. This will encourage them to respond.
- Once all of your questions have been answered, ask the interviewee if they want to listen to the recording. Ask the interviewee if they are satisfied with their answers or if they would like to change or add anything.
- Thank the person you have interviewed and acknowledge how much you appreciate them sharing their memories and knowledge with you.

After the interview

- Label the interview tape or file with name, date, location and topic.
- Send a thankyou letter or card to the interviewee.
- Acknowledge the interviewee in any work you produce that uses their information.

Cautionary advice

Oral history, with its reliance on personal opinion and memory, may be subject to half-truths, inaccuracies, bias and faulty memory. If the class is investigating changes over time in the local community, they may find that opinions vary with each person they interview. This can lead to a discussion on the variable nature of historical sources; there is never only one story or version of history.

Ethical considerations and common courtesy are also important. Some community members in small towns may have been approached for interviews many times in the past and may be reluctant to be interviewed again. Some memories will not be shared; they may be too sensitive or private. Students must learn to respect that. There may be reluctance to speak on some topics, so be aware of cultural barriers. Check the language of student questions, keeping them simple and avoiding slang and jargon.

In Years 5 and 6, students may use oral history to further investigate local Aboriginal contact history, or interview a local historian on early colonial life or family members or older residents about significant national events or developments that affected themselves and/or the local community.

