



Comparing & Contrasting Oral Histories of 9/11

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Grade level: 9-12

Length: 4-5 weeks

Introduction

A global tragedy like September 11th can sometimes obscure the impact it had on individual lives. As demonstrated in this excerpt from the HBO documentary [What Happened on September 11](#), hearing a personal story can shine a light on the effects of terrorism on people's everyday lives, and allows the students to relate to someone who was directly affected by the attacks.

Watch the [Understanding 9/11 Through Personal Stories](#) excerpt, then explore this lesson plan to see how an oral history can be a tool to teach 9/11.

Objective

To give students an opportunity to better understand and interact with people who have a vivid memory of where they were and how they reacted to the attacks on 9/11.

Common Core Standards

Comprehensive Common Core Alignments at end of lesson plan.

English Language Arts Standards for Writing: 1D, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7

English Language Arts Standards for Speaking & Listening: 4, 5

Resources

- [Understanding 9/11 Through Personal Stories](#) Excerpt
- ["What Happened on September 11"](#), HBO

Preparation

Students interview two different subjects about where they were when they first heard about the 9/11 terrorist attacks, what they did after first hearing about the attacks, and their reflections on 9/11's impact on the U.S.

1. Think of the people in your life who may be willing and able to share their account of this day. Select two. **Note:** ask the permission of the potential participants before the more formal interviews begin. Asking permission and alerting them of the subject beforehand will help the potential participants decide whether or not they want to be involved in your report. You should also ask for consent to present their interview to the class.
2. Create questions in advance that are tailored to your subjects, if possible. Here is a list of general questions to help you get started:
 - When and where were you born?
 - How would you describe your personal connection to NYC? To the World Trade Center?
 - Where were you when you first heard about the 9/11 terrorist attacks? What was your initial reaction? What was the initial reaction of those around you?
 - What did you do after you first heard about the attacks (for example, called loved ones, prayed, continued on with the day, etc.)?
 - Share any reflections you have about 9/11 and its impact on the U.S.
3. It may be beneficial to record the interviews, if permission is granted. This will allow you to produce a more accurate transcript or even paraphrased response. You will submit the interview in one of these forms (transcript or paraphrased response). Please keep in mind that it may be difficult for some of your subjects to discuss this topic, so it is encouraged that you be sensitive and flexible with the questions you ask.



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Activity

Students will write a paper in which they include all of the following:

- Why you chose to focus on these two subjects
- Highlights from both of the interviews
- A brief comparison of their reflections on the 9/11 attacks. To what degree are these reactions and reflections similar? What factors attribute to their degree of similarity?
- Your final conclusions

Assessment/Reflection

Students will present their findings to the class, in whichever format you find most effective, and will incorporate the following (note: these are the same points as in the paper above):

- Why you chose to focus on these two subjects
 - Highlights from both of the interviews
 - A brief comparison of their reflections on the 9/11 attacks. To what degree are these reactions and reflections similar? What factors attribute to their degree of similarity?
 - Your final conclusions
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Common Core Alignments

These alignments were written for the 9th-12th grade level. However, this lesson can easily be adjusted for use in other grades and corresponds to the following Common Core Standards. Student assessments and expectation may vary depending upon grade level and ability.

ELA Standards for Writing

Key Ideas and Details

- Standard 1D: Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
- Standard 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Production and Distribution of Writing

- Standard 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Standard 5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
- Standard 6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.
- Standard 7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

ELA Standards for Speaking & Listening

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

- Standard 4: Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.
- Standard 5: Add audio recordings and visual displays to presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.