

Oral History

oral = related to your mouth

history = what people have done in the past

You are a part of history! Someone in your family (maybe you!) was brave enough to leave the country where s/he was born and start a new life in the United States. The United States is a nation of immigrants. Except for American Indians, everyone's family came here from another country at some time in the past. Without immigrants, there would be no United States!

immigrant = person who leaves his/her native country to live in a new country

Look at the definitions for "oral" and "history." What do you think the term "oral history" means? _____

You are going to write an oral history of your family. Since an oral history is a report of what people say (with their mouths), not what they write down, you will need to interview an adult member of your family.

interview = ask one person many questions

When you interview your mother or father or aunt or uncle, find a quiet place with no distractions, ex. TV or ringing phones. You do NOT need to write every word your interviewee says. Take notes—only write the important words. For example, if s/he says, "I was born in Paris, France," write the note "born—Paris." If your interviewee must wait while you write everything down, you are doing something wrong. Plus, s/he will become bored and not want to answer any more of your questions. If you are talking to your interviewee in a language that is not English, you can take your notes in the other language and translate them later.

What is an oral history? _____

True or False: Only a small number of Americans have families that immigrated from another country. _____

Are you an immigrant? ____ How do you know? _____

When your interviewee answers a question, what should you write down? _____

What will happen if you try to write down everything s/he says? _____

Why do you think you should interview a person in a quiet place? _____

Give two reasons you think oral histories are important: _____
