Interviewing an Older Relative

Some people have a marvelous talent for telling fascinating stories about past events. In our family, we are lucky to have both my mother, Louise Ryder, and my mother-in-law, Constance Siegel, who possess this special gift. Thanks to them, we have gained a great many insights into our family history. Without their stories, we would know very little indeed about how our relatives—both in Europe and America—lived, and what their lives were like.

Most of us know only small bits and pieces of our family history. This activity is designed to change all that! We will be interviewing an older relative and listening to some stories we may never before have heard about our families. In doing so, we may come to appreciate our families all the more.

The ability to ask simple, open-ended questions, and to listen very carefully to the answers are important components of this activity. A cassette tape recorder is a great thing to use when interviewing your relative. If this equipment isn’t available, try to take some brief notes as the person answers your questions.

Before introducing this activity to your class, interview one of your own relatives, and tape or jot down some of his/her stories.

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**Materials**

- notebook or composition paper
- pencils
- pens
- cassette tape recorder (if available)
- blank tape

**Activity**

1. Introduce this activity by playing a tape of one of your relatives telling a story, or by briefly relating such a story through your notes.
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2. Explain that in this activity, we will be interviewing one of our older relatives in order to gain a better understanding of our family history.

3. Ask the children to choose the person they wish to interview, and to formulate some questions that they would like to ask that person. You may wish to pass out a list of suggested questions, such as the one that follows, to further assist your students.

   • What were things like when you were a kid?
   • Can you tell me about some funny incidents from your past?
   • What do you remember about another country or city?
   • Where did you live as a child?
   • What was the climate like?
   • What was your house or apartment like?
   • What kind of family gatherings did you attend?
   • What pets did you have?
   • How were holidays celebrated?
   • What kind of games did you play?
   • How did you meet another relative (ask, for example, how your mother met your father)?
   • What was school like?

4. After everyone has their questions prepared, remind them to bring a tape recorder and blank tape, or a notebook and pen/pencil to their interview.

5. Assign a certain date by which the children should have conducted their interview.

6. When all the interviews are complete, hold a sharing session and story hour.

Follow-Up

Invite the interviewees to attend a special “Meet the Relatives Class Party.” Ask each child to make a drawing based on something he/she learned about the family.

Helpful Books


