

Migration Oral History Project

This document provides guidance and resources on how teachers can teach oral history to their pupils, and organises a project whereby pupils can conduct their own oral history interviews. This guidance is influenced by my own oral history project which I ran at a school in inner city East Birmingham, the resources provided by the [Migration Museum](#), and the writing of practitioners like Emily Toettcher, Eliza West and Dan Lyndon Cohen.

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Teacher Guidance

In order for pupils to be able to conduct their own interviews, there is some pre-teaching that is required.

- 1) Pupils should understand clearly the aims of the project.
- 2) Pupils should possess a degree of fluency in the interview topic. For example, if pupils are conducting an interview on migration, they should have some knowledge of migration history and terminology.
- 3) Pupils should have been taught basic interview skills including body language and the appropriate/inappropriateness of certain questions.

The resources below aim to prepare pupils in each of these areas. This table gives more information on each of these areas.

Local and Migration History (p.3)	This document will provide a series of links for resources that can be used to educate pupils on local migration history.
Interview Skills (p.3-6)	<p>This document provides three resources to teach interview skills. All are recommended but none are, by themselves, essential.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Clear guidance on how pupils should conduct their interviews. 2) A mock interview transcript which pupils can assess according to the criteria outlined in the guidance sheet. 3) A series of questions which pupils need to sort into leading and non-leading questions.
Interview Preparation (p.8)	This document will provide example sheets that pupils can use to plan their interview.

Local Migration History Resources

Below are examples of local migration history resources, although another topic or area could be used.

Birmingham Example:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/14XoazPY4wGkrvzHgTAOYIEA45kTWQApNHSCA1FjuY8g/edit?usp=sharing>

Devon Example:

<https://www.tellingourstoriesdevon.org.uk/locations/exeter/exeter-school-resources>

North West England:

<https://www.migrationmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Migration-Stories-NW-Education-Resource.pdf>

Interview Skills Resources

Activity 1: Pupils should read through and discuss the following guidance with their teacher.

Oral History Interviews: How to interview someone about their migration story

DO:

- **Be respectful and kind**
Remember, some memories might be emotional or difficult. Be gentle with your questions and be prepared that there might be some questions a participant doesn't want to answer.
- **Listen carefully**
Give the person time to speak. Don't interrupt. Show you're interested by nodding or saying "thank you" or "that's interesting."
- **Prepare your questions**
Write down your questions before the interview. Start with easy ones (like "Where were you born?") and then ask about their journey or experiences.
- **Ask open-ended questions**
These are questions that can't be answered with just "yes" or "no". For example:

- "Can you tell me about your journey?"
- "What was it like when you arrived in this country?"
- **Get permission**
Ask the person if it's okay to record the interview or take notes. Always thank them afterwards.
- **Be patient**
Some people might need time to remember or explain things. That's okay.

DON'T:

- **Don't ask personal or upsetting questions too quickly**
For example, don't start with "Why did you leave your country?" – wait until later in the conversation. Be prepared that participants might not want to answer all your questions if they might be triggering for them.
- **Don't argue or correct them**
Everyone has their own story. It's not about being "right" – it's about listening.
- **Don't talk too much**
You're there to learn their story. Keep your own opinions and experiences for another time.
- **Don't forget to say thank you!**
They are sharing something very special with you. Show your appreciation.

Activity 2: Please read through the interview between Marcus and Ruth. During the interview, Marcus makes some mistakes. Discuss with your class what Marcus does wrong, and what he could do to improve.

Mock Interview – What Not To Do

Marcus: Hi Ruth, thanks for letting me interview you. I just need to ask you about your migration story.

Ruth: Sure, that's fine.

Marcus: Cool. So, why did your family leave your country?

Ruth: Well, I was born in Zimbabwe. My parents decided to leave because the political situation was getting tense, and they were worried about our future.

Marcus (quickly): Oh, so was it really dangerous? Did you lose your house or something?

Ruth: Not exactly. We still had our house, but there was a lot of uncertainty. My parents wanted a better life for us, especially for our education.

Marcus: Right. So, what year was that?

Ruth: We moved in 2012.

Marcus: Oh okay. So, did you like it here straight away or was it kind of weird?

Ruth: Um... it was definitely a big change. It took a while to get used to the weather and school felt very different.

Marcus (*laughs*): Yeah, the weather here's awful. I guess you missed the sunshine then?

Ruth: Yes, I did. But there were other things I missed more, like being near my grandparents.

Marcus: Right. Do you think it was worth it though? Like, was it better here in the end?

Ruth: That's a hard question. In some ways yes, but we also faced challenges.

Marcus: Yeah, I guess. What kind of stuff?

Ruth: Well, my parents had to find new jobs, and sometimes people weren't very welcoming at first.

Marcus: Oh... that sucks. Anyway, so what was school like? Were the teachers really strict?

Ruth: It was quite different from my old school. I had to catch up in some subjects.

Marcus (*checking his paper*): Hmm... I think I've got enough. Thanks, Ruth.

Ruth: Okay... sure.

Questions

What did Marcus do wrong?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

4.

How could Marcus do better next time?

1.

2.

3.

4.

Answers: Below are some points pupils could make.

1. Marcus jumped to dramatic assumptions when he asked if she "lost her house". This is a guess that could be upsetting. Instead, he should have given her space to explain why she left.
2. Marcus missed opportunities to ask meaningful follow up questions. For example, he did not explore important topics like the challenges of living in Britain or family separation.
3. Marcus tried to make jokes about the weather when she mentioned the hard changes of moving to a new country.
4. Marcus did not really listen and ask follow up questions. Instead, he just moved on to new topics without exploring what Ruth had said.
5. Asking why Ruth's family 'left their country' was not a particularly sensitive way of starting the interview about her migration story. A better alternative introductory question would have been: 'Can you tell me about your migration story?'

Activity 3: Pupils should discuss what a leading question is. Once they have done this, they must sort the following nine questions into 'leading questions' and 'non-leading' questions.

A **leading question** is a question that *suggests* the answer you want someone to give. It often includes your own ideas or guesses.

Why are leading questions bad in interviews?

- They can make the other person feel uncomfortable or judged.
- They might stop the person from sharing their true story.
- You might miss out on hearing something surprising or important!

- They can influence people into giving a certain answer.

Instead, use open and neutral questions.

- Start with words like **how, what, when, where, tell me about...**
- Don't push the person to say something specific
- Show you're ready to listen to *their* story, not tell it for them

Below is a table of 9 questions. Pupils should sort these questions into 'leading' and 'non-leading' questions.

"You must have felt really scared when you left, didn't you?"	"What do you remember most about the place you grew up?"	Why did you come here - was it because your country was dangerous?"
"Can you describe your journey to the UK?"	"I bet you missed your friends a lot, right?"	"How did your family feel about moving?"
"You came here on a plane, didn't you?"	"Tell me about what life was like when you first arrived?"	"Was it hard to find work when you got here?"

Interview Preparation

Resource 1: Interview Preparation Sheet.

Pupil Name:

I am interviewing:

Our interview will be about:

What do I want to learn about? (Think about what this person could tell you. Think about: How long have they lived in their local area and what might have changed over that time? Do they have direct experience of migrating, and why did they migrate?)

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What questions will I ask? (Make sure you are writing your question carefully so that it is polite and not intrusive. Make sure it is not a leading question).

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2.
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3.
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4.
.....

5.
-

Resource 2: Example Questions

Background and Initial Decision

1. What prompted your decision to migrate to x?
2. What were your initial thoughts or impressions about x before you arrived?
3. How did you prepare for the move, and what challenges did you face during the process?
4. Did you know anyone in x before you moved? If so, how did they influence your decision?

First Impressions and Adjustments

5. What was your first impression of x when you arrived?
6. How did you adapt to the culture and environment here?
7. What were some of the most surprising differences between x and your place of origin?
8. What challenges did you face in settling in x (e.g. housing, employment, making friends?)

Community and Belonging

9. How has the local community in x welcomed you?
10. Are there any cultural or community groups you've joined since moving here?
11. How do you maintain connections with your heritage or culture while living in x?
12. What does "home" mean to you now? Has that meaning changed over time?

Work and Education

13. Did you face any challenges in finding work or accessing education in x?
14. How has your career or education progressed since you moved here?
15. Have you noticed any differences in work culture or education systems compared to where you lived before?

Lifestyle and Daily Life

16. What are your favorite things about living in x?
17. Are there any places in x that hold special meaning for you?
18. How has your lifestyle changed since moving here?

Reflections and Future Plans

19. What advice would you give to someone considering moving to x?
20. Looking back, is there anything you wish you had known or done differently during your migration journey?

Early Experiences

1. What was x like when you first came here?
2. What stood out to you the most about the city /area back then?
3. What were the people and community like when you started living here?
4. What kinds of transport were there when you arrived?

Changes in Buildings and Places

5. How have the buildings and streets in x changed since you moved here?
6. Have the neighborhoods where you've lived changed a lot? How?
7. Have things like schools, hospitals, or libraries improved or changed over time?
8. Are there any new parks, museums, or famous places that weren't here before?

Changes in Culture and People

9. Have you noticed more or different kinds of people moving to x over time?
10. Are there new festivals, events, or fun activities in the city now?
11. Do you think people in x are more welcoming to newcomers now?
12. Are there any old traditions or ways of doing things that people don't follow anymore?

Changes in Jobs and Shops

13. How has it become easier or harder to find jobs in x since you first came?
14. Have the types of businesses or jobs here changed a lot?
15. How have shopping areas or markets in x changed over the years?

Changes in the Environment and Lifestyle

16. How have parks, rivers, or green spaces in x changed?
17. Do you think life in x is faster or slower now than when you came?
18. Do people spend their time in the same way, or do they do things differently now?

Thoughts on Changes

19. What are the best changes you've seen in x?
20. Are there any things about x you miss from the old days?

References

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