ENERGY TRANSITIONS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Activity Guide

Activity Time
15 to 45 minutes

Subjects
Social Studies, Science

Grade Level
Middle School, High School, Nonformal

Topics
Oral history, Interviewing Skills, Renewable Energy, Climate Change

University Archives
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Wisconsin Energy Institute
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

OVERVIEW

We are in the middle of a global energy transition. Create your own oral history to capture eyewitness accounts of these changes by interviewing (and recording) a person of your choice.

OBJECTIVES

Students will...

- Differentiate between primary and secondary sources of history.
- Define oral history and understand its strengths and weaknesses.
- Evaluate and construct meaningful questions about the transition away from fossil fuel sources of energy.
- Conduct an oral history interview that may be included in the UW–Madison Archives.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What is oral history?

- A field of study and a method of gathering and preserving the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events. Oral history is based on storytelling and listening (Kathy Walbert, Duke University).
- The words "oral history" can also refer to the audio recording of an interview.

Why is oral history important, interesting, or exciting?

We often learn about history through secondary sources, such as textbooks or articles that summarize and analyze events. Oral history gives everyone a platform to share their experiences and accounts. We each are the expert of our own story. Oral history democratizes history, lifting up voices and experiences that might otherwise be forgotten.

Why should we conduct an oral history about energy?

The ways we make and use energy are changing. Renewable energy projects are being built across Wisconsin and the world as the economics of energy change and as people become increasingly aware of the impacts and realities of climate change. By recording an oral history you are capturing voices and experiences of this fast-changing time and creating a primary source for this moment in history. You can listen to previous student's interviews at the UW–Madison Library *website* (https://search.library.wisc.edu/search/digital?page=2&q=Grandparents+University+AND+Oral+History+Program).

What sort of questions are good for an oral history interview?

Open-ended questions that don't lead the narrator to a certain answer are best. Try to stay away from yes or no questions.

MATERIALS

- Questions list
- Writing utensil to take notes
- Device to call and/or record your narrator
- *Interview release form* (http://go.wisc.edu/energyinterviewsform)

ACTIVITY

Before the interview

1. Choose who you will interview. In oral history, we call this person the narrator. Pick someone whose experiences and perspectives you would like to learn about, perhaps an older relative or family friend.
2. Ask permission from your parent (if under 18) and your narrator to conduct an interview. Plan a date and time for your interview and decide what platform you'll use.
3. An important part of oral history is preserving it for people to look back upon. Consider how best you could capture your conversation. Using your phone to record in a quiet room works well if you're in person. If you decide to record your interview over the internet, practice recording with whatever tool you use. (Skype, Facetime, Zoom, and Google Meet all make recording pretty easy.) If you decide to use the phone, then contact us by emailing troy.reeves@wisc.edu. We'll give you a number that you and your narrator will call into that will produce a good-quality recording. If you decide not to record, then take careful notes.
4. Together with your narrator, decide you'd like to include your interview in the UW–Madison Archives collection. By doing so, you'll preserve your first-person account for future historians. Don't worry about whether or not your story is "interesting" enough; your perspective is valuable! To share with the Archives, you'll need to fill out the attached release form. Be sure to share a copy of this with your narrator.
5. Review your interview questions. Think about what you know about how we use energy, and add questions to the list that make you curious.

During the interview

1. Find a quiet place to conduct your interview.
2. Start off by getting permission if you're hoping to record the interview.
3. Ask your questions and listen carefully to your narrator's responses. Remember that it's okay to go "off-script."Ask open-ended follow-up questions and encourage your narrator to expand upon their answers. Give your narrator time to think about their answers; silence is okay!
4. At the end of your interview thank your narrator for their time and their stories. Be sure to sign a copy of the release form and provide your narrator a copy for their records.

After the interview

1. Review your notes.
2. Save your notes and the recording of your interview. Give your files a clear title.
3. Write a brief summary of what you talked about and select a few keywords that would give a person who hasn't yet heard your interview an idea of what you discuss.
4. If you'd like to add your interview to the UW–Madison Archives collection, upload your recording and completed release form to this *Google Form* (http://go.wisc.edu/energyinterviews). The Wisconsin Energy Institute and the UW Library Archives staff will work to get your interview added to the online collections.

REFLECT

1. Share answers to each question with your class. What patterns and similarities do you notice in the narrators' responses? What differences? Compare and contrast their answers.
2. Think about what factors (age, location, gender, occupation, etc.) may be responsible for the similarities or differences in the narrators' responses.
3. Make predictions. The way we generate and use electricity, heat, and fuel has changed dramatically in the last decades. What do you predict your energy use and generation will look like in 2030? In 2050?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

StoryCorps (http://storycorps.org), is an organization that works to preserve and share stories in order to build connections between people. They have an app to help you record stories for the Library of Congress, hundreds of animated stories to listen to, and lesson plans for teachers.

UW Archives Oral History Program (http://library.wisc.edu/archives/archives/oral-history-program). The Oral History Program's collection, held at the UW–Madison Archives, currently encompasses over 1,500 interviews touching on all aspects of the University's history. They support oral history projects and collaborations.

INTERVIEW QUESTION LIST

1. Start by stating the date, your location, and your name. Then, ask your narrator(s) to state their name, age, and where they grew up and are living now.
2. Tell me about the energy your family used when you were growing up. Where did the energy you used for heat, electricity and fuel come from?
    - What did your parents tell you about energy?
    - What did you tell your kid(s)?
3. How have you seen the way we make and use energy change since your childhood?
    - What are the biggest reasons for those changes?
4. What do you remember about the 1970's energy embargo or why it happened? (If you lived through the increase in gas prices in the 1970's)
    - Did you have to make any changes to how you were living?
5. When did you first hear about renewable sources of energy?
    - What do you remember thinking about renewable energy when you first heard about it?
6. What are your thoughts about renewable sources of energy now?
7. When was the first time you heard about climate change?
    - How has your understanding about climate change changed since then?
    - What ways have you seen climate change impact your community or the world?
8. What have you noticed about how COVID-19 is impacting our energy use, whether electricity or fuel? What do you think we should prioritize about as we come out of this time of social distancing?
9. What are your hopes for my generation and how we make and use energy?
10. Do you have anything else you'd like to say?

STANDARDS – ENERGY TRANSITIONS ORAL HISTORY

English Language Arts

Completing the Energy Transitions Oral History Project supports a wide variety of English Language Arts (ELA) standards including the Wisconsin Academic Standards for Literacy in All Subjects. For a complete understanding of applying the standards to your instruction, please see the Department of Public Instruction's publication *Wisconsin Standards for English Language Arts.*

Social Studies

Completing this activity can help meet or exceed the following select social studies standards and learning priorities for grades 6-12 (m, h):

Social Studies Inquiry Practices and Processes (Inq)

Standard SS.Inq1: Wisconsin students will construct meaningful questions that initiate an inquiry.

- Inq1.a: Develop questions based on a topic
- Inq1.b: Plan an inquiry

Standard SS.Inq2: Wisconsin students will gather and evaluate sources.

- Inq2.a: Gather diverse sources

Standard SS.Inq5: Wisconsin students will be civically engaged.

- Inq5.a: Civic engagement

Behavioral Sciences (BH)

Standard BH4: Wisconsin students will examine the progression of specific forms of technology and their influence within various societies.

- BH4.a: Progression of technology

Geography (Geog)

Standard SS.Geog4: Wisconsin students will evaluate the relationship between identity and place.

- Geog4.a: Characteristics of place

Standard SS.Geog5: Wisconsin students will evaluate the relationship between humans and the environment.

- Geog5.a: Human environment interaction
- Geog5.b: Interdependence

History (Hist)

Standard SS.Hist1: Wisconsin students will use historical evidence for determining cause and effect.

- Hist1.a: Cause
- Hist1.b: Effect

Standard SS.Hist2: Wisconsin students will analyze, recognize, and evaluate patterns of continuity and change over time and contextualization of historical events.

- Hist2.a: Patters stay the same over a period of time
- Hist2.b: Patterns change over a period of time
- Hist2.c: Contextualization

Standard SS.Hist3: Wisconsin students will connect past events, people, and ideas to the present; use different perspectives to draw conclusions; and suggest current implications.

- Hist3.a: Connections
- Hist3.b: Perspective
- Hist3.c: Current implications

Standard SS.Hist4: Wisconsin students will evaluate a variety of primary and secondary sources to interpret the historical context, intended audience, purpose, or author's point of view.

- Hist4.a: Historical context
- Hist4.c: Purpose
- Hist4.d: Point of view (POV)

All standards referenced from *Wisconsin Standards for Social Studies 2018.*

Science

The Energy Transitions Oral History Project fits well with the following Wisconsin Science Standards for 6-12 grades (m, h), but to fully meet the standards they may require additional supporting instruction. For a complete understanding of applying the standards to your instruction, please reference the *Wisconsin Academic Standards for Science 2020.*

- **SCI.CC5: Energy and Matter**
- **SCI.CC7: Stability and Change**
- **SCI.LS2:**
  - SCI.LS2.A: Interdependent Relationships in Ecosystems
- **SCI.ESS2:**
  - SCI.ESS2.D: Weather and Climate
- **SCI.ESS3:**
  - SCI.ESS3.C: Human Impacts on Earth Systems
  - SCI.ESS3.D: Global Climate Change
- **SCI.ETS2:**
  - SCI.ETS2.B: Influence of Engineering, Technology and Science on Society and the Natural World

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uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/uwcampusvoices

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energy.wisc.edu/education

GREAT LAKES BIOENERGY RESEARCH CENTER

glbrc.org/outreach

2020

The Wisconsin Energy Institute is working on one of the most critical challenges of our time – the transition toward new, clean energy systems and solutions.

The Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center supports research for creating biofuels and bioproducts that are economically viable and environmentally sustainable

STORY GATHERING INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM

My signature below confirms my agreement with **UW-Madison Archives (Archives)** and their legal representatives regarding the disposition of audio recordings and photographs collected with me on _____ (date).

I hereby grant and transfer to Archives all rights, title, and interest to my story, including without limitation the copyright for future educational and scholarly use. I understand that the audio recording of my story will be maintained and made available indefinitely, including online, by UW – Madison Archives.

I attest that I have voluntarily agreed to tell my story and to be recorded and that this document contains the entire and complete agreement concerning the use and preservation of my interview.

Signature of Story Teller(s): _____

Name (print): _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Interviewer: _____

Name (print): _____

Email: _____

If interviewer is under 18, signature of parent or guardian is required.

Name (print): _____

Signature: _____