

IN HONOR OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH

TESOL INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION PRESENTS

ORAL HISTORY, ODYSSEY AND IDENTITY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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An Afro-Caribbean in World War II: Oral History in ELT

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Using Oral History in English Language Teaching

Preparation for oral history interviews conducted by students

- Help students select the subject of their oral history interviews (older family members, members of the community, members of the institution, etc.).
- Build context. Assign homework and classwork that have students read about the period in history their interviewee will be talking about.
- Make sure your students know the difference between an interview and a conversation.
- As a whole class, or in small groups, brainstorm questions to use in the oral history interview, then have students decide on the order in which to ask them.
- Have students listen to or watch interviews on TV or the internet and observe the kinds of questions professional interviewers ask (e.g., information questions or Y/N questions, and the proportions of each). Have them observe the percentage of time the interviewer speaks compared with the percentage of time the interviewee speaks.
- Show them an oral history interview and ask specific questions about it that get students thinking about the nature and significance of oral history.
- Have students practice the grammar for question formation.
- Help students identify and practice with useful grammar and vocabulary they will need for their interviews.
- Have the whole class interview one person, record the interview, transcribe it, and check/correct each other's transcriptions.
- Have students interview each other about something of mutual interest and record the interviews. Make sure each student has the chance to be the interviewer and the interviewee.
- Check and correct students' questions before they interview the subject of their oral history.
- Decide how the oral history interviews will be shared, e.g., written reports, oral presentations to the class, a collection of all the interviews, etc.

Skills cultivated by oral history

- **Critical thinking**
 - Students can draw parallels between histories of different communities.
 - Students can see the connection between history and the contemporary world.
 - Students can begin to think of the lives of others as part of history and/or their own lives as part of history in the making, e.g., witnessing the attacks of September 11, 2001; the election of the first Black president in the US.
 - Students can be assigned to identify main ideas and supporting information in the interviews. They can also learn to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information that may be contained in the interviews.
 - Students can check and correct each other's transcriptions.
- **Cooperative learning**

Small groups of students can share the tasks of preparing, recording, interviewing, transcribing, and summarizing their oral history interviews for presentations to the whole class.
- **Content area knowledge**

Students can feel encouraged to expand their knowledge of what they are studying in other courses.
- Recording oral history interviews helps students see the connection between individual people and historical events. It makes history less abstract. It helps students understand that history is composed of collective and individual stories of people who are members of their families and communities.

Advantages of oral histories for ESOL students

- **Less communicative pressure on the student**

An interview is a conversation, but an unequal one, in which the questions are meant to go in one direction, and the answers are meant to go in the other direction. Communication in a conversation is meant to be bidirectional on the part of all participants. So if students conduct oral history interviews as interviewers, they mainly need to be concerned with the questions because they don't need to respond nor answer questions. So there is less pressure on them to understand everything the interviewee is saying and respond immediately. Since the student is recording the interviewee, he/she can transcribe the interview (with the help of the teacher), and have a better chance at understanding anything he/she did not fully grasp during the interview.
- **Empowerment**
 - If students interview family members, they see their families' stories as a significant, valuable element of the curriculum. This dignifies the students, the stories and the family members.
 - Students can see themselves, their peers, and members of their community as participants in and observers of history.
 - Students can develop a self-image as historians of their families and communities.

- Oral history democratizes history by allowing students to participate in the writing of it, and by demonstrating to them that everyone, even those who are not famous, has participated in history and has witnessed historical events.
 - Students can feel that they are in control of the communication.
 - When students present their reports to the class, they become teachers for a short time. As such, they are experts on the interviews and the people that they have interviewed. They see that they can teach each other and learn from each other.
- **Student-centeredness**
 - Although they are guided by the teacher, students can select a subject, plan, organize, and implement their interviews.
 - Students can be made responsible for presenting info that they gather.

Language skills

- Listening
 - Requires listening for detail when transcribing.
 - Students can hear authentic spoken English.
 - Students can hear a variety of accents.
 - Students can control their input when transcribing by playing the recording as many times as necessary.
- Speaking
 - Asking questions for real communication.
 - Reporting on their interviews to the whole class.
- Writing
 - Transcription
 - Summarizing
 - Identifying main ideas
 - Transitions among main ideas
- Reading
 - Studying texts on the period in history
 - Reviewing and correcting transcriptions.
- Summarizing (speaking and writing)
- Grammar
 - Question formation
 - Reported speech
 - Passive voice
 - Past tenses

Geography

- Have students incorporate maps of the area referred to in the interview (country, region, province, state, city, neighborhood).
- Have students draw or annotate maps showing how the area has changed over time.
- Have students show where the area is in relation to well-known locations.

Incorporation of other visual media

- In addition to maps, have students find pictures that illustrate the story told in the interview, and use these in their report to the class.
- Have students photograph their oral history interviewees.

Recommended themes (some of these can overlap)

- Local community / neighborhood history
- Family history
- Immigrant stories
- Local entrepreneurs
- Local clergy
- Local artists
- Local entertainers, including athletes
- Local political leaders
- Institutional history (of their school)
- Institutional history of a major company or other employer in the local area
- Institutional history of a local museum, theatre, house of worship, hospital, etc.
- Professional / occupational history (that shows how a profession has changed over the years)

Additional resources:

<https://www.oralhistory.org/how-can-i-teach-students-to-conduct-research-in-oral-history/>

<https://www.oralhistory.org/how-do-i-engage-students-in-oral-history-projects/>

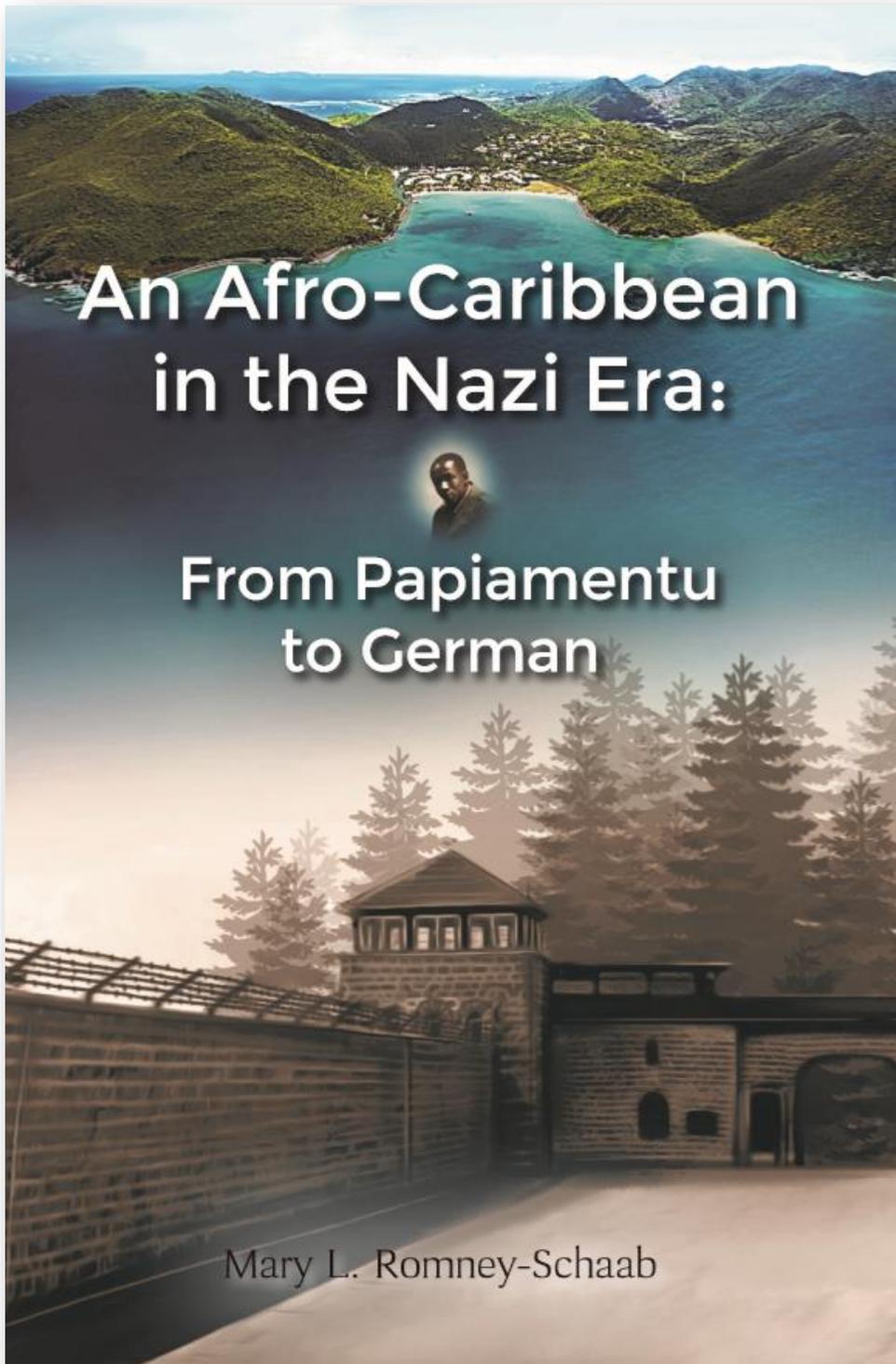
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/>

<https://www.edutopia.org/living-legends-oral-history-projects-bring-core-subjects-to-life>

<http://www.tellmeyourstories.org/sample/>

<http://archive.pov.org/granito/lesson-plan/>

<https://www.ypsilibrary.org/research/p-marshall-african-american-oral-history-project/>



An Afro-Caribbean in the Nazi Era:



From Papiamentu to German

Mary L. Romney-Schaab

[Available on Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)