

# INTERVIEWING ELDERS AT SCHOOL

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Teachers and students will learn how to use the video camera to capture cultural wisdom from village elders as an ongoing community-building project.

## Invitation for learning

In every Pacific island community, there are elders who love to share stories, chants, and songs with children at school. Why not use the video camera to record the elder interacting with the children? Videotapes honor the storyteller, can be shared in other times and places, and teach the youth that projects require planning and follow-through. Further, using *iMovie* software, the elder's voice can be extracted from the video to produce CDs and audiotapes for listening centers in the library and for families to enjoy in their cars and homes.

Building sustained relationships with elders is important. They have far more cultural wisdom than can be shared in a single school visit. These elders are ongoing community teachers, resources who can visit many times to share information.

## Directions

Working in teams of five, learners will invite community elders to the classroom to video record their stories. Teams will:

1. Visit with the elder in their home in advance of the classroom visit to set the goals and identify a range of stories and topics to be shared. Explain that the visit will be video recorded for sharing with others.
2. Assign roles:
  - *Host*. The host welcomes and seats the elder, explains what is planned, and reviews the agenda; ensures there is a glass of water for the elder; and manages the flow of the video process (introduces the elder, holds the microphone, listens and comments, and manages audience introductions, comments, and questions).
  - *Set designer*. The set designer creates an attractive set using a mat or printed cloth for a backdrop, and a flower arrangement or plants for decoration. This person ensures there are enough chairs on the set – one each for the host, elder, and an audience member to ask questions (placed to the side of the host).
  - *Sound manager*. The sound manager wears headphones to monitor the quality of sound from the microphone. If the sound manager hears buzzing or sound distortion, he or she informs the camera operator to stop the interview until it is corrected.
  - *Camera operator/Director*. The camera operator/director is responsible for cueing the beginning of the interview, establishing shots by panning and zooming, and cueing the end of the inter-

view. This person sits next to the camera, which is on a tripod about 8 to 10 feet away from the host and elder. This requires a microphone extension cord.

- *Audience.* The audience sits on the floor in a semi-circle in front of the elder. Each audience member must listen intently to the guest and be prepared with questions. If called upon by the host, the audience member walks to the designated chair beside the host, sits down, takes the microphone, says a few words (short introduction, expression of thanks to the guest, etc.), and then asks a question.
3. Develop an agenda (e.g., introductions and statement of purpose, story one, questions and answers, story two, questions and answers, student expressions of appreciation).
  4. Welcome the elder to the classroom, perhaps with a lei, and follow the agenda as described above.
  5. The day after the recording session, write letters to the elder to say thanks and to express something you learned or thought about as a result of the visit. Several students can hand-deliver the letters and perhaps a small gift.
  6. Copy the video to VHS videotape using camera-to-VCR editing.
  7. With the teacher, review the tape to create a viewers' guide that includes a summary paragraph of the videotape, questions for discussion, and suggestions for further learning and research. Print and package the viewers' guide with the videotape in a Ziploc bag to share with the elder, other classrooms, and the community.
  8. When the teacher and selected students share the tape with another classroom, pause the video at appropriate places to get the children talking and thinking about the content. Use the remote control to pause the video at least every two minutes to pose a question and evoke comments. Keep a fresh set of batteries in a Ziploc bag, along with the remote when not in use, in case they are needed.

## **Classroom applications**

Storytelling is an age-old tradition that enables people to define themselves and their communities, including their origins and place. It is important to encourage elders to tell their personal stories of growing up, not just the formal stories that they heard from others. To elicit this personal information, students must learn to ask elders what they want to know, and in return, describe what they picture in their minds. One technique is to ask children to draw pictures for the elders as the stories unfold. This, too, honors the storyteller while encouraging additional information sharing.

The value of video recording is immeasurable. Many students miss much of what is said during live presentations. By viewing the video as a follow-up to the classroom visit, new information is acquired. This is especially true if you use the pause-and-discuss method of video presentation.

As a follow-up to video recording, the audio can be recorded on the computer by using *SimpleSound* or *iMovie* software. It is as simple as positioning the camera near the computer microphone and playing back the video. This recorded sound can then be burned to CD and dubbed to audiotape to be shared in homes and classrooms.

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### **Stretching our imaginations: Dare to dream**

Students can create portfolios that contain the recorded versions of elders' stories and the written and illustrated versions that the students created. Such a project honors both the young and the old, while preserving and sharing cultural wisdom with the larger community.