

INTERVIEWING ELDERS AT HOME

Teachers and students will learn a simple, informal method to video record elders in their homes and communities.

Invitation for learning

For a variety of reasons, many elders cannot visit schools to share their knowledge, wisdom, and traditional culture. With minimal equipment and proper technique, issues of age, health, distance, or transportation can be overcome so that these community teachers can still participate in and contribute to children's learning.

Directions

Working in teams of 3-5, learners will visit elders in their homes to record stories, chants, and songs. Teams will:

1. Assign roles:

- *Camera operator/Director.* The camera operator/director manages the tripod and camera, framing the elder to include the upper torso and hands.
- *Set manager/Audio monitor.* The set manager sits just off the set to keep bystanders quiet and under control. As audio monitor, this person also ensures that the microphone is appropriately pinned to the elder's shirt or otherwise appropriately positioned. The audio monitor wears headphones attached to the camera to ensure that the audio signal stays loud and clean.
- *Host.* The host ensures that the elder is at ease and comfortable. When in an elder's home, the host is on camera at the beginning for introductions and at the end to say thanks. Otherwise, the host sits next to the camera, facing the elder, and acts as a very interested audience – asking questions and drawing out the elder.
- *Note taker.* The note taker writes down the names of each story or song in the order in which they are shared. The note taker comes prepared with sharpened pencils or pens and a note pad.
- *Audience.* The audience sits to the right of the host, just off-camera, listening to the interview. When the host asks if there are questions or comments from the audience, they take the microphone, introduce themselves, and speak. Usually, no more than 4 or 5 people should be brought to an elder's home.

2. Visit with the elder in their home in advance of the recording to set the goals of the recording, identify or explore songs and stories to be shared, and determine an appropriate set that is visually attractive, appropriately lit, and reasonably quiet and free of distraction. It may help to remind the elder that children are the audience. Arrange a time for the next visit.

3. Return to the elder's home for the recording, bringing the camera in its case with a charged battery, tripod, microphone, and headphones. You may decide to record without a tripod and external microphone, but it is good to be prepared. The microphone is especially appropriate if there is background noise such as a noisy fan or children playing. Don't forget to bring a gift of food or flowers.
4. Conduct the recording with everyone comfortably seated and actively listening to the elder.
 - The team sits close; no one should stand off in a corner.
 - When everyone is ready, the camera operator/director cues the host to begin.
 - Pause the camera after each story or song to express appreciation and to give the elder a chance to think of what to share next.
 - The note taker writes down the names of the stories and songs in order. You may want to ask the elder to say the name or introduce each of the songs or stories in terms of where it came from and how it was learned. You do not need to strictly adhere to the plan from the prior visit. Sometimes surprises are best, such as the elder suddenly remembering an old song.
 - Record the host, sitting beside the elder, expressing appreciation for the gifts the elder has shared. This makes a nice ending for the program.
5. After recording, thank the elder and the family, assuring them that they will receive a copy of the tape on VHS. Ask the elder for permission to show the tape in classes at the school and perhaps to broadcast it on community television or radio.
6. Before leaving, ask the family if the team can take a few shots outside so that the children at school can get a visual sense of place. This video portion will be shown first to audiences, but it is typically recorded last. If permission is granted, record the host standing in front of the house using the external microphone to welcome viewers. The host gives the date and place, and describes the content of the program, including the name of the elder and a brief introduction to the songs and stories that were recorded.
7. Upon returning to the school, create two VHS copies using camera-to-VCR editing, putting the introduction at the beginning, followed by the songs, chants, and stories. Give one copy of the tape to the elder and their family, and keep the other for use at school.
8. The video can be digitized on the iMac and edited in *iMovie*. Another technique is to extract the audio of each song and story and import these sound files into *iTunes* to create radio shows, CDs, and audiotapes.

Classroom applications

Elders should be cultivated as community teachers so that sustainable relationships can be maintained. An extension activity is to have the students produce a video letter (see Unit 9) back to the elder, expressing appreciation for the stories and songs, asking questions, and perhaps sharing a song or story in return.

Stretching our imaginations: Dare to dream

Creative teachers do many things with stories and songs in their classrooms. One idea is to create a song-book with the accompanying audiotape or CD. Another is for students to listen to the stories and then retell, rewrite, and illustrate them.