

PROJECT & ACTIVITY IDEAS

Designed for Middle and High School Students

ETHNOPOETIC TRANSCRIPTIONS

In this project, students create poems from oral histories in our Oral History Trust.

Ethnopoetic transcriptions are poetic renditions of spoken words from Northsiders' oral history interviews. By listening closely and identifying statements that resonate with them, students create poems by taking the speaker's words and presenting them in a way that highlights their significance.

Your students can choose an oral history from the archive to study and interpret, then develop a final project in which they "perform" their ethnopoetic transcription live or in a video. Presentations should include an introduction featuring what they have learned from the Oral History about the person's life and the Northside neighborhood and include anything else they've learned from background research. They should also explain why they chose the words they have highlighted in their ethnopoetic transcription and how those words may have helped them connect with the speaker. Presentations should be just about one minute long for quick, easy consumption.

Here are a few examples of ethnopoetic transcriptions based on Northside oral histories:

- Ms. Freda Andrews, "[Granddaddy](#)"
- Mr. Ronnie Bynum, "[They Were There](#)"
- Ms. Katherine "Mama Kat" Council, "[A Good Life](#)"

NEIGHBORHOOD VIDEOS

This activity involves creating artwork reflecting stories from their neighborhood and producing a short video on their artistic process.

Teens should choose a topic from their community to study and interpret, then share their ideas in a final video project. They can use any media to recreate their own artistic renderings of an iconic figure, structure, or event in their community. Have them write about their findings, explaining their choice of media, the stories they are telling, and their connection to those stories. Videos should be short--just about one minute long-- for quick, easy consumption.

PHOTO PORTFOLIOS

Students can create photo portfolios featuring photos of key landmarks and events in Northside and their own photographs or drawings of the same areas today. Students should research the significance of these sites in the African American communities in Chapel Hill and Orange County. Key landmarks include homes, churches, businesses, schools, as well as recreational and natural areas.

Click here for a list of [sites in Chapel Hill](#).

Click here for a list of [sites in Orange County](#).

ORAL HISTORY-INSPIRED ART

This project is designed to help students make personal connections to the people who participated in the civil right movement. The story of the Civil Rights Movement has often been told as a narrative focusing on a few gifted leaders supported by millions of people who shared a desire to see justice “roll down like the waters.” But the story of a movement is always also the story of the coming together of many different people, each one with a unique life story. The practice of oral history is based upon the idea that each person has a story to tell; a truthful narrative of history emerges from an exploration of many individual life stories, the piecing together of which is as much an art as a method.

This project challenges students to get to know history one person at a time, honoring each activists’ courage and valuing the perspective gained by listening to their telling of their story in their own words. We often tell students, “You’ve got to tell your own story or else someone’s gonna tell it for you... and they’re gonna get it wrong.” Too often the story of the people who were the civil rights movement is told for them, and the people who have told their own stories are set upon righting the record. It’s up to us to hear them out and to celebrate their legacies.

This project begins with the students’ selections of an oral history. We recommend our own archive at <http://archives.jacksoncenter.info>. There, they’ll find more than 200 oral histories from the neighbors of Northside and nearby neighborhoods, home to an historically Black community in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Chapel Hill saw the first sit-ins in 1960, just weeks after the sit-ins down the road in Greensboro launched the national movement. What makes this archive unique is that it contains oral histories of people who were often high schoolers at the time, not college students, and the tight-knit community in which they lived is a focal point of many of their narratives. Activism, in many cases, was born out of a community bound by faith and interpersonal networks of caring in which kids were taught self-worth and respect for others. Other archives include UNC’s collection, Documenting the American South at <https://docsouth.unc.edu/>, the SNCC Digital Gateway at <https://snccdigital.org/about/sncc-digital-gateway/>, and many more. Encourage your students to look for oral histories of local activists.

This project has two parts:

1. The artistic component in which students create original art to convey a message inspired by an oral history.
2. The written component which will explain the process of creating an original artwork and the contribution the original art makes to the telling of Civil Rights history. Students can consider: What about your chosen oral history inspired you? Why did you choose the medium you chose? How do you think your artwork conveys an aspect of Civil Rights history and its legacy?

Component	What to do?	What to turn in...
Artwork	Select a medium to convey your story/art. Examples: Painting, poem, sculpture, dance, film, music, sketch, collage, narrative.	A completed art project/story inspired by your chosen oral history
Essay: * Importance for you	What about your chosen oral history inspired you? Why did you choose the medium you chose?	2-5 paragraphs
* Historical Importance	How is the story important to the narrative of the civil rights movement?	2-5 paragraphs

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

In this project, students will be interviewing elders about their teen years. Teachers can tell students:

Identify either (1) elders who grew up in Northside or (2) elders you know in your family or in your neighborhood.

Begin by checking out our slideshow, [How to Do Oral History](#). Once you have identified a person or people to interview, do some background research on them, finding out as much as you can about their biography and the time and places in which they spent their teens. Then come up with some narrative, lyrical, and reflective questions to ask. Set up an interview time and place and, when you go, don't forget to bring a recorder or download a recording app to your phone. Before you begin the interview, give your interviewee a copy of [Your Story, Your Rights](#). Give them time to read over it and sign it, making any changes they want to make. When you're ready to begin, make sure your recorder is on and recording! Remember to let them do the talking and see where your conversation leads! The stories should include first dates, first love, first jobs, first cars, health, music, artists, sports and other assorted topics of the teen life.

We strongly encourage teachers to create a site to which students can upload their interview summaries and audio recordings. [An example of such a site can be found by clicking here.](#)