

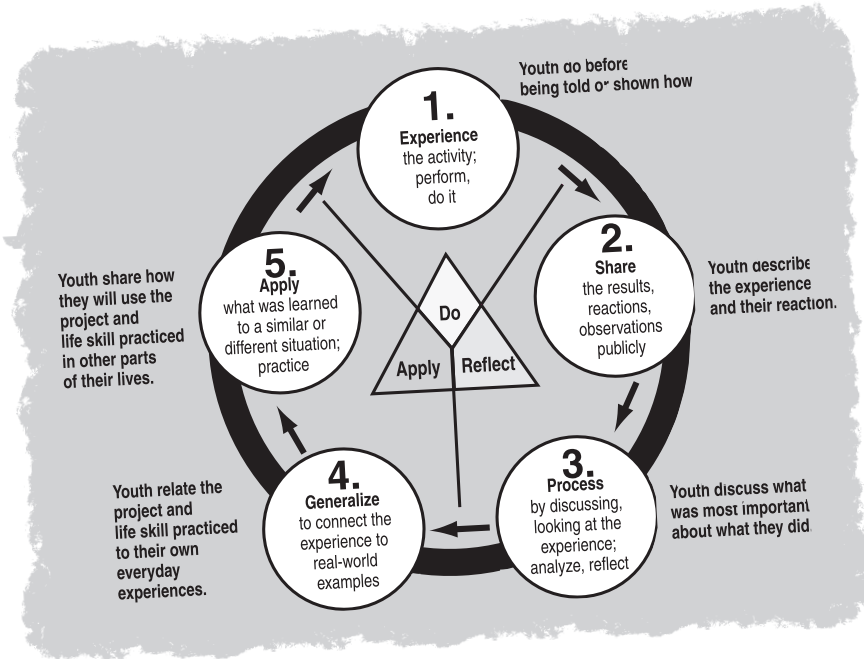


# Voices *from the* Past

Listening to  
People with  
Stories to Tell

# Experiential Learning Model

"Experiential learning" is what distinguishes 4-H Youth Development Education from many formal education methods. It involves providing opportunities for youth to practice what they are learning by sharing the experience, reflecting on its importance, connecting it to real life examples, and applying the knowledge that results to other situations.



Activities and learning experiences are designed with this model in mind. Your aim is to guide and support youth as they carry out the activity, and then help them reflect on what they did and how it applies to other situations.

Throughout this process be sure to take time to discuss and talk things over by asking questions related to the experiential learning model. You'll find that the project has been specifically designed with this in mind. In addition, here are some other key questions for you to consider.

Examples of **sharing** questions:  
(What happened?)

What kinds of things have you discovered as you have been working on this project?

What kinds of interview questions are you asking? What has the person you've been interviewing had to say?

What is the hardest part about doing an interview? The easiest?

What do you like about listening to the people you interview? What don't you like?

Examples of **processing** questions:  
(What's important?)

What do you think this project is teaching you about communication?

What are you learning about communicating with older persons?

What is something important to keep in mind?

Examples of **generalizing** questions:  
(So what?)

What are you learning about yourself through this project?

Why is what you learned important?

How does this fit into other things that are happening in your family and community?

Examples of **application** questions:  
(Now what?)

How have you been able to use these communication skills in other parts of your life?

Describe a situation where the things you learned about communication came in handy.

If you haven't had a chance to use what you have learned, can you think of a way you might be able to in the future?



# Voices *from the* Past

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## Congratulations!

**A** young person has asked you to help with this project. It's a part of the 4-H Youth Development *Building Bridges: Reaching People Through Communication* program and has been specifically developed to encourage youth to listen to the wisdom of older adults in their families and communities. You can play an important role by helping youth set goals, find resources and evaluate progress.

### Communication as a Primary Life Skill

This project focuses on the life skill of communication with a particular emphasis on the importance of learning to be an attentive and reflective listener. It's intended to be used by youth of various ages depending on their interests and the resources that are available to them. Middle school and high school aged youth will require less assistance and will probably have an easier time making decisions about how to proceed. Those who are younger will have a greater need for your support and guidance.

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# Voices *from the* Past

**I**n many cultures older people are respected because of the experiences they've had and the things they've learned about life. Elders have a wealth of information—and wisdom—to share with younger people who take the time to ask questions and then listen to the answers.

This manual will show you how to have fun working with an older person to create an original project that will end up being the only one of its kind. It will be based on personal information you gather about things that have happened in the past.

Best of all, you'll be making someone happy just by taking the time to listen to his or her stories.

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## Having fun with history

**S**ome people think history is just something you learn about in school. They don't realize there's more to it than memorizing dates of things that happened a long time ago.

History is about real life stories. It has to do with things that happened to people during their lives.

### 1 **Stories people have to tell.**

One of the best ways to find out about the past is by listening to older people share memories of things that have happened to them over the years. Some of these things are tragic and sad. Others are exciting and heroic. Some of the stories are terrifying and others are scandalous. Many are downright funny. But all of them are interesting because they really happened.

### 2 **Exploring your community.**

Another way to find out about the past is by exploring places where it has been kept alive. If your community has a historical center or museum, take advantage of it to get a feel for what life used to be like. Or, spend some time poking around an antique shop just to see what you can turn up. Do some investigating to see if there are any historical buildings nearby. You can learn a lot just by reading the plaques and commemorative markers.

### 3 **Check out some videos.**

Look for movies that deal with life in earlier times. Some examples: *The Grapes of Wrath*, about the depression; *The Best Years of Our Lives*, about World War II, etc. You can usually find these kinds of movies in the "classic movie" section of your video store. Films that were made during the 30's, 40's and 50's are fun to watch because they often reveal what life was like during those times.

Stories

Movies

Discoveries

# 1

## **Find an older person in your family or community to interview.**

Perhaps your great-grandparents lived through the depression or maybe you have relatives who served in World War II, the Korean War, or the Vietnam War. Maybe a family member can tell you stories they heard from their own grandparents. You may have a relative who knows some interesting things about immigrant ancestors who came to the United States from another country.

If there's no one in your own family, perhaps you know someone from your community who would be interested in talking with you. Are there older people living in your neighborhood who you've gotten to know? What about your church or temple?

Or, contact a local retirement center, nursing home or extended care facility for the elderly. Ask to speak with the activity coordinator or occupational therapist. Explain you're working on this project and you are interested in finding someone to interview.

# 2

## **Explain the project to the person you have identified.**

Let the other person know why you selected him or her to help you with this project and what it is all about. Explain that you would like to set up a time (or times) to do some interviewing. Be sure to mention that you will prepare a list of interview questions in advance in case the other person wants to see them ahead of time. Explain any ideas you may have for using the information to create a final product (see p. 8).

If you want to use a tape recorder, be sure to find out in advance if it's okay. Keep in mind that some people aren't comfortable being recorded. So if the other person is uneasy about being taped, be sure to let him or her know you'll take hand-written notes instead.

Select a quiet place for the interview. Even if you won't be using a tape recorder, you'll want to find a spot where the two of you won't be interrupted by other people or by a noisy television set.

Finally, be sure to set a time limit. It's a good idea to avoid going longer than 45 minutes or else both of you will probably start to get tired. You can always schedule another meeting if there are other things to talk about.

Find someone  
with a story  
to share.

Be ready to  
pay attention  
so you won't  
miss the  
good parts!

# Interviewing techniques

**I**t will be easier to get the conversation going and keep it moving if you've prepared some questions ahead of time. That way you can get off to a good start so the other person will feel comfortable talking.

Make a list of questions to take with you to the interview. Here are some examples to get started. Be sure to use your own ideas too.

What was it like to go to a one room school?  
Tell me about the kinds of tools your father used on the farm?

How did you and Grandma feel when you heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

How come you weren't allowed to go to dances on Sundays?

What are some of your most prized possessions and why are they important to you?

Why do you think Great-grandpa left his family behind to come to America all by himself?

What was the scariest thing that happened to you when you were a Prisoner of War?

What kinds of advice do you have for young people today about living a good life?

How did you have any fun if you couldn't watch TV or play video games?

Who were some of the people that had the biggest influence on you during your life?

What kinds of things do you remember about your own grandparents?

If you had your life to live over again, what kinds of things would you do differently?

Tell me about how you used to make home-made sauerkraut.

If you had your life to live over again, what kinds of things would you want to do exactly the same?

## Hint:

Avoid questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" response. Instead say, "Tell me about..." or "What was it like to...?" or "How did you feel when...?"



**R**egardless of whether or not you use a tape recorder during the interview, it will be important for you to listen carefully to what the other person is saying.

## Tips for listening

### Pay attention.

It doesn't make sense to pretend to be listening if your mind is really somewhere else. When you interview someone, be prepared to give him or her your full attention. Be alert, sit up straight, and look directly at the other person. Keep reminding yourself that he or she has something important to share with you and you don't want to miss out on what it is.

### Encourage the other person to keep talking.

Good listeners find ways to let the other person know they're interested in what he or she is saying. One way to do this is to look directly at the speaker. That way he or she can see by your own facial expression how you are responding. Nod your head, smile and use encouraging words like "Mmmhmmmmn," "And then what happened?" and "How did you feel about that?"

If you're confused about something the other person has said, simply ask him or her to help you understand. If he or she gives too short of an answer or you'd like to hear more about it, simply say,

"Could you tell me a little more about that, please?"

When you're finished with your questions, ask the other person if he or she would like to say anything else.

### Don't interrupt.

Remember, you're interested in what the other person has to say rather than telling him or her all about yourself. Try not to jump in with your own opinions or ideas. After all, the whole purpose of the interview is to find out what the other person has to tell you. Concentrate on understanding what he or she is saying.

### Show your appreciation.

After the interview, be sure to thank the other person for taking the time to talk to you. Follow up with a short note. Later, when you complete your project, be sure to arrange a time to show it to the person that you interviewed.

## The final product

**I**t's important to find a way to preserve the stories you've heard so they won't be forgotten. You might want to write a report or summary of the things you've learned. There are other things you can do as well, so be creative about presenting the information you've discovered.

### Collage

Use poster board and acid-free glue to create a photo exhibit or collage that illustrates special customs, traditions, foods, or other things you discovered from the person you interviewed.

### Exhibit

If you have a historical society or museum nearby, ask someone who works there to help with your project. Find out how to put together a special exhibit of items that relate to things you learned from the person you interviewed.

### Computer Document

Computers are handy for keeping track of important details you've learned. Start a special file to type in the answers to the questions you asked. Fill in with any stories the person may have shared with you. If you have a scanner, you can include old photographs and other illustrations. Be sure to back up your work, and save everything on a disc as well as on a hard drive.

### Scrapbook

Put together a scrapbook that includes photos of the person you interviewed. Find other photos or drawings to illustrate some of the things he or she described. Fill in by writing down details from the stories and memories you've just heard.

It may even be possible to include some other things as well—old postcards, recipes, letters, newspaper clippings, etc. But here's something to remember about putting together scrapbooks: Always be sure that the scrapbook and supplies you use are acid-free, and archival quality. Otherwise they will deteriorate as the years go by. Many crafts and art supply stores now carry a colorful selection of acid-free materials to use with scrapbook projects. You'll also find booklets and pamphlets full of eye-catching ideas for organizing your scrapbook pages.

Voices  
*from the*  
Past  
Worksheet



Person to be Interviewed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Address)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Phone)

Interview Time:

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Questions:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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Notes:









Other books  
in this series  
include:

**4-H Public Speaker's Handbook:**

*A Youth's Guide to Preparing and Presenting Speeches and Demonstrations*

**A Parent's Guide to Public Speaking**

**Communication Activities for 4-H Clubs and Other Youth Groups**

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