

LISTENING AS A CREATIVE ACT

INTRO LESSON

LESSON GOALS

- ◆ **Introduce students to what can be learned from oral histories and how an individual’s story can add to existing historical narratives.**
- ◆ **Consider the value of orality (verbal expression), including the multimodal qualities of oral history (e.g. tone of voice, pacing, and inflection).**
- ◆ **Explore how interviewers, narrators, and listeners each play a role in creating, interpreting, and preserving historical memory.**

MATERIALS

All oral history clips and transcripts mentioned in this lesson are available for streaming or download at muslims.brooklynhistory.org.

ORAL HISTORIES

The “Listening as a Creative Act” clips provide a broad overview of the topics covered in the **entire collection**. They reflect major themes in American history in the mid-twentieth century to the present, including immigration, 9/11 and state surveillance, the persistence of racism, and LGBTQ identity, as well as social-emotional topics relevant to all students. These oral histories were conducted and arranged by Brooklyn Historical Society in 2018 and 2019.

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 2:29

Ahmed Nasser describes his first memories of Brooklyn.

muslims.brooklynhistory.org/oral_history_clip/first-impressions-ahmed-nasser

“MY HORIZONS BROADENED” 4:00

Linda Sarsour describes her personal introduction to activism through changes in her community post-9/11.

muslims.brooklynhistory.org/oral_history_clip/horizons-broadened-linda-sarsour

“I SAW MY HEADSTONE” 8:51

Stacey Salimah Bell describes her experience of witnessing the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center.

muslims.brooklynhistory.org/oral_history_clip/headstone-stacey-salimah-bell

“FINDING MY IDENTITY” 4:38

Mohammed Fayaz reflects on how his sexuality affects his relationship with his family.

muslims.brooklynhistory.org/oral_history_clip/finding-identity-mohammed-fayaz/

“INNER STRENGTH” 5:58

Nsenga Knight discusses the role of martial arts in her Muslim community.

muslims.brooklynhistory.org/oral_history_clip/inner-strength-nsenga-knight/

“CHILDHOOD FRIENDSHIPS” 5:47

Mohammad Razvi shares memories of growing up in a diverse community in Sheepshead Bay.

muslims.brooklynhistory.org/oral_history_clip/childhood-friendships-mo-razvi/

“ROMANCE” 4:08

Su’ad Abdul Khabeer discusses cross-cultural relationships.

muslims.brooklynhistory.org/oral_history_clip/romance-suad-abdul-khabeer/

For more information, visit

www.brooklynhistory.org/projects/muslims-in-brooklyn/

LESSON SEQUENCE

Why Oral History?

◆ Think-Pair-Share Prompt

How is history written?

◆ Share

- Ask students to share their answers to the prompt. Students should categorize their answers as either a secondary or primary source.
- Say, *Historians construct their interpretation of the past largely through primary sources. A primary source is first hand testimony of events or life experiences. Some examples of primary-source records are photographs, letters, speeches, and oral histories. An oral history is a recorded interview that preserves an individual's unique memories of historical events they experienced.*
- Ask students to consider the information they think an historian would receive from a letter versus an oral history. Why might historians consider using oral history as a method of study?

◆ Transition

Let students know that in the next series of activities they will explore the value of oral history and what makes it a unique primary source.

INTRODUCTION

TEACHER'S NOTE



Additional Resources

Visit the "How to Use this Curriculum" and "Additional Resources" section on muslims.brooklynhistory.org for more information on oral history.

1 Whole Group Listening

- Distribute the transcript of "First Impressions" and instruct students to read it silently to themselves, but not to turn it over yet.
- After students have read the transcript, discuss the content of the text:
 - Describe who you think this narrator is based on the words in this oral history transcript.
 - How would you describe this person's emotions? What information in this text suggests emotion?
 - Oral histories are produced as narrators respond to questions posed by an interviewer. What do you think the questions were that inspired this person's responses?

LISTENING & REFLECTING

TEACHER'S NOTE



The order of this activity is important!

LESSON SEQUENCE

- After you have had this discussion, ask multiple students to read the transcript out loud with different emotions, imagining that they are the narrator.
- After different students have put their own inflections on the text, discuss the experience:
 - What is the difference between reading the text and hearing it?
 - Did the meaning of the words seem different when it was read a second time? Why or why not?
- Once students have had this discussion, play the oral history for the entire class. Students can read along with the transcript, or close their eyes and just concentrate on the narrator’s voice. After listening, debrief the experience:
 - What new insights do you gain from this oral history by listening to the narrator speak?
 - What type of information is conveyed through the human voice that can’t be gained from reading a transcript of the interview?
- Finally, students can turn over their transcript and read a brief biography of the narrator, Ahmed Nasser.
 - Does learning this additional information about the narrator change the way you interpret this oral history?
 - Think back to your answers to the prompt “How is history written?” How might a historian use this oral history to write a history of New York City in the 1980’s? Immigration to the United States? Of Brooklyn?

TEACHER’S NOTE



Facilitation Option

Choose a key sentence or phrase in the transcript, and ask multiple students to read the same sentence with different emphasis; e.g. sad, happy, sarcastic.

2 Reflect

- Older students should reflect on the way their interpretation shifted as more information was revealed about the oral history, and consider the relationship between the narrator, the interviewer, and themselves as listener. What are the implications of understanding these relationships for the way a historian interprets a primary source?
- Younger students can return to their answers to the introductory question, “Why might historians consider using oral history as a method of study?” and describe any changes to their answers.

LESSON SEQUENCE

3 Transition

Say, Now, we'll break up into small groups to listen to more oral history clips from the Muslims in Brooklyn collection and continue to consider how oral histories can be used by historians.

1 Small Group Listening

Organize students into groups to listen to a longer oral history clip. See the “Muslims in Brooklyn Clips” list that appears at the beginning of this lesson, or choose from the clips available at muslims.brooklynhistory.org.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN NARRATION

2 Listening Protocol

- Ask groups to listen to the oral history clip. As individual students listen, they should jot down words and ideas that stand out to them.
- After listening, students will engage in group conversations. Ask students to respond to one or many of the prompts below, or write your own:
 - What were your impressions of this oral history?
 - What were the most important elements of this interview to understand the narrator's story?
 - Was there anything you could relate to?
 - Do you know anyone like this person or someone who has had similar experiences?
 - Was there anything unfamiliar or new to you described in the narration?
 - How might a historian use this oral history to write a history?
- After answering the questions, students should discuss the similarities and differences in their reactions and interpretations. Pairs of students can use a Venn diagram as a graphic organizer to identify their similarities and differences.

LESSON SEQUENCE

3 Share

- Students should prepare to share the following with the group:
 - A description of the oral history as well as information from the narrator bio.
 - Any differences in how group members interpreted the oral history.
 - How might this oral history be used in writing history?

4 Summary

- Why do you think there were different interpretations of the same oral history?
- Who is the author of this oral history? If both narrator and interviewer are the author, what kinds of responsibilities might they have to each other with the long-term care or publication of the interview?
- What implications does knowing the relationship between narrator, interviewer, and interpreter have for our reading of primary sources? Secondary sources?

TEACHER'S NOTE



Co-creation

Oral historians see oral histories as being co-authored by the narrator and the interviewer. See the “How to Use this Curriculum” section on muslims.brooklynhistory.org for more information on Oral History.

☰ Research Reflection

This prompt can be assigned as an end-of-class journaling assignment, homework, or as a whole group discussion:

- Scholars sometimes use oral histories as source material when they research and write about historical events. How might the oral history clip you listened to be used to write about history? What might we gain from listening to this oral history? What other sources would you want to add to this oral history to continue writing this history?

☰ Poetry

Alternatively, use the *Black Out and Collage Poetry Lesson* available at muslims.brooklynhistory.org. Their work should evoke the theme of the lesson: that the listener creates their own meaning when listening to an oral history.

APPLICATION