

## Teacher Resource Guide

Complete with activities to utilize before and after your visit to the:

Western Heritage Center  
2822 Montana Avenue  
Billings, MT 59101  
406-256-6809  
[www.ywhc.org](http://www.ywhc.org)

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## Introduction: Oral History and Storytelling

Oral history is a way to gather information from people who took part in past events. An oral history complements and enhances historic documents and the re-telling of an event. A person recalling an experience of a particular time or event helps make the story more immediate and real. Oral history of a particular event, for example, the re-writing of the 1972 Montana State Constitution, adds several voices and perspectives to an event that textbooks might refer to in passing. Oral history, especially in the past 50 years, has been used to record stories of the ordinary citizen and their perspectives of an event. Like an interesting autobiography, someone's personal diary, or newspaper accounts, oral history enhances the depth of our experiences and understanding. The Western Heritage Center shares over 400 recorded stories, or oral histories, with visitors through exhibits, programs, and collections.

Oral histories tend to be either biographical or thematic. Biographical oral history is what you might do when you want to learn the life story of your grandmother. Its interest to the larger public might be limited, unless grandma is quite famous. A thematic oral history focuses on an event or role someone played at a specific time. Interviewing grandma about her experience as a nurse during World War II is more thematic. You would then probably interview several nurses to help build a clearer story of that specific experience.

Historians research topics by examining several sources, utilizing primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are first-hand accounts, such as an on-the-scene news report, an oral history of a person at the event, a diary, letters, an autobiography, or an original document or artifact. Secondary sources interpret or analyze primary sources. They are one step removed from the event or moment in time. Encyclopedias, history textbooks, biographies, and magazine and newspaper articles that interpret an event, are secondary sources.

Family history interviews are a primary source if it's that person's specific account of an event or place in time. For example, your father recalling where he was and what his thoughts were when President Kennedy was killed in 1963 is a primary source. But if your father tells you about his grandfather's experience at the time of President Garfield's assassination in 1881, that would be a secondary source (unless he was reading from his grandfather's letter or diary).

Telling and recording stories develops language ability, comprehension, critical thinking skills, and communicates a better understanding of oneself and the world. An oral history is one person's story of a piece of the past—everyone, even kids, have history and stories. Storytelling is a basic human need—oral history is one way to preserve stories for your family and future generations.



## Three pre-visit activities:

- 1) Learn about names in our lives.
- 2) Recording Family Histories - Biographical
- 3) Recording Family Histories - Thematic

### 1. Learning about names in our lives.

Sample questions for students to ask of their parents:

What is my first name and last name?  
Why did you give me this first name?  
Does my first name have any special meaning?  
How about my middle name? Don't have one; why not?  
Does my middle name have any special meaning?

How about our last name?  
Do you know the origins of our last name?  
Does it have any special meaning?

Sample questions for your family:

Do we have any family pets? What are they?  
What are their names?  
Who named the pets?  
Does the name have any special meaning?

Sample questions for your local historian and teacher:

What is the name of our school?  
How did our school get its name?  
Does the name have any special meaning?

What is the name of our town?  
How did our town get its name?  
Does the name have any special meaning?

What are the names of some of the streets near our school?  
Do the street names have any special meaning?



## 2. Recording Family Histories - Biographical

### Grandparents Day

Grandparents have many stories. Involve grandparents in a grandchild's school activities by hosting Grandparents' Day. This could be done in your classroom, a grade level, or school wide.

Interview grandma or grandpa, a relative, or an elderly family friend about their school days and when they were young. The students could write a one page story about the grandparent and their school days. The students could ask for copies of past school photos and a present photo of the grandparent to share with the class. The student could also ask about a family heirloom that shares a family story. Send out formal invitations to the person interviewed and invite them to "Grandparents Day."

The students could read their essays in class with some of the grandparents attending. Have the students do the written assignment and then teach them in-class how to do a sit-down recorded interview. The teacher could interview one of the grandparents (hopefully the most engaging) for the class after the student presentations. Students or grandparent(s) might also share family heirlooms and their stories with the classroom. Be prepared for an awesome day!

#### Sample questions:

- What is your name? When were you born?
- Where did you grow up?
- Tell me about your school? How did you get to school?
- What did you like about your school? Do you remember any funny stories?
- What did you do for lunch? At recess? For library books?
- What was your favorite class? Your favorite teacher? Why were they your favorites?
- What did you dislike about school?
- Who were some of your best friends in school? What did you do with them?
- What things did you like to do after school?
- What was your favorite toy, game, TV show, or radio program?

Note: National Grandparents' Day falls on the 2nd Sunday in September.

Sample Lesson Plans: <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/oralhist/ohhome.html>



### 3. Recording Family Histories - Thematic

An oral history is a both family history and an individual's response to history in the world outside the family. Older children might ask grandparents or older adults more thematic questions about particular events, new technologies, or places.

#### Events

1. What do you remember about the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert Kennedy, or the civil rights leader, Martin Luther King? How did you learn about it? How did you feel? What did you think? How about people you knew; what were their reactions?
2. What do you remember about the space program? Do you remember the first satellite, rocket launches, the landing of the man on the moon, and the Challenger disaster? How did you learn about it? How did you feel? What did you think? Then what?
3. What do you remember about September 11, 2001 and the attack at the Worlds Trade Center and Pentagon? How did you learn about it? How did you feel? What did you think? What did you do?

#### New Technologies

1. How has communication technology changed since you were a child? Where did people get their news? How did you communicate with others? Did you have a TV as a kid? What other forms of technology did you learn to use? What new technologies excited you? What do you think of today's newest technologies, such as blackberry, computers, texting, digital camera, and cell phones?
2. How has transportation technology changed since you were a child? How did you travel from place to place? When did you first fly on an airplane? Were people still using horses? What kinds of cars did your family drive? What was your first car? Did you travel when you were younger? How about lately? What new forms of transportation excited you? What do you think will be the future of travel?

#### Applying the Lesson to Your Visit to the Museum

In the Echoes of Eastern Montana exhibit there are several areas where stories are told— on the front porch, around a kitchen table, at a restaurant booth, and in the post office. Discuss with students the places where their own family stories are told.



## During your visit to the Western Heritage Center:

### Building Location:

Western Heritage Center is located in the historic Parmly Billings Library building, at 2822 Montana Avenue, downtown Billings.



This is a picture of the building.

We will get there by: \_\_\_\_\_ .

### Inside the building:

You'll be greeted at the front desk by a museum volunteer.  
The restrooms are downstairs – lock the door behind you.  
The water fountain is downstairs, next to the bathrooms.  
The gift shop has pencils for 75¢ and other toys under \$5.00.

We'll eat lunch at: \_\_\_\_\_ .

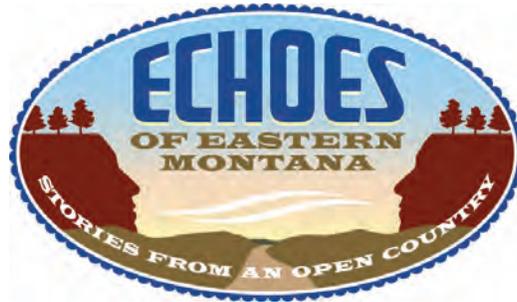


This is a picture of the Echoes of Eastern Montana Exhibit.



## Western Heritage Center Museum Exhibits

The Western Heritage Center displays up to eight exhibits. The exhibits are about the people, places, and events of the Yellowstone River Valley and the Northern High Plains. Help the students find the story in each of the exhibits. Each month there are new exhibits at the museum and they all share some kind of story about the history of our region. Two long-term exhibits, Echoes of Eastern Montana: Stories from an Open Country and American Indian Tribal Histories Project Review, share oral histories recorded by the museum during the last five years.



In the Echoes of Eastern Montana exhibit there are several displays where students can sit down and listen to stories about life in Eastern Montana. Here are some displays and what they'll learn:

**The Front Porch:** Sit in a rocking chair, push one of two buttons, and hear stories about Colstrip, Montana, from local residents. Learn what happens when you give a dog a live stick of dynamite.

**The Kitchen Table:** Sit around the old-fashioned table and listen to two stories on CD players with headphones. Learn what happens when a five year old boy took the family truck to visit his "girlfriend."

**The Restaurant Booth:** At the restaurant there is a booth with a Juke box that plays oral history stories and music. Learn what happens when you don't let go of the bucking bull during a rodeo. Listen to rock'n'roll, including *Hippy, Hippy, Shake* by Chan Romero, a local rock-n-roll star.

**The Sound Booths:** Step into the display case and have a seat in a comfy chair and listen to oral histories and music by two local musicians. Learn about Chan Romero, Billings' own rock'n'roll star, and Bob Peterman, a rancher from Wibaux, Montana, who writes and sings his songs about the cowboy way of life.

**The Post Office:** Walk into a post office and watch video from interviews with ranchers, farmers, and homemakers. Learn about life in the region during the 1920s, the dry years, and the 1930s, the great depression. The post office has mail boxes which open with combination locks. The kids can open some of the mail boxes and find notes and send cards to imaginary recipients.



## Western Heritage Center Museum Exhibits



The American Indian Tribal Histories Project stories are found in the long hallway, downstairs, near the water fountain. There are buttons to push to hear short oral histories from Crow and Northern Cheyenne Indian people. Pictures of each of the people speaking are in the hall. There is a very colorful wall, next to the speaker buttons, with pictures of the people who recorded the stories. A little further down the hall you can learn about Crow, Northern Cheyenne and Chippewa-Cree tribal flags and what the symbols and colors mean. There is also a map that locates the reservations of the Indian tribes living in Montana.

### Treasure Hunts

The following two pages are Treasure Hunts. The answers are found in the exhibits. The photograph treasure hunt is for children third grade and younger. The written treasure hunt is for older kids. Fourth graders are at the in-between stage; some will want to do the photo treasure hunt, while others will prefer the written treasure hunt.



# I Spy Treasure Hunt

## UPSTAIRS - Echoes of Eastern Montana



Why is this so big? \_\_\_\_\_



Sit in this. \_\_\_\_\_



Find this. What is it? Does your mom have one? Does it look like this? \_\_\_\_\_



The photo tells you to open this. What is inside? (Shhh, don't tell anyone!) \_\_\_\_\_



Listen to A/9. What happened? \_\_\_\_\_



Find this. \_\_\_\_\_



What is this? \_\_\_\_\_



Touch this map. S means South. How do we show North? \_\_\_\_\_

## DOWNSTAIRS - Dude Ranch Lobby & Hallway



This is a covered wagon. What was it for? \_\_\_\_\_



What do you like best in this area? \_\_\_\_\_



What did people hang on this? \_\_\_\_\_



This picture tells a story. What is it about? \_\_\_\_\_



There are three American Indian Tribal Flags here. Which do you like best? \_\_\_\_\_

# Treasure Hunt

## UPSTAIRS

### Map of the Yellowstone Valley

The Yellowstone River begins in what National Park? \_\_\_\_\_.

The Yellowstone River flows into the \_\_\_\_\_ River.

### Echoes of Eastern Montana: Stories from an Open Country

Name one instrument in the photo of the Ingomar Kitchen Band. \_\_\_\_\_

Read the story about the woodpecker. How many have they hung in trees? \_\_\_\_\_

Listen to A/1 on the juke box. What happened to Mr. Blome in the rodeo?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Long ago, when a song sold one million copies, it earned a gold record. What is the name of the song that earned the gold record? \_\_\_\_\_. It is B-9 on the juke box.

Look at the photos. They were shearing (cutting wool off) sheep in \_\_\_\_\_.

Look at the map. In English, what is the Crow name for Billings? \_\_\_\_\_

In English, what is the Crow name for giraffe? \_\_\_\_\_

Open post office box number 146. \_\_\_\_\_ is in here. Put it back and don't tell anyone.

On the scale, put the weight at 1 ounce. How many postcards can be on it until it tips? \_\_\_\_\_

## DOWNSTAIRS GALLERY

### Dude Ranch Lobby

J.K. (Ken) Ralston was a local artist. He told stories about history with his paintings. Look at the Ralston paintings in the Dude Ranch lobby. What is your favorite? \_\_\_\_\_

The story it tells is about \_\_\_\_\_.

### American Indian Tribal Histories Project Hall

The morning star is an important symbol to the Northern Cheyenne. Draw the morning star from their flag.

Montana has \_\_\_\_\_ American Indian Reservations.

How many American Indian tribes in the state? \_\_\_\_\_

Beside the drinking fountain are groups of buttons. The top left button, left side, is Barney Old Coyote telling the Crow creation story. Listen to (or read) that story to fill in the blanks:

“The duck dove three times. The fourth time the duck came up with \_\_\_\_\_ in his bill. He (the Creator) breathed into the mud and gave \_\_\_\_\_ life.”

What is your favorite thing in the gift shop? \_\_\_\_\_



# Post Visit Activities

## Family History

Use the following questions while you conduct an interview at home.

### General Questions

- Who were / are your parents?
- What was your name at birth?
- When and where were you born?
- Do you have any sisters or brothers?
- Who are some of the most important people in your life?

### Childhood and Teenage Years

- What chores did you do?
- What were your favorite toys and games?
- Any favorite family pets?
- What events do you remember from childhood?
- Who were your best friends?
- What things did you do for fun?
- Did you have any nicknames growing up?

### Holidays

- What holidays do you remember?
- How did you celebrate them?
- Do you have a particularly memorable holiday?

### Hobbies and Recreation

- What did your family do together for fun?
- What are some of your memorable family vacations?
- What hobbies did you have as a child? Do you still do it?

### School and College

- Where did you go to grade school, high school, college?
- What did you like best at school—favorite teachers, subjects?
- How did you get along with schoolmates? Teachers? Principal?

### Marriage, Children and Grandchildren

- When, where and how did you meet your spouse?
- What was your first home like?
- What are some of the best times you had with your children or grandchildren?

### Work and Career

- What kind of work did (do) you do?
- Why did you choose your career or careers?
- What memories do you have from your job?
- What do you consider turning points in your life?
- What was given you as a gift that really stands out in your mind?



## Design Your Own Flag

Tell a story with your flag. What things are important to you —sports, hobbies, family, pets, vacations, vehicles, buildings? What are your favorite colors? Have fun!

My Flag is called: \_\_\_\_\_



# Thank you for visiting the Western Heritage Center!

For more information, please contact:

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or see our website:

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