

## **The Tale of Two Smiths: Teaching with Sound at the Southwest Studies Center**

**CONTENT AREA & GRADE LEVEL: High School History or English Language Arts**

**TIME: Two Class Periods**

**LESSON FOCUS:** Students will learn how interview questions affect the quality of responses and perspectives in oral history interviews. Students will learn the difference between different interview techniques and learn to identify good interview questions.

### **STANDARDS ADDRESSED:**

Colorado Model Content Standard in History

Standard 2.2 Students know how to interpret and evaluate primary and secondary sources of historical information.

As students in grades 9-12 extend their knowledge, what they know and are able to do includes:

- interpreting oral traditions and legends as “histories”;

Standard 2.3 Students apply knowledge of the past to analyze present-day issues and events from multiple, historically objective perspectives.

As students in grades 9-12 extend their knowledge, what they know and are able to do includes:

- identifying how print and electronic media can affect perspectives regarding historical events;

### **STANDARDS ASSESSED:**

Colorado Model Content Standard in Reading and Writing

Standard 4: As students in grades 9-12 extend their knowledge, what they know and are able to do includes:

- using reading, writing, listening, articulate speaking, and viewing to solve problems;
- critiquing the content of written work and oral presentations.

**ASSESSMENT:** Using other oral histories and the questions below, evaluate students abilities to critique interviewers and determine if the interviewer is asking good questions.

### **MATERIALS/BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

- Computer with Internet connection and speakers for listening to oral history interviews:
  - Oral History Interview with Duane Smith
    - <http://www.cdpheritage.org/streaming/index.cfm?filename=FLCu001283.sideA>
    - <http://www.cdpheritage.org/streaming/index.cfm?filename=FLCu001283.sideB>
  - Oral History Interview with Sunshine Cloud Smith
    - <http://www.cdpheritage.org/streaming/index.cfm?filename=FLCu012284.sideA>
    - <http://www.cdpheritage.org/streaming/index.cfm?filename=FLCu012284.sideB>

- Transcripts of oral history interviews.
- General tips for interviewing
- The transcription file name is SmithDuane.trn.doc **and** SmithSunshine.trn.doc

Background on the two interviews selected for this lesson:

Dr. **Duane Smith** is the author of more books on Colorado's history than anyone before, and he utilizes oral history data that he gathers for his writings. He started teaching history at Fort Lewis College in 1964, fresh out of obtaining his Ph.D. at the University of Colorado, and has been teaching and writing there ever since. Todd Ellison, archivist at the Fort Lewis College Center of Southwest Studies, interviewed Professor Smith for an hour in Ellison's oral history class in 1994, on the topic of oral history interviewing.

**Sunshine Cloud Smith** was a Southern Ute tribal elder, a veteran, a tribal councilor, a parent, a spiritual leader and a teacher. She was born October 20, 1916. According to the obituary in the *Durango Herald* on December 24, 2002, Ms. Smith was the granddaughter of Chief Ouray and his wife, Chipeta, and was a "friend and confidant of Frances Buck, the last Indian princess. [She was] related to Strong Medicine Horse, a Ute child taken by the Sioux who became known as Crazy Horse. ... She died at Valley View Nursing Home in Mancos on Saturday, Dec. 21, 2002, from natural causes."

Rita Cordalis (currently the gallery director at the Art Department at Fort Lewis College), interviewed Sunshine Smith in 1991 while Cordalis was a Fort Lewis College Southwest Studies history student. The interview topics included Ms. Smith's life as a Southern Ute tribal member, and Indian schools in Colorado.

#### POSSIBLE PROCEDURES:

1. As a class discuss the purpose of oral history interviews and how they are useful material for historians.
2. Give students information about [general tips for interviewing](#) when conducting oral history interviews.
3. Have the students listen to the interviews on-line and refer to the printed transcripts.
4. Using this information, working in small groups have analyze the two interviews by answering the following questions:
  - In the preface to his transcription of his interview with Duane Smith, Ellison noted that by doing the interview in front of a class of students they chose to break one of the "rules" of oral history, that the interviewee (narrator) and interviewer should be the only ones present. What are the possible benefits of having only those two persons in the room during an interview? What could be the benefits of having others present? What may be the downside of having others present?
  - Look at a typical page of this interview. Approximately what percentage of the text is the words of the interviewer (Ellison)? What percentage is the words of the narrator (Smith)? Now, look at a page of the Sunshine Smith interview. How do those percentages compare

with the Duane Smith interview? What do you think that indicates regarding the quality of each interview?

- What sequence of progression do you see in each of these interviews? (for example, was it chronological, moving toward the most recent memories?)
- How does Duane Smith suggest one can build rapport with the person one is interviewing? How did Ellison and Cordalis do in this regard? What was the proof that Dr. Smith had attained good rapport with Nellie Spencer when he interviewed her?
- Find instances in these interviews when someone asked more than one question at a time. How did that detract from the quality of the narrator’s response?
- Look for questions that begin with “Did you…” What was the result of asking that type of question? What other words do you find at the start of a question that resulted in a brief answer? What does this teach you about formulating questions when conducting an oral history interview?
- Evaluate each of these interviews on a scale of 1 to 4 (with 4 being super and 1 being weak in that area), adding written comments on a separate sheet as appropriate.

<b>Evaluator:</b>		<b>Interview being evaluated:</b>	
<b>Technique:</b> did the interviewer...		<b>Content:</b> did the interviewer...	
1. Say an introduction at the start of interview?		1. Appear to have been well prepared?	
2. Achieve rapport with the narrator?		2. Proceed in chronological order?	
3. Ask high-quality oral history questions?		3. Only ask about first-hand experiences?	
4. Listen creatively , and follow up?		4. Ask for facts before analysis?	
5. Not interrupt?		5. Not speculate?	
6. End with a nice closing: deflationary let-down comment or question?.		6. Get beneath the superficial and generate useful historical information?	
Overall rating for technique used:		Overall rating for content gleaned:	

5. As a class discuss the small group answers.

*Todd Ellison, Southwest Studies Center, Fort Lewis College*