Oral History, Migration and the Archive

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Student Activity: Design, conduct and transcribe an oral history interview with a South Asian migrant to the United States; deposit it with The South Asian American Digital Archive.

\*Note this lesson plan could easily be adapted for another migrant group where there is an associated online or brick-and-mortar archive that could preserve their stories.

Time Needed: Several weeks- One semester

Objectives

1. Identify the regions and countries in the geographic region known as South Asia.
2. Describe the major trends in historical change, assimilation and acculturation that have affected South Asians in the diaspora.
3. Design, conduct, transcribe and analyze an oral history interview.
4. Relate historical knowledge to contemporary issues of politics and everyday life in South Asia and the South Asian diaspora raised in the interview.
5. Share audio and transcript of oral history interview with narrator.
6. Request permission to prepare the interview for deposit with The South Asian American Digital Archive [www.saadigitalarchive.org](http://www.saadigitalarchive.org).

Supplies for this activity:

1. Internet access.
2. Readings on Oral History Methodology [See attached bibliography].
3. Readings on the South Asian diaspora [See attached bibliography].
4. Audio recording equipment. Good choices include: iPhone or iPod with Griffin iTalk adapter or iTalk app; Marantz PMD 620 or 660; Zoom H2; external microphone.
5. Individuals from the South Asian American community willing to contribute 1-2 hours of their time for an oral history interview.
6. Oral History Release Form.
7. Deed of Gift Form for The South Asian American Digital Archive. Contact: info@saadigitalarchive.org

Activity:

1. Early in the class the instructor should project the website [www.saadigitalarchive.org](http://www.saadigitalarchive.org) and demonstrate the purpose of the site and its organization. SAADA has a number of audio and video histories collected that can give the students a sense of the kind of interview they will conduct. , The First Days Project provides a model for a short interview that incorporates some of the major themes pertaining to migration and resettlement and expands the narrator population to \*any\* migrant, not just those from South Asia. Encourage them to listen to several of these interviews and read the transcriptions when available.
2. Using primary and secondary sources, teach the students about the history of the South Asian American diaspora.
3. Using primary, secondary and theoretical texts, train the students on the purpose of oral history and how to conduct an oral history interview.
4. Students should peer review and give feedback on another student’s interview transcript.
5. Students should write an analytical paper about their interview and the collection created by the class.
6. Finally, students should write a thank you note to their narrator and send them a copy of the audio and transcript.

Instructor’s Notes on the Activity:

This lesson should only be attempted by an instructor versed in oral history methodology and the history of South Asian Americans. SAADA can provide a home for interviews that are of high audio quality and well-transcribed. Contact info@saadigitalarchive.org to arrange a partnership.

Encourage students to locate their own narrator, in their community, among the faculty of your institution, through local organizations, or religious communities (churches, mosques, temples). The instructor may also want to make contact with potential narrators in the event that students have trouble locating their own. Before the students embark on the interview project, they should become familiar with the history of the South Asian American community and the meaning and purpose of oral history. SAADA provides a methodological anchor for the project and a home for the interviews, but should not be the only source for training.

The online archive [www.saadigitalarchive.org](http://www.saadigitalarchive.org) houses over a thousand records pertinent to the history of South Asians in the United States dating to the early twentieth century when communities of South Asians were established in California and New York. These sources document a rich history that reveals tremendous diversity within the community that is sometimes masked by stereotypes of the “model minority,” the Indian Doctor or convenience store owner. The South Asian American community comprises vast linguistic, ethnic, religious, and ethnic diversity and reflects a broad range of gender and sexual preferences, professions, educational achievement and identities. SAADA introduces students to this diversity through first hand research.

Challenges:

* Students may be unfamiliar with the history of South Asians in the United States or the basic history and geography of South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, The Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka).
* Students may have a hard time locating a narrator independently. The instructor may need to facilitate by suggesting sites and strategies for locating a narrator or even making connections for the students.
* Students may not have access to recording technology. It may be helpful if the instructor has some equipment to loan.
* Students may submit poor transcriptions. It is very important to teach them to complete high quality transcriptions, otherwise they will have little value to the archive.
* Your institution may require Institutional Review Board approval for an oral history project like this. Check with your IRB before preparing and planning this lesson.

Oral History Release Form

Date of Interview:

Speaker/ Interviewee:

Recorder/ Interviewer:

Location of Interview:

My signature indicates that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ has my permission to make copies of the audio/video recording, photographs, and transcripts of the interview noted above, according to the provisions and restrictions below:

(please circle)

Yes No -for bona fide research purposes

Yes No -for educational use (in seminars, workshops, conferences or teaching)

Yes No -for broadcasting purposes

Yes No -for publication, including internet publication

Yes No -for public performance, display or exhibition

Yes No -for deposit in a research library or archive (including internet archive)

With the following provisions and restrictions:

(please circle)

Yes No -I wish my contribution to be anonymous

Yes No -I wish the recording and transcript to be “closed” to other researchers for \_\_\_\_\_ years from the date of the recording

Yes No -I wish the names of others to be changed/ rendered anonymous

Signed Interviewee: Date:

Address:

Telephone:

Signed Interviewer: Date:

Selected Bibliography:

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