

Introduction to Student-Led Oral Histories of Local Government Officials

Kansas Oral History Project (KOHP)

1. Why this is a good activity for students.

Kansas has more than 4000 units of local government, from city councils, county commissions to school boards, drainage districts, townships, rural water districts, etc. All have some form of governance that impacts local communities and their residents. These officials may be appointed or elected.

Using local government officials as a source for student-led oral history interviews will acquaint students in elementary, middle or high school with their local elected officials and what their job is in the local community. They will learn about oral histories and how they are created. They will also learn about their communities and its leaders.

2. How the Process Works in a Classroom.

This framework for teaching students to conduct oral history interviews is adaptable for grade levels, from elementary, middle school and high school. Using the attached KOHP guidelines and resources, students will learn how to conduct an oral history interview and learn why oral history is important.

Working in teams, they will select a current or former local leader to interview and will research what the official does for the community and the local government. The team arranges for practice sessions and training for the interviewer. The interviewer, with assistance from the team, develops questions to ask the local official. The students will make a video or audio recording of the interview and post it on social media. Their work product can also be submitted to KOHP for addition to the KOHP website collection of student-led interviews.

Different interviewers, using their own creativity, style and interests, may choose to modify the suggested interview questions in the protocol to fit the specific individual being interviewed.

However, the interviewer should remember the goal with all the interviews is to

- contribute to a better understanding of the many levels of local government in Kansas and its democratic processes;
- meet and engage local leaders involved in governance of local communities and institutions;
- supplement the documentary record;
- provide insight to the human dimension of the policy making process.

Download the attached interview protocol, the lesson plans and Activity Notes for Teachers for complete information. There is also a six minute video clip of former Water Commissioner Jack

Alexander which is intended for use with the lesson plans. See the full interview with Commissioner Alexander at [https://ksoralhistory.org/? sf s=alexander&sfid=42](https://ksoralhistory.org/?sf_s=alexander&sfid=42)

3. Utilization with the Classroom Based Assessments (CBA)

This framework also plays a role in the classroom-based assessments (CBA) which the Kansas Department of Education requires. The CBA is given in grade levels 04, 07 and either 10, 11, or 12 for the 2023-2024 school year. This program can also be a valuable part of the school district's CBA.