

Every student has a historian in the family

A three-session teaching unit: students prepare real questions, interview an elder in their own family or community, and turn what they hear into a keepsake. Built for grades 4–12; adjust the depth, not the respect.

Session one — preparing the questions (45 min)

- Each student picks their elder and asks permission — the asking is part of the lesson.
- Read the question sheet together; every student circles four and writes two of their own.
- Practice in pairs: one asks, one answers as a grandparent might. Swap.
- Send home the family consent page (last page of this kit) — nothing is recorded without it.

Session two — the interview (done at home)

- One unhurried sitting, 20–40 minutes, at the elder's kitchen table or chair.
- A phone voice recorder is plenty. Test it once, then forget it's there.
- Rule of the trade: count to five before rescuing a silence — the best stories arrive late.
- Students note one exact quote, word for word. The phrasing is the treasure.

Session three — the keepsake (45 min)

- Each student writes the story they'd tell from the interview — one page, first person or third.
- Pair it with the exact quote and, if the family likes, an old photograph.
- Families who want to keep going can bring the recording into a DearestEllie archive — free, private by default, and always exportable.

STUDENT QUESTION SHEET

Questions that open doors

Circle four. Write two of your own at the bottom. Follow the good stories wherever they go.

1. What was school like when you were my age? What got you in trouble?
2. What did your family eat on an ordinary night? Who cooked?
3. What did things cost — a movie, a candy bar, your first car?
4. What music did you love that your parents couldn't stand?
5. What was your first job? What did you do with your first pay?
6. What big world event do you remember living through? What did it feel like at home?
7. Who was your best friend growing up? What did you two do?
8. What's something you made or fixed with your own hands?
9. What was the naughtiest thing you ever did as a kid?
10. What did you want to be when you grew up? What happened?
11. What's a smell or sound that takes you straight back to childhood?
12. What do you know now that you wish you'd known at my age?

Your own two questions

One quote, exactly the way they said it

Permission to record a family interview

A student in your family has a school assignment: to interview an elder about their life and record the conversation. The recording belongs to your family — the school keeps the student's written story, not the audio.

Recording only happens with the permission of both the person being interviewed and a parent or guardian. Either can change their mind at any time, including after the interview — just tell the teacher and the recording is deleted.

The person being interviewed

I'm happy to be interviewed and recorded by:

Name and signature:

Parent or guardian

I give permission for my child to record this interview for school:

Name, signature, and date:

Keeping it, if you'd like to

Some families keep the recording in a free DearestEllie archive — private by default, owned by your family, exportable anytime, and never required for the assignment. Children take part only through a guardian's account, with the guardian approving what is kept. Learn more at www.dearestellie.org/classroom.