

# Using Visual History Testimony in the Classroom

This document is intended to help educators teach with testimony from the Visual History Archive responsibly and effectively in their classrooms. Educators will find testimony-based lessons, activities and resources on IWitness ([iwitness.usc.edu](http://iwitness.usc.edu)). When used appropriately, video testimony from USC Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive can:

- Provide a human face to the past.
- Engage students to critically think about universal themes of tolerance, diversity and justice from an individual perspective.
- Sensitize students to the value of story as a valuable source of knowledge.

## Guidelines for Effective Teaching with Testimony



### Create a Rationale

Educators should consider their rationale for the use of video testimony to reach student learning outcomes and where it most naturally can be integrated in the curriculum.

- Make explicit to students why they are going to learn about the topic of study through visual history testimony. Help students understand its value for learning across the curriculum and the topic of study.

### Know the Intended Audience

When using video testimony in the classroom, it is crucial for the teacher to consider her or his audience and choose content based on the abilities of the students.

- Consider students' background experiences and existing knowledge. This will help the teacher choose appropriate video testimony and the level of context to provide.

## Provide Historical Context

Educators should educate themselves about the time, place and culture surrounding the events described by interviewees, and share this information with students. This context will help students more fully understand and appreciate the interviewee's motivations, choices and actions, as well as those of the people around him/her.

- Consult other primary and secondary sources to enhance understanding about the time, place and culture surrounding the events described in the testimonies. For example: *artifacts, poetry, diaries and historical documents*. These sources provide additional context for students who may not have sufficient knowledge.
- Make this information available to students before, during and after viewing testimony to help them understand and appreciate motivations, choices, actions or inactions described in the testimony.
- Watch testimony more than once.

## Encourage Transparency

Considering the context in which the interview occurred, the medium itself can provide opportunities for students to engage their media literacy skills by challenging them to critically consider the source: Who is this person? Why is he or she telling her story? To whom? Under what circumstances? Etc.

- Enhance students' media literacy skills by challenging them to consider the source: Who is this person? Why is she or he telling her story? Who is asking the questions?



## Include Additional Sources

The use of other primary and secondary sources such as photographs, historical documents and artifacts, timelines, films, and diaries provides context, as well as points of comparison for activities in comparative source analysis.

## Choose Testimony Wisely and Edit Appropriately

The objectives of your lesson and the intended student-learning outcomes should guide the use of testimony. Carefully reviewing testimony for its appropriateness in the lesson is important. The Visual History Archive provides educators with full life histories that have been preserved in their entirety. Therefore, with the ability to edit testimony comes the responsibility of doing so with integrity. (See USC Shoah Foundation's video, *Ethical Editing: A Workshop*

for Teachers Using Video Testimony in Classrooms, and for students, the *Witness Connections Video: Ethical Editing*.)

- Identify the clips of testimony that will support your students' learning of the topic under study. For example: How does the clip(s) of testimony reference, illustrate or extend ideas or concepts in the curriculum, unit or lesson?
- Decide where in the curriculum, unit or lesson testimony best fits. For example: Does the clip(s) of testimony make sense to place at the beginning, middle or end of the curriculum, unit or lesson? How does the existing curriculum, unit or lesson help to contextualize the clip(s) of testimony?

# Preparing to Teach With Testimony

The suggested strategies below aim to engage students by:

- Activating background knowledge.
- Guiding the learning process.
- Guiding and scaffolding practice and application of new knowledge and skills.
- Promoting reflection.

(For more information see USC Shoah Foundation's professional development video, *Constructivist Theory and the*

*Use of Video Testimony in Education*, [sfi.usc.edu/education/professional-dev](http://sfi.usc.edu/education/professional-dev)).

## Using Testimony to Teach Topics Other Than Genocide Studies

- Testimonies include lifespan experiences and can touch on, or go into depth about, a variety of topics that connect to a range of themes across the curriculum including: immigration, fear, heroes, family customs, betrayal, human rights, coming of age, love, acceptance, forgiveness, etc.

## Strategies for Using Testimony With Students

### Assign an Activity in iWitness

- **iWitness Activities** are designed to reflect the strategies listed below. You can find iWitness activities at [iwitness.usc.edu/SFI/Activity](http://iwitness.usc.edu/SFI/Activity)

### Define Terms and Establish Accepted Vocabulary

- **Vocabulary List:** Provide students with a vocabulary list and definitions for words they will encounter throughout the lesson. Identify high frequency (Tier 2) words and subject-specific words.

### Preparation Before Watching Testimony

- **Anticipation Guide:** students respond to a series of true/false statements related to the testimony, then return to consider their responses after viewing the testimony.
- **K-W-L:** students identify what they know about the time period the testimony references, what they want to know about the time period the



testimony references, and what they learned from the testimony about the time period.

- **Interviewee Biography:** Provide students background information about the interviewee. At minimum, the following information should be provided:
  - Date and location of birth, experience group; date and location of interview
  - Other pertinent information that will help students understand the context of testimony

### Viewing Testimony

- **Save the Last Word:** students choose 1-3 pieces of information from the testimony to share, for example:
  - New information about a familiar idea or other knowledge
  - Thought-provoking idea
  - Quotes that personally resonate with students
- **GIST:** students write key words or phrases from the testimony that provides the “gist” of the story. Students could use the 5 W’s/H as a guide.

- **Leveled Questions:** students write or ask level 1 (questions about the details of the story) or level 2 questions (questions that compare/contrast information).

### Provide time for Students to Process Their Learning

- **Think/Pair/Share:** students are given time to think, develop ideas and concepts, and share with a classmate to discuss, compare and debate.
- **Dialectical Journal (T-chart):** instead of directly quoting a written text in the left column, students can paraphrase what they heard in the testimony. In the right column, they write their response, questions, or thoughts.
- **Sentence Frames:** students use sentence starters to help them process and articulate their thinking while also building academic language skills. For example:
  - “Based on what \_\_\_\_\_ said in her testimony, I think...”
  - “The connections between testimony 1 and testimony 2 are that they both...”
  - “The testimony contradicts what we learned in \_\_\_\_\_ because”

### Follow-Up and Debrief After Watching Testimony

- **Word Splash:** students write a brief summary using the key words listed on the “word splash,” which the teacher prepares beforehand.
- **Connections:** text to self, text to text, text to world.
- **Non-Verbal Analysis:** students take note of an interviewee’s body language, facial expressions, eye contact, tempo, voice tone.



### Testimony as a Primary Source

- **Rhetorical Triangle:** students consider Logos, Pathos, and Ethos.
- **Close Reading:** students consider the interviewee’s background (age, gender, locale) and range of experiences at the time of the event as well as at the time of the interview. How do those elements impact her or his telling of a story? How might memory change over time?
- **Leveled Questions:** students write or ask level 3 questions (questions that address reasons/explanation) or level 4 questions (questions that ask for evidence to support a claim).

### Promote Relevancy for Your Students

- **Connections:**
  - Text to text: students make connections between the clip of testimony and other source of information
  - Text to self: students make personal connections to their personal experiences, events and situations in their lives

– Text to world: students make connections with world events—current conflicts, social struggles, political issues

- **Writing:** students use writing to process what they have learned and how it is relevant to themselves and their larger community. For example:
  - Poetry
  - Journal entry
  - Blog post

- **Level 3 Questions:** Students write or ask level 2, level 3 or level 4 questions.

*(Strategies and activities are informed by constructive principles of learning.)*

**Share how you use iWitness in your classroom!**

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