Interview someone older in your family

A one-lesson oral history project. Students record a grandparent or other older relative, then write up one story from the conversation. Made by Lahpet Voices, an archive of Burmese family stories, and usable with any family.

What's in this kit

PAGE	WHAT IT IS	WHO IT'S FOR
1	This overview and the lesson plan	Teacher
2	Question sheet	Students, to take home
3	Recording checklist	Students, to take home
4	Consent slip	The person being interviewed
5	Writing up the story	Students
6	Notes on safety, and sharing with the archive	Teacher

Lesson plan (one period, plus homework)

TIME	ACTIVITY
10 min	Read aloud a short extract from an interview on lahpetvoices.com (we suggest "An interview with my father"). Ask: what did the interviewer do that got a good answer?
15 min	Good questions and weak questions. Compare "Was it hard?" with "What did you eat in the first week?" Students list what makes the second one better.
15 min	Students choose five questions from the sheet, add one of their own, and decide who they will interview.
5 min	Hand out the consent slip and recording checklist. Set the deadline, usually one week.
Homework	Record a 15 to 30 minute conversation, then write up one story of 300 to 600 words.

It fits a history, language, or personal and social education unit, and can start off a longer personal or service project.

Questions to ask

Pick five, and add one of your own. You won't need more. The best answers come from following up: "What did that look like?" "Who else was there?" "What happened next?"

GROWING UP

- Where did you grow up? What could you see from the front door?
- What did your family eat on an ordinary day? On a festival day?
- Who did you go to when something went wrong?
- What games did you play, and where?
- What was school like?

WORK AND MONEY

- What was your first job? What did you spend your first pay on?
- What did your parents do for a living?

MOVING, IF THEY MOVED

- When did you first think about leaving? Who did you tell?
- What did you pack? What did you have to leave behind?
- What was the first week in the new place like?

NOW

- What do you still cook, wear or say from where you grew up?
- Is there a word you can't translate for your grandchildren?
- What do you wish people asked you about?

MY OWN QUESTION

_____

_____

You can skip any question, and so can the person you're interviewing. If a question upsets them, stop and ask whether they want to go on.

Before you press record

- [ ] The person has read and signed the consent slip.
- [ ] You've told them what the recording is for, and who will hear it.
- [ ] You're in a quiet room with soft things in it (curtains, cushions, a bed). Kitchens echo.
- [ ] The fan, TV and radio are off, if you can manage it.
- [ ] Your phone is on airplane mode, flat on a folded cloth between you.
- [ ] You've recorded 30 seconds and listened back with headphones. Both voices are clear.
- [ ] You have your six questions written down.

While you record

- Let silences run. People often say the most important thing after a long pause.
- Don't correct dates or names as you go. Check them afterwards.
- Use whatever language they're most comfortable in. A mix of languages is fine.
- If they get upset, pause and ask whether they want to carry on. You can finish another day.

Straight afterwards

- Write down the date, the place and who was in the room.
- Save the recording somewhere safe and give it a clear name, for example `2026-11-14-grandma-interview`.
- Listen back within a week, while you still remember what was said once the phone was off.

Permission to record

Dear family member, a student in your family is doing an oral history project at school. They would like to record a conversation with you about your life. You can skip any question and stop at any time.

PLEASE TICK WHAT YOU AGREE TO

- ☐ The student can record our conversation.
- ☐ The student can write up a story from it for their class.
- ☐ The teacher and classmates can read it.
- ☐ If the student and I both want to, it can be sent to Lahpet Voices to consider for publishing online. (Nothing is published without a separate permission form and my final approval.)

MY NAME IN THE STORY

- ☐ Use my name.
- ☐ Use a nickname or first name only.
- ☐ Don't use my name, or names and places that could identify my family.

Name and signature of the person being interviewed

Date

Student's name and class

Relationship

Turning a recording into a story

You don't need to write up everything. Pick one story from the conversation: one afternoon, one journey, one meal. 300 to 600 words.

Step by step

1. **Listen through once** without writing. Mark the times where something made you sit up.
2. **Transcribe the best two or three minutes** word for word.
3. **Choose how to tell it.** Either in their voice ("I was eleven when…"), or yours, with their words quoted.
4. **Keep their way of speaking.** If they said it plainly, write it plainly. Don't add drama.
5. **Add one or two sentences of context** if a reader needs it: a year, a place, what a word means.
6. **Read it back to them**, or show them, and ask if it's right.

Check before you hand it in

- [ ] Every quote is what they actually said.
- [ ] You've left out anything they asked you not to share.
- [ ] Names and places follow what they ticked on the consent slip.
- [ ] There's a title, and the date of the interview.

Notes for teachers

Keeping it safe

Some families include people who left a country because they had to, or who still have relatives in places where speaking openly is risky. Tell students early that:

- they can choose who to interview, including a neighbour or family friend;
- the person can skip questions or stop at any point;
- names, places and dates can be left out;
- nothing needs to be shared beyond the class.

Offer an alternative task for any student who doesn't have, or doesn't want to approach, an older relative.

Assessment ideas

Mark the questions and follow-ups as much as the writing: did the student get a specific answer, not a general one? Did they keep the speaker's voice?

Sharing with Lahpet Voices

If a student and their relative want the story online, they can send it through lahpetvoices.com/contribute.html. We edit lightly, the family sees the final version first, and we take down anything on request. We'd also like to hear how the lesson went, including what didn't work.

Downloads, the interview guide and a feedback form:
lahpetvoices.com/for-schools.html