

Classroom Connection: Learning to Interview through Practice

A key skill in interviewing, one of the most challenging for inexperienced interviewers, is learning to listen carefully and make the interview feel like a conversation, even though the narrator is doing most of the talking. The activity below—the first one we use with students—helps develop those skills.

Procedure—Two-Minute Interviews

- Divide the class into pairs.
- Ask each pair to decide who will go first and second.
- Tell students that they're going to listen to each other talk for two minutes about a particular topic. Select a topic that relates to the lesson theme. For an immigration study, for example, you could ask students to describe a memory of having to leave or say good-bye to a person or place that they thought they might not see again.
- Tell students that while one partner talks, the other only listens, without taking notes or asking questions. When two minutes are up, ask the pairs to reverse roles.
- Invite each pair to stand or come to the front of the class, one pair at a time. Ask one partner to introduce the other and describe what their partner talked about and when finished to ask the partner if there is anything they would like to add or correct. Then reverse roles.
- Discuss. What did it feel like to listen and not ask questions? Was it easier to listen or to talk? Did anything surprise you? What did you learn? What more would you like to know? What skills did you use in this activity? (i.e., close listening and remembering; demonstrating your listening through eye contact, nodding your head, and facial expressions that show interest; retelling someone's story in your own words; telling your own story; checking for accuracy).

EXTENSION: Follow this activity by asking pairs to turn to their partners again and ask three questions based on what their partner shared—a close-ended question, an open-ended question, and a follow-up question based on something they said.

Discuss. What more did you learn by asking questions? What was the main idea of the story your partner told? Give your story and your partner's story a title. Share why you choose your titles with your partner. How are your titles similar or different? What do the differences tell you about how you each interpreted the other's story?

Classroom Connection: Creating Art from Interviews
by Teaching Artist Karl Orozco

What is the value of visual arts in my teaching practice? Can I connect art making to my goals? Why make comic books a product of an inquiry process driven by interviews and ethnography?



The following lessons integrate art making with the methodology of interviewing. Students of all ages can build skills of analysis and perspective-taking through visual arts activities as a way to extend the learning gained through interviews.

Picture book page by a student, Stephy, based on her interview with a family member.

Project Background

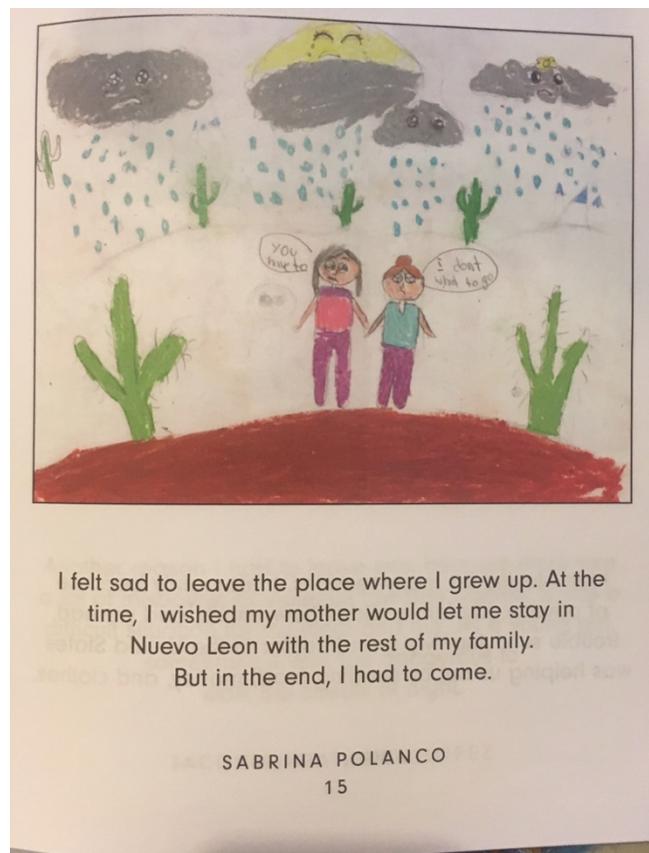
I recently conducted visual arts residencies in two elementary schools as a City Lore teaching artist. Students created picture books based on their interviews with family members and classroom guests about their migration experiences. Students first practiced interviewing each other, then family members at home, and finally classroom guests. To keep all students engaged during the group interview and emphasize a multisensory approach to interviews, I assigned each student a role, including “scribes,” who wrote down key phrases from the guest's story; “setting artists,” who illustrated the guest's descriptions of their home; and “object artists,” who created a catalog of the tools, foods, and traditions that played a role in the story. I found that giving each student a clearly defined role and responsibility in both the interview and in the process of creating the picture book increased the engagement of all students in the collaborative project. I also asked students to keep in mind the final product they would create from the interview as they are listening.

I asked each guest to bring an object or a memory of a tradition that they brought from the homes they left to their new homes in New York City. After the interview, students collaborated by sharing what they heard, wrote, and drew during the interview. The images were displayed on a “reference board.” Then they shaped the stories into a narrative sequence. At one school, each student illustrated one line in the story of their classroom guest and their combined pages were bound in a picture book to be presented to the person they interviewed (illustrations to the right, [lesson plan here](#)). Older students such as Stephy (previous page illustration, [lesson plan here](#)) begin to think about telling vs. showing a story and the ways in which graphic novels and comics can shape a reader’s understanding of a narrative.

~ City Lore teaching artist Karl Orozco



Norma Tamoor, who works at the school, reading the comic book students created from her immigration story.



Picture book page by a student, Sabrina Polanco, illustrating a line from Montse’s story.

Classroom Connection: Sample Lesson Plan—Collaborative and Multisensory Interviewing

This sample lesson plan is used within a larger class project ([City Lore: What We Bring](#)) to create an anthology of picture books that retell the migration stories of community members.

2nd-5th Grades ~ 45 Minutes

Goal	To introduce the concept of active listening and teach the components of autobiographical storytelling through creating sequential images paired with narrative.
Materials	Large drawing paper Colored pencils Pencils
Lesson	<p>Interview Roles</p> <p>Explain to the class that we will be visited by a guest speaker who is going to share their personal stories about their migration to New York City. To gather as much information and imagery as possible, the class will be assigned one of five roles (see worksheet with information on each role below):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Interviewers2. Character Artists3. Setting Artists4. Object Artists5. Scribes
	<p>Preparation</p> <p>Students receive their assigned roles and prepare their desks, materials, and minds for the Narrator's arrival. Interviewers should also prepare a list of questions they would like to ask the Narrator.</p>
	<p>Collaborative Interview</p> <p>The Narrator will spend the first 5-10 minutes sharing some background information and an introduction to their family, their home, and their migration.</p> <p>After the Narrator has finished their introduction, Interviewers may begin asking further questions to gather more details from their migration story. As the Narrator speaks, Artists and Scribes should be carefully listening and drawing and/or writing down details from their story. The interview process will carry on until the end of the period.</p>
	<p>Reference Board</p> <p>Next class, students will cut out their questions, sketches, and drawings to paste on a reference board for the class to use. Reference boards will serve as reminders for the class picture books, which they will work on starting next week.</p>

Multisensory Interviews and Student Roles

The following activity is a method of conducting group interviews that is intended to:

1. Engage all interviewing participants in active listening and build a notion of collective responsibility;
2. Harness the unique artistic, literary, and communicative strengths of each student; and
3. Generate a collection of reference materials for fuller, more descriptive storytelling.

This methodology was developed by teaching artist Karl Orozco and adapted for City Lore's "What We Bring" program. Although these roles were originally created to gather migration stories from interview subjects, they can be adapted to suit a variety of project goals.

Interviewers		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interviewers create and ask interview questions to gather more details about the Narrator's life and times and their journeys.• Interviewers listen intently to the Narrator and come up with questions in response to their stories.
Scribes		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scribes write down keywords from the Narrator's tale, including names of places, people, and things.• Scribes write down short, descriptive sentences of the Narrator's story, paired with words to describe the feelings they experienced on the way.
Character Artists		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Character Artists sketch a detailed portrait of the Narrator. Pay close attention to their clothes and body language.• As the Narrator mentions friends and family in their story, Character Artists sketch smaller portraits of these "supporting roles."
Setting Artists		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Setting Artists listen to and illustrate the Narrator's descriptions of their homes—both before their migration and presently.• Setting Artists draw illustrations of the Narrator's homes, as well as smaller pictures of the key places they passed along their journey.
Object Artists		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Object Artists create a catalog of the tools, animals, foods, traditions, and sentimental objects that play a role in the Narrator's story.• Object Artists draw the objects and/or traditions that the Narrator brought with them from their first home into their new home.

Classroom Connection: Sample Lesson Plan—Collaborative Storyboarding

This sample lesson plan uses a space traveler as metaphor to create an exercise for students in perspective-taking—a key learning objective integrated into many interview activities. It is used within a larger class project ([City Lore: What We Bring](#)) to create an anthology of comics/picture books that retell the migration stories of students’ friends, families, and community members.

6th Grade ~ 45 Minutes

Goal	To teach the practice of storyboarding and introduce the notion that migration stories vary from person to person.
Materials	Post-it notes Pencils
Lesson	<p>An Astronaut Launches Her Rocket Ship (5 minutes) Students read aloud the following five-sentence story:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. An astronaut launches her rocket ship.2. She lands on the moon and plants a flag.3. She returns to Earth with much celebration...4. But realizes that everything is different.5. At last, she is home. <p>Panel Drawings (10 minutes) Break the class into groups of five. Distribute a stack of Post-it notes and pencils to each group. Then, within each group of five, assign students a number between 1 and 5. Each student reads the astronaut story sentence that corresponds with their given number. Students then draw a picture that illustrates what is happening in that sentence on a single Post-it note. Make sure students include the sentence number in the top left corner.</p> <p>Collaborative Storyboarding (15 minutes) After each group member has drawn their panel, ask students to arrange their panels in sequential order. Ask students what they think of the story in its current state. Is it missing anything? What parts of the story appear unfinished or unexplained? Instruct students to add new picture panels to the existing story. Students can add more details, plot twists, or detours by adding Post-its in between the existing five. Students can also add more Post-its before or after the initial five panels to explain their astronaut’s motivations or see what happens next.</p> <p>Exhibition (10 minutes) Ask students to organize their comics in sequential order. Students then walk around the classroom and read their fellow groups’ stories. Instruct them to spot key differences or surprises.</p> <p>Discussion (5 minutes) Finally, discuss the following questions as a class:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How did working collaboratively affect your story?2. Where did the astronaut find herself at home?3. What words would you use to describe her migration story? (e.g. dramatic, joyous, difficult)