

Immigration History of the Marquette Iron Range

Curriculum Focus:

- History of Immigration; local history, Michigan history, history of iron mining.

Grade Level:

- Grades 9-12

Objective:

- Students will gain a basic understanding of historical research and the use of critical thinking skills in the analysis and interpretation of oral history sources.
- From their research of the selected oral history sources, students will develop a thesis based on their selection of the most verifiable and credible evidence.

Materials:

- Paper and pencil
- Computer and Internet access
- Recorded in Stone: Voices on the Marquette Iron Range
- Shopes, Linda, *What is Oral History?*
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/what.html>

Procedures:

1. The teacher will review the definition and meaning of historical research, primary sources, and critical thinking;
2. The teacher will review definition and methodology of oral history;
3. Using the *Analysis Guideline* below, students will prepare a report of their analysis of each oral history and present a proposed thesis statement that ties the evidence together.

Historical Questions and Problems to Consider:

1. Why did immigrants leave their home countries?
2. Did entire families immigrate to the United States or mainly individuals?
3. What job experiences did the different immigrant groups bring to the Marquette Iron Range?
4. What types of jobs did the immigrants get upon arrival in the Upper Peninsula?
5. Did the different immigrant groups get along with each other?
6. What were the experiences of immigrant children growing up and going to school?
7. Did immigrant families and individuals learn to be “Americans?”

Background:

The oral histories used for this lesson plan come primarily from the [Red Dust Oral History Collection \(MSS-113\)](#) and the [Italian – American Oral History Collection](#) maintained by the Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives. Click on the above links to review each collection's finding aid for background information. A summary of each immigrant group's history and related bibliography can be found at

Testing Oral History Sources for Historical Validity: An Analysis guideline

For historians, oral histories offer important evidence into the past lives of people and events. For archivists, oral histories can provide “fill-in the gaps” in the historical record caused by the lack of documentary evidence. However, oral histories are recorded memory; as such they are subjective in nature and replete with bias, error, and embellishment. For these reasons, the historian must analyze oral histories with a critical eye. The historian asks a number of internal and external questions of the oral history. Answers to these questions help the historian determine the credibility of the oral history interview as evidence.

Internal Tests

These questions seek to determine the credibility of the information or evidence provided by the oral history.

1. Does the interview make reference to community folklore? Removing references to folklore helps uncover the facts of a story.
2. Do other oral histories retell and event or subject in the same way? Corroborating oral histories makes an observation or story more credible.
3. Is the information provided in the oral history logical? Inconsistencies in the story or bizarre accounts reduce an oral history's credibility.
4. Can you identify any obvious personal bias? Personal bias can color and distort a person's recollection of an event or subject.

External Tests

These questions help to determine the credibility of an oral history by establishing the historical context.

1. Who is the interviewee? What is this person's relationship to the events or subjects under discussion? Was the person actually present when the events occurred, or is he/she relating another person's interpretation?
2. Who is the interviewer? What is this person's background and training? Does the interviewer have a prior relationship with the interviewee? Can you detect bias in the interviewer's questions?

3. Why did the interview conduct the oral history? The purpose may have “shaped the content, perspective, and tone of the interview.”
4. Where did the interview take place? The location and circumstances surrounding the interview might have had an impact on the quality of information.