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Our Roots, Our Branches: Listening and Writing to Tell a School's Story

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Unit: Our Roots, Our Branches:

Listening & Writing to Tell a School's Story
Grade: 4-5
Estimated Unit Length: 19 Days (45-minute lessons)

Stage 1: Desired Results

Transfer

Students will independently use their learning to...
- tell a story about their school community through written and oral expression.
- gain information about their school community through interviews and research.
- engage in communities where they live.

Understandings

Students will understand that…
- people tell stories for many reasons – including to teach, to connect, to heal, and to affect change.
- communities have stories to tell, both of the individuals and the collected experiences of the people within them.
- collaborative story-making strengthens communities.
- storytelling is a form of leadership.
- stories convey who we are.

Essential Questions	Knowledge & Skill

- Who is a storyteller? - Why do people tell stories? - In a community, whose story gets told, and why? - How does our identity shape the story? - How and why do communities change?	**Texas Essential Knowledge & Skills**
	ELAR 4.1 A, D SS 4.21 A - D
	       4.6 B, E, F, H 4.22 A - D
	       4.7 D, E, G
	       4.10E – G
	       4.11A – E
	       4.12B, D
	       4.13A – H

Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

Performance Task: You are on a team of community reporters that have been assigned to share the history of your neighborhood school. Your task is to write and present the school's story, including important moments in the school's history, what the school used to be like, and what the school is like today. You will receive dates and facts about the school's history, and your team must combine this information with interviews you will conduct to tell the whole story. You need to interview two people: one who used to be a part of the school community, and one who is involved with the school today. After interviewing them, you will report on their experiences at the school with the editor and the rest of your teammates. Your report must include details from their time at the school, including at least one moment they experienced that they believe was important in the school's history. Your editor will then collect your team's reports and share them with the community to tell the school's story from multiple perspectives.

Other evidence:
- School historical data reflection
- Interview request letter
- School community life map
- Peer interview
- Current stakeholder interview
- Personal Reflection

Stage 3: Learning Activities

Each day is designed to be between 45 minutes to an hour in length.

1. **Day One: What's the Story? Well, That All Depends...**
   Begin the unit with the first essential question from the unit: "Who is a storyteller?"
   Elicit responses from students (recording optional). Read <u>Seven Blind Mice</u> by Ed
   Young to the class. After reading the story, ask students who the storyteller(s) was/were
   in the book. Conclude the conversation with a quote from the end of the book: "Knowing
   in part may make a fine tale, but wisdom comes from seeing the whole." While all of the
   mice told their own story about the elephant, it wasn't until all of their stories were put
   together that they understood the **true** story about what they had experienced. We each
   bring a different **perspective** when we share a moment, so each of us may come away
   with a different story from the same experience.
   Ask the students if they can think of a time in school when they experienced the same
   moment as someone else at the school, but came away with a different perspective.
   Maybe something they thought was bad news was good news for someone else, or they
   disagreed with someone else about what happened and why. The teacher may use school
   experience examples to help. Students sketch that moment, then complete a quick write
   about it. Students may share their experiences, culminating with a class discussion about
   similarities and differences between the stories. End the lesson with an introduction to
   other books that reveal a different point of view of familiar stories. During the rest of the
   unit, these books will be in the classroom, and students can read them during independent
   reading or when other assignments are completed. If time allows, students browse the
   books.

2. **Days Two & Three: How Do We Tell Stories? Using Artifacts, Data, Visuals...Oh
   Yeah, and People.**
   Begin the lesson with the question on chart paper: "How do we tell stories?" Introduce
   the lesson by telling students that we will explore this question by looking at different
   ways stories can be told. Just like each of the mice in yesterday's story, when we find
   multiple ways to tell a story about something, we will have a better picture of the whole
   story. The chart paper will help us categorize different ways to tell a story and examples
   for each of those different ways.
   Bring in **artifacts** from an old school. If possible, check them out from a local library or
   museum: school bell, old report cards, quill, old lunch pail, readers, slates, inkwell, old
   toy, etc. Students discuss what the artifacts were used for and how the artifacts show
   details about what school was like when they were being used. Record on the chart:
   "Artifacts can tell stories." Underneath, write examples of the artifacts and the inferences
   we can make from them in telling the school's story.
   Next, introduce **data** to the class as facts, like measurements or numbers that represent or
   give information about something. Students examine data about the school's history,
   including key dates in the school, enrollment numbers, school ratings, and demographics.

Students discuss how the data shows details about their own school's history. Record on the chart: "Data can tell stories." Underneath, write examples of the data and the inferences we can make from them in telling the school's story. Students complete a reflection about what the data communicates about the school's history.

Third, introduce **visuals** to the class. Visuals can include photographs, graphs, or any other representation of the school in history. Students examine a variety of visuals and discuss how they show details about their own school's history. Record on the chart: "Visuals can tell stories." Underneath, write examples of the visuals and the inferences we can make from them in telling the school's story.

If students have created life maps before, share with students that a life map is another visual that can tell the story of a school, just like it does for individuals or families. (A resource for life maps, as well as other graphic maps, can be found at www.readwritethink.org, in the student interactive section.) Students discuss what important moments in the school's history might be, based on the visuals, data, and artifacts presented earlier in the lesson. In pairs, students create life maps of their school. After students have created their life maps, discuss what moments from the maps are common amongst the class. These may be recorded as "Most Important Moments in the School's History."

Ask the students, "What is one more way to tell a story that we haven't discussed yet?" The answer: **people!** Oral communication is the oldest form of storytelling, and collecting stories from our school is going to be our focus for the rest of the unit. Introduce the performance task to the students, explaining that the interviews and presentations students will make will accompany the artifacts, data, and visuals, to tell a **holistic** story about our school. Share examples of oral histories of other schools and communities. Finish the lesson by discussing why it is important to tell the school's story, and what the story may be used to accomplish.

3. **Day Four: If We Write Them, They Will Come...Setting Up Interviews**
   Ask students to generate a list of people who could help tell the school's big story. Who are people in our school community today that might give us different perspectives on what our school is like now? Who are people from the past that might give us different perspectives on what the school used to be like? Refer to the previous lesson's list of "Most Important Moments in the School's History". What are some moments from the school's past that we should find people who were there when it happened? Generate a list of stakeholders, both past and present, who could contribute to the school's story. Students choose, or may be assigned, to write to 1-2 stakeholders to request an interview. Students view an example of an interview request and then use an interview template to write to the stakeholder(s). *The request letters should be sent out as soon as possible, out of respect for the stakeholders and to ensure minimal delay in scheduling the interviews.*

4. **Day Five: What Makes a Story Important? A Tasting from Other Communities**
   Students begin by completing a think-pair-share around the question: "If a story was like a recipe, what would be the ingredients needed to make it great?" As the pairs share out with the rest of the class, listen for important elements like: conflict, challenge, change, suspense, a point, theme, character, plot.
   Story-telling helps us make sense of what's around us, and of who we are. We tell stories for lots of reasons: to teach, to connect to others, to heal, or to change something. Sometimes we tell a story for more than just one reason. Show examples of stories from students, teachers, and other stakeholders from other schools. Sources for stories could include narrative histories of schools, StoryCorps, or any other collection of voices. (A

fictional example is <u>Seedfolks</u> by Paul Fleischman. Students can either conduct a gallery walk, with stories arranged around the room, or by passing stories around and reading in pairs. Students read the stories and look for examples of the elements of good stories listed earlier. They may annotate or highlight examples as they see them. Students may also be asked in each round to look for a different element, or assign specific elements to pairs as they look for those elements amongst several stories.

After reading the stories, the class discusses what the stories had in common. If students do not state, tell the class that one important ingredient was **transition**. Introduce the term and why transitions are present in great stories. Students finish the discussion by brainstorming transitions in famous stories or movies they know and sharing them with each other. This may also be completed as an exit ticket.

5. **Day Six: Moments That Matter: How to Find Transitions in Interviews**
Students are set up in a circle or semi-circle for this lesson, with the two chairs in the middle of the circle. Students review what they have discussed up to this point in telling the school's story. In completing the performance task, as a team they will want to tell the big story that tells the school's history, what the school stands for, what successes and challenges the school has experienced, and any transitions that have taken place along the way. Students will have to collect all of this information through interviews. This requires good questions. Today students will learn about different types of questions and strategies for listening well during interviews.

Students begin by learning about the difference between **closed-ended questions** and **open-ended questions.** The teacher explains the difference, and students practice asking open-ended questions through a game called "What Fairy Tale Character Am I?" This game, and other resources for interviewing, come from Doug Lipman (www.storydynamics.com/Articles/Education/interviewing.html). Play one round of the game, just focusing on asking open-ended questions.

Next, students practice asking **follow-up questions**. Students use the same game, this time paying attention to follow-up questions as well as open-ended questions.

If time allows, students continue practicing follow-up questions with another Doug Lipman game called "The Hidden Mystery".

The lesson concludes with one more Doug Lipman game called "The Awful Interviewer". The teacher interviews a student volunteer, but relies on closed-ended questions and fails to follow-up on the student's responses. After the interview, students share non-examples of effective interviewing techniques.

6. **Day Seven: The Interview Fish Bowl: How to Record and Take Notes of an Interview**
With the student seating arrangement the same as the previous lesson, students conduct a "fish bowl" protocol, observing the teacher interview a school stakeholder invited to the class. (This could be a current administrator, colleague, or parent. Ensure that the interviewee is aware of the assignment and that the interview will be used for instructive purposes.) The teacher shares what to look and listen for during the interview, particularly regarding the teacher's questions and how the teacher shows that s/he is listening to the interviewee.

During the interview, the teacher thinks aloud to show what s/he is thinking about during the interview. These think-alouds include active listening skills, notetaking skills, and recording logistics. If possible, the teacher should use a document camera to capture and project the notes s/he takes during the interview.

After the interview, students reflect on the teacher's practices and what information they

learned from the responses to the questions. Students complete the lesson by making a T-Chart describing the "Do's and Don'ts" of an effective interview.

7. **Day Eight: What Do WE Say About Our School? Interviewing Each Other**
Students gather into groups of three to interview each other about their experience at the school. Using an interview question idea bank, students take turns, with each student taking a specific role in every round: interviewer, notetaker, and interviewee. There should be three rounds of interviews, so that each student in the triad has an opportunity to play each of the roles. Communicate to the students what successful work will look and sound like, using the interview question idea bank and examples of notes. Students debrief each round by giving feedback to one another.

After all triads have completed interviews, debrief as a class. What did students like about interviewing each other? What was difficult about interviewing a classmate? What was difficult about taking notes? What connections did we make to stories our classmates told? What differences did we find, or what surprised us about our classmates' stories?

Students conclude the lesson by brainstorming how they can work together in pairs to interview other stakeholders in the school. Students identify their partners (may be choice or assigned) and who they will interview in the next lesson.

8. **Day Nine: What Do THEY Say About Our School? Interviewing Current Stakeholders**
Students pair up to interview a current stakeholder about her/his experience at the school. This could be a current student from another grade, a teacher, support staff, administrator, or parent. (Stakeholders should be scheduled for interviews well in advance of the lesson.) Using an interview question idea bank, students work together to interview the stakeholder. The students take turns asking specific questions.   Depending on the pair, differentiation for role assignment may be needed, where one student may focus on asking questions while the other student take notes for the entire interview.

If time allows, students may interview another stakeholder.

Students debrief by reviewing notes and making sure that information from the interview is completely recorded. Students share with the class 1) what the experience was like and what they learned about interviewing someone else, and 2) any specific piece of information from the interview that they found interesting or surprising.

9. **Day Ten: Preparing for the Performance Task**
This lesson begins by looking once again at the performance task, and discussing the expectations as listed in the interview rubric.

Students review what they have learned from interviewing each other and other stakeholders in the school. Revisiting the list of "Do's and Don'ts" in interviewing, they add to or expand on the list based on their experiences. The teacher explains that, for the final interview, students will work independently, so time and space for writing an interview summary will be included so that the students can record everything they want to without forgetting important details from the interview or having to pause during the interview for extended periods of time.

Next, students prepare a specific list of in-depth, open-ended questions to ask for their final interview. The questions should be individualized based on the specific stakeholder they will work with. Students receive feedback from the teacher and each other about their questions.

Finally, students will ensure that the interviewing space is ready for the next lesson. This could include chair setup, equipment needed, refreshments and welcoming materials,

communication to notify other staff, etc.

10. **Day Eleven: What DID They Say About Our School? Interviewing Stakeholders from the Past**
Students welcome the invited guests for the interviews and independently conduct their planned interviews using the questions they prepared as well as follow-up questions that arise from active listening. Students record notes during the interview and write summaries of the interview after it is complete.

11. **Days Twelve - Fourteen: Performance Task Work: Writing Their Story**
Working in pairs, students use all of the information they have from data and interviews to write the school's story, including important moments in the school's history, what the school used to be like, and what the school is like today. Students create a first draft of their report and then receive feedback on it before editing and revising.

12. **Days Fifteen & Sixteen: Performance Task Work: Publishing Their Presentation**
Using the feedback and revisions they have made, students create final drafts of their reports, in the medium of the teacher's choice. This could include a slide show, written report, or combination with other media.

13. **Days Seventeen & Eighteen: Performance Task Presentations**
Students share their work with the class and any other invited guests.

14. **Day Nineteen: What BIG Story Do Our Individual Stories Tell Together? Culminating Work and Reflection**
Students debrief the presentations with class discussion. What were some things that the presentations had in common? Was there any information from a presentation that was unique? What did the different perspectives from the presentations teach us that we wouldn't have known if we had just interviewed people from the school today?
Ask the students what information from the reports is the most important. If we put all of our stories together, what are the essential details that we want our school community to know about?
Conclude the unit with a personal reflection, where students self-assess their work, describe what they learned, and share what skills they have grown in as a result of the work they did.

Interview : The Story of Our School Community

Teacher Name: **Mr. Shay**

Student Name: _____

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Labeling	The student seamlessly put the date of the interview, place of the interview, and the full name of the person being interviewed on the report in a way that was easy to find and understand.	The student included the date of the interview, place of the interview, and full name of the person being interviewed somewhere within the report.	The student included the date of the interview and full name of the person being interviewed on the report.	The student forgot to put the date of the interview OR the full name of the person being interviewed on the report.
Knowledge Gained	Student can accurately answer several questions about the person who was interviewed and can tell how this interview relates to the story of the school community.	Student can accurately answer a few questions about the person who was interviewed and can tell how this interview relates to the story of the school community.	Student can accurately answer a few questions about the person who was interviewed.	Student cannot accurately answer questions about the person who was interviewed.
Setting Up the Interview	The student introduced her/himself, explained why (s)he wanted to interview the person, and asked permission to set up a time for an interview.	The student introduced her/himself and asked permission to set up a time for the interview, but needed a reminder to explain why (s)he wanted to do the interview.	The student asked permission to set up a time for the interview, but needed reminders to introduce her/himself and to tell why (s)he wanted to interview the person.	The student needed assistance in all aspects of setting up the interview.
Preparation	Before the interview, the student prepared several in-depth AND factual questions to ask. Most of the questions were open-ended.	Before the interview, the student prepared a couple of in-depth questions and several factual questions to ask. Most of the questions were open-ended.	Before the interview, the student prepared several factual questions to ask. Some, but not most, of the questions were open-ended.	The student did not prepare many questions before the interview. Few, if any, of the questions were open-ended.
Notetaking	The interviewer took several brief notes during the interview. An interview summary was added immediately after the interview so facts were not lost.	The interviewer took occasional notes during the interview and included a basic summary of the interview afterwards.	The interviewer took some notes during the interview and included a brief summary afterwards, but the notes and summary do not communicate the interviewee's experiences within the school community.	The interviewer took no notes during the interview, and did not include a summary of the interview afterwards.

Follow-up Questions	The student listened carefully to the person being interviewed and asked several relevant follow-up questions based on what the person said.	The student listened carefully to the person being interviewed and asked a couple of relevant follow-up questions based on what the person said.	The student asked a couple of follow-up questions based on what s/he thought the person said.	The student did not ask any follow-up questions based on what the person said.
Report Writing	The report is well organized and contains accurate quotations and facts taken from the interview.	The report is well organized and contains accurate facts taken from the interview.	The report contains accurate quotations and facts taken from the interview.	The report is lacking facts and quotations from the interview OR the quotes and facts are not accurately reported.