



*Seda sünnituga oli alati kõik parem kella ja toiduained  
laksid sisse - rinde jaoks. Rahvas pidi leppima sellega, mis  
üle jäi, aga tuleväämas ei arvud eriti midagi. Ükskord tõi  
lasteseda karamell-kompekkke, mis selle aja kohta oli suur  
haruldus jagati kõigi laste vahel ära, nii et igüks sai mõne.  
Karet tõi koju - väikeses peokses üks poolenisti sulanud  
paberita kamm - ta tõi selle emale.*

## USING ORAL HISTORY AS LEARNING MATERIAL

Guide for Teachers and Youth Workers

# Using Oral History as Learning Material: Guide for Teachers and Youth Workers

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# What is a Personal Story and How Can It Be Used to Teach History?

A personal story is an oral or written historical source, either someone's narrative or a story set down in writing about one's life. This kind of narrative is subjective and is based on memories. People's personal experiences help to better understand the era and events, and to get to know the experiences and understandings of different people. Thus personal stories are important sources for making sense of the past.

The personal story not only imparts to us what people did or saw, or what happened to them, rather it also conveys their thoughts, feelings, motives for action, and opinions concerning the actions, motives for action, and objectives of their fellow men. We also find out the opinion of the participant in the event under consideration concerning their actions at that time.

The personal story helps to develop empathy. It is a feeling of communion, a way to comprehend another person and that person's attributes, states of being, and behaviour. This empathy is based on the ability to enter into the inner world of another person, to see everything from that person's viewpoint, to understand and sympathise with that other person.

It is important that the pupil understands the limitations of memory and personal observations. The fact that someone was an eyewitness of an event does not unconditionally mean that his account is true. Studies have shown that people's long-term memory is more precise and stable than their short-term memory.

The objective of the lesson/activity determines the **use of personal stories in school lessons/youth activities**:

- As a source of new knowledge.
- To develop critical thinking.
- To better understand the era and the human condition through specific experience. It is easier for pupils/young people to identify with a personalised story.
- To characterise the complexity of the era and different life situations in comparing different fates.
- To arouse interest in the events of the past.

**The following questions should be considered in analysing a personal story:**

- Is the speaker relating the speaker's own experiences or telling someone else's story?
- Are the descriptions rich in detail?

- Are dates, names of persons and / or places named?
- How much time has passed since the described events?
- What does the story not talk about? For instance, events or circumstances known by way of other sources.
- What is the geographical dimension of the story: does it tell about one's home neighbourhood or more distant places?
- Which emotions does the story express?

### **Methods suitable for analysing a personal story:**

**KFW** – I know, I will find out, I want to know – work with a text where one has to pick out and make note of ideas from that text: what I know, what I found out, and what I would want to know or study further. This method directs one to think along while reading a personal story and enriches the theme under consideration through personal experiences.

**Guided imagination** – a text is read out or a clip shown, the ending of which the pupil himself/herself has to write. It has to conform to historical reality. At the end, the way the story actually ended is disclosed.

**Pyramid diagram** – for studying historical personalities. Facilitates familiarisation with the life story of a personality and the sorting of factual data into categories, for instance spheres of activity.

**Fact pyramid** – a three-stage pyramid where the most important facts are at the tip of the pyramid, incidental facts are written down in the middle, and supporting facts are written at the very bottom. Helps to differentiate the important from the unimportant.

**Keyword chain** – keywords are given in a certain order and these keywords have to be tied together into a unified narrative, meaning how the text that has been read is connected to the given keywords.

**Interview** – getting to know a personality in the form of questions and answers. Makes it possible to place one partner in the role of the personality and to observe the personality in first person. A good method for developing empathy.

# Audio-visual Sources in Teaching History

## **Distinct features of audio-visual sources:**

- The visuals are given to the viewer: the camera shows actions and people at a chosen distance and at a fixed angle, and the action takes place within the limits of the frame.
- The moving picture makes it possible to see emotions, facial expressions, gestures, the environment, and to hear sounds, etc.

Although audio-visual sources support the formation of a complete picture, the mental image that takes shape in one's fantasy as a text is read should not be underestimated. If a pupil becomes accustomed to being given pictures exclusively, his imagination and capacity to think abstractly do not develop. In contemporary schools and youth activities, pictures and film can be means for generating interest and guiding pupils to the analysis of written texts, but they are not meant to replace written sources.

**The use of audio-visual sources develops** the ability to compare, analyse and interpret sources, critical thinking and the formation of one's own position, independent research and capacity for empathy.

The objective of the lesson/activity determines the **use of audio-visual sources in school lessons/youth activities.**

- The running time of the segment is 3–20 minutes, depending on the assignment.
- Suitability for the relevant ages and comprehensibility (the theme under consideration, use of words, content, etc.).
- As an objective, the introduction is to raise interest in the theme, to inspire pupils/the youth to pose questions, and to generate the wish to find out more.
- In summary of the theme: to guide the pupil/youth to notice details, to compare what is happening on screen to existing knowledge.
- In the same lesson as both the introduction and summary of the theme. To compare the experience of viewing and to discuss how new knowledge affects what the eye or ear picks out from the screen.
- As a source of new knowledge or a replacement for the teacher's/trainer's explanation.

In the interest of better understanding, the teacher/trainer can comment on the videos while they are being watched. The need to interrupt the film and in the interval to provide supplementary explanations depends on the content and purpose of the film. Stopping the film provides the opportunity to analyse one frame or a course of events that has been seen, yet it may disrupt the understanding of the complete story. Taking notes depends on the assignment. This may divert the pupil's/youth's attention from the film and for this reason, it is not reasonable to expect longer writings that require concentration. Keywords should be written down for the later analysis of the course of events.

After watching the film, a summary should be made. What was seen in the film, and which of the

known events were left out should be discussed. This helps pupils to construct their knowledge, and to tie the knowledge they have gained in to a broader background. Otherwise there is the danger of accumulating incomplete knowledge and unrelated facts.

**The following questions should be considered in analysing an audio-visual source:**

- Does the course of events correspond to previously known facts?
- What is likely? What seems to be unlikely?
- From whose viewpoint are the events presented?
- To what extent can the format of an interview affect the content of what is being spoken about?
- To what extent can the place where the interview is conducted affect the content of what is being spoken about?
- Are the events presented engagingly, in an absorbing way? How is this achieved?
- How may later events have affected what the interviewee says?
- What do we not find out? Can some important part of information remain beyond reach and why?

**Methods suitable for video analysis**

When watching an audio-visual source with both sound and picture, the viewer has all the information contained in the frame. Since this requires the viewer's full attention, it is advisable to watch the same video segment at least twice. What has been seen could be discussed after the first viewing, and viewers could concentrate on details during the second viewing.

**Watching the visuals without sound** makes it possible to focus on recognising the situation or persons. The viewer can often understand much more precisely what is happening to a person by observing that person's body language (facial expressions, movements, gestures, body posture, distance, and other such aspects).

**Listening to the soundtrack without the visuals** can be used before watching the video. The assignment is to describe events and persons. From that point onward, how and why such a perception came about can be discussed.

**Freeze-frame.** Stopping the video in order to analyse a frame or episode. The pupil may be given the assignment to describe verbally or in writing how events proceeded and to predict what will happen next. The additional story that has been made up has to be in harmony with historical reality.

The **mosaic** is based on the idea of mutual teaching, where each member of the group knows one part of the information and shares that with the others. For instance, one person focuses on different characters or some specific aspect. The assignment of the pupils is in the course of discussion to determine which event was reflected and from whose viewpoint events were presented.

**Watching different videos in a chronologically mixed-up order.** The assignment is to put the events in their correct chronological order. Thereafter the basis on which the decisions were made is discussed.