

'Environmental Memoirs' sample student activity

Creating a community 'Environmental Memoir'

This is a fun and exciting activity that requires students to create an 'Environmental Memoir' for an individual (adult, preferably a community elder) that tells a story about their community. As a class, the research material provides an insightful record of how their local community has changed over time.

The activity requires students to undertake interviews of their community elders, with a focus on one or more environmental issues and to write the results in *first person* and submit them for assessment. Compiling a set of student works provides an excellent opportunity for a class exhibition of their findings.

Method

1. Introduce 'Environmental Memoirs' as a homework task through requesting students collect a story from their parents/grandparents/guardians/neighbours. The story can be collected verbally and reported back to the class individually or shared in small groups. The theme of the story must focus on the environmental changes that have occurred from that persons childhood to adult life. Sharing a personal story with the students might also inspire students' in their collection task.
2. After students have reported their findings (the following class), introduce the 'Environmental Memoir' task. Explain that the objective of the task is to create a record of environmental change of the community
3. Explain the process of collecting and publishing the research material.
 - a. **Creating the interview questionnaire**
Possible ways of introducing interview concepts include:
 - Reading through one of the published 'Environmental Memoirs' available from www.swinburne.edu.au/ncs/environmentalmemoirs e.g. Indonesia and asking the students to identify the questions required to obtain the necessary answers.
 - Distribute a series of questionnaires and ask students to identify which questions are best for their task.
 - Introduce a theme for the 'Environmental Memoir'. This will make the questionnaire more specific. For example, waste, water, industrial development, wetlands, desertification etc¹.

For the design of the questionnaire, students will need to decide what the environmental theme is going to be. To save time, a prepared questionnaire could be given to students.

¹ Questions about childhood games, food, weather, school life, hobbies etc are all useful.

It is important to note that your educational institution may have ethics policies on collection of personal information, which should be known before commencing this task.

b. Undertaking interviews

Once a questionnaire has been prepared, ask the students to undertake an interview of an adult/community elder. It is important that the individual has lived in the community for the majority of their life. Video and audio recorders are useful in this activity, but not essential. It is also important that the interviewees' confidentiality is respected. This needs to be addressed on the interview sheet.

c. Writing up the interviews

Using the interview transcripts / notes students are required write the research findings in *first person*. Ask the students to submit the interview in first person and accompanied with a photograph of the person if permission for this is granted. Memoirs from the 'Environmental Memoirs' website can be printed and distributed as examples. If possible, students should collect photos of the area. This will make for a more comprehensive report.

d. Presentation of the interviews (optional)

Using the memoirs and the images collected by the class post the memoirs on storyboards within the school. It will make for a great class exhibition!