

**EXPLORING SKYLINE FARMS, ALABAMA  
THROUGH ORAL HISTORY**

**Grades:** 7-12

**Subjects:** Social Studies, U.S. Government, Visual Arts

**Time Required:** Two 50-60 minute class period

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**OVERVIEW**

In this lesson, students will explore the history of Skyline, Alabama through photographs and oral histories. Students will analyze photographs taken by Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographers in the 1930s of Skyline Farms, Alabama, and conduct an oral history of a community member to gain a more thorough and personal understanding of the culture and history of the area.

**GOAL**

Students will

- Learn how to analyze photographs
- Learn how to conduct an oral history
- Understand how oral histories are an important primary source in understanding the history of a community

**OBJECTIVES**

The learner will

- Understand the Resettlement Administration and its role in creating Skyline Farms, Alabama
- Analyze photographs of Skyline Farms to gain a better understanding of what life was like there in the 1930s
- Create a list of interview questions geared at learning more about a specific topic of interest related to Skyline
- Conduct an oral history project within the community of Skyline in order to learn more about the history and culture of the area

**INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION**

What can oral history add to our understanding of community history, and how can oral history help interpret primary sources such as photographs?



[Farmer after shopping trip. Skyline Farms, Alabama.](#) [Feb. 1937]



[Untitled.](#) [1937]

**ALABAMA CURRICULUM STANDARDS**

**7th-12th grade Visual Arts, Level IV**

**8.** Analyze artists' choices in order to interpret meanings, ideas, attitudes, views, and intentions in works of art.

**11th grade Social Studies**

**6.** Describe social and economic conditions from the 1920s through the Great Depression, factors leading to a deepening crisis, and successes and failures associated with the programs and policies of the New Deal.

**12th grade United States Government**

**7.** Trace the development and impact of the media on the political process and public opinion in the United States.

## MATERIALS

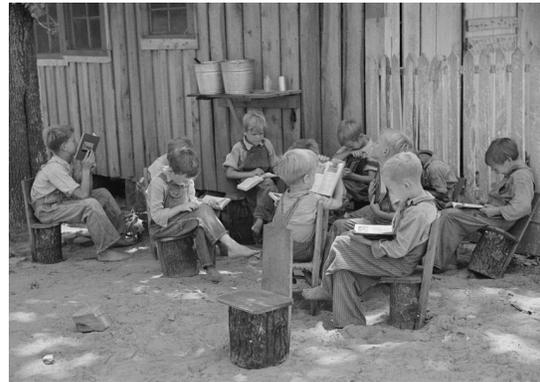
- [Primary Source Analysis Tool](#)
- [Teacher's Guide, Analyzing Photographs & Prints](#)
- [Interview Release Form](#) (page 50 of *The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide*)
- [Interview Information Form](#) (page 51 of *The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide*)
- [Interview Context Form](#) (page 52 of *The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide*)
- Tape recorder
- Worksheet 1



[Store, Skyline Farms, Alabama.](#) [Feb. 1937]

## RESOURCES

- “Skyline Farms.” <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1546>.
- *The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide.* <http://www.folklife.si.edu/resources/pdf/interviewingguide.pdf>.
- The American Folklife Center Interviewing Guides. [http://www.loc.gov/folklife/edresources/edcenter\\_files/interview-guide.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/folklife/edresources/edcenter_files/interview-guide.pdf)



[School scene at Cumberland Mountain Farms \(Skyline Farms\) near Scottsboro, Alabama.](#) [June 1936]

## PROCEDURE

### Step 1:

Before beginning the lesson plan, read pages 12-20 in [The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide](#) by Marjorie Hunt on the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage Web site, so you are able to summarize the process of conducting an oral history for the class. Also, try to reserve a computer lab for the class, and print out a copy of the [Primary Source Analysis Tool](#), [The American Folklife Center Interviewing Guide](#), pages 22-27 of [The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide](#) (these pages provide example questions), [Interview Release Form](#) (page 50), [Interview Information Form](#) (page 51), [Interview Context Form](#) (page 52), and Worksheet 1 for each student. If you do not have access to a computer lab, then print out a copy of the [Encyclopedia of Alabama article on Skyline Farms, Alabama](#) for each student. In addition, search the [Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-And-White Negatives Collection](#) (keyword: Skyline Farms Alabama) for photographs of Skyline Farm. Print out a different image for each student in the class.

### Step 2: **CONNECT**

Before beginning this lesson, students should have some knowledge about the Great Depression and the Resettlement Administration. Have students research these topics in the school library or on the Internet. What is the Resettlement Administration? Why was it created? How did the program affect farmers? What is the significance of the RA in Alabama's history?

### Step 3: **CONNECT**

Have students read the [Encyclopedia of Alabama article on Skyline Farms, Alabama](#), a community established by the RA. Allow students time to ask any questions they have about the article.

(Continued on p. 3)

**PROCEDURE** (continued from p. 2)

**Step 4: CONNECT**

Have students search the [Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-And-White Negatives Collection](#) (keyword: Skyline Farms Alabama) for photographs of Skyline Farms. Have each student select a different photograph and print it out. Have each student fill out the [Primary Source Analysis Tool](#) to help them analyze the image. Teachers should refer to the [Teacher's Guide, Analyzing Photographs & Prints](#) to prompt discussion and help the students to critically examine the image.

**Step 5: EXPRESS**

Have each student show the class the photograph that he or she selected (display the images on a wall, so students can see all the images at once). How does the photograph depict Skyline Farms (positive or negative, progress or failure)? Remember, FSA images were often used as propaganda. If these images were printed in newspapers or magazines, then what message would it send to the general public about Skyline Farms and about the government's programs? What did you learn about Skyline Farms from your photograph? Do you have a better understanding of what Skyline Farms was like in 1930s? What questions do you have about Skyline that the article and the photographs did not answer?



[Sawmill, Skyline Farms, Alabama.](#)  
[Sept. 1935]

**Step 6: WONDER**

Tell students that they will be participating in an oral history project within their community. Summarize what you have read in [The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide](#) to your students. Then give students a copy of pages 22-27 and [The American Folklife Center Interviewing Guides](#) to read. For homework, have students complete Step 1 and Step 2 on Worksheet 1 (give students ample time to complete this). Students should turn this portion in on a given due date.

**Step 7:**

Review and edit the students' lists of questions and hand them back.

**Step 8: INVESTIGATE**

Divide the students up in pairs. Have students role-play and practice interviewing each other in class using their lists of questions. Did you run into any difficulties when interviewing each other? Did the interviewee understand your questions? Were you able to ask any impromptu questions? Suggest additional questions for each other.

**Step 9: INVESTIGATE & REFLECT**

For homework, have students complete Step 3 and Step 4 (give students ample time to complete this step, since they will have to coordinate a time with their interviewee to conduct their interview).



[Cabinet maker, Skyline Farms, Alabama.](#)  
[1937]

**Step 10: EXPRESS**

Have each student share their oral history experience with the class. Did they encounter any problems or struggles? What did they learn about the community? What questions do they still have?

**Step 11: REFLECT**

Have a class discussion about oral histories as a primary source. Why are they important? How can students use their newly acquired skill of conducting an oral history in the future (i.e. future research assignments, interacting with people)?

## EVALUATION

Use the following rubric to evaluate the oral history projects:

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 90-100       | Prepares an extensive list of interview questions geared at a specific topic of interest, asks many impromptu questions as the interview progresses, thoroughly answers all of the reflective questions and is able to thoroughly discuss several examples of what he or she gained from the interview and how it can be used to learn about the community in general |
| 80-89        | Prepares a thorough list of interview questions geared at a specific topic of interest, asks several impromptu questions as the interview progresses, answers all of the reflective questions and is able to discuss a couple of examples of what he or she gained from the interview and how it can be used to learn about the community in general                  |
| 70-79        | Prepares a short list of interview questions which are geared at a specific topic of interest, asks a couple of impromptu questions as the interview progresses, answers most of the reflective questions, but can only identify and discuss one example of what he or she gained from the interview and how it can be used to learn about the community              |
| 69 and below | Prepares only a few interview questions that are not geared at a specific topic of interest, does not ask any impromptu questions as the interview progresses, did not answer all of the reflective questions, and cannot discuss what he or she gained from the interview or how it can be used to learn about the community in general.                             |



[Schoolhouse and school scene at the Skyline Farms near Scottsboro, Alabama.](#) [June 1936]

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## EXTENSION

Marjorie Hunt argues that we are all bearers of tradition, from the young to the old. Oral histories are rich primary sources that offer invaluable insights into our history, culture, and heritage. Part of the importance of conducting an oral history is preserving these first-hand accounts of history and culture for the general public. Have students type a transcription of their interview (For some examples of oral history transcriptions search the Library of Congress Collection, [Voices from the Days of Slavery](#)). The heading should include the name of the interview and the interviewee, the location, the date, and if the transcription was edited by the interviewee. Also, have students include copies of any photographs they took during the interview. Make sure the photographs have appropriate captions that describe the image (i.e. who took the image? When was it taken? Where was it taken? What is the image of?) For good examples of titles and descriptions of images, search the [Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-And-White Negatives Collection](#) (keyword: TVA) and read the titles of some of the images. Work with the librarians at the local school or community library to archive the oral histories.

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- Hunt, Marjorie. *The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2003. Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. <http://www.folklife.si.edu/resources/pdf/interviewingguide.pdf> (accessed November 30, 2010).
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## Teaching with Primary Sources—MTSU

LESSON PLAN:

# EXPLORING SKYLINE FARMS, ALABAMA THROUGH ORAL HISTORY

## WORKSHEET 1

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 1: Locate an Individual to Interview

Work with your teachers, parents, and the owners of the Rock Store to locate and help gain permission from a community member to interview who has knowledge or personal experiences related to the Skyline Farms community of the 1930s and 1940s. If no one is available, then it is acceptable to interview any community member.

Name of interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 2: Formulate a List of Questions

On a separate sheet of paper, formulate a list of possible questions to ask the person you are going to interview. Refer to pages 22-27 of the [The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide](#) for ideas. If the person you are interviewing has knowledge or personal experiences related to the Skyline Farms community of the 1930s and 1940s, then try to use some questions you came up with when you viewed the photographs in the [Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-And-White Negatives Collection](#). What do you want to know about your community? What do you want to know about the individual you are interviewing? Your questions should be tailored to a specific idea that you are looking to learn about (i.e. every day life, food traditions, crafts, music traditions, education).

### Step 3: Conducting the Interview

If your interviewee has knowledge or personal experiences related to the Skyline Farms community of the 1930s and 1940s, then print out some photographs of Skyline Farms from the [Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-And-White Negatives Collection](#) (keyword: Skyline Farms Alabama). You may want to show these images to your interviewee to prompt them to discuss memories or knowledge related to what is in the image. Conduct your interview in a quiet place. Ask the interviewee for permission to record them during your interview. Make sure the interviewee reads and signs the [Interview Release Form](#) (page 50). Also make sure you fill out the [Interview Information Form](#) (page 51) and the [Interview Context Form](#) (page 52). Use your list of questions as a guide. Your interviewee may mention something that you want to learn more about. Feel free to ask additional questions to prompt the interviewee to tell you more. When you have finished your interview, be sure to thank your interviewee for their insight and time!

### Step 4: Reflect

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper:

What did you learn about your community from conducting an oral interview?

How is an oral interview different from other primary sources?

Why is an oral interview an important primary source?

How will your new skill of conducting an oral history help you in the future?