



## Living History DIY Project

### **Civic Circle Area:** Listen and Learn

*The impact of COVID-19 continues to change our daily lives and routines, but volunteering and civic engagement are just as important as ever. This project can be modified to adhere to social distancing guidelines set by local and national authorities, to do virtually or to do at home and deliver via mail or drop off.*

Life looked very different for people who are now senior citizens. At the same time, they also faced many of the social issues we still face today. While history books give us an overview of the past, seniors' stories add depth. Interview a senior citizen, veteran or grandparent about the past and important moments and social issues they experienced and help document their lives and stories for future generations.

### **What You Need:**

- A tape recorder, video recorder, smartphone or a tablet
- Notebook and pens
- A person, or people, to interview
- Commitment and creativity

### **Steps:**

1. Contact a local Veteran's Association, nursing home, hospital, online pen pal organization or another organization that frequently works with seniors. Ask if there are any seniors who do not receive letters or visitors or who are lonely, and if they are available to receive visitors or letters. Explain the living history project.
  - You can also do this project with someone in your own family, such as a grandparent.
2. Depending on the privacy rules of the organization, collect the name and contact information of the senior so you can contact them. Or ask the organization to connect you.
3. Write an introductory letter with your name, age and a little bit about your hobbies and interests. Explain the project and goals in the letter to confirm that the senior may be willing to participate. For example: "My name is Jane Smith and I am a sophomore in high school. I like to read and write and hope to one day become a journalist. I'm writing to you because I want to tell your story and learn more about social issues of the past."
4. Ask to set up a date for a phone or in-person interview where you can ask specific questions about their experience and story or ask if they prefer the chance to tell their stories through letters.
5. Ask them if they have any memorabilia that they would be willing to discuss, like photos and letters.
6. Record the interviews or keep all of the letters. Keep notes of your impressions and of the experience. The interviews may take several sessions depending on the emotional and physical state of the senior.



7. Do research to learn more about the events discussed in the interview(s) or letter(s). Put the senior's story in historical context before writing or sharing it.
8. Ask permission from the senior to spread the word of their story. There are many ways to do this: Start a column in a school paper or present a story during the morning announcements. Complete the steps to turn the story into the Library of Congress and be recorded for future generations. Create a book that tells the story and offer it to the senior who can choose to share it with their family or friends.
9. Keep in contact with the senior. Maintain a friendly relationship to learn more about the history of the country and show your appreciation for them.

**Reflection Questions:**

- How did getting to know the senior's story change your perception of history?
- Why is it important to learn about the stories and social issues of the past?
- What do you hope other people learn from this story?