

STORYCORPS IN THE LIBRARY

“The nation is facing an extraordinary crisis and collectively facing a defining moment,” said Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden, when StoryCorps launched StoryCorps Connect. “Americans are resilient and we will come out of this stronger with stories that will highlight our spirit and strength.” ([StoryCorps Connect Press Release, 4/9/2020](#))

If this pandemic shows us anything, it's that there is no script for life. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't still take the time to come together, to celebrate hard-earned achievements and milestones, and to learn from one another.

Use this guide to record the stories of loved ones or other important figures in your life. Interviews are archived at the Library of Congress, becoming part of American history, and will be searchable online.

BEFORE YOU START

Most participants are able to get through about six questions during a 40-minute interview. Select six to eight questions from the lists below. Keep in mind that sometimes the best questions are the ones that you've always wanted to ask, so feel free to add a few of your own.

PARTICIPANT 1:

My name is (name). I am (age) years old. Today is (date), and I'm speaking with (partner's name), who is my (relationship). I am recording this interview in (place, city, state; e.g., “my home in Nome, Alaska”).

PARTICIPANT 2:

My name is (name). I am (age) years old. Today is (date), and I'm speaking with (partner's name), who is my (relationship). I am recording this interview in (place, city, state; e.g., “my home in Nome, Alaska”).

GREAT QUESTIONS FOR ANYONE

- How did we first meet? What is your first memory of me?
- What was the happiest moment of your life? The saddest?
- Who has had the biggest influence on your life? What lessons did they teach you?
- What does your future hold?
- How would you like to be remembered?
- Can you remember a time in your life when you felt most alone?
- How has your life been different than what you'd imagined?

COVID-19 PANDEMIC QUESTIONS

- How has living through this experience made you feel?
- What has given you comfort and hope during this time?
- What has been the most challenging part of this experience?
- Is there someone you can't see right now who you really wish you could?
- How is this experience different from other historical events you've lived through?
- If you could ask anyone from your life, living or dead, for advice on getting through this, who would it be and what would you ask them?
- Do you or have you had COVID-19? What is/was that experience like for you?
- Is there anything you want to say to me given what we're living through at this moment?

QUESTIONS RELATED TO LIBRARIES AND LIBRARY STAFF

- What have you learned during this time about the role of libraries and/or archives?
- What concerns about your community are forefront in your mind right now?
- How do you anticipate that your role will change in the coming months or years?
- How has your library or archive responded to community needs in light of COVID-19 and a national reckoning on racial injustice?
- What do you most miss about your role or workplace from pre-COVID-19?
- The “role” of a library has been ever-evolving over the last two decades. It again faces a change. What does that change look like to you?
- What lessons from this time do you hope to carry with you going forward as a library and as a community?
- Has your library or archive sought to document your community’s experiences during COVID-19? In what ways?
- What has it meant to you to work in a library or archive during the time of COVID-19?
- What are the most important ways that you have served your community, your patrons, and your colleagues during this time? Is there a specific story that comes to mind when you reflect back on this work?
- How did your library or institution first respond to the COVID-19 shutdowns? What were those initial weeks like for you and your community?
- How have your services and priorities shifted as a library or archive in response to COVID-19?
- What has been the most memorable reaction from a patron to your library closing or reopening?
- What has surprised you the most about your work with patrons and colleagues in recent months?
- What do you want people to know about the work of libraries and librarians during this time?
- What do you want others to know about your community, your patrons, and your colleagues?

CHECKLIST FOR INTERVIEW DAY

- ✓ Prepare your questions in advance: write down or print a copy of questions you’d like to ask. Be prepared to go off script and ask follow-up questions!
- ✓ Invite your partner to record on [StoryCorps Connect](#) by sharing a private link to your recording session.
- ✓ Begin the interview by introducing yourself and your partner. State the location, date, and year where and when you are conducting the interview. Example: *My name is Abraham Lincoln. Today is May 17, 2020 and I am talking with my friend Frederick Douglass.*
- ✓ After you record, enter your summary, title, and keywords and take a photo with your partner when prompted by the app. Don’t forget to use the keyword #LibraryStories and the name of your local library.
- ✓ Thank your partner for sharing their story with you. Share your interview on social media and tag #LibraryStories and @StoryCorps!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ [StoryCorps Connect](#)
- ▶ [StoryCorps Online Archive](#)
- ▶ [Love Letters to Libraries](#)
- ▶ [The Great Thanksgiving Listen](#)
- ▶ [StoryCorps DIY](#)

WHAT IS STORYCORPS?

Founded in 2003, StoryCorps has given people of all backgrounds and beliefs, in thousands of towns and cities in all 50 states, the chance to record interviews about their lives. We preserve the recordings in our archive at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. Today, it is the largest single collection of human voices ever gathered.