

"The Great Thanksgiving Listen" challenges teens to collect stories

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Sam Harmon (left) is interviewed by his grandson, Ezra Awumey, while his daughter, Vivian Awumey, watches inside a StoryCorps soundproof booth, May 19, 2005, in Washington, D.C. Photo: AP/Manuel Balce Ceneta

A nonprofit group called StoryCorps has a challenge for students as they settle back in to school. The organization wants teenagers across America to record an interview with a grandparent or another elder this Thanksgiving holiday.

StoryCorps' main purpose is preserving peoples' stories. The group has asked high school history teachers for help with their new project, which is called "The Great Thanksgiving Listen." Teachers can make the interviews a class project or just help spread the word about the challenge.

Students who take part in the challenge will record interviews using StoryCorps' free smartphone app. Then they will use the app to send the interviews to the Library of Congress. Recordings will become part of the American Folklife Center so that anyone can listen to them.

An Assignment With No Deadline

Dave Isay is the founder of StoryCorps. He says "The Great Thanksgiving Listen" is an assignment that will last for generations.

When young people do these interviews, they know "their great-great-great-great-great-grandkids are going to get to eavesdrop on this conversation someday," Isay explained. Students are giving listeners a chance to understand who their ancestors were, he said.

Isay hopes the Thanksgiving interviews will become an annual tradition. He wants to use modern technology to preserve the wisdom of elders and bring families closer together.

This year's interviews could tap into memories of events dating back to the 1920s, but for Isay, that's not what is most important. He is more focused on the fact that two people are talking.

People Are Naturally Good Interviewers

Isay says StoryCorps helps people feel more connected and gives the person who is being interviewed the chance to be heard. "It's not so much what's in the stories as what the experience is like for the people who are recording," he said.

Brandon Clarke helps run the Berkeley Carroll School, which is not far from StoryCorps' New York City headquarters. The school partnered with StoryCorps to create instructional materials for the challenge.

Clarke says teachers at his school will probably spend extra time helping students with their interviewing skills right before Thanksgiving. They could work on things like developing good questions and handling interesting responses.

According to Isay, interviewing is not hard. In fact, he believes people are naturally good at it.

"It's just a matter of concentrating, being present, making sure you're in a quiet place," he said. "I think people understand the importance of the moment and they treat it very seriously."

Lots Of Stories To Share

StoryCorps has collected 60,000 conversations since 2003. Roughly 10,000 of those were recorded using the StoryCorps app, which was released in March 2015.

The other 50,000 interviews took place in StoryCorps' own recording booths. Permanent StoryCorps booths are available in New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Atlanta. StoryCorps also has a mobile recording booth that tours the country.

Using the library is not the only way people can enjoy the interviews StoryCorps collects.

Every Friday, a popular National Public Radio show called "Morning Edition" plays short clips from the interviews. The radio program shares the interviews with about 13 million listeners.

StoryCorps also uses the recordings to create animated videos and podcasts.

History Is Life

Isay said the Thanksgiving project will help spread the idea that history comes from real people's everyday lives.

Clarke agreed.

"This is a really great example of how oral history is really history," Clarke said. "It doesn't have to appear in print in a carefully edited book. Individual stories are also part of history."

Quiz

- 1 Which answer choice, taken from the article, is NOT a reason why StoryCorps wants to collect people's stories?
- (A) Isay hopes the Thanksgiving interviews will become an annual tradition. He wants to use modern technology to preserve the wisdom of elders and bring families closer together.
 - (B) When young people do these interviews, they know "their great-great-great-great-grandkids are going to get to eavesdrop on this conversation someday," Isay explained. Students are giving listeners a chance to understand who their ancestors were, he said.
 - (C) Isay says StoryCorps helps people feel more connected and gives the person who is being interviewed the chance to be heard. "It's not so much what's in the stories as what the experience is like for the people who are recording," he said.
 - (D) Clarke says teachers at his school will probably spend extra time helping students with their interviewing skills right before Thanksgiving. They could work on things like developing good questions and handling interesting responses.
- 2 Which selection from the article provides the LEAST supporting evidence that the "Great Thanksgiving Listen" project is intended to have an impact on lives?
- (A) Isay says StoryCorps helps people feel more connected and gives the person who is being interviewed the chance to be heard. "It's not so much what's in the stories as what the experience is like for the people who are recording," he said.
 - (B) Isay hopes the Thanksgiving interviews will become an annual tradition. He wants to use modern technology to preserve the wisdom of elders and bring families closer together.
 - (C) "This is a really great example of how oral history is really history," Clarke said. "It doesn't have to appear in print in a carefully edited book. Individual stories are also part of history."
 - (D) Brandon Clarke helps run the Berkeley Carroll School, which is not far from StoryCorps' New York City headquarters. The school partnered with StoryCorps to create instructional materials for the challenge.

- 3 How does the following paragraph contribute to the development of the MAIN idea in this article?

Students who take part in the challenge will record interviews using StoryCorps' free smartphone app. Then they will use the app to send the interviews to the Library of Congress. Recordings will become part of the American Folklife Center so that anyone can listen to them.

- (A) It proves the important role technology plays in the conservation and collection of stories.
 - (B) It summarizes StoryCorps' goal and explains the tools available for those participating in the collection of stories.
 - (C) It analyzes how the stories will be collected and explains the limitations of accessing the stories.
 - (D) It explains the role teens will play in collecting the stories and the process of how they will record and share the stories.
- 4 Which answer choice BEST explains the role of the following paragraph in the article?

A nonprofit group called StoryCorps has a challenge for students as they head back to school. The organization wants teenagers across America to record an interview with a grandparent or another elder this Thanksgiving holiday.

- (A) It introduces the participants in the project.
- (B) It explains which organization is leading the project.
- (C) It introduces the teenagers as the leaders in the project.
- (D) It explains the goal of the project.