

## ***Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Pérez** **Active Program**

### **General Introduction to Active Program**

*Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Pérez is historical fiction set in the 1930s in Texas. The novel is inspired by historical events that took place in New London, Texas and the historical atmosphere of East Texas in the 1930s. Many communities have experienced historical events that have helped shape them as we know them today. The activities listed below will help teens immerse themselves in the history of their community. They are designed to help them learn about their community's past, so they can be responsible for shaping its future.

### **Remembering our Past, Taking Responsibility for our Future**

#### **Activity 1: Collecting Oral Histories**

Many communities have experienced events like those in *Out of Darkness*. The purpose of this activity is to gather oral histories from local residents regarding important events in your community's history.

#### **Books to Display or BookTalk**

*Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans* by T.R. Fehrenbach

*The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank

*Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* by Laura Hillenbrand

*A Texas Tragedy: The New London School Explosion* by Bobby Johnson

*The Bottoms* by Joe R. Lansdale

*Texas: A Historical Atlas* by A. Ray Stephens

*Lies We Tell Ourselves* by Robin Talley

*Code Name Verity* by Elizabeth Wein

#### **Activity Supply List**

Recording device (digital recorder, cell phone, computer, etc.)

Interview questions (sample included below)

Release forms (template included below)

#### **Detailed Description of Activity**

Preparing to Interview:

One of the first things that needs to be done is deciding on a topic to discuss in the oral history interviews you will be conducting. Be sure to choose an event that has happened during the lifespan of living individuals. This activity can be tailored to collect oral histories from teens specifically, or the teens can collect oral histories from adult members of the community. If you are going to collect oral histories exclusively from teens, be sure to pick a topic that falls within their lifetime.

Once you have settled on an event you would like to discuss in your interview, you and/or your teens will need to conduct research so you have some background information to prepare your questions. If you cannot think of an event that is specific to your local community you can broaden the topic to something historically significant to the state or nation. For example, while no one in your community may have been present in New York on September 11, those living will certainly have memories to share of how the events impacted them.

After you have decided who, in general you would like to interview, you will need to formulate some questions to ask those you are interviewing. The Smithsonian Center for Folklife recommends that you make sure your questions are clear, concise and open-ended. They also advise to note which questions are key so you are sure to ask them, but do not have to be tied to your list. Also suggested is to structure your interview as a story with a beginning, middle and end, building on your questions to link them in a logical way.

#### Selecting Equipment to Record Interviews:

Depending on what is available to you, equipment can be very basic, or you can use more sophisticated recording equipment. Most teens have smartphones with them at all times. Phones can be used to record oral histories. There are many apps that can be downloaded free if the phone you are trying to use does not already have an audio recording app. A phone can also be used to record a video oral history if you prefer to have a video rather than only audio. On a more sophisticated level, a computer and microphone can be used to collect better audio. If you do not have audio editing software on the computer you will be using to collect the audio, Audacity is a good open source free software that can be downloaded from <http://audacityteam.org/>. Portable digital audio recorders can also work well. Many record using flash memory and the interview can be uploaded to the computer at a later time. Before you conduct your interviews, you will want to test out your equipment and make sure you understand how it works.

#### Conducting the Interviews:

Schedule your interviews at a time and place that the person you are interviewing will be comfortable. Be sure to place your recording device in a location that will clearly pick up your subject's voice. Try to use a location that will be free of background noise. Run a test in the location before your interview so you are certain the equipment is working and the audio is clear. To start with you will want to ask the subject questions that will put them at ease. The Smithsonian Center for Folklife recommends starting with questions like, "Where were you born?" "Where did you grow up?" They also recommend avoiding questions that will bring a yes or no response and following up with questions like "Could you explain?" "Can you give me an example?" or "How did that happen?" The key to a good oral history interview is to participate in the conversation without dominating it. Be sure to get a signed release form from your subject. A template is provided in the Activity Resources section. When you are saving the audio or video from your interview be sure to save them in an organized and logical manner so they are easy to identify.

After conducting the interviews they can be kept for historical purposes, or possibly shared in some sort of online exhibit. Be sure that you notify the participants of what you will be doing with the interviews before they are interviewed.

### **Activity Resources**

Sample Oral History Questions  
Release Form Template

### **Activity Resources for Teens, Teachers & Librarians**

Audacity <http://audacityteam.org/>

Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing

Guide [http://www.folklife.si.edu/education\\_exhibits/resources/guide/introduction.aspx](http://www.folklife.si.edu/education_exhibits/resources/guide/introduction.aspx)

The Spoken Word [www.historicalvoices.org](http://www.historicalvoices.org)

Step-by-Step Guide to Oral History [http://dohistory.org/on\\_your\\_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html](http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html)

### **Activity 2: Historical Presentation**

The purpose of this activity is to provide teens with information about historical events that have occurred in your community.

### **Books to Display or Publicize**

*A Northern Light* by Jennifer Donnelly

*Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans* by T.R. Fehrenbach

*Uprising* by Margaret Peterson Haddix

*The Color of Courage: A Boy at War: The World War II Diary* of Julian Kulski

*Echoes in the Glass* by Cheri Lasota

*Between Shades of Gray* by Ruta Sepetys

*Texas: A Historical Atlas* by A. Ray Stephens

### **Activity Supply List**

Speaker or Historian

Space for presentation

Microphone (optional)

Speakers (optional)

Projector and Computer (optional)

Water for Presenter

Flyers for advertisement

### **Detailed Description of Activity**

Planning your event:

First you will need to decide what topic will be discussed during the historical presentation. This may be best achieved by finding a speaker for your presentation first, then finding out what their specialties are. If your library or local public library (for teachers) has a local history department or historian, you might want to speak with them first. If they are unable to make a presentation themselves, they will certainly be able to direct you to someone who will be able to make a

presentation. If you do not have a local history librarian in your community, you may want to contact any historical societies, or possibly history teachers or professors. Another resource to consider is a directory of distinguished speakers created by the Texas State Historical Association (<https://www.tshaonline.org/speakersbureau/>). Hiring a speaker from the Texas State Historical Association will require that you pay the speaker a fee. If you need support to fund the speaker consider speaking to a Friends group, or your school's PTA.

Once you have scheduled your speaker be sure to publicize the event. To publicize the event be sure to get the word out among your library's Teen Advisory Group if one exists. If your event is taking place in the school be sure to have it included in the announcements, you may also want to speak to the history teachers so they can promote the event in their classes. Post flyers at your library or school and other public places that will allow you to promote your program. (A sample flyer is included in the Activity Resource section)

Be sure to do some research about your speaker so you are prepared to make a proper introduction on the day of your event. Include their credentials and what they will be speaking about. Familiarize yourself with what you will say at the introduction so you aren't stumbling on the day of the presentation.

Discuss with your speaker ahead of time any technology needs that they will have during their presentation. Consider the space your speaker will present in and decide if audio equipment like a microphone and speakers will be necessary. Make arrangements to have any necessary equipment ready on the day of your event.

On the day of the event:

It is normally helpful to the speaker if they are allowed to see the room they will be speaking in before their presentation. Be sure to offer to show them the setup and make sure that they have everything they need. If your speaker will be using any technology be sure to do a quick test to make sure everything is working. Also take the time to show your presenter how to use any technology that you are providing for them, such as remotes for PowerPoints. If your speaker has agreed to speak for a designated amount of time be sure to watch the clock and be prepared to interrupt if needed so the speaker will not run past their allotted time. If your speaker is willing to answer questions, be sure notify the audience at the conclusion of their presentation.

### **Activity Resources (Produced by the Committee)**

Flyer Sample

### **Activity Resources for Teens, Teachers & Librarians**

Texas State Historical Association's Distinguished Speakers Bureau: <https://www.tshaonline.org/speakersbureau/>