LESSON TITLE: ORAL HISTORIES AND EVERYDAY HEROES

Common Core Standards

SL 2 Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

SL 3 Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Key Questions/Issues Addressed

What is a primary source?
What attributes characterize a hero?
Why is 9/11 an important day in history?

Lesson Goals/Objectives

Students will identify an oral history as a type of primary source.
Students will listen and visualize a survivor’s story from 9/11.
Students will recognize that individuals can have different perspectives on the same event.
Students will gain an appreciation of “everyday heroes.”

Key Terms

Hero, History, Oral history, Primary source, Survivor, Survivor Stairs

Materials

Tom Canavan’s oral history (www.911memorial.org/911-events-day)
Journals / Paper for student responses

Background for lesson

Preview the recording of Tom Canavan’s story to see if it is age appropriate. This lesson is geared for upper elementary. See the 9/11 FAQ for background on 9/11. For younger students, see 9/11 Fact Sheet for Early Childhood Students: www.911memorial.org/sites/all/files/HI_9.11%20Fact%20Sheet%20for%20Early%20Childhood_0.pdf
1. Begin by having students answer the questions: What is history? Why do we study history?
Possible answers include: To learn about our past, not to make the same errors again, understand the origins of contemporary life.

2. Tell students that we are going to look at 9/11, a specific event in history. Ask: Why is 9/11 important?
Possible answers include: Largest terrorist attack on US soil, changed the course of history, many deaths and injuries.

3. Inform students that they are going to learn about 9/11 through someone’s own words. This is called a primary source (first-hand account from the time period being studied). Provide students with several more examples of primary sources (letters, films, newspaper articles). Tell them that they are going to look at primary sources to learn that anyone can be a hero.

4. Ask students: When you go to a museum, are you looking at primary sources? Tell them that the 9/11 Memorial Museum, opening in fall 2012, has many primary sources to help tell the story of 9/11 and its aftermath.

5. Play the recording of Tom Canavan’s survival story: www.911memorial.org/911-events-day. Have students close their eyes, and as Tom is describing his journey, picture in their minds what it looks like. As students are listening to the recording, pause to recap and gauge understanding, noting and defining any unfamiliar terms. If necessary, replay parts again.

6. Ask students to describe the traits Tom displayed while trying to escape. Have the class discuss the questions: Is Tom Canavan a hero? Why? What makes him heroic? How does Tom feel now looking at the World Trade Center site?

7. Students write down how they would feel if they were in Tom’s position. What would they do? How would they feel?

Evidence of Understanding
Students will display understanding through their class participation.

Extension Activities
Students interview someone in their own community – a family member, first responder, public servant – about their experience on 9/11. What questions would you ask? How do they think the world changed after 9/11? What would be useful for a future historian?

Students look up other survivor stories and compare and contrast them to Tom Canavan’s heroic story.

Students research information about the “Survivors’ Stairs.”