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Digital Storytelling, Spring 2016
Oral History Discussion Questions

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1. Define oral history in your own words. Be as complex as necessary. What makes oral history different than traditional forms of history? Find three examples from the reading to support your statements.

2. Alex Haley's description of learning his past reveals much, but one thing that is unstated is the power of community-based stories as a converse or compliment to more traditional forms of history. How does the *griot* system challenge our own traditional forms of story telling and history, if it does at all? Do we in our western American culture have anything similar to the *griot* and if not, why not?

3. What does Thompson mean when he states "All history depends ultimately on its social purpose" to open his discussion? How does oral history challenge and/or engage that social purpose?

4. Sangster argues it is "crucial that we ask how gender, race and class, as structural and ideological relations, have shaped the construction of historical memory" (p. 7). Break that statement down. What does she mean? How is memory constructed? What do her and Thompson's discussion say about the factual nature of history? Is history factual or something else entirely? If it is something else, how then are we to explore history and oral history?

5. (If time.) Toward the end of his essay, Thompson turns his attention to interviewing, a subject we will be addressing on Thursday. He writes that "to be a successful interviewer a new set of skills is needed, including an understanding of human relationships" (p. 30). Why? What do human relationships have to do with interviewing?