



STRAND STORIES

STRAND
ARTS CENTRE



Made possible with
**Heritage
Fund**



This pack was developed as part of 'Strand Stories' - a heritage project funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and managed by the Strand Arts Centre - that aims to record, cherish and promote the social and architectural heritage of the former Strand Cinema in East Belfast.

This resource was written by the Strand Arts Centre's Heritage Officer, Rosie Hickey, in consultation with the Oral History Society, local historians, and teachers and pupils from Strandtown Primary School and St Joseph's Primary School, Ballyhackamore.

Thanks to The National Lottery Heritage Fund for funding the resource and to the P.7 teachers and pupils from Strandtown Primary School and St Joseph's Primary School who helped to trial and develop this resource. And thank you to all the participants in the 'Strand Stories' project who have generously contributed their time, memories and stories.

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About the resource

Who is this education pack for?

Primary 7 schoolchildren in Northern Ireland and their teachers

What is this education pack for?

It is to be used as a tool to help pupils uncover and explore the heritage of the Strand and the Strandtown area.

This education pack aligns with four key Areas of Learning within the KS2 NI Curriculum:

- The Arts
- Language and Literacy
- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding
- The World Around Us

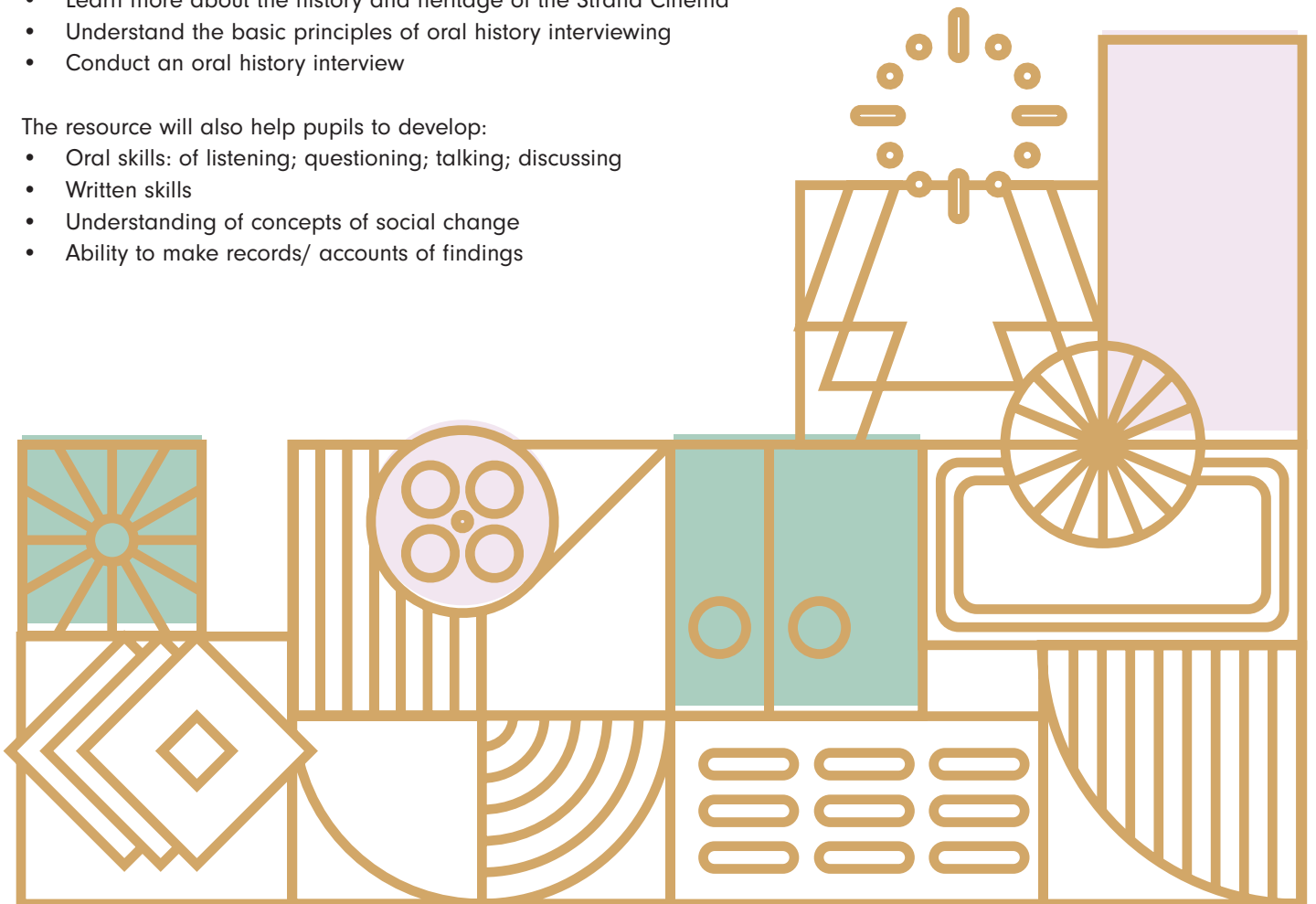
It also incorporates cross-curricular skills: Communication and Using ICT

The resource has the following Learning Objectives:

- Learn more about the history and heritage of east Belfast
- Learn more about the history and heritage of the Strand Cinema
- Understand the basic principles of oral history interviewing
- Conduct an oral history interview

The resource will also help pupils to develop:

- Oral skills: of listening; questioning; talking; discussing
- Written skills
- Understanding of concepts of social change
- Ability to make records/ accounts of findings



The 'Cinema Boom'

During the 1930s cinemas were built all over Belfast. By the end of the decade, the city contained over 40 cinemas. As a result, the 1930s have become known as the Golden Years of Cinema in Belfast.

Cinemas back then were different to cinemas today. They were built with just one massive screen and auditorium where one large audience watched the same film. Many were known as 'picture palaces' – they were places of luxury and comfort!

Back in the 1930s and 40s, cinema-going was an important part of life for many people. It provided people with entertainment, escapism and information. They were important social and cultural spaces where people from all parts of the community came together.

**"everybody went to the cinema,
it was part of public life"**

Noel Spence

Almost every main street in the city once had a cinema!
Below are just two examples in East Belfast:



Ambassador, Cregagh Road, 1961 (opened in 1936, closed 1973)



Castle, Castlereagh Road, 1961 (opened in 1934, closed 1968)

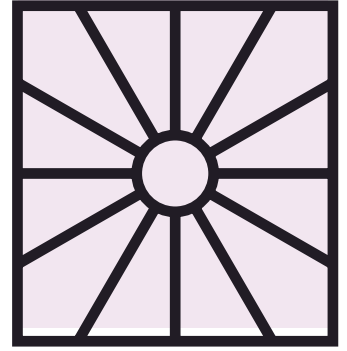
Photos courtesy of Noel Spence

**These buildings still stand today.
Do they look familiar?
Try to work out what they are now.**

Discussion Activities

Why do you think cinemas were so popular in Belfast in the 1930s and 1940s?

Think about how life was different back then and what forms of entertainment were available.



Compare the photos of 1930s Belfast cinemas below and on page 4 with what cinemas look like today. How are they different? Why?

Think about design, location and size.

Ask older friends and relatives if they remember these cinemas!

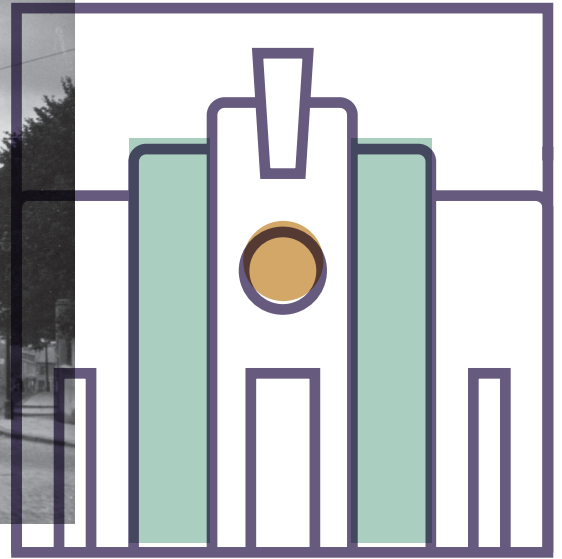


Picturedrome, Mountpottinger Road (opened 1934, closed 1971)



Curzon, Ormeau Road (opened 1936, closed 1999)

Photos courtesy of Noel Spence



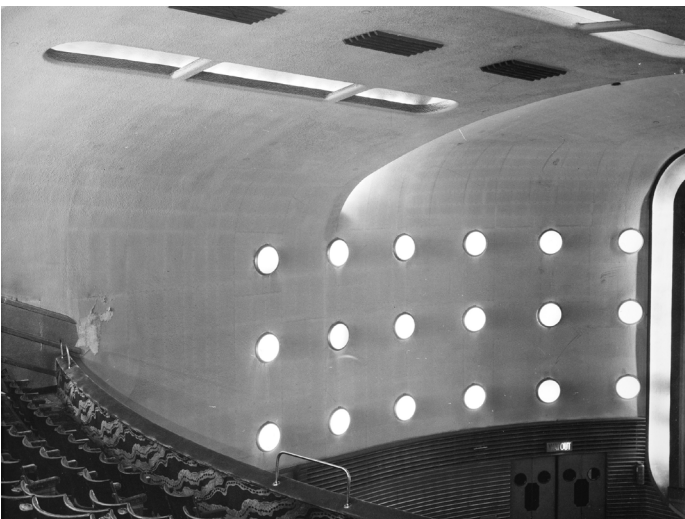
The Strand Cinema

The Strand Cinema opened its doors on 7 December 1935, with just one massive screen and 1170 seats. It was designed by architect John McBride Neill who designed many cinemas across Belfast and Northern Ireland. Amazingly, the Strand was built in just six months!

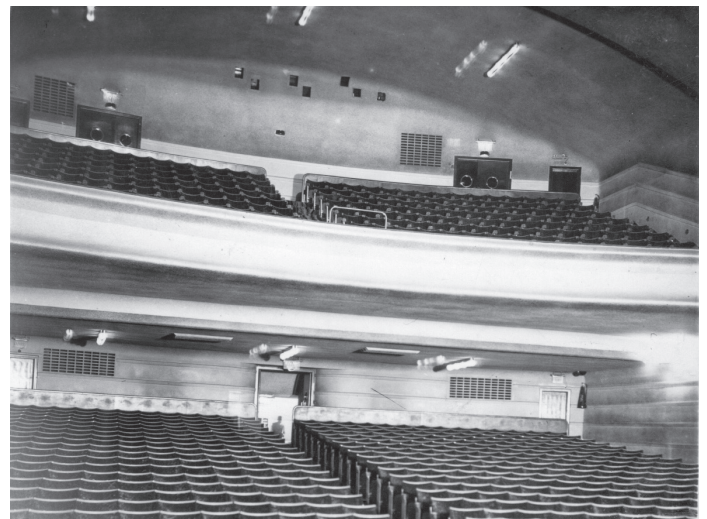
Like the terraced housing around it, the exterior of the Strand was brick. But the cinema was actually built around a steel frame constructed in the nearby shipyards! Inside, the auditorium originally had a snake design carpet, speckled metallic paint on the walls, and porthole-like lights which would have given the impression of being in a massive ship. In fact, lots of people have compared the experience of going to the cinema to going on a journey/ escaping/ travelling to another world!

Research activity: What was life in Belfast like back in 1935?

- What industries were important?
- How did people travel?
- What was happening in the wider world?



View from balcony of the Strand Cinema, 1935



The Strand as it looked in 1935.

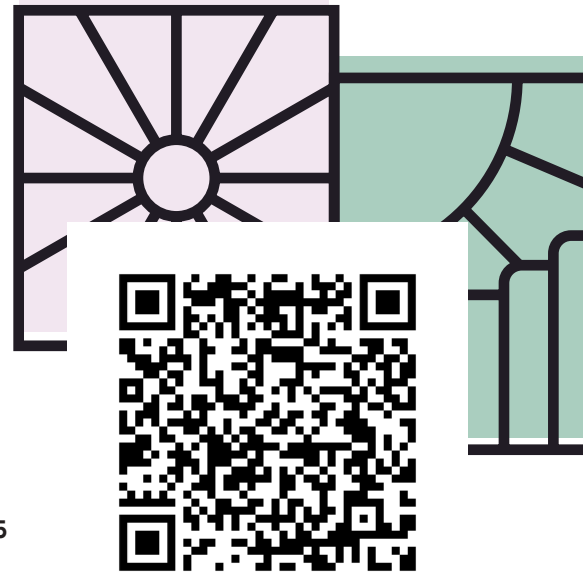
The Decline of Cinema

Despite the popularity and glamour of cinemas in the 1930s and 1940s, by the end of the 1950s the cinema business fell into decline. Many cinemas across Belfast closed their doors in the 60s and 70s. Although traces of some cinemas – like the Castle and the Ambassador – remain, many other cinemas were demolished and have been lost forever.

Watch this clip from Northern Ireland Screen's Digital Film Archive:

<https://digitalfilmarchive.net/media/derek-murray-examining-the-decline-in-315>

List the reasons why you think so many cinemas closed here in the 1960s and 1970s:



Strand Variety

Even the Strand closed as a cinema in 1983. At this point, the survival of the building hung very much in the balance. However, in September 1984 it reopened its doors as Strand Variety - a live performance venue. The new venture was masterminded by local businessman Ronnie Rutherford.

Ask older friends and relatives if they remember the Strand as a variety theatre!

Highlights of the variety theatre years (1984 - 1987) included performances by The Drifters and The Nolans.



The Drifters, pictured with Ronnie and his family at the Strand, 1986.



Detail of Strand Variety poster, 1985.

Change



Strand Cinema, 1988.

In the 1980s there was a revival of cinemas, largely due to the release of popular blockbuster films. So on the 29th of April 1988 the Strand was reborn as 4 screen multiplex. It was an immediate success! The most popular film at the Strand was 'Three Men and a Baby'! Can you make out the film advertised in the 1988 photo on the left?



Strand Cinema after refurbishment, 1999.

In the 1990s, large multiplexes started to arrive in Belfast and smaller cinemas like the Strand suffered. In 1999 the long-running Curzon on the Ormeau Road closed down. But, in that same year, the Strand embarked on a revamp, transforming the exterior.

Today the Strand is the last surviving cinema from the 1930s in Belfast – and Northern Ireland!!



Strand Arts Centre, 2021, Credit: Images NI.

In 2013 the Strand changed again. It became an Arts Centre – so it is no longer just a cinema but a venue for live performances, music, and theatre! And it has also been established as a charity.

What is your favourite version of the Strand? Why?

Discussion Activities

Local photographer Perry Zachary took these photos of the Strand 50 years apart. Look at the photos. How has the Strand changed over the years? How is it the same?



1947



1997

Photos courtesy of Perry Zachary.

Look again at the photos - what else do they tell us about how the area has changed?

What other ways can we learn about how the Strand and the local area have changed?

Oral History

One way we can uncover more about the heritage of the Strand and the local area is to talk to people about their memories of it. This is known as oral history. It helps to bring the past to life in a way that can't be achieved by history books alone. Some people refer to oral history as **memory collecting**.

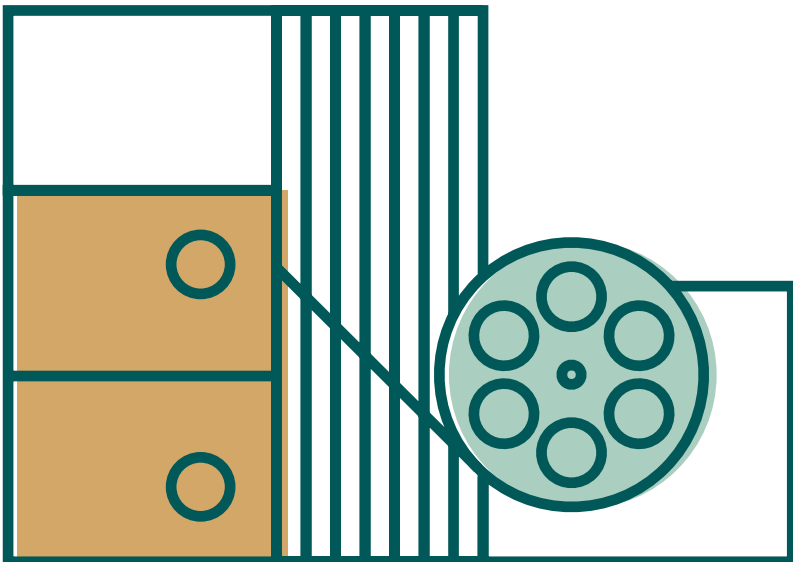
The 'Strand Stories' project has already collected lots of memories from a range of people. Listen to short audio extracts here: www.strandstoriesbelfast.com/stories



What can we learn from these extracts?

How might these memories be different from information you might get in a history book?

What was your favourite extract that you listened to? Why?



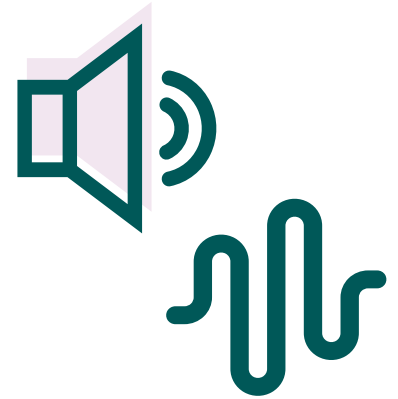
Getting started...

To collect people's memories we conduct an **oral history interview**. We (the interviewer) have to think very carefully about what we want to find out from a particular person (the interviewee) and what questions we should ask.

Interviewers should avoid asking **closed questions** which encourage 'yes'/'no' replies or very short answers, e.g. when did you start school? Instead we should ask questions that encourage people to give detailed answers. These are known as **open questions**, e.g. What are your first memories of starting school?

It is best to start the interview with simple/ easy questions and leave more tricky questions until later in the interview. It is also good to prepare **'prompts'** (follow up questions that encourage the interviewee to give more detail.)

It is recommended to prepare an **interview schedule** - a list of questions that helps the interviewer to organise the interview.



Example 'prompts':

Tell me more
Why?
When?

Class Activity: Questions

Imagine that you are interviewing someone about their memories of their first day in school. Prepare questions and prompts in the table below. Avoid 'closed questions' that could get one-word answers.

Questions	Prompts
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	



Class Activity: Interviewing

In pairs, take 10 minutes to ask each other about your memories of your first day of school, using the questions and prompts you have prepared. Take turns as interviewer and interviewee. Swap roles after 5 minutes. The interviewer should write down a few notes.

Follow up homework activity

Repeat the interview with a parent or even grandparent – how do their memories differ? Why?

Things to think about:

- *Don't interrupt the interviewee – it is important for them to tell their story in their own way.*
- *If the interviewee gives a very short answer, it is the job of the interviewer to ask more questions or 'prompts' to find out more.*
- *Maintain good eye contact with your interviewee and give them plenty of time to answer.*

The teacher will ask some pairs to volunteer or select some pairs to report back on what they learnt.

As a class discuss this experience of oral history interviewing: Was it easy/ difficult to get information? Was it easy/ difficult to remember your first day at school? Did you prefer being the interviewer/ interviewee? Why?

Recording and Permission

Today, it is easier than ever to record and store people's memories digitally, allowing us to listen back to them for years to come.

But we have to remember that memories are precious. We can't record someone without their permission. We have to get their permission using a written form. You can learn more and download template permission forms here:

<https://www.ohs.org.uk/ethics-and-legalities-for-schools>



Homework Activity: 'Memories of the Cinema'

You will need:

- Somebody to interview (it could be a grandparent/parent/guardian...)
- Table of questions (below)
- Pen and paper to make notes



Activity Duration: about 20 mins

Instructions:

- Make sure you have everything you need, and you and your interviewee are comfortable.
- Explain to the interviewee what the interview will be about.
- Ask the questions in the left-hand column of the table below. If the interviewee gives a very short answer, you could use the 'prompts' in the right-hand column to find out more. You can make up your own 'prompts' too.
- Write short notes during the interview to help you record what the interviewee said.
- When the interview is complete, thank the interviewee.
- Now write a short report that summarises what you have learnt from the interview.

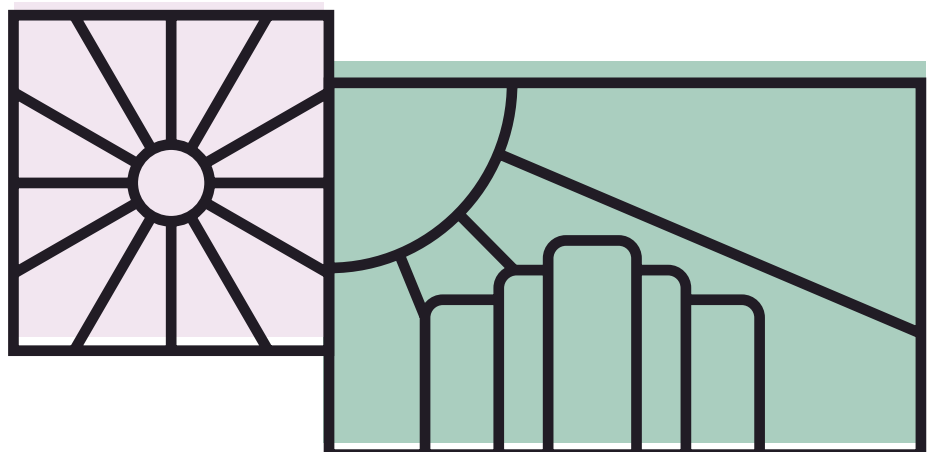
Questions	Possible Prompts
Tell me about the first time you went to the cinema.	How old were you? What cinema was it? What film did you see? Who did you go with? How did you feel?
What other memories of cinema-going stand out for you?	Why did you think this memory stands out?
What is your favourite thing about going to the cinema?	What else do you like about going to the cinema? Is there anything you don't like?
Tell me about the last time you went to the cinema.	What cinema was it? When did you go? What film did you see? Who did you go with? How did you feel?

Follow-up Activity 1

Create a poster to show what you found. You could include photos, drawings and quotes.

Follow-up Activity 2

Now talk to someone else and ask them the same questions. How are their memories different? Why?



Class Activity: Audio Recording

You will need:

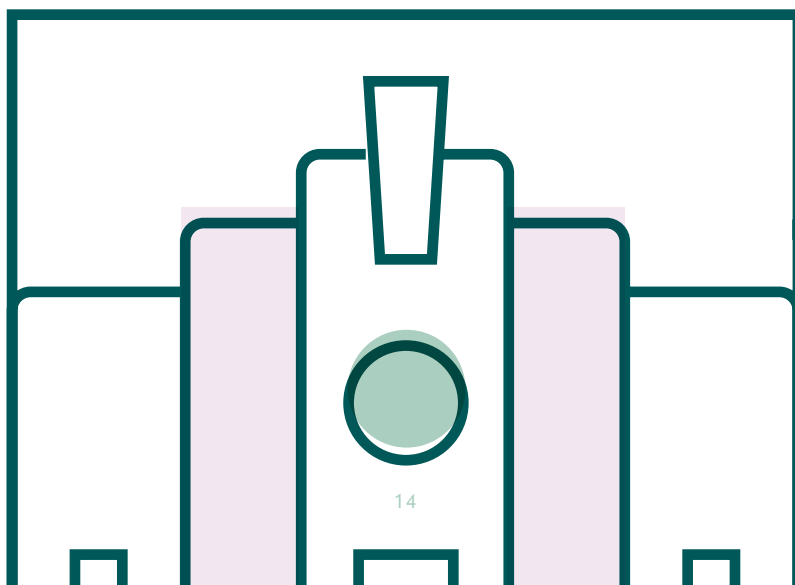
- One audio recorder per table
- One set of headphones per table
- One memory card per table

Instructions:

- Gather around your teacher who will show you how to operate audio recording equipment. Listen to the teacher carefully and take notes of all the steps you need to take to operate the equipment.
 - Break into your table groups and take it in turns to operate the audio recorder. Ask the person to your right a simple question (e.g. what is your favourite film and why?)
 - When everyone has had a chance to be interviewer and interviewee listen back to the recording.
 - Reflect on the experience of recording an interview below. What would you do differently if you were to do the recording again?
 - Delete the recording.
-
-
-

Now you have the skills to
conduct an oral history
interview!

Would you like to be a 'Strand Stories' memory collector? Ask your teacher for more information!
All memory collectors will get a goodie bag and everything they need to record an interview about
memories of cinema-going which will go into the 'Strand Stories' archive!



Links to other useful resources

Bryson, Anna. 2013. *Oral History: A Training Manual for beginners*. Available free of charge via: <https://www.nicie.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Oral-History-Training-Manual.pdf>

Oral History Society. No date. *Oral History for Schools and Young People*. [online]
Accessed via: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/for-schools-main-page/>

Manning, Sam. 2020. *Cinemas and Cinema-Going in the United Kingdom: Decades of Decline, 1945–65*. London: Royal Historical Society Institute of Historical Research University of London Press. Available to view online via:
<https://humanities-digital-library.org/index.php/hdl/catalog/book/cinema-going>

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