

Voices in the Dark

Start date 27 September 2018**End date** 1 November 2018**Venue** Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge**Tutor** Midge Gillies**Course code** 1819NWR003**Director of Academic Centres**

Dr Corinne Boz

**For further information on this
course, please contact**Academic Centre Coordinator, Clare Kerr
clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk or 01223 746237**To book** See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262

Tutor biography

Ms Midge Gillies is the author of seven non-fiction books, including biographies of Amy Johnson and Marie Lloyd. Most of her books use oral testimony to tell a true story. She studied History at Girton College and has written for a range of national, international and regional newspapers and magazines. Her book about army wives from the Crimean War to the present day was published in August 2016. For three years she was Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Magdalene College, Cambridge and is currently Academic Director for Creative Writing at the University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education. She is working on a PhD about the uses of oral testimony in creative writing.

Course syllabus

Most writers turn to research at some point, whether they are working on a true story or a fictional account. Although there is a wealth of material available on the internet and elsewhere, oral testimony is sometimes overlooked in favour of documents, such as birth and death certificates, that appear to be more “legitimate”. On this course we will listen to voices from the past and examine the extent to which oral testimony may enhance our writing and bring forgotten voices to life again.

Aims:

- To introduce students to oral history sources and how to use them;
- To encourage students to use oral testimony in their own writing;
- To make students aware of the necessary practical and ethical considerations when conducting their own interviews.

Content:

Session 1: What do we mean by oral testimony and how reliable is it?

There are many ways to recreate the past. We can use official documents such as birth, marriage and death certificates, or we might be lucky enough to have some diaries or letters to refer to. But what if you want to write about someone who didn't leave any written sources behind? And exactly how reliable are official sources any way?

Session 2: Mining sound archives.

This session will look at some of the sound archives available to the researcher and how to use them – whether you're writing fiction or non-fiction. We will also look at how to keep track of your findings.

Session 3: The interview.

How should you approach and conduct an interview? How might you put the interviewee at their ease and how would you deal with difficult or painful subjects? What are the pros and cons of interviewing more than one person at a time?

Session 4: Finding themes and stories.

You may approach an interview with a particular goal in mind, but interviews can yield surprising results. How do you spot a good story and how do you weave it into your writing?

Session 5: Using the transcript.

A transcript is a source in itself. How can you make the most of it and how do you integrate other sources?

Presentation of the course:

This course will be taught in a friendly and informal style. You will be encouraged, but not obliged, to share your writing on the class's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and to respond to regular writing prompts. We will read and discuss examples of published writers who use oral testimony and you will be encouraged to share your own experience of oral history or your questions about the practice. Occasionally, we may listen to short sound or video clips.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- Identify some of the sources of oral testimony;
- Demonstrate an awareness of how oral testimony may be used in different types of writing, including their own;
- Show an awareness of the practical and ethical challenges presented by the use of oral testimony, especially when combined with other sources.

Reading and resources list

Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk *

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Alexievich, Svetlana	<i>Chernobyl Prayer: A Chronicle of the Future</i>	Penguin Classics, 2016
Levy, Andrea	<i>Small Island</i>	Tinder Press, 2004
Perks, Robert & Thomson, Alistair (eds)	<i>The Oral History Reader</i>	Routledge, 2015 (can be consulted at a library or individual essays read online)
Sand, Philippe	<i>East West Street</i>	W&N, 2017
Various	Any of the "Forgotten Voices" books e.g. <i>Forgotten Voices of the Blitz and the Battle for Britain: A New History in the Words of the Men and Women on Both Sides</i>	Ebury, 2007
Waters, Sarah	<i>The Little Stranger</i>	Virago, 2010

Website addresses

British Library Sound Archive:

<https://www.bl.uk/subjects/oral-history>

Imperial War Museum Sound Archive:

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/sound>

Oral History Society:

<http://www.ohs.org.uk/>

University of Cambridge's policy on ethics:

the University's policy on ethics :

<https://www.research-integrity.admin.cam.ac.uk/research-ethics>

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 06 August 2018