Story Gathering Toolkit - Overview

A guide for families and communities to preserve and share stories

Why Stories Matter

Your story matters. Your voice matters.

Every family holds memories that deserve to be passed on—moments of laughter, resilience, tradition, and change. Recording stories is one of the most powerful ways to connect generations. It ensures that wisdom, experiences, and culture are not lost but carried forward.

This toolkit will guide you step by step: how to get ready, how to ask meaningful questions, how to capture the story, how to preserve it, and how to share it so others can carry it on.

Think of it as creating a bridge between the past, present, and future.

Getting Ready

Before you press record, a little preparation makes all the difference. Getting ready is not just about technology—it's about creating a safe, welcoming space where stories can flow with ease.

1. Choose Your Storyteller

It could be an elder, a parent, a sibling, or even yourself. Many families start with grandparents or great-grandparents, but any story has value. Begin with whoever feels ready to share.

2. Choose the Space

Pick a quiet, comfortable spot where the storyteller feels at ease. A living room, kitchen table, or even a sunny spot by the window can work beautifully. The key is that it feels familiar and relaxed.

3. Prepare Your Phone or Device

Your phone is all you need. Just make sure:

- Battery is fully charged.
- Storage space is cleared.
- Notifications are silenced.

If you have a backup (a second phone, voice recorder, or even pen and paper), keep it handy.

4. Lighting & Sound Made Simple

- **Light:** Sit near a window for soft, natural light. Keep the light in front, not behind.
- **Sound:** Choose the quietest space possible. Headphones or a simple microphone can help, but aren't required.

5. Framing the Shot

- Place the phone at **eye level**.
- Keep the storyteller's **eyes in the top third** of the screen.
- Use a stable surface or tripod to keep the video steady.

Pro Tips

- Do a **test recording** for a few seconds, then play it back.
- Offer a **glass of water** or tissue nearby.
- Ask everyone to **silence phones**.
- Focus on presence—imperfections are part of authenticity.

Cultural Sensitivity Note
Comfort is not only physical but also emotional. In Nikkei families, stories may touch on histories of displacement or discrimination. Create a space of respect and calm, where storytellers feel safe choosing what to share.

Asking Questions

Asking questions is how we invite stories to come alive. Think of it less like an interview and more like sitting with a friend over tea.

1. Start with Comfort

- "What's your full name and when were you born?"
- "Where did you grow up?"
- "What foods or traditions remind you most of your childhood?"

2. Open the Door

- "Can you tell me about a time you felt especially proud?"
- "What was your childhood home like?"
- "Who influenced you the most when you were young?"

3. Follow the Thread

- "What happened next?"
- "How did you feel at the time?"
- "What do you remember most vividly?"

4. Respect the Pace

Some stories flow easily, others take time. Silence often brings deeper memories to the surface.

5. Use the StoryPrompts

This toolkit includes a StoryPrompt section with question patterns designed to guide storytellers through a natural story arc—from setting the scene, to describing challenges, to reflecting on meaning.

Pro Tips

- Keep a short list of questions handy, but let conversation flow.
- Avoid interrupting—it's their memory, their voice.
- Use encouragers like "mm-hmm" or "that sounds important."
- If emotions arise, pause and offer space.
- Invite sensory details—smells, sounds, feelings make stories vivid.

Cultural Sensitivity Note

Some questions may stir painful community histories, such as internment or cultural loss. Never push for details. Allow storytellers to guide what feels right to share.

Capturing the Story

Once you're ready and the storyteller feels comfortable, it's time to begin. Think of this as pressing "record" on a memory that will outlast both of you.

1. Begin with Presence

- Start with gratitude and warm-up questions.
- Confirm consent one last time.
- Remind the storyteller they can pause anytime.

2. Hit Record, Then Relax

- Begin recording before the first question.
- Keep your device steady and avoid fiddling.
- Focus on listening, not the technology.

3. Listen More Than You Speak

- Give your full attention.
- Avoid sharing your own stories unless invited.
- Simple acknowledgements are enough.

4. Flow with the Conversation

- Use questions as a guide, not a script.
- Follow the storyteller's lead.

5. Closing the Recording

- Thank them sincerely.
- Ask if there's anything more they'd like to add.
- Let them know how their story will be saved and shared.

Pro Tips

- Try a practice run to ease nerves.
- Use airplane mode to avoid interruptions.
- Sit close enough for clear audio and video.
- Label the file immediately (e.g., Yada_Frank_2025_Childhood.mp4).

Cultural Sensitivity Note

For Japanese Canadian families, memories may include laughter and joy, but also trauma from internment or displacement. Approach with empathy and patience. Respect pauses and emotions. The storyteller always decides what to share.

Archiving & Preserving

Recording the story is just the beginning. The next step is making sure it can be safely kept and enjoyed by future generations.

1. Save Immediately

- Play back the file to check it worked.
- Make a backup right away.

2. Name Your Files Clearly

Use a simple format:
LastName_FirstName_Year_Topic

3. Store in More Than One Place

- Keep a copy on your device.
- Save another in the cloud.
- Store on an external drive or USB.

4. Organize Thoughtfully

Use folders by family member, topic, or date.

5. Share with Care

Decide together how and with whom the story will be shared.

Pro Tips

- Write a short note or description alongside each file.
- Save transcripts with matching file names.
- Create printed transcripts or photo books.
- Share a copy with another trusted family member.

Cultural Sensitivity Note

Archiving is an act of respect. For Nikkei families, some stories may carry generational trauma. Always confirm how the storyteller wants their story preserved, and honor their wishes.

Bringing Stories to Life

A recorded story is more than a file—it's a gift. Sharing it ensures it continues to connect and inspire.

1. Share with Family

- Play stories at gatherings or anniversaries.
- Pair them with family photos, recipes, or traditions.

2. Share with the Community

- Contribute to the Nikkei National Museum or other archives.
- Share highlights at schools, libraries, or community events.

3. Share Online (with Permission)

- Use private cloud folders or family drives.
- Share clips (only with consent) on social media.
- Create a family YouTube channel or podcast.

4. Make It Tangible

- Print transcripts and photos in a book.
- Create a slideshow or short film.
- Pair stories with a family tree or timeline.

5. Keep the Story Alive

Encourage younger generations to listen, reflect, and add their own stories.

Pro Tips

- Always confirm consent before sharing.
- Add subtitles or transcripts for accessibility.
- Share stories on birthdays, holidays, or cultural milestones.
- Revisit and refresh your archive every few years.

Cultural Sensitivity Note

In Nikkei families, sharing can be both healing and vulnerable. Respect when a story is meant only for family, and honor when one is entrusted to the wider community. Every choice to share—or keep private—is a vital part of resilience.