**Product Requirement Document (PRD)**

2025

Jun 2

1. Project Overview

This project explores how AI can facilitate interpretive, contrast-based reflection and research in an oral history repository. It is not intended to replace the existing *Stories Matter* platform currently in use by oral historians and students at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) at Concordia.

Instead, the tool will draw from the *user experiences and workflows* of oral historians—especially in how they analyze, cross-reference, and synthesize oral history materials (including secondary analysis). The ultimate goal is to explore how AI can help researchers visualize contrast, build interpretive connections, and consolidate emergent knowledge from diverse oral histories, across time, language, and narrative perspective.

2. Goals

* Understand how oral historians perform interpretation, contrast analysis, and knowledge building.
* Identify specific AI functionalities that could assist these interpretive practices.
* Surface and visualize contrasts in narratives across oral history materials.
* Explore how AI can support multilingual, cross-referenced, and secondary analysis workflows.
* Lay groundwork for artistic representations of contrast (e.g., touch-based generative visuals).

3. Scope & Boundaries

In-Scope:

* Analyzing the pain points of *Stories Matter* through lived user experience.
* Prototyping concepts for AI-supported:
  + Keyword search enhancement
  + Cross-language querying (English/French)
  + Narrative relationship mapping
  + Contrast detection in secondary analysis
* Early experimentation with generative art as a narrative visualization tool.

Out-of-Scope (for now):

* Full tool replacement or migration of current COHDS workflows.
* User management, secure access control, or complete metadata standardization.

4. Key Pain Points Identified from User Research (Meeting with Kelann)

Functional Barriers:

* High threshold for time and attention (T&A) from both oral historians and interviewees.
* Manual follow-up is needed when transferring recordings and metadata across platforms.
* Access restrictions limit reuse and exploration across users.
* Limited support for secondary analysis (re-using interviews not originally conducted by the researcher).

Search & Interpretation Pain Points:

* Keyword search only works with exact spelling—no synonym support.
  + *Example: “fruits” will not return “apples”*
* Cognitive labor to reframe queries: Semantic gaps in classification.
  + *Example: “survival” returns more than “genocide”; “immigration” more than “live in Canada”*
* Language mismatch: French and English data not linked or interoperable.
  + *Example: English-labeled records cannot be retrieved via French queries*
* No relationship mapping or entity linking: Researchers must manually track connections across people, themes, and stories.
* No visual summaries: No mosaic or pattern overview of contrasting narratives.

5. User Personas (Preliminary)

* Oral History Student  
  Engaging in secondary analysis, trying to cross-reference older interviews.
* Academic Researcher  
  Writing reflections or chapters based on oral history material. Interested in surfacing contradiction or contrast.
* Community-based Historian  
  Working in multilingual contexts and focused on memory, place, and cultural identity.

6. Success Criteria (Exploratory Phase)

* Ability to prototype or demonstrate:
  + Improved semantic search and synonym handling
  + Basic cross-language retrieval (English 🡨🡪 French)
  + A method to visualize narrative contrast
  + Preliminary generative visual outputs from narrative variables (exploratory)

7. Future Considerations

* Ethical considerations around AI and oral histories (especially in relation to Indigenous and marginalized communities)
* Accessibility of visual tools for users with different cognitive and interpretive needs
* Potential for plug-in or API integration with existing platforms like *Stories Matter*