

Part Two: Interview Tips

World War II

A Videotape Oral History Project
The History Channel

A Workbook for Students

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Interview Tips

Proper Attire

You want your interview subjects to relax and tell their best stories. Your clothing should not distract your subject from the purpose of the interview. You should be neatly dressed in comfortable clothes.

Practice

If you are not familiar with a videotape camera, you should make a practice tape at home.

Set Up

If the camera will be set up on a tripod, put the camera as close to the interview subject as possible. If you have a camera operator ask him or her to keep the camera as still as possible. Use the zoom button only when a close-up seems to help the audience understand the story being told. (Do not put the camera more than ten feet from the subject unless you have a special microphone that is attached to a jack.)

Identify the Tape

Look into the camera and say, My name is _____ and I am interviewing _____ on the topic of _____. The time is _____ a.m./p.m. and the date is _____.

Conducting the Interview

Let your interview subject know that this is an important project and that you are very interested in his or her personal experiences in World War Two. Treat the interview as serious work. Ask each question from your list and wait respectfully for an answer. (Don't be afraid of silence! Sometimes it may take your subject a moment or two to compose an answer.) Look directly at the person who is giving the interview. Nod and smile to show that you are listening and understand the story. If you don't understand, ask a follow up question. Remember this probably will be your only chance to get these stories on tape.

Interview Skill:

Active Listening

If you find that your interview subject needs to be assured that you are listening and understand his or her story, try to paraphrase (repeat in your own words) an important part of the interview. This will let your storytellers know that you are connecting with them and their stories.

Example:

Interview Subject: "My job was an air raid warden. During a blackout, I made sure that no lights were showing in windows so that enemy bombers could not see their targets."

Your paraphrase: "You made sure that the blackout rules were followed."

Checking the Tape

When you feel the interview is complete. Stop the video recorder and rewind the tape. Replay the tape to check to see that the recording can be seen and heard. (You may need a special cassette holder to be able to use the standard/VCR format video player that most people have attached to their television sets.)

Ask your subject if they wish to erase or add any comments before you leave. Once both of you are satisfied, ask your subject sign the following permission form. This is an important final step of the interview (This will allow you to show the interview to others.) Before you leave, smile and say, "Thank you!"

Sample Permission Slip

<p>I give my permission for:</p> <p>_____ (student interviewer)</p> <p>to submit a tape and transcript to the History Channel World War II Interview Contest. I understand that, if this tape is among the winning entries, this interview may appear on television. I release all claims and rights to this tape.</p> <p>_____ (interview subject)</p> <p>Date: _____</p>
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Written Transcript of the Videotape:

You should make a written transcript of some part of the videotaped interview that you think is especially important. When you think back on the experience, which story comes to mind first. These stories are probably the best parts to transcribe on paper. Remember that a transcription is the exact words from the tape. In order to be true to your subject's wishes and to be historically accurate, do not change words.

Thank you note: Write a thank you note after you view the tape. Quote an important part of the interview in the note to let the subject know that you spent the time to listen and think about his or her story.

Conclusion: After the videotape and transcript are complete it is a good idea to take a quiet moment to think about what you learned from the experience.

Write a thoughtful response to these sentence stems:

My most important job in this assignment was...

The most important thing I learned was...

I didn't know that...

One thing I did well was...

If I had another opportunity, I would improve...

Class Activities:

You will want to discuss your experiences and share them with your classmates and teacher. The following activities will help you learn more about the war through the interviews and experiences of you and your classmates.

Sharing Stories: Each student will prepare him or herself for this activity by bringing the interview transcript to class. Students then will pair up in groups of two to explain their interviews to each other. After students understand their partners' stories, students should switch partners and try to retell their first partners' stories.

Finding the Common Themes:

Before students divide into groups, each person should make a list of the major themes covered in his or her interview. Then, students meet in groups of three, sharing their lists with each other. After each student has explained the items on his or her list, the group should decide together how each interview subject's stories and experiences are similar. Students then can record the similarities on a separate chart, which they will present to the class. After each group has presented its findings, ask the whole class to identify and discuss the themes that appeared most frequently in the interviews.

Class Journal: A group of student editors or the teacher should collect the written transcripts and select the best excerpts for publication. The editors should include original snapshots of the interview subjects to illustrate the class journal.

We Remember Celebration

It might be nice for the class to invite the interview subjects into school for a celebration at the completion of the project. The class could preview excerpts from the interview tapes and distribute copies of the class journal. The class could even hold a "book signing," asking the interview subjects to autograph their contributions in the class journal. To really put people in the spirit, play World War Two era music and serve refreshments that were popular at the time.

Worksheet: Memory Questions

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Worksheet: Explanation and Judgment Questions

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Worksheet: Taking Notes

Title:

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

Why?

