The Interview Cafe

TAKING THE HISTORY DAY EXPERIENCE TO THE NEXT LEVEL
What is the Interview Café?

- First introduced to NHDC through stellar educators at Rocky Heights Middle School
- Makes students reach out into their community
- Involvement of the local school parent association
  - Can bring in treats for the interviewees and create ambiance
What is the Benefit of Conducting Interviews

- History becomes “real” to students
- Great community-building opportunity & can engage students in civics
- Can expand a student’s research avenues; Networking
- Students can become more engaged with their project
  - Interviewees are also great cheerleaders!
The Skills Gained from the Interview Cafe Experience

- **Writing**
  - Contacting people within the community
  - Generating transcripts from the interview

- **Research**
  - Basic topic research to formulate questions
  - Locating experts (that’s another added research layer)

- **Communication**
  - Articulating questions to the interviewee

- **Etiquette**
  - Sending invitations, follow ups, and thank you notes
  - Learning how to speak with an adult in a professional setting

- **Time Management**
  - Working with another person’s schedule to determine interview time
Step 1: Preliminary Research and “Becoming an Expert”

- Students need to have some baseline knowledge of their topic so that they can identify their research needs.
- Basic research helps with question formulation.
  - We’re not talking about nuanced research here!
- Students need to have a basic understanding of the who, what, when, where, and why.
Step 2: Locating Experts

- Where can students find experts?
  - Colleges and Universities
  - Local museums and archives
  - Community organizations (Veterans of Foreign Wars, etc.)
  - Their own network of friends and family

- Students can think about interviewees to serve as primary or secondary sources
  - Newer topics can provide students with a great primary source opportunity
Step 3: Inviting an Expert

- Encourage students to generate a short-list of interviewees
  - If one does not work, the student will have some “fall-backs”
- Once the student identifies their star interviewee, have them send an invitation
  - Snail mail
  - Email
  - Phone
- You may want to have the students practice a “dry run” of the ask
Step 4: Scheduling the Interview

- In the Interview Café format, the event can be a large-scale
  - In that case, all of the students will schedule on the same day
- Some students may not be able to schedule on the same day as the scheduled event...And that’s okay!
  - They can sit in and observe others in action
- Skyped sessions are good, as are phone calls
- After the scheduled time is set, students really should confirm their interview at least a couple days before
A Fun Tip…Especially for Primary Source Interviews

- Encourage interviewees to bring photo albums or other stimuli with them to the interview.
- Sometimes a visual stimulus will enhance the quality of the interview and take you into unpredicted, but rewarding avenues.
Step 4: Formulating Questions

- Students will want to ask obvious questions (i.e. when did D-Day happen?). Push them to think more critically.
- Experts get frustrated when they provide information that can be found in a quick encyclopedia search.
- The questions should reflect the interviewee’s unique perspective on an issue.
- Students need to get past “yes” or “no” questions.
The Different Kinds of Questions

- Memory questions
  - For primary source interviews
  - Focus on personal experience and reminisces

- Knowledge questions
  - Good for secondary experts
  - Explains the depth of knowledge

- Judgment questions
  - Help formulate the “big picture”
  - Can be more opinion-based
Memory/Knowledge + Explanation + Judgment = Successful Interview
A Word of Caution...

- Personal biases
  - Many interviewees will have opinions that might be different than a student (and may prove uncomfortable)
  - Encourage students to listen and not judge
- Pushing past the point of comfort...Not a good idea
  - Some things (especially wars) may be traumatic
  - Encourage students to know their boundaries and be sensitive to their interviewee.
Your Turn:

FORMULATE SOME QUESTIONS WITH THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU.
THEORETICAL SITUATION– YOU ARE INTERVIEWING A VIETNAM WAR VETERAN
Step 5: Preparing for the Interview

- Interview exercises in class with classmates
- Practicing handshakes, eye-to-eye contact, etc.
- Discussing etiquette and attire
- Testing equipment
  - Recording devices
  - Camcorders
Step 6: The Actual Interview Day

- Students should be prompt and greet their interviewee
- Students need to provide a basic background on their NHD project so that the interviewee understands the purpose
- Students should go over the permission slip/consent form with the interviewee
- Students should test out their recording devices to ensure success
- Students need to practice **active listening**
- Even if recording, students should take notes and think of follow up questions as they go through the interview
- Once the interview is complete, students must say “THANK YOU!”
For Documentary or Website Kids...

- Valuable opportunity to get footage to use in the actual documentary or website

- This one can be a bit tricky... Need to have a quiet area set aside so that there is not noise interference from other students
  - Establishing schedules can help
Step 7: Send a Thank You Note!

- A little bit of gratitude goes a long way…
- The most impactful notes are handwritten and sent in the mail
Step 8: Using the Interview

- Students should work on a transcription for their own use
- All project types can refer to the interview in their projects and when talking with judges
- Direct quotes from the interview take the project to the next level
Encourage students to maintain a relationship with their interviewee during the stages of the contest.