

# The Interview Cafe

TAKING THE HISTORY DAY EXPERIENCE TO THE NEXT LEVEL

 University of Colorado **Denver**

**National History  
Day in Colorado**

*A pre-collegiate social studies  
and literacy program*

**NHID**  
NATIONAL  
HISTORY DAY

# 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

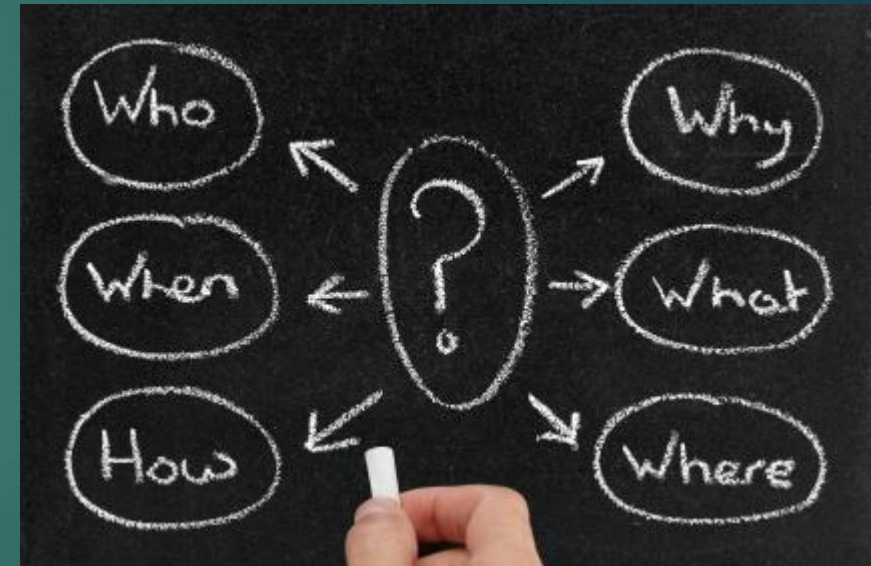
- ▶ History becomes “real” to students
- ▶ Great community-building opportunity & can engage students in civics
- ▶ Can expand a student’s research avenues; Networking
- ▶ Students can become more engaged with their project
  - ▶ Interviewees are also great cheerleaders!

# 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

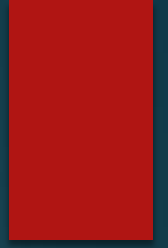
- ▶ Memory questions
  - ▶ For primary source interviews
  - ▶ Focus on personal experience and reminisces
- ▶ Knowledge questions
  - ▶ Good for secondary experts
  - ▶ Explains the depth of knowledge
- ▶ Judgment questions
  - ▶ Help formulate the “big picture”
  - ▶ Can be more opinion-based





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