

AP Language/APUSH Oral History / Narrative History Interview

Assignment – Narrative History

Your task is to become a historian, to research a specific event in history and weave into it the human experience of events, merging your studies with the personal history of your subject. The purpose of an oral history is to record the experiences of ordinary people, their impression of events, and the impact on their lives of those events. It personalizes the academic study of history. You will produce an article length work on a specific topic in history and a personal narrative that illuminates the topic. This is NOT an essay. You will need images, historical and personal, and perhaps some other graphics. Photos of artifacts from your subject, such as medals, letters, or other memorabilia can add richness to your article. The final product will be formatted as an article from a magazine.

It is no easy task to find an area of interest and a subject who had a personal experience with it. [Note: it does not require that they were “on the front lines,” so-to-speak, of the events, but that they can frame the events or that they responded to them in some way.] Listening and probing (carefully) are necessary skills for this assignment; pre-planning is essential. Do not go through the interview only to discover that you don’t have enough information on your topic. Anticipate the interview, let the subject know the purpose and the focal points you intend to hit so they can prepare their thoughts ahead of the interview. After the interview you will need to do some research to draw more details into the narrative than just the history in your textbook. This is your major homework assignment for the last month of school, so it will entail time and effort before we get to June.

Specific information and examples of the final narrative essay project will occur at a later time.

Interview Guidelines_____

- Your subject must have been born in 1950 or earlier.
- Based on the interview, you will summarize the subject's impression of the 1960s (and 70s) and answer several questions.
- Everyone must ask the core questions below, and you may, nay, you must, (epanorthosis ☺) ask follow up questions to clarify or draw out more information. Follow up questions are an essential part of the interview to explore interesting new ideas that you hadn't anticipated.
- Based on the responses, you will need dig more deeply into one aspect of American history that you will use as a focus topic for the final narrative essay. The choice of focus topic is entirely based on your interviewee's experience and your interests.
- With oral histories, the words chosen by the interviewee are essential, and when you summarize his/her words you are acting as a prism that, despite however faithfully you believe you are in interpreting these thoughts, ultimately distorts their intention. Take careful notes or even record the interview(s).
- When you have finished the interview it is polite and expected that you will provide a copy of the finished project for the interviewee and/or their families. Most importantly, you WILL write a thank you note for their time.

Setting

Your final project will combine direct quotations from your interviewee, paraphrase, research, narrative and descriptive writing. As you are doing your interview, please make note of descriptive detail: voice, appearance, and mannerisms of interviewee; descriptive sight, sound, smell details of location of interview, etc. This is another reason why filming your interview might be helpful.

Artifacts

You will hopefully enrich your final project with visual images of your interviewee or significant artifacts from his/her life. Be prepared to ask to see and take pictures of mementos, pictures, keepsakes or other items of significance to your interviewee.

Background Questions

1. Subject's Name:
2. Date of Birth:
3. Place of Birth:
4. Date of Interview:
5. Contact Information (phone # / email):

Required Core Questions

1. What was your perception of the Vietnam War in the 1960s, and, if so, how has it changed over time?
2. How did the Cold War impact your life and thinking, and how afraid were you of a Soviet nuclear attack?
3. What is your most vivid memory of the 1960s and 1970s?
4. How prevalent were drugs in society in the 1960s and why do you think the decade is perceived as a time of hippy drug culture?
5. How did the events of this era, particularly Vietnam and Watergate, impact your view of government?
6. Describe your perceptions of and/or experiences with racism and segregation in the 1960s and specifically how you viewed MLK.
7. How did gender roles change in the 1960s & 1970s?
8. What did you do for fun?
9. How does the image/perception of the 1960s differ from your experience?
10. What do you think is the biggest difference between the younger generation today, and your generation at our age?

Topics you might consider for your focus/research: (You may design your own questions for the interview based on the topic you are most interested in. You are not limited to just these topics.)

Music

Cars

High school

Apollo missions

Dating

Vacations

Assassinations (JFK, MLK, RFK)

Fashion

War experiences

Hobbies

Woodstock

Marches

Television

Anti-war / Hippies

Bay of Pigs / Cuban Missile Crisis
Movies