

INTERVIEWING SKILLS

Unlocking History's Mysteries

History is not just something that happened long ago. Every day, events occur that shape the way people think, how they act, and what they believe. Here's your chance to help record history. All you have to do is interview someone about an event or a time period he or she lived through and write about it for the Current Events Eyewitness to History Contest. Here are some tips to help you get started. Good luck!

BACKGROUND

- Find someone to interview, such as a relative, neighbor, or friend. If the person is willing, set up a time for the interview that is convenient for him or her. Ask the person what time period or event he or she witnessed so you can prepare for the interview.

PREPARATION

- Hit the books or go online to research the event or time period your interviewee wants to talk about. Once you have a good understanding of the topic, write a list of at least 10 questions to ask. Make sure your questions require more than a yes or no answer. Possible questions include, Where were you when this event happened? How did this event make you feel? How did it shape your life?

THE INTERVIEW

- Make sure you start the interview off right—be on time! Introduce yourself and thank the person for agreeing to meet with you. Bring a pen and some paper with you so you can take notes. You can also use a tape recorder. But be careful—you should always take notes too, just in case the tape recorder stops working.
- To begin the interview, ask the person how to spell his or her name. Then start out with some basic questions, such as: Where were you born? Where have you lived? Ask your interviewee to spell the names of people and places he or she mentions.
- Be a good listener. Give your interviewee plenty of time to answer your questions, and don't interrupt the person when he or she is talking. Don't correct or argue with your interviewee.
- Don't confine yourself to the written questions. If your interviewee brings up something else interesting or doesn't answer your question fully, ask follow-up questions—even if they aren't on your list. If you don't understand something, ask your interviewee to explain it to you.
- Go for the details. The best stories are ones that include many details so a reader can really imagine what it was like to be part of the event or time period.
- After the interview, send a thank-you letter to the person you interviewed.

Eyewitness to History Contest Rules

- Interview someone who has lived through a historic event. **(An interview with someone who witnessed an event on TV doesn't qualify.)**
- Write up the interview in 1,000 words or fewer in a **question-and-answer format**. You should also include a paragraph explaining what you learned from the interview.
- Have your teacher sign the written interview.
- Entries should be sent, postmarked by March 7, 2008, to *Current Events*, Eyewitness to History Contest, 1 Reader's Digest Road, Pleasantville, NY 10570-7000.