

Looking Back: Interviewing Those Who Lived Through the Vietnam Era

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Oral history interviews are useful to historians because they bring a historical time period “back to life.” For the purpose of this assignment, please interview a person who lived through the Vietnam Era but did **not** serve in the Vietnam War. **Your grandparents, neighbors, and older teachers** might serve as excellent interviewees.

Tips for a Successful Interview:

- **Prepare yourself well for the interview.** Make sure you have a general understanding of topic to be discussed. Get your facts organized.
- **Consider the feelings of the person you are interviewing.** Your questions may bring an emotional response. Be sure to speak slowly and clearly.
- **Relax and remember to smile!** If your interviewee has agreed to be tape recorded, start the tape. If you are taking notes, have your pen and notepad ready. (Do **not** give the interview questions to your interviewee and instruct him/her to write down the answers!)
- **Provide a copy of the sample questions to the interviewee ahead of time, if possible.** As a result, you will be given clearer facts, dates, and information. The person might even look up old photographs and memorabilia to enrich your understanding.
- **Courtesy is very important!** Thank your interviewee. Ask him/her if you could meet again, if necessary. Inform the person that you will send him/her a copy of your final report. Help the interviewee realize that he/she is a vital link to this period of history.

Be sure to record the following information before you start your interview:

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

Age (at present and during the Vietnam Era--The Interviewee MUST have been born before 1952)

Date(s) of Interview:

Place of Interview:

For the Interviewee: We ask you to think back to the Vietnam Era as today’s students try to better understand this crucial time period in our history. We are very interested in your thoughts, insights, and reflections regarding this Era (1960s-mid 1970s). Please respond with as much detail as possible to the following interview questions as they are presented to you.

Interview Questions: Looking Back to the Vietnam Era

- 1. How old were you during most of the Vietnam War Era?**
- 2. What were you doing during this period (school, job, etc.)?**
- 3. What was your attitude initially regarding American involvement in this military conflict?**
- 4. Did you know anyone who served in the Vietnam War?**
- 5. As the war progressed, did your attitude change? If so, how and why?**
- 6. In what ways (if any) did this military conflict affect your life?**
- 7. What is your most vivid memory of the Vietnam War?**
- 8. How did you feel when Saigon fell in April, 1975?**
- 9. Today, what are your feelings about the Vietnam War? About the War on Terror?**
- 10. In your opinion, what are the lessons of Vietnam?**
- 11. In your opinion, what should we teach today's students about the Vietnam Era?**