

Once high school history or English students have defined a topic and decided on the best sources, it is then time to actually locate and access the sources. If students are using library print resources, it is routine to locate the needed book. If students are using an online subscription database, such as Newsbank or ProQuest®, using the right search term will usually locate the needed article. However, one of the least used sources for many high school projects is another person, or an expert in the field of study. These primary sources usually aren't used because students are not taught how to access experts or how to interview another person—an essential skill when applying to college or interviewing for a job. In the print world, it is challenging to locate an expert in a specific field. However, with the World Wide Web, locating an expert is much easier.

Why Are Experts So Important?

Talking with an expert, or someone who has experienced an historic event, gives firsthand knowledge. (Then the reporter writes an interpretation of the expert's story). Every student should have the experience of interviewing another person. Interviews strengthen relationships between people and everyone likes to talk about his or her job or expertise. Most experts or family members are happy to talk with young people about mutual topics of interest. Although face-to-face interviews give more information to a student, with the digital world, these interviews can

take place through phone, e-mail, or even Instant Messenger™.

Students involved in National History Day, a yearly



By Rob Darrow

research-based program for students in grades 6–12, know how important interviewing skills can be. Experts can lead you to further resources or important primary source material that can open up to a more unique aspect of a topic. More than 500,000 students participate in the National History Day program each year. More information about the National History Day Contest is available at <www.nationalhistoryday.org>.

For your next history or English research assignment, try having students locate and access, and then interview a primary source as part of their research! Here is a quick lesson to guide students in finding an expert to interview.

Big6™ Lesson—Locating and Accessing the Right Expert to Interview

1. Have a variety of books, news articles, magazine articles, and a few printed Web sites available for students. Each source should have authors listed.
2. Working in small groups, students will read through the various print materials and write down all authors, experts quoted in the article, and sources listed at the bottom of pages or in the bibliographies at the end of the articles or books.
3. Have groups identify the top three people that they would like to interview, and ask students to look for clues about where each person lives.
4. Have groups discuss different ways they can locate the person (call Directory Assistance for that city, use a Web site phone book, call the college or university, or contact the book publisher).
5. Students will write five specific questions to ask the expert to get the information they want.

6. Have groups share their strategies for finding experts and the top questions to ask.
7. Students can then apply the above strategies to their own research topic.

Successful National History Day students have become proficient at interviewing experts. Intermediate and high school students have interviewed many high level experts—only after doing the proper groundwork in Location and Access. As part of their history day projects, students across the United States have interviewed the flight crew of the Enola Gay (the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima); the son of bomb creator Robert Oppenheimer; Fidel Castro's sister who lives in Florida; the Little Rock Nine who first integrated Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas; Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi; lawyers who were involved in the Brown v. Board of Education; and World War II veterans. The students involved in these interviews report that they were nervous before the interview, but after completing the interview, they were more confident and gained more information about their topic than they ever imagined.

If you're not sure of the types of questions to ask a veteran or an expert, use the Library of Congress Veteran's Web site for ideas <www.loc.gov/folklife/vets/>. ■

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