Oral history guide

You have studied a wide range of popular culture in Australia, with a focus on the period since World War II. That information comes from a collection of sources that have given you an insight into general experiences in Australia. You should now prepare an oral history to allow you to look at someone’s specific experience, and compare it with your research.

Oral history is the recording of the memories of people's life experiences. It is an opportunity to access the unique perspective any individual can bring to events. As with all historical sources, it should be checked against other sources and perspectives.

Preparing for an oral history interview

Planning is essential before conducting any interview to obtain an oral history. Some questions you must answer before commencing include:

• What is the purpose of the interview? You must be clear what the topic you are trying to gain information on.
• What do I already know about my interview subject? This will be a big help in making sure you can direct appropriate questions to your interview subject. For example if you knew your subject was born in 1970, there would be no point in asking them questions about the reaction to Apollo XI landing on the moon as that occurred before they were born.
• Have I planned out my questions? It is vital that you have planned your questions before you start your interview. They should be planned to ensure that you get the information you require to complete your research on the topic you are investigating.
• Do I have any information or visual sources I can use as prompts? Sometimes asking about something specifically or showing the subject a picture may help them remember specific periods and events.
• How are you going to present your information? Remember that it is ethical to let your interview subject know how the information is going to be used. They must have the opportunity to refuse information being reproduced in any public arena. Are there any specific requirements about what to do with your findings? Will you incorporate them into a broader response or simply submit the content of the interview?

Research the background

For this interview you are going to gain an insight into popular culture in Australia in the period after World War II. Therefore you know the topic you are investigating. Your interview subject will have to be someone who has some experience of life in Australia since 1945. That will be an important consideration when selecting a person to interview.

Once you have an interview subject you will have to research so that you have appropriate questions to ask them. Good research will not only help you prepare relevant questions, but will also help to provide you with prompts that could prove useful. This is where you will have to think about the area you wish to focus on. Some possibilities include:
• Music
• Sport
• Film
• Television
• The impact of changing technology
• The impact of the United States and Britain
• The emergence of a more diverse range of cultural influences.

Conduct an interview
You should then conduct an interview with someone to gain information to answer the question:

How can oral history help us understand the continuities and changes in Australian popular culture since World War II?

Your interview could be recorded to become a podcast or vodcast that could form a school digital archive for future students to use and add to.