

THE WAR

A KEN BURNS FILM

DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY
KEN BURNS AND LYNN NOVICK



THE WAR is a Co-production of Florentine Films and WETA Washington, D.C.

THE POWER OF STORY

A Student Guide to Documentary Filmmaking

Throughout the making of the series, one theme stayed constant, one idea continually emerged as we got to know the brave men and women whose stories it is our privilege to tell: in extraordinary times, there are no ordinary lives.

– Ken Burns and Lynn Novick on making THE WAR

THE POWER OF STORY

MAKING YOUR OWN DOCUMENTARY FILM

Written by Allison Silberberg

Note to teachers:

The documentary process provides an excellent model for engaging students in seeking out and understanding history in their own communities while using the technologies that are part and parcel of their lives. This section of THE WAR Educator's Guide is written for students — to walk them through the nuts and bolts of making a documentary. It can easily be adapted for classroom use. Before distributing to students, watch the “Interview Tips” and “The Making of THE WAR” segments on the enclosed DVD for background from Ken Burns and Lynn Novick on their approach to storytelling and filmmaking.

INTRODUCTION

It is meaningful and mesmerizing to make a documentary. As Studs Terkel, one of the finest interviewers of our time, said recently, “Everyone wants to be remembered.”

This document walks you through the basic steps of making a documentary, some of which you may already know. We hope that many years from now, when you look back at school, this film project will be one of those moments you will treasure. And who knows? Maybe you will be intrigued by filmmaking and want to work in this field. Perhaps you will become the next Ken Burns or the next Lynn Novick.

THE POWER OF STORY

Whether you're making a film (documentary or drama) or writing an article, a book or a play, it's all about telling a story. It is that simple. Documentaries can force us all to pause in this fast-paced world and feel the joy and pain of someone else's life from any era.

THE MISSION

With this documentary film project, your role is to capture the words and feelings of a veteran or anyone who has a memory of

World War II — what he or she saw, accomplished, felt, feared and wondered. Most veterans never saw combat, but their perspective is gripping nonetheless. Those at home made important contributions to the war also. If you're fascinated by a story, chances are your viewer will be too. This is also an opportunity to learn more about your hometown and its history. And remember, you can use the tips in this guide to create a documentary on any subject.

KNOW THE PURPOSE OF YOUR DOCUMENTARY

Sixteen million American men and women served and more than 400,000 Americans died in World War II. Recording a veteran is a significant way to show your appreciation and say thanks. In addition, by filming the stories of World War II, you help to preserve our nation's history.

As Ken Burns and Lynn Novick exemplify in their filmmaking, even the smallest story can be universal. Therefore, by interviewing anyone with a memory of World War II — whether an uncle, grandfather or someone in your community — you have the possibility of discovering the feelings and fears of a family, a community and a nation at war. Your film will be part of something that will endure.

STEPS TO MAKING A SUCCESSFUL FILM

CHOOSE A SUBJECT

The person in your film can be a family member, a friend or someone in your community. Ask your family and friends about people they know who remember World War II. If you chose to interview a veteran, there are veterans' organizations at the local, state and national levels.

Note: Though in this guide we stress World War II, the veteran in your film can be from any war. For various reasons, not all veterans are able to talk about their service, but most veterans want to talk about it in order to preserve their experiences for future generations.

AT TIMES, REMEMBERING IS PAINFUL

Keep in mind that the act of telling one's story can rekindle traumatic feelings. For most veterans, the emotion is never that far from the surface, just tucked away. Even for people who experienced the war on the home front, sharing their memories of anxiety and often tragedy can be extremely difficult. Always have water and tissues accessible in case your interviewee becomes emotional. If this happens, do not think it indicates a mistake on your part. In many cases, it means that you have done a good job of establishing rapport, trust and respect. Always wait until the interviewee has gathered his or her composure before continuing with your questions. If they ask you to stop recording so they may collect themselves, do so by pressing the pause button and gently ease back into more neutral topics, verbally acknowledging when you begin recording again.

HONOR WHAT THEY SAY

Every day was a revelation and in this film, every day was difficult, because we were dealing with the ultimate sacrifice that human beings were making. ... We were so privileged to be ushered into the lives of these people — some of whom shared painful stories — sometimes for the very first time. We just attempted to honor what they were saying.

– Lynn Novick about making THE WAR

This film project is focused on interviewing witnesses to war, because they can provide a firsthand perspective on the war. As Ken Burns and Lynn Novick put it, it's about telling a story from the "bottom-up" rather than from the top down. Let your interviewee tell his or her version of events and how everything felt. His or her experiences will become part of the nation's memory.

PREPARATION

Be prepared, as the Boy Scouts always say. The more prepared you are, the better the interview will go and the more productive your whole experience will be.

Once you decide who you will interview, you need to find out as much as you can about your subject. First, ask for basic information about his or her family, hometown and rank and branch of service if your subject was in the military. Get details such as full name, serial number, place of residence, place of enlistment, date of enlistment, years of service, grade, services branch, where he or she served, duties in general, date and place of birth, education, civilian occupation and marital status.

Type up this basic information on the Bio Sheet found at the end of this guide. You should have the Bio Sheet with you at the interview.

QUICK HINT: If your subject would like to bring some memorabilia from the war, that would be tremendous for the shoot. This might include letters to loved ones, a uniform, diaries, photos or souvenirs.

RESEARCH

Before the interview, you will need to do research. You need to know as much as possible about the era and the war you are focused on before you begin your film.

You can begin your research online but also consider other sources such as your local library and the archives of your local newspaper. Both the library and paper may have everything on microfiche. Look for articles, columns and editorials about the war and the impact of the war on the home front. Also look at the obituary section for stories about those killed or missing in action. Print out some pages so that you can share them with your subject.

There might also be a historical society in your community that has materials to explore for information.

Online resources for research:

- The Library of Congress (www.loc.gov)
- The National Archives and Records Administration (www.archives.gov)
- United States Army (www.army.com)
- United States Navy (www.navy.com)
- United States Marine Corps (www.marines.com)
- Our Documents (www.ourdocuments.gov)
- The Web site for THE WAR (pbs.org/thewar) has numerous links and a huge searchable database full of resources.

USE OF PRIMARY SOURCES

Documentaries are based upon primary sources. People and documents that bear witness firsthand are considered primary sources. If you were making a documentary about the battle at Gettysburg in the Civil War, and you had access to a diary written by a soldier who fought at Gettysburg, that diary would be an example of a primary source. Letters and newspaper articles of an era are also considered primary sources.

GET TO KNOW YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND: THE CAMERA EQUIPMENT

Equipment Checklist:

- Video camera
- Microphone (preferably a lapel or lavalier microphone)
- Tripod
- Proper lighting equipment or what you may have available
- Headphones
- Extra tapes and batteries for all equipment used
- Extension cords, cables and/or power strip

Get to know your equipment BEFORE the interview. This is critical! As with everything, the more you do something, the better you get at it. And yes, it can all be learned. If it's available, read the manual for the camera, and go over the equipment with someone who knows how to use it.

For this film project, it might be helpful to have a partner. That way, when you are interviewing, your partner is filming and checking on the sound quality. When your partner is interviewing, you are filming and checking sound quality.

Do a couple of test runs with this partner in order to become totally familiar with the ins and outs of the equipment. Ask a friend or a family member to participate in a mock interview with you. If possible, do a couple of mock interviews. Afterwards, ask the interviewees if they have any suggestions. You want to work out any problems with the equipment days before you do the interview and not during the interview.

If you are having trouble finding equipment from family and friends and if your school does not have any to borrow, there may be a camera shop or video equipment company that rents equipment

by the day. The company might even give you a price break if you explain that it's for a school project. Be sure to mention that if they donate the equipment for that day, you will list them in the credits.

Have plenty of tapes and batteries. Running out would be like running out of water in the desert — so plan ahead. You will not have time to get more during the interview. In general, it is far better to plug into an outlet rather than depend upon a battery pack.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION!

You have a choice to make: to shoot inside or outside. Shooting inside is far preferable because it allows more control over extraneous noise. Shooting outside can provide stunning views in case your interviewee lives near the beach or mountains, but you can't control extraneous sounds from people, barking dogs or passing sirens. Having a quiet place is extremely important. The main attraction is your interviewee's face, not the background or scenery. Nothing should distract your audience from the story your subject is telling.

Choose a location that is comfortable and convenient for your interviewee. That might be his or her home or office, which might be best, given that you can control extraneous noise. The location could also be a local community center. A coffee shop would likely be too distracting and noisy. If you decide to shoot in a home, make sure all noises and distractions are out of sight and earshot.

COMPOSITION, LIGHTING AND SOUND

COMPOSITION

The setup you see through the viewfinder is referred to as the composition of the shot. Remember, what you see is what you get. Nothing magical happens after the shoot. So before you hit "record," pay close attention to details like lint on a dark jacket or something not right in the background of the shot. Some things can be fixed in postproduction in the editing process, but not everything.

Place the camera on a tripod so that the camera is steady and does not move. Pay attention to the height of the camera. It should be about the same height or an inch or two higher than the interviewee's eyes. Through the viewfinder, look to make sure that the framing of the shot gives your interviewee enough headroom so you are not too low or too high. To have the appropriate headroom, the top of the frame should be about an inch or two above the interviewee's head, and the bottom of the frame should be approximately midchest. Some call it a midrange shot. In other words, you're close, but not too close. The reason for the midrange shot is that if the person uses his or her hands, you want to be able to see that.

After you set up the camera, remember that when you look through the viewfinder, you must be able to see the interviewee's face and especially his or her eyes. You want your subject's face to be left or right of center, not in the center. No straight-on shots are allowed. In general, everyone looks better when shot from a slight angle. It also appears more natural. It's as if the viewer is sitting in on a conversation that the interviewee is having with someone, not with the camera directly. In fact, that is exactly what is going on.

LIGHTING

Proper lighting can make or break a shot. Always use a light source you can control, rather than natural light which will change. If the room is dark, then you can add light to the room with lights set up on the side. This could simply mean bringing a floor lamp over from another side of the room. In addition, you always want to ensure that some light hits the interviewee's shoulders from behind to give dimension and separation from the background.

***QUICK HINT:** If your subject is wearing glasses make doubly sure that the light is not reflecting and causing a glare. You might also want to bring a compact case of powder to help reduce any shine on your subject's face.*

One way to think about lighting is what is known as a “3-Point Light Kit.” You don’t need to buy this kit. Your location may have a great deal of natural light plus some big floor lamps. But most likely you will need some extra lights, and you may be able to borrow this equipment. Here is how the 3-Point Light idea works. Typically, you want a main light on one side of the subject’s face. Then there should be a “fill” light, or softer light, on the other side of the subject’s face. And third, there needs to be a background light, which is placed behind the subject to give dimension to the interviewee’s shoulders and head.

AUDIO is critical!

Check the audio! During the interview, you or your partner will need to wear headphones the whole time to ensure that the audio is captured properly. Test the microphone and the sound quality. Any distracting background noise — air conditioning, a refrigerator, pets — can ruin your sound. Your equipment must include a lapel microphone or lavalier microphone. An onboard mike is not good enough. You want to check the levels and check for distortion or noise. Remember that if people cannot hear or understand the words of the interviewee, your film will die fast.

HANDLING THE TAPES

In the days before the interview, it is important to have a system for handling used tapes. First, using a Sharpie pen, label each tape “MASTER TAPE.” Put those tapes in a Ziploc bag that is labeled “NEW TAPES.” Then label a second Ziploc bag “USED TAPES.” Doing these things in the days ahead of the interview gives you more time with your interviewee. It is also more professional to have the tapes ready to go. Number each tape, then write the name of the interviewee, date and interviewer.

FINAL PREP

Confirm! A week before the taping, call your interviewee and confirm the shoot date and other pertinent information. Also call the day before the interview to reconfirm the appointment.

Gear up your brain! That means review notes, materials and questions during the days leading up to the interview and the morning of the interview with your teacher or partner.

Get organized! Have everything ready to go the day before. Double-check that equipment and supplies are in order. Have your notes organized. Have the Bio Sheet and a sheet of paper listing your questions and points of interest.

ON THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

Think of yourself as a professional. Dress accordingly.

If you’re shooting in a home or office, ask if you can arrive about an hour early to set up the equipment. For any shoot, arrive early...always!

Set up everything and do a practice run. Before the interview, have someone sit where you want your interviewee to sit. Double-check the camera equipment, and test the lighting on the face and around the room. Check the audio. Do a quick practice run to ensure that everything is getting captured.

Once your subject arrives, ensure that all phones and beeping watches are turned off. Even a phone that vibrates will make unnecessary noise.

Make sure there are glasses of water and tissues nearby.

Even with the best preparation, something might still go wrong. If that happens, stay professional and calm as you go about fixing the problem. Keeping a sense of humor is helpful. Remember that others will take their cues from you. Your goal is to solve problems quickly so that you can complete your shoot.

During the interview, think of yourself as an active listener. Be a listening guide for the discussion; don’t dictate it. You never know

when an interviewee will divulge something, and they need to feel that you are really listening. If you are looking at a piece of paper full of questions and thinking about what your next question will be, you might miss a moving detail. Stay focused on the question at hand, then look down at your list of questions.

Remember that you want to be so familiar with the questions that you don't need to look at them all the time. If possible, have a sheet with talking points and questions you would like to cover. The more relaxed you are, the better the interview will go. Ask only one question at a time. Try to keep your questions short and make them open-ended to discourage one-word answers.

***QUICK HINT:** Go with the flow of your subject's answers. While your interview is designed to elicit information, it is also meant to spur and capture the emotional essence of a memory. Don't insist on asking your prepared questions one after another. Let your subject tell his or her stories.*

INTERVIEW TIPS

Stay focused on the interview. If you feel bored or tired, suggest a quick break for snacks, conversation and some stretching. There should be a break every 45 minutes or so.

Ask one question at a time and always keep the questions brief. There is a gentle way to ask anything. Reliving some of these memories will be very difficult for many. Always keep that in mind.

Be skeptical. Memory can be complicated. Just because someone tells you something happened, doesn't mean it is completely accurate — it is first and foremost a subjective personal testimony.

Do not give your subject a list of questions in advance. You want fresh, unrehearsed answers. Even after you sit down for the interview, do not show your subject the questions.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS for a World War II veteran:

Note: You do not need to cover all of these questions or all of the questions on your list. Use this more as a map or guide for the conversation.

- Were you aware of the war that was already going on overseas before Pearl Harbor was attacked? Did you think America should get involved?
- When did you go into the service — did you enlist, were you drafted? How old were you? Which branch of the service did you choose/get assigned to?
- How did you feel when you said goodbye to your family, left home and went into the military? What was it like going from civilian life to military life? What do you remember about your training? What did they teach you in the Army/Navy/Marines?
- Where did you serve (dates, which division, which unit, which ship, etc. — as much detail as possible)?
- (If in combat) Which theater of the war were you in? Were you ever wounded? What specific details do you remember — sights, sounds, smells, sensations? What was the worst moment?
- Tell me about the chaos of the war — did you know where you were most of the time, where the enemy was? Where your objective was? What to do when you found it?
- What did you believe, at that time, was at stake in the war? What did you think you were fighting for? Did that change once you actually got overseas and into combat?
- How did you feel about the enemy (German, Italian or Japanese) you were fighting? How do you feel about them now?
- Did you write home often? What reminded you most of home when you were overseas? What did you look forward to most when you thought about coming home?

- After the war was over, was it possible for you to put it behind you completely? What parts of the experience have stayed with you?
- What do you think people today should know about what you went through? What do we need to remember about World War II?

QUICK HINT: Once you ask a question, don't interrupt no matter what. You don't need your voice in the film, and you don't want to stop your subject while he or she is telling a great story.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS for a non-veteran:

- Tell me a little bit about the place you grew up — what kind of town, neighborhood, street?
- Do you remember where you were when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?
- What did you see, feel, think in that moment? When did it sink in what this would mean for you, for your family, for the country?
- Do you remember seeing soldiers around town? Did you hear a lot of young men you knew talking about the war, about going into the service?
- How did the war affect daily life in your hometown during the war?
- More women worked during the war than before or after it — how did that affect you personally? Did you see any kind of change in women's lives and attitudes because of that?
- Did you work during the war? What did you do? Did you or anyone you knew do work that was related to the war in any way? Did you continue working after the war?
- People today cannot comprehend the idea of rationing. Tell me what it meant. What kinds of things were rationed, and what did you have to do to get them?
- Did your neighborhood and community pull together — did the war foster a new sense of closeness and everyone pitching in together?
- Do you remember getting news about anyone you knew, anyone in your neighborhood, who was killed in the war? How did that family cope? How did that affect your attitude about the war?
- We were fighting a war against fascism and totalitarianism, yet our own government did not treat all citizens equally. Were you aware of discrimination against any ethnic groups? (Mexicans and other Hispanics, Native Americans, African Americans, others...)
- Did you realize that the armed forces of the United States were segregated on the basis of race? What did you think about that at the time?
- Were you aware of the fact that the government interned 110,000 Japanese Americans for most of the war? Why do you think that was done? What did you think of it at the time?
- It is so easy to say the war changed our country, and we all know that it did — but if you had to think about the ways it affected you in your life, what would they be?
- What did you think about FDR as the leader of our country — did you watch him in newsreels, listen to him talk on the radio? How did he make you feel about the war as it was going on?
- Where were you when you learned about the death of FDR? What kind of impact did it have on you?
- The war took a toll on everyone in different ways — did you know any boys who came home and were changed — who “never got over it?”

- What do you want people who weren't alive then to know about the war?

***QUICK HINT:** Let the camera shot stay with someone a few seconds in silence after they finish speaking, especially if there is emotion on display. Don't cut away until an emotional moment has passed. You can see this powerful technique used repeatedly in Ken Burns and Lynn Novick's work.*

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

After the interview, be sure to thank the interviewee. When you get home that day, write him or her a thank-you note for participation in your film.

Later, when your film is completed, mail your subject a copy and include another thank-you note. Mention that if he or she would like more copies of the film, you would gladly arrange that quickly.

EDITING THE FILM

To complete the film, you need to edit the raw material of your interview into a film that tells a story. Using editing software, edit the film accordingly. Since there are many different software editing systems, some for PCs and some for Mac users, here are some general guidelines for editing your film.

The first rule in editing is, never use the original. Make a complete copy and work off the copy. That way, you can go back to the original if need be. Since film is digitized, you won't lose a "generation" in the process of making a copy.

By now, your tapes are already labeled "MASTER TAPES" and numbered. Never tape over them. Just set them aside and use the copy. That way, if your hard drive crashes, you will still have your master tapes. Know that editing takes time... lots of it. Editing is about making a thousand little judgment calls about what to keep, what to discard and how to fit everything together to tell the story.

The main thing to remember is that each story needs dramatic tension to hold an audience's attention. Tension is based upon conflict. A documentary about a time of war is automatically full of tension. Who will survive? Was the veteran hurt? Conflict can be surviving as a prisoner of war, not knowing how parents back home are doing or concern for family members and friends serving overseas. There can also be conflict from the elements of nature, such as rain, snow or heat.

Create a log of your footage. A log will help you get all the material organized for the edit. Lay down time code if you have access to it. (Time code helps you keep the material manageable.) If you don't have access to time code, don't worry about it. Just keep going.

***QUICK HINT:** If at all possible, have your tapes transcribed and work with the transcript as you edit, sitting with the copy in hand as you review your footage. Circle the parts you like best and number them for easy reference.*

Take a legal pad and write down "blurbs" or summary points that encapsulate the gist of each part of the interview. Then write down the corresponding code or log numbers. All of this preparation will help you edit the film efficiently. You're weaving a tapestry as you are creating a story line. You're going to put moments of the interview in some kind of order that tells your interviewee's story. Like any raw material, it will contain some moments that are poignant and some parts that need to be cut. Some parts might seem cut and dried, but they actually provide information about your subject's life, so they might be useful. Use your judgement — less can be more ... it usually is.

PHOTOS AND MUSIC CREATE A POWERFUL EFFECT

As you put your film together, include the photos or objects your subject brought in and any pertinent photographs you found at the library or in a newspaper. Always be sure to credit the

photographer. When showing the photos or objects, you can have your subject's voice explaining what is in the shot.

With the sound of your subject's words, use the "Ken Burns effect" when panning across or zooming into and out of photographs. For example, open a clip with a close-up of one person in a photo, then zoom out so that others in the photo become visible. The effect can be used as a transition between clips as well. The zooming and panning across photographs give the feeling of motion, and keep the viewer visually entertained.

You can also use music to enhance emotion and drama. Remember to keep the volume of the music in-check. Music should add to the impact of a moment, not overtake the images or words from your interviewee. It's a balancing act. Just make certain that any words from your subject are the main focus. All words need to be clearly heard.

***QUICK HINT:** As you edit, remember that you have seen and heard all the parts of your film a great deal. So when you edit, always imagine that this is the first time you are seeing and hearing your film. This will help ensure that you lay the levels for sound and picture quality correctly.*

COMPLETING YOUR FILM

Mixing in the interviewee's story with the photos and music is the next big step. Remember that hearing your subject's words is the biggest priority. Mix the sound and listen to all of it to ensure that you can hear the words. Most people do the sound last, and that's fine. But remember that you have seen your film and heard the words over and over again. For everyone else, it will be their first time to watch and listen to your film. If the words are difficult to hear, then your film will be frustrating if not impossible to watch. Audio is critical!

Create a short credit list for the end of your film. If anyone donated equipment or services for your film, be sure to thank them in the

credits. This is also where you will list any crew names, any music you used, the name of the composer and the musician(s), photo credits and special thanks.

SUBMITTING YOUR WORK

You can submit your interviews, transcripts and tapes to the Veterans History Project (VHP), and they will become part of this country's documented history. Your work will be housed in the Library of Congress alongside documents such as The Emancipation Proclamation and the papers of Jackie Robinson. THE WAR companion Web site (pbs.org/thewar) contains all the information you need to participate in VHP, including forms required for submission and specific mailing instructions.

OTHER PLACES TO SUBMIT YOUR FILM

- Apple Student Gallery
<http://edcommunity.apple.com/gallery/student>
The Apple Student Gallery is a convenient place to post and share student-created documentaries.
- Talk to your teacher about National History Day (www.nhd.org), it's a great place to submit your project. Each year, more than half a million students nationwide participate in the NHD contest.
- THE WAR Web site (pbs.org/thewar) contains a list of student and other film contests you can enter.

Special duties/highlights/achievements

Was the veteran a prisoner of war? Yes _____ No _____

Did the veteran or civilian sustain combat or service-related injuries? Yes _____ No _____

Medals or special service awards. If so, please list (be as specific as possible):

Memorabilia _____

Additional Biographical Information

