



History Day Frequently Asked Questions

What is History Day?

National History Day is a nationally acclaimed history education program that challenges students to become historians, explorers, investigators and leaders. Students choose a topic that relates to an annual theme, then conduct extensive research using primary sources, articles and books, interviews with experts and eyewitnesses, and many other resources. They analyze and interpret their findings, draw conclusions about their topic's historical significance, and present their work in project form as an exhibit, documentary, performance, paper or website. They can choose to enter local competitions, where their projects are evaluated by teams of experts, in hopes of advancing to the state and national contests. History Day has proven to be an invaluable way to introduce students to the techniques of historical inquiry and the importance of history in everyday life.

Who participates?

All students—public, private, home-schooled—in grades 6-12 may participate in Washington History Day.

How can I get involved?

First, investigate whether your school has a History Day program. If not, find a teacher who is willing to be your coach as you go through the History Day process. Coaches help students with topic selection and identifying resources, and act as a mentor as students research, analyze, create and present. No registration is required unless you plan to compete, in which case you should look at the regional contest information to find out how to sign up.

How does the contest work?

Working individually or in groups, junior (grades 6-8) and senior (grades 9-12) division students select a topic related to the annual theme. They research, analyze, interpret and present their work in one of five categories: exhibit, documentary, performance, paper or website. If you choose to enter a contest, first check whether your school holds its own competition. The next step is to enter a regional contest. Regional winners advance to the state contest, held at the end of April. Top entries in each category at the state competition advance to the National History Day contest in June near Washington, DC. At each level, judge teams composed of historians, educators and professionals evaluate your work and provide useful feedback.

Who runs Washington History Day?

The Washington State Historical Society has been the home of Washington History Day since 2004. The state office runs the state contest, provides teacher training and resources statewide, works with the seven regional contests, and leads the national contest delegation. The program was founded in Washington in 1982, and nationally in 1980, when it was launched in Cleveland, Ohio.

How many students participate?

Last year, more than 5,000 students from more than 100 schools participated; about 2,000 chose to enter a regional contest. Nationally, more than 700,000 students and 40,000 teachers take part. Forty-nine states have a History Day program, along with Washington, DC, American Samoa, Guam, and the Department of Defense European Academies. More than 2,500 students attend the national contest.

Is History Day just another academic contest?

Definitely not. History Day is changing the way history is taught and learned. Its innovative, project-centered approach encourages student investment in learning and fosters engaged citizens. History Day offers teacher workshops, summer institutes, curricular materials and a variety of additional resources.

Why should I do History Day?

History Day is really fun! You'll meet amazing people and learn real-life skills that can be applied throughout your school years and beyond. This is not name and date memorization—it's learning history by doing history. Past participants often cite their History Day experience as their most meaningful school experience, and many stay active in the program after graduation as judges or volunteers at local contests. Make your own history, and participate in Washington History Day!

For further History Day information, please contact Mark Vessey at 360-586-0219 or historyday@wshs.wa.gov.