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# The Washington History Day Educator Handbook

## WASHINGTON STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## Introduction

National History Day is an annual historical research program that challenges middle and high school-aged students to become historians. Each year, students across Washington State select a topic of interest that relates to an annual theme and conduct extensive research of primary and secondary sources about the subject. Students may work individually or in teams, and present their research creatively in one of five project formats: documentary, performance, paper, website, or exhibit. Students may also choose to submit their projects in regional History Day contests with hopes of making it to the state contest, or even nationals. There are two divisions for the History Day contests: Junior Division for grades 6-8 and Senior Division for grades 9-12.

## Why Should I Incorporate History Day in My Classroom?

History Day is a project-based learning program that aligns with Washington State GLEs and CBAs, as well as Common Core standards for social studies, literacy, and twenty-first century skills. Students gain skills in research, writing, communication, critical thinking, and project management. The program is adaptable to any learning setting, and it routinely attracts participants from public, private, and home schools. History Day engages students by making history relevant and exciting, and students often report that the program prepared them for life beyond secondary education.

## Levels of Organization

National History Day has several levels of organization to help students navigate the yearlong project.

### Classroom Level

The research and project development portions of the History Day program take place at the classroom level. Educators coach students in conducting historical research, developing a thesis, and constructing a project. They oversee the students' work and offer feedback.



## Regional Level

Washington State has eight History Day regions, each administered by a regional coordinator. Regional coordinators are volunteers who organize the regional contests that occur in February and March, and are the main points of contact for educators within each region.

## Affiliate/State Level

National History Day in Washington (or Washington History Day) is administered by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction in partnership with the Washington State Historical Society. The program is administered by an affiliate coordinator at OSPI who organizes the affiliate/state contest and corresponds between regional coordinators and the national office. The Washington State Historical Society provides education programming and services to support students and educators through the research process.

## National Level

National History Day is a non-profit educational organization based in College Park, Maryland. The national office writes the rules and guidelines of the contests, selects the annual theme, and coordinates the national contest. The national office also provides professional development training for teachers to study history internationally and online.



## National History Day Timeline

As with any long-term project, time management is key to ensuring success in the National History Day program. History Day works best when students can devote ample time to reaching incremental milestones that result in the final project. Below is a suggested timeline based on the NHD seasons – autumn is the research season; winter is the project development season; and spring is the contest season.

<b>July</b>  Annual Theme Announced	<b>August</b>	<b>September</b>  Topic Selection	<b>October</b>  Secondary Research	<b>November</b>  Primary Research	<b>December</b>  Draft Thesis Statement
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<b>January</b>  First Draft of Project	<b>February</b>  Second Draft of Project	<b>March</b>  Regional Contests	<b>April or May</b>  Affiliate (State) Contest	<b>June</b>  National Contest
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## The Nuts and Bolts of National History Day

### Theme

Every year National History Day selects a theme that frames the research of students who participate in the program. Annual themes are broad enough to be applied to world, national, or local history, so that students are able to select a topic that excites them, whether ancient or recent. Themes frequently pair together two or three aspects of history, which students must address within their chosen topics. Previous themes include:

- Exploration, Encounter & Exchange in History
- Leadership & Legacy in History
- Conflict & Compromise in History
- Triumph & Tragedy in History



## Topic

Students should choose to research a topic that excites them. Developing a National History Day project takes months of research and planning, and students are likely to have more fun if they choose to study a subject that interests them. However there are a few guidelines to help lead students through the topic selection process.

- Does the topic relate to the annual theme?
- Is the topic historical? Current events should be avoided, as they do not count as history. In general, students should choose topics that occurred at least 20 years ago.
- What primary sources are available for the chosen topic? Different time periods produce different types of primary sources. And likewise, different primary sources lend themselves more easily to different project formats. A topic from ancient history will produce more archeological artifacts and might be better suited as a performance or paper. But a topic from the twentieth century will produce more digital media, and will lend itself well to developing documentaries or websites.
- Is the topic the right size for creating a History Day project? Part of the research process is narrowing the focus as the project advances. History Day Projects need to be broad enough to produce primary sources but narrow enough to fit within the size restrictions of each project format. A student will not be able to discuss every aspect of World War II. Instead, they might focus on a single part of it, such as the life and experiences of Anne Frank.

## Categories

History Day students present their research in five different categories: documentary, exhibit, paper, performance, and website. Students can work by themselves or in groups for all categories except for the paper category, which only allows individual participation.

Additionally, National History Day maintains a list of general rules for all History Day entries and rules for each category. Educators and students are strongly encouraged to read the full list of rules in the NHD Rule Book, available online at [www.nhd.org](http://www.nhd.org).

### Documentary

Historians use documentaries to present their research through film. Students who select this category examine a topic using historical film footage, oral histories, photographs, and more.

A documentary should reflect a student's ability to use audiovisual equipment and editing software. The documentary category will help students develop skills



in film and sound editing and analytical writing. Students must have access to equipment and must be able to operate it.

### Exhibit

Historians use exhibits to present their research using physical displays at museums and historic sites. Students create exhibits using trifold boards that examine a topic through interpretive labels, objects, and images.



Exhibits challenge students to be concise and clear in their understanding of their research. Students who choose to create exhibits gain skills in graphic design and analytical writing.

### Paper

Historians use papers to publish their research in journals or books, and papers are the most common method for sharing research. Students write papers that examine a topic's significance through analytical, expository, or creative writing. Like projects in other categories, Students reference journals, newspapers, maps, or images as evidence to their claims.

Students who participate in the paper category will learn to hone their writing skills.

### Performance

Historians use performances at living history museums and historic sites to dramatically portray a person, event, or culture in history. Students who create performance entries develop a script based on their research and perform it live to classmates and the public.

Students who enjoy acting or singing should participate in the performance category. However, talent and dramatic appeal should not eclipse the student's historical research. Students who create



performances gain skills in creative writing, acting or singing, and set/ prop design.

### Website

Historians use websites to present their research digitally to the public, around the world. Students create a website using Weebly, and incorporate multimedia, images, and quotes to support the main argument of their project.

Websites should be clearly written, easy to navigate, and aesthetically designed. Students who create websites need to have access to a computer and internet. They will gain skills in web development, graphic design, and analytical writing.

## History Day Contests

Spring semester is the contest season of National History Day. Contest participation is purely optional, but is also beneficial to students in developing public speaking skills. At the contests, students present their project to a team of judges (often professional historians or educators) who interview the students about their research. Judges rank each entry based on quality of research, relation to theme, and clarity of presentation. At the end of each contest, students receive evaluation sheets with the judging team's critical feedback. Students are encouraged to incorporate the feedback either for classroom credit or advancing to the next contest.

There are three levels to the History Day contests: regional, state, and national. Regional and state contests last a day, while the national contest lasts a week.

### Rules

National History day has rules for how students are expected to conduct themselves at all contest levels.

**Students must adhere to the following general rules applied to all contest entries. Failure to do so might result in a lower ranking, prohibiting the student(s) from advancing.**

- Once an entry has been registered for the contest, additional students may not be added or replaced and the entry may not switch between group and individual.
- Students must set up their own projects, equipment, and props, though they may have reasonable help from an adult for carrying or lifting them.
- Students are responsible for supplying all materials and equipment needed at the contest (including extension cords), unless otherwise specified by the organizer.



- Students should be ready to discuss their projects with the judges, but may not prepare formal statements for the interview.
- Potentially dangerous items (weapons, animals, organisms) are strictly prohibited, but replicas that are clearly not real are allowed.
- Costumes are only allowed in Performance category entries.

**There are only three grounds for disqualification at History Day contests:**

- Reusing or revising any project from a previous year
- Plagiarism or failure to give proper credit to sources
- Tampering with another entry

## Paperwork

In order to assist judges in evaluating the quality of research, all entries must include a title page and annotated bibliography. The title page identifies the name of the entry, who created the entry, and the word count of student-composed text. The annotated bibliography lists the primary and secondary sources referenced in completing the project, and explains well why each source was useful.

Additionally, all entries for exhibit, website, performance, and documentary categories must include a process paper which explain how the student(s) researched and developed their project. Entries for the Paper category do not need to complete a process paper.

Rules for how to compose a title page, process paper, and annotated bibliography may be found online at [www.nhd.org](http://www.nhd.org).

