

September 8:

Week 3: Narrowing the Focus

Understanding the annual theme is an important step to a successful National History Day project. Equally important is narrowing the focus to a topic within that theme that is workable and relevant. Consider the theme “Turning Points in History.” The Civil War is certainly a turning point in American history, but a student could not possibly research and present a project on the entire Civil War within the restrictions of the NHD rules. There is simply too much information. Rather, a student must find a smaller issue within the Civil War on which to focus. Researching and creating a project on the Battle of Gettysburg as a turning point in the war would be much more manageable. But narrowing even further can lead to greater success. Consider a project on how General Robert E. Lee’s own arrogance changed the face of the battle. This is a narrowly focused topic that can easily remain within the confines of the project allowances. This workshop will help students to begin to focus on a manageable topic.

A note about topic choice:

You, as the teacher or sponsor, have a hand in the topic choice of your students. Ultimately, they should choose their own topics, but you might give some boundaries for this choice. You might allow your students to choose any subject matter that interests them. For instance, a student who loves baseball might do a project on Jackie Robinson, or a student musician might explore how music was used on the Civil War Battlefield. While this gives great latitude to the students, they will need guidance in focusing their work. This works best in club or enrichment settings. If you are using NHD as part of a classroom curriculum, you can set some of your own guidelines. For instance, if you are teaching US History, you might limit the project scope to a certain time period (Industrial Revolution). Perhaps you want to limit your projects geographically (New Mexico history), or you might want to tie the project to a general theme of the particular class you are teaching (Immigration for a Human Geography class). You can adapt NHD to fit the needs of your classroom as long as the projects adhere to the annual theme.

Mini-Lesson:

Review the word study assignment from last week to refresh the annual theme in your student's minds. Using the definitions your students created, discuss viable topics for this theme. It would be wise to have a list of suitable topics prepared beforehand. NHD provides a list each year that can be found online. NM NHD provides a list of suitable New Mexico topics. To begin, use broad ideas. With the students, narrow these ideas to a more focused point of view. A graphic organizer such as this will help your students find an interesting and manageable point of view:

Theme

Area of interest or teacher requirement

Broad topic

Narrow Point of View

(Adapted from p. 54, Ch 2 A Guide to Historical Research through the

National History Day Program)

If you are allowing students to choose their topic based on personal interest, use this model:

Innovation in History

Area of interest: Football

Broad Topic: How
broadcasting effected
football

POV:

Instant Replay
Changed the Game

If you are setting parameters based on your course content, use this model:

Theme: Conflict and Compromise in
History

Teacher requirement: New Mexico
History

Broad Topic: The Indian Wars in New
Mexico

POV:

The Taos Revolt of 1847

Once you have demonstrated the use of the graphic organizer, have a discussion with your students about creating a working thesis statement. Point out that the thesis statement will change as they do their research. While the thesis statement will be covered in depth later, student should create a working thesis now. A very simple formula to accomplish this step is:

TOPIC+THEME+IMPACT=THESIS

Work Time:

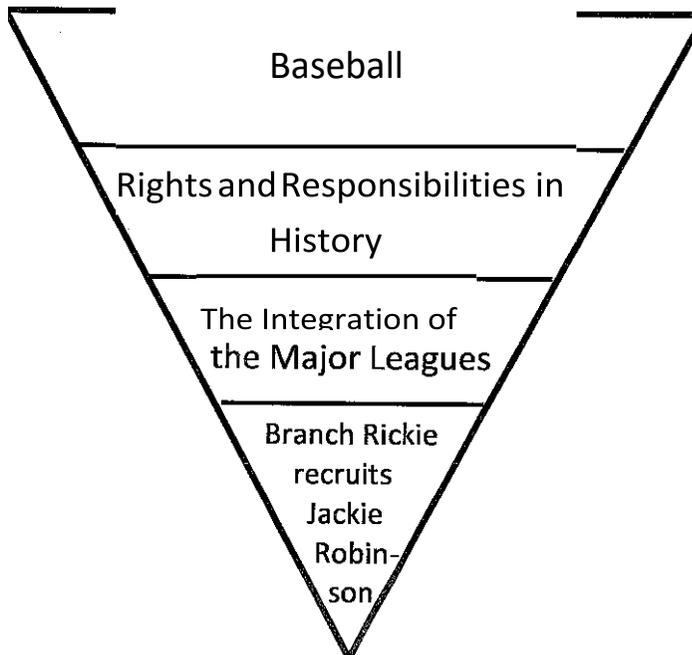
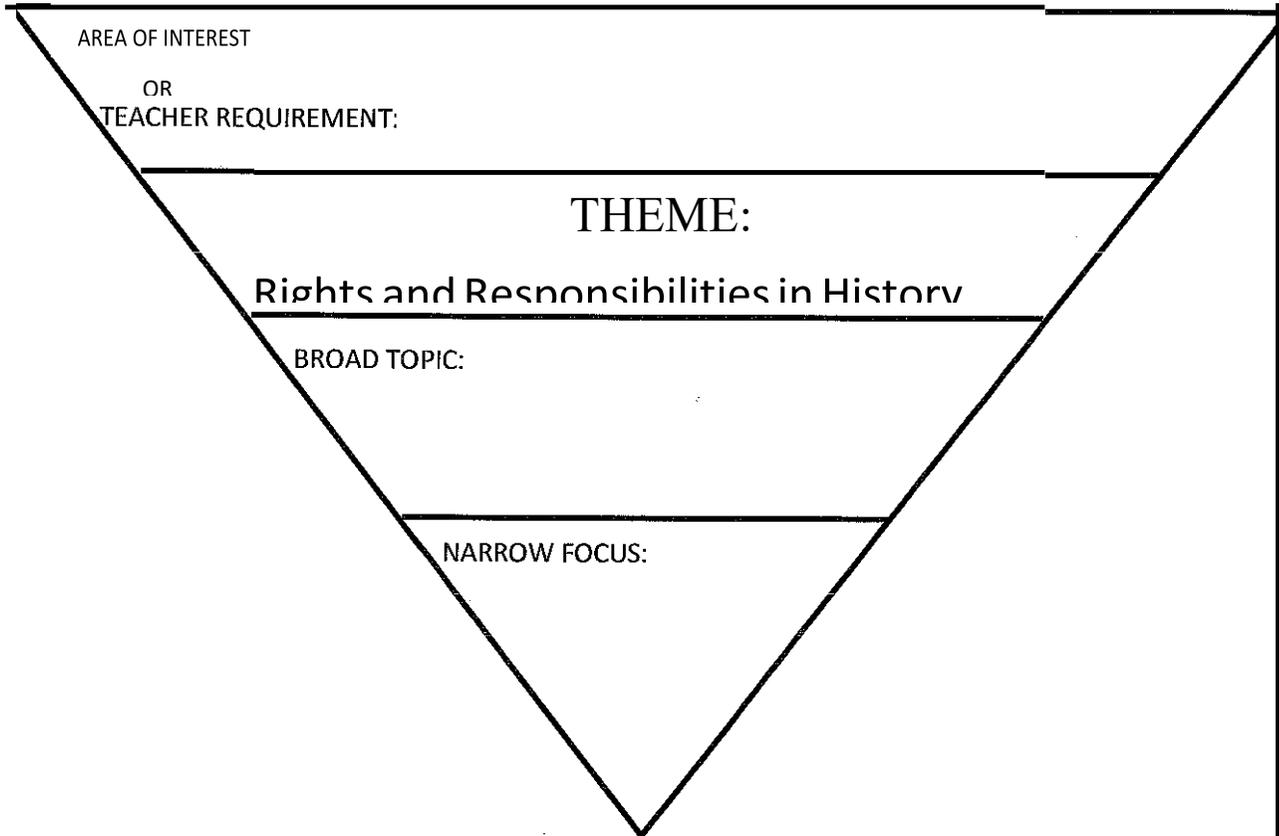
Provide several history compilation books for students to peruse for ideas. Works like *We Were There, Too! Young People in American History* by Phillip Hoose or *That's Not in My American History Book: A Compilation of Little-Known Events and Forgotten Heroes* by Thomas Ayres are an easy way for students to consider many events and people quickly.

Students will complete three topic choice organizers. Once they have narrowed three possible topics, have them do a Wikipedia search of their topics. The goal is to gain a basic understanding of the event/person and determine if there will be enough information available to complete the project. **(Please see the note about Wikipedia below.)** If students are considering working in groups, this could be done together. (Please see note about group projects in the introduction pages).

A note about Wikipedia:

Wikipedia is generally not a good source for students to use for research for two reasons: first, because it can be edited by individuals, the information is not always accurate, although this is improving as time marches on. (For a demonstration of the fluidity of Wikipedia, visit this website or search "Listen to Wikipedia".) Secondly, because it is a compilation website, it is considered a tertiary source. NHD research should focus on primary and secondary sources. This doesn't mean Wikipedia isn't valuable. It is a great starting point for ideas. In addition, entries often have sources listed on the page; this can help students learn where to look for primary and secondary sources. Students should never cite Wikipedia as a source in their bibliographies.

CHOOSING A GREAT NATIONAL HISTORY DAY TOPIC



Working Thesis Statement

TOPIC+THEME+IMPACT

Sample:

THE "SO WHAT" FACTOR

Things to Consider When Selecting a Topic

THEMES:

You may select a topic on any aspect of local, regional, national or world history. Regardless of the topic chosen, the presentation of your research and conclusions must clearly relate to the annual theme. Manage your topic-make it narrow enough to focus your research and interpretation of issues that can be explained and interpreted within the category limits of size and time.

TOPICS:

Effective entries not only describe an event or a development; they also analyze and place it in its historical context.

1. Choose 3 or 4 topics that look interesting to you, then step back and analyze them.
2. While your favorite topic might be interesting and you may be able to find a great deal of material, does the information allow you to:
 - place the topic in historical context that relates to the annual theme?
 - analyze the social, economic, political and cultural aspects of the time period? Are you able to make an argument for your topic that takes the reader through the significant issues? Can you support your conclusions with primary research?
 - offer more than good "description"?
 - analyze your topic to answer the MOST important question-"So what?"
3. Are you able to make a clear and concise argument that shows:
 - how your topic is important?
 - how it developed over time?
 - how it influenced history?

These questions, in addition to the "So What" factor will help you draw conclusions about your topic's significance in history.

4. We encourage you to select topics that really interest you. However, in order to be competitive at the state and national levels, please consider your topic carefully. Topics that focus on more recent events (less than 25 years old) are difficult because their full impact on history may not yet be known. It is difficult to make a significant "So What" argument that takes into account social, economic, political, and cultural ramifications of a recent subject.
5. There are many popular topics that recur every year, no matter what the theme. Examples include various aspects of the Civil Rights movement, WWII Japanese internment, or the sinking of Titanic. If you choose a popular, recurring topic, you should look for a new "twist" in order to make your project stand out. The historian is like a private detective looking for clues that no one else had ever discovered in order to shed new light on a subject.

(Information provided by National History Day in Colorado.
www.nationahistorydayincolorado.org)

Week 4: Note-Taking Skills

Note taking is one of the most important skills that students participating in National History Day will learn or improve. The goal of this lesson is to help students establish a system of recording information that will allow them to process and evaluate ideas, organize information, and present an accurate and complete annotated bibliography. It is highly recommended that you show students an annotated bibliography before they begin taking notes so they can see what is expected in the end. (Two student sample annotated bibliographies-- one junior division and one senior division--are found on the flash drive.) Reiterate to student how much time they will save themselves in the end by collecting publication information as they research.

Because students learn differently, one style of note taking might not fit all of your students. It is best to expose them to several types of note taking and let them choose the way that will allow them to process information most efficiently. Forcing all students to use one particular type of note taking (note cards, for instance) may cause some students to struggle. Try introducing three methods and allowing them to choose which will work best for them.

NOTE CARDS:

Yes, they may be old-fashioned, but note cards do have a place in research, especially for students who are visual learners.

PROS:

- Note cards can be color coded to help students integrate ideas from different sources.
- Note cards can be physically manipulated to help students organize their information.
- Students who think spatially will easily create a "system" for coding and organizing information.
- Note cards help students internalize information as they hand-write their notes.

CONS:

- Students may see this method as outdated.
- Note cards can be cumbersome, and disorganized students may easily lose parts of their research.
- Students who are not visual or spatial learners might struggle with the systematic nature of note cards.
- Students with poor handwriting might struggle with this method of note taking.

RESEARCH LOG:

Having a three-ring binder dedicated to NHD research is another method students might employ. The research log allows students to have a separate page (or pages) for each source. It also allows students to keep photocopies of newspaper or magazine articles, printouts of materials from the internet, etc. in one convenient location.

PROS:

- Keeping a research log helps students internalize ideas because they are handwriting their notes.
- Using a research log can help students who easily lose things stay more **organized**.
- A research log can help students focus on note taking without worrying about organizing information...yet.

CONS:

- The information recorded in a research log format cannot be physically manipulated to organize the project.
- Students who have difficulty with mental organization might find this method difficult.

A sample of the research log note taking sheet can be found on the flash drive.

DIGITAL NOTE TAKING:

Many students will be most comfortable keeping their notes on a computer. While students might find this to be "the easy way out," there still must be a level of organization and accountability.

PROS:

- Many students will be comfortable with this method of note taking.
- Students can manipulate information to organize the project.
- Students will find it quicker to keep notes in this fashion than to hand write them.

CONS:

- Students tend to mingle sources when they keep notes digitally. There is a tendency to keep all of their notes together rather than dividing them according to each source.
- There is a higher chance of plagiarism with this method of note taking because students will wish to cut-and-paste information into their notes.
- Students using digital note taking tend to limit their sources to just internet resources. Encourage (or require) them to branch out to hard copy sources.
- If students are using a classroom computer, they may not have access to their notes to research outside of class. Consider requiring Google Docs as a note taking platform.

The research log found on the flash drive can also be used as a digital template.

Mini-Lesson:

1. Show students a sample annotated bibliography. This will help them understand why it is important to record source information and keep orderly notes.
2. Using material of your choosing, demonstrate for students where to find publication information for several different sources. You might wish to project a copyright page from a book in the classroom and help them identify what information is generally needed in a bibliography.
3. Demonstrate for student how to record this information on each of the types of note-taking devices.
4. Together as a class, take some notes about your chosen topic on each of the three note-taking devices. You don't need to go too deeply at this point...you are simply demonstrating how each type works.
5. Point out some of the pros and cons that are relevant to your class.

WorkTime:

If students have access to classroom computers, help them set up a folder for NHD research on Google docs. In addition, give them a few note cards and a research log sheet. Then, instruct them to return to the three Wikipedia articles they used in their initial investigation last week, and take notes. One article should be explored using each of the three note-taking devices. This will help students discover which method is most comfortable for them. **Make sure they understand that this is just note taking practice. They will not be including the Wikipedia research on their bibliographies because Wikipedia is a tertiary source.** While the notes they take are only for practice, they will be gaining information that will help them when they begin researching primary and secondary sources.

A note about online bibliography services:

Many of your students will want to use an online bibliography organizer like BibMe or EasyBib. While bibliography tools found on the internet can be helpful, they should be used with caution, and they are never a replacement for recording what sources were explored during the research process. While there are no rules against using one of these tools, many have flaws that are apparent in the completed bibliography. For instance, BibMe does not capitalize the words in the title of sources. Many of these tools leave random symbols within the citation. We will revisit this subject later in the curriculum as students prepare their bibliographies. For now, insist that they keep source information on their notes.

Dinner with the President
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:

"Cabinet Dinner in Honor of the President and Mrs. Roosevelt." *New York Times* [New York City] 3 Feb. 1904: 9. Print.

From this source, I got an idea of who was invited to state dinners.

"The Booker T. Washington Papers, Vol. 6, 1901-1902." *University of Illinois Press*. Web. 25 Feb. 2011. <historycooperative.org/btw>.

This particular volume of Booker T. Washington papers allowed me access to telegrams sent between Roosevelt and Washington.

Roosevelt, Theodore to Booker T. Washington. Sept. 14, 1901. Booker T. Washington Papers Collection. University of Illinois Press. Web. Feb. 2011. <historycooperative.org/btw>

This source also provided me with telegrams between Roosevelt and Washington.

Roosevelt, Theodore. Lincoln Day Dinner Address. New York City. Feb. 13, 1905. Keynote address. Web. Feb. 26, 2011. <www.emersonkent.com/speeches/lincoln_dinner_address>

This speech gave me some insight into the views and values of Theodore Roosevelt.

Secondary Sources:

Beyer, Rick. "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?." *The Greatest Presidential Stories Never Told: 100 Tales from History to Astonish, Bewilder & Stupefy*. New York: Collins, 2007. 122-123. Print.

This chapter gave me several quotes and an improvement on my understanding of the impact of Roosevelt's invitation to Booker T. Washington. It also explained how the newspapers portrayed his actions.

Donald, Aida D. *Lion in the White House: A Life of Theodore Roosevelt*. New York: Basic Books, 2007. Print.

This book offered me a better understanding of the inner workings of Roosevelt's administration and the Roosevelts life in the White House.

NOTE CARDS

Note taking is an acquired skill that will help you throughout your academic career. Keeping clear notes helps you organize your information and avoid plagiarism. Here are some guidelines:

1. Create a source card for each source you use. This information should contain all of the information you will be using in your bibliography: author's name, book or magazine title, article title, publisher, publishing date and place, web address, etc... Number or letter each source, and use that number on each note card you take from that source.

Number of card.A
Williams, Roger S. The Wild Side of Conservation. New York: Atlantis Publishing, Inc., 1996. (UHS 1<Amp; i.fcu book with ors autim.)
(Follow correct format (p.20) for CirtallOtl.'I when you make your bibcards. If you do, when it comes time to type your works cited page, all you will ba'III to tto ls put yourcards u l alphabeucal order and type).
"Each bib card ,s numbered. E-:h note card mat corresponds to uus source ls numbered la, lo, lc , etc. This system helps you keep track of notes and lhelps you w!:ien you cite your sources in t'ie body of your paper.

2. Create a note card for each new piece of information you learn. Record facts and figures, quotes, and anything that might be called into question. Unless you are recording a quote, write the information in your own words.

Number or card.S
Headin2: subiect ofnoteand context of infonnation
I EX: Deernonulation -nroblerns with ovemonulation in cities)
Write vour one note here. If it is a direct ouotalion. use ouotlltion marks to show that it ,s. Be sure vou only havç one note. one main idea, one quote, one gwnrnary , or one paraphrase per caret use el lpses l- .. J il you are leavmg part of tie quote out
fn. 1121 page number of information in book, magazine. etc.