NEW!

NHD Contest Rule Book


NHD Contest Evaluation Forms

What is National History Day®?

National History Day (NHD) is a nonprofit organization that creates opportunities for teachers and students to engage in historical research. NHD is not a predetermined, by-the-book program but rather an innovative curriculum framework in which students learn history by selecting topics of interest and launching into year-long research projects. The mission of NHD is to improve the teaching and learning of history in middle and high school. The most visible vehicle is the NHD Contest.

When studying history through historical research, students and teachers practice critical inquiry, asking questions of significance, time, and place. History students become immersed in a detective story. Beginning in the fall, students choose a topic related to the annual theme and conduct extensive primary and secondary research. After analyzing and interpreting their sources and drawing conclusions about their topics’ significance in history, students present their work in original papers, exhibits, performances, websites, or documentaries. These projects are entered into competitions in the spring at local, affiliate, and national levels, where they are evaluated by professional historians and educators. The program culminates at the national competition held each June at the University of Maryland at College Park.

Each year National History Day uses a theme to provide a lens through which students can examine history. The annual theme frames the research for both students and teachers. It is intentionally broad enough that students can select topics from any place (local, national, or world) and any time period in history. Once students choose their topics, they investigate historical context, historical significance, and the topic’s relationship to the theme by conducting research in libraries, archives, and museums; through oral history interviews; and by visiting historic sites.

NHD benefits both teachers and students. For the student, NHD allows control of his or her own learning. Students select topics that match their interests. Program expectations and guidelines are explicitly provided for students, but the research journey is driven by the process and is unique to the topic being researched. Throughout the year, students develop essential life skills by fostering intellectual curiosity. In addition, students develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that will help them manage and use information now and in the future.

The classroom teacher is a student’s greatest ally in the research process. NHD supports teachers by providing instructional materials and hosting workshops at local, affiliate, and national levels. Many teachers find that incorporating the NHD model into their classroom curriculum encourages students to watch for examples of the theme and to identify connections in their study of history across time.

NHD’s work with teachers and students extends beyond the contest and includes institutes and training programs, which provide teachers with opportunities to study history and develop lessons and materials they can share with their students. In addition, NHD offers continuing education courses for teachers (for graduate credit or professional development hours) to improve classroom practice (nhd.org/onlineeducation). NHD also offers teaching resources to help teachers integrate primary sources and critical thinking into the classroom. These resources are free and accessible to all teachers. Visit nhd.org to learn more.
2021 Theme Narrative: Communication in History: The Key to Understanding

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During the 2020-2021 academic year, National History Day (NHD) students will explore topics relating to the theme Communication in History: The Key to Understanding. This theme asks students to consider how people exchange information and interact with each other. Students have the chance to explore how the methods and modes of communication have changed over time, and how they have shaped the present. Major inventions like the telephone, the telegraph, and the television stand out in our minds as obvious examples of how communication has changed over time. Yet, communication is more than just these inventions. It is about how words, thoughts, or ideas are exchanged throughout history.

THE ACT OF COMMUNICATION

Merriam-Webster defines communication as "a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior.” History is filled with stories about people, groups, or nations either communicating or failing to communicate with each other. Before we can understand these stories, we must go beyond common definitions of communication and recognize the many ways people communicate. Only then can we begin to investigate the impact communication has had on social and political changes throughout history.

Let us look at written communication. Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in the 1400s, making it easier to mass-produce the written word. Before that, manuscripts had been written by hand and were only available to the elite. How did the mass production of books and other printed materials help to shape society? Or, consider telecommunication. Students interested in global history might look to the spread of telecommunication lines across the globe. For instance, the development of Australia’s first international telecommunication system linked them to Asia in 1872. How did this development shape international diplomacy?

Students can also research the importance of the radio in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s. The radio provided a more accessible and less expensive way to get updates on popular culture, weather, and daily news. Some students might examine the radio’s role in promoting jazz in...
the 1920s. Others might explore President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s fireside chats. How did President Roosevelt use the radio to communicate with the American people? Why was it important that he did so?

Conventions, exhibitions, movements, and other public gatherings help people communicate ideas and opinions with each other. For instance, World’s Fairs (also known as World Expositions), in which nations showed off their most recent advancements, exploded in the 1800s. Visitors came from all over the world. Why might countries want to communicate their achievements? What specific ideas and information did the nations show the world, and why might that be important?

The 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, Missouri, featured a Palace of Electricity meant to showcase the United States’ achievements in commercializing electricity. Courtesy of the Hornbake Library, University of Maryland.

Another example is the use of conventions by social activists to speak out on topics like abolition, woman suffrage, temperance, and other social reforms. The Declaration of Sentiments address given at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention revealed that suffragists wanted equality and voting rights. How did the suffragists shape their arguments? Was the message they conveyed well-received, or did it lead to a broader discussion? Other students might look to Steve Biko’s speeches and his time with South Africa’s Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s. How did he communicate his demand for an end to apartheid and social unrest in South Africa?

Language is a key way we communicate with each other. Immigrants to the United States often lived and worked in communities alongside others who spoke their native language. Why might they have chosen to do so? Did their language barrier make it harder for immigrants to communicate effectively and adjust to life in the United States?

What restrictions have been placed on language in the past? Students might explore the ban on the native Hawaiian language following the overthrow of Queen Lili’uokalani in 1893. Why was the Hawaiian language banned? Did that action change the way native Hawaiians communicated with each other?

The December 1893 cover of Judge magazine featured a caricature of Queen Lili’uokalani being dethroned by armed American soldiers. The artist’s aggressive imagery and the phrase “We draw the line at this” presented the event as a hostile takeover by the U.S. government. Courtesy of HathiTrust & Digital Library (18811939).

Language does not always involve the physical act of speaking. Developed in the early nineteenth century, American Sign Language (ASL) helped deaf individuals communicate. What barriers did hearing-impaired individuals experience before the use of ASL? Similarly, the written language of Braille has helped the blind community communicate. Who invented it, and why? Did it break barriers or create more challenges?

On a more personal level, students might explore letter writing. How were letters used as a means of communication? What did people write about in letters? Did they write to the government, family, or friends? How does the tone change based on the recipient or the topic? Students might explore letters written by women during the American Civil War and investigate what they wrote about. What was the purpose of the letters? To whom did they send these letters? Why did they feel the need to voice their thoughts during the American Civil War? Others might
explore open letters like the one written by Émile Zola to protest the Dreyfus Affair in France (1894-1906). What consequences did Zola face? How did the event affect the country of France?

Images and imagery, too, can communicate thoughts, opinions, or ideas. Portraits, photographs, and art convey meaning. Students might look to the cave paintings of earlier societies or the hieroglyphs and drawings created by Ancient Egyptians. What do those images convey about their society? Do they communicate what was deemed to be important whether it be about family, war, or society in general? Other examples might include satirical materials from England’s *Punch* weekly magazine. In 1906, *Punch* ran “In the Rubber Coils,” a political cartoon that depicted Belgium’s King Leopold II as a rubber vine coiled around a Congolese man. What is the image trying to convey to the reader about the relationship between Europe and Africa? How do images communicate people’s opinions on important political and social topics? How did political cartoons sway public opinion about support for anti-imperialism measures?

Students might also look at other key ways imagery has communicated opinions or feelings. The invention of the television changed how we communicate and learn about different events. The Vietnam War (1955-1975) divided American public opinion for over 20 years. How was press coverage of the Vietnam War different from that of previous wars? What images of the war did Americans see daily on their television screens? How did photographs and film footage inspire anti-war protests in the United States and abroad? Other students might compare and contrast the footage of the 1968 Democratic and Republican Conventions. How did those broadcasts influence the vote? What was the overall impact on Republican Richard Nixon’s victory over Democratic Vice President Hubert Humphrey?

**THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING**

Communication, in and of itself, is defined by the exchange of ideas, news, or information. Yet, there is another side to communication. Do we understand what is told to us?

American journalist Sydney J. Harris wrote, "The two words ‘information’ and ‘communication’ are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communication is getting through.”

Information is extremely important, but if we fail to get our point across or miscommunicate the information, it often leads to unintended results.

What happens when we do not understand the intended message? How has miscommunication or failure to communicate shaped history? History is riddled with examples of miscommunication that resulted in unwanted consequences. The events at Wounded Knee (1890) between Native Americans engaging in their ancestral ghost dance and U.S. soldiers led to a violent encounter between the two groups. Why? Did both sides understand what the other was doing, or did a lack of understanding lead to violence and chaos?

What happens when miscommunication occurs during war? Students might explore the events of the now-infamous Charge of the Light Brigade during the Crimean War (1853-1856). How did miscommunication affect the battle? What were the consequences of such miscommunication?

Another example of misinformation is the 1898 Spanish-American War. Misinformation and miscommunication led many Americans to blame Spain for the explosion onboard the USS Maine in Havana Harbor. Newspapers ran wild stories about the event. Why did they choose to blame Spain? Why publish such a sensational story? What effect did this story have?

Miscommunication and misinformation can turn countries against each other or turn friends into enemies. Take, for instance, the Bosnian War (1992-1995), which turned

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1 Sydney J. Harris was an American journalist for the *The Chicago Daily News* and *The Chicago Sun-Times* until his death in 1986. His column, "Strictly Personal," was syndicated in over 200 newspapers throughout the United States.
Serbians against their Bosnian and Croatian neighbors. What was communicated? Why? What consequences arose as a result? How did Slobodan Milošević’s fiery rhetoric cause such miscommunication between the nations? How did it affect friends, family, and neighbors who found themselves on opposite sides of the conflict?

**CONCLUSION**

The act of communicating with other people, communities, or nations is often taken for granted. Yet, communication and our ability to understand what is being conveyed is a much more complicated story. In order to understand the role communication plays in history, students will have to understand the historical context of what is being talked about during the period. All communication happens as part of a larger story. In order to understand, we need to know what is motivating people to talk, write, and communicate with each other in the first place.

While this narrative provides examples to help students think about different topics, many more can be found in museums, archives, and related organizations that support NHD student research. Learn more about these NHD partner resources at nhd.org/partner-resources.

To access more theme resources, go to nhd.org/themebook.

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**Know The Rules!**

**Same Contest, New Rules**

REQUIRED PROJECT DOCUMENTS

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

All NHD projects must include an annotated bibliography, a document that allows students to cite their sources and provide brief annotations showing how their sources influenced their project. The annotated bibliography provides a way for judges to better understand the research students conducted, allowing them to determine whether the student conducted wide research, examined both primary and secondary sources, and considered multiple perspectives.

Information about creating annotated bibliographies can be found at nhd.org/annotated-bibliography.

PROCESS PAPER

A process paper is required in all entry categories. It allows students to explain their research process, choices, topic development, and the creation of their entry. It serves as a valuable tool for judges, providing them with insight into topic selection and relationship to the annual theme, the research process, project creation, historical argument, and the significance of the topic in history. More information can be found in the Contest Rule Book available at nhd.org/rulebook.

RESOURCES

A wealth of helpful resources can be found on the NHD website. Teachers and students should become familiar with all the website has to offer.

STUDENT RESOURCES

The “For Students” section of the NHD website provides numerous resources to support students throughout the project process. These resources include contest advice, guidelines for creating annotated bibliographies, tips for conducting appropriate interviews, and reliable research links. In addition, NHD provides historical partner resources for topics such as Women in American History and World War I. Be sure to also check out the annual Ask an NEH Expert web series (nhd.org/nehexperts), a collaboration between NHD and the National Endowment for the Humanities that introduces students to the unique attributes of each NHD project category and offers tips on how to research, construct, and revise NHD projects. Explore NHD Student Resources at nhd.org/student-resources.

TEACHER RESOURCES

At National History Day we believe that we cannot support our students without supporting their teachers. To assist in your classroom, the Teacher Resources page (nhd.org/teacher-resources) provides numerous resources including sample rubrics, grade level-specific guides, lesson plans, and free partner resources. NHD also has numerous webinars and videos to help teachers get started, as well as NHD publications that you can add to your classroom library, such as the Making History Series, which provides step-by-step instructions for creating projects in each of the five contest categories.

You can also follow NHD on multiple social media platforms to stay current on new resources and announcements.

› facebook.com/NationalHistoryDay
› instagram.com/nhdcontest
› twitter.com/NationalHistory
› youtube.com/nationalhistoryday

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In addition to teacher resources, NHD provides various professional development opportunities for teachers, adding new opportunities every year.

› Online webinars and workshops
› Summer institutes
› Live teacher workshops
› Online classroom resources

You can learn more about NHD Professional Development at nhd.org/professional-development.

NATIONAL HISTORY DAY NEWSLETTER

To ensure you never miss an exciting NHD announcement, National History Day provides a free monthly newsletter that focuses on NHD-related opportunities for both teachers and students. Newsletters include regular updates on the program and news about national education trends as they relate to history education and the NHD program.

You can register for the NHD Newsletter at nhd.org/newsletter, where you can also access archived newsletters.
THE CONTEST

BASIC CONTEST INFORMATION

The contest side of NHD can vary by affiliate, since not all contest levels happen in all affiliates. Generally, the progression looks something like this:

District or School → Region → Affiliate → National

Students receive feedback from judges at each contest level. One of the unique aspects of the NHD contest progression is that students who are advancing to the next level are encouraged to apply feedback and make edits to improve their projects. Some affiliates may even offer workshops between contest levels to aid students and teachers. By the time students reach the affiliate and national levels, they often have well-rounded and scholarly research projects ready to share.

For information on registering for the district, region, and affiliate levels of the contest, contact your affiliate coordinator.

THE NATIONAL CONTEST

Students who place first or second at their affiliate contests are eligible to attend the annual NHD National Contest in June at the University of Maryland at College Park. At this stage in the contest, students become members of their affiliate’s National Contest delegation, representing their affiliate on the national stage.

In addition to the competition, students who qualify have the opportunity to participate in various activities, including the NHD Welcome Ceremony; NHD-Explore (NHDx), which allows students to explore the Washington, D.C.-area museums and institutions; and the popular NHD Parade of Affiliates in which students showcase their affiliate pride to kick off the National Contest Award Ceremony.

SPECIAL PRIZES

Special prizes are a way to recognize students’ outstanding work in a specific area of history. In addition to place awards, a variety of special prizes are presented at the National Contest as well as at many affiliate and regional contests. You can visit nhd.org/special-prizes to see the list of current national contest special prizes and learn about their sponsors. Contact your affiliate coordinator for information about special prizes at the affiliate or regional levels.

Additional Questions

Now that you have the National History Day basics down, you are ready to get started. If you have additional questions, reach out to your affiliate coordinator or email your questions to NHD at info@nhd.org.

Happy researching!

To access more theme resources, go to nhd.org/themebook.

Students from Massachusetts and Maryland show their state pride at the Parade of Affiliates. Courtesy of National History Day.