



Welcome to National History Day-CA!

During the 2018-19 program year, students across the country will research topics related to a theme estab-

lished by National History Day®. This year's theme is Triumph and Tragedy in History. The theme is intentionally broad to allow you to select a local, state, national, or world history topic of interest to you and that fits with any school requirements you may have. You will live with your NHD project for a long time. Pick a topic that interests you!

Understanding the Theme What is Triumph and Tragedy?

The first step in developing a NHD project is to understand the theme. You can begin by investigating the definitions of the key words in the theme.

Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (2018) says that triumph is "a victory or conquest by or as if by military force; a notable success." Tragedy is defined as "a disastrous event; calamity; misfortune." Since this year's theme requires students to address triumph and/or tragedy, understanding how narratives of triumph and tragedy play out in history is essential to a successful project.

You should keep in mind, that often the same topic can be viewed as both triumph and tragedy depending on the experience of the participants, the perspective of historians and the passage of time. One person's triumph was often another person's tragedy. For example, the American Civil War was a great triumph of the North over the South, of unionism over sectionalism, of freedom over slavery. But the war also took a terrible toll in human lives, caused widespread destruction and left a legacy of bitterness. In all wars and military encounters there are social disruptions and material costs-winners triumph and losers experience tragedy (2007 Theme Sheet).



Another way to think about the triumph and tragedy is to imagine a balance scale that is heavy on one side. A topic will not be balanced equally with triumphant moments or tragic moments but one will weigh in heavier than the other. Uncovering both sides of any event helps build historical perspective and constructs a stronger historical argument, two essential elements of a successful History Day project (2007 Theme Sheet).

A key element to researching and analyzing a History Day topic is paying close attention to the context of a topic. You will need to ask questions about time, place and context; cause and effect; change over time; and impact and significance. Students must consider not only when and where events happened, but also why they occurred and what factors contributed to their development. Description of the topic must also include an analysis of information and conclusions about how the topic influenced and was influenced by people, ideas or events.

The Toll of Triumph and Tragedy on Society

Triumphs and tragedies have led to significant shifts in history. You will need to consider the significance of your topic by researching how strongly it impacted all aspects of society. Some questions you should consider while conducting your research include:

- How did a triumph and/or tragedy affect a person's choice in where to live, opportunity for education, what religion they can practice (**Cultural/Social Lenses**)
- Do people who are triumphant have responsibilities to society? (**Political Lens**)
- How does a tragedy affect a person's ability to make a living or gain wealth? (**Economic Lens**)
- What happens when a triumph is not evenly applied to all members of a society? (**Cultural/Political/Economic Lenses**)
- Do tragedies also apply to natural resources and animals? (**Economic/Environmental/Political/Lenses**)

One way of discovering potential issues of triumph and tragedy is to identify events in history that precipitated, or came before, a triumph or tragedy. Consider the decision in Brown vs. The Board

of Education of Topeka in the context of the Civil Rights Movement or the Battle of Gettysburg in the context of the Civil War.

Your research and analysis may lead you to conclude that uprisings, revolutions, and civil wars include both elements of the theme. The fall of the Communist bloc in the 1980s was the result of people fighting for the right of individual, economic, and political choice. Lech Walesa's triumphant fight for trade unions in Communist Poland led the Polish people to demand a government that takes responsibility for securing these rights. As the historian, it will be your job to analyze the facts around your topic, determine the triumphs and tragedies, and defend your position with evidence from historical sources.

Thinking Like a Historian

As a history sleuth exploring triumphs and tragedies, you will want to think like a historian. Historical thinking requires that a topic be investigated and researched from different perspectives. Your analysis will need to reflect the following:

Significance: Is your topic significant in history? Why is it important to learn more?

Chronology: Identify key moments in history around your topic and establish the time period.

Turning Points: Think about the continuity and change related to your topic. What are the causes and consequences related to your topic? Is your topic centered on a period of progress or decline?

Context: Use primary sources to think about the context of your topic. Don't forget to take in the point of view of the creator of your documents.

Evidence: Use a broad base of sources to present an argument based on analysis of the evidence.

Historiography: Assess arguments among multiple secondary sources to determine if historians' interpretations differ, or have changed over time.

Historical Lens: Distinguish arguments and emphases in sub-fields of study, including political, economic, environmental, intellectual, social, and cultural history.

Be sure to look at the time at which your topic occurred and try to see it from the perspective of people living in that time and place. You cannot judge history, but instead, try to make sense of it. As you research your topic, find out what was happening at that time in history and what led up to the triumphs and tragedies you are researching. What factors allowed your topic to become important enough to be remembered now?

Sometimes, a triumph or tragedy will lead up to unintended, dramatic changes. For example, Executive Order 9981 was a triumph for civil rights by integrating the military, but it also led southern politicians to pull away from the Democratic Party. Whether it is a war, an environmental issue, an ethical medical case, or an artistic style, find out how your topic initiated a change – how were things dramatically and permanently different because of it.

The Historical Significance of Triumph and Tragedy

Many historians say that triumph and tragedy is a historical theme that reveals itself across space and time. As you examine the changes that were caused either directly or indirectly by your topic, you will want to highlight the circumstances that allowed the original event, action, or idea to become significant. Significant changes can impact how people interact with each other, govern, work, and view the world around them. If the triumph and/or tragedy you are studying continued to be an issue for a long time, what might that mean about the significance of your topic in history?

The historical significance of your topic may be positive or negative. In migration and immigration there were those who triumphed over the odds and others who met tragic fates. In the settlement of the American West, for example, pioneers struggled against elements, the land, and sometimes each other to carve new homes and communities out of the wilderness. Conversely, Native Americans fought the pioneers' encroachment onto the land and the changes in their livelihoods and culture brought by the advance of white settlement. You will want to learn about the people involved with the triumph and/or tragedies – both the people who prospered by it and those who were hurt by it.

Connecting the Elements of the Theme

When you research a topic related to this year's theme: Triumph and Tragedy in History, you most likely will discover that people related to your topic had ideas and were involved in events that directly led to or catalyzed dramatic change. Triumph and tragedy provide you with a framework for organizing your research, thesis statement, and maybe even your project. You may want to draw an image to remind yourself how the pieces fit. Your History Day Teacher/Coach will provide you with options. You will decide the best way to organize the elements of the theme to fit your topic.

Choosing a Topic

After defining the elements of the theme, you will begin to consider possible topics. You probably will start big. Some big topic areas might include people, events, and/or ideas that dramatically changed social conditions for the poor, the way food is grown, political boundaries, or rights of previously oppressed groups of people. Other big topic ideas may come from history's "headlines:" the American Revolution, the French Revolution, Libya's 1969 bloodless revolution, Mahatma Gandhi and India's revolt against British rule, apartheid in South Africa, etc. You may even notice something happening today that makes you wonder about the past. Just remember that you must make the case for your topic to be considered "history." You probably will conduct initial research in a big topic area to learn background information and find a more manageable topic.

Narrowing the Topic

Successful NHD projects do not tackle large topics like World War II. Instead, you should search specific incidents, people, or groups within the larger topic. For example, you might look at the tragedy of displaced citizens as a result of World War II. Or, you might analyze the tragic impact the Scramble for Africa had on the rights of native people and the triumphs implied with colonization and imperialism. The big idea about picking a topic is to narrow it down to a compelling individual, group, event, or idea that ultimately held great significance over time.

Analyzing the Research

National History Day projects emphasize a great deal of research which calls for as much primary source research as possible. NHD projects are much more than just research reports. You are becoming an historian. This means that you will analyze the research. You will study your topic closely, pull apart information, and pay attention to how different sources explain it. You'll notice where different sources are not in agreement with each other. You will pay attention to details about your topic so you can put all the pieces together in a well-organized, logical way when you create your project. As you learn more and more, you want to be able to answer some key questions such as:

1. What is my topic about?
2. Why is it important?
3. What is the larger issue that my topic connects to?
4. How did it happen?
5. Why did it happen?
6. How does it relate to the annual theme?
7. What is the historical significance?
8. Who are the compelling individuals or groups?
9. What is the compelling idea or event?

You are not limited to these questions; however, they might help get you started.

From Analysis to Creating Your Project – The Thesis Statement

You will be developing a project using an argumentative style. This means your project will be logically developed with lots of evidence to support your "argument" or position about the importance of your topic. As you become an expert about your topic, you will write a thesis statement (your argument or position on the topic). Although the thesis statement will appear at the beginning of your project, it will be revised many times and will be one of the last elements you finalize. When you begin to conduct your research, you should write down some focus questions that will help you organize your research. Your thesis statement provides a response to your key questions. You will continue to research your

topic to find more and more evidence to support your thesis/argument. You may discover that your thesis statement changes as you do more research. That's the sign of deep research and analysis.

A thesis statement is a kind of road map for your project. It will tell the audience where you will be taking him or her. Many times, thesis statements make claims that others dispute. If there's nothing controversial in it, it probably is just a summary, not an argument. Questions you may want to ask yourself as you analyze your research and develop your thesis statement include:

1. Did I answer my key questions?
2. Did I take a position or did I simply restate facts?
3. Does my thesis statement show that my topic matters?
4. Did I use the theme in my thesis statement?
5. Did I support my thesis statement with evidence from my research?

As you develop your project, you will visit your thesis frequently. You will most likely end up changing it. Make sure your project's components and evidence are in line with your thesis.

Pulling the Pieces Together – The Historical Significance of Your Topic

The reason for your analysis is to be able to explain why your topic is important in history. If you just told the story of your topic and explained how it connected to the annual theme, you would have developed a fancy summary or book report. As a historian, you are expected to create your own conclusion(s) about the importance of your topic in history. For example, following the triumph of World War II, American racism was seen as the nation's Achilles heel. U.S. allies, as well as critics, questioned whether civil rights abuses undermined our nation's international image, and interfered with its leadership of the free world. Did the tragedy of civil rights abuses impact the triumph of victory? Successful NHD students often explain or show how even topics from very long ago affect us today.

Determining the importance of your topic requires asking and finding answers to questions about time, place, cause and effect, change over time, impact, and significance. Some initial questions include:

- When and why did the triumph or tragedy take place?
- What impact did those victories or struggles have?
- What factors contributed/led up to the victory or struggle?
- Why was there a need for change at the time?
- Why did this event cause a change?
- How were things forever changed because of the triumph or tragedy?
- Why does it matter that triumph or tragedy led to change?

Balancing Your Research

As a historian, you will be an active researcher using primary and secondary sources. You will seek out secondary sources to develop essential background knowledge, understand some of the differences in perspectives about the topic, and help narrow your topic. To the extent possible, you will seek out primary sources to get the "raw" story and first-hand accounts that bring the topic to life. As you conduct your research, you should continually craft new questions and look for contradictions and disagreements among sources. Be aware of bias and point of view.

As with each year's theme, the NHD theme for 2019 is intentionally broad. You'll become an expert on a topic that your teacher and NHD judges might not know a lot about, so be sure that they can easily see the connections between your topic and the theme. Now it's time to dig in!