GETTING STARTED WITH NATIONAL HISTORY DAY IN YOUR CLASSROOM

A resource for guiding your students through the NHD research process.

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National History Day in Pennsylvania (NHD in PA) is a highly-adaptable, highly-impactful program that can be implemented in many different ways to fit your classroom or learning setting in which you are working. Students use inquiry-based learning to develop their critical thinking, reading, research, and communication skills, while also learning about personal responsibility and agency in creating their own success. As an educator, there are many unique benefits that can be gained from implementing NHD in the classroom. Among those benefits are:

- The program is an authentic assessment and allows students to achieve success on their own terms.
- The program model is highly flexible. Teachers shape the project to meet their classroom needs.
- Students take ownership of their work through topic selection, independent research, and project selection. NHD empowers students to make their own choices.
- NHD meets state Social Studies and ELA standards.
- Students learn historical thinking skills and dive deep into historical content.
- The program fosters cooperative learning across disciplines.
- With over 200 teachers doing NHD across the state, there are many opportunities to network with your peers.

NHD provides opportunities for students to research topics that interest them. While engaged in that learning, they practice skills they will use throughout the rest of their educational journey. Students who complete the process will develop research, writing, analytic, and presentation skills that will help them complete future school assignments with ease, thus allowing their self-confidence to grow exponentially. You can use NHD as a unit, but you may find more success doing it as a long-term project. And while NHD has a contest component, the benefit to the student comes from participating in the research process. What other one assignment in your classroom can do all of this?

GETTING STARTED

Step 1: Teach the Theme (Early September or first three days of project)

NHD has a different theme every year, and students must select topics based on that theme. The benefit of focusing on a theme is that it guides students to analyze the information they find through their research, rather than just presenting facts as in a book report. In addition to supporting their thesis, students must make an argument that connects their topic to the annual theme.

The need to build a connection to the theme encourages students to consider historical context, the content that proves that their topic is connected to the theme, and then the consequences of their topic in history and through the present day. Having a theme each year also allows for myriad varieties of projects, even on the same topic.

Step 2: Select a Topic (Mid-September or day four of the first week of project)

The opportunity to pick their own topic makes NHD a special experience for students. Students will become experts in their topic.   They will come to know more about it than any other student, and sometimes even more than their teacher, a liberating experience that fosters real historical inquiry.

Students choose topics for many reasons. Some are interested in science or medicine and want to investigate medical advancements or one of the first female African-American doctors. Some have recently watched a movie on a historical event and are compelled to know more about it. Students often choose to study local events that affect them and their families.

Students need guidance to find a topic. **Topics must be historical, they cannot be current events.** They must fit the NHD theme; which is usually broad enough to accommodate most topics. Teachers must stress to students that they should pick a topic that they love, not a topic that they think will be easy. Many students think a topic like Abraham Lincoln will be less work than a more obscure topic. That is usually not the case--there is a lot out there about Lincoln that they will need to know. Students report that they find that NHD work is most enjoyable when they have chosen a topic that they care about deeply, not when they have chosen a topic that brings up the most hits on their Google search.

At times, students choose a topic and then decide to change. It is effective to allow them to do so without changing the timeline of the project. This gives them the agency to decide if they really dislike the topic they thought they wanted to study, but they are still accountable to the timeframe that the teacher has imposed upon the project.

Choosing a topic is a rare instance when students can direct their course of study, and it is truly empowering.

Step 3: Research (Begin Mid/Late September or by end of first week of project)

The greatest part about NHD is that students engage in high quality research, using the methods of professional historians.

Places to start your research:
- Local museums/historical societies/historical sites
- Library of Congress
- National Archives
- Chronicling America (newspaper archive)
- Online Collections of Universities and Museums
- Books (digital/print)
- Websites of National Organizations and Institutions
- Online National Libraries, Archives, and Directories
- Online Primary Source Repositories (ex: JSTOR)

As students discover both primary and secondary sources online, they need to cite their research properly in an annotated bibliography (Chicago or MLA style) that is sorted by primary and secondary sources. A bibliography creator such as NoodleTools or EasyBib can simplify the process). The bibliography work helps the judges understand how students interpreted their sources. A student will also explain their research process in the required Process Paper (limited to no more than 500 words). All rules can be found in the NHD rule book. **Teacher Tip:** Use Wikipedia for topic ideas, but **do not cite it** in your research, follow links to the original sources.

Step 4: Thesis Building and Historical Argumentation (October-with continued research or second/third week of project)

Contrary to popular belief, a thesis is driven by research, not the other way around. When creating a historical argument, encourage students to include the following:
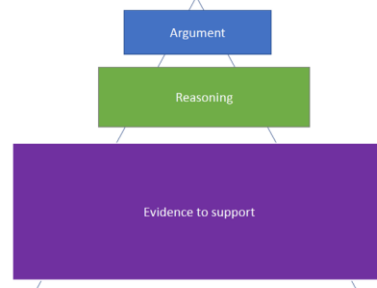
Use primary and secondary source material to help create the thesis. Make sure they are not restating facts, but using the evidence to support their argument and reasoning. If they are struggling to find evidence, they may need to rethink their argument. Students may choose to explore one argument in depth or make multiple arguments that support their thesis. There is no perfect format, it is driven by the topic they are researching.

Step 5: Project Creation (November/December or week four/five of the project-pick the category, outline the key sections of the project: historical context, relation to theme, and historical significance.

NHD allows students to work collaboratively with a group of from two to five students, or individually. There are five different types of projects that students can create:

- Historical Papers (individual only)
- Documentaries
- Performances
- Websites
- Exhibits

Students will also have to create an Annotated Bibliography and Process Paper to submit with their entry.

Scan QR Code for the NHD Rule Book

Teachers should help students pick a type of project that interests them, plays to their strengths, and works for their topic. Many artistic students gravitate towards the exhibit category. Students with topics that are text-heavy and for which there are not many images tend to avoid the documentary category. Provide students with information on the parameters of each type of project so that they can make an informed decision.

Once students have chosen their project category and whether they are working alone or in a group, students need to apply the research that they have already started. Ensure that students have each of the following clearly represented in their project:

- Engaging Title
- Clear thesis that references the theme
- Historical Context
- A precise and detailed argument about how the topic fits the theme
- Analysis of short-term and long-term change as a result of the topic

If any section seems weak or underdeveloped, more research is necessary. It is also essential that students immerse themselves in the NHD rule book which provides guidance on time limits, word count, and other formatting requirements.

Teacher Tip: Rough drafts, storyboards, and outlines can save time in the long run. Asking students to put all the words they will use in their exhibit on a google doc or to submit a preliminary script for a performance or documentary will allow the teacher to provide feedback that can then be incorporated into the project *before* sources and words are pasted onto a board or recorded for a documentary.

Step 6: Revision (December/Early January or week six of the project)

This is one of the most important parts of project creation. Once teachers have provided feedback on rough drafts, storyboards, and scripts, students should be given a limited amount of time to create the actual project. Once the project is complete, teachers and peers should provide more feedback. Ideally, the teacher will use the evaluation form provided by NHD as well as verbal and written suggestions and peer feedback in the form of written suggestions. The more constructive feedback that students receive incrementally, the better their projects will be.

Step 7: Competition (see time periods below)

Should you choose to enter your students in the competition (and seriously, after the work they put in, why not show it off?) the name, National History Day can sometimes create confusion. "NHD is not a day, it's an experience!" Which means there can be several rounds of the competition:

- **School level** (if desired-usually in early January just after winter recess)
- **Regional Contest** (There are twelve Pennsylvania Regional Contests held late January to mid-March)
    - The 1st through 3rd place winners in each category qualify to move on to the State Competition
- **State Contest** (held late April-Early May)
    - The 1st and 2nd place winners in each category qualify to move on to the National Contest
- **National Contest** (held at the University of Maryland in mid-June each year)

It is important to understand that most students who compete will not move on past the Regional Contest. **While the hope of winning the competition might be the motivation for a competitive student or teacher, the real value of the program is the research and critical thinking skills that students learn by creating a project.** NHD in PA is a very competitive program at the state level, and making it to the State Competition is a notable achievement.

Judging: Once your students have finished their projects, their work will undergo an evaluation process.

Judges are people who love history and appreciate students and teachers who share that interest. They are often professionals or volunteers with in-depth historical knowledge. All of them are excited about meeting your students and seeing what they've learned over the past year. Judges will rigorously evaluate your students' research, presentation, technology, and communication skills in a manner appropriate to students' ages and grade levels. Judges also want to help your students gain confidence and encourage their love of history. They want to see you and your students come back for another NHD experience next year.

Judges receive training before they ever meet your students. Regional and State Contest coordinators give judges a variety of resources when they sign up. These include: explanations of the contest theme, judging criteria, and helpful judging tips. Regional and State Contest coordinators also hold in-person judges' training sessions prior to their contests. Training materials emphasize the need for judges to be fair, consistent, open-minded, and respectful. All judges use standard NHD evaluation forms developed by the national organization. You can access them here, or contact the State Coordinator's office.

Judges work in teams to evaluate your students' work. If there are large number of projects in a category, your students may experience two rounds of judging – an initial round and a run-off round. The judges who evaluate run-off entries will be new judges, who have not seen any of these projects before. Judges make their decisions by consensus. They will meet privately after assessing all their assigned projects, discuss each one, and agree on the rankings.

Judges evaluate projects on their historical quality, relation to the year's theme, and clarity of presentation. You can get elaboration on these criteria, along with other contest rules, from the Contest Rule Book at nhd.org. Judges also read students' process papers and annotated bibliographies and consider rule violations and questions they asked your students.

Your students will receive the judges' evaluations, which include comments. The comments should provide a positive, yet critical evaluation of the projects. Judges know that your students have worked very hard for many months and want feedback they can use as a guide for future NHD entries.

Despite extensive training and good intentions there is some subjectivity in the judging process. History itself can be somewhat subjective. Historians think some topics are more important than others, they use different primary sources, and they interpret sources differently, too. Using three judges and the rubric developed by NHD helps limit the subjectivity. But teachers and students can be frustrated by judges' decisions. Please know that these decisions are final. However, if you have any concerns about the judging, please contact your Regional or State Coordinator. Participating as a judge yourself can be a great way to learn about the NHD evaluation process, so long as you avoid judging your own students' work.

RESOURCES FOR USE IN YOUR CLASSROOM FROM NHD IN PENNSYLVANIA:
Please visit https://www.armyheritage.org/programs/education/national-history-day-in-pa/ where you will be able to find a version of this document with links to resources that you can use to gain an even greater understanding of the program as well as videos, files, links, and presentation slides that can provide a greater detail of information about each of the parts of the NHD Process.

Please consider using NHD in your classroom or as a cross-curricular activity with English/Language Arts to help build the research and critical thinking skills that are so important to students as they continue to develop as students and contributing members of society. In addition to research skills, students will also develop public speaking and presentation skills that can serve them well in the future.

Check out the last page for resources that are available from the NHD National Office. They have more contest resources for students and teachers as well as opportunities for Online classes for credits.
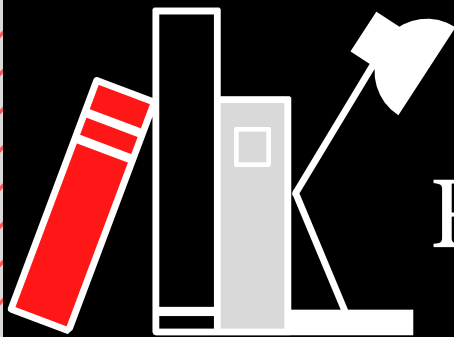
NHD RESOURCES

NHD CONTEST RESOURCES

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CONTEST?

Visit nhd.org/contest to learn more about rules, timelines, and other information relating to the NHD contest.

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CATEGORIES?

Check out nhd.org/categories to explore how-to guides and review questions relating to the different categories.

NEH'S ASK THE EXPERTS

Visit nhd.org/nehexperts for insider tips and training from NEH's experts on helping students create their NHD projects.

LOC'S INSPIRING STUDENT RESEARCH AND HISTORICAL ARGUMENTATION WEBINAR SERIES

Check out nhd.org/library-congress-tps for videos, tips, and resources on inspiring student research and historical argumentation.

NHD THEME BOOK

Want to learn more about this year's theme? Visit nhd.org/themebook for NHD's current theme book, theme video, topic ideas, and graphic organizer.

NHD CONTEST RULE BOOK & EVALUATION FORMS

Have a question on the rules? Review NHD's *Contest Rule Book* at nhd.org/rulebook.

STUDENT RESOURCES PAGE

Encourage students to review nhd.org/student-resources for contest information, rules, topic ideas, and other student materials.

NHD'S TEACHER BAG HAS GONE VIRTUAL!

Follow the link to NHD's virtual teacher bag to find more resources from NHD and our partners!

NHD.ORG/VTB

FOLLOW NHD ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Visit nhd.org/stay-connected to find NHD's social media handles and news feeds.

NHD TEACHER RESOURCES

ONLINE COURSES

Interested in learning more about the NHD program? Check out our online courses at nhd.org/onlineeducation, designed to connect teachers and provide strategies and advice.

PARTNER RESOURCES

Looking for primary sources? Check out nhd.org/partner-resources to find links to different online databases, archives, and resources relating to different world and U.S. history topics.

WORLD WAR I RESOURCES

Visit nhd.org/wwi to find lesson plans, webinars, and other content relating to the Great War.

WOMEN IN HISTORY RESOURCES

Visit nhd.org/herstory to download a free copy of our activity book featuring bell ringers on different women in United States history.

TEACHER RESOURCES PAGE

Check out nhd.org/teacher-resources for lesson plans, activities, and other classroom materials designed by teachers for teachers.

NHD'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Head over to NHD's YouTube Channel youtube.com/nationalhistory to watch short-form videos and webinars from NHD and our partners.