

# Meeting the Standards

## NHD in Today's Classroom

### NATIONAL HISTORY DAY AND NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

The purpose of this document is to encourage participation in National History Day while illustrating how such participation supports teachers and students in meeting local, state and particularly national educational standards as teachers integrate History Day into their classroom teaching and curriculum. In this document, the History Day process is aligned with the national standards in history and English language arts. But each individual History Day entry also meets numerous specific American or world history standards unique to a particular student entry. Each state has its own state history and language standards. The alignment of activities leading to involvement in National History Day and national standards should aid in aligning local History Day programs with state standards.

### WHAT IS NATIONAL HISTORY DAY?

National History Day is a year-long program which uses history to challenge students in grades 6-12 to improve their research, analytical, and communication skills. In groups or individually, students conduct research on topics related to a broad theme which changes annually. The search for primary and secondary sources leads students to libraries, archives, historical societies, and museums; many conduct oral history interviews. They then present their findings in research or creative papers, museum-style exhibits, original dramatic performances, or multimedia documentaries. Students may enter History Day contests at the school or local level, with winners in each category and division advancing to state contests, then to the national contest, held each June at the University of Maryland at College Park. At every level, panels of judges consisting of history educators, public historians, or academic historians evaluate the entries and provide constructive feedback to the students. Many teachers, parents, school administrators, and community members find National History Day to be an exemplary program illustrating what educational reform and the raising of standards are trying to accomplish – the development of knowledgeable, skilled, creative, enthusiastic learners and citizens.

### STEP 1: SELECTING A TOPIC AND CREATING A RESEARCH PLAN

Students begin work on a History Day entry by choosing a topic, usually starting with a broad preliminary

area of interest and then narrowing it down. While investigating potential subjects, students need to determine if there are sufficient primary and secondary sources available to support an entry. They must make sure that their topic is related to the annual theme and that they can explain its significance in history. The annual theme is broad enough to allow students to study world, national, state, or local history, depending on their interests and their teachers' requirements. For example, past NHD themes include "Turning Points in History: People, Ideas, Events" and "Triumph and Tragedy in History." The flexibility of the theme encourages students to pursue subjects which interest them; many research events or issues related to their family or community. After choosing a topic, students develop a research plan. They must set goals, form hypotheses and create thesis statements or questions to guide their research, and meet deadlines. Both in the details as well as the process, students develop and reinforce positive attitudes about their abilities and potential as learners and persons.

### Corresponding Standards in Historical Thinking:

- 4A Formulate historical questions.
- 4B Obtain historical data.
- 4C Interrogate historical data.
- 5A Identify issues and problems in the past.
- 5C Identify relevant historical antecedents.

### STEP 2: RESEARCHING THE HISTORY DAY ENTRY

While researching their History Day entries, students become empowered, engaged and excited learners. They become historians who *do* history rather than just read *about* history in textbooks, in the process mastering historical knowledge and developing historical thinking skills that transfer to other areas of their lives. They begin the research process by identifying and reading secondary sources such as monographs, articles, and encyclopedias. These sources provide students with an overview of their topic and an understanding of its broader historical context. Often, students will contact experts for additional information or suggestions for other sources. After doing this background research, students are then ready to do more in-depth research in primary sources. The quest for primary sources may take them to libraries, museums, archives, historical societies, or historic sites as well as to the Internet. They may conduct oral history interviews

with participants in the events they are studying. Frequently, they look for non-textual sources such as photographs, maps, videos, and artifacts. Students must then analyze their sources, reconstructing the meaning and evaluating the bias and credibility of each source. They should take notes and keep their notes well-organized. They should look critically at their own research and make sure that they have considered all appropriate perspectives; they should identify weak areas that require additional investigation.

### **Corresponding Standards in Historical Thinking:**

- 1B Identify in historical narratives the temporal structure of a historical narrative or story.
- 1D Measure and calculate calendar time.
- 2A Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage.
- 2B Identify the central question(s) the historical narrative addresses.
- 2C Read historical narratives imaginatively.
- 2D Evidence historical perspectives.
- 2E Draw upon data in historical maps.
- 2F Utilize visual and mathematical data presented in charts, tables, pie and bar graphs, flow charts, Venn diagrams, and other graphic organizers.
- 2G Draw upon visual, literary, and musical scores.
- 3A Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative.
- 3C Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations.
- 3D Consider multiple perspectives.
- 3E Analyze cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation, including the importance of the individual, the influence of ideas, and the role of chance.
- 3G Compare competing historical narratives.
- 3H Hold interpretations of history as tentative.
- 3I Evaluate major debates among historians.
- 4B Obtain historical data.
- 4C Interrogate historical data.
- 4D Identify the gaps in the available records, marshal contextual knowledge and perspectives of the time and place, and construct a sound historical interpretation.
- 5C Identify relevant historical antecedents.

### **Corresponding Standards for the English Language Arts:**

- 1 Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
- 3 Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
- 7 Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- 8 Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

### **STEP 3: DEVELOPING AN INTERPRETATION**

Even as they conduct their research, students begin to develop their own interpretation of their topic. They must analyze and synthesize the information they have discovered in their primary sources and construct their own historical narrative, organizing their material chronologically or topically. Their interpretation should be balanced, incorporating all relevant perspectives. For a business topic, for example, they should consider the views of workers as well as owners; for political issues or events, they should consider the opinions and actions of opponents as well as supporters. Their interpretation should place their subject into historical context – its intellectual, physical, social, and cultural setting. They must also provide historical perspective on their topic, explaining its causes and consequences, or, for a family or local history topic, how it relates to larger events or trends.

## Corresponding Standards in Historical Thinking:

- 1A Distinguish between past, present, and future time.
- 1C Establish temporal order in constructing historical narratives of their own.
- 1F Reconstruct patterns of historical succession and duration.
- 2D Evidence historical perspectives.
- 3A Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative.
- 3B Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions.
- 3C Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations.
- 3D Consider multiple perspectives.
- 3E Analyze cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation, including the importance of the individual, the influence of ideas, and the role of chance.
- 3F Challenge arguments of historical inevitability.
- 3G Compare competing historical narratives.
- 3H Hold interpretations of history as tentative.
- 4C Interrogate historical data.
- 4D Identify the gaps in the available records, marshal contextual knowledge and perspectives of the time and place, and construct a sound historical interpretation.
- 5B Marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances and contemporary factors contributing to problems and alternative courses of action.

## Corresponding Standards for the English Language Arts:

- 7 Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

## STEP 4: CREATING AND PRESENTING THE HISTORY DAY ENTRY

As they do their research and develop their interpretations, students must consider which category is the most appropriate way of presenting their research and analysis. Students present their History Day entries in one of four formats:

**Historical Paper** – a paper is the traditional form for presenting historical research and interpretation. As an alternative to a research paper, students may choose to write an historically-based creative paper, such as a fictional diary or an epic poem.

**Exhibit** – an exhibit is a visual representation of a topic and its significance in history, much like a small museum exhibit. Labels and captions should be used creatively with visual images and objects to enhance the message of the exhibit.

**Documentary** – a documentary may take the form of a videotape, slide show, Power Point presentation, or similar types of multimedia presentations. It uses images such as film, video, or photographs and audio such as music, excerpts from tapes, and voice-overs to present a topic.

**Performance** – a performance is a dramatic portrayal of a topic and its significance in history. It should be original and creative, not simply an oral report or a recitation of facts.

Every entry must include an annotated bibliography, separated into primary and secondary sources. In every category except papers, students must also write a 500-word process paper explaining how they conducted their research and developed their entries. The process paper concludes with an explanation of how the topic relates to the annual theme.

At each level of the contest, students present their work to a team of judges. The judges review the entries and the written materials and interview the students. They provide constructive written comments, which students may use to revise their entries before the next level of the contest.

## Corresponding Standards for the English Language Arts:

- 4 Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- 5 Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
- 6 Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
- 7 Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- 8 Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
- 12 Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

## BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION FOR TEACHERS

For teachers, National History Day

- is a model teaching tool for the classroom, based on active learning;
- meets the requirements of state and national education standards;
- provides an excellent assessment tool;
- integrates the study of history with other disciplines, including writing, the arts, and other social sciences;
- supplies curricular aids such as lesson plans and resource guides;
- supports professional development by offering workshops and summer institutes where they may learn about the latest in historical scholarship and new teaching methods and techniques;

- encourages interaction with academic historians, librarians, archivists, and public historians;
- involves families and communities in support of education.

Simply...

what National History Day promotes is a better-informed citizen in a democracy where problem solving, clarity of thought, in-depth research, character and rigorous academic learning are encouraged.

## Bibliography

*National Standards for History*. Rev. ed. Los Angeles, CA: National Center for History in the Schools, 1996.

*Standards for the English Language Arts*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, and Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1996.

Author Mark Gale is a longtime History Day advisor and history teacher in Coupeville, Washington. In 1995, he was named National History Day's Teacher of the Year. He has involved more than 1,000 students from his small, rural public school during 18 years of participation in History Day. Some 154 students have advanced to the national contest, 28 of whom have made it to the finals. From 1992-1994, he worked on the national history standards. Mr. Gale has a Masters in Education degree with an emphasis in Curriculum and Instruction. He has been a Fulbright Fellow, NEH Fellow and Wallace Research Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society Research Library in Worcester, Massachusetts.

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