

# NATIONAL HISTORY DAY TEACHER GUIDEBOOK 2021-2022



WISCONSIN  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU START .....	3
TOPIC.....	4
CONDUCTING RESEARCH.....	6
ENGAGING WITH SOURCES & HISTORICAL ANALYSIS .....	7
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES.....	9
HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	9
HISTORICAL ARGUMENT .....	11
PROJECT CREATION .....	12

## *QUESTIONS?*

Contact NHD in Wisconsin at  
[historyday@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:historyday@wisconsinhistory.org)

The National History Day in Wisconsin office at the Wisconsin Historical Society has based this manual upon material from the National Office of NHD.

# Questions to ask before you start

## *Grading*

- Which classes/students will do NHD?
- Will this be optional or required?
- What percentage of their grade will this be?
- Will this be completed mostly in class, outside of class, or split?
- Will you be checking in weekly, have major deadlines, or a combination?

## *Project Options*

- Can students work in groups? (no more than 5 students per group for competition)
  - o If yes, are you going to allow groups with members from different classes?
  - o To help students decide whether a group or individual project is the best fit for them there is a worksheet on p.1 of the Resource Book.
- Can students select any of the 5 project categories?
  - o If not, which ones?
- Will student topic choice be limited in any way? Such as time period or region? (There are no limits in the competition cycle; anything that goes with the theme is fair game!)

## *Work-in-Progress*

- Does your library have resources you can use?
- Do you need to reserve library time or library instruction on how to research?
- Are there local public libraries or college/university libraries students can use?
  - o Which ones and are you thinking about planning a visit?
    - Looking for local Area Research Centers? You can find a list here: <https://wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS4000>
  - o Outside of class or field trip?
    - You can schedule an NHD focused tour at the Wisconsin Historical Museum.
- Are there other departments you can collaborate with? English, Technology, Art?
- Do you plan on sending a letter home to parents?
- When do the projects have to be completed and when do you have to input grades?

# Topic

The first step in the process of creating an NHD project is selecting a topic. The questions below can help guide students. A topic selection activity can be found on p.2 of the Resource Book.

## Questions students should ask when selecting a topic

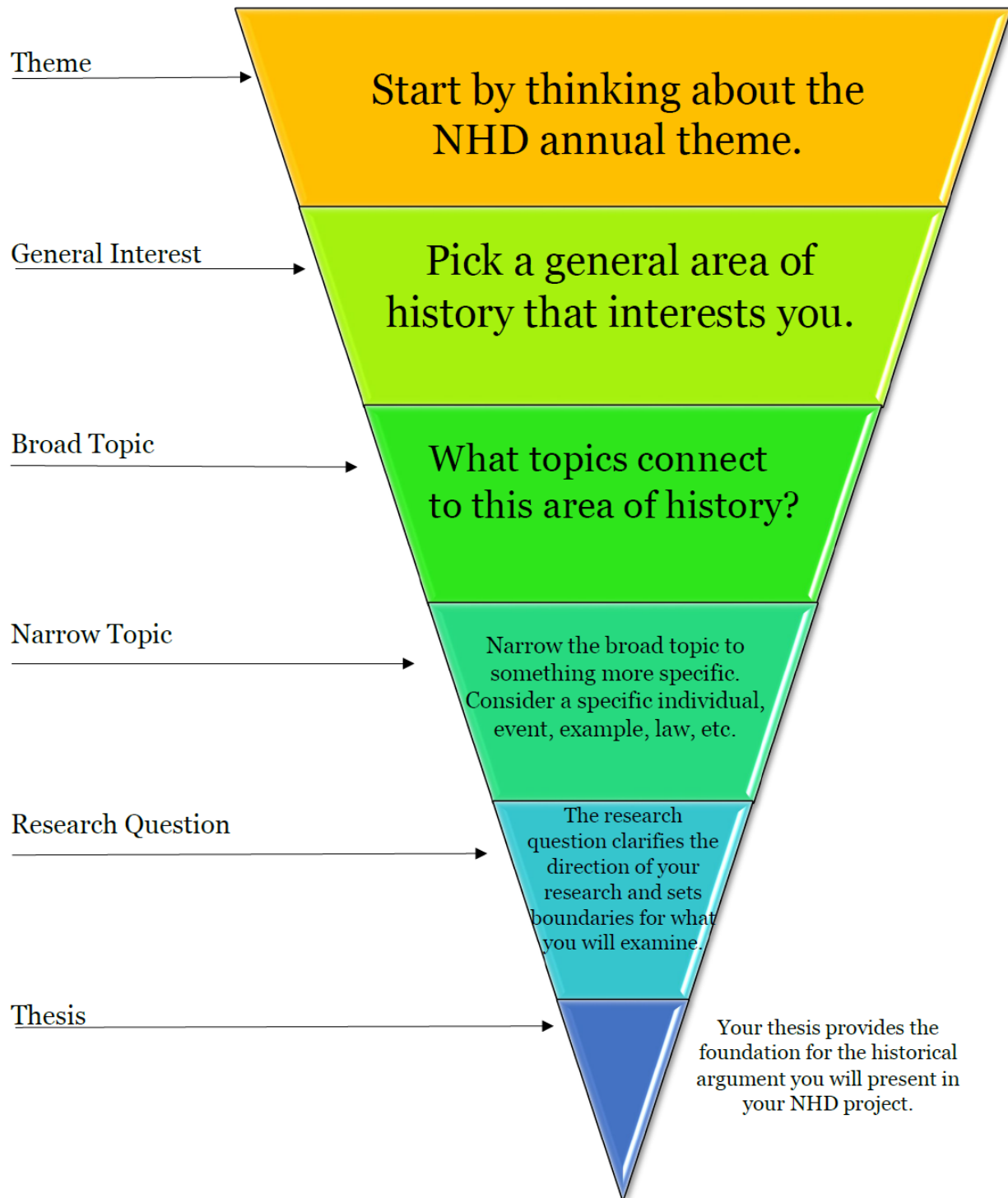
- ✓ Will this topic hold my interest over time?
  - Students can gravitate towards familiar topics, but this is a chance to explore history they want to know more about.
- ✓ Is this topic historical (as opposed to current events)?
  - Distance allows for historical analysis versus personal reaction
- ✓ Are there sufficient sources to fully research my topic?
  - Both primary and secondary sources are necessary to complete a successful historical argument.
- ✓ Did I narrow my topic enough?
  - Too big and students cannot cover everything to make a convincing argument.
- ✓ Is my topic historically significant? Will I be able to answer the “so what” question?
  - What occurred as a result of the topic? Did it have an impact on society or the course of human events?

When choosing a topic students will also be developing their historical research question. A thoughtful research question helps to frame their investigation and connect the theme to their research and analysis.

## Good questions are:

- **Debatable**
  - A good question is not answered with a simple yes or no response.
- **Narrow**
  - Students need to provide a credible and concise answer to their question.
- **Significant**
  - Students work to understand the larger themes in history and the consequences of historical events.
- **Researchable**
  - Both primary and secondary sources need to be available, if both do not exist students will struggle to craft a project.

The **Funnel Method** is one way to help narrow a student's interest into a concrete research question and project topic. A blank funnel method is available on p.3 of the Resource Book.



# Conducting Research

Research will happen in stages and having a solid historical question will guide them in this process. Students will first need to build background knowledge and this early research typically focuses on who, what, when, where, why questions as they construct a framework or timeline for their topic. Secondary sources are a great place to start when conducting research to help students develop this well-rounded knowledge of their topic. By the end of the first stage students should have a working thesis or a possible answer to the historical question they posed at the start of their research.

The second stage of research should delve into exploring primary sources and using historical analysis. They will need to discover if the evidence available supports their developing historical argument.

## Sources should be:

- Credible
  - Likely to be believed
- Reliable
  - One that we can trust, have faith in, or feel is dependable
  - Provide a thorough, well-reasoned argument supported by compelling evidence

**Note:** Organizing sources is also important as research proceeds in order to put together a complete annotated bibliography.

Consider an organization method like index cards or the Cornell Notes System as a way to aid your resource gathering. Check out the Resource Book for an example on p.4.

**Primary sources** are a firsthand account of the topic and are created by someone who participated in or observed the event (eyewitness account).

## Examples:

- ✓ Diaries
- ✓ Letters
- ✓ Archival Collections
- ✓ Photographs
- ✓ Government Documents
- ✓ News Footage
- ✓ Autobiographies
- ✓ Oral Histories
- ✓ Speeches
- ✓ Artifacts

**Secondary sources** are created after an event and by someone who did not participate in the event. They analyze or interpret the primary sources but do not provide the firsthand account that a primary source does.

### Examples:

- ✓ Textbooks
- ✓ Books
- ✓ Biographies
- ✓ Documentaries
- ✓ Journal Articles
- ✓ Reviews or Essays
- ✓ Text labels in a museum exhibits

Deciding if a source is primary or secondary can be tricky. A newspaper article is a great example of this because it can be secondary when an article is written 75 years after an event occurred and primary when it written by a person who experienced the event as it happened. It is important that students consider who created the source and their link to the event. Many secondary sources also contain primary sources as they use them to explain their interpretation of events, but the overall source is secondary.

An activity to practice identifying primary and secondary sources is available on p. 5 of the Resource Book and after students are feeling more comfortable there is another activity for source practice on p. 6. Once students are comfortable with sources there are 2 worksheets to help students with historical research and research strategy on pp.8-10 of the Resource Book.

## Engaging with Sources & Historical Analysis

After finding sources students must engage with the sources by analyzing them and thinking historically. This means that they need to think beyond the dates, names, and events. They must ask historical questions and answer them with evidence from the sources they've collected. By engaging with historical interpretations and creating their own narrative and arguments based on this evidence students are thinking historically!

A great activity for teaching this to students is to have them analyze a primary source (visual ones work well!) and find out the **who** (author and subject), **what** (is it depicting), **where** (location & source) and **when** of the source. You can find primary (p.11) and secondary (p.12) source analysis sheets in the Resource Book.

## Analyzing Secondary Sources

### Secondary sources are great for:

- Understanding a topic and how historical events unfolded over time
- Learning more about the topic's historical context or background
- Understanding how historians have written about a topic (historical interpretations)
- Finding more sources

### Questions to ask when analyzing:

- ✓ Who is the author and what are their qualifications?
- ✓ What is their purpose behind writing this piece?
- ✓ Does the author have any bias?
- ✓ Does the evidence support the author's argument?
- ✓ How do the conclusions of this author compare with other sources you have read?

## Analyzing Primary Sources

### Primary sources are great for:

- Learning how people experienced historical events
- Considering different perspectives on the same event or issue
- Drawing their own conclusions about what documents say about events
- Providing evidence for their thesis

### Questions for analyzing Primary Sources:

- ✓ What kind of source is it? (document, photograph, letter, etc...)
- ✓ Who created it? What do you know about them? Are they trustworthy?
- ✓ When and where was this source created? How does it fit into the larger context?
- ✓ Why did the author create this source? What was their motivation?
- ✓ Has the source been altered or edited in any way?
- ✓ What biases may the author have?
- ✓ Who is the intended audience?
- ✓ What historical meaning can you obtain from this source?
- ✓ What was the significance of this source when it was created?
- ✓ How could it be used for evidence for my project?



# Historical Perspectives

Considering multiple points of view helps students to create a project that shows a fuller understanding of the event/issue they are researching.

## Students should consider when looking at their sources:

- ✓ How close their source was to the events they are describing- a participant or witness?
- ✓ How might this person's access to power shape their perspective?
  - Do they have rights, privileges, or access not shared by others?
  - Were they educated?
  - Was this person free to act the way they wanted to or were they constrained by societal norms or laws?
- ✓ What were their motivations or beliefs?
- ✓ How did their circumstances color their understanding of historical events?
  - How does the historical figure's perspective compare to others who come from different circumstances?
  - Which viewpoints overlap and which are different?

Researching different perspectives on the issue will also help in detecting bias that may appear in the sources.

Identifying different points of view can be done with the POV worksheet on p.13 of the Resource Book.

# Historical Context

Topics need to be set within historical context, which means that students should explain the project's relationship to its broader political, economic, social, cultural or intellectual setting and background. This helps to explain why events unfolded at a particular time and place in history.

Students need to be aware that context and cause are separate.

**Cause** is often the event, person or idea that starts change.

**Context** is the influence of the world around a person or event.

## Contextualizing a Source

These 3 questions help with contextualizing a source, which is part of analyzing historical perspective:

- ✓ When and where was the source created?
- ✓ What was different then? What was the same?
- ✓ How might the circumstances in which the source was created affect its content?

One strategy students can use to help them with contextualizing sources is creating a timeline. Note when the source was created (before, after, during the event), who created it (someone who supported or opposed the event or even someone not directly there) and did the creator have direct knowledge of the event or what was happening?

## Placing in Historical Context

While sources need context, the entire topic needs to be placed into broader historical context as well. By placing a topic into historical context it will:

- Frame the topic for the reader by discussing relevant political, economic, social, cultural, religious, or intellectual factors
- Place the topic in its proper time and space
- Provide the background needed to help the viewer understand how and why events unfolded as they did
- Consider both “Big C”(global context) and “little c”(local factors) contextual factors

A great way to practice this is with the Historical Context activity on p.14 of the Resource Book.

## Impact & Significance

This can be framed as the “so what?” Students need to answer the question of why does this topic matter and what its historical significance is. They must present conclusion to the following questions:

- ✓ What are the short-term effects of my topic?
- ✓ What are the long-term effects of my topic?
- ✓ What change over time can we see because of my topic?

As they are researching students are looking at their sources and aiming to answer the all-important question of: **What changed and why is that so important?**

## Historical Argument

Students must create their own argument using an active voice and the synthesized information they have collected and analyzed. The thesis statement, which will be at the start of the project, will be the guide that tells us what the student's project will prove. It is the roadmap for the project that guides us through the historical argument.

**Thesis** is a short statement that tells the reader or viewer what the author will prove in their project.

### Elements of a Historical Argument

- Thesis & Introduction
- Theme Connection (If competing)
- Background and Context
- What Happened?
- Multiple Perspectives
- Significance (both short and long term impact)
- Conclusion

**Historical Argument** is a conclusion or interpretation of a topic's significance in history supported by the evidence.

## Thesis

After undertaking their research students will draft a working thesis and test their sources against their thesis to see if their evidence supports it. A thesis should evolve as students work on their project and find new evidence or develop their interpretation.

### A strong thesis will:

- Summarize and present the project's argument in one to three sentences
- Take a stand.
  - It should be debatable and something the student can prove in their project.
- Have a narrow and specific focus
- Explain why the topic is historically significant
- Provide general direction about the topic
- Be written as a statement
- Present historical analysis
- If competing, tell the viewer how the project relates to the NHD annual theme.

Students can test out their thesis (p.15) and strengthen their thesis (p.16) using the activities in the Resource Book.

## Project Creation

The final step is for students to take all of the required parts and assemble all of the pieces to create their project. One helpful point for students is to have a required written materials checklist for them to double check that they have all of necessary parts of their project. There is one for each project category located in the Resource Workbook (pp. 18-27). If your students are participating in the NHD contest, please look over the Contest Guide to see additional information for participating in the Regional and State contests.

### Students should:

- ✓ Decide on their project style after completing their research.
  - Certain projects lend themselves to certain types of evidence. Lots of visual evidence- Try a documentary, website or exhibit. Lots of textual sources- Try a performance or paper.
  - What category is best for my skills or interests?
- ✓ If they plan on competing at a NHD regional contest have them review the NHD Rulebook ([nhd.org/rulebook](http://nhd.org/rulebook)) for the individual category rules and overall rules for projects. There are additional steps that students will need to take.