

Selecting a Topic

To choose a topic, you should first begin by thinking about the theme. What does the theme mean? What events, people, and ideas could fit within the theme? Look at the sample list of topics on the National History Day website. Try to use the list as a source of inspiration rather than a list of specific topics. Write down several ideas that come to you. Discuss the theme and contest with your friends, family, and teachers. Do they have topic ideas that interest you? Add them to your list.

Once you have a list of ideas, check each one by using the following questions:

- Does your topic fit into this year's theme of History Day? Will you be able to explain its tie to the theme within your project? If you were asked by a judge to explain the correlation, would you be able to do so? A thesis statement will help do this.
- Can you analyze your topic? Though every event and action that occurred in the past is now part of history, some events were simply part of history while others helped shape history. Judges are looking for topics that helped shape history and they want you to tell them the "hows and whys" history was shaped in your project. Can you do this with your topic?
- Is your topic too small? The answer to this question will almost entirely be based on the number of available resources. Will you be able to find enough resources for your topic?
- Is your topic too large? This is a more common problem. If your topic is too large then there are too many resources to read. You would spend all your time summarizing the event rather than analyzing why it was important.
- Are there primary sources available for your topic? Some topics have numerous primary sources while others have few or none available. The most successful projects use an abundance of primary sources.
- If you are making an exhibit or documentary, will you be able to find enough photographs and/or images? If your topic is before the mid-1800s you will likely have a difficult time finding images to use.
- Is your topic unique? If you are the only person with your topic you will look original and interesting when compared with others' projects.
- Will you enjoy researching and learning about this topic? History should be fun to learn. If you dislike your topic before you start, you will not like it any more as you continue to research and prepare your project. Choose a topic that makes you want to learn more.