



Welcome to National History Day-CA!

During the 2019-20 program year, students across the country will research topics related to a theme estab-

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

Understanding the Theme

What is a barrier and how do you break it?

The first step in developing an NHD project is to understand the theme. You can begin by investigating the definitions of the key words in the theme. While the theme seems straight forward, you should understand the difference between encountering a barrier, cracking a barrier, and breaking a barrier. Before you choose your topic, first consider what is a barrier?



A barrier is:

- Something that impedes or separates
- Natural formation that blocks or intends to block passage
- An obstacle

Barriers aren't always physical barriers. Some barriers may be laws, ideas, social, or cultural barriers.

Next, what is the difference between encountering a barrier and breaking a barrier? Encountering a barrier is coming up against an obstacle; whereas breaking a barrier is overcoming the obstacle, leading to an outcome or change. Just as a barrier can be either positive or negative, so can the outcome. Carefully consider what the barrier is, how it was broken, and the lasting impact or change when choosing your history day topic.

The historical consideration is important

Breaking barriers in history 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 barrier 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. You will want to learn about the people involved with the barrier – both the people who prospered by it and those who were hurt by it. Crusaders in the middle ages broke geographical, political, and religious barriers between the Christian and the Muslim worlds, seeking to expand Christianity's influence. How did breaking this barrier impact the European control and influence over empires in both Europe and the Medieval Muslim World? What could be some of the possible negative and positive consequences of the Crusades?

Choosing a Topic

After learning the different elements of the theme, you will begin to consider possible topics. You probably will start with big ideas. Some broad 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." Conduct initial research in a big topic area to learn background information in order to find a manageable topic.

Narrowing the Topic

Successful NHD projects do not tackle large topics like World War II or Imperialism. Instead, you

should search specific incidents, people, or groups within the larger topic. For example, you might narrow World War II by looking at the Siege of Leningrad. Or, you might analyze the role of anti-malaria medication in European expansion in Africa. 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.

Connecting the Elements of the Theme

When you research a topic related to this year's theme: Breaking Barriers 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. Breaking Barriers in History provides 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.

Thinking Like a Historian

As a history sleuth exploring broken barriers in history, 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 consider 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.

Multiple Perspectives: How did the people of the past view their world? Did everyone have the same point of view or experience?

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.

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

Be sure to look at the time period when your topic occurred and try to view 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 barriers you are researching. What factors allowed your topic to become important enough to be remembered now?

Sometimes, breaking a barrier will lead up to unintended, dramatic changes. For example, when Richard Nixon decided to visit China in 1972, he broke the barrier of previous US foreign relation policies. As a result, this opened up a divide between China and the Soviet Union leading to a shift in the Cold War balance. Whether your topic 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.

Context Matters

A key element to researching and analyzing a History Day topic is to pay close attention to the context of the topic. You will need to ask questions about time, and place; 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.

One way of discovering the context of breaking a barrier is to identify events in history that precipitated, or came before the barrier. Consider the decision in *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka* in the context of the Civil Rights Movement or the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in the context of ending slavery in the United States.

As the historian, it will be your job to analyze the facts around your topic, determine how and why the barriers were broken; then defend your conclusions with evidence from historical sources.

Analyzing the Research

National History Day projects focus on primary sources as evidence, requiring deep research. NHD projects are much more than just research reports. You are becoming an historian: analyze the research; study your topic closely; pull apart information; and pay attention to how different sources explain it. You will notice where different sources are not in agreement with each other. 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.

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.

Pulling the Pieces Together – The Historical Significance of Your Topic

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 was the barrier recognized as a barrier?
- What impact did the barrier have?
- What factors contributed/led up to the breaking of the barrier?
- 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 barrier being broken?
- Why does it matter that the broken barrier led to change?

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 described 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) that explain the importance of your topic in history. For example, following the American occupation of Southern Korea post WWII, Kim Il-Sun broke through the 38th parallel igniting cold war tensions between the Soviet Union, China and the United States. What was the significance of

the 38th parallel as a barrier? What was the ideological barrier between the Soviet Union and the United States? What is the legacy of these broken barriers? Successful NHD students often explain or show how even topics from very long ago affect us today.

From Analysis to Proving Your Argument – The Thesis Statement

You will be developing a project using an argumentative style. Develop your project with a lot of evidence to support your argument or position about the importance of your topic. As you become an expert about your topic, you will develop analysis by forming a thesis (your argument or position on the topic and its connection to the theme). Although you will likely write a draft thesis statement early on in your research process, you will revise the thesis many times. It will be one of the last elements you finalize.

Begin your research with 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 is the sign of deep research and analysis.

A thesis statement is like a road map for your project. It will tell the audience how your topic connects to the theme. Many times, thesis statements make claims that others dispute. If there's nothing controversial in your thesis, 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 refer back to 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.

As with each year's theme, the NHD theme for 2020 is intentionally broad. You will 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!