

# NATIONAL HISTORY DAY 2014–15

## Leadership and Legacy in History

Welcome to National History Day! During the 2014–15 program year, students across the country will research topics related to a theme established by the National History Day organization. This year's theme is *Leadership and Legacy in History*. The theme is intentionally broad to allow you to select a local, state, national, or world history topic of interest to you and that fits with any school requirements you may have. You will live with your NHD project for the majority of this school year. Pick a topic that interests you!

### HOW DO THE WORDS *LEADERSHIP* AND *LEGACY* FRAME THE THEME?

The first step in developing a NHD project is to understand the theme. Begin by investigating the key words in this year's theme, *Leadership and Legacy in History*:

- **Leadership** is the “position as a leader of a group, organization, etc.; the time when a person holds the position of leader; the power or ability to lead other people.” (Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary 2014)
- **Legacy** is defined as “something that happened in the past or that comes from someone in the past; something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past” (NHD Theme Sheet).

While the theme seems straight forward, students should understand the difference between a leader and leadership as well as the importance of a legacy that has historical significance. Since this year's theme requires students to address both leadership **and** legacy, understanding how leadership and legacy go hand in hand is also essential to a successful project.

The act of great leadership comes from an individual who inspires a following by demonstrating courage and conviction through action and decisions. The legacy of significant leadership is the impact of these actions and decisions. President Kennedy's leadership during the Cuban Missile Crisis illustrates leadership during crisis. When faced with a decision that might lead to nuclear war, Kennedy chose to act in a way that made it possible to keep making decisions. He knew that it would be better to make a wrong

decision than to act in a way that would give up to unfolding events.

As you consider different topics to research for your NHD project, remember that you will need to narrow your topic to specific acts of leadership. Projects that strive to be all encompassing about an individual will often be a retelling of a leader's life rather than an analysis of a leader's qualities and decisions and the impact, or legacy, of their leadership.

### HOW DOES THE LEGACY OF THE LEADER IMPACT SOCIETY?

Great leadership includes a legacy that has had a significant historical impact. You will need to consider the significance of your topic by researching how strongly its legacy impacted society. Some questions you should consider while conducting your research include:

- Do leaders' decisions/actions affect religion or education? (Cultural/Social Lenses)
- Do leaders who hold power have responsibilities to their followers? (Political Lens)
- How do leader's decisions affect a person's ability to gain wealth or the ability of a country to become wealthy? (Economic Lens)
- Does every leader show leadership? (Social and Political Lens)
- Did the legacy impact natural resources or the environment? (Environmental Lens)

One way of discovering potential topics for this year's theme is to think about turning points in history and the people who were instrumental during that time. Consider the role of Walter White with the NAACP or Carrie Chapman Catt and the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Your

research and analysis may lead you to conclude that lesser known individuals are also capable of great leadership. Frank Kameny, the founder of the gay rights movement, and Pauli Murray, civil rights advocate, both demonstrated two characteristics of great leadership, indomitable persistence and relentless self-invention. ***As historian, it's your job to analyze the facts of your topic, determine the leadership qualities and legacy, and defend your thesis with evidence.***

### **WHAT ABOUT THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LEADERSHIP & LEGACY?**

Many historians see leadership and legacy as 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 leader to become significant and the impact of the legacy. Significant changes can impact how people interact with each other, govern, work, and view the world around them. ***If the legacy you are studying continued to have an impact 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. Not all legacies are without controversy. Throughout history, there have been leaders who achieve greatness that is associated with negative legacies. Chinese revolutionary Mao Tse Tung achieved victory during the revolution through his leadership of the Red Army and his implementation of guerilla warfare. His legacy as a leader, however, also reflects the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. ***You will want to consider the significance of not only the type of leadership, but also the different ways people were impacted by it.***

### **CHOOSING A TOPIC – MAKE IT HISTORICAL**

Two important words in this year's theme are "in history." As you think about possible topics remember that you should focus on topics that are old enough to have historical context. You

may even notice something happening today that makes you wonder about the past. While there are no specific rules about how long ago your topic took place, a successful topic will be old enough to have a body of secondary sources written about it. *It is up to you to make the case of the historical nature of your topic to your judges.*

### **HOW DO I NARROW MY TOPIC?**

After defining the elements of the theme, you will begin to consider possible topics. You probably will start big. Your initial research will likely be focused on a broad topic area to learn background information. This will lead to a more manageable topic. Some *big* topic areas might include famous generals or presidents who have become heroes because of their leadership. Other big topic ideas may come from history's "headlines:" the American Revolution, the French Revolution, Mahatma Gandhi and India's revolt against British rule, apartheid in South Africa, etc. Instead, you should search for specific examples of leadership within the larger topic. For example, you might look at the leadership of General Eisenhower and how he used consensus to lead. ***The big idea with regard to picking a topic is to narrow it down to a compelling individual whose legacy ultimately held great significance over time.***

### **HOW DO I CONNECT THE ELEMENTS OF THE THEME?**

When you research a topic related to this year's theme you most likely will discover that people related to your topic had ideas and made decisions that directly led to or were part of dramatic change. Leadership and legacy provide 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 together. Your History Day Coach will provide you with options and you will decide the best way to organize the elements of the theme to fit your topic.

## HOW DO I THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN?

As a history sleuth, 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** – Note key moments around your topic and establish the period it belongs in.
- **Turning Points** – Think about what continued and what changed 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 (surrounding events) of your topic. Don't forget to take in the point of view of the creator of your documents.
- **Evidence** – Use a broad base of sources in order to present an argument based on analysis of the evidence.
- **Historiography** – look at arguments of multiple secondary sources in order 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.

Be sure to look at the time period in which your topic occurred and try to see 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 circumstances provided the opportunity for great leadership. What factors allowed your topic to become important enough to be remembered now?

You will discover a leader's legacy by analyzing the impact of the leadership over time. A

legacy is what remains of the leadership, the actions or decisions of the leader, after the leadership has ended. Sometimes legacies are the unintended results of leadership. Whether in war, as an elected officer, or as an agent of social change, find out how your leader initiated a change or achieved an objective that became a legacy. How were things dramatically and permanently different because of the leadership?

## HOW DO I ANALYZE THE RESEARCH?

National History Day projects emphasize a great deal of research, which calls for as much primary source research as possible. NHD projects are much more than just research reports. You are becoming an historian. This means that you will analyze the research. You will study your topic closely, pull apart information, and pay attention to how different sources explain it. You'll notice where different sources are not in agreement with each other. You will 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:

- What is my topic about?
- Why is it important?
- What is the larger issue my topic connects to?
- How did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- How does it relate to the annual theme?
- What is the historical significance?
- Who are the compelling individuals and/or groups?
- What are is the compelling event or idea?

You are not limited to these questions; however, they might help get you started.

## HOW DO I USE A THESIS STATEMENT TO SHOW MY ANALYSIS IN A PROJECT?

You will be developing a project using an argumentative style. This means your project will be logically developed with lots of evidence

to support your “argument” or position about the importance of your topic. As you become an expert about your topic, you will write a thesis statement (your argument or position on the topic).

Although you might have an idea of how your topic connects to the theme when you start your research, the thesis statement will be your presentation of an argument backed by evidence from your research of the connection to the theme. When you begin to conduct your research, you should write down some focus 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’s the sign of deep research and analysis.

A thesis statement is a kind of road map for your project. It will tell the audience where you will be taking them. Many times, thesis statements make claims that others dispute. If there’s nothing controversial in it, 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, Did I:***

- Answer my key questions?
- Take a position or did I simply restate facts?
- Write a thesis statement which shows that my topic matters?
- Use the theme in my thesis statement?
- Support my thesis statement with evidence from my research?

As you develop your project, you will visit 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.

### **PULLING THE PIECES TOGETHER – THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF YOUR TOPIC**

The reason for all of 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 explained 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) about the importance of your topic in history.***

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 and why did the leader exhibit behavior or make a decision that is an example of great leadership?
- What impact did this behavior or decision have?
- What factors contributed/led up to the behavior or decision?
- Why was there a need for leadership at the particular time?
- Why did this leader cause a change?
- What is the legacy of this leader? And, how does the legacy have historical significance?

### **HOW DO I BALANCE MY RESEARCH?**

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.

As with each year’s theme, the NHD theme for 2015 is intentionally broad. You’ll 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!