

Choosing a Competitive National History Day Topic that *ACTUALLY* Interests You

Key Concepts to Consider:

1. Are you interested?
 - Is there something from the past in your family or community that you connect with or would like to learn more about?
2. Is it closely aligned with the annual theme?
 - How might your topic relate to the theme?
3. Historically significant?
 - Have historians, archivists, or professors written about it?
4. Rich in primary sources?
 - Are there letters, documents, photos, etc. from the time related to your topic?

Here's a step-by-step guide to help you or your students choose a strong topic:

1. Understand the Theme

Each year, NHD has a theme (e.g., *Turning Points in History*, *Frontiers in History*). Read the theme guide carefully and brainstorm how different historical events or figures connect to it.

Tip: Look for cause and effect, change over time, or historical significance.

2. Brainstorm Broad Areas of Interest

Think about:

- Personal interests (e.g., family, sports, or science)
- Family or local history
- Topics encountered in class that spark your curiosity

3. Do Preliminary Research

Check if there are:

- **Enough primary sources** (letters, photos, newspapers, interviews)

- **Secondary sources** (books, documentaries, scholarly articles)
- A clear historical argument or interpretation to be made

✿ 4. Look for a Unique Angle

Competitive projects often explore:

- Lesser-known individuals or events
- New perspectives on well-known topics
- Local history with national or global relevance

☑ 5. Test the Topic

- Does it clearly connect to the theme?
- Can I argue its historical significance?
- Are there enough sources to support a strong project?

How to Choose a Competitive NHD Topic – Summary

1. Start with a List:

Begin by brainstorming 3–5 topics that interest you. Narrow this down to a “Top Three” and rank them by your enthusiasm for research.

2. Invest Time Early:

Early research pays off. Even if you don’t use a topic this year, it might be perfect for a future NHD theme.

3. Don’t Rush the Decision:

Avoid setting arbitrary deadlines. Talk to teachers, peers, or even historians to help refine your choices.

4. Begin Soon After Nationals:

After resting up, many students start exploring topics as soon as the previous year’s competition ends. This gives ample time for quality research.

