

History Day: Getting Started

Nothing in history happens in a vacuum. To understand the connections between your topic and the time period, begin reading about the time period. As you read, ask yourself these questions:

- Why did my topic happen at this particular time and in this particular place?
- What were the events or the influences that came *before* my topic?
- How was my topic influenced by and how did it influence the economic, social, political, and cultural climate of the time period?

All of these questions will help you to build the story of your topic and grasp the historical significance. This will also help you begin thinking about your thesis.

Develop a Thesis Statement

NHD projects should do more than just tell a story. Every project should make a point about its topic. To do this, you must develop your own argument of the historical impact of the person, event, pattern or idea you are studying. The point you make is called a thesis statement. A thesis statement is not the same as a topic. Your thesis statement explains what you believe to be the impact and significance of your topic in history.

Example:

Topic: Battle of Gettysburg

Thesis Statement: The battle of Gettysburg was a major turning point of the Civil War. It turned the tide of the war from the South to the North, pushing back Lee's army that would never fight again on Northern soil and bringing confidence to the Union army.

Primary Sources: A primary source is a piece of information about a historical event or period in which the creator of the source was an actual participant in or a contemporary of a historical moment. The purpose of primary sources is to capture the words, the thoughts and the intentions of the past. Primary sources help you to interpret what happened and why it happened.

Examples of primary sources include: documents, newspaper clippings, quotes, artifacts, historic sites, songs, or other written and tangible items created during the historical period you are studying.

Secondary Sources: A secondary source is a source that was not created first-hand by someone who participated in the historical era. Secondary sources are usually created by historians, but based on the historian's reading of primary sources. Secondary sources are usually written decades, if not centuries, after the event occurred by people who did not live through or participate in the event or issue. The purpose of a secondary source is to help build the story of your research from multiple perspectives and to give your research historical context.