

NATIONAL HISTORY DAY 2025-26

THEME: Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History

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DATES TO REMEMBER

RUSD History Day: January 31, 2026
Riverside County HD: March 14, 2026
NHD-CA: May 1-3, 2026
NHD: June 7-11, 2026

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the National History Day program and contest! Each year, students all over the U.S. research a topic in history and relate it to the annual theme. You have a wide range of topics available and many different methods for publishing research. You can:

- Create a **poster** (Grades 4 & 5)
- Create a **podcast** (Grades 4-12)
- Write a **research paper** (Grades 6-12)
- Produce a miniature museum **exhibit** (Grades 6-12)
- Create a **documentary** (Grades 6-12)
- Publish a **website** (Grades 6-12)
- Act out a **performance**

Students may work individually or in groups of 2-5 students. This applies to all categories **except** Historical Paper. The Historical Paper category is individual only.

After completing your classroom project, you have another choice: whether or not to compete. Winners from each RUSD school move on to the RUSD History Day competition in January; winners from RUSD History Day move on to the Riverside County competition in February; winners at County move on to the state competition in May. Students in grades 6-12 may then move on to nationals in June. Ultimately, the project is about learning. Whether it's a dramatic interpretation of Lincoln in debate or a research paper about women's suffrage, you are developing skills in research, analysis, and communication.

Parents, your role is to encourage, offer trips to the library, provide space to work, and praise students for working independently. Thank you for allowing students to be the true creators of their project!

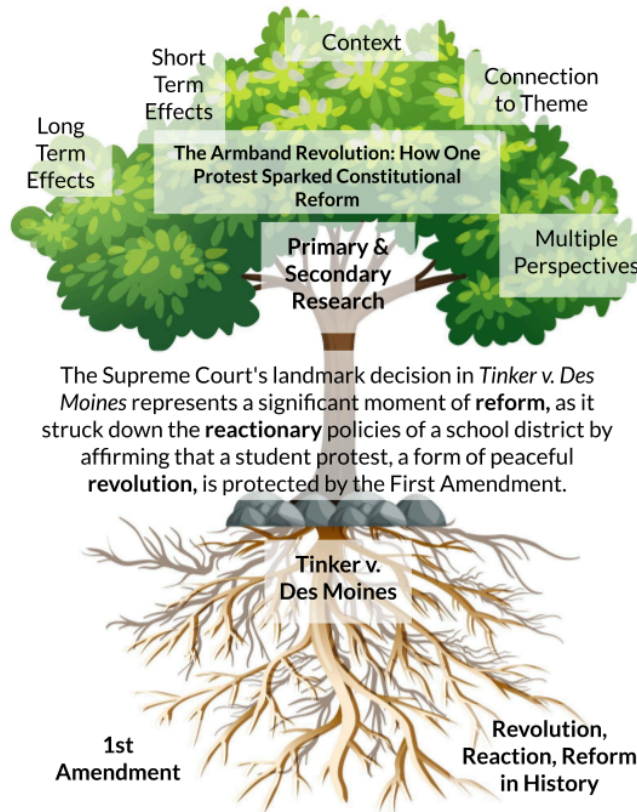


Adapted from Thomas Hart MS



CHOOSING A TOPIC

Students find a topic they are interested in involving the theme: **Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History**. Your topic should be something you are interested in, connected to the theme, and narrow enough that you can build an argument around it. Start with a broad theme, but narrow down to something manageable.



In the example above, the student may be interested in the First Amendment and narrows the topic down to the Supreme Court case, *Tinker v. Des Moines*. Additionally, the title ties in the topic and gives a hint about what the thesis will be.

RESEARCH

Find information about your subject from as **many different kinds of sources** as possible. Use the school library, public library, and the internet to find your sources. Note that the internet and Google are not sources, but like the library, they are *places* where you may *find* sources. You may write a letter to a place that may have information to send you. National parks and public museums are especially good about responding to students. At least **ten sources are recommended**, but note that students moving on to RUSD History Day, Riverside County History Day, NHD-CA, or NHD will want to continue their research beyond ten sources.

The following types of sources are recommended for your class project. Completing this list is not a requirement for participation. Every project is different and, therefore, there are differences in available sources. You will primarily use primary and secondary sources. Tertiary sources, such as Wikipedia, are a starting point for gaining a better understanding of your topic, but are not to be cited in your Annotated Bibliography.

Use the following list as a guideline for your research.

Types of Sources and Number Recommended for Class Project

Types of Sources	# Recommended*
Book, or part of a book – Books usually give more depth and context than shorter sources. (Your textbook does not count as a source, although you should read the relevant portions.) Use the Riverside Public Library and the UCR Tomás Rivera Library.	Two recommended No limit!
Encyclopedia – These may be online or book encyclopedias from your teacher’s classroom or any library. Choose carefully. You may not cite Wikipedia or any other encyclopedia, but if you follow the links at the bottom of their articles, you will probably find other excellent sources.	Limit: two
Periodicals, Magazines, and Newspapers – Any publication citing a month and year (or day, month, year) is a periodical. <i>Cobblestone</i> , <i>Calliope</i> , <i>Boys Life</i> , and <i>Smithsonian</i> often provide excellent background information, and most libraries save copies. Check local newspaper archives for articles about your topic, or about its remaining legacy today. Periodicals from the time of your topic may be considered primary sources.	One recommended
Documentaries – These provide context and a broad overview. Public libraries lend these; public television (PBS), and the History Channel offer many choices.	One recommended
Internet Secondary – California's K-12 Online Content Project offers access to online educational content from Britannica, ProQuest, TeachingBooks and Gale for all students and educational institutions at no cost. Museums, universities, and news organizations (BBC, History Channel) are also reliable. See Internet Tools above.	Recommended limit: two Monitor for quality!
Primary Documents and Images – Diaries, contracts, birth or marriage certificates, letters, military records, baptismal certificates, property deeds, and photographs taken at the time are all excellent primary sources. Do not overlook artifacts like clothing and tools. Check the Library of Congress , presidential libraries, the Smithsonian , and the National Archives for a treasure trove of primary sources. Or visit the National Archives Riverside for resources from Southern California and the surrounding region. Plan ahead because you need an appointment to see the archives.	Two recommended Unlimited
Pamphlet – Parks and monuments usually respond to requests for information by sending pamphlets containing facts, maps, and other visuals.	Unlimited
Interview – Telephone or in-person interviews with experts are a huge asset to your research. Ask the expert by email first. Submit your questions in writing, verify a convenient time to talk, and then follow up by phone or in person. You may reach out to professors at UC Riverside, Cal State San Bernardino, or Cal Baptist University. However, make sure they are experts in the field of your topic, and make sure that you have a well-designed list of questions. They are busy people and shouldn’t be your first source on a topic.	One encouraged! Unlimited

TAKING NOTES

When taking notes, look for:

- topic background,
- evidence of theme,
- immediate impacts, and
- long-term effects or why it matters today.

Start with a citation, the correct bibliographical information for that source, at the top of the page. You may use MLA or Chicago style, or sign up for free [NoodleTools](#).

Use the two-column Cornell Notes format, making sure to put **unanswered questions** in the left column. Use the right column for headings and details. Write notes **in your own words**. Include some direct quotes in your notes, especially opinions. (See [Direct Quotations](#) below.) For books and magazines, write page numbers in the left margin so you can locate the information again if needed.

Evaluate your sources using guidance from the [Annotated Bibliography](#) information below.

DIRECT QUOTATIONS

Word-for-word quotes from experts and eyewitnesses of your topic can give vivid information about your topic and powerful testimony about its effects. Quotes from primary sources are best, but sometimes quotes from expert secondary sources are useful, too. You will definitely want direct quotes when you interview an expert on your subject. Look for three or more sentences or phrases by authors or eyewitnesses that help describe the main ideas of your topic or give some valuable opinion about it.

- Copy words exactly, using quotation marks. Quote interviewees *exactly*.
- Copy the author of the quoted words, identify that person's role in relation to your topic, and give the date or time period of the quote. The more exact, the better and the easier to make commentary later!
- Commentary: concise phrase or sentence telling your thoughts about the quote: what inspired it, its impact, how it may have influenced others, or what it otherwise showed about your topic.

Direct quotes do not count in the total number of words in your project. But use them wisely! If you simply string together a bunch of quotes, your own thoughts and your argument will not be clear to your audience.

RESEARCH LETTER

When contacting organizations to seek out interviews or other content support for your project, it's a good idea to write a brief letter to an expert at an institution. A chamber of commerce of a city important to your topic, a state or national park, museum, monument, or other institution with a land address might be able to provide you with important information to support your thesis. You may send your letter via email or through the regular mail services. Send as many as you wish to different locations.

- Use business letter format.
- *To Whom It May Concern* is a good salutation or the director's actual name.
- Tell your grade and school, and the topic you have chosen to research.
- Provide contact information so they know how to reach you with their response.
- Politely ask if information might be sent to you about your topic. If you are writing to an expert, ask if they are willing to be interviewed as part of your research.
- Express your appreciation for whatever the reader of the letter can do to help you.
- *Sincerely* is a good closing. Don't forget to sign your full name and type it, too.
- For mailed letters, address and stamp an envelope. Your name and return address go in the upper, left corner.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

(one per group, written by all members)

As you finish notes, record sources online or on the Annotated Bibliography Worksheet. Include:

- author,
- title,
- city,
- publisher,
- and publishing date or other source information needed according to the MLA Guide, NoodleTools or another service.

This information will be easy to pull together at the end of the project if your source information is all in one place, adding new sources as you use them. *You will not receive credit for textbook or Wikipedia sources.*

In **one to three sentences**, describe

- what sort of information (primary, secondary, biography, diary, photograph, and so on) you found in the source,
- how the source helped you understand the topic, and as you write your final bibliography,
- how that source was useful in helping you put together your final project.

Remember, you are *evaluating* the information, not taking notes. Was the source biased? If so, how did you balance your research?

On the final copy:

- Make sure you have followed a style guide, either Turabian or MLA.
- Make sure you have two sections: Primary Sources and Secondary Sources. Within each of these sections, alphabetize by author (where available) or by title.
- Make sure that you correct any errors your teacher found in grading your worksheet.
- Make sure that each entry has an annotation.

THESIS STATEMENT

(one per group, written by all members)

The thesis statement is a claim written after much research, and is the heart of your project. It states what you are proving and connects your topic to the theme. Additionally, the statement should include important effects on people or groups over time, and even in our world today. All your practice writing essays over the years will help you succeed with this important step.

A strong statement:

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ▪ States an argument | ▪ Is the main idea of your project |
| ▪ Connects to topic to theme | ▪ Mentions 2-3 areas of focus |
| ▪ Is proven in your project | ▪ Is between 30 and 60 words |
| | ▪ Is one or two sentences |

You will display your statement prominently on your exhibit or website home page, or introduce your performance, documentary, or historical paper with it. Here is a possible thesis statement that could work with the topic of blasting in the Sierras:

Though he receives much criticism for expanding the use of TNT, Alfred Nobel's development of liquid nitroglycerin was a turning point in history by saving lives and increasing access to California.

CREATING THE FINAL PROJECT

See the [National History Day California](#) website for the full, official National History Day-CA rules in each category below.

Exhibits: An exhibit is a miniature museum. People look at visuals and objects, while reading a limited amount of text. If you enjoy creating and assembling objects, you will enjoy this option. There is a 500 student composed word limit, but you are not limited to the number of quotes you include on the exhibit.

Website: If you enjoy working online and would like to combine text, images, and even sound, a website can be very effective. National History Day requires students to use their web-making tool, [NHDWebCentral](#). There is a 1200-word limit for student-composed text, and a 4 -minute total limit for multi-media clips.

Documentary: A combination of informative primary source visuals and a well-written script makes a superb documentary. The time limit is 10 minutes. Only students listed as project participants may operate the equipment, read the narration, and appear on camera. Students have found *iMovie* to be one useful tool; others are also possible.

Performance. A 10-minute dramatic interpretation can be a highly effective way to present your research. Simple costume changes – putting on a hat or removing a pair of glasses – can allow one or two students to play multiple parts. Any great texts you learn for a dramatic performance will stay in your memory for years to come.

Podcast. A 6-minute (Elementary Division) or 10-minute (Jr. & Sr. Divisions) story-telling format, the podcast is a great way to incorporate voice, sounds, and interviews. A good podcast is engaging and informative. *These projects can only compete as far as NHD-CA.*

Historical Paper. If you really enjoy writing and your topic lends itself more to words than pictures, a historical paper may be an excellent choice. Use your best essay-writing skills to produce a paper no shorter than 1500 words and no longer than 2500 words. Instead of using pictures and maps, write 1) an introductory paragraph with the claim made in your thesis statement, 2) about nine body paragraphs with evidence to prove your claim and commentary for each point of proof of your claim and 3) a closing paragraph that emphasizes thesis with commentary. Your bibliography does not count in the word limit, and you will not write a process paper at the end of the project. Beginning in 2024, Historical Papers will not compete at the Riverside County competition. Rather, three papers from each middle school and three papers from each high school will go directly from the RUSD History Day competition to NHD-CA.

WRITING THE PROCESS PAPER

(one per group, written by all members, required for all categories)

At the very end of the project, you will write a Process Paper, in which you describe your research methods and final conclusions. In 500 words or less, explain:

- **Topic:** why you chose it and project category (exhibit, website, etc.)
- **Research:** methods, special places or people you visited, what you learned
- **Creating the project:** processes; problems and solutions
- **Theme:** how your topic relates to this year's theme; your thesis statement should be the basis—add evidence to explain short- and long-term effects

Catchy Title
Catchy subtitle with theme

Your Name
Category
Junior Division

Write or type a rough draft first. Proofread carefully. Did you use an interesting style, descriptive vocabulary, correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation?

Next, revise your rough draft and add a title page. Include a creative title plus your heading. *See the Rule book for the correct layout of the title page.*

CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL LEVEL COMPETITION

See your teacher for details about your class and school level competitions. Each school can send up to five (5) projects on to the RUSD History Day competition per category.

GROUP PROJECTS

Have you read all of the previous material? Good! Now you may consider the group option. Carefully read on...

History Day rules allow students to cooperate in a group of up to five students in creating a poster, podcast, exhibit, performance, documentary, or website. (Individuals write historical papers only.)

- You may work with a partner or partners with parent permission.
- Group projects must evenly reflect the work of **all** the students in the group.
- If you submit your project as a group project to the RUSD History Day competition, it **will be considered a group project for every level of competition after that.**
- **Research:** Each person in a group will take their own notes on ten or more sources each, and record their sources and annotate them online or on the Annotated Bibliography worksheet as individuals. Talk to each other. Do you have all different sources? All sources will later be combined into one bibliography.
- **Final Annotated Bibliography:** One per group, combining all members' sources. **Impact statement:** one per group; work together!
- **Timeline:** one per group; work together!
- **Process Paper:** one per group; work together!

CONTESTS AND COMPETITIONS

See bit.ly/RUSDNHD for dates and locations.

All are invited to participate!

School History Day Contest

See your teacher to learn more about your school site History Day competition. Your school may send up to five (5) projects per category to the RUSD History Day Competition for all categories EXCEPT Historical Papers. Each site may send up to three (3) Historical Papers to the RUSD History Day contest.

RUSD History Day Competition

If you win at this Saturday event, you can compete at county and maybe go on to state! Local teachers and community members, and possibly History Day alumni will examine your project and interview you. Three (3) projects in each category may go forward to the County competition. (Historical Papers do not go on to Riverside County History Day, beginning in 2024. Three Historical Papers from each school may go forward to the NHD-CA competition.)

County History Day Competition

Winners of the RUSD History Day competition will display their projects alongside the best from many schools in the county. Judges will interview students about their work; three (3) winners per category will be chosen to compete at the State Finals.

California History Day Finals

NHD-CA is held in Sacramento in April. Junior Division (grades 6-8) judging will be held on Friday; Elementary Division (grades 4-5) and Senior Division (high school) is judged on Saturday. History Day State Finals provide a unique opportunity to see top-notch student work from around the state. Middle- and high school students present spine-tingling performances of our country's great historical moments; documentaries are prime-time caliber; exhibits are highly professional. Earning a spot at State Finals is an honor!

National History Day takes place in June in College Park, MD. The best of the best get to go to College Park!