

---

# What is National History Day?

---

National History Day (NHD) is a yearlong educational program that makes history come alive every day. You learn about interesting issues, ideas, people, and events of your choosing. It is an exciting way to study history because you express what you have learned in a creative and original performance, documentary, paper, web site, or exhibit. Through NHD you learn the skills and techniques of the historian and discover new insights. At the competitions you have the opportunity to meet students from other schools, exchange ideas, and demonstrate the results of your work. Your success in researching and producing an NHD entry even may take you to the national contest held each June at the University of Maryland at College Park.

## *Please Read This!*

Before you begin work on your entry, you, your teacher, and your parents should read this booklet carefully. It contains rules that you must follow to compete in all levels of the National History Day competition. More information on topics, sources, and deadlines are available from your regional and affiliate NHD coordinators. Always contact your regional or affiliate coordinator to learn whether any rules have been revised. The most up-to-date rules are available on the NHD web site at [www.nhd.org](http://www.nhd.org).

## *Definitions*

**Affiliate:** NHD programs organized by coordinators and recognized as such by the national office; usually designated by

a geographic name (e.g., Iowa, Guam, Department of Defense Schools of Europe, etc.).

**Historical Context:** The appropriate settings in which to understand your subject's time period. Settings might include relevant physical, economic, intellectual, and/or socio-cultural characteristics of the place and time.

**Historical Perspective:** Understanding a topic's development over time and its influence.

**Plagiarism:** Presenting the work or ideas of others in ways that give the impression that they are your own (e.g., copying information word-for-word without using both quotations and footnotes; paraphrasing an author's ideas without proper attribution; using visuals or music without giving proper credit).

---

**Primary Source:** Something that is written or produced in the time period you are investigating. Primary sources include letters, speeches, diaries, newspaper articles from the time, oral history interviews of people from the time, documents, photographs, artifacts, and anything else that provides firsthand accounts about a person or event. This definition also applies to primary sources found on the Internet. A letter written by President Lincoln in 1862, whether scanned, transcribed, or otherwise reproduced, is a primary source for a student researching the Civil War era. A newspaper article about the Battle of Gettysburg written by a contemporary in July 1863 is a primary source. An article about the battle published in June 2001 and not written by an eyewitness or participant is not a primary source (unless the project was about 2001). The memories of a person who took part in the battle also can serve as a primary source because he or she was an eyewitness to and a participant in this historical event at the time. However, an interview

with an expert (such as a professor of Civil War history) is not a primary source UNLESS that expert actually lived through and has firsthand knowledge of the events being described (highly unlikely for a Civil War historian!).

*NOTE: Primary materials, such as quotes from historical figures or photographs of historical events, when found in secondary sources, can be used effectively in History Day projects. However, these are not considered primary sources. Check out the "Conducting Research" page in the Contest section on the NHD web site at [www.nhd.org](http://www.nhd.org) for additional help on primary sources.*

**Secondary Source:** A source by an author who was not an eyewitness or a participant in the historical event or period. Secondary sources are interpretations of primary sources, research, and study. Secondary sources provide context for a historical event. For example, high school history textbooks and history books about a particular topic are secondary sources; so are biographies, newspaper retrospectives, and reference books such as encyclopedias. This definition also applies to interpretations found on the Internet.

