

The “So What” Factor

Things to Consider When Selecting a Topic

Themes:

You may select a topic on any aspect of local, regional, national or world history. Regardless of the topic chosen, the presentation of your research and conclusions must clearly relate to the annual theme.

Manage your topic—make it narrow enough to focus your research and interpretation of issues that can be explained and interpreted within the category limits of size and theme.

1. Topics:

Effective entries not only describe an event or a development; they also analyze and place it in its historical context.

2. Choose 3 or 4 topics that look interesting to you, then step back and analyze them.

- Place the topic in historical context that relates to the annual theme?
- Analyze the social, economic, political and cultural aspects of the time period? Are you able to make an argument for your topic that takes the reader through the significant issues? Can you support your conclusions with primary research?
- Offer more than good “description”?
- Analyze your topic to answer the most important question—“So what?”

3. While your favorite topic might be interesting and you may be able to find a great deal of material, does the information allow you to:

- How your topic is important?
- How it developed over time?
- How it influenced history?

4. Are you able to make a clear and concise argument that shows:

5. We encourage you to select topics that really interest you. However, in order to be competitive at the state and national levels, please consider your topic carefully. Topics that focus on more recent events (less than 25 years old) are difficult to make a significant “So What” argument that takes into account social, economic, political, and cultural ramifications of a recent subject.

6. There are many popular topics that recur every year, no matter what the theme. Examples include various aspects of the Civil Rights movement, WWII Japanese internment, or the sinking of the Titanic. If you choose a popular, recurring topic, you should look for a new “twist” in order to make your project stand out. The historian is like a private detective looking for clues that no one else had ever discovered in order to shed new light on a subject.