

# NATIONAL HISTORY DAY IN COLORADO *101: THE NUTS AND BOLTS*



University of Colorado **Denver**

**National History  
Day in Colorado**

*A pre-collegiate social studies  
and literacy program*

## NHDC IS ADAPTABLE

- NHDC is appropriate for all course and extra curricular formats
  - *An element of a current course*
  - *An AP/IB project*
  - *A course dedicated specifically to NHD*
  - *An interdisciplinary project*
  - *An after school club*
- Appropriate for all types of learners
  - *Gifted and talented*
  - *General population*
  - *Special needs*
  - *English language learners*

## SAMPLE TIMELINES

### Sample of a 6 – 12 Week Schedule

- 1 week for NHD process and theme introduction
- 1 week topic selection
- 2-4 weeks for research and development of final thesis statement
- 1- 4 weeks for outline development and project creation
- 1-2 weeks for finishing, editing, and final touches such as writing the process paper and bibliography

### Sample of a 13 – 20 Week Schedule

- 1 week for NHD process and theme introduction
- 1 week for topic selection
- 4-6 weeks for research and development of final thesis statement
- 4-6 weeks for outline development and project creation
- 3-4 weeks for finishing, editing, and final touches such as writing the process paper and bibliography

# GETTING STARTED

## BEFORE YOU START...

- Check out...
  - *Annual theme*
  - *Sample topics*
  - *Rules*
  - *NHDC website*
  - *Past projects*
  - *Timelines, syllabi, lesson plans*
- Consider
  - *Potential timelines*
  - *What topics are appropriate for your class—be careful not to be so restrictive that you hinder student voice and choice*
  - *Making NHDC your class research project or a cross-curricular project*
    - NHDC is also a state-sanctioned capstone project that satisfies graduation requirements
  - *Adapting NHDC into a course*
    - High school students have the opportunity to earn college credit through CU Succeeds by taking HIST 1400
  - *Assessments and graded benchmarks*
  - *Will your students compete? If so, work backwards from your Regional Contest date to develop your timeline.*



# The NHDC Process in 11 Steps

#1 Topic Selection

#2 Become an “Expert”

#3 The Thesis Statement

#4 The Research Process

#5 Make Sense of Your Research & Outline Your  
Argument

#6 Choose a Category

#7 Groups or Individuals?

#8 Project Creation & Rules Summary

#9 The Process Paper

#10 Citations & the Annotated Bibliography

#11 The Contest: Decision & Preparation

Post Contest: Assessment

## THE TRIANGLE OF HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

EVERYTHING THAT HAS HAPPENED; THE WHOLE PAST AS IT ACTUALLY OCCURRED;  
NOT A LINE BUT A TANGLE OF INFINITE LINES, EACH DIFFERENT AS EXPERIENCED  
AND AS LOOKED AT FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

\*\*\*\*\*

SURVIVING EVIDENCE OF WHAT HAPPENED: THE KNOWABLE PAST

\*\*\*\*\*

DISCOVERED EVIDENCE OF WHAT HAPPENED:  
THE USABLE PAST

\*\*\*\*\*

USED EVIDENCE: THE VALUED PAST

\*\*\*\*\*

VERSIONS OF HISTORY:  
THE STUDIED AND  
INTERPRETED  
PAST

\*

- How “old” should a topic be?
  - *Rule of thumb: 20-25 years*
  - *However, topics like 9/11 are fair game, as students were not alive for this event.*
  - *MUST be able to draw long-term impacts-- otherwise it is not a historical project, but a current events project.*
- What topics are appropriate for your course?
  - *If you teach U.S. History, you may want to limit your students to U.S. history topics.*
  - *However, don't jeopardize student voice and choice—to succeed, they have to feel ownership of the project.*
- Consider
  - *Personal interests*
  - *Family history*
  - *Local history*
  - *Historical roots of current events*
  - *Ideas on our website*
  - *Special Awards criteria*
  - *The “so-what” factor*
- Students should think big at first, but they will need to sufficiently narrow their topic to something specific and manageable.

# Step 1: Topic Selection



# Topic Selection:

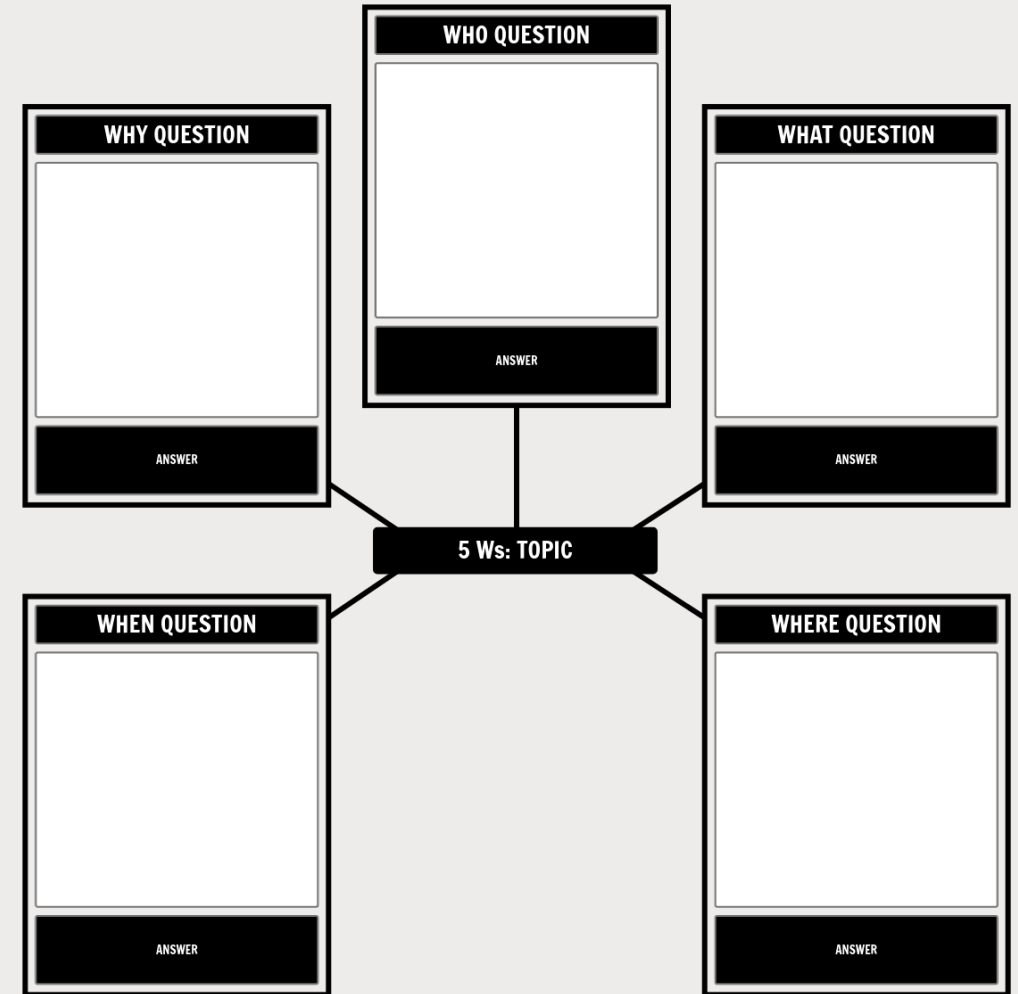
## *Things to Consider*

- **Family histories** make great projects, BUT students need to connect that personal history to the larger societal trends and events of the time.
- **Current events topics** are not appropriate for a history day topic, but the historical roots of those current events may be. For example, students interested in the DACA program might want to look at the history of Latinx immigration to the United States, and look at the DACA program as a long-term impact of that history.
- **Topics must be sufficiently narrow.** Martin Luther King, Jr. is an interesting topic, but not narrow enough. He is generally considered an overused topic because projects about him are rarely specific enough. Martin Luther King, Jr. is a complex historical figure. You couldn't possibly tell his entire history in a single NHD project, therefore students need to consider something specific about MLK, for example his relationship to the Black Panthers, his thoughts on capitalism, or the role of women in his non-violence movement.



# Step 2: Becoming an “Expert”

- Context is not just important, it's **ESSENTIAL!**
  - *It would be incredibly difficult to tell the story of the Holocaust without the contextual information about WWII, the Great Depression, and WWI for that matter.*
- Students should understand what was happening before, during, and after their event as it applies to their specific topic.
- Students must be able to provide nuanced answers to the **5 W's**.
  - *Who?*
  - *What?*
  - *Where?*
  - *When?*
  - *Why?*
  - *and also... How?*
- For understanding context, **Wikipedia is your friend!!!**





# Step 3: The Thesis Statement

- History Day projects are not a reporting of facts. They **MUST** present and defend a specific argument.
- Must connect to the annual theme—the theme words **NEED** to be in the thesis statement.
- The thesis statement should serve as a road map for the entire project.
- The thesis statement **MUST** change throughout the project. If the student's thesis statement hasn't evolved over the course of the project, they haven't learned anything.
- **BE SPECIFIC!!**

## Examples of Various Thesis Statements for the Theme of Leadership and Legacy (2015)

### Weak Thesis

*"Abigail Adams was a first lady of the United States."*

Why this is a weak thesis:

- This is merely a statement of a fact.
- The statement does not integrate the theme.
- The statement does not leave room for disagreement.

### Average Thesis

*"Abigail Adams was a remarkable leader for early women's rights."*

Why this is an average thesis:

- The statement addresses at least one point of the theme.
- The statement can be supported by evidence.
- The thesis is vague on the "how" aspect.

### Strong Thesis

*"Highly-educated and well-spoken, Abigail Adams advised and influenced many of the political and diplomatic decisions made by her husband and companion, John Adams, thus making her the first woman to influence American politics, and establishing her legacy as one of the first advocates of women's rights in America."*

Why this is a strong thesis

- The statement addresses at least one point of the theme.
- The statement can be supported by evidence.
- The thesis answers the "so what" question.

**MAGIC FORMULA: TOPIC + THEME + IMPACT = THESIS**



# Step 3: The Thesis Statement

## Thesis Statement Checklist

- Step 1: BE SPECIFIC!
- Step 2: 5 W's
- Step 3: Topic
- Step 4: Theme
- Step 5: Impacts
  - Short-term AND long-term

## A THESIS STATEMENT...

### IS NOT...

- A statement of what you already know
- A catch-all
- A grandiose claim
- A counterfactual

### IS...

- The "So-What"
- Falsifiable
- Supported by primary and secondary sources

## EXAMPLE:

In 1947, post-World War II (WWII) Europe saw the growing threat of communism and declining economies. This economic and political environment caused President Harry Truman and Secretary of State George Marshall to devise the European Recovery Plan, or ERP. The ERP was an economic stimulus program that injected over \$13 billion into the struggling economies of Western Europe. This program, now referred to as the "Marshall Plan," marked a turning point in American foreign policy. It was a reversal from post-World War I (WWI) isolationism and generated long-lasting relations with other nations.

-Alexander Weissman  
2013 National Junior Paper Gold Medalist

- The 5 W's
  - Who?** President Harry Truman, Secretary of State George Marshall, United States, Western Europe. Notice how all the major players are specifically identified. Notice how titles are included to help identify specific people.
  - What?** The European Recovery Plan (ERP), later known as the Marshall Plan.
  - Where?** The United States and Western Europe—Money is coming from the U.S. and being injected into Western European economies.
  - When?** In 1947, post-World War II Europe.
  - Why?** To inject money into the struggling economies of Western Europe.
- **Theme:** The theme in 2013 was *Turning Points in History*. Alexander says, "This program, now referred to as the 'Marshall Plan,' marked a **turning point** in American foreign policy."
- **Topic:** Alexander clearly narrowed his topic from a general interest in the consequences of WWII, and the broad topic of post-war economics before he landed on the Marshall Plan.
- **Impacts**
  - **Short Term:** What happened immediately after?  
"It was a reversal from post-World War I (WWI) isolationism..."
  - **Long-Term:** Why do we care about it today? So what?  
"...generated long-lasting relations with other nations."

*Note: Each element is very specific. Instead of just saying, Europe, the location is identified as Western Europe. This is an important detail, as Eastern Europe was under Soviet control and forbid its satellite countries from accepting Marshall Plan money. Details are important!*

# Step 4: The Research Process

- It's important that research is on-going.
  - *Students must research preliminarily before constructing a draft thesis.*
  - *Students must do intensive research before constructing a project.*
  - *Students continue to research to fill in gaps and to refine their thesis statement.*
- How many sources?
  - ***AT LEAST 20-25!***
  - *As a rule of thumb, students should have twice as many primary as secondary sources, but this will depend on topic.*
  - *Tertiary Sources: Encyclopedias*
    - These should **NEVER** be cited, as they are a consolidation of other, better sources and often state known fact.
    - These are a great place to gain preliminary knowledge about a topic.
- Students **MUST** use a **VARIETY** of sources.
  - *This includes books, pictures, articles, paintings, letters, etc.*
  - *Students whose primary source section is only photograph citations will score poorly in that category.*
  - *It is ok if students access all sources online, though exploration of libraries, museums, and archives is always encouraged.*
- Take notes, take notes, take notes, take notes, take notes!!!



# Step 4: The Research Process

## VETTING SOURCES FOR RELIABILITY

- Vetting sources is a crucial part of the research process.
  - *This includes comparing sources from different perspectives to come to YOUR OWN conclusion.*
  - *Students must determine who wrote the source, the purpose of the source, and what biases might be inherent in the source.*
  - **NON-RELIABLE SOURCES**
    - Sources whose origin is unclear.
    - HISTORY.com
    - Typically, sources that end in anything other than .org or .edu—these still need to be vetted for reliability.
  - **RELIABLE SOURCES**
    - Google Scholar
    - Archives
    - Peer reviewed sources
    - Scholarly publications
    - Cultural partners (visit [nationalhistorydayincolorado.org](http://nationalhistorydayincolorado.org))
    - Everyone has bias, even professional historians and scholars, but they typically address those biases in reliable sources.
- How you use the source matters...
  - *Breitbart is not typically considered a reliable source, however, if you are using it to demonstrate a particular, biased viewpoint, then it is absolutely a good source to use for that purpose.*
  - *Sources can also be both primary and secondary based on how you use them. For example, a Denver Post article written about the DACA program would be a secondary source if you use it to address the historical roots of Latinx immigration. However, if you are talking about DACA as a long-term impact, then it becomes a primary source.*

## QUICK TIPS TO HELP YOU JUDGE HARD

Remember: Read the entire article, not just the headline.

### 📅 Check the dates: is this still relevant?

Information can have an expiration date. If not using for historical content it is usually good to use the most up-to-date sources, especially with news.

### 🔍 Find the sources/"facts."

If a citation is given, check on it. Can't find the source or corroborate information given? Try to find out more about the topic so you can judge more thoroughly.









### 👤 Validate author credentials.


Is the author specialized in the field they are writing about? Do they work in the field? Check for authority and accuracy.

### ⚖️ Look for bias or loaded/extreme language.

Does this lean towards a particular point of view? This may not be the entire story.

## HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS

 <b>CONSIDER THE SOURCE</b> Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.	 <b>READ BEYOND</b> Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story?
 <b>CHECK THE AUTHOR</b> Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?	 <b>SUPPORTING SOURCES?</b> Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.
 <b>CHECK THE DATE</b> Republishing old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to current events.	 <b>IS IT A JOKE?</b> If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.
 <b>CHECK YOUR BIASES</b> Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.	 <b>ASK THE EXPERTS</b> Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

 International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions  
United Library Network



# Step 4: The Research Process

Analysis is a BIG part of conducting research

Students should ask:

- Who wrote the document?
- Who is the document about?
- What is the purpose of the document?
- When was it produced?
- Does it refer to another time period?
- Where was it written?
- Why was it written?
- What kind of language is used?
- Does the language have a “secret” meaning?
- What are the expectations of the author?
- Who is the intended audience?

Sources should work together to tell a complete story with multiple perspectives.

Students should draw their own informed conclusions about the sources.

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS WILL PROVIDE THE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE THESIS

## What Is a PRIMARY SOURCE?

A **primary source** is an **object, document, or first-hand account** of an **event or historical time** that is being **evaluated or researched**.

### Examples of PRIMARY SOURCES:

-  A **Diary** is someone's written account of his/her life. A diary is written as a way to express feelings, to provide an account of daily activities, or to document a certain event.
-  A **Newspaper Article** is a journalist's written account of an event. Newspapers or magazines can be local, regional, or national in circulation, so it's important to keep in mind how many readers a newspaper article may actually have reached, and who the intended audience was for the information given in the article.
-  A **Map** is a depiction of the geography of an area. Early maps can give us an idea of what the geography of an area was like in centuries past, and they can also show what people of a certain era thought the geography of a region was like. It's sometimes useful to compare historical maps with current maps to see what differences there are.
-  A **Political Cartoon** is usually designed to poke fun at or send a message about a certain event or person. Political cartoons tend to be satirical in nature, so they must be carefully read to gain accurate insight into what they are conveying.
-  A **Letter** is a form of correspondence between people with a first-hand account of events, feelings, or stories. Letters are often personal in nature, but they can also be more formal. Some of the most poignant letters are those from soldiers writing home to their loved ones in times of war.
-  A **Speech** is a talk given by one person to a group of people. Speeches are often made to convince or persuade. When listening to a speech or reading the transcription of one, it's important to understand the speaker's purpose and who the audience was.
-  A **Government Document** is a document officially written by the government, like treaties and executive orders, usually spelling out rules and laws. The US Constitution is a great example of a government document.
-  A **Photograph, Painting, or Artwork** is a graphic depiction of an event, person, or object. Sometimes a painting or piece of art is meant to make a political statement. Other times, paintings are done to honor a certain person. Photographs are often taken to remember or document an event.
-  An **Interview** is conducted with a person to find out more information about an event or that person's life and decisions. Interviews can be conducted one-on-one, or they can be done in a press conference. An interview can be recorded and then transcribed to create a written record of the audio.
-  A **YouTube Video** and/or **Sound Recording** can be taken to record or document an event. Likewise, a sound recording can be made to document a person's feelings on an event or situation. The sound recording could even contain background noise or be made in secret, such as a wiretap.
-  A **Material Object** is also an example of a primary source. War medals, furniture, pottery, buildings or structures, fossils, clothing, or even food are just a few examples of objects that are primary sources.

### How to Read a PRIMARY SOURCE

#### Ask yourself:

- What type of document is it?
- Who wrote it?
- When was it written?
- What were the historical circumstances surrounding the source's creation?
- Who was the intended audience?
- Why was it written, taken, or recorded?
- What was the author's purpose or goal?

### What is a SECONDARY SOURCE?

A secondary source is an interpretation or description of an event and/or an analysis of a primary source. The video of the football game is **PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIAL**. The commentary and the endless sports talk shows after the game are **SECONDARY SOURCE MATERIAL** or abstractions. As you know, the **abstractions** are **LOADED** with opinion.

### How to Read a SECONDARY SOURCE

#### Ask yourself:

- What argument is the author making?
- What is the author's purpose?
- What types of primary sources has the author used to support the main argument?
- How is the author interpreting the event?
- Who is the audience?

### NOTE: Always Consider the Source!

Don't think that a primary source is always objective or true. The person who wrote the diary, composed the article, or gave the speech was a human being with deeply felt personal opinions. A good historian will always ask questions like, "Who wrote it?", "Why did they write it?", and "How close were they to the event?" to determine if the source is a reliable one.

# Step 5: Make Sense of Your Research & Outline Your Argument

Introduction
<b>Thesis</b>  A concise statement of the argument linking the topic to the theme.  <i>The evidence and analysis should “prove” the thesis.</i>
<b>Body - Main Point</b>  Evidence (at least three strong examples) Analysis of evidence: Discuss the context, link it to the thesis, explain how and why it proves your thesis. Why the topic is important in history Clearly relates topic to the theme  <i>Make certain that everything you include relates clearly to your thesis and helps you to make your case.</i>
<b>Conclusion</b>  Reiterates the main points presented in the thesis.  A good conclusion will tie up the project and answer the “so what” question while demonstrating short-term and long-term consequences.
<b>Required Written Materials</b>  Title Page Process Paper ( <i>not required for Paper category entries</i> ) Annotated Bibliography ( <i>Websites must display the Process Paper and Annotated Bibliography within the site</i> )

When writing,  
every  
paragraph  
should be a  
**MEAL**

**M: Main Point**  
of the  
paragraph

**E: Evidence** to  
support the  
main point

**A: Analysis**

**L: Link** back to  
main thesis

- All projects share the same basic outline and are essentially an argumentative essay.
  - *Some teachers have ALL their students compose an essay prior to choosing a category.*
  - *An essay form is also a great way to organize a project prior to constructing it.*



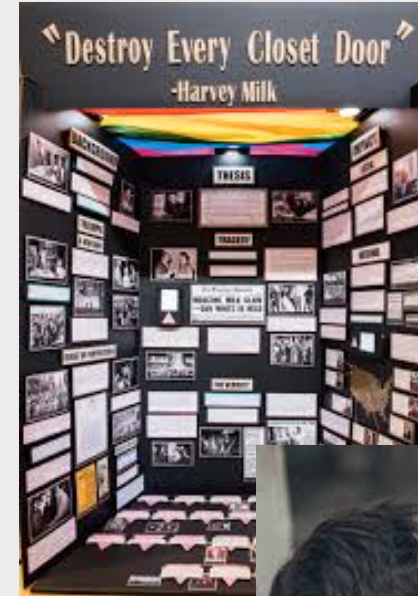
# Step 5: Make Sense of Your Research & Outline Your Argument

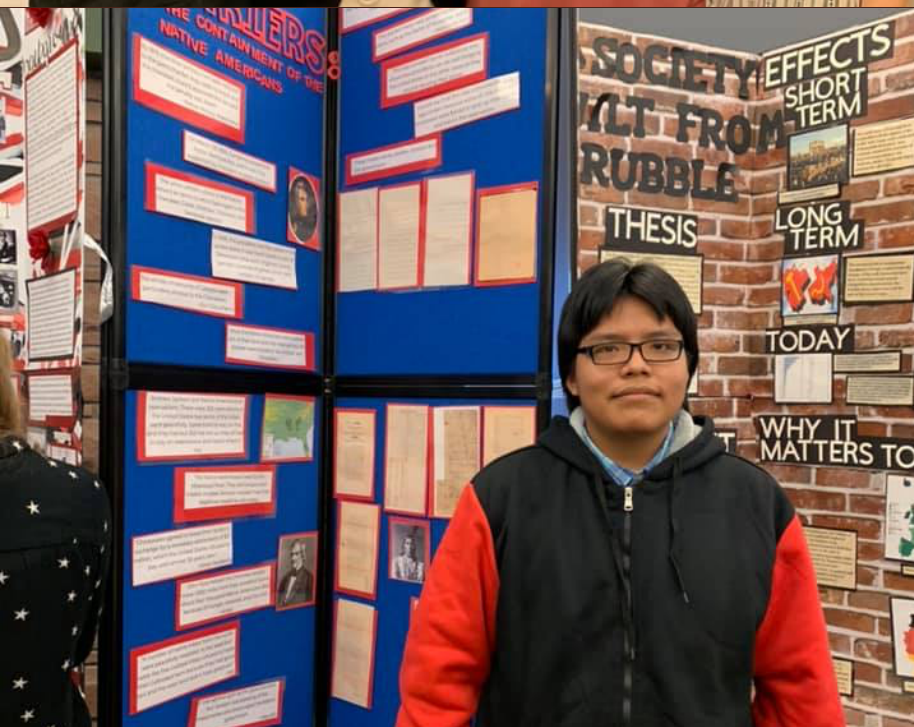
Title		
<b><u>Background Information</u></b> Give background information about some of the big ideas that lead into your main event. For example: segregation, World War II, the Great Depression	<b><u>Thesis</u></b> 1-3 sentence that argue a main point and includes all or most of the 5 W's, the significance of your topic in history and connect to the theme.	<b><u>Impact</u></b> Give the short term impact of the main event. What happened in the weeks, months or maybe even years after?
<b><u>Build Up</u></b> More specific information people will need to know to understand your thesis. Include events that directly lead to your main set of events.	<b><u>Main Argument</u></b> The heart of your project and center of the project. Focus on the main event, how it happened, who was involved and why. Often times, this is a great place to support relation to the theme.	<b><u>"So What?"/Legacy</u></b> What is the long term impact? Why do we still talk about this today? This is a good place to include something about how your topic ties to today.

Students may also benefit from organizing using this exhibit layout visual. Even if the student is not competing in the exhibit category, it's a good tool to visually see where there are gaps in research.

# Step 6: Choosing a Category

- Students should not definitively pick a category before they begin their research.
  - *Each category has special elements that make it unique.*
- Categories
  - **Exhibit**
    - Requires a range of different sources, as students are only allowed 500 student-generated words. They must supplement these with quotations, photos, headlines, maps, etc.
    - If a range of visual sources is not available, an exhibit is not a good project choice.
  - **Website**
    - A website must have multimedia elements, along with a range of other visuals.
    - If multimedia elements are not available for a particular topic, a website is not a good choice.
  - **Documentary**
    - Documentary is a visual-heavy category. A 10-minute documentary requires approx. 150-250 unique visuals and clips.
    - If a depth and breadth of visuals is not available, a documentary is not a good choice.
  - **Performance**
    - Performances are good alternatives for topics that lack a depth of visual material, however, they require a script, costuming, and sometimes, multiple characters.
    - If not enough materials exist to tell a compelling, original story through a unique script, then the performance is not a good choice.
  - **Paper**
    - Papers are good options for almost any topic, especially older topics where primary sources may be hard to find. Papers also facilitate the use of compelling direct quotations, so topics with text-heavy source materials work well for papers.
    - The exception might be a topic that would suffer from a lack of visual materials.





# Step 7: Groups or Individuals?

Students can compete in groups of 2-5 in every category, except paper.

With the exception of the performance category, where 5 actors may be entirely necessary, 5 is generally WAY too many students in a groups.

The optimum number is 2-3 students per group.

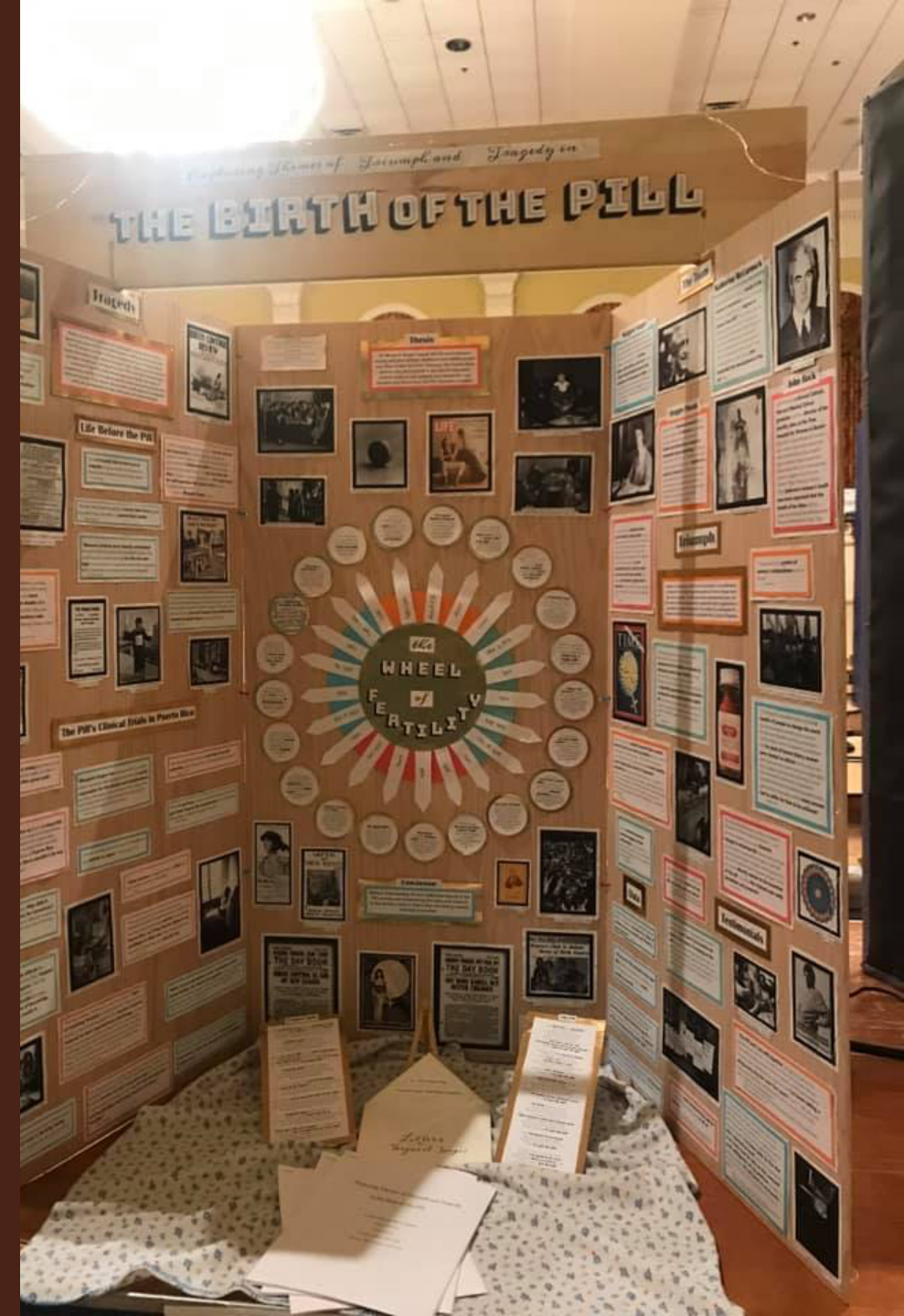
With more than that, it is very hard for students to justify how the work was divided.

In groups, ALL group members must contribute to ALL aspects of the project. It is not appropriate for one student to do all the research, while another does only design.



# Step 8: Project Creation

- It is essential every project begin with a good outline before construction begins.
- Every project includes the same essential elements.
- Projects should not be done overnight.
- Design is important, but historical quality is 80% of the final score.
- Students should consult the category-specific checklists for the project creation step.
- UGLY projects are easy to fix. BAD HISTORY is not!



A large white puzzle piece with a black question mark is centered on a blue background. The puzzle piece is surrounded by other white puzzle pieces, some of which are partially visible. The background is a solid blue color.

# Step 9: Process Paper

- Students should leave the process paper for last.
- This cannot be an extension of research or include additional arguments to supplement the project itself.
- It should be 500 words maximum and must address the following:
  - *How did you choose your topic and how does it relate to the annual theme?*
  - *How did you conduct your research?*
  - *How did you create your project?*
  - *What is your historical argument?*
  - *In what ways is your topic significant in history?*
- The process paper can be written in the first person.



# WHAT IS A CITATION?

A reference to any item, such as a book, a website, or an author, that identifies the source where the complete work can be found and credits its creator.

## WHY SHOULD I CITE SOURCES?

- ✓ Give credit where credit is due.
- ✓ Present the originality of your own research and forethought.
- ✓ Show the origin of an idea.
- ✓ Support your ideas and credibility.
- ✓ Provide the location of the source for your reader's further study.
- ✓ Avert blame for inaccuracies or bad third-party research.
- ✓ Avoid risk of plagiarism.

## WHEN DO I HAVE TO CITE?

Whenever you quote, paraphrase, use an existing idea or opinion, or reference another work.

## HOW DO I CITE SOURCES?

List your sources in a bibliography, works cited, and/or in footnotes/endnotes.

Citations always include:

- The author's first and last name
- The title of the work
- The name and location of the company that published the work
- The date the work was published
- The page number(s) of the material used in your assignment

There are many different styles for formatting citations. Ask your teacher which style guide you should follow.



# Step 10: Citations & the Annotated Bibliography

- VERY important—should not be left until last, as it could be the deciding factor between a winning and losing project.
- The bibliography should be on-going throughout the project.
- Chicago or MLA style citations are acceptable, though Chicago is HIGHLY recommended.
- All primary and secondary sources that were consulted must be included, even if you don't cite them in your project.
- Annotations must be included for every single source, even photos, and must be no more than 2-3 sentences. They should address the following:
  - How you used the source
  - How the source helped you to understand the topic.
  - Explaining your reasoning for any sources that are not clearly primary or secondary.

# Step 11: Contest

- Contest is optional, but highly encouraged
- Prepping for the contest
  - *Mock interviews*
  - *Rehearsals*
  - *Editing for errors*
  - *Contest registration*
- 4 Disqualifiable Offenses
  - *Plagiarism*
  - *Reusing a History Day project*
  - *Tampering with another student's project*
  - *Failure to publish a website*

## Stage 1: Regional Contest

- Some schools conduct preliminary school contests before the regional contest. Some regions require an in-school contest, check with your coordinator.
- There are 13 regions in Colorado.
- Held in the spring semester.
- Top 3 winners in each division & category advance to the state contest.



## Stage 2: State Contest

- Held first Saturday in May on the CU Denver campus.
- About 1,000 Colorado students participate.
- Top 2 winners in each division & category advance to the national contest (about 70 students).



## Stage 3: National Contest

- Held in June at the University of Maryland near Washington, D.C.
- 3,000 students around the globe compete.

# Important Tips



- Time management is vital!
- Note taking and organization is essential!
- A few items set apart good projects from great ones:
  - A sufficiently narrow topic
  - A well-thought out, specific thesis statement
  - The inclusion of multiple perspectives
  - Specificity throughout the project
  - A robust bibliography with annotations