

Choosing a Topic

When you are thinking about your History Day topic, you might start with a broad or popular topic. But don't stop there! Students often choose topics that are so general that it becomes impossible to completely explore their subject. Many other students choose events with which they are familiar. These topics tend to be grossly overused. When deciding on your topic, try looking at a well-known event or figure from a different angle and coming up with a more narrow and focused topic. Below are some examples of wide topics that have found a more specific or unique focus.

Too Broad/Overused	More Narrow/Specific Topic
Trail of Tears	Fort Gibson's role in the Trail of Tears
Martin Luther King Jr.	Roscoe Dunjee and the <i>Black Dispatch</i>
Civil Rights Movement	Role of the NAACP in Oklahoma
D-Day	Jake McNiece and the "Filthy Thirteen"
Pearl Harbor	Aloysius H. Schmitt and the USS <i>Oklahoma</i> Paul Goodyear and the <i>Oklahoma's Legacy</i>
Revolutionary War	Nathan Hale and His Impact on the Revolution Role of General von Steuben at Valley Forge
Holocaust	The Nuremburg Trials 45 th Liberates Dachau
<i>Titanic</i>	Class Structure on the <i>Titanic</i> and its Impact on Survival Rates
Industrial Revolution	Industrial Revolution and Changes in the Home Child Labor
Dust Bowl	The Dust Bowl in Boise City Dust Pneumonia Oglala Aquifer Okie Migration
Gettysburg	Citizens of Gettysburg After the Battle Creation of the National Cemetery System
NASA	Women in NASA
George Washington	George Washington the Farmer
Abraham Lincoln	Abraham Lincoln and the Homestead Act
Thomas Jefferson	Thomas Jefferson and the Louisiana Purchase
Rosie the Riveter	Women at the Douglas Aircraft Plant
Title IX	<i>Randolph v. Owasso Public Schools</i>
Suffrage	Mary Church Terrell
Abolition	William Wells Brown: Abolitionist and Author
Land Run	Lew Carroll and His Role in the 1889 Land Run
Civil War	Civil War Surgery 1 st Kansas Colored Infantry Civil War and the Texas Road
Vietnam War	The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire	The Role of the Pinkerton Detective Agency
World War II	Comanche Code Talkers
Polio Vaccine	Henrietta Lacks and HeLa Cells

Narrowing Your Topic

When beginning a NHD project, students often think of a general area of history that they are interested in, such as World War II. While this is a good starting point, students ultimately need to choose a very specific subject on which to focus. Many History Day students struggle to come up with a narrow topic, instead using their broad beginning topic. The problem with this is that a general subject is far too large to completely explore. This document will help you to take a general area of history and develop a narrow, focused topic.

First, let's look at some examples of narrowed topics:

- 1. Interest:** Fashion
General Topic: US Women's Fashion
Narrow Topic: Fashion of US Women in the 1920s
 - First, narrowed by focusing on subset of people (women) and geography (US)
 - Second, narrowed by time period (1920s)
- 2. Interest:** The Civil War
General Topic: Battles
Narrow Topic: Battle of Honey Springs
 - First, narrowed by looking at the military aspect of the war (battles)
 - Next, narrowed by looking at a specific battle (Battle of Honey Springs)
- 3. Interest:** American Indians
General Topic: Treaty Rights
Narrow Topic: 1788 Fort Schuyler Treaty
 - First, by looking at a political aspect (Treaty Rights)
 - Second, narrowed by looking at an individual issue (1788 Fort Schuyler Treaty)
- 4. Interest:** Women's Rights
General Topic: Suffrage Movement
Narrow Topic: Mary Church Terrell
 - First, by looking at a political aspect (women's suffrage)
 - Next, by looking at an individual person (Mary Church Terrell)
- 5. Interest:** World War II
General Topic: D-Day
Narrow Topic: Role of Jake McNiece and the "Filthy Thirteen"
 - Military operation (D-Day)
 - Specific subset of people (Jake McNiece and the "Filthy Thirteen")

- 6. Interest:** Ships
General Topic: Titanic
Narrow Topic: Class Structure Onboard the Titanic
 - Individual ship (Titanic)
 - Social structure (class structure on the Titanic)
- 7. Interest:** Space
General Topic: NASA
Narrow Topic: Women in NASA
 - Specific organization involved in space (NASA)
 - Gender in the organization (women in NASA)
- 8. Interest:** American History
General Topic: Abraham Lincoln
Narrow Topic: Abraham Lincoln and the Homestead Act
 - Political leader (Abraham Lincoln)
 - Individual law promoted by Lincoln (Homestead Act)

In the next two examples, we will show how you can form multiple narrow topics from the general topic.

- 9. Interest:** American History
General Topic: Dust Bowl
Narrow Topic: Dust Bowl in Boise City
 - Dust Pneumonia
Okie Migration
 - Specific event in American history (Dust Bowl)
 - Specific geographical region (Dust Bowl in Boise City)
 - Medical consequences of event (dust pneumonia)
 - Social consequences (Okie Migration)
- 10. Interest:** Technology
General Topic: Industrial Revolution
Narrow Topic: Income Changes Resulting from Industrial Revolution
 - Child Labor
Advent of the Cotton Gin
 - Specific time period of technological advancement (Industrial Revolution)
 - Economic consequences (income changes resulting from Industrial Revolution)
 - Social consequences (child labor)
 - Individual technological advancement of event (advent of cotton gin)