

## NATIONAL HISTORY DAY

### Judges' Orientation

(sample orientation for use at district and state contests, based on the national contest orientation)

1. Welcome.
2. **Thank you** for supporting National History Day. Judging represents the capstone of the National History Day program. Many young people have engaged in months of research and preparation, and they are anxiously awaiting your evaluations. We very much appreciate your time and energy here today.
3. First we will go over general instructions and then specific instructions by category.
4. The theme is "**Conflict & Compromise in History.**" Students can focus on conflict or compromise *if* the topic is one in which there was no compromise or if conflict was avoided. Most topics will involve both aspects of the theme. Students who fail to look for and address both, if warranted by the topic, should be evaluated accordingly. The students have been very creative in choosing their topics. You must decide if they have adequately explained their topic's relationship to the theme and **significance in history**. In addition to providing basic information about their topics, the entries must draw conclusions about significance. Be open minded and allow the entry to convince you, if you are somewhat skeptical--but make sure that the entry is convincing and the evidence is clear.
5. You will be working on a **team of three judges**. One of the three judges has been designated as the **team captain** and is responsible for guiding the team in accomplishing the necessary tasks.
6. Please remember that your **evaluations should be based on the quality** of the work, and most importantly on the historical quality. **Be careful not to give "cute points."**
7. When considering your evaluation of "clarity of presentation," be careful to avoid being swayed by glitz. Your evaluation should be based on the clarity and appropriateness of the style of the entry for its particular category. Remember that the message is most important; the medium is not the message. Conversely, do expect a visually appealing presentation. But remember: this section is worth only 20% of the total evaluation; **historical quality and relationship to the theme are most important.**
8. Please remember that you will be evaluating the work of **young students**. They are not graduate students; do not hold them to the same kind of standards to which you might hold your colleagues. But at the same time, expect quality.

Understand that History Day motivates students to conduct extensive research and develop superior critical thinking skills. Do not underestimate their work. And remember to reward them for their efforts--no matter what you determine to be the ultimate success of the entry.

9. Your job will result in **most of the entries being eliminated**. The only thing that most students will take home is whatever kind words you have for their efforts and suggestions for improvement. Please write comments on the evaluation sheets. Please be sure to explain your ranking. Your comments on the evaluation sheets should include constructive criticism and positive remarks. **Do not make negative comments. Be careful how you phrase your comments. Do not lecture** the students regarding their work. This is their day to be the experts. Your comments are what make this program unique and educational in every way at every level. It is especially important for those students who will not win a prize. You must inform them--in a constructive and positive manner--how they can improve; what they need to do next time to be more successful. This is absolutely crucial.
10. Remember to **discuss your evaluations** with one another. Remember that all judges on a team must consider any rule infractions and factor such infractions into the final ranking. It is also important to remember that, while the rules are important and should be considered in the final ranking, you should not allow a minor rule infraction to determine the final ranking of the entry. The rules provide the parameters for the competition, but they, in and of themselves, are not the most important aspect of the contest. Small infractions such as an error on the title page should not take an entry out of contention. BUT, such infractions should be noted on the evaluation sheets so that they may be corrected before the entry moves on to the next level of competition. Major rule infractions, such as size or time limit, should be considered in the final ranking. Use your judgment. If an entry exceeds the time or size limit to the extent that it contributes an advantage over the other entries (e.g., allows more information and interpretation), the rule infraction should be considered. For example, if a performance exceeds the time limit by more than approximately five seconds--especially if it runs over by more than 10 seconds--the extra time might allow students to extend their interpretation or information and give them an edge over those within the limits. However, if a performance exceeds the time limit by a few seconds, the entry may still be considered for a prize, as one or two seconds does not allow for any significant increase in material or analysis.
11. Evaluation sheets: (Explain your process for collecting evaluation sheets and processing them.)
12. Remember that the **Process Paper** that students must provide in the performance, documentary and exhibit categories must be a description of how the students went about the research and creation of the entry and concludes with an

explanation of the topic's relationship to the theme. **This should not be a research paper about the topic.**

13. Attached to the process paper should be an annotated bibliography. The annotation should explain how the work was used in producing the entry and the student's rationale for classifying each source as primary or secondary. Evaluate their bibliographies based on the strength of their sources and on the breadth of their research appropriate to the topic and a young person's ability to investigate the sources (e.g., students cannot be expected to travel to archives abroad or to other states, translate material from other languages, etc.). If you are unsure why they have classified a source as primary or secondary, ask them.

14. **Performances:** a performance must be original (they cannot use something that is already written); performers should display stage presence, including clear and audible voices; costumes do not need to be authentic but should be simple or consider the topic (wearing red and white for a performance on the Civil War is not a good idea); take into consideration nerves, forgotten lines, and audience applause or laughter when timing the performance.

**Documentaries:** a documentary should be a documentary, something you might see on PBS or The History Channel it should not be simply a performance on videotape; students must run all equipment. The room will be dark please stay awake!

**Web sites:** a Web site should be constructed in such a way that it is clear that the student has created a presentation that involves his or her own interpretation about the topic's significance in history. The Web site should be more than just information which the judges peruse through and draw their own (the judges') conclusions.

**Exhibits:** an exhibit should be like a museum exhibit writ small; it should contain only 500 student composed written material (this does not include primary sources, newspaper articles, but does include timelines, captions, etc.); be careful to spend an equal amount of time with each student and exhibit you don't want to rush through the end. You will have the first hour to look at the exhibits without the students present.

**Papers:** paper judges should have read their papers ahead of time; now they must interview the students.

15. **Interviews:** after viewing the entry or reading the paper, you should ask questions of the students. The purpose is to clarify any concerns or questions you have, and to provide some interaction between the professional and student. Ask something of substance regarding the topic. Sample questions: Why did choose this topic? How did you begin the research process? What was your most important source and why?
16. **Do not tell** the students what their evaluations are or who the winners are. Save that for the awards ceremony.
17. **Finals:** (The large number of entries at the national contest requires that there be a semi-final and a final round in each category. If your contest requires finals, be sure to explain your process to your judges--how many entries should move on; who will evaluate the finals, etc. At the national level of competition, students are not questioned in the finals; the entries must be able to stand on their own merit.)

18. For a smooth and efficient competition, it is **essential** that you keep to the time limit.
19. **Special prizes:** (If you present special prizes at your contest, be sure to explain to your judges the procedure for choosing the special awards.)
20. Absent group members: (Some state coordinators grant permission for some members of groups to be absent, but require all members to register for the contest--this is due to the number of activities that some students are involved in, such as track, band concerts, SAT exams, etc. Be sure to explain your own policy regarding absent members of exhibit and documentary groups to your judges. Of course, all students involved in individual and performance entries must be present.)
21. Lunch: (If you offer lunch or refreshments to your judges, don't forget to tell them when and where!)
22. The end of the judging process: (Explain your procedure for completing the evaluation process--e.g., return to a central location to turn in their forms, finalize the rankings, etc.)
23. Thank them again!