

Theme Narrative Rights & Responsibilities in History

This year's National History Day theme allows you to look at topics from all over the world and in many areas of study. As you dive deeper into your research, you'll find that this is a complex and thought-provoking theme. We've broken down this year's theme to help you choose a topic and begin your research.

Don't forget to check out the Ohio Topic List for more help on how to explore this year's theme of [Rights and Responsibilities in History](#). We're so excited to see what topics you select and the projects you create this year!

What is a right?

You may have heard of ideas like the right to vote or the right to free speech. But what actually is a right? **Rights are the freedoms or privileges that people enjoy as members of a society or simply by being humans.** They are the rules about what people can do or what is owed to them based on laws, social agreements, or ethical beliefs. For example, the right to vote allows us to participate in our country's democracy.

Think about the different groups you are a part of. They may be local – like your family, school, sports teams – or they may be bigger – like being a member of a state, nation, or the world. Being a member of these groups, or societies, gives you a set of rights.

There are different types of rights. You've most likely heard about rights like civil rights and human rights, but there are also political rights, social rights, and economic rights. Take a look at the chart below for more about these rights.

Types of Rights	Definition of Rights
Civil Rights	Rights that allow for freedoms like freedoms of speech, religion, assembly, petition, and press. The Bill of Rights is a great place to start looking for topics!
Political Rights	Rights that allow citizens to participate in their government. These can include the right to vote or the right to run for office.
Social Right	Rights that ensure a basic standard of living. These could be rights like the right to education, right to housing, right to healthcare.
Economic Right	Rights that allow people to work, earn wages, and own property.
Human Rights	Rights that are universal and apply to everyone. They guarantee basic freedoms and protections for all individuals. Check out the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from the United Nations to learn more about these ideas!

What is a responsibility?

Responsibilities are expectations of individuals as members of society. As members of societies with rights, we also have responsibilities. For example, citizens of the United States who can vote have responsibilities like staying informed about issues and candidates, following voting procedures, and respecting the privacy of other voters' choices.

The different societies, or groups, that you are a part of each have responsibilities. For example, being a member of a sports team comes with various responsibilities to ensure the team functions well and achieves its goals. There are personal responsibilities, like attending practices and following team rules, and team responsibilities like supporting your teammates. You also have ethical responsibilities like playing fairly. And these are just some of the responsibilities that you have as a team member! Now think of all the other groups you're a part of. Each of those groups have their own sets of responsibilities.

Just like there are different types of rights, there are also different types of responsibilities. We have legal, civic, social, and ethical responsibilities.

Types of Responsibilities	Definition of Responsibilities
Legal Responsibility	A responsibility that involves following laws paying taxes, and respecting others' rights
Civic Responsibility	A responsibility that includes voting, staying informed about political issues, and participating in community activities
Social Responsibility	A responsibility that involves treating others with respect and helping those in need through your actions
Ethical Responsibility	A responsibility that requires making morally sound decisions based on personal values, even if they are not legally required

How do rights and responsibilities work together?

While we can think about a right separate from a responsibility, this year's NHD theme asks you to consider how they work together. It's important to look at how responsibilities and rights work together in history when you are choosing a topic. A right can impact a responsibility, and a responsibility can impact a right. It's important to remember that there isn't a cause-and-effect relationship between the two ideas.

Rights allow individuals to enjoy freedoms and protections, while responsibilities ensure these freedoms are exercised in a way that maintains order, respects others, and promotes the well-being of the community. In an ideal, balanced society, rights and responsibilities work together to build a place where we live harmoniously. However, most societies are ever evolving and require citizens to recognize their human and ethical responsibility to fight for

rights that are not yet guaranteed. Sometimes this can lead to a tension between the responsibilities and rights.

Let's see how a right and responsibility can impact each other, using the Underground Railroad as an example.

A Right Impacting a Responsibility

- The right to equality, where all people should be treated equally under the law, inspired many to challenge the institution of slavery. This belief in the right to equality led individuals to act on their ethical responsibility by providing safe houses, resources, and guidance to freedom seekers, despite the personal risks involved.

A Responsibility Impacting a Right

- Some of those who participated in the Underground Railroad felt a civic responsibility to uphold justice and fight against the unjust system of slavery. Their actions, such as advocating for abolition, directly supported the movement towards equal rights for all individuals, ultimately contributing to the abolition of slavery.

When you are deciding how rights and responsibilities work together, try asking some of these questions:

- If I have a right to BLANK, what responsibilities do I have?
- If I have a responsibility to do BLANK, is there a right I am entitled to?
- Are there rights that certain individuals or groups are missing? What responsibilities do other members of society have to ensure equal rights for all people?
- Have individuals or society failed at fulfilling their responsibilities? How does that failure impact rights?
- What tension exists between rights and responsibilities in this topic?

Multiple Perspectives

When thinking about rights and responsibilities, it's important to consider different perspectives. People from different backgrounds or cultures might have different views on what rights are most important or how responsibilities should be fulfilled. The way that they choose to uphold their responsibilities can differ too. It's important to remember that everyone values rights and responsibilities differently, so not everyone will have the same views on them. It's also important to remember that not everyone in society might believe that the fight to secure a particular right is worthwhile or important. By considering these perspectives, we can better understand and respect each other.

Let's consider the right to vote. When the U.S. was first founded, the right to vote was only given to white men with property. Over time, many people fought hard to expand this right to include African Americans and women. However, when people were fighting for this right, not everyone agreed on who should be allowed to vote. People from various backgrounds

had different opinions, with some believing that only certain groups deserved this right, and others advocating for equal voting rights for all citizens. Recognizing these differing perspectives helps us understand the complexities of achieving the right to vote.

When thinking about different perspectives, consider these questions:

- Who decides who has rights?
- Does everyone have the same rights?
- Does everyone express their responsibility for ensuring that rights of others in the same way?
- Who decides on the limits of these rights and responsibilities?
- How do different forms of government affect rights and responsibilities?

Thinking About Short and Long-Term Impacts

It's important to think about how actions related to rights and responsibilities can have both short-term and long-term impacts. For example, standing up for a right might lead to immediate changes, but it can also inspire future generations and lead to long-lasting societal changes. Similarly, neglecting responsibilities can have immediate negative effects and cause long-term harm to communities and society.

Local History Topics Rights & Responsibilities in History

History happens every day and in your own backyard! In fact, Ohio has played an essential role in both U.S. and World History. Below we've put together a list of Ohio topics for the 2025 NHD theme of Rights & Responsibilities in History. Be sure to check out some example topics, marked with asterisk (*), after the local history list!

African American History

- Brigadier General Charles Young – First African American man to achieve the rank of colonel in the U.S. Army
- Carl B. Stokes – First African American mayor of a major US city (Cleveland, 1967), later a judge and ambassador
- Charlene Mitchell – Civil rights activist and socialist. She was the first African American woman candidate to run for President of the United States
- Ohio in the Underground Railroad
- Levi Coffin
- John P. Parker
- John Rankin
- Henry Boyd
- AME Church (see Dr. Cheryl LaRoche)
- Abraham Depp
- Lady Fanm Goumen
- W.C.A. No. 2—First African American branch of the YWCA in the nation
- Wilberforce University—First Black owned and operated private HBCU

American Indian History

- American Indian Movement, 1960s/70s
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act, 1978
- American Indian Wars, 1789-1795
- French Indian Wars, 1754-1763
- Haudenosaunee Confederation
- Indian Removal Act, 1830
- Lord Dunmore's War (1774)
- Michikinikwa, or Little Turtle, leader of the Myaamia
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, 1990 *

- Proclamation of 1763
- Tecumseh- leader of the Shawnee
- Western Confederacy

Diplomatic History

- Bouquet's Expedition
- Constitutional Conventions, 1851, 1870, 1912
- King Philip's War, 1675-1678
- The Dayton Accord
- Toledo War & the Frostbitten Convention, 1835-1836
- Treaty of Greenville, 1795
- War of 1812

Economic History

- Baldemar Velasquez – American labor union activist and co-founder of Farm Labor Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO.
- Building of the Miami and Erie Canal
- Cincinnati meatpacking "Porkopolis," 1840-1875
- Cleveland Strike at General Motors –
- Construction of the National Road in Ohio, 1825-1838
- Formation of the United Auto Workers
- Panic of 1907 & the founding of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland
- United Mine Workers coal strike of 1919 in Ohio
- Youngstown "Little Steel" Strike – Led to the formation of the United Steels Workers Union

Environmental History

- Cuyahoga River Fires
- National Environment Policy Act, 1970
- Ohio Conservancy Law
- Scioto River pollution

Local History Topics Rights & Responsibilities in History

- The Great Dayton Flood
- The Wilderness Act of 1964

Political History

- Associate Justice Harold Burton, 1 of 9 Supreme Court Justices to rule on *Brown v. the Board of Education*, 1954
- Benjamin Lundy – Abolitionist, publisher of antislavery newspapers
- *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, 1969
- Clement Vallandigham – Leader of the Ohio Democratic Party and opponent of the American Civil War *
- *Columbus Board of Education v. Penick*, 1979
- *Equality Foundation of Cincinnati vs. City of Cincinnati*, 1997 *
- Florence Ellinwood Allen – First woman elected to the Ohio Supreme Court and first to serve on the Supreme Court of any state
- Joshua R. Giddings – Abolitionist, one of the founders and member of the Republican Party
- Kent State University shootings, 1970
- *Mapp v. Ohio*, 1961
- Maxwell's Code, 1795
- Ohio Black Codes & Ohio Black Laws, 1804 & 1807 respectively
- Ohio Civil Rights Act of 1959
- Ohio Public Accommodations Law of 1884
- Ohio Statehood, 1803
- Stonewall Union (now known as Stonewall Columbus)
- The Bing Act, 1921
- The Northwest Ordinance, 1787

Science & Medicine

- 1918 Flu Epidemic at Camp Sherman in Chillicothe, Ohio
- AIDS Task Force of Greater Cleveland
- Albert Sabin & the invention of the oral polio vaccine
- Ella P. Stewart – First African American female pharmacist in the U.S.
- Neil Armstrong & Apollo 11 mission *

- Thomas Alva Edison – Menlo Park laboratory & his inventions
- Willem Kolff – Cleveland Clinic doctor who invented kidney dialysis

Social & Cultural History

- 'Red Power' – Pan Indian Identity, 1960s
- Cleveland Black Gay Pride Weekends
- Harry C. Smith – Journalist & Legislator who championed Civil Rights in Ohio
- Jean O'Leary – one of the founders of National Coming Out Day
- Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster- creators of the "first superhero," Superman *
- Jesse Owens & 1936 Berlin Olympics
- Lane Seminary Debates *
- Lockbourne Army Air Force Base (Columbus) – Tuskegee Airmen
- McGuffey Readers – standardized textbook for students around the country in 18th century
- Natalie Clifford Barney – American playwright, poet and novelist
- Paul Laurence Dunbar– African American Poet and activist
- Protest & labor songs of Appalachian coal miners
- Toni Morrison, author & first African American woman to win the Nobel prize in literature
- United Freedom Movement

Women's History

- 19th Amendment
- Betsy Mix Cowles – Prominent educator, activist & suffragist
- Gloria Steinem – Famed women's rights advocate
- Lucy Stone – Abolitionist & Suffragist
- Oberlin College – First college to admit women and one of the first to admit African Americans
- Ohio Women's Convention at Salem
- Victoria Woodhull – First woman to be nominated for president in 1872 and member of the suffrage movement

Local History Topics Rights & Responsibilities in History

Dig deeper into some Ohio topics! Take a look through the background on each topic and think through the research questions. What other research questions could help you think about these topics and how they relate to rights and responsibilities?

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

Background

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was enacted in 1990 to ensure the protection and return of Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural significance. NAGPRA lays out the process for proper treatment of the remains of Native ancestors and their belongings “with dignity and respect,” as well as the procedures for remains found on Federal or Tribal land. Additionally, the Act requires Federal agencies and institutions that receive Federal funds (including museums, universities, state agencies, and local governments) to return or transfer Native American human remains and other cultural items to lineal descendants and culturally affiliated Native American tribes. Though the law was enacted in 1990, the repatriation of objects is ongoing as Federal agencies and organizations receiving Federal funds continue to work through collections housing thousands of remains and objects.



NAGPRA: National Park Service
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/index.htm>

Questions to Consider

How did the enactment of NAGPRA change the rights of Indigenous people? How did it impact the access archaeologists, anthropologists and other scientists have to study Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred and cultural objects? How can policy balance the need to treat

all people with dignity while also allowing for continued advancement in fields like anthropology and

archaeology? NAGPRA does not dictate what actions must be taken for remains and objects found on private or State lands. How have state governments handled this issue differently than the Federal government?

Local History Topics
Rights & Responsibilities in History

Equality Foundation of Cincinnati vs. City of Cincinnati, 1997

Background

In 1993, Cincinnatians voted to implement a City Charter amendment stating, "No special class status may be granted based upon sexual orientation, conduct or relationships." This amendment ultimately prevented the city from providing legal protections to LGBTQ+ individuals and repealed all prior legislation that provided legal protections. As a result, the Equality Foundation of Greater Cincinnati, Inc. brought a lawsuit against the City of Cincinnati, arguing that the amendment would violate the First and Fourteenth Amendment rights of LGBTQ+ individuals. The Equality Foundation ultimately lost the case on appeal at the Federal level. The amendment was implemented and prevented the passage of any laws protecting LGBTQ+ Cincinnatians until 2004, when the amendment was repealed by voters.

Questions to Consider

How did Cincinnatians exercise their rights in voting for the amendment? How did the implementation of the amendment change the rights of Cincinnatians? Did it have the same effect on all people? What responsibilities do voters have to ensure legal protection for minorities? What role do the courts play in determining rights and responsibilities?

Local History Topics Rights & Responsibilities in History

Apollo 11

Background

In July 1969, the Apollo 11 mission successfully landed the first humans on the moon. The American mission was part of the Space Race, a period of competition between the United States and Soviet Union to determine which superpower possessed spaceflight superiority. The astronauts collected samples, left behind equipment to monitor and collect more data from the moon, and took measurements while they were on the surface. Though an American flag was planted on the surface of the moon, the United States did not claim ownership of the moon. This was in line with the so-called Outer Space Treaty, an agreement drafted by the United Nations that outlined the basic principles of space law, including provisions that prevented any claims of ownership or sovereignty by a nation and that declared space exploration for the benefit of all nations. The American people celebrated the Apollo 11 mission as a great victory and many considered it to be the final battle in the Space Race between the Soviet Union and United States.



Apollo 11 launch photograph. (1969).

<https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll32/id/14757>

Questions to Consider

What rights and responsibilities were at play in the Apollo 11 mission? In what ways did NASA employees view their work on the Apollo 11 mission as a civic responsibility? What rights did the United States give up in signing the Outer Space Treaty and how did that impact the Apollo 11 mission? What responsibilities did the treaty place on the United States during the mission? What responsibilities did the United States have to preserve and protect the moon? Who should own and control the samples astronauts took from the moon? How did the Apollo 11 mission impact the rights and responsibilities of spacefaring nations?

Local History Topics Rights & Responsibilities in History

Clement Vallandigham

Background & Questions to Get You Thinking

Clement Vallandigham was a leader of the Ohio Democratic Party and an opponent of the American Civil War during the 19th century. In the years leading up to the American Civil War, Vallandigham was a staunch opponent of war to settle the differences between the North and the South and believed that the Union had no right to regulate slavery or use military force against the South. Vallandigham was one of President Lincoln's most outspoken critics and the leading Peace Democrat in Ohio. He delivered a speech denouncing General No. 38 (issued by Union Gen. Burnside, it banned "sympathies for the enemy"), which Vallandigham believed was a violation of civil liberties. He was arrested, tried and ultimately sentenced into exile in the Confederacy. Vallandigham quickly escaped from the Confederacy into Canada and would return to Ohio after the war to become a leader in the Ohio Democratic Party.

Questions to Consider

What rights and responsibilities were at play in the leadup to and duration of the American Civil War? How did opponents and proponents of the Civil War view states' rights? Should First

Amendment rights be limited during wartime?

Should those rights be applied differently

depending on the level of influence a person

has? How did Vallandigham view the rights of the Southern states? How did his view differ from Ohio Republicans and President Lincoln? Should conviction of a wartime crime prevent a politician from regaining office?



Clement Vallandigham Conscription Bill Speech. (1863).
<https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll36/id/4496>

Local History Topics Rights & Responsibilities in History

Lane Seminary Debates

Background

In the winter of 1834, the students of Lane Theological Seminary, including some southerners and one former slave, organized an eighteen-night revival under the leadership of Theodore Dwight Weld. These antislavery debates over immediate abolition versus colonization (sending free African Americans to a colony in Africa) effectively converted almost all the students to prefer immediate abolition. American newspapers publicized the debates, and women supporters, "the Cincinnati Sisters," organized local schools for African American children. The debates caused considerable

controversy and even prompted threats of violence against the seminary. In response, the trustees prohibited the students from discussing controversial issues. As a result of this prohibition, most of the students withdrew, set up a seminary in exile in Cumminsville, Ohio and then moved it to Oberlin College. The Lane Seminary Debates marked the shift in American antislavery efforts from colonization to abolition, and the "Lane Rebels" became ministers, abolitionists, and social reformers across the country.



Sketch of Lane Seminary. (1830).

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:LaneSeminary.jpg#filehistory>

Questions to Consider

What responsibilities did the students believe they had to speak out against slavery? How were students exercising their rights in hosting these debates? How did the students' right to free speech clash with the board of trustees' responsibility to the seminary? How did the students' arguments for immediate abolition or colonization reflect their views of rights and responsibilities? How would the two primary proposed plans for the end of slavery (immediate abolition versus colonization) impact the rights of formerly enslaved people, in enacted? How would they change the responsibilities of the United States government and the American people?

Local History Topics Rights & Responsibilities in History



Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, creators of Superman.. (1942).
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/06/24/kryptonomics>

Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster- creators of the "first superhero," Superman

Background

Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster met in 1930 as high school students in Cleveland, Ohio, creating comics together. In 1938, the duo agreed to sell Superman to National Allied Publications (a forerunner of DC Comics) for \$135 and a 10-year contract as the principal writer and artist for the Superman comics, earning half of the net profits. When the contract ended in 1948, Siegel & Shuster sued to regain the copyright for Superman and to receive compensation for DC's use of the Superboy story (for which the company had never paid), but ultimately lost the case and received a \$100,000 settlement. Their names were subsequently removed from the comic bylines. Siegel sued for the rights to Superman again in 1967 but lost. Finally, in 1975, Siegel launched a campaign to pressure Warner Bros. (the parent company of DC Comics) for financial compensation. Due to public pressure,

Warner Bros. agreed to give Siegel and Shuster each a yearly stipend of \$20,000 and added their names back into the comic bylines.

Questions to Consider

How did Siegel & Shuster's rights to their intellectual property change throughout the life of the Superman comics? What rights did they give up in order to get their comics published? What did they gain in return? What responsibilities did DC have to Siegel & Shuster? Did both parties always find this to be a fair exchange?