

Introduction to History Day

Youth History Division

TEACHER GUIDE

AUDIENCE

Grades 4-5

TIME

80 minutes (or two
40-minute blocks)

STANDARDS

Social Studies:

Grade 4: C.S. 1, C.S.
2, C.S. 15, C.S. 16,
C.S. 17, C.S. 18

Grade 5: C.S. 1, C.S.
11

English Language
Arts: Grades 3-5: R.L.
4.1, R.L. 5.1, R.L. 4.2,
R.L. 5.2, R.I. 4.1, R.I.
5.1, R.I. 4.2, R.I. 5.2,
R.I. 4.3, R.I. 5.3, W.
4.2, W.5.2

*Lesson includes ideas
and sources from VMHC
Virginia History Day
Elementary Teacher
Guide.

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HISTORY
CONNECTION

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Introduction

In this lesson plan, students will learn about the National History Day project and the expectations for success. Students will understand the narrative (or theme) of a piece of history and why this story element is important to creating a successful History Day project. Students will consider how historical fiction texts and narrative nonfiction texts tell the story of history. They will explore what historians need to do to tell the story of a historical event or person.

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to identify the theme of historical fiction or narrative nonfiction texts.
- Students will make connections between theme in stories and the theme of the National History Day project.
- Students will be able to identify the expectations for a successful National History Day project.
- Students will understand the definition of a revolution and be able to name examples of revolutions.
- Students will understand the definition of a reaction and be able to give examples of reactions.
- Students will understand the definition of a reform and be able to name examples of reforms.

Materials

- Lesson Plan
- [Ohio Youth History Day Introduction Slides](#) PPT
- Historical Fiction Picture Book (*She Loved Baseball* by: Audrey Vernick or *Henry's Freedom Box* by: Ellen Levin)

Vocabulary

Revolution	The forcible overthrow of a government or social order, in favor of a new system, or a dramatic and wide-reaching change in the way something works or is organized or in people's ideas about it.
Reaction	An action performed, or a feeling experienced in response to a situation or event; the resistance or opposition to a force or movement.
Reform	The effort to change to a better state or form; to improve by alteration, substitution, abolition.
Theme	Universal idea, lesson, or message explored in a book, text, or project
Historical Fiction	A realistic story that takes place in a specific time or era in the past. It may be based on actual historical events or actual people but includes some fictional elements.
Story Element	Parts that make up a story (plot, setting, characters, point of view, conflict)
Primary Source	Direct or firsthand evidence about an event, object or person. Some examples include artifacts, autobiographies, letters, diaries, photographs and oral histories.

Program Outline

Pre-Activity 1: What Makes a Good Story?

- I. Activate your students' background knowledge by beginning with a discussion on the parts that make up a good story. Record students' ideas on the board or chart paper. Expect students to list ideas like a beginning, middle, end, characters, setting, action/drama, lesson or theme, etc.
- II. Explain to students that the theme or lesson of a story is the part of a story that is the focus of today's lesson. Review the definition of a theme for fictional texts. Ask students to share out ways that they find theme in their books. What clues do good readers look for to find a theme? Record their answers on the chart paper.
- III. Students will be reading a historical fiction picture book. Introduce the title of the picture book (either *She Loved Baseball* by: Audrey Vernick or *Henry's Freedom Box* by: Ellen Levin) using primary sources. Analyze the primary sources with the students. Have students brainstorm connections the images have between each other and the title of the book.
 - a. *She Loved Baseball* Primary Sources Links:
 - [Baseball Hall of Fame](#)
 - <https://d36tnp772eyphs.cloudfront.net/blogs/1/2019/11/A-baseball-with-the-logo-of-the-National-Baseball-Hall-of-Fame.jpg>
 - [Newark Eagles Baseball Team](#)
 - <https://nlbemuseum.com/history/teams/newarkeagles.html>
 - [Negro League World Series Ad](#)
 - <https://sabr.org/gamesproj/game/september-17-29-1946-newark-eagles-get-the-best-of-kansas-city-monarchs-in-negro-league-world-series/>
 - b. *Henry's Freedom Box* Primary Sources Links:
 - [The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown at Philadelphia](#)
 - <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004665363/>
 - [Representation of the Box](#)
 - <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/125hpr-38895746c85153d/>
 - [Advertisement for Adams & Co's Express](#)
 - <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/8151hpr-10118de251d9433/>
 - [Henry Box Brown](#)
 - <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/12hpr-c24a6b12a930fd9/>

Pre-Activity 2: Historical Fiction Read Aloud

- I. Read aloud your historical fiction picture book of choice (either *She Loved Baseball* by: Audrey Vernick or *Henry's Freedom Box* by: Ellen Levin). Remind students to be thinking about a theme or lesson that they see in the story. What is it that the characters learn? What is the author teaching us about history? How do you know?
- II. Pause throughout the story to tie back to the primary sources they viewed to help build their background knowledge on the time period.
- III. At the end of the story, call on students to share their thoughts on the theme of the story. Make a connection to Ohio History Day by sharing that as a part of their project, students will be creating their own story following a theme based on a historical event or person. Students will be exploring primary (and secondary) sources to learn more about a historical topic just as we began today's lesson.

(If choosing to break this lesson into two days, STOP here.)



Main Activity: What is National History Day?

- I. Explain that NHD is based on a theme each year. Share with the students what the current year's theme is (Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History) and explain that they'll dive deeper into the meaning of the theme and how we as authors can show this theme.
- II. Play the Ohio History Day overview video (<https://youtu.be/10Ciy3WplcM> 4:59). Students will see the many options for projects categories. It is important to note that students in the Youth Division can choose from the Exhibit Category or the Performance Category only. Youth division students do not compete at Regional Contests. They compete only at the State Contest in Columbus each spring. They can complete the project without competing as well.
- III. Display the Many Hats of History Day. Go through each hat and discuss the different roles and expectations they will take on as they begin their projects.
 - a. **Detective Hat:** Who wears this hat? A detective. What does a detective do? Looks for clues. Where does he look? Scene of the crime, witnesses, evidence, etc. Draw parallels to research.
Fall = Research
 - b. **Mortarboard.** When do you wear this hat? Graduation. A graduate of either high school or college is a scholar. By the time you graduate college, you have a "major," something you are an expert in. As an expert, you can tell me what's important and can make an argument. Draw parallels to writing your thesis and making an argument for History Day project.
Winter = Project Creation
 - c. **Chef's Hat:** Whose hat is this? A chef. More than just cooking food, what does a chef do with it? Presentation is key! A chef brings together all the ingredients in just the right way to make it tasty! Do you put spaghetti ingredients in a blender and serve 'em up with a straw? Nooooo!!
Spring = Contest & Review (edits to project based on judge feedback for next round of competition)
 - d. As a History Day student, you need to wear all three hats.

*The following steps in the lesson plan are specific to the **2026 National History Day Theme of Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History**. This lesson plan will need to be modified to address future themes. *

- I. Introduce the vocabulary words of Revolution, Reaction, and Reform. Follow the same steps for explicit vocabulary instruction:
 - a. Show the vocabulary word (revolution) with the part of speech and a simple definition. Discuss with students how the picture might represent the word. Have students choral read the slide with you. You may have students write this information down in a notebook or vocabulary tracker.
 - b. The next slide will feature a paragraph with the vocabulary word used frequently. This slide will expand upon the simple definition. Read aloud the paragraph to the class. Students will chorally read with you **ONLY** the words highlighted and underlined. For this slide, it will only be the vocabulary word.
 - c. The next slide expands further on the vocabulary word and introduces some other words or phrases associated with it. Read aloud the paragraphs to the class. Again, students will read aloud with you the words that are highlighted and underlined. This time the words include other words associated with the vocabulary word.
 - d. Repeat steps A-C with the next vocabulary words (reaction, reform).
- II. Closure: In the next lesson we will be learning more about examples of Revolutions, Reactions, and Reforms in history and think about how we can show this theme in our projects.

