

National History Day 2012 Theme:

REVOLUTION, REACTION, REFORM IN HISTORY

Welcome to National History Day! You are about to become a better student! It doesn't matter if you are planning on becoming a doctor, a historian, a marine biologist, or a teacher: whatever your career path, National History Day will help. Besides being a fun experience, NHD will improve your reading and writing skills and help you become a better researcher, all while you are learning about a topic of your choice!

During the 2011-2012 school year National History Day invites students to research topics related to the theme, "Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History." The theme is broad enough for you to select a local, state, national or world history topic. To understand the historical importance of your topic, you must ask questions of time and place, cause and effect, change over time, impact and significance. You must ask questions about why events happened and what impact the events had. What factors contributed to a revolution? Why was there a need to reform at the particular time? Why did this event cause a reaction? Regardless of the topic selected, you must do more than describe what happened. You must draw conclusions, basing your opinion on evidence, about how the topic affected individuals, communities, nations and the world. Studies should include an investigation into available primary and secondary sources, analysis of the evidence, and a clear explanation of the relationship of the topic to the theme.

As you investigate this year's theme think of the theme in broad terms, as the distinction among revolutions, reactions and reforms may be blurred. Never be too literal. Revolutions and reforms are often reactions to particular situations or events, which may inspire reactions. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, the word revolution means "the overthrow of one government and its replacement with another" or a "sudden or momentous change in a situation." Whether revolutionary or gradual, such changes often inspire opposition, as some people seek to slow or even reverse them. Consequently, some topics will focus on revolution, reaction, AND reform, while other topics may allow you to focus on just one or two aspects of the theme.

For many Americans, the word revolution conjures up images of the Fourth of July, celebrating our revolutionary heritage; for others, it brings to mind gun-toting guerrillas in wars we do not understand. Political and social revolutions such as those in America in the 1770s and the communist revolutions of the 20th century are complex events, which provide a plethora of potential possibilities for NHD research projects but not in their entirety. Rather than attempting to analyze and document an entire political revolution, you should look for more manageable topics such as ideas emerging from a particular revolution, specific events or factions within a revolution, or individuals who affected or were affected by a revolution. A paper could illuminate the role of the Stamp Act of 1765 played in the coming of the American Revolution. The role of women in the French revolution might be illustrated through a performance focusing on the bread riots of 1789, while Mahatma Gandhi's leadership of India's revolt against British rule would make a compelling topic for a documentary or website.

Political revolutions provoke reactions far beyond the borders of a single nation. How did other revolutions inspire slaves in Saint Domingue to stage their own revolution in 1791? An exhibit could examine the allied invasion of Russia as a reaction to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. How did American fear of the spread of communism affect the Cold War? A website could focus on the Marshall Plan or the Truman Doctrine as manifestations of this fear, while a performance might look at U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. A website could examine the consequences of the student revolts in France in 1968.

Failed revolutions and rebellions also provide excellent topics for student entries. A paper could appraise the Sepoy Rebellion in India in 1857 and how it affected British colonial policy. An exhibit could examine the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, which helped fuel Chinese nationalism and the rise of Sun Yat-sen. What was the reaction throughout the Southern United States to Nat Turner's rebellion in Virginia in 1831? Can Reconstruction be considered a failed revolution?



Wide-ranging reform programs sometimes can spur changes as great as those caused by revolutions. The effects of the reforms of Solon and Cleisthenes on Athens in the 6th century BCE would be a suitable topic for a paper. How did the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912) affect Tokugawa Japan? A performance might focus on Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of Glasnost and Perestroika in the Soviet Union during the last years of the Cold War. A documentary could examine the impact of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. How did the New Deal revolutionize the role of government in American life in the 1930s?

Individual reforms and reform movements also deserve attention. The work of anti-slavery advocates such as Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison supplies dramatic material for performances. Any of the reforms of the Progressive movement of the early 20th century in the United States would make good topics. An exhibit might explain the role of muckraking journalists in agitating for reform. How was the settlement house movement an attempt at social reform? What role did Jane Addams play?

Court cases frequently can be classified as reactions, while their outcomes may lead to reforms or even revolutions. A performance might explore the role of the British Court of Star Chamber in leading English Puritans to revolt in the 1630s. How could the 1896 case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, be considered a reaction? How did the U.S. Supreme Court's *Miranda v. Arizona* decision in 1966 reform the treatment of those accused of crimes?

While less frequent than political revolutions or reforms, economic revolutions may have an even broader impact. The commercial revolution of the 1500s involved Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe. The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century eventually affected the entire world. Students should focus on a specific, fairly limited aspect of an economic revolution rather than try to master such a revolution in its entirety. The spice trade between Europe and Asia would be an excellent topic for an exhibit, as would the role of sugar in creating plantation economies in the Caribbean. A documentary could assess the experience of female workers in the Lowell, Massachusetts mills of the 1830s. How did the Luddites represent a reaction to the Industrial Revolution?

Consumers also have experienced revolutions. How did tea play a role in stimulating a consumer revolution in the 18th century? What impact did it have politically? Students

could create documentaries analyzing revolutions in shopping such as the development of department stores or the Montgomery Ward and Sears catalogues in the late 19th century, while a paper could explore the significance of installment buying in the early 20th century.

Economic revolutions often result from technological innovations, which sometimes led to tremendous social change as well. How did the cotton gin have an impact on slavery in the antebellum South? In what ways did the typewriter provide new opportunities for women in late 19th century offices? How was this revolutionary? The adoption of the stirrup in 8th century Europe and its effects on warfare and society could be the subject of a paper, while a documentary could portray the effects of automobiles on dating. How could other transportation innovations such as steamships, canals, railroads, and airplanes be considered revolutionary?

Advances in human thinking and knowledge made the technology described possible. What was revolutionary about Isaac Newton's work in the 1600s? How did Galileo Galilei's trial before the Inquisition in 1633 represent a reaction to the Scientific Revolution? The impact of Marie Curie's work on Radiation in the early 1900s would make an interesting documentary, while a performance might examine her contemporary Sigmund Freud's study of human psychology. Alternatively, students could investigate any of the revolutions in medical care of the 20th century.

You may find many topics in local history that are suitable. The local consequences of industrialization, or revolutions in transportation, would make good topics. If you live in Eastern United States, you could study local experiences during the American Revolution, while those in the South could focus on Reconstruction. If you live in an agricultural area, you might look at the history of the Populists in your state. The work of Progressive reformers or civil rights activists in your states also would be good topics. Or you may find reform movements or "revolutions" unique to your own community.

The theme is a broad one, so topics should be carefully selected and developed in ways that best use your talents and abilities. Whether a topic is a well-known event in world history or focuses on a little known individual from a small community, you should be careful to place your topic into historical perspective, examine the significance of your topic in history, and show development over time.



Maryland History Day: April 28, 2012 at UMBC
National History Day: June 10-14, 2012 at UMCP

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