

NHD® Annual Theme: Rights & Responsibilities in History

National History Day® (NHD) selects a new theme each year to help guide and connect all NHD projects. The annual theme for the 2024–2025 school year is "**Rights & Responsibilities in History**." To start your NHD project, you must first pick a research topic that connects to this theme. This guide will help you do just that. Remember that everything has a history, so try to find one that fascinates you! Your topic can be from any time in history or anywhere in the world. However, you do want to check with your teacher just to make sure they don't have any specific guidelines on topic choice before you begin.

Understanding the Theme

Before you decide on your topic, let's break down the theme and look at its parts. It's important to remember that rights come with responsibilities. For example, we all have the right to freedom of speech, but we also have the responsibility to use it in a way that doesn't affect the rights or well-being of others. This means your topic choice this year must highlight **both** historical rights and responsibilities.

Rights and responsibilities shape the relationship between individuals and society. A society can be a community, state, country, family, club, school, or religious organization, among other groups, where people come together and feel a sense of belonging. Rights and responsibilities play a significant role in how individuals interact with each other, their communities, and their governments.

Defining Rights

Rights are freedoms or privileges that individuals have as human beings or as citizens of a society. They are often protected by laws, charters, or constitutions that establish the boundaries of personal freedoms (rights) and protections and obligations (responsibilities).

- › **Civil rights:** nonpolitical rights of individuals that their governments (through law) are required to protect. They can include:
 - › **Freedom of speech:** the right to speak freely (within reason).
 - › **Freedom of religion:** the right to worship the religion of one's choice (or decline to worship).
 - › **Freedom of assembly:** the right to assemble in a group of one's choosing.
 - › **Freedom of petition:** the right to ask the government to make a change.
 - › **Freedom of the press:** the right to report on events and express opinions on the day's events.
- › **Political rights:** the rights of citizens to participate in their government, such as the right to vote and run for public office. Political rights ensure that citizens have a say in how they are governed.
- › **Social rights:** rights that establish a basic standard of living and well-being for all members of society, including education, safe housing, and access to social services.
- › **Economic rights:** rights that allow people to participate in the economy, including the right to own property, work, and earn fair wages.
- › **Human rights:** the rights that apply to all individuals, no matter who governs them. They are considered *universal* because they belong to everyone regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, or other identities or affiliations. These rights are *inalienable* because they cannot be withdrawn, surrendered, or transferred except in specific situations. They are most famously defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in December 1948. This document affirms the right of every person to life, a fair justice system, and access to the community's resources.¹

Defining Responsibilities

Responsibilities are expectations of individuals as members of society, including **legal responsibilities** (obeying the law, paying taxes), **civic responsibilities** (voting, staying informed about political issues), **social responsibilities** (treating others respectfully, helping those in need), and **ethical responsibilities** (making morally sound choices and decisions).

¹ Access the full Universal Declaration of Human Rights at [un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights](https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights).

History of Rights & Responsibilities

When considering a topic on rights and responsibilities in history, it's important to understand both its **historical context** and **historical significance**.

Historical Context

Historical context examines the time period, events, and conditions that influenced people's actions and decisions. Try finding the answers to these questions when reading about your topic:

- › What was happening in the world, country, and specific location of my topic at this time?
- › Who were the important leaders or groups involved, and what did they believe?
- › What laws or rules were in place that affected people's rights and responsibilities?
- › What other social, economic, and political factors may have influenced people's actions during this time?

Historical Significance

Historical significance focuses on why an event, person, or action was important at the time and how it impacted the future. The key to finding historical significance is to look for changes in rights and responsibilities over time. Consider these questions:

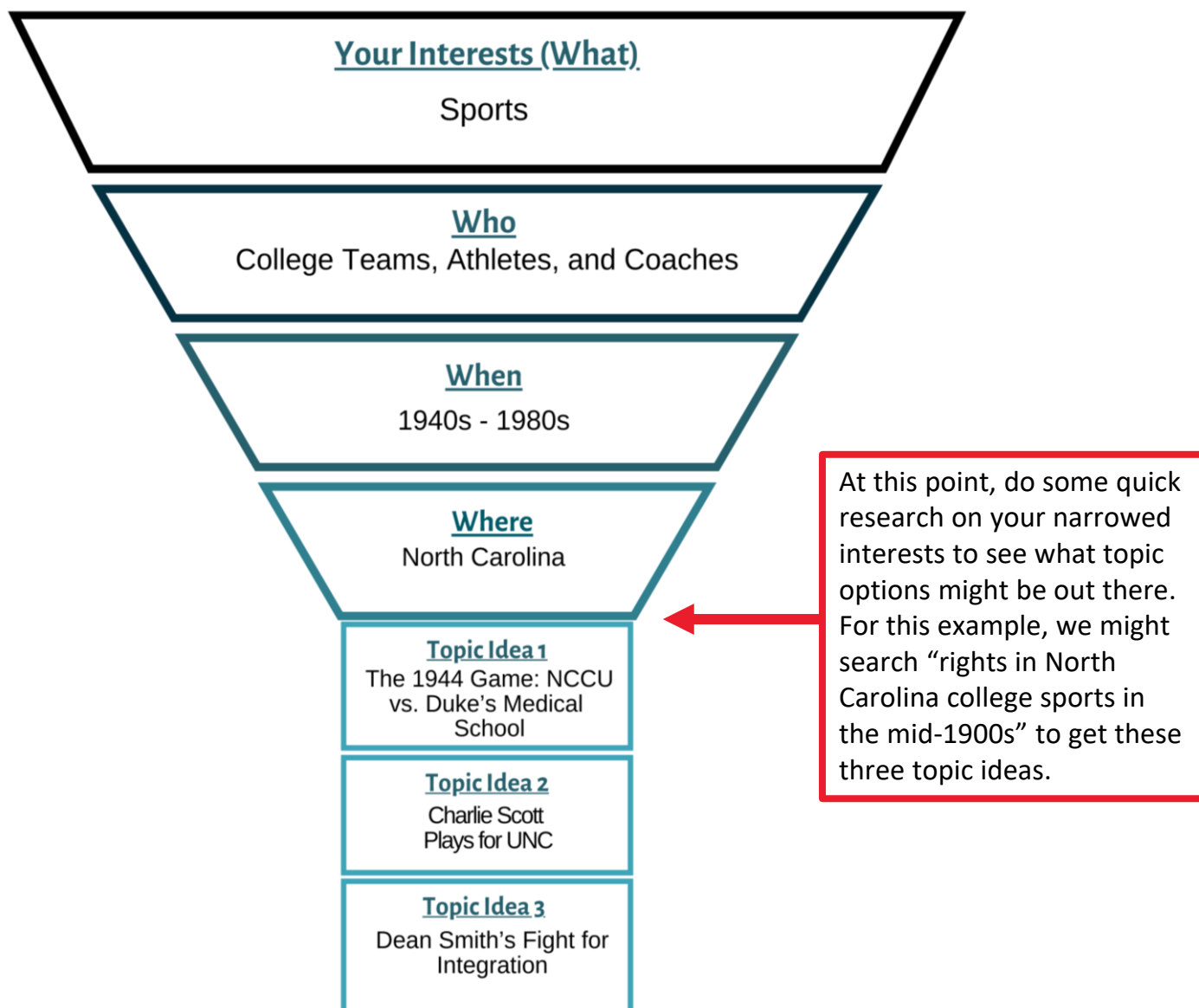
- › How did this event change people's lives?
 - › What were the immediate and long-term effects?
 - › Did it lead to new laws or social changes?
 - › Who benefited or suffered because of it?
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Narrowing Down a Topic

As you choose your topic, you want to try to find the right size topic. A topic such as “The Civil Rights Movement” might seem a good choice at first, but it covers a large amount of time, people, places, ideas, and actions. A broad topic like it might make finding sources easy but will be much harder fit into your project category's word or time limits. However, if you instead look at a specific person, action, or event of the Civil Rights Movement, such as the Greensboro Sit-in, it will help you focus your research and form a more manageable **historical argument**. Learn how to scale down broad ideas into specific topic using the topic funnel on the next page.

Using a Topic Funnel

The chart below shows how you can use **Who**, **What**, **When**, and **Where** questions to narrow your broad interests into focus history topic ideas. Remember that everything has a history, so think of things that are interesting to you! The end of this handout has a blank topic funnel for you to use.



N.C. History Topic Ideas

The topic ideas listed on the following pages explore possible connections to this year's theme within North Carolina history. Though sorted by type of history, many topic ideas fit into multiple sections, so examine the list carefully. NCpedia.org is a great place to start learning more about these topics.

Topic Ideas for Rights & Responsibilities in N.C. History

Arts & Entertainment

Founding of the American Dance Festival in Durham
André Leon Talley and the Fashion Industry
Artist Ernie Barnes
Bennie Lydell Glover & the Record Industry Downfall
Chang and Eng Bunker
Chitlin' Circuit in North Carolina
Creation of the North Carolina Symphony
Dancer Mel A. Tomlinson
Doc Watson
Establishment of the North Carolina Film Office
Formation of the North Carolina Museum of Art
Integration of Black Mountain College
Jazz Musician John Coltrane
Millie and Christine McKoy
Singer Nina Simone

Education

1971 Durham Schools Charette
Charlie Soong at Trinity College
Charlotte Hawkins Brown and the Palmer Institute
Creation of Salem College
Creation of Shaw University
Creation of the Croatan Normal School
Creation of UNC at Chapel Hill
Ira Harris and Desegregation of Franklin County Schools
Pearsall Plan
Poole Bills and Teaching Evolution in NC
Rosenwald Schools in North Carolina
Speaker Ban Laws
Sequoyah Creates the Cherokee Syllabary

Environment

1997 Clean Water Responsibility Act
Brown Creek Soil Conservation District
Carl Schenck and the Cradle of Forestry
Carolista Fletcher Baum's Fight to Save Jockey's Ridge
Creation of Mount Mitchell State Park
Creation of the North Carolina Zoological Park
Elizabeth Dole and Environmental Regulation
Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore
Extinction of the Carolina Parakeet
George Masa
Granville County Toxic Waste Incinerator Protests
Movement to Save the Red Wolves
Warren County's 1982 PCB Landfill Protests

Government

1763 Proclamation Line through Western NC
1830 Indian Removal Act
1868 Federal Recognition of Eastern Band of Cherokee
1898 Wilmington Coup d'état
1911 State Recognition of the Sappony
1956 "Lumbee Bill"
1964 State Recognition of the Haliwa-Saponi
1971 State Recognition of the Coharie
1971 State Recognition of the Waccamaw-Siouan
1986 State Recognition of the Meherrin
2001 State Recognition of the Occaneechi- Saponi
Bayard v. Singleton
Equal Rights Amendment in North Carolina
Founding of the N.C. Commission of Indian Affairs
NC Constitution of 1835
NC Postpones Consideration of 19th amendment
Prohibition in North Carolina
The Tuscarora's 1710 Petition against Carolina Settlers

Industry & Labor

1906 Formation of the NC Child Labor Committee
1995 Strike at Morganton's Case Farms
Burlington Dynamite Plot
Creation of Student Action with Farmworkers
Crystal Lee and the J.P. Stevens Plant
Ella Mae Wiggins and the Loray Mill Strikes
Harriet-Henderson Cotton Mills Strike
Hamlet Chicken Processing Plant Fire
Land and Claim Rights and the NC Gold Rush
Textile Strike of 1934 in NC

Maritime & Naval

Construction of Cape Lookout Lighthouse
Otway Burns and Right to Privateer
NC and its Pirate Problem
NC and the Maritime Underground Railroad
Pea Island Life-Saving Station
Sinking of the *Metropolis*
Sinking of the *USS Huron*

Medical

Creation of Leonard Medical School
Formation of the NC Eugenics Board
"Miracle of Hickory"
NC Artificial Limbs Program after Civil War
Simkins v. Cone (1963)
Zelda Fitzgerald and Mental Health Treatment

Topic Ideas for Rights & Responsibilities in N.C. History

Military

35th Regiment of the United States Colored Troop
1863 Salisbury “Bread Riot”
Abraham Galloway
Conscription Act of 1862 in NC
Creation of Montford Point
Culpeper's Rebellion
Fort Dobbs and the Catawba Alliance
Ned Griffin and the American Revolution
Shelton Laurel Massacre
WWII Prisoners of War in North Carolina
WWII Detainee Camps at Grove Park & Assembly Inn

Politics

Jacob Henry's Fight Against Expulsion
Lillian Exum Clement
North Carolina Congressional Gerrymandering
Stanly-Spaight Duel

Road to Revolution

Edenton Tea Party
Governor Tryon's “Palace”
Halifax Resolves
NC Committees of Safety
Regulators Movement
Stamp Act in North Carolina

Science & Innovation

Burroughs Wellcome Co. v. Barr Laboratories, Inc.
Christine Darden and the Space Race
Creation of Research Triangle Park
Mary Maria Petty's Chemistry Lab for Women
R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. v. Liggett & Myers
Rural Electrification Administration in NC
The Wright Brothers' Patent War

Social Justice

1981 Gay Pride Parade in Durham
David Walker and His Appeal
Ella Baker
Formation of El Centro Hispano
Gertrude Weil
Greensboro Sit-in
Lowry War in Robeson County
Lumbee Organize Against the Ku Klux Klan (1958)
North Carolina's 1865 Freedmen's Convention
Pauli Murray
Royal Ice Cream Sit-in
Sarah Keys v. Carolina Coach Company
Greensboro Sit-in

Sports

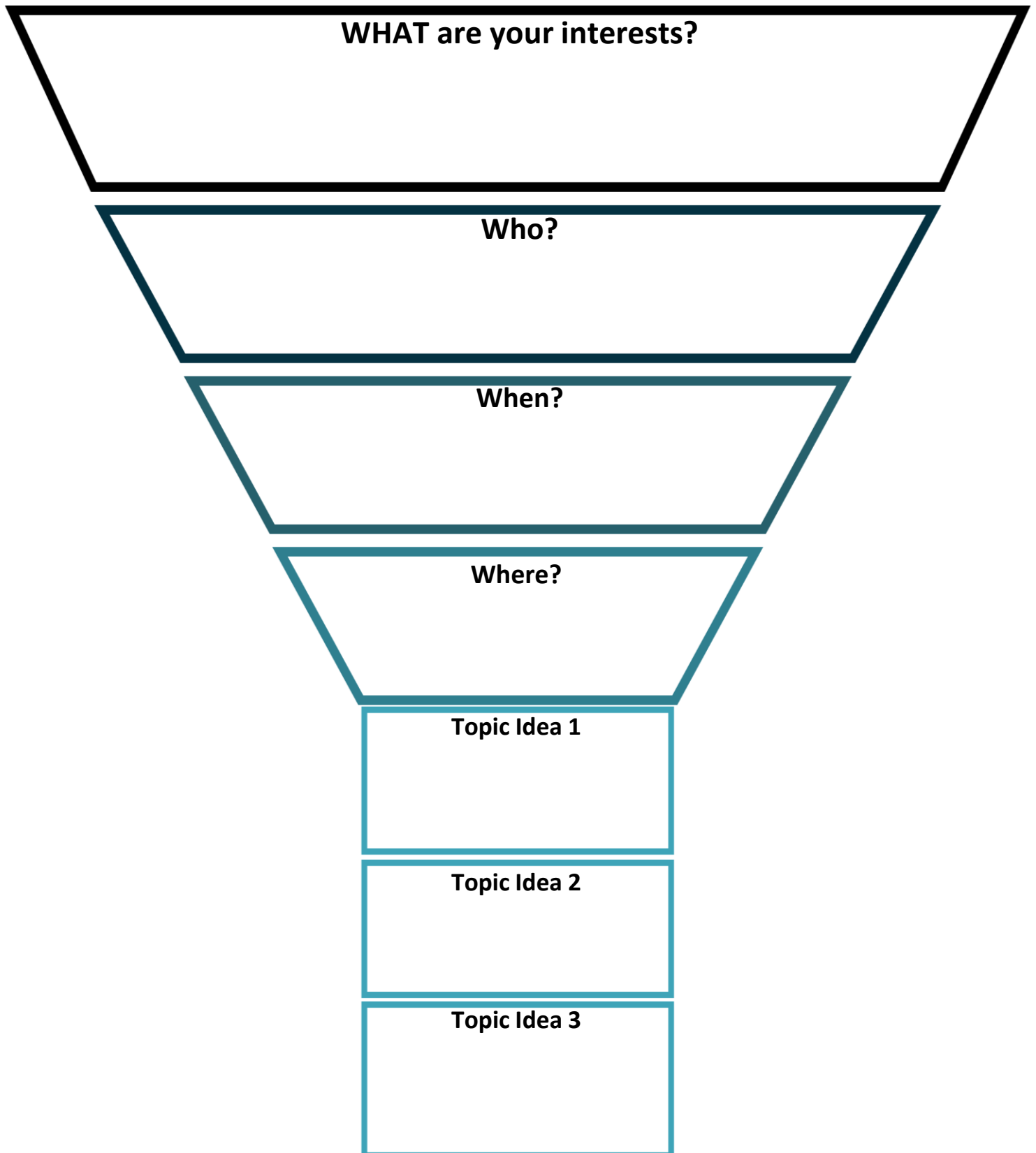
1944 Basketball Game: NCCU vs. Duke Medical School
Althea Gibson and Tennis in 1940s Wilmington
Charlie Scott Plays for UNC
Dean Smith's Push for Integration
Edwin Okoroma and UNC Soccer
Integration of Pinehurst
Irwin Holmes and NC State Tennis
Merger of the NC High School Athletic Association &
NC High School Athletic Conference
NASCAR Driver Lawrence "Bubba" Wallace Jr.
NC High School Athletic Association and Football Safety
NC State's 1974 Women's Basketball Team
Ned Jarrett Advocating for NASCAR Integrity and Safety
Richard Petty Advocating for NASCAR Safety

Looking for US History or World History Topic Ideas?

Watch the [2025 NHD Theme Video](#), check out [DocsTeach 2025 NHD Page](#) from the National Archives, or visit the [NHD Theme Page](#). Also, try searching “Rights and Responsibilities in World History” or replacing “world” with a specific geographical or topic area to get ideas flowing!

Worksheet: Topic Brainstorming and Focus Ideas

Using **Who**, **What**, **When**, and **Where** questions can help you narrow down your broad history interests into focus topic ideas. Use this funnel template on this worksheet to brainstorm and narrow your ideas. See the example on **p. 4** of this handout if you need help.



Checklist for a Selecting a Strong Topic

When you are finally ready to pick your topic, use this checklist to make sure you are choosing a strong one that will set you up for success!

- ❑ **Does this topic fit the annual theme?** A strong topic will have a solid connection to the theme that you can clearly show throughout your project. Can you explain how your topic connects to both rights and responsibilities? If the answer is no or hard to explain, this might not be the right topic for you to take on this year. If the answer is yes, move on to the next question.
- ❑ **Does this topic fit your teacher's guidelines?** If you are doing History Day as a class project, your teacher might have given you guidelines, such as what geographical region or time period your topic must be from. If so, ensure your topic fits those guidelines before moving on to the next question.
- ❑ **Are you interested in this topic?** Make sure you pick a topic that fascinates you. You will be studying your topic for several weeks, so you want to make sure it will not bore you!
- ❑ **Can you find sources on your topic?** There are some fascinating topics, but some might be very hard to uncover sources for during research. Do a quick search to see if you can quickly turn up both primary and secondary sources connected to your topic. If not, you might want to pick another one.
- ❑ **Does your topic have historical significance?** Remember that a strong History Day project shows how a topic is significant in history. This does not mean you need to show that it changed the world, but do you think you can find and explain what changed in history because your topic happened?
- ❑ **Is your topic historic?** If your topic is too recent, it may be more of a current event than history. A recent topic can also make the research stage difficult, and it will be harder to show the lasting impact of the topic. Though there is no hard rule, we often suggest you try to find a topic from at least 25 years ago.