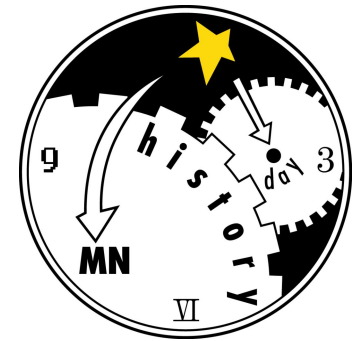


National History Day 2010 Theme: Innovation in History: Impact and Change

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The 2010 History Day theme, “Innovation in History: Impact and Change,” has endless opportunities for creativity, particularly for students whose interests may lie outside the realm of history. Science, economics, music, technology and sports all have a place alongside history in this year’s theme.

Innovation, by definition, means the introduction of something new and/or creative. Students must keep in mind, however, that not all new ideas or creations are innovative, or historically significant. Television was innovative and significant, but color television was simply an improvement upon an innovation. The key to expressing an innovation is to demonstrate how that idea, invention or method is something new and different, by establishing what the innovation intended to change and showing the innovation’s impact and significance.

There are a few paths students may follow as they choose topics. One is the selection of an invention. Inventions can radically change the way that humans function in daily life, but inventions, within this theme, are only the tip of the innovative iceberg. Another path students may follow is the selection of an innovative idea. Evolution, communism and religious freedom have all been innovative ideas at certain times in history. A third avenue for students to take is an innovation of method, or ways that people have altered their techniques or approaches, such as the Civil Rights Movement’s use of sit-ins to protest segregation.

When considering topics, students should first choose a subject area that interests them. Students should then ask broad questions on that subject and do some initial research to find “moments of change,” or points in time when a person or people tried something new. Once students understand these “moments of change,” they can begin to determine if those changes are truly innovative, uncover the innovative qualities of the changes, and find the impact of those innovations. They may find other innovations hidden in their original topic. If a student is interested in transportation, they may determine an obvious “moment of change” as the invention of the automobile. But research might show that certain impacts of the automobile were also innovations, such as the assembly line and the Eisenhower Interstate System. Here is an example of breaking down a subject into different innovations:

Women’s history: A few “moments of change” in the long history of women could include issues of suffrage or fashion.

Suffrage:

- When was the idea of suffrage truly innovative? Was it still innovative in 1920?
- Was the 19th amendment an innovation, or should it be considered an impact?
- Did all suffragists use innovative methods or just some? What were the methods?

Fashion:

- Were all changes in women’s fashions innovations, or just reflective of the times?
- Are some inventions in women’s fashions considered innovative changes, such as bloomers?
- Did changes in women’s fashions help women express themselves innovatively, such as the abandoning of corsets?

Communication: Some “moments of change” in the history of communication could include inventions, ideas and methods.

Inventions:

- How were inventions such as the telegraph, the postal service and the radio innovations?
- What were some innovations that were a result of the invention of the printing press?
- Are cell phones and color photography innovations, or simply improvements upon inventions?

Ideas/Methods:

- What innovation ideas, such as stunt reporting, changed the nature of newspapers?
- How were certain communication methods, such as the Pony Express, innovative?
- What communication methods did groups, such as temperance groups, use to express opinions or advocate change?

No matter what subject matter students choose, they must always ask the question: What was new and different about my topic at that time, and what did that innovation seek to change? It is the “new and different” aspects of a historical topic that will help students focus well on “Innovation in History.”