

At its heart, this year’s theme is about change. What was the change and how did it impact history? Start with your own interests, community, or issues that you care about. Innovation is in any area of history!

Innovation

Innovation is a type of change. Change is something different from what came before. It could be big or small. Change can be created by humans, like the passage of a law. It could also happen on its own, like the formation of the Grand Canyon. Innovation is a type of change that was on purpose and in response to a specific situation. Innovation also likely has a bigger impact.

- *Change: Henry Ford made many models of cars in the early 1900s. Different wheels, engines, or colors would be changes in the car’s history.*
- *Innovation: Ford began using the moving assembly line to build cars in 1913. It was innovative because it was a completely different process for building cars that had a significant impact. He produced them faster. They were less expensive to buy, so more people could afford cars. Other industries began using the assembly line for manufacturing.*

The key to identifying innovation is to think about the historical context. What were they trying to do differently? Why? What was the scale of impact? Ford offering a car in a new paint color option is a change. But it would be hard to argue that a blue car versus a gray one was an innovation.

When brainstorming, inventions may be your first ideas. These can be great topics, but don’t stop there!

- **New Technology:** A brand-new creation that had a major impact. The retractable seat belt was an invention developed by James J. “Crash” Ryan at the University of Minnesota. It became a life-saving innovation when the National Traffic and Motor Safety Act required them in cars.
- **Different Ways of Doing Things:** A drastically different technique or approach. Secret messages during warfare have been used throughout history. The use of the Navajo language during World War II was an innovation. This unbreakable spoken code contributed to many victories.
- **Innovative Ideas:** A different way of thinking or solving a problem. Sesame Street was based on the innovative idea of using television to deliver educational programs. The program has revolutionized early childhood education.

Impact, Influence, Change

The second half of the theme is all about the significance of your topic in history. Since these words are synonyms, you might use one, two, or all three in your project!

- **Think about what changed in the short term and long term.** Right away, the insecticide DDT was an innovation in agriculture and public health. Over the years, it was also shown to be harmful to the environment and people.
- **The influence might be global or local.** The Interstate System was an innovation that allowed for high-speed travel. Look at a case study of where these roads were built and the local impact it had. For example: The impact of I-94 on the thriving Black neighborhood of Rondo in St. Paul.
- **The impacts could be positive, negative, or both.** The atomic bomb was an innovation that brought a rapid end to WWII. It also had devastating effects on people and the environment..
- **The innovation may have impacted people or groups in different ways.** The Hetch Hetchy reservoir was an engineering innovation. It brought water to San Francisco, but it also destroyed the natural area and displaced Native communities.
- **The outcomes may have been planned or unplanned.** “HeLa Cells” were important to the creation many medicines and vaccines. These cells came from tissue samples taken without the permission of Henrietta Lacks. When her story became public, it was a turning point in requiring patient permission.

In History

Don’t forget about the words “in history” in this year’s theme! We don’t know the long term impacts of recent topics. Try to pick topics where the main events took place at least 20-25 years in the past.