

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 topics, 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 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?

