

Topic Selection

Choosing a topic is a challenge and an important first step in beginning on your History Day journey. Here are some questions to ask yourself when choosing a topic:

- Does my topic fit the National History Day theme?
- Will this topic maintain my interest over a long period of time? Will I have fun researching and writing about this topic? Will it make a good story, as well as a convincing argument?
- Do I have enough background knowledge on this topic to do research on it?
- Have other historians written about this topic, or is it just of personal interest to me?
- Are there primary sources (letters, speeches, diaries, newspaper articles from the time, oral history interviews, documents, photographs, etc.) available on this topic for me to research? Can I find quality resources relating to my topic?
- Is this topic really historical (say, before I was born), or is it so contemporary that historians have not yet explored it? In other words, did my topic reach closure, or is it still happening?
- Is the topic too big and broad (modern Russia), too small and narrow (Lenin's speech at the Finland Station, April 1917), or just about right (the response of the Bolsheviks to the Provisional Government in 1917)?
- Does the topic present a significant question that can be reasonably answered?
- Can I relate my topic to other important historical events?
- What events led up to my topic's occurrence?
- Will my project contribute anything original or take sides in a historical debate?
- Can I explain to my parents, friends, or teacher what the topic is and why it should be of any interest to them?
- Who, What, or Where was impacted by my topic?
- How did my topic change history? And, Can I show the impact of my topic in history?

Adapted from Williams, Robert C. *The Historian's Toolbox: A Student's Guide to the Theory and Craft of History*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharp, Inc., 2003.