

The Annual History Day Theme

Each year National History Day selects a theme. When participating in history day, you'll have to select a topic that is related to that theme. In fact, one of the important components of a history day project is the student's ability to **relate** her/his topic to the theme. The annual theme frames the research for both students and teachers. It is intentionally broad enough that students can select topics from any place (local, national, or world) and any time period in history. Once students choose their topics, they investigate historical context, historical significance, and the topic's relationship to the theme by conducting research in libraries, archives, and museums; through oral history interviews; and by visiting historic sites. Remember: History Day projects aren't just reports with dates and facts, they are studies of a topic's **significance** and **importance** in history.



2025: Rights and Responsibilities in History

This year's theme, *Rights and Responsibilities in History* invites students to consider the complexities of the way in which we understand the relationship between the idea of rights and responsibilities that often come with them. As is always the case with History Day themes, this year's is broad and as such requires the student to consider first the terms themselves.

As Cathy Gorn writes in this year's theme book:

“the NHD theme for this year is focused on both historical rights and responsibilities. NHD projects must focus on both as well.” We often take for granted the term “rights” and its definition but remember the notion of what is a right versus a privilege has been passionately debated so allow some time to really think about the history of the “right/s” you’re studying.

Again, from the themebook:

“To study rights and responsibilities in history we must ask a number of questions:

Who decides who has rights?

Does everyone have the same rights?

Who decides on the limits individuals should or should not have? Why?

What led to establishing certain rights, and to whom were they given?

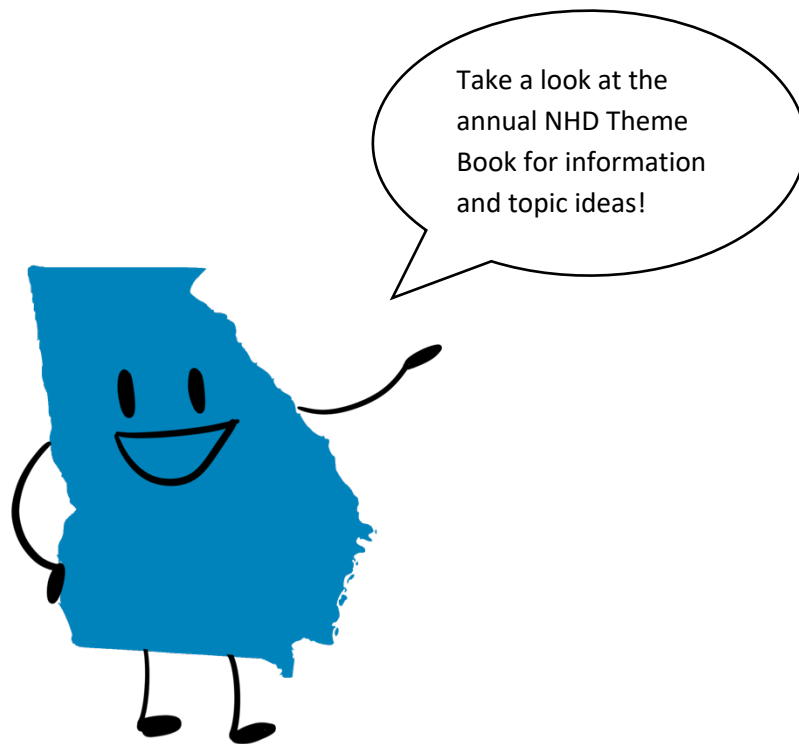
Regardless of the topic selected, students must not only present a description of it, but also draw conclusions about how their topic affected individuals, communities, nations, or the world.

To understand the historical importance of their topics, students, like historians, must ask questions of time and place, cause and effect, change over time, and impact and significance:

- **What** factors contributed to the debate over a right?
- **Why** did the issue develop? How did it create change?
- **What** were the immediate and long-term consequences of the codification of the right?
- **What** responsibilities are incumbent to that right?
- **What** impact did such have on the people who experienced it? How did they, in turn, affect it?
- **What** is the long term impact/significance of the right/s on individuals and society?

Getting Started

Begin by exploring topics in an area that interests you. Perhaps you're interested in military history, sports history or women's history. Talk to your teacher, parents and librarian about topics and look for possible topics in books, as well as online.



SELECTING A TOPIC

Keys to consider when selecting a topic:

- **Make sure it fits the theme.** Ask yourself: “how does this relate to the theme?”
- **Make sure you’re interested in it!** A history day project requires a lot of time and effort. Your topic has to be something you’re truly interested in and excited about!
- **Availability of research.** Take a look online and in library catalogs. Talk to your teacher and media specialist about your ideas and make sure you that (a) research materials are available (both primary and secondary) and (b) that you can get access to them.
- **Your topic has historical significance.** Every successful history day project makes the case that the topic was important to history. It has be able to explain to the viewer/reader ‘why’ this topic is important; ‘why’ we need to pay attention to this topic in history. In other words, it successfully explains the topic’s **historical significance!**
- **Your topic is historic.** Although it’s not a ‘rule’ we do suggest that you select topics that have occurred at least 25 years in the past. This is to ensure that (a) material is available and (b) enough time has passed that historians have been able to offer some analysis/interpretation of the event, its context and significance.



EXPLORING TOPIC POSSIBILITIES

WORKSHEET: TOPIC BRAINSTORM

A good way to choose a topic is to start with a general area of history you find interesting. This might be something you read about in your textbook or something related to family history. Using the chart below, brainstorm one topic in each category that fits this year's theme,

Politics

Topic
Idea:

Civil Rights

Topic
Idea:

Military History

Topic
Idea:

Science & Technology

Topic
Idea:

Business

Topic
Idea:

The Environment

Topic Idea:

Social Issues

Topic Idea:

Religion

Topic
Idea:

Education

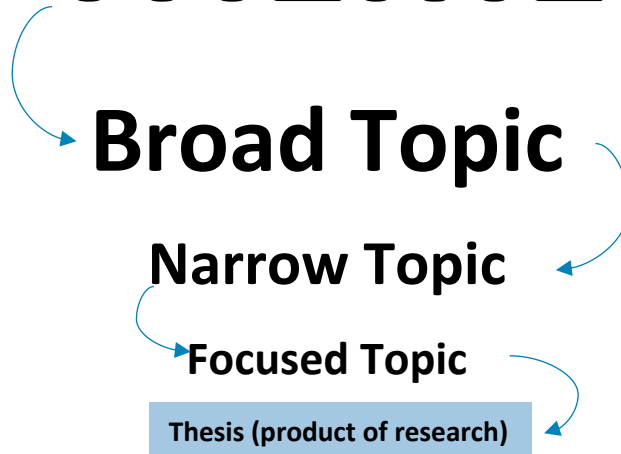
Topic Idea:

Arts, Music & Culture

Topic Idea:

One of the most important elements of a successful and effective history day project is a topic that is **narrow and focused!** History Day projects are limited in size and you have to be able to make your point about the significance of your topic within those limitations, so focus, focus, focus!

THEME



Now let's take a look at an example:

Rights & Responsibilities in History

Magna Carta

Abuses of Royal Power

Baronial Rebellion that leads to Royal concessions

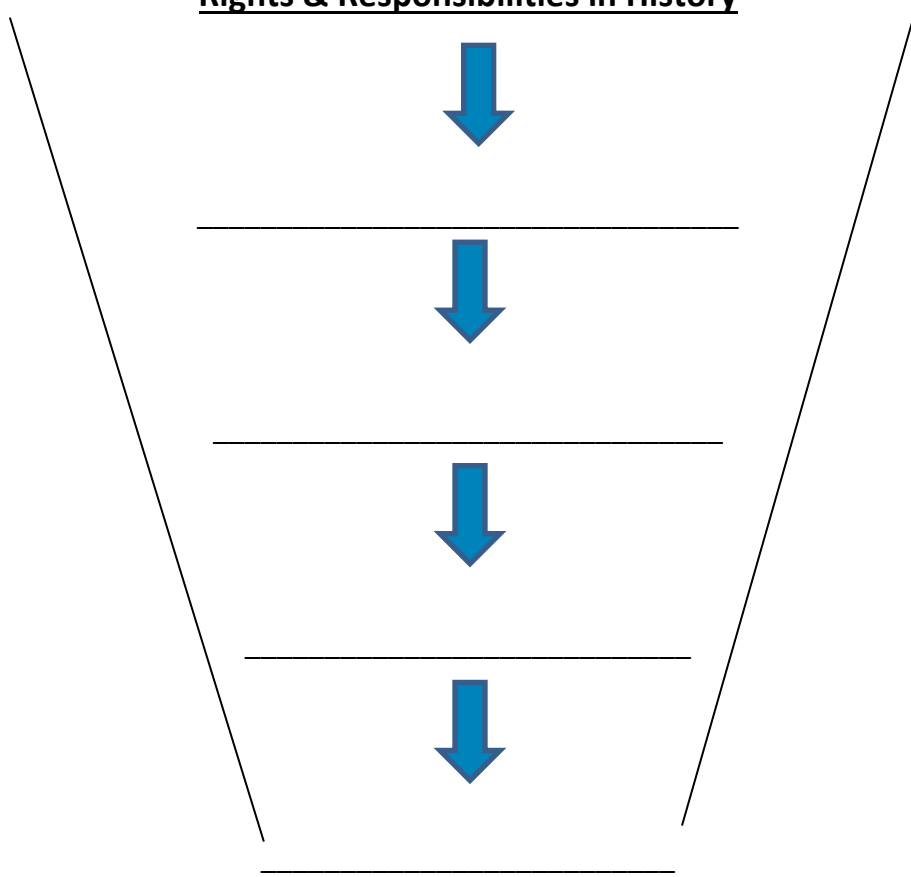
What rights and responsibilities are enumerated in the charter?

By codifying specific rights and responsibilities between King and Baron, Magna Carta established the principle of no one being exempt from the rule of law.

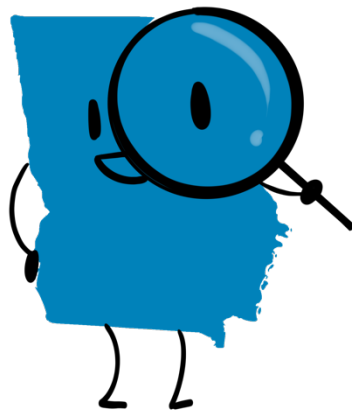
Topic Funnel Worksheet

Use the funnel to narrow your general interest into a focused topic

Rights & Responsibilities in History



When you're thinking about a topic it's better to be 'an inch wide and a mile deep'



RESEARCH

The 'Heart & Soul' of it!

Research is the foundation of your NHD project. The stronger the foundation, the stronger the project. You have to remember that a successful researcher is:

- Informed – She knows how to find information
- Organized – She keeps track of her notes and sources

Where do I start?

After talking with your teacher about a possible topic you need to get a good introduction to it. For that you need to visit your school media center or public library where you can find an encyclopedia. An encyclopedia article is basically an overview of its subject. It introduces you to the basic understanding that's developed surrounding the topic. A good discipline specific encyclopedia will have articles at the end of which the author lists basic sources for further reading (mostly secondary but sometimes primary). Articles containing these 'suggested readings' or 'bibliographies' are GOLD!!!! Not only does the article give you a general introduction but it gives you the beginning of a bibliography! You can then get the titles in that 'suggested reading' list and before you know it you're rollin'!

Remember though that an encyclopedia is only the beginning. It gets you started but you should not depend solely upon it. Your research needs to be dominated by scholarly secondary sources and primary sources.

How do I find more sources?

As you get further into your research you will want to search for additional sources, more unique sources, both primary and secondary. To do that you might visit

- **College or University Libraries:** These academic libraries house sources a public library or your school library usually can't, including academic journals, books written by leading scholars in the field you're studying (secondary sources) and primary source collections like historic newspapers.
- **Historical Societies:** Local and regional history topics can make for very powerful history day projects. If your topic is local or state history, you'll want to visit a regional or state historical society. These institutions collect and preserve information about Georgia.
- **Interviews:** Although they are not required, an interview with someone connected to your project can be very helpful. If the person was involved in your topic, you'll be conducting an oral history interview. Contact your subject in advance and get their permission to be recorded in writing. Prepare your questions in advance and come equipped to either take notes or record the session. If you can't meet in person, you can talk by phone or via email. Remember to thank your interview subject and send a thank you note afterward.
- **Talk to a Librarian:** Librarians are arguably the best resources for finding information. Librarians are professional information-gatherers and keepers. If it's out there, they'll find it!

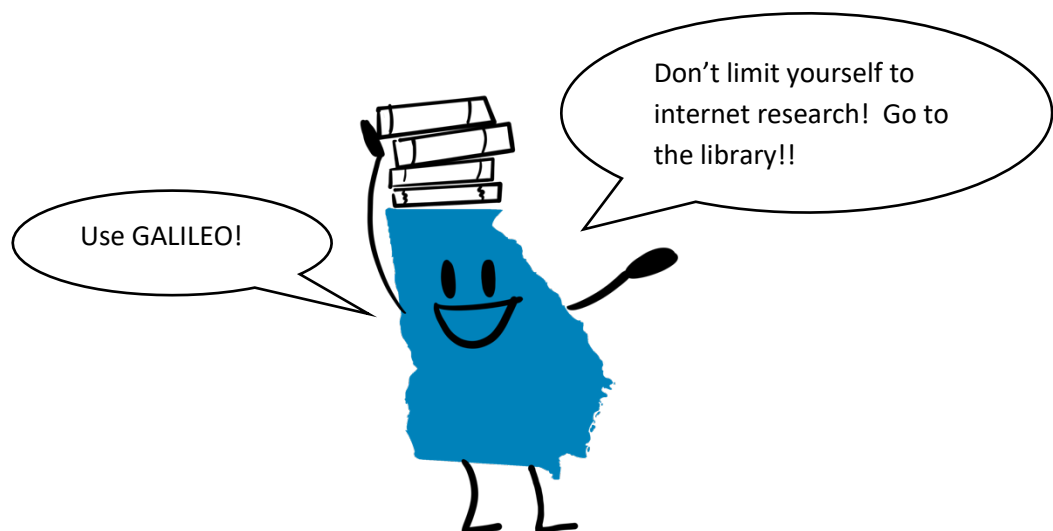
What about the Internet?

As you know, the internet is a remarkable resource for information. You can simply ask your web browser a question and it'll give you page after page of websites with the answer. That can be a blessing and a curse. You must approach the internet with the critical eye of a 'scholar.'

- The internet can be an informative place to start your research. Just like your library there are online encyclopedias and dictionaries that can provide you with a solid introduction. You'll want to look for articles with citations and references in order to verify their validity, but they are out there.
- If your school has access to **GALILEO** visit the National History Day webpage. It is a customized guide built just for you! Anything you access through **GALILEO** has been reviewed by academics, so unlike a general web search you can have full confidence in the sources you find.
- You can use the internet to prepare for a visit to an academic library or archive by using their online catalogs, pathfinders, and databases to identify the sources you want to consult when you visit.
- Online exhibits and document collections. Many institutions have begun to digitize their collections and make them accessible via the web. Once you've gotten into your research and have narrowed your topic you can take advantage of these online collections of primary sources.

Beware!!! Not all websites are created equal!

- Pay attention to the site host. If it's an academic institution (.edu) or a governmental agency (.gov or .uk) you can have more confidence in the accuracy of the information on the site than if it was hosted by 'aliensbuiltit.com'. **Please be careful.**
- Online research should be conducted along with traditional historical research, NOT replace it.
- Students often find the same information restated on one website after another. The traditional scholarship on the field (books and journals) will offer you a deeper and more nuanced exploration of the topic which is exactly what you need for your history day project!



PRIMARY & SECONDARY SOURCES

When historians study a topic they try to gather material from a wide variety of sources. They do this so that they can understand their topic in its **historical context**. They also need to understand what questions about their topic have already been answered by scholars. In the end, historians (like lawyers) need evidence to “make their case.” There are two basic categories of sources historians use: **Primary** and **Secondary**. You need to use **both** to have a successful History Day project.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are published books or scholarly articles composed by an author who is offering an analysis/interpretation of the topic. This analysis and interpretation is based upon primary sources but the author **is not an eyewitness to, or a participant in, the historic event**. Most of the books, encyclopedias, and websites you’ll consult are secondary sources. These sources are fundamental to your work because they provide the background information you need. They give you an understanding of a topic’s historical context as well as a sense of what scholars are saying about your topic. The **footnotes and bibliographies** of secondary sources will lead you to additional secondary and critically important primary sources.

Examples of Secondary sources

- ✓ Encyclopedias
- ✓ Biographies
- ✓ Textbooks
- ✓ Media Documentaries
- ✓ Books about your topic
- ✓ Interviews with scholars/experts
- ✓ Articles about the topic
- ✓ Websites

Primary Sources

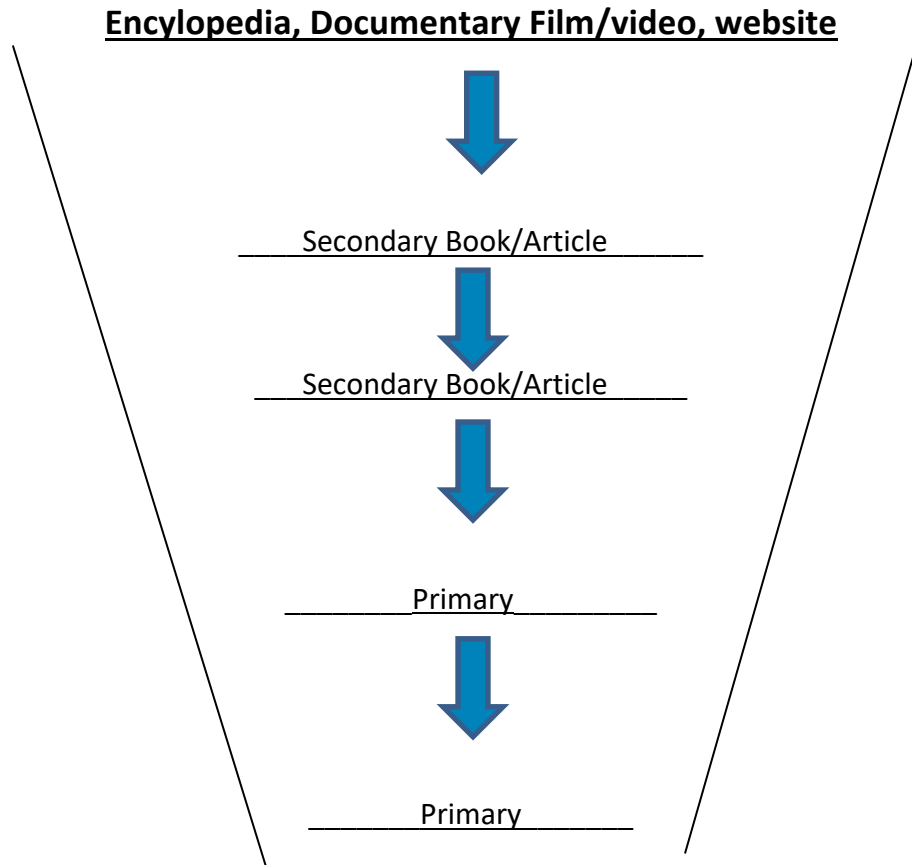
Primary sources are materials **produced by people in the place, at the time your topic occurred**. They provide a first-hand account about a person or an event because they were produced in the time you are studying. These are eyewitness accounts, documents published at the time of the event.

Examples of Primary sources

- ✓ Historic objects
- ✓ Government records
- ✓ Photographs
- ✓ Manuscript collections
- ✓ Newspapers from the era
- ✓ Music of the era
- ✓ Interviews with participants (oral history)/ Letters
- ✓ Original film footage
- ✓ Autobiographies

Remember to funnel your research the way you funneled your topic. You want to move from the general to the specific, from secondary to primary. We always want to jump right to the primary sources but the only way to get the most out of your primary sources is to have first grounded yourself in the secondary scholarship. So, think of the funnel!

Use the funnel to focus your research



STAYING ORGANIZED

Information is only valuable if you can record it and use it later. One of the best ways to organize your research is to use note cards. Use one set of cards to record notes and quotes that you find in your sources. Use another set of cards to record the information about your sources that you will need for your **annotated bibliography**. Here's what your note cards might look like

Bibliography	Secondary	Book
Goodwin, Doris Kearns. <u>Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln</u> . New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.		
Biography of Abraham Lincoln and the key political rivals/figures who shaped the Lincoln presidency. Deeply detailed history of the political leaders as well as the civil war itself.		
Important pages:		

<u>Team of Rivals</u>	Goodwin, p. 471
Horace Greeley's open letter to Lincoln in the <i>New York Tribune</i> Lincoln replied in a letter of his own	
"As to the policy I 'seem to be pursuing' as you say, I have not meant to leave anyone in doubt," he began. "My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery."	

Remember too that there are a variety of apps and web based tools you can use to keep your work organized. Talk with your teacher or media specialist about which ones are available through your school.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A successful research project requires more than just locating as much information as you can. You want your topic to be narrow and focused. Achieving that is helped by developing and being guided by good research questions

Good research questions will allow you to exam the issues of cause and effect, change over time, differences in perspective, etc. What were the causes of past events? What were the effects? How did past decisions and actions affect future choices? What has changed? Remember: research questions will take you beyond the basic who, what, when, & how. They will get you to an understanding of “Why”!

WORKSHEET: WRITING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

PART OF PROJECT	SAMPLE: ROSA PARKS	YOUR TOPIC
<p>Long Before</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What outside people, ideas, or events were going on to influence your topic? • What other information does your viewer need to know to understand the background of your topic? 	<p>What was going on in the Civil Rights Movement at the time? How were African Americans treated? What were the key points of debate in America over the Civil Rights Movement?</p>	
<p>Right Before</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the main players and what are they doing to prepare for the main events of the topic? • What are the events leading up to the main event? 	<p>Who was Rosa Parks? Why didn't Rosa Parks give up her bus seat? What were leaders in Montgomery doing to prepare for this event?</p>	
<p>Main Event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happened? 	<p>What happened after Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat?</p>	
<p>Right After</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some of the reactions to the main event? Include both positive and negative • Did anything change right away? 	<p>What changed right away in Montgomery because of the boycott? Did everyone agree on the boycott? How did people across the country hear about and react to it? Did debate intensify?</p>	
<p>Long After</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are things different because of the topic? • Did this topic influence other historical events? • Why is this topic important in history? 	<p>How did the Montgomery Bus Boycott turn debate into action in both the city and the Civil Rights Movement? How did King become a national leader after this event?</p>	

WORKSHEET: RESEARCH STRATEGY

Plan a strategy for your History Day research, including what to search for and where to look.

Topic: _____

1. **What are some important words, dates or people related to your topic?** These 'key' terms will help you to search for information.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

2. **What types of secondary sources exist about your topic?** Circle the types of sources you could find about your topic

Book	Media Documentary	Encyclopedia
History Textbook	Biography	Website
Interview with Scholar	Journal article	

3. **What types of primary sources might exist about your topic?** From the list below, circle the types of sources you can find about your topic.

Diary	Manuscript collection	Government Records
Oral History	Autobiography	Newspaper from time
Original film footage	Music of the period	Photographs
Historic object	Letters	

4. **Where can you go to find this information?** Answer the following questions and think about the places you could visit for your research

a. **What is the first place you plan on looking for information?** _____

b. **Where else can you look?** Circle which you plan to visit.

School media center	Public library	College Library
Historical center	Archive	Internet

c. **What other places can you go?** _____

d. Is there a **Research Roundup** event/session you can attend? If so write the date and location below.

WORKING ON YOUR OWN OR IN A GROUP

Working On Your Own

When you work on your own **the effort is less complicated**. There are no divided responsibilities, potential distractions or disagreements you might encounter in a group. With no one else to depend on, the success of your History Day project rests on your shoulders.

Working in a Group

Being in a group has distinct advantages. You and your colleagues can share the work. Each member will bring her/his unique set of skills and interests to the project. Your project will be the product of a team effort.

Be careful when choosing your group members. When selecting group members ask the following:

- ✓ What type of people do I like to work with?
- ✓ What skills will each group member bring to the project?
- ✓ What makes someone a good group member?
- ✓ What traits in people do I want to avoid when picking my partners?
- ✓ If you need to work outside of class, will you be able to get together?

WORKSHEET: CATEGORY AND GROUP CHOICES

Use this worksheet to explain your choices about category and working alone or in a group

1. Which category do you want to select? _____

Why is this the best category for you and your topic? _____

2. Do you plan on working individually or in a group? (Circle one) Individually Group

3. Fill out the questions below for whichever group size that you plan on selecting for History Day.

Working Alone

What will be your responsibilities?

Why is working alone the best choice for you?

Working in a Group

What will be some of the challenges?

Why is working in a group best for you?