

Unit 5: The Topic and the Topic Funnel

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 **media specialist** about topics and look for possible topics in books, as well as online.

SELECTING A TOPIC

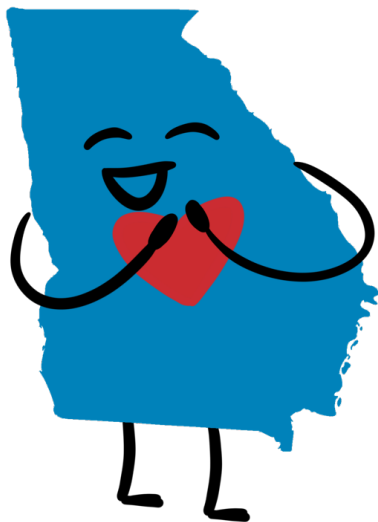
Keys to consider when selecting a topic:



- **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 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 been 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.

You should also consider a possible topic that answers the following:

- Relevance to people living at the time
- Resonance to people's experience, beliefs or situations at the time
- Relevance to an increased understanding of the present-day
- Remarkd on by people at the time and since
- Remembered within the collective memory of a group
- Revealing of some other aspect of the past
- Results that have consequences for the future
- Durability – for how long people's lives were affected
- Quantity – how many lives were affected
- Profundity – how deeply people's lives were affected



Like your topic! You'll be spending a lot of time with it!

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:

PRELIMINARY TOPIC SELECTION SHEET

Due Date: _____ Name: _____

Directions: Complete each of the following sentence starters. Sign your name below and ask a parent/guardian to do the same

1. This year's History Day theme is

2. I think my topic will be

3. I am interested in this topic because

4. This topic relates to the theme because

5. "Ws" questions I have about my topic are...

a. Who? _____

b. What? _____

c. When? _____

d. Where? _____

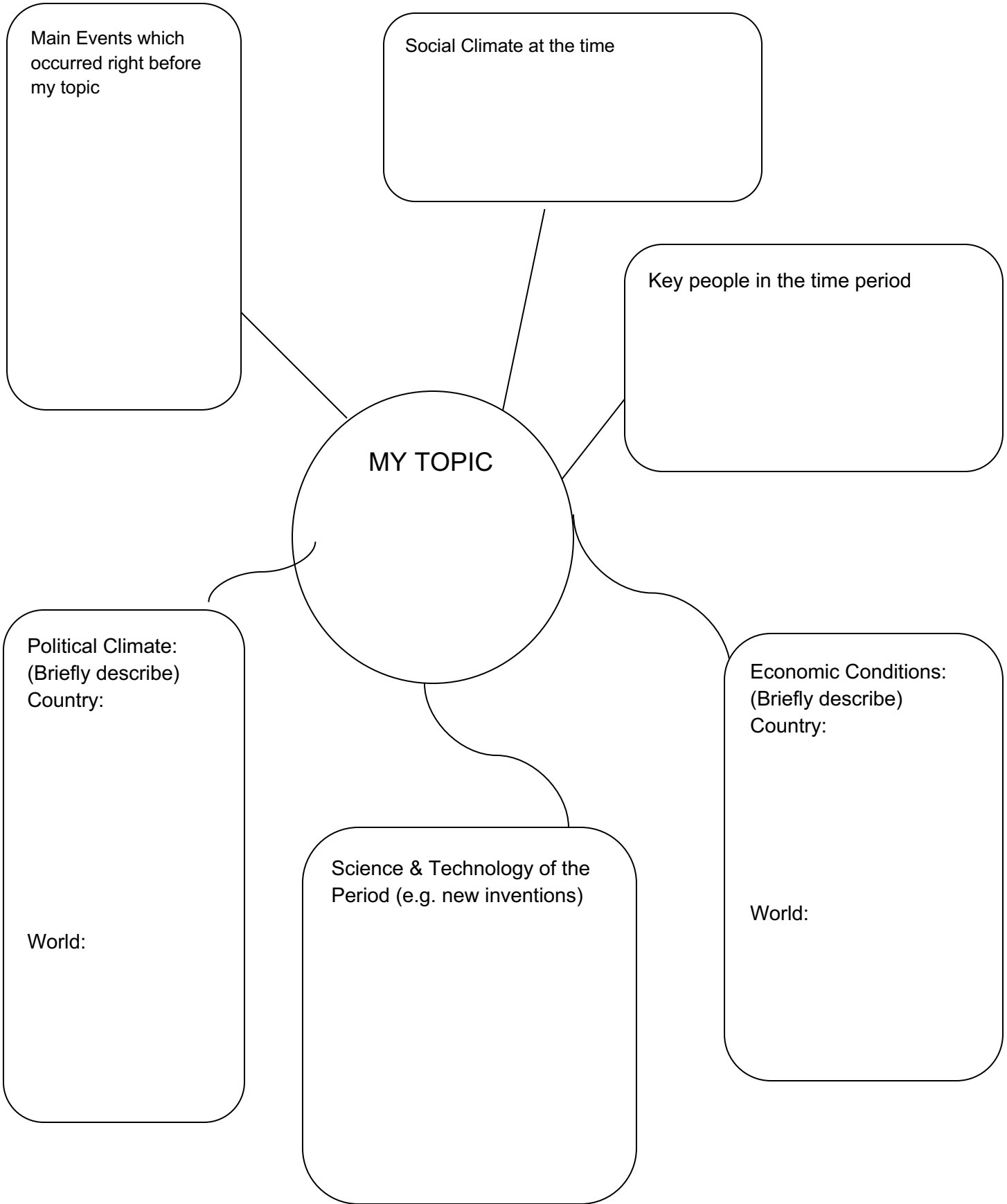
e. How? _____

f. Why? _____

6. Another topic I might explore is _____

Student Signature: _____

Parent Signature _____



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

Broad Topic

Narrow Topic

Focused Topic

Research Questions

Now let's take a look at an example:

Turning Points in History

Diplomatic Frontiers

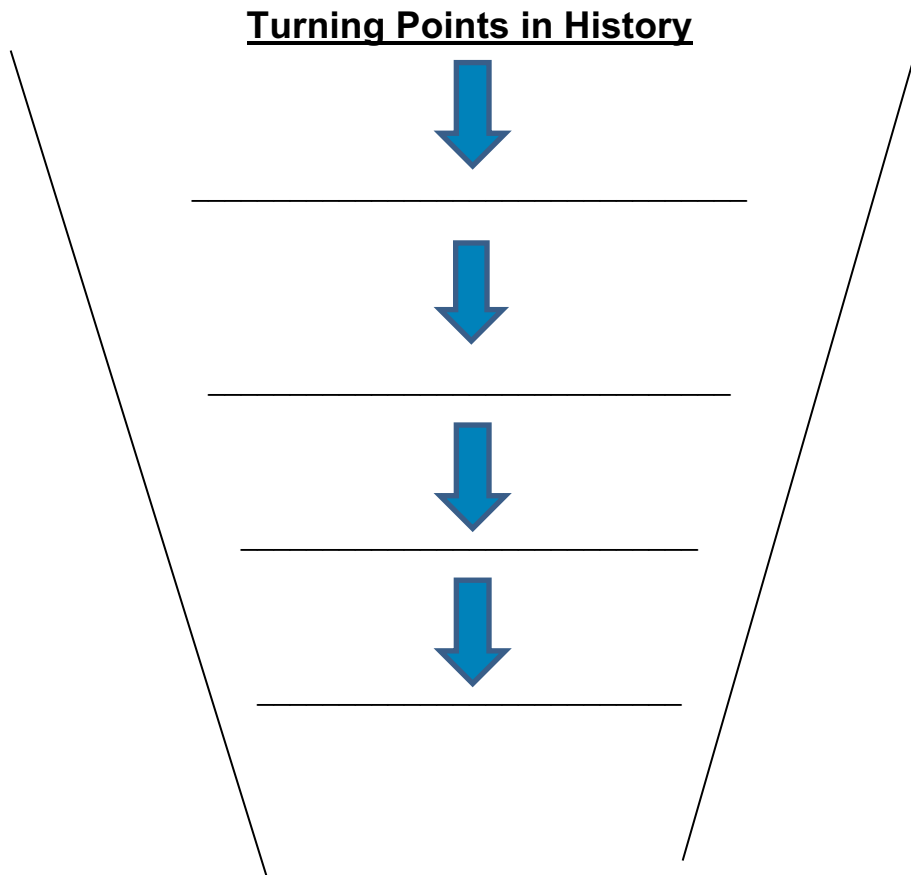
US – China Relations

Nixon's trip to China

Why did Nixon embark on this venture what were the consequences?

Topic Funnel Worksheet

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



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