



# DOCUMENTARY CATEGORY: JUDGING CRITERIA AND RULES

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Thank you for agreeing to serve as a judge for the National History Day (NHD) contest. Some of our finest young historians have labored for months preparing their entries and are eager to share their outstanding historical research and conclusions with you.

## PURPOSE OF JUDGING

NHD's goal is to provide young people with a high quality educational experience—whether or not they win a prize. It is critical that your interactions with the students be fair, helpful, and positive. Your spoken and written comments are fundamental to the learning process.

Together we succeed or fail based on the quality of the learning experience.

## YOUR PROCESS

1. Review all materials sent to you in advance of the contest.
2. Attend the contest-day orientation.
3. With your team, review each entry's process paper and annotated bibliography, then view the documentary. Conclude by interviewing the student(s).
4. Return to judging headquarters to deliberate, reach consensus, complete paperwork and write thoughtful, constructive comments.

## EVALUATING DOCUMENTARIES

A documentary should reflect the students' ability to use audiovisual equipment to communicate their topic's significance. Students must operate all equipment, both during production and at the competition. If they do not have access to appropriate equipment, they should choose another format. Regardless of how polished the presentation may be, the most important aspect of the documentary is its historical quality. The presentation should include primary materials but must also be an original production.

No matter how impressively the students handle themselves during the interview, please remember that the entry itself should be able to stand alone. Answers to questions should not overshadow the material presented in the entry.

## JUDGING CRITERIA

### ***Historical Quality – 60%***

This is by far the most important factor in judging a documentary. It refers to the research, analysis, and interpretation of the topic. The documentary should be historically accurate. It should not simply recount facts but interpret and analyze them; that is, the entry should have a strong thesis or argument. In addition, it should place the topic into historical context—the intellectual, physical, social, and cultural setting. The entry also should reflect historical perspective—the causes and consequences of an event, for example, or the relationship of a local topic to larger events. The best entries will use a variety of both primary and secondary sources and will consider multiple viewpoints (e.g., those who suffered as well as those who benefited, males and females, people from different racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic

groups, etc.) as appropriate to the topic.

Primary sources are materials directly related to a topic by time or participation. These materials include letters, speeches, diaries, contemporaneous newspaper articles, oral history interviews, documents, photographs, artifacts, or anything else that provides firsthand accounts about a person or event. This definition also applies to primary sources found on the Internet. A letter written by President Lincoln in 1862 is a primary source for a student researching the Civil War era. An article about the Vietnam War published in 2001 and not written by an eyewitness or participant about his or her experience is not a primary source. An interview with an expert (a professor of Vietnamese history, for example) is not a primary source UNLESS that expert actually lived through and has firsthand knowledge of the events being described. Primary materials such as quotes from historical figures or photographs of historical events, when found in secondary sources, can be used effectively in NHD projects; however, these are not considered primary sources.

### ***Relation to the Theme – 20%***

The entry must clearly relate to the annual theme and demonstrate why the topic is significant in history. Do not confuse fame with significance. Local history topics may not be well known but may represent larger trends or events. The documentary should draw conclusions about the topic's significance. In other words, the entry should answer the questions, "So what? Why was this important?" It should not be just descriptive.

### ***Clarity of Presentation – 20%***

This relates to the entry's production quality: the creativity and clarity of the script, the use of visual images, the use of music and other sounds, and the mastery of technical skills. You also should consider whether the process paper and the bibliography are clear, organized, and well done. Do not be carried away by glitz; simpler is often better. Conversely, do not discount an entry or assume students had outside assistance simply because a documentary is of high visual and production quality; many students achieve both superior production quality and superior historical quality.

## **CONTEST RULES**

These are the rules to which all students must adhere in developing their entries. Please note the difference between a simple violation of these rules and a disqualifying offense:

**Rule Infraction:** A violation of any of the rules stated in the *Contest Rule Book*. Judges will take any rule infractions into consideration in their final rankings. Failure to comply with the rules will count against the entry but will only result in disqualification as delineated below. Any rule infractions should be corrected before a winning entry competes in the next level of competition.

Interpretation:

- Major violations are those that give an entry a substantial advantage over other entries, for example, significantly exceeding time requirements, word limits, and size requirements or having unauthorized outside assistance (e.g., someone else operating editing equipment, etc.). Major violations should result in lower rankings.
- Minor violations are those that can be easily remedied and that do not confer a competitive advantage, for example, putting the school name on the title page, exceeding time requirements by a few seconds, using inconsistent citation formats, etc. Minor violations can be treated with some leniency, especially at the local levels where you may choose to note them without imposing a penalty. At the affiliate level, enforcement of the rules should be stricter, however, one or two minor violations should not keep an

entry that is clearly the best in its category from advancing to the National Contest. At all levels, if two entries are otherwise equal in quality, the entry with fewer violations should be rated higher.

**Disqualification:** Removal of an entry from competition. A project may be disqualified from the contest on three grounds:

1. Plagiarizing all or part of the NHD project. Please note that failing to give proper credit is plagiarism.
2. Reusing, individually or as a group, a project (or research from a project) from a previous year, or entering a project in multiple contests or entry categories within a contest year.
3. Tampering with any part of the project of another student.

If you feel an entry has reason to be disqualified, please contact the contest coordinator, who will make the final determination.

## GENERAL RULES

**Annual Theme:** An entry must clearly relate to the annual theme and explain the topic's significance in history.

Interpretation:

- Entries that do not relate to the theme at all should not win, since adherence to the theme counts 20% in judging.
- If a topic is only tangentially related to the theme, you should take that into account when evaluating the entry. An example of a tangential topic is "Pickett's Migration at the Battle of Gettysburg" for the theme "Migration in History."
- If an entry is merely descriptive and does not analyze the topic's causes and consequences, you should take that into consideration when ranking it.
- While entries should clearly relate to the annual theme, they often do not need to address every aspect of the theme. For the theme, "Rights and Responsibilities," students could examine rights OR responsibilities; they do not have to include both, though one often leads to the other when fully explored.

**Contest Participation:** Students may participate in the research, preparation, and presentation of only one entry each year.

**Development Requirements:** Entries submitted for competition must be researched and developed during the current contest year that begins following the National Contest each June. Revising or reusing an entry from a previous year—whether a student's own or another student's—is unacceptable and will result in disqualification.

**Construction of Entry:** Students are responsible for the research, design, and creation of their entry. They may receive help and advice from teachers and parents on the mechanical aspects of creating their entry, such as typing a paper and other written materials. They may seek guidance from teachers as they research and analyze their material, but their conclusions must be their own. Students may have reasonable help preparing their project. Examples of reasonable help include:

- a teacher instructs students in how to use an editing software program.
- a parent uses a cutting tool to cut the exhibit board or performance prop the student(s) designed.
- a teacher offers editing suggestions on a student's historical paper.
- a parent assists in sewing costumes the student(s) designed.
- a teacher shows students how to build an NHD website.

- students have photographs commercially developed.

**Interpretation:**

- Students entering as individuals should do all of their research themselves and not share research or bibliographies with other students. Students entering as a group may share research only with other students in their group. In cases where students have shared research with other entrants, it is appropriate for you to reduce their final ranking.
- Students may receive reasonable help from adults on the mechanical aspects of creating their entries. Nonetheless, students should do as much of the mechanical work as possible.
- The intellectual aspects of the production, such as the actual writing of the script, must be the student's own work.
- It is up to you to decide, when appraising an entry, if adult assistance has exceeded acceptable levels and given the students an unfair advantage over others.
- Advice and guidance are encouraged and acceptable.

**Supplying Equipment:** Students are responsible for supplying all props and equipment at each level of competition. All entries should be constructed with transportation, setup time, size, and weight in mind. Students must provide their own equipment, including computers and software, unless the contest coordinator has specified that certain equipment will be provided at the contest venue. Projection screens for documentaries, websites, and performances may be provided.

**Discussion with Judges:** Students should be prepared to answer judges' questions about the content and development of their entries, but they may not give a formal, prepared introduction, narration, or conclusion.

**Costumes:** Students in the documentary category are not permitted to wear costumes that are related to their topic during judging.

**Interpretation:**

- If you suspect students are wearing costumes, ask them before imposing a penalty. Students sometimes wear ethnic clothing that may be mistaken for costumes.

**Prohibited Materials:** Items potentially dangerous in any way— such as weapons, firearms, animals, organisms, plants, etc.—are strictly prohibited. Such items will be confiscated by security personnel or contest officials. Replicas of such items that are obviously not real are permissible.

**Title:** Entries must have titles that are clearly visible on all written materials.

## REQUIRED WRITTEN MATERIAL FOR ALL ENTRIES

**Title Page:** A title page is required as the first page of written material in every category. The title page must include only the title of the entry, the name(s) of the student(s), the contest division and category, and applicable word counts. A title page for an entry in the documentary category must include the word count for the process paper.

Note: the title page must not include any other information (pictures, graphics, borders, school name or grade) except for that described in this rule.

**Annotated Bibliography:** An annotated bibliography is required for all categories. It should contain all sources that provided usable information or new perspectives in preparing the entry. Students will look

at many more sources than they will actually use. They should list only those sources that contributed to the development of their entries. Sources of visual materials and oral interviews must be included. The annotations for each source must explain how the source was used and how it helped the students understand their topics.

**Separation of Primary and Secondary Sources:** Students are required to separate their bibliographies into primary and secondary sources.

Interpretation:

- While many sources clearly fall into one category or the other, some sources can be either, depending on how they are used. In those questionable cases, the student should explain in the annotation why they classified that particular source as primary or secondary.
- If you disagree with the categorization of a source as primary or secondary, ask about it during the interview and allow the students a chance to explain their rationale.
- If you have doubts about the validity of an Internet source or its classification as primary or secondary, ask about it during the interview.

**Style Guides:** Style for citations and bibliographic references must follow the principles in one of the following style guides: (1) Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers* or (2) Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Regardless of which manual is used, the style must be consistent throughout the project.

**Process Paper:** Entries in all categories except historical papers must provide a description of no more than 500 words explaining how the students chose their topics, conducted their research, created and developed their entries, and the relationship of their topics to the contest theme.

Interpretation:

- The process paper should not summarize the students' research but should instead explain how they conducted research and developed the entry.

**Plagiarism:** Students must acknowledge in their annotated bibliographies all sources used in their entries. Failure to credit sources is plagiarism and will result in disqualification.

## CATEGORY RULES: DOCUMENTARIES

**Time Requirements:** Documentaries may not exceed ten minutes in length. Students will be allowed five minutes to set up and five minutes to remove equipment. Timing begins when the first visual image appears and/or the first sound is heard. Audio and visual leads will be counted in the time limit. Timing ends when the last visual image or sound of the presentation concludes. This includes credits.

Interpretation:

- At the regional level, if a documentary exceeds ten minutes by a few seconds, you may be lenient and not penalize the entry if you believe the entry gained no advantage by the extra seconds.
- If a documentary is more than a few seconds too long, providing an opportunity to include additional information or interpretation, you should take that advantage into consideration by reducing that entry's ranking. At the affiliate level, such a documentary should not be allowed to advance to the National Contest.

- Please note violations of the time requirements on the evaluation sheets; especially at the regional level, it is important to stress to the students that they need to fix their entry to comply with the time requirement before the next competition.

**Introduction:** Students must announce only the title of their presentation and the names of participants. Live narration or comments prior to or during the presentation are prohibited.

**Student Involvement and Production:** Students are responsible for running all equipment and carrying out any special lighting effects for their entry at the contest. All entries must be student-produced. Students must provide the narration, voice-overs, and dramatization for their entry. Only those students listed as entrants may participate in the production. Only those students listed as entrants or the subjects of an interview may appear on camera. Interactive computer programs and web pages in which the audience or judges are asked to participate are not acceptable; judges are not permitted to operate any equipment.

**Entry Production:** An entry must be an original production. Students may use professional photographs, film, recorded music, etc., within their presentation. However, they must give proper credit in the credits at the end of the presentation and in the annotated bibliography. Students must operate all editing equipment used in the production of their presentation.

Note: Using material created by others specifically for use in the entry is prohibited. Using photographs, video footage, etc. that already exists is acceptable.

Interpretation:

- Students may have assistance in learning how to operate the editing equipment they use, but they should be the ones who actually operated the equipment used in the production of their documentary. It is not acceptable for students to have supervised someone else using the equipment; they must operate the editing equipment themselves. Failure to do so constitutes a major violation and should result in lower ranking.
- If students do not have access to equipment that they can use themselves, they should choose to do another type of documentary or enter a different category.
- Any items created specifically for the entry should be the students' work. Students should shoot pictures themselves, although the photographs may be professionally developed. Students should conduct all interviews specifically for the entry.
- The students should address the development of their entry, including production and editing, in the process paper; you also may question them about it during the interview.

**Credits:** At the conclusion of the documentary, students must provide a list of acknowledgments and credits for all sources. These credits should be brief—not full bibliographic citations and not annotated. Students are not required to credit individual images or video clips while the documentary is playing; that is the purpose of the credits at the end. All sources (e.g., music, images, film/media clips, interviews, books, websites, etc.) used in the making of the documentary must be properly cited in the annotated bibliography. The list of credits counts toward the ten-minute time limit and should be readable by viewers.

**THANK YOU AND HAVE FUN!**

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