



NHD Thesis and Historical Argument



Your historical argument states the central point or focus of your project in two or three sentences. It is sometimes called a thesis or claim. Historians create historical arguments after carefully analyzing evidence from the past. The evidence that supports your argument will come from the primary and secondary sources that you discover during your research. Your argument should reflect your analysis of the historical evidence that you gathered.

Your historical argument must make a meaningful connection to the theme and show why your topic is significant in history. It must be incorporated into your project and be clear to those who read or view it. However, labeling your historical argument in or on your project is not required.

Example for the theme, Breaking Barriers in History: *The 1919 Treaty of Versailles subjected Germany to significant economic penalties. The treaty created an economic barrier between Germany and the rest of Europe, which led to hyperinflation and, when coupled with the Great Depression, the rise of the Nazi Party.*

(NHD Contest Rule Book, 2020. p. 8)

Part A: Crafting a Strong Thesis

Step 1: Historical Context

Once you have selected a topic, identify some background information to help establish historical context.

Who were the individuals/groups involved?	
When did this occur?	
Where did this occur?	
Why did this occur?	
What was happening locally in relation to your topic?	
What was happening nationally/globally in relation to your topic?	
What social norms/cultural beliefs played a role in the events related to your topic?	

You may want to use the NHD theme organizer, [DECODE](#), to help you with these questions.

Step 2: Gathering Historical Evidence

Locate and identify 3-4 primary sources or events specific to your topic. Consider documents, events, speeches, images, newspapers or addresses, etc. that can be a source of information. Consider using the [National Archives Document Analysis Worksheets](#) to complete your exploration once you've chosen your documents.

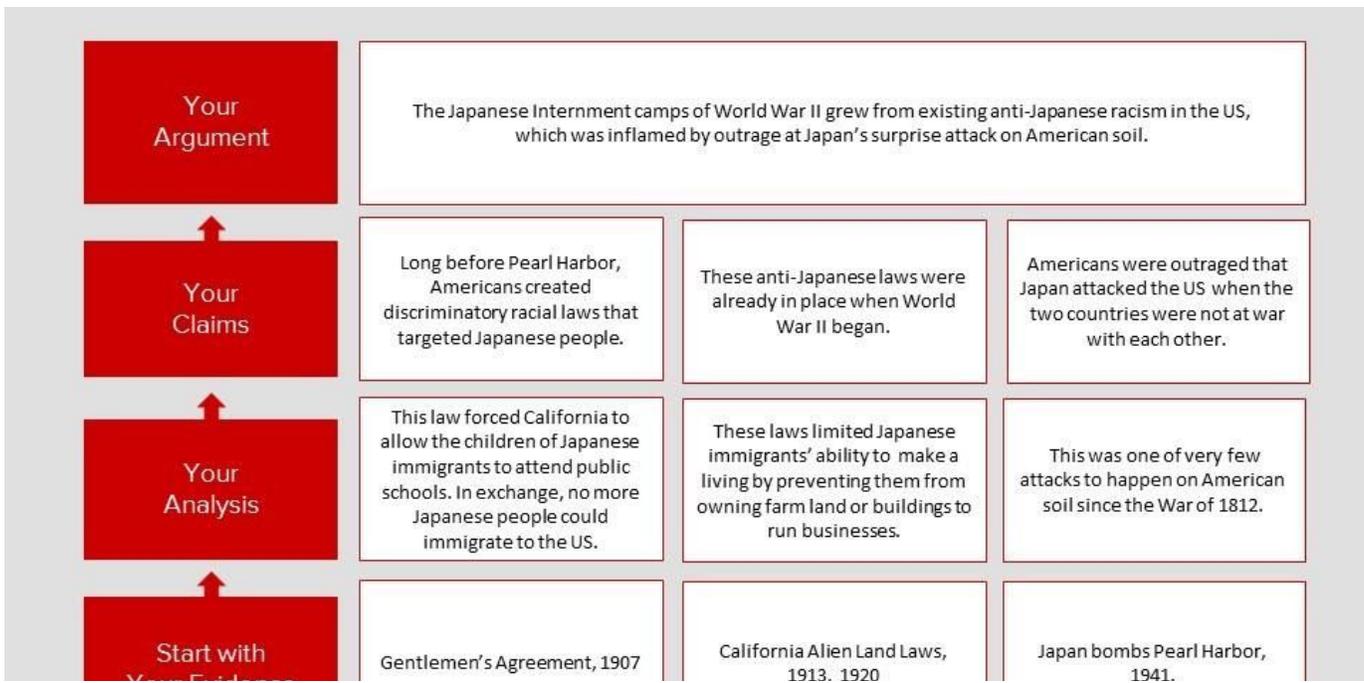
Step 3: Analyzing the Evidence

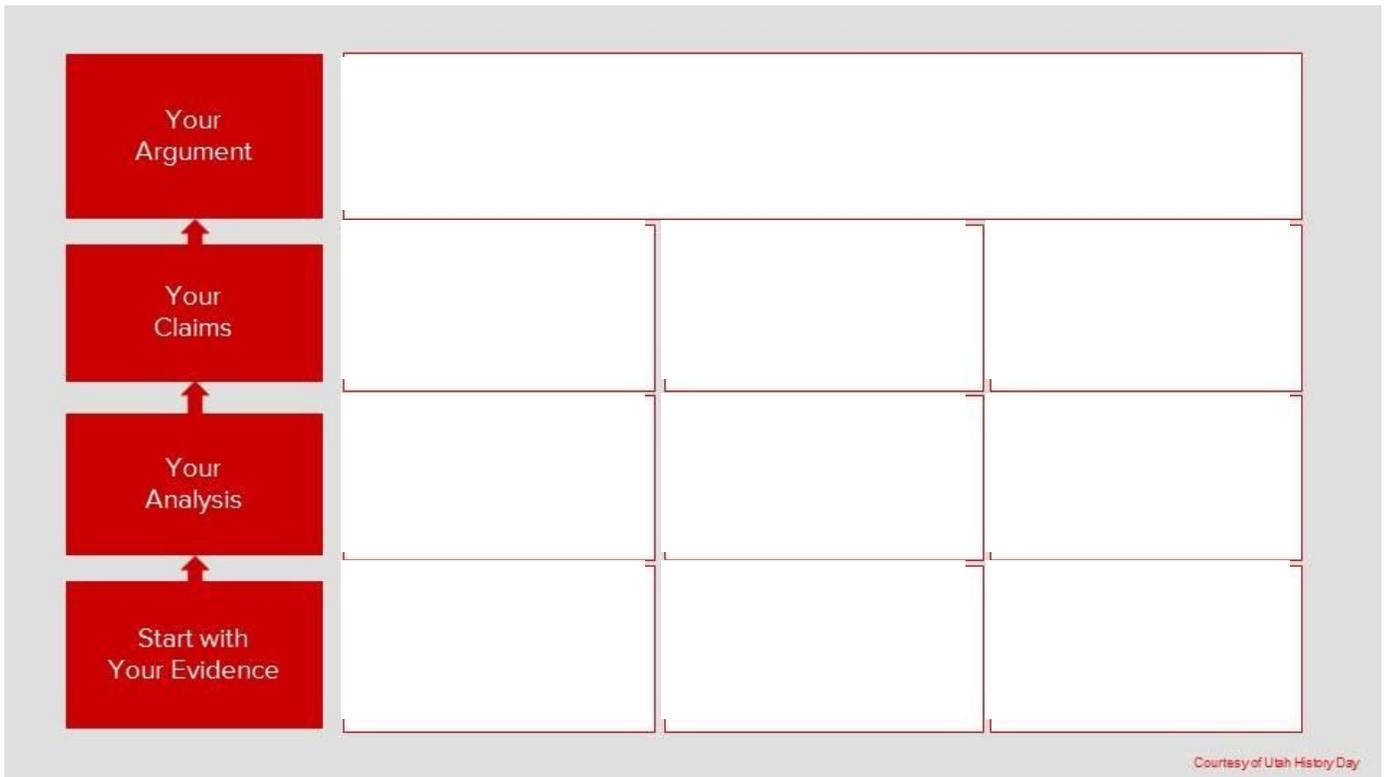
Analyze your primary source research and summarize each piece of evidence. Examining primary documents related to your topic at the beginning of your research will encourage you to draw **your own conclusions** about your topic and how it connects to the theme.

Primary Source/Event (include where you found the information)	Summary in your own words	Analysis (How does this source/event impact or relate to your topic?)
		Courtesy of Utah History Day

Step 4: Developing Your Argument

Use your analysis to develop your historical argument. Keep the theme in mind as you are fitting these pieces of evidence together. Review the example below, and then complete the organizer for your topic.





Step 5: State Your Project Thesis

A strong History Day thesis contains four elements: clearly stated topic, defined parameters, annual theme, and historical argument (which indicates the historical impact of your topic). It is your job to blend these elements into 1-2 powerful sentences. Here are some [examples](#) of thesis statements.

Topic:

Parameters (Date, time period, range of years, etc.):

Theme words:

Your argument (A debatable argument, NOT a statement of fact):

Thesis draft: Write your initial thesis here. Keep in mind, you will revise this more than once before your project is finalized.



Ask a peer to read your thesis statement and identify each element by:

- Drawing a circle around the topic
- Drawing a box around the parameters
- Drawing a star above the theme words
- Underlining the argument and considering an opposition to the argument
- (If this activity is completed digitally, students can assign different colors and highlight the text)

Revised thesis: Review the feedback you received on your initial thesis draft. Make improvements to the statement here.

Part B: Supporting Your Thesis by Thinking Like a Historian

Now that you've identified your argument, you will need more research to support your claims. Consider who was involved, what impact was made on society (or a portion of society), and what was gained or lost because of your topic.

When selecting secondary sources, you must consider several factors to identify potential biases and the overall credibility. These elements will help you better understand the author's interpretation.

- Author's background, purpose and potential biases
- Intended audience
- Identify the author's thesis and arguments
- What primary sources did the author rely upon?
- What facts were presented by the author?
- What opinions were presented by the author?
- Is the source reliable and convincing? Why or why not?
- How does the source relate to your topic? How does it add to what you already know about your topic?

Part C: Explain the Historical Significance

YOU make the case for why your topic is significant in history and how it relates to the annual theme. Consider the message you want your audience to understand based on your conclusions. Be sure to provide evidence to support your conclusions.

- Short Term Outcomes (What changed immediately or soon after? What didn't change?)
- Long Term Outcomes (Can you show logical connections between your topic and events 10, 20, or more years later?)
- Why does this topic matter to your audience?

Part D: Putting It All Together

The magic happens within a History Day project when you can synthesize your research and analysis into a cohesive argument that is supported by relevant primary and secondary sources. You're on target when you have:

- A well-formulated historical argument supported by thorough analysis, and the annual theme woven throughout the project.
- Integrated body of credible research into a fully developed historical argument.
- Used primary sources develop the historical argument.
- Analyzed the short-term and long-term causes of the historical event(s).
- Integrated multiple perspectives throughout the historical argument.
- Verified that all historical information is accurate.
- Drawn an evidence-based conclusion about the topic's significance in history and analyzed the topic's short-term and long-term impact.
- Ensured your ideas, analysis, argument, and conclusions are original and persuasive.



(See the new [NHD Evaluation rubrics](#) for more information.)