

ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENT

A thesis statement is a promise to the reader or viewer of your project as to what your project will prove. It is the answer to your basic research question. It is a key element in making people understand your position or point of view.

An effective thesis statement for your History Day project, regardless of the category in which you are competing, should have all of the following elements:

1. It should clearly state your topic.
2. It should define the parameters (the focus) of your research.
3. It should clearly and explicitly relate your topic to the NHD theme.
4. It should be written in the form of an argument rather than a statement of fact.
5. It should convey why your topic is important or significant. How did it impact history?

The following is a typical draft of a thesis statement associated with last year's theme of "Breaking Barriers in History". The author *has tried* to incorporate all five elements of an effective thesis in his statement. Yet, it should not be considered a finished product. It will require further refining and editing to make sure that it delivers the thesis in the most concise and most effective way. The appropriate length of your thesis will depend on your category's limit on word count.

TOPIC: John Brown's Trial

John Brown's trial, after his capture at Harpers Ferry, sparked the Civil War, which hastened the abolition of slavery in the United States thus breaking the major barrier to the attainment of equality and citizenship for people of color. Brown's trial was a national media event. During this trial, Brown's passionate denunciation of the legal existence of slavery and his insistence that it could only be ended by force further fueled the national debate, already raging on this issue. His remarks, as well as his conviction and subsequent execution, were all prominently reported in every major newspaper in the country on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. These reports inflamed passions and sharpened the division between the north and south on the issue of slavery, making further compromise impossible. When modifying the barrier ceased to be an option, the only thing left to decide was merit of the barrier's very

existence. Brown was the key player forcing this decision to be made. His efforts changed America forever.

Can you find the five elements of a thesis in this draft?

- 1. Topic: _____

- 2. Parameters of research: _____

- 3. Relation to the theme: _____

- 4. Author's Argument: _____

- 5. Significance: _____

