National History Day

Getting Started on your History Day Project

1. **Choose a Topic**, which fits into the annual theme.

2. **Narrow your topic**. For example, the Pony Express is an interesting phenomenon that was an innovative approach to transcontinental mail service. However, the topic of the Pony Express in general is very broad. You should consider what made the Pony Express so innovative and explore its legacy to American history to focus your research. Narrowing your topic is essential to a successful History Day project!

3. **Research!!!** This is the *bulk* of the History Day Experience. There are wide varieties of resources available for you to begin your quest. Begin with *Secondary Sources*. These will provide *Historical Context*, may assist you in narrowing your topic even further, and guide you toward Primary sources relevant to your topic.

Some helpful hints about *Quality Research*:

A. **Use credible sources.** Experts in the field write credible sources. They are peer reviewed and fact checked. If you have questions about your source's credibility, you need to investigate further! This is especially important when using information collected from the internet!!! *Always* complete a website evaluation *before* using a website. When evaluating websites keep in mind:
   o Who wrote, published, and maintains the site? Does it contain copyrighted material?
   o What is the purpose of the site? Does it contain factual information or is the content ONLY opinion?
   o Is it easy to navigate?
NOTE: *This evaluation process applies to ALL sources you plan on using for you project!!! BE CRITCAL*!

B. **Keep good records!** You need to develop a system to track and categorize your research. Begin by building an ANNOTATED BIBIOGRAPHY as you research. Include all the relevant information you will need to direct someone else to that source or to complete a bibliographic reference:
   o Author or Editor
   o Publisher
   o Year of publication or copy-right
   o City of publication
   o Title of book or journal, include issue and volume numbers when applicable
   o Title of article
   o Page numbers
   o Hosts and URL addresses for websites
Annotations should include:
   o What is the purpose of the publication?
   o What types of information that can be found in this source?
   o Is this source a primary or secondary source? How can you tell?
   o How did you or will you use this source?

NOTE: Annotated bibliographies are REQUIRED for ALL projects. Building a quality bibliography as you go will save you time and headaches later!!!

Along with an Annotated Bibliography you must develop a system to record and organize the research you are collating. Note cards are an effective tool to assist you. They are small, contain limited, streamlined information and can be sorted and categorized easily by author or topic. Make sure you include WHERE info on each card!

4. **Budget your Time and Resources!!!** Develop a timeline and use a task list to keep track of your progress and group members' accountability! Make firm due dates for yourself and your group! Know how to contact your group members! Exchange phone numbers and emails with EVERYONE IN YOUR GROUP! KEEP MULTIPLE COPIES OF EVERYTHING! DO NOT PROCRASTINATE!

Above all, have fun, be creative and amaze yourself!!!

Source: Nevada National History Day