

National History Day 2011 Theme:

DEBATE & DIPLOMACY IN HISTORY: SUCCESSSES, FAILURES, CONSEQUENCES

By Ann Claunch

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Congratulations on your decision to become a National History Day Scholar! You are joining more than half a million students studying history by doing history! No longer will your knowledge of history be measured by the correct answers to the predetermined questions at the end of the chapter or how often you lug a 1000-page history book home only to fall asleep, drooling on the couch, after two pages of the chapter. National History Day (NHD) wants you to become the historian! You decide on a topic. You find the sources. You determine the consequences based on the evidence. After you finish your research, you have a choice on how to tell the story. You may choose to create a historical performance, paper, web site, documentary or an exhibit. NHD puts you in control of your learning. Let's get started.

First, begin with the theme: *Debate and Diplomacy in History: Successes, Failures, Consequences*. If you have participated in National History Day before you know the theme is always broad enough to include research topics at the community, state, national or world history level. The theme

is important because historical research requires more than a detailed description of an event. The theme helps you ask questions and think deeply about your topic. Examine the arguments for and against. Explain the historical consequences of the outcome of the debate or diplomatic event. Whose success is it? Whose failure? Excellent topics that are not connected to the theme can quickly become poor research projects.

The best way to understand the theme is to define each word. The first two words, *Debate* and *Diplomacy* are broad categories. Your topic will be on a debate or a diplomatic event. Sometimes you will find a topic that fits under both debate and diplomacy but that is not required. To understand all the possible meanings for the words go to the dictionary with a partner, think about different meanings and

brainstorm possible research topics under each definition. The key to topic selection is the ability to articulate its connection to the theme.

What are examples of debates? A debate is defined as an argument, a dispute or a deliberation. Famous debates like the Lincoln/Douglas debates over slavery, Aristotle and Plato discussing "nature versus nurture" or the impact of the Kennedy/Nixon televised presidential debates on political campaigns are interesting topics. But so are debates concerning civil liberties. Who should be allowed to vote? A paper or an exhibit on the 15th or the 19th amendments or a web site of Anna Howard Shaw's *Fundamental Principles of Representation*, are

excellent NHD projects. With this theme, the amendments to The Constitution or Supreme Court cases can be mined for topic ideas. CAUTION! Always think historically. Be careful not to focus on present day debates and don't forget local topics!

What about censorship? If you are interested in music you might consider a web site or an exhibit about the debate

surrounding the innovative music of Johann Sebastian Bach in the 17th century or Giuseppe Verdi's suggestive opera lyrics in the 19th century. What about the 1955 debate proposing a connection between rock music and juvenile delinquency or *The Buckley Report* and the heated debate correlating rock music to drug abuse?

Consider reform movements! New ideas introduced are always debated. You might write a paper about the Hull House, the establishment of the Tuskegee Institute or the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Other possibilities are a web site about the controversy surrounding the publication of Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle* or a documentary on *A Red Record* by Ida B. Wells. From world history you can do a documentary on Martin Luther's 95 theses or *Emile* by John Jacques Rousseau.



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How about women? What types of jobs should women be employed to do? Should both sexes have equal treatment under the law and receive equal pay for the same job? In answers to these questions, you might create a documentary on the impact and legacy of Title IX legislation or a performance on the Seneca Falls conference. What about the change in women's fashion in the 1920s? A web site on the role of women in the 1830s or the debate surrounding Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, in the 1960s are topic options.

What about diplomacy? Diplomacy is defined in the most simplistic terms as international affairs. When nations collide in ideological differences or battle over resources the result may demand a diplomatic solution. An international conference, a treaty or a summit of historical significance are examples of research topics related to *Diplomacy in History*. Although diplomacy usually evokes an international disagreement, be alert to other possibilities. Researching the early 18th century about land ownership in the United States and treaties with the Native Americans involved diplomacy and its consequences. The Black Hawk War of 1832 in the U.S. and The Lancaster Treaty of 1744 are examples of research topics that had immediate impact which resulted in a legacy of treatment.

What are national and international topic ideas? The Daytona Peace Accords, NAFTA, the Geneva Convention or Nixon's 1972 visit to China are international topics that changed history. Careful analysis of the Salt Treaties in a web site, a documentary on the Munich Agreement of 1938 or a paper on Ben Franklin's trip to England reveals varying diplomatic outcomes. What about the carefully orchestrated diplomatic pressure during the 1980s by President Ronald Reagan on Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev regarding The Berlin Wall and communism? Don't forget diplomacy topics on the national front. You might consider an exhibit on the impact of The Missouri Compromise

or a web site about the Guadalupe Hidalgo land grant or a performance on the Smoot Hawley Act.

No matter what your interests are, you can find a historical topic to research with

Debate and Diplomacy in History: Successes, Failures, Consequences. For instance, if you are interested in affairs of the state, you might create a performance on the impact of Albert J. Beveridge's *The March of the Flag* by exploring the debate between isolationists and interventionists in the Spanish American War. What about a web site on the two sides of the Cuban Missile Crisis? Was diplomacy a success? Other possibilities are a paper or an exhibit explaining the debate over The League of Nations or the South East Asia Treaty. What happens when diplomacy fails?

The second part of the theme, *Successes, Failures, Consequences*, includes words to use as a thinking backboard or to bounce your topic off. These words help you analyze your topic by raising questions that you will need to answer as you research. What made your topic a success or a failure? Was it a success in the beginning and then later determined a failure? For whom? Why or why not? Was an important group of people's voices silenced? And the most important word—consequences. How does your topic have long term impact? How did it change history? Your interpretation of the consequences and historical significance of your topic should be based on your research and supported by evidence. Always examine your topic for the short-term consequences and the long-term change.

Debate and Diplomacy in History is an exciting theme because you can find topics everywhere. Start by talking to everyone about possible topic ideas and reading widely. Ask your parents, your teachers, your friends. You can search the Internet. Peruse your textbook and your school library. Carry a notebook and write down ideas. When you have a list, circle the topics you want to know more about and go to the library to begin researching!



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Refer to web site for local contest dates and information. National Contest: June 12–16, 2011

