

## LESSON: PROJECT ORGANIZATION – THESIS DEVELOPMENT

**Essential Questions:** 1. What is a thesis statement? 2. How is a History Day thesis statement similar to or different from an English/Language Arts thesis statement?

**Objective:** At the end of this lesson students will be able to write a thesis statement for their History Day project.

**Grade Level:** 6 – 12

**Time Needed:** 90 minutes

**Materials: Worksheet: Thesis Development,** pencil, notes

### Procedure

1. Ask students if they know the definition of a thesis statement. Based on their responses, expand on what they already know and discuss the definition and role of a thesis statement. A thesis statement:

- Tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.
- Is a road map for the project. In other words, it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the project.
- Directly answers the question asked of you. A thesis is an interpretation of a question or subject, not the subject itself. The subject, or topic, of an essay might be World War II or Moby Dick; a thesis must then offer a way to understand the war or the novel.
- Makes a claim that others might dispute.
- Is usually a single sentence somewhere in your first paragraph that presents your argument to the reader. The rest of the paper, the body of the essay, gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the reader of the logic of your interpretation.

2. Based on the experiences that students may have had in other classes, discuss what students might be familiar with for writing thesis statements in English class.

3. Go, write! (Just kidding). Using the **Worksheet: Thesis Development**, walk through a sample thesis writing process with a topic that students already know. Pick a topic that no one has – so you are not writing a thesis for a student. Abraham Lincoln and Rosa Parks are provided as samples. Before beginning, discuss topic narrowing with students: *What specific issues are we going to focus on for either of those topics – we won't be able to cover their entire life.*

4. Get students to brainstorm what they already know about either topic. Write Abraham Lincoln or Rosa Parks on the board and list about five or six facts about either of them.
5. In looking at the facts on the board, it could be a great time to discuss the balance between interesting vs. important. *Using some of the facts on the board, think also about information you want to include in your statement. If I am doing a project on Abraham Lincoln, is his birthday important? Should I put that in my thesis statement?*
6. Then begin the **Worksheet: Thesis Development** as a group for the sample topic. Answer Who? What? Where? When? Why? What is my theme connection? Sample responses are available on the **Thesis Development Worksheet Information** page.
7. Once you get to the “why is this important” and “what was the impact” questions, it’s a good time to discuss how these are key questions for thesis statements. The answers to these questions will let people know why this topic is important to study.
8. Before writing the thesis statement, brainstorm and discuss the characteristics of a good NHD thesis. (Addresses a specific issue, discusses significance in history, has a theme connection)
9. Ask students to begin completing this worksheet for their own topic. Remind students that their thesis can – and should – change over time as they find more research.

### **Lesson Extension/Alternative**

**Individual Thesis Discussions:** Use the outside resources such as History Day mentors, staff, parents, and other adults in the community to help students and sit with them to prompt them to answer questions.

**Reverse Thesis Statement:** Have a thesis statement on the board. Using the Thesis Development Worksheet, take it apart. Find the answers in the thesis statement (who, what, etc.). Then ask how this can be proven and help the students answer that question by giving examples of research and sources already discovered. The thesis statement is like a road map of the project. They should also find a clue for background, build-up, impact, and significance.

**Thesis Pitfalls:** If students have already written thesis statements, discuss common pitfalls in History Day thesis statements. Things to avoid when writing a thesis statement: hope, forever, always, dreams. These are very broad words and can be challenging to prove.

**Current Events:** Instead of using an historic topic as the class thesis statement, write one using a current event or popular culture issue/item as most students will be more familiar with it.

## **WORKSHEET: THESIS DEVELOPMENT Sample: The Montgomery Bus Boycott**

**WHO:** Who was involved? Who was affected? *Rosa Parks, Citizens in Montgomery, Civil Rights Movement leaders, Montgomery's government officials*

**WHAT:** What happened? *Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, which violated a law enforcing segregation on Montgomery city buses. She was arrested and went to jail. Civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., organized a boycott of buses and challenged the law as unconstitutional.*

**WHERE:** Where was/were the place(s) it took place? *Montgomery, Alabama*

**WHEN:** When did it happen? How long of a time period was it? *Rosa Parks was arrested on December 1, 1955. The boycott started on December 5 and lasted for 381 days.*

**WHY:** Why did it happen? What caused it? *Civil Rights Movement leaders wanted to overturn segregation laws. Rosa Parks attended training for non-violent protest at the Highlander Folk School.*

**WHY:** Why is it important? What were the outcomes? *The boycott forced change in Montgomery and succeeded in overturning the law requiring racial segregation on public transportation through a Supreme Court battle. This boycott inspired other civil rights movement protests and helped Martin Luther King, Jr. develop nonviolent strategies to fight segregation.*

### **Thesis:**

**Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama when she refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger in 1955. The following year-long bus boycott and Supreme Court battle broke the barrier of segregation on public transportation, opening doors for other civil rights movement victories through non-violent protest.**

## WORKSHEET: THESIS DEVELOPMENT

**TOPIC:**

---

**WHO:** Who was involved? Who was affected?

---

---

**WHAT:** What happened? What was the main event?

---

---

**WHERE:** Where was/were the place(s) it took place?

---

---

**WHEN:** When did it happen? How long of a time period was it?

---

---

**WHY:** Why did it happen? What caused it?

---

---

**WHY:** Why is it important? What were outcomes?

---

---

**THEME CONNECTION:**

---

---

**Put it all together into a thesis statement:**

---

---

## LESSON: PROJECT ORGANIZATION – NARRATIVE ORGANIZER

**Essential Questions:** 1. How do I organize all the information? 2. What tools have I already used in the History Day process that can help me get organized?

**Objective:** Students will be able to organize the notes collected and present the information they deem important for their story.

**Grade Level:** 6 – 12

**Time Needed:** 90 minutes

**Materials:** Worksheet: Narrative Organizer, pencil, draft of working thesis statement

### Procedure

**Before Class:** Choose a thesis statement of issue from a previous lesson to discussion in this activity.

1. Ask students to think back to the discussions you had as a class about historical context and historical significance? Explain that you are now we going to take a look at the thesis and how that previews the bigger picture ideas you have been researching. Each idea that you discuss in the thesis will need to be discussed and proven in the project itself.
2. Walk through the introductory thesis together, as a roadmap of the project.
3. Using the **Worksheet: Narrative Organizer**, take apart the thesis and figure out what details belong in each section. *What part of the thesis sets up historical context? What part gets to the heart of the story? Where do you discuss the historical significance and theme connection?*
4. As the students do the same for the working version of their own thesis using a new copy of the **Worksheet: Narrative Organizer**.
5. After filling in the main ideas, ask students to add details that further support the argument. *What other information is needed to support what you are saying?*
6. As the next step the students can use this narrative organizer to begin drafting the text into sentences for their project.

### **Lesson Extension/Alternative**

**Checklist Alternative:** The checklists that students may have completed through this entire process could form the foundation for the **Worksheet: Narrative Organizer**.

**Five-Paragraph Essay:** Students could write a five-paragraph essay that includes their thesis statement.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## **WORKSHEET: NARRATIVE ORGANIZER**

### **1. Thesis:**

### **2. Background: Topic Sentence/Point**

- a. Point 1
- b. Point 2
- c. Point 3
- d. Point 4

### **3. Build-up: Topic Sentence/Point**

- a. Point 1
- b. Point 2
- c. Point 3
- d. Point 4

### **4. Main Focus: Topic Sentence/Point**

- a. Point 1
- b. Point 2
- c. Point 3
- d. Point 4

### **5. Impact: Topic Sentence/Point**

- a. Point 1
- b. Point 2

c. Point 3

d. Point 4

**6. Legacy/Long-term Effect/Historical Significance: Topic Sentence/Point**

a. Point 1

b. Point 2

c. Point 3

d. Point 4



## LESSON: PROJECT ORGANIZATION - WRITING FOR YOUR CATEGORY

**Essential Questions:** 1. How will I present my project? 2. What are the basic rules for my category?

**Objective:** Students will be able to create the narrative from the research and outlines done in previous lessons.

**Grade Level:** 6 – 12

**Time Needed:** 100 minutes

**Materials:** Completed Worksheet: Narrative Organizer, Handout: Organizing Information for History Day, sentences, pens/pencils

### Procedure

1. Review the five categories and basic rules for each category:
  - a. Exhibit: 500 student-composed words
  - b. Performance: 10 minutes
  - c. Documentary: 10 minutes including credits
  - d. Website: 1,200 student-composed words
  - e. Paper: 1,500 – 2,500 total words in paper
2. Brainstorm how the writing process might be different for projects in each category.
3. Now put the Narrative Organizer you made into a written product for your category! Use the **Handout: Organizing Information for History Day** for general reminders about presentation.
4. Peer Review. Have students work with someone not in their History Day group. They will read the others' work and answer the following questions in a conference. Ask each student to:
  - Come up with three questions they have about the topic.
  - Do you need to know those answers to understand the story? What images/illustrations will be helpful to tell the story?
5. Bring the class together to discuss the difficulties of this task. *What was easy? What was difficult? What is the next step?*

## HANDOUT: ORGANIZING INFORMATION FOR HISTORY DAY

Beginning the writing process can be difficult. It is hard to know what information to include and how to arrange it in your project. As a writer you will be acting as both a “scholar” and a “chef” to complete your project. As a scholar, you will have to decide on the most important information to include. As a chef, you will share your information in the most effective way for your category and topic.

### Top Tips on Writing for All History Day Categories

- **Break it down.** Instead of trying to write everything in one night, create an outline or guide that lets you write in smaller pieces. Using this as a guide for your project will also help viewers and judges more easily understand your project. Also, if you have divided up the writing responsibilities, make sure your writing style flows smoothly in the end.
- **Use your thesis to guide you.** Everything included in your project should lead back to supporting your thesis. If you are having trouble narrowing down the information you want to fit into your project, look back at your thesis. It can help you to figure out what is “interesting” versus “important.”
- **Seek advice.** Remember you want your project to be easily understood by anyone. Ask your friends or family members to take a look at the project. If they have that “huh?” look on their face, you may want to consider revising your work. Your argument and evidence should be clear and easy to understand to someone not familiar with your topic.
- **Keep it short and to the point.** If you are working in the exhibit or website categories, you don’t have a lot of words to convey your information. Make sure to keep your writing short and to the point. No one goes to a museum to read a book.
- **Once is not enough.** It is crucial to have at least one re-write of your information. Writing is a process. Your first draft will likely need to be revised as least once – and maybe more!
- **Use an active voice.** Things rarely just “happen” in history, someone or something is usually propelling it. Instead of saying “the Berlin Wall came down in 1989,” try, “the Berlin Wall was taken down in 1989.”
- **Viewers can’t read your mind.** You have been working on this topic for months, for some of the viewers and judges this may be the first time they encounter it. Don’t assume they know anything about what you are presenting.

## Strategies for the Writing Process

- **Start by identifying the most important quotes, excerpts, images, etc.** Write these on notecards that you can arrange on a table.
- **Write it out on paper first.** Writing key points on notecards and then moving them around into different configurations can help you segment your work. This can also be a good way to save drafts you may want to come back to later, rather than having just erased them on the computer.
- **The best place to start is to start.** Don't let your time go to waste because you are afraid of "getting something wrong" or not writing it perfectly the first time. Once you write something on paper it is much easier for others to advise you and help you work on your writing.