

# LESSON: CHOOSING A TOPIC – NARROWING AND CONNECTING TOPICS TO THEME

**Essential Questions:** 1. How do topics in history relate to the History Day theme? 2. How do you make long histories concise?

**Objective:** At the end of this lesson students will understand the concept of narrowing topics and deciding what is interesting and what is important.

**Grade Level:** 6 – 12

**Time Needed:** 50 minutes

**Materials:** Texts, library, computers, notes, speakers for audio, book about MN90 audio clip, or similar material, MN90 audio clip chosen (<http://ampers.org/category/mn-in-90-seconds/>)

## Procedure

**Before Class:** Have a MN90 clip chosen and a book that has a similar topic or includes the topic. Choose a clip that relates to the stories that have already been discussed in class from earlier lessons. Choose a student who will feel comfortable to read in front of the class and have them read a chosen passage before class so they feel more comfortable in front of their peers.

1. Play a MN90 segment your students will be particularly interested in; something that will draw their interest into class. We recommend using something you may have already discussed, such as the story from the first lesson.
  - a. There are many options and different ones can be used for different classes: <http://ampers.org/category/mn-in-90-seconds/>.
2. When completed, ask students the following questions:
  - a. *What was the main topic/event?*
  - b. *Who was involved?*
  - c. *Why was the story interesting?*
  - d. *Where did this story take place?*
  - e. *When did the story take place?*
  - f. *What else do you know about this topic? (What else did the company/person do? What else is happening at this time period?)*
3. Ask a student to read a passage for 90 seconds. Have the students time the reader. When completed, ask the reader how much material they were able to cover in 90 seconds. Ask the students the same questions as above, and include:
  - a. *Can we fit the entire book into 90 seconds? What about the entire chapter?*
  - b. *What is missing from the story so far?*
4. The intent of the exercise is to illustrate the importance of narrowing the topic, but also the knowledge that needs to go into narrowing the focus. Continue to ask questions:
  - a. *What did the MN90 crew need to do to produce their Minnesota history story in 90 seconds?*
  - b. *Where would they need to get information?*
  - c. *What would they need to know?*
  - d. *Do you think they presented all of the information they found?*
5. Ask students: *From what you have discovered from the era research you did in the previous lesson, choose three topics that interest you. They can be from the same era, two eras, all three, or a mix of*

*random topics not included in the previous research. Do preliminary research on these topics and answer the questions on the **Worksheet: Choosing a Topic 2.***

6. Bring students back together and ask, “How do your three topics fit into their bigger era or time period?”  
*How do the three topics fit with the History Day theme?*

### **Lesson Extensions/Alternatives**

**Extra Time to Explore Topics:** Some students may need more time to complete this activity. For students who may not be able to navigate early topic selection, consider providing them with a few websites or pages of reading to help navigate choosing a topic. Or provide them with a list of things they can start from to select their topic.

- MN History Topics from the MNHS library- <http://libguides.mnhs.org/>

**Using the History Day Funnel:** The History Day funnel is a great tool to help students understand the scale of topics that they are looking for in a History Day project. Once they have brainstormed topics, ask them to keep narrowing their topic into a focused topic. Look at an era, narrow by time, place, person, event, etc. Choose a potential topic and relate to the theme.

- **Worksheet: Focusing History Day Topics and Sample Topic Narrowing Funnels**
- **Worksheet: History Day Topic Narrowing Funnel**