

LESSON: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STUDENT CONTRACT

Essential Questions: 1. What makes a good research question? 2. How do I develop research questions? 3. How will you be held accountable for your History Day project?

Objective: At the end of this lesson students will be able to develop guiding questions to focus their research and sign a contract to commit to their group.

Grade Level: 6 – 12

Time Needed: 50 minutes

Materials: *Worksheet: History Day Self-Reflection, Worksheet: History Day Crew Contract, Worksheet: Research Questions*

Procedure

To Teachers: National History Day rules say that groups can be up to five students, or students can work individually. However, teachers may determine how large or small groups can be, or if students should work in groups at all.

1. Introduce the **Worksheet: History Day Crew Contract** to the students. Explain to them the meaning of the contract and any consequences/results from the contract. Encourage them to make smart choices about working in groups and picking topics.
 - Additional samples of contracts developed by Minnesota History Day teachers are included and more can be found on the [Master Teacher Network](#) of the Minnesota History Day website.
2. As students are doing preliminary reading with their topics, they should begin to think about the research questions that will guide their process. This will give their research process focus, rather than trying to gather every fact they can about their topic. Explain the difference between information-gathering questions and research questions.
 - a. **Information gathering questions** will help you to get the basic facts about your topic. These questions are often the “who, what, when, and where” questions.
 - b. **Research questions** get at more of the “why and so what” questions, that address the significance of the topic in history. These questions will often address:
 - 1) Cause and Effect: What were the causes of past events? What were the effects?
 - 2) Change and Continuity: What has changed? What has remained the same?
 - 3) Through Their Eyes: How did people in the past view their world? What were their motivations for their actions?
 - 4) Turning Points: How did past decisions or actions affect future choices?
 - 5) Using the Past: How does the past help us to make sense of the present
3. Walk through the process of writing a research question together for a topic previously discussed. Use the sample questions about Rosa Parks on the **Worksheet: Research Questions** as an example. Discuss with students how these questions are more than “yes” or “no” and go beyond just finding facts. Research questions should address “why and so what” issues.
4. Students can continue to research the three topics from the previous lesson and figure out if they want to join a group or not.

5. If students would like to work together but cannot choose a topic, the following questions may be helpful:
 - a. Which topic do each of you like? Why?
 - b. What do you want to find out about your topic?
 - c. Is there any way your topics are related?
 - d. What are the benefits of working together?
 - e. What are the drawbacks of working with a partner or in a group?
 - f. Why do you want to work together?
 - g. Ask individually: How flexible are you with your topic choice? Are you determined to do this topic, or can you research whatever?

6. It is important for students to be interested in their project because they will be working on this for quite some time. If they do not like a topic, or cannot find one that fits the theme, Minnesota History Day has a [Picking a Topic Weebly](#) and a [topic list](#) that may help.

7. Remind students of their two tasks and why they are necessary:
 - a. Discuss with an adult the project and your intent to work individually or in a group. Signing the contract means you are making a commitment to see the project through completion.
 - b. Coming up with research questions will help guide reading and help you take notes. When you find something that answers a question, it is like a gold mine.

Lesson Extension/Alternative

Framing and Guidance of Group Selection: Teachers can limit the group size or allow certain students to work together. The **Worksheet: History Day Self-Reflection** asks students to reflect on the characteristics they want in group members. The **Worksheet: Who Do I Work With – If Anyone** is a ship on the sea analogy to help students think about the benefits and drawbacks of group work.

Development of Research Questions: After explaining the purpose of research questions and modeling the writing process, students can use the **Worksheet: Research Questions** to write their own questions.

Gathering the Basic Information: Students can use **Worksheet: Thesis Development** to help figure out some of the basic facts (information-gathering questions) that they are likely starting out with about their topic. From there, use **Worksheet: Research Questions** to get students to identify more substantial research questions to guide their entire research process.