

Selecting and Narrowing a Topic

Youth History Division

TEACHER GUIDE

AUDIENCE

Grades 4-5

TIME

60 minutes

STANDARDS

Social Studies:

Grade 4: C.S. 1, C.S. 2, C.S. 15, C.S. 16, C.S. 17, C.S. 18

Grade 5: C.S. 1, C.S. 11

English Language Arts: Grades 3-5: R.L. 4.1, R.L. 5.1, R.L. 4.2, R.L. 5.2, R.I. 4.1, R.I. 5.1, R.I. 4.2, R.I. 5.2, R.I. 4.3, R.I. 5.3, W. 4.2, W.5.2

*Lesson includes ideas and sources from VMHC Virginia History Day Elementary Teacher Guide.

OHIO
HISTORY
CONNECTION

©2020 Ohio History Connection

Introduction

In this lesson plan, students will activate prior knowledge and explore primary and secondary sources to select a topic that they would like to research for National History Day. They will learn how to find topics that are not too broad and be able to narrow down their interests to a "just right" topic for their projects.

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to identify what makes a good research topic.
- Students will learn more about how to gather information to begin researching a topic.
- Students will learn how to take a broad topic and narrow down to a research topic.

Materials

- Teacher guide
- [Selecting and Narrowing a Topic Lesson Slides PPT](#)
- [Selecting and Narrowing a Topic Worksheets and Graphic Organizers](#)

Vocabulary

Primary Source	Direct or firsthand evidence about an event, object or person. Some examples include artifacts, autobiographies, letters, diaries, photographs and oral histories.
Secondary Source	Created by studying primary sources and gathering information about an event, object or person. Some examples include encyclopedias, documentaries, biographies and textbooks.
Research Topic	Idea that is the starting point for research

Program Outline

Pre-Activity 1: What Makes a Good Research Topic?

- I. Activate your students' background knowledge by beginning with a discussion on what they think would make a good research topic for National History Day. Remind students that their research topic will be something that they are interested in, connects to the National History Day theme, and will spend an extended amount of time researching about.
- II. Have students share out ways in which they think they will gather information on their topic.
 - Look at primary and secondary sources
 - Go to a library
 - Search on the internet
 - Read books, watch videos, etc.
- I. To help students get some ideas about potential topic ideas, set up a Gallery Walk with a variety of sources for students to explore. Here you can focus on topics that align with your social studies curriculum. Below is a text set of primary and secondary sources that can be used for 4th Grade Ohio Social Studies Standards around the Underground Railroad and Abolition.
 - a. [Who Was Harriet Tubman by Yona Zeldis McDonough](#)
 - b. [Portrait of Harriet Tubman https://www.loc.gov/item/2018645050/](https://www.loc.gov/item/2018645050/)
 - c. Uncle Tom's Cabin Newspaper-<https://www.loc.gov/resource/lprbscsm.scsm0268/>
 - d. Effects of the Fugitive Slave Law- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3a05114/>
 - e. Map of Slavery in the Southern States- <https://www.loc.gov/item/96685918/>
 - f. Frederick Douglas Collection- <https://www.loc.gov/collections/frederick-douglass-newspapers/about-this-collection/>
 - g. Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad by: Michael Martin
- II. Discuss with students your expectations for participating in the Gallery Walk. What etiquette do you expect from them? (Walking quietly throughout the room, taking notes on ideas that pop up as you explore, look through the source carefully and then put it back as it was, etc.)
- III. Give students 15 minutes to explore the Gallery.

Pre-Activity 2: Broad v. Narrow Topics

- I. After completing the Gallery Walk, ask students to think about what could happen if a research topic is too big (too much information to read, you can get overwhelmed, you don't have time to explore all the resources, it will be hard to find the main point).
- II. What if a topic is too narrow? (not enough resources to complete the project)
- III. The goal is to find the "just right" sized topic, just like Goldilocks and the 3 Bears. We want a Narrow topic that is not too small where we have enough sources to research with, but not too many to overwhelm us.
- IV. Play the Broad v. Narrow sorting game. Show students a topic idea and ask their thoughts on if the topic is too broad or narrow.
- V. Have students partner up and hand out the Broad v. Narrow sort activity worksheet. Students will practice identifying which topics are too broad v. narrow by writing the ideas on the chart.

Main Activity: Brainstorming Topic Ideas

- I. Give students two minutes to think about the topic ideas and interests that came up for them during the Gallery Walk. Have students jot down as many ideas on topics as they can think of in the two-minute Brain Dump.
- II. Next hand out the PIEs graphic organizer. Have students use the ideas that they wrote out and sort them into the categories of People/Places, Ideas, and Events. This organizer will help students to come up with many narrow topics to choose from.
- III. Students can share their ideas with a partner and help each other to complete their topic brainstorming

