

2025-2026

# Getting Started with NJ History Day



# Welcome to NJ History Day!

01

## What is NJHD?



New Jersey History Day challenges students in grades 6-12 to become historians through an exciting project-based learning program. New Jersey History Day is the state's official affiliate of [National History Day](#), an award-winning and globally recognized program that welcomes students into the world of historical research and interpretation.

History Day's combination of creativity, personal relevance, and scholarship creates a leading model of project-based learning and performance-based evaluation. Each year more than half a million students, supported by thousands of teachers nationwide, participate in History Day. By becoming part of the NJHD community, you're joining a network of teachers and learners who value research skills, critical thinking, and better understanding of our world.

## Key Resources

→ Website: [National History Day](#)

→ Website: [New Jersey History Day](#)

→ Video trailer: [“What is History Day?”](#)

→ CBS Sunday Morning video feature: [“Students Making History”](#)



02

# Why teach History Day?



National History Day provides a comprehensive framework for teaching essential skills required in New Jersey state learning standards: developing questions, planning inquiry, building information literacy, finding and critically evaluating sources, creating arguments supported by evidence, using primary sources, exploring multiple perspectives, and more. But NHD also fuels intrinsic student motivation through the power of personal choice, engaging them in research projects that are meaningful to them.

A [rigorous independent evaluation of the NHD program](#) found that participants:

- Outperform non-NHD peers on standardized tests
- Write more effectively, using evidence to support their ideas
- Develop strong critical thinking skills, including the ability to find, analyze, and evaluate information
- Gain 21st-century college and career ready skills

There are many ways to teach NHD. NHD projects can be the focus of an afterschool club, an option for independent study or extra credit, a class unit of study, or the foundation for the whole year's curriculum. The program is intentionally flexible to meet many different teaching needs.

## Key Resources

→ Website: [National History Day](#)

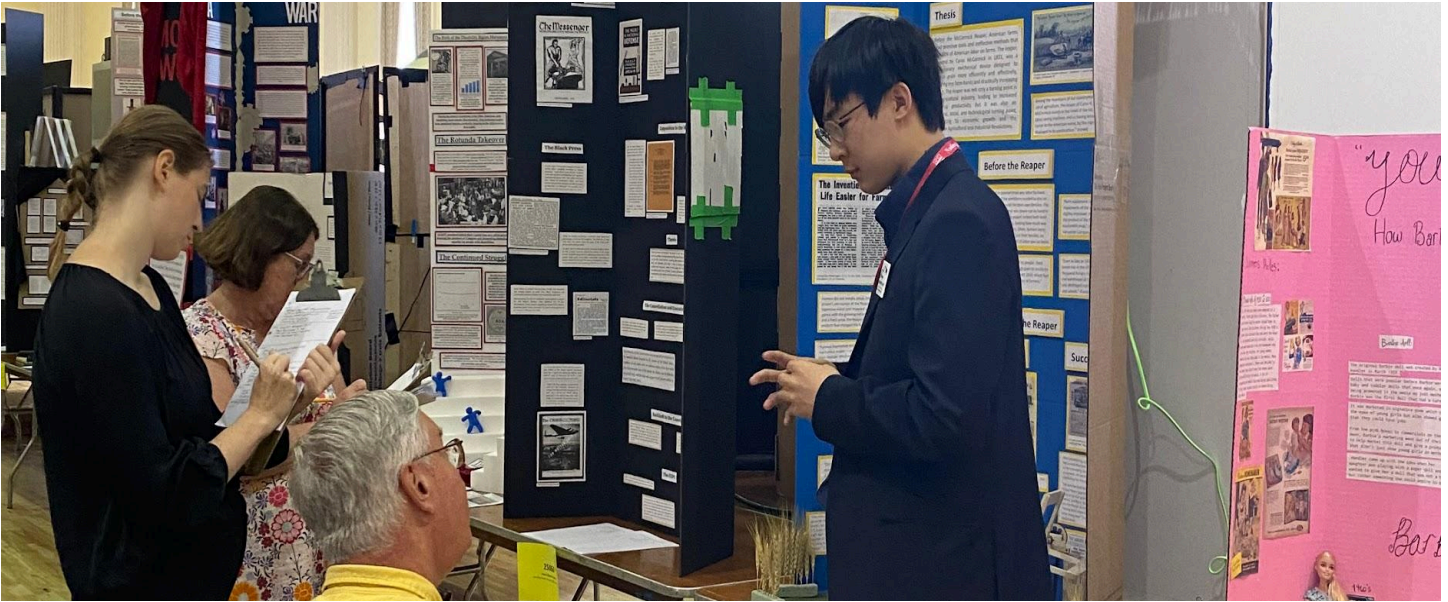
→ Website: [New Jersey History Day](#)

→ Video trailer: [“What is History Day?”](#)

→ CBS Sunday Morning feature: [“Students Making History”](#)

# 03

## How does the program work?



New Jersey History Day's core program is the **annual contest series**, leveraging the excitement of competition to fuel students' motivation. **Students in grades 6 through 12 are eligible** for the contests, competing in two divisions: Junior (Grades 6-8) and Senior (Grades 9-12). At the contests, students present their work to volunteer judges with backgrounds in history and education, who review each project in depth and provide individualized feedback. High-ranking projects move to the next level of competition.

The journey begins with the **Regional Contest** level, where students convene with others from nearby counties. In 2026, NJHD offers three Regional Contests.



Entries that qualify for top honors at the Regionals move on to our **State Contest**, held in May at William Paterson University. Top entries from the New Jersey State Contest and other affiliate contests worldwide advance to compete at the Kenneth E. Behring **National History Day Contest**, held in June at the University of Maryland. Each year, New Jersey sends a delegation of 50-60 students and their teachers to the National Contest, where they join thousands of peers in an exciting week of programs, events, and competition.



**Competition is *not* a requirement to participate in NHD.** Many History Day teachers use NHD tools and materials in their classrooms, assign NHD projects to students, and visit the contests without requiring students to compete. However, there's nothing like the thrill of competition to give students an exciting goal to strive for. Competition is also a powerful form of authentic assessment, as volunteer judges provide real-world, independent feedback on how students can improve their work. A contest experience makes for an unforgettable day of learning and celebrating achievement.

# 2026 New Jersey History Day Registration & Contest Dates

→ Registration opens: **December 1, 2025**

→ Registration closes: **February 1, 2026.** This date is final!

→ **Regional Contest** at **Monmouth University: February 28, 2026**

→ **Regional Contest** at **Rutgers-Camden University: March 7, 2026**

→ **Regional Contest** at **St. Elizabeth University: March 21, 2026**

→ **New Jersey State Contest** at William Paterson University: **May 2, 2026**



# 04

## Creating Projects



Creating a project is challenging. As they go, students will build new skills and thinking habits. Projects require students to consider themes, write clearly, create bibliographies in a standard format, place events in historical context, and analyze evidence. It can be helpful to break NHD project work down into steps.

### Exploring the Theme

To create a History Day project, students start with the year's theme statement, which changes with each program year. The themes are broad enough to allow students to choose topics from any time period or place, but narrow enough to help them find a clear focus within their topic. At NHD contests, the theme plays an important role in the judging criteria - projects should clearly connect their topics to the annual theme. The theme for 2026 is "Revolution, Reaction, and Reform in History."

## Selecting a Topic

After exploring the theme, students select a topic. Often, teachers ask students to propose projects for approval, to help ensure there will be enough material to work with. Each year, NJHD provides suggested starting points for topics that fit each year's theme.

## Doing Research

Students conduct their own extensive research, using resources from libraries, archives, museums, and historic sites. NHD criteria require students to use both primary and secondary sources, and to log their research in a bibliography.

## Developing an Argument

Students then analyze and interpret their sources to create a thesis-based argument about their topic, relating it to theme and describing its significance to history

## Choosing a Category

Students share their research in creative presentations. They can choose from one of **five creative formats**:



Exhibit



Documentary



Paper



Performance



Website

The [National History Day Contest Rule Book](#), available as a free download, provides detailed requirements for each format. Students are responsible for ensuring their projects meet the requirements before competing.

## Producing a Project

Students use their sources to build their project, following the rule book to ensure their work will meet judging criteria. They will write text in the form of exhibit labels, scripts, or paper content; select and edit images and/or video; design the visual look of their project, and more. The production phase is interdisciplinary and a great opportunity to work with collaborating educators.

## Key Resources

→ Annual Theme Resources: [“Revolution, Reaction, and Reform in History”](#)

→ [NHD Contest Rule Book \(English and Spanish\)](#)

→ NHD web resource for students: [“Get Started on Your Project”](#)

→ Student Guidebook from the Library of Congress: [“Finding, Analyzing, and Constructing History”](#)

→ Teacher Handbook from the Library of Congress: [“Guide to Student Research and Historical Argumentation”](#)

→ NHD teacher resources: [“Classroom Tools”](#)



## Evaluation and Judging



At the contests, student projects are evaluated by volunteer judges, who are trained by NJHD staff. Judges evaluate each project against a consistent rubric and provide authentic, constructive feedback aimed to support student improvement. 80% of the judges' assessment focuses on the quality of the historical work, with the remaining 20% focusing on clarity of presentation.

For most categories, judges conduct short interviews with students about their projects. These interviews help students hone their presentation skills and promote a sense of ownership and pride in their work. Students often remember their interactions with judges as one of the most valuable elements of their participation



**Volunteer as a judge!** Teachers make our best judges. Participating as a judge is an excellent way to gain insight into how the contests work and what makes entries successful. Judge registration begins in December. We encourage you to register and get to know the contest from the inside out!

## Key Resources

→ [Project Evaluation Rubrics for all categories](#)

→ [NJHD Judging Process and Tips](#)



## Professional Development



History Day educators have access to a host of opportunities beyond projects and contests. NHD and its affiliates offer virtual courses, in-person teacher institutes, and special partnership programs. Each year New Jersey nominates two outstanding teachers for the NHD Teacher of the Year Award.

New Jersey History Day is housed within the College of Education at William Paterson University, which offers virtual and in-person professional development throughout the year. We also work closely with the New Jersey Historical Commission, the Amistad Commission, and other organizations, sharing learning opportunities offered by our partners whenever possible.



[Sign up for Jersey History Day's newsletter](#) and follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram to stay informed about these and other opportunities available to New Jersey teachers.

## Key Resources

→ [NJHD Newsletter Signup Link](#)

→ NJ History Day Workshop: [Teaching Women's Suffrage, November 1, 2025](#)

→ [Amistad Commission Summer Teacher Institutes](#)

→ [William Paterson Professional Development and School-Community Partnership Programs](#)

→ [NHD Virtual Courses and Webinars](#)

# 07

## Questions?



We are here to help. New Jersey History Day is hosted and sponsored by William Paterson University's College of Education, [Office of Field Experiences and Partnerships](#), with support and partnership from the [New Jersey Historical Commission](#), [New Jersey Humanities Council](#), and the [Amistad Commission](#). As your State Coordinator, I look forward to working with our team to answer your questions, assist with your NJHD participation, and see you at the contests.

Our office hours are Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30-5:30, and you can reach us by email throughout the week. Don't hesitate to reach out. We want to help you and your students develop a lifelong passion for history. We look forward to working with you – Happy History Day!

# Reach us at:

**Michelle Moon, State Coordinator**

**Ivanna Valdivia, Graduate Assistant**

New Jersey History Day

Department of Field Experiences and Partnerships

William Paterson University

300 Pompton Road, Wayne, NJ 07470

Phone: (973) 720-4121

Email: [www.wpunj.edu](http://www.wpunj.edu)

[njhistoryday@wpunj.edu](mailto:njhistoryday@wpunj.edu)



