

# National History Day in Missouri Newsletter

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## Teaching with National History Day in Missouri

By Heather Van Otterloo

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I have been involved with National History Day for over 25 years. Beginning in middle school, I was an NHD student. Working through the process of historical research as a student was something that challenged me in a way that much of my other classwork did not. I couldn't simply find facts and use them to complete a worksheet, or read something and share my feelings about it. Instead, I had to think. I had to process. I had to stretch myself in ways that I wasn't used to. NHD definitely took me out of my normal comfort zone of "being a smart kid who just got it", and made me someone who had to work hard to achieve. Did I frequently want to quit? I'm not going to lie; yes, I definitely did! [continued on page 2 & 3]

When I never had a project advance past regionals, I would ask myself-- do I really want to try again? But because I had teachers who believed in my abilities and had a passion for using NHD to challenge us as students, I kept trying. I kept learning. I kept growing. The perseverance through challenges that they taught me had a lasting impact on me, and I honestly believe it is what helped spark my desire to be a lifelong learner. I'm currently working on the dissertation portion of my Doctorate in Education, and many of the skills I learned researching for National History Day still come in handy in that process. Ending my K-12 education did not stop my passion for NHD.

I remember the excitement I felt when I knew the regional competition was going to be on my campus. I got great joy out of walking through the exhibit hall, I loved talking with the students about their projects, and I loved reconnecting with my own teachers as they continued to share their passion for NHD with new students. It was during these days that I knew that I would incorporate NHD in my classroom some day.

Now I'm in my 16th year as an educator, and I have worked with over 100 students in two different districts in the course of seven NHD seasons to complete the NHD process. My students have seen regional, state, and national success with their projects, and I have seen the academic and social benefits of the program through their experiences.

At this year's regional competition for National History Day, I received a button that says "I teach National History Day. Ask me why!" This made me think about the MANY reasons that I have stuck with National History Day for so many years. Here are my top reasons (and encouragement for all teachers) for participating in National History Day:

- NHD gets my students on college campuses surrounded by other students who have the drive necessary to complete an NHD project.
- It gives them a little taste of what their educational future could be like. Being able to take the students to Mizzou is always a treat. The campus always impresses the students, and they feel very grown up being on an overnight trip earned through their success.
- And how can I not gush over the pleasure that comes from taking students to the national competition? Some of the students who have traveled with me to College Park have not been very far from our southwest Missouri area, so to take a day trip into Washington DC and see the sights that fill their lessons in American History is one of the best feelings I've had as a teacher.
- NHD also allows my students to speak with a variety of adult judges from various professions and educational backgrounds about their topic. I often tell them that they will be in the room with experts, but that they, themselves, will be the expert in their topic. Watching them stand before strangers in a college classroom and share about their topics fills me with so much pride.
- NHD helps my students to become critical thinkers, creative designers, effective communicators, and collaborators. NHD students have to persevere throughout the research and creation process that comes with NHD. All of these are skills students will need to successfully navigate the areas of life as they go on to high school and mature into adulthood.
- NHD is a way to show my students that history is happening all around us every day, and that the things that are happening today are connected to myriad of other things throughout history. It's amazing to see the connections my students make when they research a topic from decades or centuries ago and see how decisions made during those events continue to impact our world today.

- NHD allows my students to be website designers, documentarians, playwrights and actors, academic writers, and museum-exhibit designers while still 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. Every year, I try to impart on my students that these skills are real life! That the ability to create something for public consumption is a skill that will last them a lifetime. I love seeing their faces when they share their materials with their classmates, their families, and the judges. They take pride in their products because of the work they've gone through.

National History Day is not for the faint of heart, as it really does take a lot to ensure that students are making those cognitive leaps into analysis, but when it happens the results are utterly breathtaking. I encourage every teacher to consider using National History Day in their classroom to dive in because the outcomes benefit students in immeasurable ways.

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## A Message from the NHDMO State Coordinator

Thousands of students participated in National History Day in Missouri, researching this year's theme of Debate and Diplomacy: Successes, Failures, and Consequences. Over a thousand students competed in regional contests across Missouri, with the top projects advancing to the virtual state contest in April. Just under 500 students participated at state where they presented 273 projects. Eighty-four teachers acted as student sponsors, and over 100 educators, historians, museum staff, and community members served as judges for this event.

Fifty-five students from the state contest served as Missouri delegates at the virtual NHD National Contest. Missouri had two outstanding entry awards. Joplin students from South Middle School, John Jasper, David Bhend, and Brock Pyle received an outstanding entry award for their junior group website, "Cuban Missile Crisis: Diplomacy on the Brink of Nuclear War." The group were also among the top ten finalists in their category/division. Essex student, Elizabeth Arnold, from Richland High School also received an outstanding entry award for her senior individual documentary, "Governed with Greater Justice: The Debate and Diplomacy of the Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902." Allison Arnold, a Richland High School student, was awarded the Agriculture and Rural Life special prize for her junior individual documentary, "A Traitor to the Planter Class: Thad Snow." Odessa Middle School students Kiley Thomas and Rebekah Thurston were selected to show their exhibit, "The Newsboy Strike: Fighting for a Diplomatic Compromise" at the NHD 2022 exhibit showcase, hosted by National History Day, the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, and the Smithsonian Learning Lab. The exhibit was on display from June 13-27.

Missouri teachers were also recognized at the national contest. Kimberly Brownlee of Liberty North High School and Brian Wiedmer of North Andrew Middle School were nominated for the Patricia Behring Teacher of the Year Award. Brownlee was a top finalist for the award.

Congratulations to all our Missouri students on their hard work this year! We know that the last two years have been a challenge, but you continue to create impressive, high-quality projects. Additionally, thanks to everyone in the NHDMO community—students, teachers, judges, parents, staff, and volunteers— for making 2022 amazing!

Sincerely,  
Danielle Griego



## **NHDMO Instagram**

National History Day in Missouri has a new social media platform! Check out the NHDMO Instagram page for fun content, updates, and details about the program.

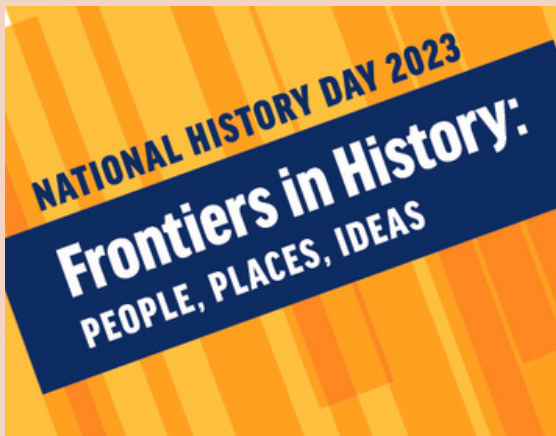
Find us at: [nationalhistorydaymo](https://www.instagram.com/nationalhistorydaymo)

To learn more about the program, visit our website: [nhdmo.org](https://www.nhdmo.org)



## **Missouri Humanities Grant**

The National History Day in Missouri program has received a \$10,000 grant from Missouri Humanities. The grant will be used to support teacher workshops, defray the cost of contest materials and other needs to enhance the 2023 program.



## **2023 Contest Theme**

We are happy to announce that the 2023 National History Day theme is Frontiers in History: People, places, and ideas.

Check out the NHD website for resources like the theme introduction video and the theme graphic organizer:  
<https://www.nhd.org/frontiers-history>

# **Thanks for your support of NHDMO!**

