

Each year, National History Day gives us a theme that brings together all student topics. You will need to connect your idea to this year's theme, **Turning Points in History**. A "turning point" is more than just a change. It's a moment of *significant* change where an action, event, or idea directly causes things to be different from how things were before it.

Change happens all the time. The impact of a change will range from things staying pretty much the same to things being very different for a community, country, or even the world. Many changes will fall somewhere in between.

- **For example:** Changing lanes on the highway while driving north for a fishing trip will not significantly impact your life. Let's say, however, you take a different route and stop at a fossil site. What if that experience led you to discover a passion for archaeology, which then became your career? That detour might be a turning point in your life.

Often, we don't know if a change is going to be a turning point until *after* it happens. **This is why the second half of the theme, "in history," is so important.** Enough time needs to have passed from the main events of your topic to understand what happened right away *and* what happened much later. As a rule of thumb, you should look for topics that are at least twenty years old.

How do you know if your topic is a turning point? You'll need to do some beginning research and think about the following questions to learn about the during, before, and after of your topic. Answering these questions will help you create a great project.

During: What happened during my topic?

You will likely start your topic exploration by thinking of a person, thing, idea, or event. It might be something that's in your history book, was on the front page of a newspaper, or is important in your community. You first need to figure out what happened - who, what, when, where, why, and how. You also might need to make your topic more specific.

- **For example:** World War II was a turning point in world history, but is too big for a History Day project. You might focus on the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan in 1945 by the United States. This was the first time nuclear weapons were used.

Before: How is this different from what happened before?

Historical events do not just happen on their own. They build on the people, ideas, and events that came before them. This is called historical context. You will need to think about how the people, events, actions, and ideas that came before helped to create the situation in which your topic took place. You won't be able to cover everything. What is directly connected to your turning point?

- **For example:** If your topic is the use of the atomic bomb, you'll need to think about a few different areas of historical context. You'll need to understand how it fits into World War II. This may include who was fighting, why, and how long the conflict had been going on. You would also need to know how this type of weapon came to be. What types of weapons were used before it? How was it created and why?

After: How did this topic significantly change things?

Now that we know what happened and why, we have to think about how the topic *significantly* changed things. This is how we prove the topic was a turning point. The changes that your topic caused could have happened right away, took a long time, or both. The changes could be positive, negative, or a combination. More than just saying that your topic was a turning point, be specific. A turning point for what? How did things change because of it? Be sure you can prove it.

- **For example:** After the United States used atomic bombs against Japan, the end of the war soon followed. It was a turning point in the conflict. The use of the atomic bomb also was a turning point in global peace. Some countries saw how dangerous nuclear weapons were and felt they should be banned. Others, like the United States and Soviet Union, continued to build weapons, leading to the Cold War.