



Evaluating National History Day Exhibits

An exhibit is a visual representation of a topic and its significance in history, much like a small museum exhibit. The analysis and interpretation of the topic must be clear and evident to the viewer. Labels and captions should be used creatively with visual images and objects to enhance the message of the exhibit. Some exhibits will be dazzling, using a variety of fonts, high-quality graphics, sophisticated mounting, and expensive boards. Regardless of how polished the exhibit may be, the most important aspect is its historical quality. No matter how impressively the students handle themselves during the interview, please remember that the entry itself should be able to stand alone. Answers to questions should not overshadow the material presented in the entry.

Judging Criteria:

Historical Quality—60%.

This is by far the most important factor in judging an entry. It refers to the research, analysis, and interpretation of the topic. The entry should be historically accurate. It should not simply recount facts but interprets and analyze them; that is, the entry should have a strong thesis or argument. In addition, it should place the topic into historical context—the intellectual, physical, social, and cultural setting. The entry should also reflect historical perspective—the causes and consequences of an event, for example, or the relationship of a local topic to larger events. The best entries will use a variety of both primary and secondary sources and will consider multiple viewpoints (e.g., those who suffered as well as those who benefited, males and females, people from different racial or ethnic or socioeconomic groups, as appropriate to the topic).

A note on primary sources: primary sources are materials directly related to a topic by time or participation. These materials include letters, speeches, diaries, contemporaneous newspaper articles, oral history interviews, documents, photographs, artifacts, or anything else that provides first-hand accounts about a person or event. An interview with an expert (a professor of Civil War history, for example) is not a primary source. Quotes from historical figures in secondary sources are not considered primary. Primary sources may be found in a variety of formats: the original documents in archives or in microform formats, facsimile copies, transcriptions printed in books or available on reliable Internet sites, or even films or recordings.

Relation to Theme—20%.

The entry must clearly relate to the annual theme and demonstrate why the topic is significant in history. Do not confuse fame with significance. Local history topics may not be well known but may represent larger trends or events. The exhibit should draw conclusions about the topic's significance. In other words, the entry should answer the questions, "So what? Why was this important?" It should not be just descriptive.

Clarity of Presentation—20%.

This relates to the entry's appearance and overall presentation. Is the exhibit well organized? Are the title, sectional divisions, and main points easy to discern? Are photographs and other images appropriate in terms of content and location? Do they have clear captions? Is the overall appearance cluttered or pleasing to the eye? You also should consider whether the written materials—the process paper and the bibliography—are clear, organized, and well done. Do not be carried away by glitz; simpler is often better. Conversely, do not discount an entry or assume students had outside assistance simply because an exhibit is of high visual and production quality; many students achieve both superior production quality and superior historical quality.