

## Topic Checklist

Once you have a tentative topic selected, it's important to run that topic through a series of questions to see if it's the best topic for you. Picking the right topic can be one of the most important decisions you make – so choose wisely!

### *Does the topic fit the theme?*

Can you provide analysis, not just a biography?

### *Is my topic historical?*

Can you prove the significance of the event?  
Best done if topic is more than 20 years old.

### *Have I narrowed my topic down?*

Your topic needs to be specific!

What was truly significant?

### *Have I checked the availability of resources on my topic?*

Do you have quality primary sources within reach? Secondary sources? Enough material to completely support your argument? If you answer "yes" to these questions, you will likely run into fewer problems.

### *Is my topic unique?*

How many other students will be showing the same topic in the same medium this year? It's okay to pick a popular topic, but think about how you are presenting it. Can you present that topic in a new light or an unexpected perspective? In what way will observers remember your project among the rest?

### Historical Context

Use your background reading to understand historical context.

Ask and answer these questions when researching:

What similarities does my topic have to the time period?

Was my topic part of a bigger movement at the time, or an isolated incident?

Is the issue I am studying confined to one time period, or a recurring theme in history?

How is my topic connected to what I have learned in my classes at school?

What other issues of the time period might affect my topic?

### **Reading Historical Documents:**

During the “detective” phase of NHD interrogate the evidence, as a detective would a suspect. Pull out all the important information to build a case.

Ask who, what, when, where, why, and how questions about each source.

Use a variety of primary sources.

Seek out primary sources beyond just illustrations, painting, and photos.

### **Note of caution:**

Just because a source is primary doesn't mean that the author is unbiased or that his/her interpretation is the only correct interpretation.

Asking – Why was this written?

What was the purpose of the document?

May help understand any potential bias and help you make a critical use of the information gathered.