

“Triumph & Tragedy in History”

The 2019 National History Day theme inspires topics from every part of the world and every area of history. The most dramatic events might come to mind at first, like war. The definitions for this year’s theme, however, aren’t limited to this area of history.

- **Triumph:** A *victory* or conquest by or as if by military force, or a *notable success*
- **Tragedy:** A disastrous event

The definitions are broad and flexible. Many areas of history, including social issues, science and technology, politics, or the environment are going to be full great topics.

- The AIDS Memorial Quilt was begun in the 1980s to celebrate the lives of those who died, and to raise awareness of the tragedy of the AIDS crisis and government inaction. How did this project turn art into demand for change?
- In 1908, Lewis Hine was hired as a photographer for the National Child Labor Commission to document child labor. How did his work help to end the tragedy of child labor in the United States?

The theme also asks you to pick a topic that is “in history.” The strongest topics will be those where the majority of the events took place at least 20 years in the past. For topics that are more recent, we don’t know the long-term impact.

- Current events about immigration and family separation are not old enough. Explore more historical topics related to immigration. Consider the Chinese Exclusion Act, Ellis Island, or Executive Order 9066 and the internment of Japanese-Americans.

MAKING A THEME CONNECTION

You might not know how your topic connects to the theme right now. Your connection will become clear as you do your research. Try to find both ideas: triumph *and* tragedy. These ideas might appear in either order (triumph then tragedy, or tragedy then triumph). These ideas might appear in any part of your project (before, during, or after). Triumph and tragedy will likely not be equally important. You may talk about one idea more than the other.

- The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League played its first game in 1943. How did the tragedy of World War II open an opportunity for women to triumph in professional sports?
- Starting in the 1930s, DDT was a scientific triumph to fight insect-borne disease. Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, brought attention to the environmental tragedy DDT had caused. How did our understanding of the chemical change from triumph to tragedy over time?

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Point of View	Human Responsibility	Use Caution
<p>Think about multiple points of view when researching your topic. One person’s triumph may be another’s tragedy. One group may feel that an event is both a triumph and a tragedy.</p> <p><i>For Example:</i> Hmong soldiers supported the United States in both the American War in Vietnam and the Secret War in Laos in the 1960s. After the United States withdrew, the Hmong became refugees in their own homeland and a target for political enemies. Was their involvement a triumph? Tragedy? Both?</p>	<p>The triumph and tragedy in your topic was most likely caused by the actions of people. You need to ask questions about who and why.</p> <p><i>For Example:</i> Slavery in the United States didn’t start on its own. This human tragedy was begun and was continued by the policies of the government and the actions of people. Who fought for it? Against it? Why?</p>	<p>Both natural and manmade tragedies are likely to bring up some of the darker events in the past. Get the advice of teachers or family members when picking a topic. You may need their help as you research challenging issues in history.</p> <p><i>For Example:</i> Ida B. Wells and her fight against lynching will make for a powerful History Day project. This topic, however, will contain graphic images. You don’t need to censor history, but use caution. Know when things might be a personal trigger for you and how to process those ideas.</p>