

HISTORY DAY CALIFORNIA



Research Questions



Whitney Olson, NHD-CA

Craig Irish, NHD-CA

Annie Olson, Menlo-Atherton High School,

NHD-CA Leadership Team, CA Foundation for History Education



Agenda *

Make it Historical

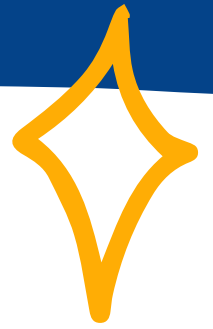
Make it Significant

Make it Compelling

NHD *Roadmap*



WE ARE HERE:



- ✓ Identify the theme
(Turning Points in History)
 - ✓ Choose a Topic
 - 📍 Craft a Research Question
- • •



HISTORICAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Make it
Historical

- Topic at least 20 years old
- Evidence of significant shifts
- Event, Action, or a Choice
- A point of no return

Make it *Historical*



To make your research question historical, you might:

- "ask **how or why** an event happened (causation, explanation)"
- "ask what the **consequences** were of a particular event"
- "discuss the **intellectual origins** of a particular idea"
- "ask what the **cultural context** of an event was";
- "ask about the **social history** of a political event"

● ● ● Source: Williams, Robert C. *The Historian's Toolbox: A Student's Guide to the Theory and Craft of History*. Second ed. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2007.





Crafting the *Question*



Step 1:



**ASKS LOTS (AND LOTS AND LOTS)
OF QUESTIONS!**

Identify the
Parts and
How They
Interrelate

Trace Its Own
History and Its
Role in a
Larger History

Identify Its
Characteristics
and the
Categories
that Include It

Determine Its
Value

Make it a
Question

Source: Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing and Publishing. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Make It *Historical*

**Identify the Parts
and How They
Interrelate**

What are the parts of your topic, and how do they relate to one another?

- historical figures
- historical context
- main event
- historical significance

How is your topic part of a larger system?

- historical lenses (political, social, economic, etc)
- local, national, and global histories
- identity (race, class, gender, etc)



Make It *Historical*

Trace its Own History and its Role in a Larger History

How and why has your topic changed through time, as something with its own history?

- historiography / different historical narratives
- different audiences
- different contexts

How and why is your topic an episode in a larger history?

- space in a larger historical sequences of events
- causes and consequences
- identity (race, class, gender, etc)



Make It *Historical*

Identify its Characteristics and the Categories that Include it

What kind of thing is your topic? What is its range of variation? How are instances of it similar to and different from one another?

- what is the most common narrative
- how do others differ
- why do others differ

To what larger categories can your topic be assigned? How does that help us understand it?

- what other events/people/ideas are like yours
- how does your topic compare to other locations
- what historical narratives are similar?



Make It *Historical*

Determine its Value

What values does your topic reflect?
What values does it support? Contradict?

- what is the ethical dimension of your topic
- whose purposes does each narrative serve

How good or bad is your topic?
Is it useful?

- which parts are most accurate
- which parts are least accurate





Crafting the *Question*



Step 2:

EVALUATE THE QUESTION.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Make it
Significant

- Based in historical reasoning
- Requires thought & research
- Leads to an explicit argument
- May not be the immediate subject of your investigations



Evaluate the *Questions*



Stick to questions that
ask **HOW** or **WHY**.



Try to combine smaller
questions into larger, more
significant ones

ABCs of 

 NHD

 A

 B

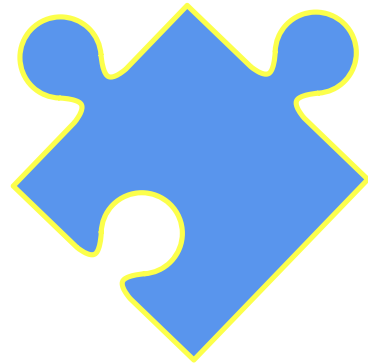
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ALWAYS



BE



CONNECTING

**BACK TO THE
THEME**



Let's Practice

Evaluation



What was Frank Kameny fighting for during the gay rights movement?
What did the protests communicate during the gay rights movement?



The theme for these sample questions is
Communication in History



Let's Practice



Evaluation



What was Frank Kameny fighting for during the gay rights movement?
What did the protests communicate during the gay rights movement?



- + Historical
- Missing a connection to the theme
- "what" question
- isn't arguable
- is Google-able

The theme for these sample questions is
Communication in History



Let's Practice *Evaluation*



How did Frank Kameny use protests to raise awareness of gay rights?



The theme for these sample questions is
Communication in History



Let's Practice

Evaluation



How did Frank Kameny use protests to raise awareness of gay rights?

- + How question
- + Connection to theme (kind of)
- + Historic
- Google-able

The theme for these sample questions is
Communication in History



Let's Practice

Evaluation



Why were Frank Kameny's protests an effective counter to the Lavender Scare? How did his protests spark the gay rights movement?



The theme for these sample questions is
Communication in History



Let's Practice

Evaluation



Why were Frank Kameny's protests an effective counter to the Lavender Scare? How did his protests spark the gay rights movement?

- + Why & How Questions
- + Theme
- + Historic
- + Not Google-able
- Lacking Significance



The theme for these sample questions is
Communication in History

The theme for these sample questions is
Communication in History



Let's Practice

Evaluation



How did Frank Kameny's Mattachine Society redefine what it meant to be gay in the United States, ultimately setting the stage for the future gay rights movement?

Why were his protests and newsletters an effective form of communication to help him achieve his goal?



The theme for these sample questions is
Communication in History



Let's Practice

Evaluation



How did Frank Kameny's Mattachine Society redefine what it meant to be gay in the United States, ultimately setting the stage for the future gay rights movement?

Why were his protests and newsletters an effective form of communication to help him achieve his goal?

- + Analytical
- + Multiple Perspectives
- + Significance
- Context



Make It
Compelling

Start by asking - 

"SO WHAT?"

...



Make it 

Compelling

Step 1: Name Your Topic

"I am trying to learn about _____"


Step 2: Add a Question

"because I want to find out why/how"



Step 3: Motivate the Question

"in order to help my audience understand how, why, or whether:"





"IT IS ALWAYS BETTER TO KEEP ASKING
QUESTIONS YOU THINK YOU CANNOT
ANSWER THAN TO STOP ASKING
QUESTIONS BECAUSE YOU THINK YOU
CANNOT ANSWER THEM."



HISTORY DAY CALIFORNIA 2023-2024



QUESTIONS

