Narrowing Your Topic

When beginning a National History Day (NHD) project, students often think of a general area of history that they are interested in, such as World War II. While this is a good starting point, students ultimately need to choose a very specific subject on which to focus. Many History Day students struggle to come up with a narrow topic, instead using their broad beginning topic. The problem with this is that a general subject is far too large to explore completely. This document will help you to take a general area of history and develop a narrow, focused topic.

First, let's look at some examples of narrowed topics:

1. **Interest**: Fashion  
   **General Topic**: American Women’s Fashion  
   **Narrow Topic**: Fashion of American Women in the 1920s  
   - First, narrowed by focusing on subset of people (women) and geography (US)  
   - Second, narrowed by time period (1920s)

2. **Interest**: The Civil War  
   **General Topic**: Battles  
   **Narrow Topic**: Battle of Honey Springs  
   - First, narrowed by looking at the military aspect of the war (battles)  
   - Next, narrowed by looking at a specific battle (Battle of Honey Springs)

3. **Interest**: American Indians  
   **General Topic**: Treaty Rights  
   **Narrow Topic**: 1788 Fort Schuyler Treaty  
   - First, by looking at a political aspect (Treaty Rights)  
   - Second, narrowed by looking at an individual issue (1788 Fort Schuyler Treaty)

4. **Interest**: Women’s Rights  
   **General Topic**: Suffrage Movement  
   **Narrow Topic**: Mary Church Terrell  
   - First, by looking at a political aspect (women’s suffrage)  
   - Next, by looking at an individual person (Mary Church Terrell)

5. **Interest**: World War II  
   **General Topic**: D-Day  
   **Narrow Topic**: Role of Jake McNiece and the “Filthy Thirteen”  
   - Military operation (D-Day)  
   - Specific subset of people (Jake McNiece and the “Filthy Thirteen”
6. **Interest:** Ships  
**General Topic:** Titanic  
**Narrow Topic:** Class Structure Onboard the *Titanic*  
- Individual ship (*Titanic*)  
- Social structure (class structure on the *Titanic*)

7. **Interest:** Space  
**General Topic:** NASA  
**Narrow Topic:** Women in NASA  
- Specific organization involved in space (NASA)  
- Gender in the organization (women in NASA)

8. **Interest:** American History  
**General Topic:** Abraham Lincoln  
**Narrow Topic:** Abraham Lincoln and the Homestead Act  
- Political leader (Abraham Lincoln)  
- Individual law promoted by Lincoln (Homestead Act)

In the next two examples, we will show how you can form multiple narrow topics from the general topic.

9. **Interest:** American History  
**General Topic:** Dust Bowl  
**Narrow Topic:** Dust Bowl in Boise City  
- Dust pneumonia  
- Okie migration  
- Specific event in American history (Dust Bowl)  
- Specific geographical region (Dust Bowl in Boise City)  
- Medical consequences of event (dust pneumonia)  
- Social consequences (Okie migration)

10. **Interest:** Technology  
**General Topic:** Industrial Revolution  
**Narrow Topic:** Income Changes Resulting from Industrial Revolution  
- Child Labor  
- Advent of the Cotton Gin  
- Specific time period of technological advancement (Industrial Revolution)  
- Economic consequences (income changes resulting from Industrial Revolution)  
- Social consequences (child labor)  
- Individual technological advancement of event (advent of cotton gin)