



4511 Knox Road
Suite 205
College Park, MD 20740
Voice (301) 314-9739
Fax (301) 314-9767
www.nhd.org

Important Elements of Leadership and Legacy

Kayla Uplinger
Mount Spokane High School
Mead, Washington

Welcome to National History Day! Whether this is your first time competing or you are a returning champion, you probably have a multitude of questions racing through your mind. What does the competition entail? What does the theme, Leadership and Legacy in History, even mean? Are there any examples? What else do I need to know? If any of these questions sound familiar, you have come to the right place.

To give you a general overview, by competing in National History Day, you will be choosing and investigating a topic, collecting sources, analyzing connections between different events, and effectively communicating your topic's significance. In the end, your final project should engage viewers and bring the theme, Leadership and Legacy, to life. Your most important task is to relate your topic to the theme. To do this, you need a basic understanding of the terms leadership and legacy.

Leadership is the power or ability to lead other people in order to achieve a goal. After reading this definition, your mind probably jumps to former presidents or rulers. While such people are viable topic choices, leadership can exist outside of government. The theme encompasses multiple areas, including economics, social movements, scientific discoveries, and intellectual theories. Within these categories, the leadership exhibited does not necessarily have to be an individual. For instance, an organization may possess leadership by mobilizing people in support of their cause. Doubtlessly, leadership exists in various forms, and it is your job to identify one of them.

The other half of the theme is legacy, which is something that originated from a person or group of people in the past. This "something" could be the continuation and progression of a social movement, an intellectual idea, an economic theory, an approach to diplomatic relations. Whatever your "something" is, you should recognize that the legacy varies in different time frames. Some individuals or organizations had a temporary impact on society, while other people or groups had a lasting influence. In some cases, the impact is evident in modern times; however, you should only momentarily touch on the current influence. It is more important to

examine the legacy throughout history. To do this, you should also ensure that your topic is actually in history. A current event would not fit this theme because the legacy simply cannot be observed, and, needless to say, your topic needs to have a legacy.

It may be easy to identify leadership and legacy in history– separately. However, since this theme has two parts, it is mandatory to analyze both leadership AND legacy in history and draw a conclusion about the relationship between the two. Admittedly, this sounds difficult, but do not worry; this task is not as hard as you are probably thinking. Leadership and Legacy can be interpreted as a cause and effect or a before and after prompt. When creating your project, simply ask yourself an essential question: Why was this example of leadership important both at the time and in other periods of history?

There are multiple approaches to answering this question since Leadership and Legacy can be interpreted in countless ways. Because of this, you can pursue any subject that fascinates you. For example, you may be interested in social movements. A historical paper could examine Margaret Sanger's leadership as a birth control advocate, which allowed her to influence various court cases and led to the legalization of contraceptives. Her leadership in developing the American Birth Control League, which evolved into Planned Parenthood, could also be investigated. How did she alter the social norm at the time? How did people view her message? Where can her influence be seen in later years? In another instance, a documentary could portray Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed*, the first notable novel that criticized the automobile industry for ignoring safety regulations. How did the automobile industry and public respond? Who did Nader mobilize in support of his cause? How did this book lead the way for establishing consumer safety standards? What specific legislation was passed?

Those that find economics intriguing could construct a group exhibit on the leadership and legacy of Adam Smith. How did his economic theory differ from the existing theories at the time? What countries experimented with his theory? Which countries did not? How did this not only affect economics, but also diplomatic relationships or social life? The French physiocrat Francois Quesnay would also be a fantastic topic choice. Francois Quesnay, who believed that the aristocracy in France stifled agricultural production, sought to reform the existing agrarian system by implementing laissez faire policies in agriculture. In fact, he led a group of physiocrats in opposition of mercantilist policies. What social class supported him? What methods or actions did he use to advance his reform

attempts? Was he ultimately successful in his intentions? Where, if anywhere, did he fall short?

From an intellectual standpoint, a group website could address the role of Sir Isaac Newton's Principia in either the scientific community or the Enlightenment philosophes. What was life like in the time that Newton lived? How did the time period impact his influence? What were the different points of view on this novel? An individual exhibit could investigate Ernest Rutherford's gold foil experiment, which paved the way for nuclear physics. Did other individuals support his findings? How did the public react? Who built on his ideas?

For some students, political figures are exceedingly fascinating. A performance could detail Henry Clay's leadership as the head of the War Hawks in the United States prior to the War of 1812. As Speaker of the House, he played an enormous role in mobilizing support for war with Great Britain. Why did he support war? How many other representatives did he influence? What resulted from the war? How did he contribute to these results? In another example, Otto Von Bismarck, a political leader during the time of German unification, paved the way for the growth of the Prussian military and was the primary encourager of a Prussian based Hohenzollern Germany. What was the original plan to unify Germany? Who did Bismarck directly influence? What other leaders later in history mimicked Bismarck's tactics?

Whether looking at political, social, or economic application, do not take on more than you can handle. The most persuasive projects look at a particular event as opposed to a general concept. For example, instead of examining the influence of the Populists, a historical paper may look specifically at the Omaha platform, and instead of examining the Indian nationalism movement, an individual website could document the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. With a narrow topic, the correlation between the topic and other events in history is typically clearer, and generally speaking, the analysis is stronger and more convincing.

Likewise, an extensive variety of sources will reinforce your analysis. Doubtlessly, you want to include a handful of secondary sources, such as books and websites. However, to take your research to the next level, you need to find primary sources, like newspapers, journals, and autobiographies, that accurately express an opinion related to your topic. By collecting a variety of primary sources, you will obtain multiple points of view and elevate your analysis. Additionally, professors are excellent

resources. You can conduct interviews on a college campus or through your email, telephone, or webcam.

At the same time, remember that your goal is not to get the most amount of sources; rather, you need to focus on quality over sheer quantity. It may be tempting to find random articles that slightly relate to your position to increase your number of sources, but in the end, this will only hurt you. The judges can tell if the source is actually relevant or just fluff, so make sure that all of your sources support your analysis.

Subsequent to completing your research and analysis, you will ultimately present your information in the form of a website, exhibit, documentary, paper, or performance. When deciding on your presentation type, keep in mind that you should choose a project style that highlights your strengths. For instance, if you have notable literacy skills, you could write a paper, and if you have exceptional theatrical abilities, you could do a performance. In the end, your project should make your research and analysis shine.

After reading this, you may be feeling overwhelmed. This is completely normal. Just remember, you are more than capable of doing this! A quick summary may help reduce your stress level. To compete in National History Day, you must select a topic you are passionate about. Then, you research your topic and its relationship to Leadership AND Legacy, which are the TWO key elements of the prompt, by collecting both primary and secondary sources. Finally, you string all of your information together in a creative project. Though this is an arduous undertaking, the academic skills you acquire will help you succeed in high school and college, and the creation and presentation of your project is a thrilling, irreplaceable experience.



About the Author: Kayla Uplinger grew up in Colbert, Washington, and attended Mount Spokane High School from 2010 to 2014. Outside of the classroom, she enjoys playing tennis and skiing, and she is an avid volunteer in her community. In 2013, Kayla participated in National History Day by writing a historical paper, and she competed at the national level in Washington D.C.