The Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is a central thought that holds your entire National History Day (NHD) project together. Early in the research process we like to call this a working thesis; as you gather your information, this thought can, and probably should, evolve. By the time you present your NHD project, however, you need to have a concrete thesis that is supported by evidence.

Thesis = Topic + Theme + Impact. In other words, you are not just introducing your topic, you are creating an argument that expresses your topic’s significance and demonstrates how the theme plays a central part.

Sample Statements: Do’s and Don’ts

Don’t: Martin Luther was born in 1483. He started the Reformation. (Fact)
Do: Beginning in 1517, Martin Luther reacted against Roman Catholic religious practices, especially the sale of indulgences, corruption, and the emphasis on salvation through good works. Luther’s Reformation succeeded in igniting a religious revolution, creating a new sect of faith, and later bringing change to the Roman Catholic Church.

Don’t: Emiliano Zapata wanted land reform. Want to know why? (Fact/Rhetorical)
Do: Under the banner “Reform, Freedom, Law and Justice” Emiliano Zapata commanded revolutionary forces in southern Mexico to uplift agrarian peasants through land reform. Zapata’s role in the Mexican Revolution helped foster a new constitution in 1917 which was later used to redistribute property to the nation’s rural poor.

Don’t: Franklin D. Roosevelt created the New Deal. Read more below. (Fact/Incomplete)
Do: In response to the stock market crash of 1929, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt initiated a revolutionary “New Deal.” This government reaction brought reform to the U.S. banking system and helped get Americans back to work. Roosevelt’s goal of restoring economic stability would go unmet, however, until the country mobilized for war.

Don’t: Without Norman Borlaug’s Green Revolution, billions of people would have died. (‘What if?’ history that cannot be supported with evidence)
Do: Beginning in 1944, Dr. Norman Borlaug conducted research surrounding disease-resistant wheat varieties. His successes in agricultural reform sparked the Green Revolution in several developing nations struggling with starvation. Reaction to Borlaug’s work has been mixed as farming practices have accomplished higher yields while also undermining small scale farms and presenting negative environmental impacts.

Don’t: Adolph Hitler was an evil man that killed a lot of Jews. (Opinion)
Do: International reaction to the atrocities of the Holocaust led to a reform of the Law of Armed Conflict through the Geneva Convention of 1949 to include the protection of civilian persons in a time of war. The Fourth Geneva Convention laid the groundwork for international humanitarian law and is used to regulate and enforce war time crimes even today.
Choose a sample statement and identify:

The Revolution: ____________________________________________

The Reaction: ____________________________________________

The Reform: ____________________________________________

The Statement of Impact: ____________________________________________

What must be proven in order for this statement to be true?

What evidence will we need to support our claims?

Where might we find this evidence (consider documents, statements, opinions, and other sources)?

Consider your own working thesis and identify:

The Revolution: ____________________________________________

The Reaction: ____________________________________________

The Reform: ____________________________________________

The Statement of Impact: ____________________________________________

What must be proven in order for this statement to be true?

What evidence will you need to support your claims?

Where might you find this evidence (consider documents, statements, opinions, and other sources)?