# Virginia History Day Teacher Manual: The Basics



**Virginia History Day is organized by the**

**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF HISTORY & CULTURE**

## Introduction

### *What is National History Day (NHD)?*

National History Day is a year-long contest allowing students to not only express and explore their passions in history, but also to foster growth in historical research and creative expression. Students begin by deciding a research topic which fits the yearly theme and the student's interests. From there, they conduct historical research and analysis of primary and secondary sources, which they will present in the form of exhibit, documentary, paper, performance, or website. After creating their research project, students have the option to compete at the regional, state, and national level, should their project be selected to advance. Available to them are scholarships and national recognition for their achievements.

### *What is Virginia History Day (VHD)?*

Virginia History Day is the state affiliate of National History Day and is organized by The Virginia Museum of History & Culture (VMHC). Throughout the year, the VHD Coordinator works with teachers, students, and local historical institutions to implement the program in classrooms. For VHD purposes, Virginia is broken into 8 geographic regions. Regional contests begin in late February and are organized by local institutions, in conjunction with the VHD Coordinator. In late April, qualifying students compete in the state contest at the VMHC in Richmond.

### *What NHD Does*

1. National History Day is best known for its annual contest for students in grades 4-12. The contest is massive in scope and reaches over 600,000 students at the regional level across 56 affiliates.
2. In addition to and in support of the contest, NHD seeks to improve history education through programmatic materials, curriculum assistance to schools and teachers, and participation in national forums.
3. As NHD recognizes the critical role played by teachers in the promotion of history education, NHD conducts a week-long summer teachers' institute. This intensive program for about 30 educators from across the affiliate spectrum focuses on a topic or period in history as related to the host location of the institute. Renowned historians provide lectures and tours, drawing connections between broad historical concepts and local/regional people and events. Teachers are given a reading list prior to the institute and are required to make presentations about their experience upon their return home. Recently, NHD has pioneered a teacher-student institute, welcoming teacher and student pairs to participate together in *Normandy: Sacrifice for Freedom*.

## *Effectiveness*

NHD has proven to be very beneficial to students, as found in formal studies:

- NHD students are better writers, who write with a purpose and real voice, and marshal solid evidence to support their point of view.
- Independent writing assessments show it pays off.
- NHD students already know how to do college-level research.
- NHD students are critical thinkers who can digest, analyze, and synthesize information.
- NHD builds college readiness and 21st Century skills.

## *NHD Project Basics*

NHD is a national program that encourages students to investigate a topic in history and create a project based on a nationally chosen theme. Throughout the process, student choice should be encouraged as much as possible. Below are the 5 basic steps of a NHD project.

1. **INTRODUCTION**
   Explain to your students the different steps of the NHD process and the general skills they will be working on throughout the year. Introduce this year's NHD theme and have students read the NHD Theme Book for a closer examination. Brainstorm different interpretations of the theme.

2. **TOPIC SELECTION**
   There are no limits as to the type of historical topic students may choose. Emphasize to your students that they will be working with their topic for a long period of time, so they need to be thoughtful and interesting to the student. A good topic needs to be the right size; not too big where a thesis statement is difficult to craft (WWII) or too small where research or historical significance can't be found (a single battle during WWII). Making an argument as to the importance of a topic in history is crucial. Therefore, it is recommended that topics focus on events at least 20 years in the past, providing enough time for historical relevance to be clear.

3. **RESEARCH**
   Research about the chosen topic is the foundation of a History Day project. Students should spend the majority of the project's length researching a topic in order to complete a quality, thorough, unbiased investigation. Emphasis should be on primary sources, however, there is no set number of sources students must have for a quality project. Students will be asked to gather, analyze, and present the relevant information of their topic.

4. **ANALYSIS**

   After students begin to understand the basic narrative of their topic, they will begin to develop their historical argument, or thesis statement, which describes the significance of their topic in history. In this step, students will also look at historical context, understanding how their topic is connected to larger issues in history.

5. **PRESENTATION**

   The final step of the process is project creation and presentation. Students will assemble their findings into one of the 5 project categories (see below). In addition to category specific requirements, every student creates a process paper and annotated bibliography. Once their projects are complete, students should be given the opportunity to present their work to an audience. This can be through the contest structure of NHD or simply a classroom presentation to their fellow students. This last step allows students to feel proud of their work and think more deeply about their topic when answering questions.

## *Annual Theme*

To keep the program fresh year to year and to encourage creativity and variety in topic selection, an annual theme governs the entry development and evaluation processes. The themes are broad enough to facilitate wide variety in topic selection-from local to national to international history-- but narrow enough to enable focus. Themes may be repeated, but never within a seven-year time span so that a sixth grader will see a different theme each year through twelfth grade. For more on this year's theme, please visit www.nhd.org.

## *Learning Targets*

How does a historian think? Analytically. Critically. Broadly. By the time your students complete their NHD projects, they should be able to check off these learning targets.

- ❏ I can pose research questions about a topic in history.
- ❏ I can gather and organize a variety of primary and secondary sources related to my research question.
- ❏ I can analyze primary and secondary sources for credibility and bias.
- ❏ I can suggest possible answers to my research questions.
- ❏ I can write a thesis statement related to the History Day theme, taking a position on my topic.
- ❏ I can organize primary and secondary sources in a format that tells a historical narrative.
- ❏ I can organize primary and secondary sources in a format that proves my thesis statement.

❏ I can draw conclusions from my research findings and explain the impact my topic has on history.
❏ I can present and cite sources in an annotated bibliography.
❏ I can compose a process paper that explains how I selected my topic and conducted my research.

## *Student Skills*

Throughout the process of History Day, students develop and practice skills that are important in their scholarly lives. These skills will also help to meet academic standards. Please be aware that some students excel if they learn new skills with already established content before they apply to the new content of their project. Consider introducing these skills before they start work on their History Day project.

Some of the skills that will be developed are:
- Topic Selection
  - Socratic Seminar
  - Thinking in historical eras
  - Understanding different areas of history (using acronyms such as SPRITE, PARTIES, etc.)
- Research
  - Note taking
  - Developing research questions
  - Online and library-based research
  - Verifying source integrity
  - Plagiarism
  - Primary vs. secondary sources
  - Reading primary sources
  - Reading maps
  - Reading images/cartoons
- Analysis
  - Writing thesis statements
  - Understanding historical context
- Presentation
  - Writing in five paragraphs (or a script)
  - Project organization and planning
  - Project development
  - Writing a Process Paper
  - Completing an annotated bibliography

## *Models of History Day Participation*

**Social Studies/History Classroom Assignment**

History Day is assigned as the major project for a quarter or semester. The assignment may apply to an entire grade level or selected classes. The project may culminate in a school history fair with a number of students advancing to a Regional History Day event.

- Projects usually account for 25% to 50% of overall grade for that quarter or semester.
- Students advancing to History Day events may receive extra credit for revising their entries.
- Minimum of 10 weeks to complete the assignment. For schools that intend to participate in the competitive cycle, projects are usually completed by mid to late February.
- Participation in the competition cycle is not a required part of History Day participation. Please notify us if you intend to participate in a non-competitive classroom so we can continue to send you relevant teaching materials.

**Interdisciplinary Assignment (Language Arts/Social Studies)**

Teachers collaborate to build upon the learner outcomes required for a History Day project. Language Arts instructors focus on research and writing skills. Social Studies teachers assist students with topic selection and research/analysis skills.

**Alternative Classroom Enrichment Assignment**

Students who have completed the standard curriculum, or want to substitute an in-depth research assignment for other tests and assignments, participate in History Day as an optional project. Students can work during a school day "pull-out" or after school. Support is provided by a G/T coordinator who serves as an advisor and liaison with parents and History Day staff.

**Extracurricular/Club Activity**

Offered as an after school activity or club for interested students. Requires at least one sponsoring teacher to supervise. As students work on different aspects of the project, "guest" teachers with different backgrounds could work with them on specific skills, ex: Social Studies for topic selection, Librarian for research, Language Arts for writing and story creation.

## NHD Competition Basics

Keep in mind, entering into the contest aspect of NHD is **NOT** required. You may use the general structure of NHD with your students in any way you feel works best for your situation. The following standards only apply to projects when entering into a NHD contest.

VHD follows NHD project and contest rules. You'll find NHD contest information at https://www.nhd.org/how-enter-contest.

## *Rules*

The NHD *Contest Rule Book* is a student's guide to creating an entry and preparing for judging. It stipulates the general rules that pertain to every entry, such as the requirement of an annotated bibliography and process paper. It also covers the category-specific rules with detailed rules including size limit for exhibits, time limits for documentaries and performances, etc.

Every student should be given access to the *Contest Rule Book,* either by receiving a printed copy or through a PDF copy, which is available as a free download at www.nhd.org Refer directly to the Rule Book when questions arise. When in doubt about NHD rules, contact your state coordinator or NHD. Ultimately, NHD's executive director is the final arbiter of all rules.

## *Divisions and Categories*

For purposes of fairness and greater participation, student entries are divided into age divisions: **Elementary**, grades 4-5; **Junior**, grades 6-8; **Senior**, grades 9-12. Elementary Division students are not eligible to compete at the National Contest. Within each age division, there are five categories of projects that students can create: **Paper, Performance, Documentary, Exhibit,** and **Website**. Elementary Division students may only compete in the Exhibit category. Except for Papers, students can enter individually or as a group of up to five. Individual and group projects compete separately in every division. Adding together the divisions and categories, there are twenty total categories of competition, nine each in the Junior and Senior Divisions and two in the Elementary Division. Each category requires different skill sets designed to appeal to student interest and abilities. After all, project work is more enjoyable when one can build upon existing skills.

- **VHD Contest Divisions -** For contests, students are broken into age divisions as follows:
  - Elementary Division: Grades 4-5
    - Elementary students may compete in the regional and state competitions, but cannot advance to the National Contest.
  - Junior Division: Grades 6-8
  - Senior Division: Grades 9-12
- **VHD Project Categories -** For each category (except Paper), students may work individually or in a group of up to five students.
  - Paper (individual only; group work not allowed)
    - Historical research paper between 1,500 and 2,500 words
  - Exhibit (Elementary students may only compete in the Exhibit category)

- - - Three-dimensional visual representation of a topic, similar to a poster board
    - ○ Website
        - ■ Collection of web pages that present a topic, must use NHDWebCentral web builder
    - ○ Performance
        - ■ Dramatic portrayal of a topic
    - ○ Documentary
        - ■ Audio/visual representation of a topic
- **Universal Project Elements**
    - ○ Title Page - Project's title, division and category, student name(s), word counts
    - ○ Process Paper - Answers the following questions:
        - ■ How did you choose your topic and how does it relate to the annual theme?
        - ■ How did you conduct your research?
        - ■ How did you create your project?
        - ■ What is your historical argument?
        - ■ In what ways is your topic significant in history?
    - ○ Annotated Bibliography - Lists all sources students consulted
        - ■ Citations follow Chicago or MLA format (Chicago preferred)
        - ■ 1-3 sentences explaining how and why student used each source
            - ● Elementary Division students do **NOT** need to annotate their bibliographies

## *Competition Levels*

The contest year begins immediately after the National Contest and ends in June with the National Contest. Generally, the more levels of competition, the higher level of quality of advancing student entries as, ideally, students take advantage of judges' advice to improve their projects.

In Virginia, there are three levels of competition:
- **Regional/ District Contests:**
    - ○ Most affiliates (states) are subdivided into regions, which might be county-based or by some other system. Each region hosts a regional contest, with winners advancing to the affiliate contest. Regional contests are typically held in February and March.
        - ■ Within some regions, particular schools have such large participation that they hold in-school contests prior to regionals.
- **Affiliate (State) Contest:**

- ○ Affiliate contests occur between late March and early May. Students who win 1st or 2nd place at their affiliate contest are eligible for nationals, with 3rd place winners serving as alternates in case the top finishers are unable to attend.
- **National Contest:**
  - ○ The National Contest is held during the second week of June at the University of Maryland in College Park, Maryland.

## *VHD Regions*
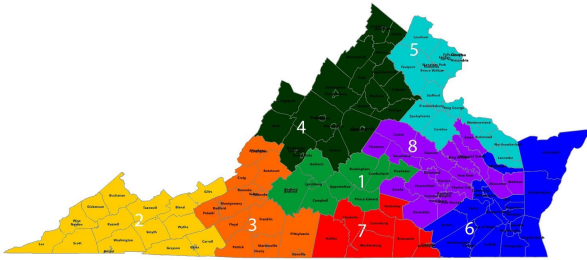


**DISTRICT ONE -** Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Buckingham, Campbell, Cumberland, Lynchburg

**DISTRICT TWO -** Bland, Bristol, Buchanan, Carroll, Dickenson, Galax, Giles, Grayson, Lee, Norton, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, Wythe

**DISTRICT THREE -** Alleghany, Botetourt, Covington, Craig, Danville, Floyd, Franklin, Henry, Martinsville, Montgomery, Patrick, Pittsylvania, Pulaski, Radford, Roanoke City, Roanoke, Salem

**DISTRICT FOUR -** Albemarle, Augusta, Bath, Buena Vista, Charlottesville, Clarke, Culpeper, Frederick, Greene, Harrisonburg, Highland, Lexington, Madison, Nelson, Orange, Page, Rappahannock, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Shenandoah, Staunton, Warren, Waynesboro, Winchester

**DISTRICT FIVE -** Alexandria, Arlington, Caroline, Fairfax, Falls Church, Fauquier, Fredericksburg, King George, Lancaster, Loudoun, Manassas Park, Manassas, Northumberland, Prince William, Richmond (County), Spotsylvania, Stafford, Westmoreland

**DISTRICT SIX -** Accomack, Chesapeake, Franklin City, Hampton, Isle of Wright, Middlesex, Newport News, Norfolk, Northampton, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Southampton, Suffolk, Surry, Sussex, Virginia Beach, Williamsburg, York

**DISTRICT SEVEN -** Brunswick, Charlotte, Greensville, Halifax, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Nottoway, Prince Edward, South Boston

**DISTRICT EIGHT -** Amelia, Charles City, Chesterfield, Colonial Heights, Dinwiddie, Essex, Fluvanna, Gloucester, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, Hopewell, King and Queen, King William, Louisa, Mathews, New Kent, Petersburg, Powhatan, Prince George, Richmond City

## Tips for Classroom Implementation

### *Sample Timeline*

**Introduction to National History Day**                                                          **Week 1-2**
  - Explain what NHD is, the theme, and what student expectations will be
  - Introduce thesis statements, primary and secondary sources, and annotated bibliographies – provide examples of each for students
  - Introduce sample topics – these can come from content you intend to teach through the semester or year
  - Topic selection activity – have students bring in a newspaper or magazine and point out topics that relate to the theme.

**Article analysis/Preliminary topic chosen**                                               **Week 2-3**
  - Have students determine their broad topic of interest and choose and read two articles/ chapters related to it.
  - Their response to the sources should identify and describe the author's thesis, evaluate their use of evidence (i.e. what stats, examples, data support their thesis), and explain if the author was successful or not.
  - They should address how the article/chapter helped them in their research.

**Primary Source Analysis**                                                                          **Week 3-4**
  - Introduce students to places to find primary sources: public and university libraries, Library of Congress, National Archives, Kentucky Historical Society, and Chronicling America.
  - Have them find at least two primary sources related to their preliminary topic.
  - They should read and analyze the sources and write an annotation for them.
  - Their annotations should address: the type of source, its subject, bias of the author, and how it supports their research.

**Article/Source Analysis**                                                                          **Week 4-5**
  - Students should find two more secondary and primary sources each as related to their topic.
  - They should be beginning to narrow their topic focus.
  - They should submit annotations for each source.

**Final topic and initial thesis**                                                                  **Week 5-6**

- Students should have narrowed their focus from their initial broad topic.
- They should submit a provisional thesis statement
- Students should submit a revised annotated bibliography for the eight sources they have up to this point.

**Revised thesis/article analysis**                                            **Week 6-7**
- Students should submit annotations for two more primary and secondary sources each.
- They should submit a revised thesis based on your feedback.

**Outline**         **Week 7-8**
- Thesis statement
- Main supporting points with topic sentences
- Should include which primary sources will be their evidence
- Annotated bibliography

**Rough draft of paper**         **Week 9-10**
- Five- to seven-page paper that has a thesis, three to five supporting points, conclusion, and annotated bibliography
- This paper will provide the text for whatever project type they choose.

**Final draft of paper**         **Week 10-11**

<div align="center">

**Determine project type: January**

**Work on projects: January/February/March**

**Competition: March/April**

</div>

## *Tips for Creating Your Classroom Calendar*

You can apply these tips for creating your classroom calendar to an in-school or after-school program design.
- Start the calendar with the first day of your school year
- End the calendar with the NHD National Contest in June (Hey, shoot big. You never know.)
- Include these dates:
  - Your school or local contest (if you have one) for sharing student projects with their peers other teachers and administrators
  - Your regional contest (February-March dates to be determined.)
  - The state contest (April)
  - Your school's winter/spring breaks, religious holidays, state testing weeks and any other days you know when student work will be limited.
  - When you will introduce NHD to your students.
  - When students will propose topics to you.
  - When you will attempt to reserve time in your school library / computer lab / media center.

- Interim deadlines when students will submit research / annotated bibliography phases to you
- Interim deadlines when students will submit evidence of their research.
- When students will submit their project in pieces / phases for peer or teacher feedback.
- When complete drafts are due for all students.

## *Teacher 'Must Do's' For History Day Success*

1. **Connect with Virginia History Day staff.**
   a. The VHD staff at the Virginia Museum of History & Culture will be there to help you throughout the process. Make sure to let them know that you are participating by filling out an online enrollment form.
2. **Build your support network.**
   a. In addition to the VHD staff, it's useful to begin building your support network in your school.
      i. Your English or Language Arts teacher may be able to assist with aspects of writing thesis statements or creating bibliographies.
      ii. Your librarian or media specialist may be able to support the research process.
      iii. Connecting with community or university libraries will help your students to access even more research resources.
3. **Keep parents informed.**
   a. Letting parents know about this project, important deadlines, as well as ways that they can assist.
4. **Know the deadlines.**
   a. By enrolling and connecting with the VHD staff, you will get regular updates on program and competition deadlines. Keep these dates in mind as you plan your History Day calendar.
5. **Divide the project into parts.**
   a. Don't forget that this may be the first time your students have embarked on a research project of this size. By dividing the project into smaller parts, helping them to meet the smaller deadlines along the way, and awarding points for the process – not just the final project – you will help them to build time and project management skills.
6. **Don't rush it.**
   a. Students may be excited and motivated by the possibility of creating the final project, but there are important steps along the way that they need to go through. Allow time for them to first understand the theme, explore topics, and conduct research before letting them put their actual project together.

7. **Think about skill-building.**
   a. There are many ways to scaffold important lessons that will support a VHD project. Before you even introduce the project, there are likely important skills that you are already planning on introducing in your classroom that will feed into History Day. For example, do you have other lessons already planned to explain the difference between primary and secondary sources? How to analyze documents? Maybe the Language Arts teacher is already planning on covering thesis statements and bibliographies? These skill-building activities can do double-duty in a History Day classroom.

8. **You don't have to be an expert on every topic.**
   a. Many teachers initially feel overwhelmed by the prospect of having students researching topics with which they may be unfamiliar. Remember that you don't have to be the content expert on each of your students' topics. You are the expert in the process and can guide them to where they might find those answers.

9. **Know that each student will get something different out of History Day.**
   a. While the competition is an exciting part of History Day, the ultimate goal is the academic growth of the students. Not all students are going to go to the national contest. Help students to understand that even if they don't win, they have still gained important skills as historians and scholars.

10. **You are the boss.**
    a. History Day can be adapted to suit your classroom. You have the ability to adapt the program to suit specific classroom needs, like limiting group size, category options, or restricting topic choice to the time period covered in your class.

## Parents and Evaluation

### *Communication with Parents is Key!*

Annual parent surveys show parents appreciate regular communication from teachers about the project and competitions. Since the state History Day office does not communicate directly with parents, this communication needs to come from teachers. We asked parents "What do you wish you would have known before starting History Day." So, what do parents want to know?

**Introduction to the Project**
Give parents a heads up about History Day before it begins. Share the introductory video with them. Let parents know about the theme. Consider hosting a parent kick-off at school. Send home one an introductory parent letter. Let them know ...
- **That History Day is worth the work**. You've chosen to bring History Day into your classroom because it meets state standards and teaches valuable college and career skills.

Topic and category choice empowers students and motivates learning. Sure, it's work, but it's worth it!

- **That History Day can extend beyond the classroom.** Some parents weren't aware of the competitions associated with the project, or that 8,000+ Virginia students participate in History Day each year!
- **That this is a big project.** Many parents were surprised at the amount of time their son or daughter invested into this project, especially if they advanced to State History Day.

**Project Steps and Deadlines**

This may be the first time their son or daughter is completing a project as large in scale as History Day. Parents want to know the steps in the process and clear deadlines for completion. Share with them a project timeline that lists the major milestones in the project.

**A Parent's Role**

Parents want to support their child, but also don't want to cross the line. Remind them that doing well with History Day doesn't mean spending a lot of money and students should do **ALL** the work themselves. Guidelines on reasonable adult help can be found in the NHD Rule Book.

**Where to Get Help**

Many parents didn't feel that they knew who to contact when they had questions. Most importantly, parents said they didn't know that there was a website of resources from Virginia History Day until too late in the process.

- **School-level Requirements and Deadlines**: Parents should contact teachers with school-level issues.
- **Regional/District Contest**: We post information about these events on our website. If parents have questions, they can contact the local History Day volunteer coordinating the event.
- **Virginia History Day**: Contact the VHD Coordinator at sflorer@virginiahistory.org or 804-342-9672.
- **General Questions**: The answers to most general questions are on our website. Parents should start at https://www.virginiahistory.org/learn/virginia-history-day.

**Rules and Rubric**

Parents want to make sure they are directing their child down the right path. Let them know not only the classroom expectations, but how those requirements might change if their son or daughter's project advances to a Regional or State competition. Many parents also expressed frustration at the rules "changing" partway through the school year. Be clear that the official rules never change mid–year.

- Direct parents to the complete NHD Contest Rule Book: https://www.nhd.org/how-enter-contest
- Help parents understand how projects are evaluated by providing them access to NHD Evaluation Sheets

**Communication**

Parents appreciate the regular flow of communication via a newsletter, email, blog, or other format. They also recognize that their own son or daughter may be the missing link in effective communication, so make sure that parents have other ways to access this information.

## *The Evaluation Process*

Evaluation forms for each category can be found at https://www.nhd.org/categories. These forms can also be used by teachers for classroom level assessment.

Each NHD evaluation form has two sections:
- **Historical Quality (80%)** - This section focuses on the strength of historical argument, research, and relationship to the theme and is the same for all categories.
- **Clarity of Presentation (20%)** - This section evaluates how well a project communicates an argument using the tools of a specific category and is different for each category.

**The Benefits of the Evaluation Process**

Judges' evaluations are part of the learning and skill building process of NHD. Judges' evaluations identify areas for improvement and provide positive feedback. The judges' comments also can provide students with ideas for revisions and enhancements as they move from one contest level to the next.

**Who are the Judges?**

Historians, educators, and others interested in history and education serve as judges at each level of the National History Day competition.

**How Does the Evaluation Process Work?**

At official NHD contests, each separate NHD division and category is usually judged by a separate panel of judges. After the judges review a student's project, they then conduct a brief (5-10 min) interview to ask follow up questions. A student's interview skills are not officially judged. Instead, the interview provides an opportunity for the student to explain their historical thinking process and more clearly add their voice to their project.

Time constraints, due to the number of entries, often require that some categories have a first round and a final round. In such cases, the entries judged best by each team of initial judges are re-evaluated by a new team of judges to determine the winning entries in the category. The number of entries in finals and procedures for judging vary by contest.

**Consensus Judging**

Judges will not assign a numerical score to each entry; rather, they will rank the entries in their group. Judges are required to consult with each other in determining individual rankings. Judges are allowed to review the results of their category upon completion of the judging to assure accuracy in the evaluation process. As a final step, the judges will assign each entry an overall rating.

**The Subjective Nature of Judging**

Remember, judges must evaluate certain aspects of an entry that are objective (e.g., were primary sources used; spelling and grammar). However, judges also evaluate interpretive aspects of an entry that are qualitative in nature (e.g., analysis and conclusions about the historical data). Historians often reach different opinions about the significance of the same data. It is therefore crucial for students to base their interpretations and conclusions on solid research. Judges will check to determine whether students used available primary sources and if they were careful to examine all sides of an issue and present a balanced account of the research. The process paper and annotated bibliography are critical to this process.

**The Decision of the Judges is Final**

All parties taking part in a NHD contest should realize that inadvertent inequities may occur in judging and that contest officials do want to be informed of any problems. However, the decisions of the judges are final.