

2021 Virginia History Day Topic Ideas

The following topics are just a few of the many possibilities that would make for compelling National History Day projects. Use the attached discussion question to think about the topic in terms of this year's NHD Theme – *Communication in History: The Key to Understanding*. Follow the link to get started with some basic research.

General Subjects:

- Speeches/rhetoric
- Protests
- Government documents/laws
- Visual communication (advertising, cartoons, clothing, appearance, etc.)
- Hidden communication (spies)
- Printed text (newspapers, magazines, novels, journals, etc.)
- Technology (telegraph, phone, radio, television, etc.)
- Transportation (automobiles, railroads, planes, space, etc.)
- Diplomacy
- Trade

Virginia Specific

- Cultural differences led to complicated interactions between Powhatan Indians and English colonists at Jamestown.
 - Discussion Question - How did each group use trade to communicate their intentions and desires?
 - Get Started - <https://www.historyisfun.org/learn/learning-center/what-was-the-relationship-between-the-powhatan-and-the-english/>
- The formation of the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1619 marked the first representative government in North America.
 - Discussion Question – How much/little did elections change the relationship between the people and government?
 - Get Started - <https://www.historyisfun.org/learn/learning-center/what-was-the-great-charter/>
- After the arrival of the first enslaved people to Virginia in 1619, colonial governments eventually passed laws that applied to people based on the color of their skin.
 - Discussion Question – How did the development of these laws lead to the treatment of African Americans today?
 - Get Started - <https://www.historyisfun.org/learn/learning-center/how-did-slavery-develop-in-colonial-virginia-2/>
- In the late 1700s, Clementina rind was Virginia's first female printer.
 - Discussion Question – What role did women play in colonial or revolutionary communications?

- Get Started - <https://www.virginiahistory.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/clementina-rind-printer>
- Patrick Henry's use of language inspired support for the American Revolution.
 - Discussion Question – What themes and words did Patrick Henry focus on to make his point? Why?
 - Get Started - <https://www.historicstjohnschurch.org/patrick-henry>
- Dunmore's Proclamation offered freedom to enslaved people in Virginia who supported Great Britain against the Revolutionaries.
 - Discussion Question – What larger meaning did this document communicate to various groups of people during the period, ex: enslaved people, Revolutionaries, British generals?
 - Get Started - https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/01706_fps_1.pdf
- In the early 1900s, John Mitchell Jr. advocated for African American civil rights with his newspaper *The Richmond Planet*.
 - Discussion Question – Why was a newspaper such an effective way to counter racist ideas and celebrate black identity?
 - Get Started - https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/John_Mitchell_Jr_1863-1929#its2
- Barbara Johns and fellow students led a strike to protest school segregation in Virginia.
 - Discussion Question – How did Civil Rights activists use strikes to communicate their message?
 - Get Started - <https://www.virginiahistory.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/civil-rights-movement-virginia/brown-i-and-brown>

Colonial Period

- New political, religious, and scientific ideas of the Enlightenment changed the way people viewed their world.
 - Discussion Question – How did Enlightenment thinkers spread their ideas? Were these new or old techniques?
 - Get Started - <https://www.britannica.com/event/Enlightenment-European-history>

American Revolution

- The relationship between Great Britain and its North American colonies fell apart, leading to the American Revolution.
 - Discussion Question – What types of miscommunications occurred that eventually led to an outbreak of war and revolution?
 - Get Started - <https://www.virginiahistory.org/what-you-can-see/story-virginia/explore-story-virginia/1763-1825/causes-revolution>
- The Declaration of Independence called for an independent American nation.
 - Discussion Question – What tone of voice does this document use to convey its message?

- Get Started - <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration/what-does-it-say>

Building a New United States

- The development of the steamship allowed for faster and cheaper travel across the ocean and on rivers.
 - Discussion Question – In addition to improved trade, how were ordinary people effected by this development?
 - Get Stated - <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/steamboat/>
- Abolitionists’ different forms of communication supported freedom for enslaved people.
 - Discussion Question - How did various Abolitionists articulate their opposition to the institution of slavery, ex: Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglas, John Brown, William Lloyd Garrison, Harriet Beecher Stowe? Were some more successful than others?
 - Get Started - <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african-american-odyssey/abolition.html>
- The Transcontinental Railroad was completed in 1869, linking by land the east and west coasts of the United States.
 - Discussion Question – What effects did the railroad have on Native American people?
 - Get Started - <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/tcrr-impact-transcontinental-railroad/>

The Civil War and Reconstruction

- Disagreements over slavery caused the South’s secession from the United States, leading to the Civil War.
 - Discussion Question - What language did southern politicians use to justify their decision to secede?
 - Get Started - <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/reasons-secession>
- Technological innovations in communication impacted the course of the Civil War.
 - Discussion Question – What role did the railroad and telegraph have during the Civil War? What about newspapers and photographs?
 - Get Started - <https://www.virginiahistory.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/american-turning-point-civil-war-virginia/wagi-1>
- The Emancipation Proclamation had an important effect on the meaning of the Civil War.
 - Discussion Question – How did the Emancipation Proclamation change the way different people viewed the war, ex: white Northerners, white Southerners, enslaved people, foreign powers?
 - Get Started - <https://www.virginiahistory.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/american-turning-point-civil-war-virginia-1/wh-0>
- In the late 1800s, supporters of the “Lost Cause” portrayed the Confederacy in a positive light and falsely declared the Civil War had nothing to do with slavery.
 - Discussion Question – How did pop culture play a role in spreading “Lost Cause” ideas?
 - Get Started - https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/lost_cause_the

The 20th Century

- A worldwide rise in imperialism, nationalism, and militarism led to the start of World War I.
 - Discussion Question – What type of rhetoric did different national leaders use to justify their involvement in the war?
 - Get Started - <https://online.norwich.edu/academic-programs/resources/six-causes-of-world-war-i>
- The invention of the radio changed the way people consumed news and entertainment.
 - Discussion Question – How did the radio effect politics, religion, and culture?
 - Get Started - <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-history-of-the-radio-industry-in-the-united-states-to-1940/>
- The passage of the 19th Amendment guaranteed American women the right to vote.
 - Discussion Question – What techniques did American suffragists adopt to convince politicians and the general public to support the 19th Amendment?
 - Get Started - <https://www.virginiahistory.org/what-you-can-see/story-virginia/explore-story-virginia/1876-1924/virginia-and-women%E2%80%99s-suffrage>
- The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s produced a new African American identity.
 - Discussion Question – How did black artists challenge the way white people understood African American life?
 - Get Started - <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/new-african-american-identity-harlem-renaissance>
- During WWII, most international governments used propaganda to inspire support for the war and vilify their enemies.
 - Discussion Question – What different techniques were used to convince the public of a government’s ideas or actions?
 - Get Started - <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2016/12/world-war-2-propaganda-history-books/>
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have A Dream” speech inspired many Americans to support civil rights legislation.
 - Discussion Question – What type of language did Dr. King use in his speech? Why was it so effective?
 - Get Started - <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>
- During the 1960s, protests related to the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement swept across the United States.
 - Discussion Question – What techniques did different protestors use to convey their message? Were some techniques universal or exceptional?
 - Get Started - <https://americanarchive.org/exhibits/first-amendment/protests-60s-70s>
- In 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the United States and the Soviet Union to the brink of nuclear war.
 - Discussion Question – How did diplomacy lead to the crisis and its peaceful resolution?
 - Get Started - <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis>