



Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History (9-12)

The theme for the 2026 National History Day asks students to think about how reform (fixing problems) and revolution (big changes) can cause strong reactions. These reactions often

push people to change the way a group, system, or practice works, usually to make it better. When you pick your topic, make sure you think carefully about how it connects to this theme. Keep in mind that the lines between reform, revolution, and reaction are not always clear.

MAKE IT RELEVANT TO THE THEME WORDS

You should cover all aspects of the theme relevant to your topic.

- All topics should connect to **reaction**.
- **Reform** involves making modifications without completely removing the existing system.
- When changes are absent or insufficient, they may serve as a catalyst for **revolution**.
- The objective of a **revolution** is typically radical transformation, including the replacement of existing authority or structures.

MAKE IT ABOUT HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The linked relationship between the theme words makes it clear which came first, revolution, reaction, reform, with regard to your topic. Once you decide your topic, analyze what caused the situation or event you are researching. What changed? Did all people experience these changes in the same way? What escalated society toward reform or revolution? Did reform fail and lead to revolution?

MAKE IT ABOUT IMPACT

To understand the significance of your topic, research how it impacted society through revolution, reaction, and/or reform. Consider these questions as you work:

- What are the consequences when a revolution fails?
- In what ways can broad reform programs create social change as significant as revolutions?
- How do court cases serve as reactions, and can their outcomes spark reform or revolution?
- How do revolutionary ideas or discoveries generate reactions or reforms that transform society?

The Way Things Were

What circumstances led people to a reaction that demanded change?



The Main Event

Your topic - the situation, event, idea, sudden shift you identify as revolution, reaction, or reform.



Shifted History

The significant ways in which life or society changed because of revolution, reaction, or reform.



THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

Historical thinking requires that a topic be investigated and researched from different perspectives. Reflect on:

Significance - Consult credible secondary sources to determine if your topic is significant in history?

Chronology - Identify key moments in history around your topic and establish the period in which it belongs.

Multiple perspectives - Think about how people's lives changed as a result of your topic. Did all people experience the change in the same way? Who benefitted from the change and whose voices are missing from the power structure?

Context - Use primary sources to understand the context of your topic. What happened to cause people to react?

Evidence - Use a variety of credible primary sources to be sure your argument is based on solid evidence.

Historical Lens - View your topic through different lenses, such as political, economic, environmental, intellectual, social, and cultural history.