



Breaking Barriers: A Fitting 2020 National History Day Theme

By Hayley Andrews, 2020 OHD Region 8 Coordinator

For years philosophers, teachers and parents have worried that with all that is provided to children, are they also building the necessary skills to succeed in the “real world?” Do they have grit? Will they persevere in the face of failure? Do they possess the tenacity to endure life’s challenges as their parents and grandparents had? Now I find myself wondering, what if this generation is actually better equipped? How can we look to students as a model for virtual connectivity? Will these students place greater value on our environment, teachers, grocers, health care workers, and custodians? Is our youth the best example of empathy, flexibility and innovation?

An example of this adaptability was on full display during this year’s Ohio History Day.

National History Day ([NHD](#)), the parent organization for Ohio History Day, was founded in Cleveland, Ohio in 1974 to provide a unifying social studies curriculum for schools across the country. Its mission is to provide students with opportunities to learn historical content and develop research, thinking and communication skills through the study of history. With students ranging from grades 4-12, participants satisfy Learning Standard goals through a dynamic, creative and rigorous social studies curriculum.

Before competing in the national contest, students first compete in a regional competition, hosted locally by Cincinnati Museum Center (CMC). The regional competition is hosted in partnership with Ohio History Connection, the statewide coordinator that then hosts the National qualifiers. As another layer, many schools host their own competitions to narrow down who enters the regional competition. Making it to nationals involves up to three rounds of competition. The allure of placing in the national competition draws many students to this challenging event. Throughout the competition, students have the opportunity to win monetary prizes, present their projects in government buildings, publish in periodicals, showcase their documentaries in local screenings and write about it all in future resumes and college applications.

This year however, the year of COVID-19, students went from studying historical figures to becoming them. In future years, their stories will reflect a globally significant moment in time. These participants should be commended for how they have adapted creatively and reflected what living in a precarious national crisis looks like for students. Their challenges are historic.

In preparation for our regional Ohio History Day (OHD), educators and students spend six to eight months developing interests based on an annual theme, conducting research with primary and secondary sources and learning how to write a research paper from title page to annotated bibliography. Students then have the opportunity to choose their medium for the presentation based on five categories: papers, theatrical performances, documentaries, exhibits and websites creation.

In years past, the climax of the students’ work arrives on regional Competition Day, when the students present their work to judges, receive questions and critiques, and winners are awarded an opportunity to compete at the State-level competition. As you can imagine, this day comes with loads of teenage anxiety, ingenuity, and brilliance—papers have gone missing only to be summoned at the last minute

from the depths of a smart phone and missing costumes are recreated out of the contents of the car trunk. Upon entering a judging room, students are given ten minutes to share their projects to a panel of judges made up of historians, educators, and enthusiastic community members. Some of which respond with smiles and nods, while others forget that these are not (yet) Broadway performers and PhD candidates.

This year however, students didn't even have to set an alarm for Competition Day. In the final weeks of preparation for the March 21 regional OHD, participants were jolted out of their routines and preparations by the news of school shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pivoting first to a new site for the competition in which organizers could maintain the recommended social distancing guidelines, it was quickly learned that no in-person competition would be allowed. Within a week of March 21, the community of students, judges, coordinators, families and teachers turned an in-person experience into a virtual one.

A few major challenges arose immediately: students with group performances were unable to gather to film; exhibits needed to be photographed and explained via PowerPoint; and many students were without the technology to even submit their proposed work. However, the extraordinary participants of OHD 2020 shape-shifted, piecemealed and worked many extra hours to make sure projects were submitted for virtual judging. In this new medium, students lost the opportunity to present their work in person and gain the affection of the judges. Somehow, they needed to communicate their work and experience through a process paper shared with each judging team. These brief write-ups, along with the virtual presentations, managed to convey to an oft-technologically challenged generation the effort, resilience and bravery of those events and peoples that were studied, as well as the demonstrating those same traits in the students themselves.

This year at the state competition, out of a pool of 650 students and 100 schools from across the state, the Cincinnati region had an incredibly strong showing with 13 award winning projects by 17 students! These students have another opportunity to revise their work with feedback from judges and present on a national level. To honor those students and all of their hard work, please review the amazing topics by title and those students that brought the stories to life. Several of the projects are available to view with an active link embedded in the title.

Group Performance: Second Place

Nellie Bly by Leila Gilbert, Alexander Partridge, Ilana Thomas
Spencer School For Gifted And Exceptional Students

Group Performance: Third Place

Victoria Woodhull: Breaking the Barriers of Society's Expectations by Kinsey Bowling, Kennedy O'Daniel,
Dana Zimmer
Mercy Montessori

Individual Documentary: Third Place

DeHart Hubbard by Lydia Goetz
Walnut Hills High School

Individual Exhibit: First Place

Bring A Spoon: A Cincinnati Story of Sabin Sundays and the Polio Vaccine by Corinne Adams
Walnut Hills High School

Individual Performance: First Place

David Hume and Human Nature: a New Way of Thinking—An Original Opera for Two Voices Sung by One Singer by Mischa Sella
Walnut Hills High School

Individual Performance: Honorable Mention

Lucy Stone: Forgotten In History by Azalea Kinkele
Spencer School for Gifted And Exceptional Students

Individual Website: Honorable Mention

Marie Curie: Defining Her World Through Science by Claire Geiger
Mercy Montessori

Paper: First Place

[*Nellie Bly: Writer for Rights*](#) by Sheridan Hennessy
Walnut Hills High School

Paper: Second Place

[*Poverty Amidst Plenty: How the War on Poverty Broke Barriers to Economic Opportunity*](#) by Rishi Verma
Sycamore High School

Paper: Third Place

[*Contraceptive Legalization: Breaking Barriers to Emancipate the Domestic American Woman*](#) by Aaditi Lele
Sycamore High School

Paper: Honorable Mention

The Woman Who Saved Humanity by Elizabeth Forman
Sycamore High School

The Ohio Women in Government Award - Jr. Division First Place

Lucy Stone: Forgotten In History by Azalea Kinkele
Spencer School For Gifted And Exceptional Students

The American Suffrage Movement Award - Jr. Division 2nd Place

Lucy Stone: Forgotten In History by Azalea Kinkele
Spencer School For Gifted And Exceptional Students

We, at CMC, are proud to provide an engaging and authentic educational opportunity that carries on the work of learning, even while students are staying safe at home. While National History Day participants across the country studied those that preceded them, these last few months of government-mandated shutdown in the face of a global pandemic has made it clear that one day future students will be studying this generation. Our students today are living history.