Ohio History Day Performance

The Performance category allows you to create a historical play. Entries in this category must have dramatic appeal, but not at the expense of historical information. Creativity is the key here, and students must make effective use of their 10-minute time allowance. Innovative performances have made this category the highlight of many History Day competitions!

Here are some suggestions:

- Do good research first, don't jump right in and start writing a script. Take time to brainstorm about general ideas and the ways they might be presented.
- When you do write your script, make sure it contains references to the historical evidence, particularly the primary source material you found in your research. Using actual dialogue, quotations, or taking excerpts from speeches are good ways of putting historical detail into your performance.
- Be careful of presenting an oral report on a character that begins with when they were born and ends with when they died. Become the historical figure and write your script around an important time or place which will explain your ideas.
- Don't get carried away with props! Content is the most important factor and any props you use should be directly related to your topic. Props should help you to emphasize the key concepts of your performance.
- Remember, you only have five minutes to put up and take down your props.
- Good costumes help make you convincing but be sure they are appropriate to your topic. Consult photographs or costume guides if you are unsure about appropriate dress.
- See examples of historical plays to gather insights into stage movements, use of props, etc.
- Practice! Practice! Practice!

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WORKSHEET: PLANNING YOUR PERFORMANCE

By their very nature, performances are the most creative History Day category. It's impossible to give you a formula for a successful performance. They can take many different formats and will vary based on the number of people, characters, scenarios, and topic. Below are two tools to help you begin brainstorming your performance. Keep in mind that these are not the only successful approaches to the performance category – just a place to get started. Be creative!

DRAFTING YOUR SCRIPT

What	Key Questions and Elements
Intro (1 minute)	• Set the scene. • Who are you? When is this taking place? Where are you? • Introduce your thesis.
Historical Context/ Background (2 minutes)	• What happened before your topic to influence it? • Were there other movements, people, or ideas that influenced it? • What events led up to the topic?
Heart of Story (3 minutes)	• Key events and issues related to your topic.
Short and Long-term Impacts (3 minutes)	• What ere the immediate outcomes of your topic? • What has been the long-term significance of your topic in history?
Conclusion/ Wrap-up (1 minute)	• Reinforce your thesis. • Conclude your characters actions.

SCENARIO BRAINSTORM

Brainstorm at least two different scenarios using different characters in each. Which one is the best approach for presenting your ideas?

Scenario 1
Character(s) (historical figures, composite characters, narrators):
_____

Setting: _____

Timeframe:_____

Describe Scenario: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Scenario 2
Character(s) (historical figures, composite characters, narrators):
_____

Setting: _____

Timeframe:_____

Describe Scenario: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What Would Your Character Know?

When selecting characters for your performance, think about what they would or wouldn't know. If your character is Abraham Lincoln, it's impossible for him to know what happened in 1870 because he was assassinated in 1865. Sometimes selecting a different character – maybe someone who wasn't a major player – gives you the chance to take a step back and discuss your topic's significance in history in a different way. Instead of Abraham Lincoln, one of his advisors or aides who lived after his death would give you a more long-term perspective on Lincoln's presidency.

National History Day Performances

What is a performance?

The History Day performance category allows you to create a play that conveys a historical argument with dramatic appeal. Innovative performances have made this category the highlight of many History Day events.

In creating a performance, it's important to remember that entries in this category are not oral reports about a topic. You will create a script, with characters, lines and costumes in order to convey your argument to the audience. Use your imagination and have fun!

The Basic Framework

- **Time Limit**: Your performance may not be longer than 10 minutes. This does not include your performance introduction (including only the title and participant names). Timing will begin after you introduce your project. You will have five additional minutes to set up your performance and five additional minutes to take it down.
- **Media**: You are able to use media in your performance, including CD players, computers, etc. However, only group members are allowed to run this equipment and you will have to provide the equipment yourselves.
- **Costumes**: Performers can find costumes in a variety of places. You can create your own or have one produced for you. You can also rent a costume from a store or borrow one from your school drama department. No matter what you do, the choice of pieces in the costume, choice of fabrics used and choice of design of the costume must be your own. You do not have to buy or rent expensive historically accurate costumes, but you are expected to consider the appropriateness of your clothing in relation to the time period and the script. For example, a student might wear a plain grey shirt and slacks to represent a Confederate soldier in the Civil War, understanding that a dark blue shirt and slacks wouldn't be appropriate.
- **Script**: You should bring an extra copy of your script to a competition in case you want to review your lines, but you should not include your script with the other written materials presented to your judges.
- **A Live Performance**: The very nature of the performance category means that performance are not pre-recorded. You will have to perform in front of an audience of judges and other viewers. Don't be afraid! The people watching your performance will be other students, teachers or family members and will all be there to support you.
- **Be sure to check the NHD Contest Rulebook for complete category rules!**

Why Should I Choose the Performance Category?

If you enjoy being on stage and performing in front of an audience, this is the category for you! You should enjoy creative writing and producing scripts. It's also important to have access to costumes and props and have the ability to transport them to competitions.

In choosing this category, it's important to think about the appropriateness of your topic for a performance. Is there a character or event that is related to your topic that you can turn into an effective argument about your topic? Are there various types of historical evidence that you can include in your performance, such as quotes, music, photographs, maps, etc?

Elements of a History Day Performance

The Script
Your script is the most important element of your performance. It is the culmination of all your research and conveys your argument to the audience. The script must be an original creation of the student(s) working on the project.

History Day scripts are similar to other types of performances or plays. If you've never seen a script before, check your library or ask your teacher for an example to see how scripts are formatted.

Remember, this isn't a Broadway drama! Since your performance can only be 10 minutes long, you don't have a lot of space to write your script. You will be able to include about 5 pages (double-spaced) of script in a History Day performance.

Blocking & Stage Directions
In preparing your performance, it's important to think about how you will present your words to the audience. In addition to your lines, write stage direction for the actors. How should they deliver certain lines? Is the character angry? Happy? Sad? Where should they pause for dramatic effect or to let the character's words sink in? Where should each character be on the stage while delivering their lines? How do the characters interact with each other? Thinking about these elements before will help your performance to appear polished and consistent.

The Stage
The stage you will use to present your performance will vary at different History Day competitions. Most likely, you will have a classroom to share your performance. An area will be cleared at the front of the classroom and the desks will be set into rows for the audience. At other competitions, you may find that there is a stage or a platform in a lecture hall. No matter where you are, there will be room for group members to move around comfortably. You may or may not be able to operate the lights in your performance room.

Props & Set
History Day sets don't have to be elaborate. (In fact, elaborate sets can cause problems when it comes time to move them during competitions. You only have five minutes to set-up and an additional five minutes to take down your set.)

Every prop should have a use, and you should use every prop. When you have your script written, make a list of every object that a character **must** use, including furniture. If your list is huge, think about whether all the props are really necessary, or whether you can get away without certain items. Let the audience use their imaginations!

Costumes
An effective costume will help your audience understand who you are as a character and the time period in which your performance takes place. You can make your costume yourself, rent your costume or have one produced for you. However, according to NHD rules, the student(s) in the performance must make all the decisions about the costume, including the selection of materials, patterns or costume selection. Look at photographs, paintings or costume design books about the time period for inspiration.

Remember, effective costumes do not have to be elaborate. Plain clothing, with simple hats or coats can easily show an audience a change of character.

Media
You are allowed to include media in your performance, including the use of CD or tape players. Remember, you will need to provide all additional equipment to play these media elements and only group members may operate them.

Tips for Creating a Spectacular NHD Performance

Planning

Remember the NHD Criteria
Especially in the performance category, it's easy to get caught up in telling a story through drama. It's important to remember the purpose of your performance and the elements that the judges will be looking for:

Argument: A performance should clearly express an argument, just like a written paper. Incorporate it at the beginning to let your audience know what you will be proving. Make sure to incorporate it again at the end to reiterate your argument for the audience.

Historical Context: When researching and creating your performance, you should consider more than just the narrative of the topic. Think about what took place before or during the time period. How did these people, place or events influence your topic? This historical context is important to understanding your topic and making an argument.

Evidence: Just like other presentation categories, it's important to incorporate historical evidence that supports your argument. What lines can you include in your script that will show this evidence or support? For example, let's say that you are creating a group performance about Susan B. Anthony and the women's voting rights movement in the United States. A pro-voting rights character might give reasons that he or she thinks women should have the right to vote. These don't necessarily have to be quotations from the past, but should be the same arguments that women from the movement gave for demanding the right to vote.

In addition, are there quotations from primary sources, such as letters or diaries, which you can use in your script? Are there photographs or other visual elements that you can incorporate into your performance?

Putting It All Together

Be Historically Accurate
Your performance should appeal dramatically to the audience, but this shouldn't be at the expense of historical accuracy. Be creative when you make up characters, imagine scenes or write dialog. However, make sure there is a historical basis for the narrative of your performance. It's okay to imagine what Susan B. Anthony might have said to her supporters as she fought for women's right to vote, but it's not appropriate to contend that she fought against the vote. That wouldn't be based on historical fact.

Tips for Creating a Spectacular NHD Performance

Focus on Certain Characters During a Moment in History Rather Than Narrating an Entire Biography or Timeline
The characters depicted in your performance can be real or fictional, as long as they're supported by evidence. Before writing your script, brainstorm a list of people – famous or unknown – who were affected in one way or another by the historical topic you are researching. Consider each person's unique perspective on events. What scenes do you imagine for them as characters in a performance? How could different characters help express your argument?

Establish the Scene Right Away
Who are you? Where are you? What time period are you in? Who is your character talking to? Communicate the "who, what, where and when" early in your script. This will not only help you give a stronger performance, but will also let the audience tune in to your argument and ideas instead of trying to identify your topic and setting.

Less Can Be More
Remember the purpose of your History Day performance before getting too involved in elaborate scenes, props, character changes and costumes. Most of your effort should be put into your research, argument and a solid script.

Look it Over

The Performance Stands Alone
When evaluating NHD performances, the judges should be able to find all the information about your topic in the performance itself. The performance has to stand on its own. Have someone who has never seen your performance watch it (a friend, teacher, neighbor, etc.). After they have seen the performance, ask them a few questions to see if you have communicated your argument clearly: What am I trying to prove in my performance? What evidence have I shown to support that argument? What do you like about my performance? What is confusing to you?

Planning Your Performance

Research First
Since your research is the basis for your performance, it's only fitting that you should have a strong basis of research *before* you begin writing your script. No matter how tempting it is to dive in and begin writing a script, it's best to have your research done to understand the full range of possibilities open to you.

Brainstorm Your Options
Having a strong foundation of research will allow you to write a brief description of your topic. Then, think about all the possible answers to the following questions:

- What events, both major and minor, are connected to my topic?
- What characters, both famous and not, are connected to my topic?
- What scenes, both real and imagined, might I use in my performance?

Get Inspired
Check out other types of historical dramas or NHD performances to get inspired about what you might do through your performance. You can borrow sample performances from the NHD in Wisconsin office, or check out samples online through the national office at http://www.nhd.org/ProjectExamples.htm

Develop Your Characters
Once you've decided on your characters, it's time to "get into your character's head," whether you're portraying a real or fictional person.

- How does the character dress? How does the character speak?
- What is the character's personality or mood?
- What was life like for someone like this character?
- What does the character think about events in his or her time period?
- What kinds of social behavior would someone in this character's time or situation portray?

Outline the Basics of Your Performance
Before you begin writing your script, take the time to outline the basics of your performance. You don't want to get too far into your writing and then realize that a certain aspect of your performance won't work. This is also a great time to think about how you will make transitions in time and characters in your performance, if applicable.

- What sections are you going to break your performance into?
- Where are you stating your argument?
- How does each part of your performance support your argument?
- What evidence or primary source might you be able to incorporate and where?
- Where do you show how your topic is connected to the them?
- How do you address historical context through your performance?

Edit It Down
About five pages of double space script will be enough to fill 10 minutes of performance. You may have to make some difficult decisions as to what you are and are not able to include. Remember that your historical argument and evidence are the most important parts of your performance. When you have finished a draft of your script, highlight the parts that express your argument in one color and specific supporting evidence in a different color. If it looks like there's not enough of one color on the script, it may be time for some editing! It should be easier to see what parts of your performance you may be able to edit out.

Practice, Practice, Practice!
Having a working script done is just the beginning. Keep rehearsing to learn your lines and to practice speaking at the right speed, volume and tone. As you go through your lines, take time to block out where your characters will stand, how they will move and what props they might need to use. If possible, ask someone to tape record your performance. You can watch it later to see how the performance looks from the audience's perspective.

Going to a NHD Competition with a Performance

Presenting a project in the performance category at a History Day competition is similar to presenting projects in other categories. At your assigned time, you will have the chance to share your work with the judges. This is how a presentation in the performance category usually works:

- **Set-Up**: You have five minutes to set up your set and props for your performance. Your judges will ask for your process paper and bibliography before you set up so that they can begin looking at it. Remember, only group members should set up the props and any background. Once you are set-up, wait for the judges signal begin your performance.
- **Performance**
- **Take-Down**: Take down your set and move your props to the side of the room or into the hallway. Make sure to be as quiet as possible while you are doing this as there may be other presentations going on in the same area.
- **Interview**: Don't be afraid of the interview! This is your chance to help your judges understand your argument and highlight any cool research that you have done. Remember, the interview isn't a memorized presentation for the judges. You will respond to the questions they ask, such as "How did you choose your topic?" or "Why do you think your topic is significant in history?"

Frequently Asked Questions About Performances

Does my performance have to be memorized?
There isn't a rule that says that your performance has to be memorized, but it's best if it is. Memorizing your script will help you focus on *how* you say your lines versus just reading a script to your audience. Finally, memorized lines contribute to good stage presence, which is part of clarity of presentation on the History Day evaluation sheet.

What props might be available at the competition?
To be safe, it's best to bring all the props necessary to a competition. You're likely to find a chair or table at a competition, however, these are not guaranteed. If you have questions, be sure to check with the contest coordinator.

What happens if I go over the time limit?
Going a few seconds over the time limit with your performance isn't the end of the world. Judges will understand that you may be nervous and that this may happen. What isn't appropriate is to go *significantly* over the time limit, as this would give you an unfair disadvantage over other projects. If you do go significantly over time, the judges will take this into consideration in your final ranking. When planning and rehearsing your performance, try to plan extra time to allow for audience response or forgotten lines at a competition.

What do I give judges at the competition?
Before you begin your performance, your judges will ask for copies of your process paper and annotated bibliography. You should not give them a copy of your script or copies of your research.

A Few Final Reminders:

- **Be Confident**! You're the expert on your topic. You've spent a lot of time researching and creating your performance and should be proud of all your hard work.
- **Speak Slowly and Loudly**: It's easy to get nervous and rush through your lines, but take a breath and slow down. This is the first time your audience has seen your performance and they need to be able to hear and understand your words.
- **Have Fun!** The History Day event is your opportunity to share your research with other scholars. Take the time to learn from the other projects you see, meet new people and enjoy yourself!

The History Day Project

Project Thankfully, many History Day participants share their projects online. Both students and educators benefit from observing projects from past contests.

Helpful Hints and Sample Projects

Performance Hint:

Students must speak loudly enough to be heard and slowly enough to be understood. It can be tough, as nerves and excitement can cause students to talk faster and/or quieter.

http://www.youtube.com/embed/uM36p2In4R4

See Rachel Roberts and Aishwarya Nirmal (International Community School) show their mastery of effective speaking and presentation skills in their 2012 gold-medal performance.
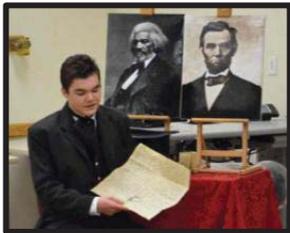
See Matthew Broussard (IMPACT Early College High School in Texas) demonstrate his speaking skills in his 2013 gold-medal performance. http://www.youtube.com/embed/tZVKUQ_pRcI

Performance Hint:

Be sure that students can move and set up props themselves, and that props can be transported. Many students have discovered that cloth backdrops on PVC-pipe frames are both light and portable.

See Samantha Irvine (Gibbs High School in Florida) use a two-sided scarf to distinguish two characters in her 2012 gold-medal performance. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5VKUpxSz0o

See Megan Rogers and Sophie Hall (Timbercrest Junior High) utilize props and stage space to express both separation and unity during school integration. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jq_aWlld4Gc&list=UU8XXV59jICmmTG7gAHUBPCw

Performance Hint:

Students playing multiple characters should consider making simple, easy costume adjustments to distinguish characters.

See Hazel Homer and Jack Higgins (homeschooled in Wyoming) move between many props in their 2013 gold-medal performance. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1WBfTC0ihY

Performance Hint:

Practice "blocking," or the actions of the performance. Determine the timing of movements and how to transition between them.

For more sample projects, visit www.washingtonhistory.org/education/historyday/samples