

Theme Narrative Rights & Responsibilities in History

This year's National History Day theme allows you to look at topics from all over the world and in many areas of study. As you dive deeper into your research, you'll find that this is a complex and thought-provoking theme. We've broken down this year's theme to help you choose a topic and begin your research.

Don't forget to check out the Ohio Topic List for more help on how to explore this year's theme of [Rights and Responsibilities in History](#). We're so excited to see what topics you select and the projects you create this year!

What is a right?

You may have heard of ideas like the right to vote or the right to free speech. But what actually is a right? **Rights are the freedoms or privileges that people enjoy as members of a society or simply by being humans.** They are the rules about what people can do or what is owed to them based on laws, social agreements, or ethical beliefs. For example, the right to vote allows us to participate in our country's democracy.

Think about the different groups you are a part of. They may be local – like your family, school, sports teams – or they may be bigger – like being a member of a state, nation, or the world. Being a member of these groups, or societies, gives you a set of rights.

There are different types of rights. You've most likely heard about rights like civil rights and human rights, but there are also political rights, social rights, and economic rights. Take a look at the chart below for more about these rights.

Types of Rights	Definition of Rights
Civil Rights	Rights that allow for freedoms like freedoms of speech, religion, assembly, petition, and press. The Bill of Rights is a great place to start looking for topics!
Political Rights	Rights that allow citizens to participate in their government. These can include the right to vote or the right to run for office.
Social Right	Rights that ensure a basic standard of living. These could be rights like the right to education, right to housing, right to healthcare.
Economic Right	Rights that allow people to work, earn wages, and own property.
Human Rights	Rights that are universal and apply to everyone. They guarantee basic freedoms and protections for all individuals. Check out the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from the United Nations to learn more about these ideas!

What is a responsibility?

Responsibilities are expectations of individuals as members of society. As members of societies with rights, we also have responsibilities. For example, citizens of the United States who can vote have responsibilities like staying informed about issues and candidates, following voting procedures, and respecting the privacy of other voters' choices.

The different societies, or groups, that you are a part of each have responsibilities. For example, being a member of a sports team comes with various responsibilities to ensure the team functions well and achieves its goals. There are personal responsibilities, like attending practices and following team rules, and team responsibilities like supporting your teammates. You also have ethical responsibilities like playing fairly. And these are just some of the responsibilities that you have as a team member! Now think of all the other groups you're a part of. Each of those groups have their own sets of responsibilities.

Just like there are different types of rights, there are also different types of responsibilities. We have legal, civic, social, and ethical responsibilities.

Types of Responsibilities	Definition of Responsibilities
Legal Responsibility	A responsibility that involves following laws paying taxes, and respecting others' rights
Civic Responsibility	A responsibility that includes voting, staying informed about political issues, and participating in community activities
Social Responsibility	A responsibility that involves treating others with respect and helping those in need through your actions
Ethical Responsibility	A responsibility that requires making morally sound decisions based on personal values, even if they are not legally required

How do rights and responsibilities work together?

While we can think about a right separate from a responsibility, this year's NHD theme asks you to consider how they work together. It's important to look at how responsibilities and rights work together in history when you are choosing a topic. A right can impact a responsibility, and a responsibility can impact a right. It's important to remember that there isn't a cause-and-effect relationship between the two ideas.

Rights allow individuals to enjoy freedoms and protections, while responsibilities ensure these freedoms are exercised in a way that maintains order, respects others, and promotes the well-being of the community. In an ideal, balanced society, rights and responsibilities work together to build a place where we live harmoniously. However, most societies are ever evolving and require citizens to recognize their human and ethical responsibility to fight for

rights that are not yet guaranteed. Sometimes this can lead to a tension between the responsibilities and rights.

Let's see how a right and responsibility can impact each other, using the Underground Railroad as an example.

A Right Impacting a Responsibility

- The right to equality, where all people should be treated equally under the law, inspired many to challenge the institution of slavery. This belief in the right to equality led individuals to act on their ethical responsibility by providing safe houses, resources, and guidance to freedom seekers, despite the personal risks involved.

A Responsibility Impacting a Right

- Some of those who participated in the Underground Railroad felt a civic responsibility to uphold justice and fight against the unjust system of slavery. Their actions, such as advocating for abolition, directly supported the movement towards equal rights for all individuals, ultimately contributing to the abolition of slavery.

When you are deciding how rights and responsibilities work together, try asking some of these questions:

- If I have a right to BLANK, what responsibilities do I have?
- If I have a responsibility to do BLANK, is there a right I am entitled to?
- Are there rights that certain individuals or groups are missing? What responsibilities do other members of society have to ensure equal rights for all people?
- Have individuals or society failed at fulfilling their responsibilities? How does that failure impact rights?
- What tension exists between rights and responsibilities in this topic?

Multiple Perspectives

When thinking about rights and responsibilities, it's important to consider different perspectives. People from different backgrounds or cultures might have different views on what rights are most important or how responsibilities should be fulfilled. The way that they choose to uphold their responsibilities can differ too. It's important to remember that everyone values rights and responsibilities differently, so not everyone will have the same views on them. It's also important to remember that not everyone in society might believe that the fight to secure a particular right is worthwhile or important. By considering these perspectives, we can better understand and respect each other.

Let's consider the right to vote. When the U.S. was first founded, the right to vote was only given to white men with property. Over time, many people fought hard to expand this right to include African Americans and women. However, when people were fighting for this right, not everyone agreed on who should be allowed to vote. People from various backgrounds

had different opinions, with some believing that only certain groups deserved this right, and others advocating for equal voting rights for all citizens. Recognizing these differing perspectives helps us understand the complexities of achieving the right to vote.

When thinking about different perspectives, consider these questions:

- Who decides who has rights?
- Does everyone have the same rights?
- Does everyone express their responsibility for ensuring that rights of others in the same way?
- Who decides on the limits of these rights and responsibilities?
- How do different forms of government affect rights and responsibilities?

Thinking About Short and Long-Term Impacts

It's important to think about how actions related to rights and responsibilities can have both short-term and long-term impacts. For example, standing up for a right might lead to immediate changes, but it can also inspire future generations and lead to long-lasting societal changes. Similarly, neglecting responsibilities can have immediate negative effects and cause long-term harm to communities and society.