Chicago Metro History Fair Documentaries

What is a Documentary?

A History Fair documentary reflects your ability to use audiovisual equipment to communicate your topic's significance. Through a documentary you will be able to incorporate still images, moving images, narration, and other types of media into a 10-minute original production. When imagining what a History Fair documentary looks like, it is helpful to think about the films that you might see on the PBS or the History Channel, or in your history class.

The Basic Framework

- **Time Limit**: Documentaries may not exceed 10 minutes in length.

- **Student Produced**: A History Fair documentary must be produced only by the student or students who are listed as the creators of the entry. This means that only the students can work with the technology used to create or edit the documentary, record or film interviews and narration, etc. Others may teach you to use the equipment, but you must operate it when producing and presenting your final project.

- **Visual and Aural:** Documentaries should rely primarily on images, a pre-recorded spoken narration, and sound to communicate the story. Text-heavy presentations are inappropriate for this category.

- **Credits**: You must also include credits at the end of the documentary and these credits will count towards the time limit.

- **Self Run**: A History Fair documentary must also be self-run, which means that there is no live narration or commentary during the documentary. You should be able to hit "play" and walk away.

- **Be sure to check the complete category rules!**

Why Should I Choose the Documentary Category?

A documentary can be an excellent way to communicate the research and analysis of your topic. However, you need to make a careful decision in selecting the documentary category.

- **You need to be a good fit for the category**. You should be interested in working with computers and documentary technology. You should have access to a computer with documentary software (such as iMovie or MovieMaker) either at home or at school. Do you know how to use this software or are you willing to learn? You should also think about where you will have to do most of the work on your documentary. If you are working in a group, how will you arrange transportation to group members' homes?

- **Your topic needs to be a good fit for the category**. You also need to think about if your topic will lend itself well to the documentary category. A great deal of visual materials are required to fill ten minutes in a documentary. What photographs, illustrations, film footage, etc. will you be able to find about your topic?

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Documentary Rules

Documentaries allow students to communicate their ideas through visuals (photos, video footage, etc.) and pre-recorded narration. Similar to the documentaries one may see on television, historical documentaries allow students to communicate an argument through a script and support it with visual evidence drawn from primary and secondary sources. Documentaries are shown from a DVD. To produce a documentary, you must have access to editing equipment and be able to operate it.

- Documentaries are created by individuals or groups of no more than five students.

- Documentaries may not exceed ten minutes in length. Time begins when the first image or sound appears and ends after the last visual/sound concludes. The length of the documentary must be provided on the Summary Statement.

- Documentaries must be researched, created, narrated, and produced by the students registered (e.g. no external narrators). You must operate all equipment used in the production of the project. Only those students listed as entrants may participate in the documentary's production.

- You may use *pre-existing* photos, video excerpts, music, etc. in your film with proper acknowledgment in the credits and Annotated Bibliography. However, students may not use material created by others specifically for their History Fair project (for example, an adult could not craft an audio or visual piece specifically to be used in the student's project; "actors" cannot provide dramatization).

- Documentaries conclude with a list of credits for major audio and visual sources only. Credits should be brief—not full bibliographic citations. The Annotated Bibliography and Summary Statement must be printed for the judges and do not appear on the documentary. All sources used in the documentary must be properly cited in the bibliography.

- Documentaries are self-running. Live narration and other comments before and during the project are not permitted. PowerPoints, podcasts, and "performances on film" are not appropriate in the documentary category.

- You are allowed five minutes to set up and five minutes to remove equipment. Students should operate the equipment independently. Adults should not assist with set-up of equipment. Students should use set-up time to prepare the documentary for presentation (adjust volume, etc.).

IMPORTANT COMPETITION NOTES

Each project submitted to History Fair must be accompanied by the Documentary Entry Form at the time of registration. **The best final format for a documentary is a MP4, AVI, or WMV file, published and burned to a DVD.** Due to multiple standards for DVD players, DVDs do not play on all devices, therefore, students should test their DVD on a number of players or bring their own laptop to the competition. Multiple entries from the same school should not share presentation equipment, as entries may be assigned at concurrent times. ***Internet access is generally not available at the competitions, so do not plan to present your documentary from YouTube or other online storage.***

Please bring three copies of the following materials to the contest:
- Summary Statement
- Annotated Bibliography, separated between primary and secondary sources (see "Rules for All Categories")

Written materials should be printed on plain white paper and stapled together (no binders). Judges will ask to keep at least one copy of the written materials. Judges may ask you to leave a copy of your film for History Fair purposes, but it is not required. The presentation concludes with a short interview with the judges.

Rules for All Categories

- Exhibits, documentaries, websites, and performances may be completed individually or by a group of 2-5 students. Papers are individual only. All students in a group must be involved in the research and creation of the project.

- Topics must connect with Chicago or Illinois history in order to advance to the state contest. Non-Illinois topics are permitted at the regional and finals competitions. Teachers often require integration of the National History Day theme, but the theme is not required by the Chicago Metro History Fair. Projects registered as "NHD eligible" will be assessed on how well their project integrates the NHD theme.

- Students may research, create, and enter only one project each year. Sharing research in multiple projects is not permitted. Revising or reusing an entry from a previous year may result in disqualification. Entries submitted for competition must be original and have been researched and developed in the current contest year.

- Students are responsible for the research, design, and creation of their own project, as well as operating their own equipment and materials. Students may receive advice from adults on the mechanical aspects of creating an entry and/or reasonable help necessary for safety, but the work must be completed by students. Feedback on the student's work is permissible (help proofreading; suggestions or questions based on the student's ideas, etc.). Materials created by others specifically for use in the entry violate this rule.

- Each project is required to have a Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography.

- Word counts must be provided for exhibits, websites, and papers. Time lengths must be provided for documentaries and performances. *[See individual category rules for more specifics.]*

- Exhibits, performances, and documentaries will be judged and interviewed at the public competitions. Papers and websites are judged in a separate stream, which may have different deadlines for submission. Paper and website entrants will have an opportunity to share their projects at the competitions.

- Students should not prepare a formal, verbal presentation; however, they should plan to respond to questions posed by judges. The interviews are important to the History Fair experience, but the entry is judged on its merits alone.

- Plagiarism is unacceptable, and constitutes grounds for disqualification. *[See www.plagiarism.org]*

- Items potentially dangerous in any way—such as weapons, firearms, animals, etc.—are strictly prohibited.

- The Fair Use Doctrine allows students to use pre-existing materials (photos, footage, music, etc.) for educational purposes, including student productions like History Fair; therefore, students need not seek formal permissions within the context of the competition. However, if the project is shown in non-educational settings, then permissions should be sought as appropriate.

- Teachers may have additional rules/restrictions for the History Fair at individual schools. Students should comply with all rules set by their teacher.

Required Materials

All projects must include an **Annotated Bibliography** and **Summary Statement**. In the bibliography, each source should be *annotated* with a short description of how the student used that source. The bibliography must be divided between *primary* sources (sources from the time period or written by someone with firsthand knowledge) and *secondary* sources (sources written after the time period, typically by a historian). Bibliographies must follow either the *Turabian* or *MLA* style format. Include all sources that contributed useful information, perspectives, or visuals, but not necessarily every source consulted. Annotations may describe why students placed the source as primary/secondary if it is not immediately obvious; and, in the case of web sources, may also describe who sponsors the site. Bundle photos or other materials from the same collection into a single citation. Cite oral history transcripts, questionnaires, or other supplementary materials in the bibliography—do not provide copies of them. Students must acknowledge all sources used in the development of the entry in the Annotated Bibliography in order to avoid plagiarism.

The **Summary Statement** provides the project's thesis, a summary of the argument, and information about the development of the project. The form is available on the History Fair website. Except for websites, the Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography should be printed on plain, white paper and stapled together. The Annotated Bibliography and Summary Statement are not included in the word count.

Your Ideas on Screen

Video Editing: In many respects, History Fair documentaries are 10-minute versions of the types of historical films you might see on PBS or the History Channel. Students use video-editing software to combine spoken narration with photographs, other images (moving or still), interview clips, and music. There are many types of affordable and user-friendly video-editing software—Apple's iMovie, Windows' MovieMaker, and WeVideo come standard with many computers or may be downloaded for free, for example. Video-editing software allows you to easily combine visual and audio elements in your presentation and make revisions.

A Caution Against PowerPoint-Style Slideshows: The easy accessibility of PowerPoint has tempted some students to enter text-based slide shows in the documentary category. Text-based slides are not the most effective method for presenting a historical interpretation in a documentary. Viewers will want to <u>hear</u> the narration and <u>see</u> visual images, not read extensive text on a screen. For this reason, computer slide show presentations that rely on heavy text will be penalized in the presentation category at the competitions.

Documentary Organization

Similar to any other History Fair project, your documentary should **make an argument** about your topic. In order to make a clear argument, you need to organize your documentary clearly.

- **Opening/Introduction**: As the documentary begins and you introduce the subject, make sure that you are also making your argument clear. You want to let your viewers know what you will prove.
- **Body**: Documentaries should be more than just one fact after another. Dividing your documentary into claims will help develop the argument you laid out in the opening. Sections with specific claims and evidence will make it easier for you to create your documentary and easier for your viewers to follow.
- **Closing/Conclusion**: While squeezing everything you want to say into just 10 minutes can be difficult, it's important to make time at the end of your documentary to reiterate your conclusions and argument for your viewer.
- **Credits**: Remember to include credits at the end of your documentary.

> **What should I include in my credits?**
> Your credits include sources used in the making of your documentary, but not every source consulted in your research. This means that you don't need to include your entire bibliography in the credits, but it should include a list of sources, institutions, and people important to the development of your film, including: people who provided special assistance, interviewees who appeared in the documentary, archives or institutions used to find information, music sources, filming locations, important sources of visuals, and any special thanks that you would like to include. If you need a sample, check out a professional documentary to see what they include and how they format their credits.

Documentary Elements

- **Script**: The script is one of the most important elements in your documentary. The script contains your thesis, support for your argument, and demonstrates your research. You should put a significant amount of time into writing a solid script. Your script can include quotes from your research that help to support your argument. You can incorporate the words of those you may have interviewed for your research. In the end, you will record your script to create the narration for your documentary.
- **Visual Images**: Visual images are critical in a good documentary as they provide the visual support for your script. It is wise to build a large image collection as you are doing your research, instead of waiting until you are putting the documentary together. It is also important that your visual images match the message of your script (not every image you find will be suitable with your script). You can find images online for your documentary, but you should also build your image collection by scanning or taking digital images of photographs and drawings in books or things you find in archives. Take care to make sure that your images are at a high enough resolution so that they will not appear pixelated on screen.
- **Music or Sound Effects**: An effective soundtrack can make a moving presentation. What music or effects would enhance your documentary? Make sure that the music is not too loud, disconnected from the tone of your script, or the effects too abrupt to distract from your narration, which is the most important part of your documentary.

Equipment and Technology

Creating a documentary requires access to software and/or video editing and production equipment. This doesn't mean you have to purchase pricey software programs! Apple's iMovie and Windows' MovieMaker are included on many computers, WeVideo is available as a free download, and most schools have some kind of video-editing software available. Talk with your parents and teacher about what resources are available at home or school and where you will do the majority of your work. (This is especially important if you do not use the same program at home and school or have different programs at group members' homes.)

If you are planning to shoot your own footage or interviews, you will need access to a video camera or recording equipment. You may also need a scanner to capture images found in books or magazines. Again, talk to your parents or teachers about what you can borrow from school, friends, or family. If equipment isn't available at your school, the public library or other schools in your district may have equipment you can use.

Questions about Making the Documentary

Who can operate the camera or recording equipment to create the documentary?
All entries must be student-produced, which means that group members (or the individual student) must operate all equipment. If you are creating a documentary as an individual and want to appear on camera, you will need to set the camera up on a tripod and film yourself in the scene.

Who can appear in the documentary?
Since entries must be student-produced, this means that group members (or the individual student) must be the only ones that appear on camera as narrator. Please note that interviews of participants in a historical event or experts are allowed and encouraged; *"performances on tape" or dramatizations are discouraged*.

**Can someone else read quotes, narrate, or edit the documentary for me?**
No, only group members (or the individual student) may provide the narration, voice-over, and editing for the documentary. Students can use pre-existing narration or sound clips, but cannot include something created by others specifically for use in your entry.

Can I use clips from other films? Yes, you may use clips from other documentaries with proper credit (for example, an excerpt from an interview with a person who was there); however, they must be SHORT and selected to reinforce YOUR interpretation. Judges frown on projects that overuse film clips to the point of distracting from your argument. Clips are not a substitute for your own ideas.

Putting the Documentary Together

Organization and planning are important keys to success in the documentary category. Once you have completed your research, outline the main points of your argument and the sections you will need in your documentary, much like if you were writing a paper. From there, you will be able to write a script and develop a storyboard of images to include in your documentary. It is important to plan all of this on paper before you even begin working with the computer program!

The **Video Storyboard** form on the following page offers you a simple template to plan out your documentary. Once you have written your script, you will want to select visuals that help explain, demonstrate, and support your argument. You may also want to keep track of the duration of each video clip or narration segment.
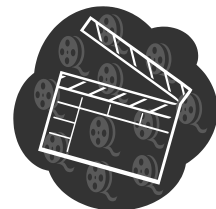
Documentary Storyboard

Notes/Time	Visual	Audio

Tips for Creating a Spectacular Documentary

Watch Other Documentaries
One of the best ways to understand the qualities of a good documentary is to watch other documentaries, both professional and those produced for History Fair or National History Day. What are the effective features of the documentary? How do they convey their argument? Are there any techniques you think you should avoid?

Develop Your Argument
No matter if you are working alone or in a group or in the junior or senior division, it is important to make sure that your argument (thesis) is clear **in the project** itself. Your argument should be your analysis of why your topic is significant in history. It is what transforms your documentary from just a story to an argument. It is the lens that brings everything else in your documentary into focus.

Plan It Out
Using your thesis as a guide, outline your argument and write your script. You can then use a storyboard to plan out what visuals you can use to support your narration. Planning this film on paper before you even begin using the video-editing program will save you frustration and time later on.

Use Your Research
Your research is there for more than just embellishing your bibliography. Figure out ways to include your research as support in your documentary. Are there quotes that you can include in your script? Newspapers or photographs that you can use for visuals? Not only will this help to prove your argument but it will also make your documentary more interesting to your viewers.

Content is More Important than Glitz
Fancy transitions, graphics, and effects can make for a flashy documentary and can be fun to create, but remember that the history is the most important part of your documentary.

The Documentary Stands Alone
When evaluating History Fair documentaries, judges should be able to find all the information about your topic in the documentary itself. The documentary has to stand on its own. This means that your argument, support, and theme connection need to be apparent within the documentary and not depend on your explanation in the interview. Ask someone who has never seen your documentary to watch it (a friend, teacher, neighbor, etc). Without saying anything, have them watch the film and then ask them a few questions to see if you have communicated your argument clearly: What am I trying to prove in my documentary? What evidence have I shown to support that argument? What do you like about my documentary? What is confusing to you?

Copyright and Fair Use
Making History: How to Create a Historical Documentary, a booklet produced by National History Day, offers a good summary of this issue for NHD and History Fair students. Because you are creating an *educational* documentary for the NHD competition and are following the contest rules, your entry should fall within "fair use" copyright laws. But this means that...
- Your documentary can only be shown at school or within NHD affiliate competitions.
- You must have proper *credits* within the film.
- You must list and credit *all* of your sources in your annotated bibliography.
- You cannot take and use verbatim the narration of another [professionally produced] documentary.

If you have questions regarding copyright issues, you should contact the NHD office or an attorney directly. In preparing your documentary, you, your teacher, and your parents or guardians should be mindful of copyright issues. A helpful source to consult with respect to these issues is The Copyright Kids webpage, operated by The Copyright Society of the U.S.A. This page can be found at http://www.copyrightkids.org/.

Preparing for Competition with a Documentary

Showing Your Documentary

Students will have an assigned time at which they will share their documentary with the judges and conduct a short interview. If you need to do a tech check, you should go to your assigned judging room <u>before</u> judging begins to test the equipment. When you play your documentary, other students, teachers, and visitors will be able to quietly watch your project. You must be able to operate all technology to play your documentary at a competition.

History Fair documentary judging usually follows the order given below:

- **Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography**: Give the judges copies of your Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography first so they can begin reading these right away.
- **Set-Up**: While judges are reading these documents, begin set-up of your documentary. Make sure that the documentary works on the equipment provided and test the volume. You have five minutes to set up your equipment.
- **Wait for the Signal**: Wait patiently for the judges to give the signal that they are ready for you to start.
- **Introduction**: Introduce yourself(ves) and your documentary. Make sure to state only your name(s) and the title of your project. Any other commentary at this time is inappropriate.
- **Play**: Begin the documentary. You may also need to adjust the lights.
- **Take-Down**: When the documentary is over, remove your documentary (and any extra equipment you may have brought) so that the next student can begin set-up. You have five minutes to take down your equipment.
- **Interview**: After you have taken down your project, come to the judging table for your short interview.
- **Things to Leave with the Judges:** Do leave one copy of your written materials (Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography) with the judges. If you have an *extra* copy of your documentary on DVD, we encourage you to leave it with the judges as we sometimes use these projects for competition or educational purposes. An extra copy of your DVD is NOT required, however.

Frequently Asked Questions about Presenting Documentaries at History Fair Competitions

What happens if I go over time?
The judges won't stop your documentary if you go over time while presenting at a competition. They will, however, note that you exceeded the time limit on your comment sheets. Going over the time limit can also affect your ranking at a competition as a significant time overage gives you an unfair advantage over other students.

What happens if my documentary won't play?
Don't panic! We have all had technology problems and will work our hardest to make sure that you are able to play your documentary. If you are unable to get your documentary to play, talk to the judges and the contest coordinator. They may have access to additional equipment to play your documentary. If the documentary won't play during your assigned judging time, they will likely ask you to come back after the other documentaries are finished and try again. The History Fair staff may also elect to schedule an alternative judging time sometime the following week at the Newberry Library.

Can I edit my documentary if I advance?
Yes! Students are encouraged to edit their projects based on feedback given by judges and other advisers before advancing to the next round of competition.

What are the Qualities of a Good Documentary?

As you create your documentary, go through this list and ask yourself if you have met all the criteria for a good History Fair project. Judges will use these criteria to evaluate your project.

Historical Knowledge—35% Junior Division (gr. 6-8); 30% Senior Division (gr. 9-12)

☐ **My documentary is historically accurate:** All the information in my documentary is true to the best of my knowledge.

☐ **My documentary demonstrates thorough, balanced, relevant knowledge:** I have made an effort to fully explain my topic and show different perspectives.

☐ **I place my topic in historical context:** My topic didn't take place in isolation. I made sure to place my topic into historical context – the wider intellectual, political, social, and cultural setting.

Historical Analysis—25% Junior Division (gr. 6-8); 30% Senior Division (gr. 9-12)

☐ **My project offers a historical interpretation/argument that is supported by evidence:** I present a thesis in my project and back it up with information drawn from my research.

☐ **I have demonstrated historical significance and impact:** My project offers an answer to the "so what?" question. I explain why it is important to know about these events in history.

☐ **I have shown change over time and cause and effect:** My documentary offers an explanation of what things changed over time and why the changes took place.

Relation to National History Day Theme – *Optional*

The National History Day theme is optional in Illinois. If you choose to use the theme, it should be integrated into the analysis presented in your project. Consider using the theme in your thesis so that it is threaded throughout your project.

Sources—20%

☐ **My project uses a depth and range of available primary sources:** I consulted a wide variety of sources from the time period of my project (newspaper accounts, diary entries, photographs, archival accounts, and other first-hand accounts).

☐ **My project uses a depth and range of secondary sources:** I used accounts written by historians and other experts to understand the issues involved in my topic and their long-range significance.

☐ **I make effective use of sources in my documentary:** Sources are used as evidence for points made in my narration.

Clarity of Presentation—20%

☐ **My documentary tells a coherent, well-organized story:** I made sure my documentary is easy to follow and understand.

☐ **I used the documentary medium effectively:** My topic lends itself well to telling a story through visuals and narration. I was careful to use the technology appropriately to emphasize my historical message.

☐ **My documentary and written materials show attention to detail and make an impact:** My documentary script and images are carefully written and selected. I have proofread and edited my Annotated Bibliography and Summary Statement.