The History Day Ship-on-the-Sea Metaphor

You are preparing to set sail on a journey in history called the National History Day Project. It is more than a one-day journey. It's one that will last for many weeks. Each of you, in a sense, is a “ship” on this journey. Before you leave the “harbor,” you need to determine what will accompany your ship.

If you make a good choice, you will be bringing along extra “sails” for your ship. These sails are good partners with whom you choose to work (a group can have between two and five people in it). Sails are great to have because they represent quality people who will work hard and share the load in a way that really makes your ship fast, efficient, and comfortable. If you make a poor choice of partner or partners, instead of bringing along sails, you will carry “anchors.” These anchors are people who oftentimes:

• Are lazy and don’t help much, or...
• Are comedians who provide a lot of laughs but little effort, or...
• Are looking for you to carry them through the project, or...
• Are involved in so many different activities that it’s difficult to find time to meet, or...
• Are control freaks who have trouble considering others’ ideas or cooperating.

These anchors take up room and slow down your ship. In fact, anchors can sink your ship! Also, be very careful of anchors because they sometimes beg to come on board, but once you are “out to sea,” they end up holding you back. You may offend an anchor by leaving him or her behind, but it is often the best decision to make. Stand firm, mates! If you think you’re bringing along a sail and find out that you’ve actually brought along an anchor, you can’t throw him or her overboard once you’re underway, so choose wisely.

Another option is to choose to sail alone. Sometimes a ship’s sails can get tangled and not work very well together. If you decide to sail alone, there is only you, and you can sail the boat easily. If you choose to do your research project as an individual, it can be less complicated with fewer distractions to impede your progress. Sailing solo can be very rewarding; it can be a very fine means of travel.

Fifth key to success: Choose the right History Day category

In the History Day program, you get to use your strengths in art, writing, design, drama, and other skills. You now know that research means learning about a topic, thinking about and analyzing what you’ve learned, and finally sharing your knowledge and conclusions with others. When you get to the point when you’re ready to share your knowledge in your History Day research project, you can do it in one of four ways:

1. Write a HISTORICAL PAPER
2. Develop a DOCUMENTARY
3. Create a PERFORMANCE
4. Design and construct an EXHIBIT

Even though you’re just beginning the research process, you should (with your teacher’s help) learn about and see examples of each of the four ways to share your knowledge. Knowing early in the process which of the four options is most appealing to you will help you in choosing a topic and guiding your research.

Let your teacher know about the early decisions you make (whether to work as an individual or in a group, and which of the current categories you’ve selected) by completing a History Day Contract. Your teacher will determine when the contract is due.
PRELIMINARY TOPIC SELECTION SHEET

Due Date __________________ Name ________________________________

Directions: Complete each of the following sentence starters. Sign your name below and ask a parent/guardian to sign as well.

1. This year’s History Day theme is ...

2. I think my topic will be ...

3. I am interested in this topic because ...

4. This topic relates to the theme because ...

5. "How?" and "Why?" questions I have about my topic are ...
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

6. Another topic I’m also considering is ...

7. I know that choosing to have a positive attitude about my research project will help me to be successful. I can have a positive attitude by ...

Student signature ____________________________________________

Parent/guardian signature ____________________________________