

Creating a History Day Documentary

Constantly changing technology offers students limitless possibilities in developing media-based presentations for the documentary category. Students may create documentaries using computers, films, and/or slides. Whatever presentation format is chosen, students must be able to operate all equipment on their own, both during production and at each level of competition.

IMPORTANT: The most important aspect of any entry is its historical quality. Students should not get so caught up in the production of a documentary that they lose sight of the importance of the historical quality. Judges are not looking for glitzy productions; rather, they are looking for solid research and a thorough analysis of the chosen topic.

Drafting a Documentary: Creating a Script or Storyboard

A storyboard is a visual display of the script divided into segments, where each segment is represented by an appropriate image (slides, video clips, etc.) for that segment. This technique is used by those involved in media production to help them decide which pictures will best suit the script. It is important because it allows students to see which visuals fit best, which still need to be made, what songs need to be recorded, etc. Students should create a storyboard after they have completed their research and written a good script.

Storyboarding is an important part of the documentary process. This technique is used to help you decide which pictures, graphics and sound will best suit the narrative script. When you have done your research and written a good script, divide the script into segments with appropriate slides, video segments, etc. drawn in. At this point, the visuals and the sound elements (narratives, music, interviews, etc.) must match up and communicate the basic message of your project -- including a clear statement of your thesis, a coherent documentation of supporting evidence (historical information and interpretation), and a conclusion that points out the historical significance of your program.

You can create a storyboard by using index cards or by filling in the boxes on a form (see "Documentary Storyboard" below). You can also make a written script with two columns. The left column lists and describes the exact images you will use, and the right column shows the narration that matches those images. Use this opportunity to record the bibliographic information for the images so that you won't have to hunt for these details when you write your annotated bibliography.

Video Presentations

The availability of home video cameras, digital equipment, and computer-based editing software has increased the popularity of this entry category. Students use computer technology to create special effects, animation, graphics, and other visuals for use in their videotape presentations.

Following are some suggestions for video entries. Students should:

- Operate all camera and editing equipment
- Draw up a storyboard draft and write the narration before they begin “shooting” images
- Present a variety of images: panning shots, interviews, live action, and still subjects
- Keep track of the scenes in a notebook or on index cards to make editing easier
- Include music as an effective addition to the sound track

Computer-Based Presentations

The computer has become a very important tool for creating documentaries. Students who choose to use the computer to create their entries should have access to computers with multimedia capabilities and should be familiar with at least one type of presentation software. Students should also have access to editing equipment that they can operate themselves.

Important: While most students are using computers as tools to help them to create various aspects of their presentations, some students are using computers as their vehicle for presentation. Although doing so is acceptable, there are a number of limitations to using the computer as the presentation device: Computer equipment is not necessarily supplied at the various levels of competition—students will have to provide their own equipment; computer presentations cannot be interactive (judges cannot push buttons, etc.); computer monitors are often too small for the judges and the audience to see; and computer presentations often inadvertently focus on the technology behind the presentation rather than providing an in-depth analysis of a historical topic.

Slide Presentations

Although the use of video and computer-based presentations in the documentary category is growing, slide presentations are still popular and effective. Slides can be either purchased or produced by students. One advantage of the slide show is the ability to project a large image that makes an impact on the audience. The key to an effective entry is a good combination of visual images and recorded narrative.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Draw up a storyboard draft and write the narration before they begin shooting images
- Photograph pictures from books to build a slide collection and avoid repetition
- Music is an important addition to the recorded narrative
- Make sure the narrative matches the image on the screen, and vice-versa

Documentary Storyboard

Name(s): _____

Notes	Visual	Audio

Sample Documentary Script

The following is an excerpt from the first draft of a History Day documentary script (storyboard) about Cesar Chavez. The left column describes images that will be displayed: the right column is the narration text. Primary sources are highlighted and in bold text. (Students were instructed to highlight their primary sources for easy identification.) The total script length was approximately five pages.

-Portrait of Cesar Chavez-	Cesar Chavez once said, " Our workers are not filthy beasts to be feared. They are not lesser than any one of us, nor are they better. They are human, they are American. They are to be treated with dignity. "
-Men and women farm workers working in fields-	In California during the 1960's, Cesar Chavez took a stand for migrant farm workers rights, and fought against low wages, pesticide poisoning, and poor living conditions. In 1950, male farm workers were paid \$1.10 an hour, while women were paid even less.
-Picture of Helen Chavez-	Helen Chavez recalls, " When the grape harvest was pretty heavy, sometimes I'd work 10 hours a day, 5 days a week, for \$.85 an hour. "
-Picture of a farm worker's family-	Often times families were forced to bring their children to work so the family could survive.
-Farm workers working in the fields-	In addition to low wages, workers suffered inhumane working conditions. John Gregory Dunne the author of <u>Delano: The Story of the Grape Strike</u> said, " The workers hunched over the vines like ducks, there is no air, making the intense heat all but unbearable. Gnats and bugs swarm out from under the leaves. Some workers wear face masks; others, handkerchiefs knotted around their heads to catch the sweat. "
-Pictures of fields, and bottle of pesticides-	The growers' use of pesticides was one of the main contributors to these inhumane conditions.
-Picture of pesticide bottles and Mr. Yuk stickers-	The pesticides <i>captan</i> , <i>dinoseb</i> , <i>methyl bromide</i> , <i>parathion</i> and <i>DDT</i> caused tumors, childhood cancer, and rashes or open sores that covered exposed workers' entire bodies.
-Picture of Lori Salinas-	Lori Salinas, a 13 year old farm worker on the McFarland plantation in California, was one of the many children diagnosed with numerous tumors, a consequence of exposure to lethal pesticides.
-Workers on Giumarra plantation-	In 1964, 12 workers in the Giumarra Vineyards in California died after working with high levels of pesticides.
-Pregnant woman on the plantation housing-	These problems were never given sufficient medical attention. The workers couldn't afford any health care benefits and the growers refused to give them any.