

To **take a stand**: Defend your point of view, assert your opinion, take action to support or resist an issue.

What does it mean to take a stand? Is it just about expressing your opinion? If that was the case, then every person who has shared their opinion on social media would be taking a stand. To truly take a stand, you must:

- Take action on purpose
- Challenge or support a current situation
- Have a goal of achieving or stopping change

The key to finding a great History Day topic for the 2017 theme is to choose a stand where people **acted on purpose**. They did something to defend a social, political, or ethical issue: they marched, they changed laws, they refused to act, they organized others.

For example: Thomas Edison was not taking a stand when he invented the lightbulb. Simply inventing something is not taking a stand. To connect science and technology topics to the theme, think of a way some one used the invention to make a purposeful change. Edison took a stand when he fought for the system to power his invention. What impact did the “war of currents,” about the use of AC or DC power, have on history?

When people take a stand, they want results. It is your job to understand **why they took a stand**, their motivations and the outcome of the situation. Choosing a topic with a strong purpose and a significant impact will help you be successful in this History Day project. Equally important, you should look at other points of view on the issue. When people take a stand, there is usually another stand taken against them.

For example: In 1963 Martin Luther King, Jr., was invited to Birmingham to confront what he called “the most segregated city” in the United States. King took a stand in support of local Civil Rights leaders through boycotts and marches. Not everyone in Birmingham agreed with King’s stand. City officials like Eugene “Bull” Connor took a stand against the protests through arrests and the use of police dogs and fire hoses against marchers. In the end, Connor’s stand was not successful. The violence in Birmingham played out on national TV and increased support for federal civil rights legislation.

Picking a topic

Start with your areas of interest. You might like women’s history, religious history, war history, or African American history. Or you could be interested in cars, medicine, sports, or science. Look at books, topic lists, or the web to help brainstorm topics.

Let’s say you are interested in the fight against slavery in the United States, which began long before the Civil War. Trying to cover this whole movement would be too big for a History Day topic. You’ll have to narrow it down to a specific person, group, event, or time period. For example:

- 1816: The American Colonization Society was founded to transport free blacks and emancipated slaves to Africa, but some felt this stand wasn’t based on abolition, but rather the feeling that free blacks and whites couldn’t live together.
- 1845: Frederick Douglass became an influential speaker against slavery, writing his autobiography detailing his life as an enslaved person.
- 1859: John Brown’s took a stand at Harper’s Ferry. Though this stand didn’t cause a slave revolt, it did bring attention to the abolition movement.
- 1850’s: Harriet Tubman’s stand put her in serious personal danger as she led fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad.
- 1863: President Lincoln took a stand through the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the enslaved people in Confederate states.

There are so many great possibilities for this theme. Start with your interests and consider different points of view within those interests. When you have an idea, ask yourself these questions:

- What was the reason for taking a stand?
- What action did people take?
- What was the important impact of the actions?
- What were the other points of view on the issue?

Guided Notes for “Taking a Stand in History” Minnesota Theme Sheet

1. What is the definition of “taking a stand”?

2. Write three differences between “taking a stand” and giving an opinion.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3. What makes an something “taking a stand,” rather than other actions Fill out the chart below with your own example in each column from things going on right now.

Giving an Opinion	Inventing Something	Taking a Stand
<i>Sample: I wrote a review online for a movie you watched.</i>	<i>Sample: Google invented self-driving cars.</i>	<i>Sample: People gathered at the Governor's mansion to protest.</i>

4. When someone takes a stand, they are taking action on purpose. There will probably be people who feel differently about the situation. Think about something going on today. Fill out the bubbles below to explain what people are doing and why.

Topic: _____

Why are they taking a stand? What are they thinking?
Sample: MLK wanted to end segregation and make life better for African Americans.

What are they saying/doing?
Sample: MLK helped with protests in Birmingham, Alabama.

What is another opinion?
Sample: City officials fought against change. They used police dogs and arrested protesters.