

Student Theme Sheet

INNOVATION IN HISTORY: IMPACT AND CHANGE

Welcome to National History Day! You are joining more than half a million students studying history in a new way. National History Day uses a theme to improve your historical eyesight. We ask students to look for interesting examples of our theme throughout their history textbooks, because every time you find an example, you have found a possible research topic. *Innovation in History: Impact and Change* is the 2009-2010 theme and we think you will find it an exciting way to learn history!

Innovation is everywhere. If you have a special interest in economics, civics, world or American history, medicine, literature, industry, architecture or music you can find a topic to research. For instance, if you are interested in war and weapons, you might research the impact of the *stirrup* or the *longbow*. The stirrup was first used in the era of Genghis Khan and revolutionized fighting because soldiers could stand while riding and use both hands to shoot. This gave a great advantage in speed and accuracy to the armies using stirrups on the saddles. The longbow, with its superior range, transformed the strategies of battles. If you have ever read or seen the movie *Henry V*, the Battle of Agincourt, which appears at the end of the movie, is all about the longbow.

If you are interested in exploring things closer to home, you might look at the invention of the vacuum cleaner or the TV dinner. Through your research you will discover the answer to the questions: did the innovation make life easier or did the innovation add more work? If you are interested in medicine, you could examine the discovery of the laser and trace medical breakthroughs. If you are interested in fashion, you might uncover the impact of blue jeans in the late 1890s.

If your interest points you toward the stars, you may want to write a paper on the solar system as described by Ptolemy in the ancient world. Why did Ptolemy propose his theories? Or in a group, you may want to design a website that illustrates the solar system as described by Copernicus. What influence did these theories have on scientific thought during the centuries that followed? What did these theories

say about the way human beings felt about themselves in relation to their universe? These are some of the questions you need to consider as you research.

If you are a car aficionado, you may want to create a documentary on the car and the conditions that led to its invention, or the conditions that permitted its large scale production and the impact of this single technology on the ability to travel, which eventually determined where people lived. Or you might create an exhibit on the car's influence on governments who had to build roads, set speed limits, and license drivers, or to explore the influence of the automobile on owners and managers of factories and on workers and their families. How do time, place, and values determine when and if the technologies will be developed? How have communities been influenced by other

modes of transportation, such as the railroad? How did railroad stations reflect the role of railroad society? The list is endless and so are the possibilities for a great research project.

To produce a successful documentary, website, paper,

performance, or exhibit, you need to understand the theme. In the case of the NHD theme, we are asking you to consider an innovation as an invention, a creation, a discovery, or a device that is new and that changed the world. The airplane and the Gutenberg Press are examples of inventions that improved life and created a lasting impact on our world. The next question you must ask is why is the innovation important in history?

When you choose to research an invention, you must analyze why this innovation happened at this particular place and time in history and why the innovation is historically significant. As a historical researcher, you must do more than give a detailed summary of the invention and how it works; you must interrogate the innovation. What was the need for the invention? Why is the innovation of historical significance? What caused the innovation to happen at this particular time and place in history? Did the invention have unintended consequences? An example of unintended consequences can be examined while studying the cotton gin.





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INNOVATION
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The cotton gin was introduced to America in the late 1700s. It was invented to increase the speed of cleaning the seeds from the cotton. The immediate impact was the increased speed in which cotton could be cleaned which encouraged planting more cotton. With more cotton production, the need for cheap labor increased, thereby increasing the demand for slaves. The immediate impact caused by the cotton gin was an increase in cotton production. However, the unintended consequence of the cotton gin became its legacy: the spread of slavery in the U.S.

As you begin your reading to find a suitable topic, you must think about inventions or new ideas that are historically significant. Think about the word "change." Did the innovation change history? In fashion, "go-go" boots were innovative but not historically significant. On the other hand, the invention of the button significantly influenced the design of clothes. Throughout your research, ask the question, what is the historical significance of my research topic?

Wherever your historical research journey begins or ends, you will have fun! When you think of *Innovation in History: Impact and Change*, don't forget local or even family history. Here is an example of a family history topic:

A few years ago, Taylor Yach heard that his great-grandfather built the first snowmobile in 1897. The credit for this invention, the family claimed, had been stolen by a man named Carl J. Eliason, who is widely considered the inventor of the snowmobile. For his History Day project at D.C. Everest Junior High, Taylor did some digging. Taylor found a copy of his great-grandfather's original 1911 patent. Eliason's patent was filed in 1927. History was changed!

Sample Topics to Consider

- Longbow or the Stirrup or Gunpowder: Revolutionizing Warfare
- Metallurgy: Transforming Agricultural, Military and Artistic Tools
- Irrigation: Urbanization of Communities
- Ox Drawn Plow: Opening Trade, Transporting Goods
- Electrum: Standard Unit of Measure
- Anesthesia: Improving Surgery, Improving Health
- Waterwheel: Harnessing Energy
- The Compass and Exploration
- Lateen Sails: Sailing Against the Wind
- Gatlin Gun or Repeating Rifle: Faster than a Speeding Bullet
- Telescope: Bringing the Stars into Focus
- Gutenberg Press: Spreading Literacy to the Masses
- Heliocentric Solar System: Centering our Thoughts on Astronomy
- Mercator's Projection: A Grid of Directions
- The Sextant: Guided by the Stars
- Barometer: Under Pressure
- Pendulum Clock: Measuring Time
- Telegraph: Communicating through Code
- The Steam Engine: Faster and Stronger
- Spinning Jenny: Automation of Weaving
- Canning: Preserving Food
- Cotton Gin: Expanding Production and Slavery
- Automated Loom: Speed Weaving
- Transcontinental Railroad: Linking a Continent
- Electricity: Shedding Light
- Photography: Capturing Time
- Refrigeration: Cold Storage
- The Reaper: Slicing through Labor Costs
- Sewing Machine: Seamless Production
- Dynamite: Exploding and Expanding Construction Projects
- Plastics: The Gift that Won't Stop Giving
- Internal Combustion Engine: Speed and Energy
- Telephone: Communication Connection
- X-Ray: Seeing through the Future
- Household Vacuum: Cleaning Up
- Airplanes: Transforming Transportation: Connecting the World
- Polio Vaccine: New Hope
- Laser Technology: Curing without Cutting
- Barbed Wire: Fencing the Future



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Refer to web site for local contest dates and information. National Contest: June 13-17, 2010

