**1) Start with a current topic and work backwards to a similar event**

Students may look through newspapers, news and other current event magazines for topics and issues that are of immediate concern or interest to them. Once they find a topic, they must then “historicize” the topic. For example, a student interested in the current "swine" or "avian" flu pandemics might want turn to the Flu Pandemic of 1918 or the early responses to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. Or, a student interested in anti-war struggles might look at earlier episodes such as the world wars and Vietnam.Whatever topic they choose, they must find a similar issue or situation that happened at least 20 years in the past. Nearly 90% of the project should be based in history rather than the current topic.

**2) Trolling for topics: Learning to skim**

A National History Day coordinator offers his lesson plan for helping students develop a topic using available sources. Troll for ideas in both new and old newspaper and magazines, books, encyclopedia, etc. FIND the hidden stories yet to be told by History Day students!

[Trolling For Topics](http://www.chicagohistoryfair.org/images/stories/pdfs/1_trolling_for_topics.pdf) (Acrobat PDF) http://www.chicagohistoryfair.org/images/stories/pdfs/1\_trolling\_for\_topics.pdf

**3) Look at local history**

Local history entries tend to be judged well, perhaps because the judges don’t know enough about the topics to be overly picky or because they are excited to see their own area presented.

If interested in Tennessee History, explore the Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture available at <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net>

Or, visit the Volunteer Voices website available at [www.volunteervoices.org](http://www.volunteervoices.org)

Or, the Tennessee State Library and Archives website which has online exhibits and links to primary sources. <http://www.tn.gov/tsla/>

Or visit a museum, library, or archive website in your own community!

**4) Explore general books or history textbooks**

Scan the table of contents and index of books to find out what other historians thought was significant. These books can often serve as the first level of research about a topic and their bibliographies can give students an idea of the availability of sources as well as lead them to collections of primary sources and focused secondary sources. General history books are available at most community libraries and school libraries. Ask the librarian for some help!