

HANDOUT: THESIS “DO” AND “DON’T” STATEMENTS (1)

A thesis statement is a central thought that holds your entire History Day project together. Early in the research process we like to call this a working thesis; as you gather your information, this thesis should change based on new information and ideas. By the time you present your project, however, you need to have a concrete thesis that is supported by evidence.

Thesis = Topic + Theme + Impact. In other words, you are not just introducing your topic, you are creating an argument that expresses your topic’s significance and demonstrates how the theme plays a central part.

Boston Tea Party

Don’t: In 1773, colonists in Boston dumped tea into the harbor. Why do you think they would do that?

Why Not? This is a rhetorical question, not a thesis.

Do: In 1773, colonists in Boston protested the taxation policies of England, which they felt violated their right to “no taxation without representation.” The Sons of Liberty took on the responsibility of protesting against the Tea Act by throwing three shiploads of tea into the harbor. Determined to enforce the rule of British law over the American colonies, Parliament passed the Coercive Acts, which suspended the rights of self-government in Massachusetts and increased the calls for American independence.

Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

Don’t: Many workers died during the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in 1911 in New York City.

Why Not? This is a statement of fact. Your thesis needs to explain the significance of this topic in history.

Do: In 1911 a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City took the lives of 146 workers. The trial and debate that followed, pitted the owner’s right to control their business against their responsibility to provide a safe workplace for their employees. Although the owners were acquitted, the fire eventually resulted in stricter safety standards and increased attention for the labor movement.

Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation

Don’t: If Abraham Lincoln hadn’t given the Emancipation Proclamation, the South would have won the Civil War and there would still be slavery.

Why Not? This is “what if” history, which cannot be supported with evidence.

Do: In order to fulfill his presidential responsibility to preserve the Union, President, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, which freed the slaves in rebelling states and counties. With this proclamation, Lincoln redefined the Civil War to include freeing the slaves, which encouraged abolitionists and further undermined the principles of state’s rights that were at the heart of the Confederate rebellion.

The Nuremberg Trials

Don’t: Nazi officers committed terrible crimes during World War II and it was right to punish them.

Why Not? This is more of a philosophical opinion, not a historical thesis statement.

Do: The Nuremberg Trials were held after World War II in an attempt by the victorious Allies to hold Nazi officials responsible for their actions during World War II. In doing so, the trials established a foundation for international criminal law and the right of an international body to prosecute and punish government and military officials for their actions.

Titanic

Don’t: The sinking of the Titanic was a terrible disaster. Read more below!

Why Not? This a statement of fact. Don’t give instructions to your viewer. Explain you ideas!

Do: The 1912 sinking of the Titanic made headlines for the tremendous loss of life on the “unsinkable” ship. Investigations showed that the loss of life was compounded by a lack of safety precautions. Calls for reform confronted the competing interests of ship’s owners’ right to manage their business versus their responsibility to ensure passenger safety. In 1914 the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea established new safety policies to prevent future disasters.

Name: _____

HANDOUT: THESIS "DO" AND "DON'T" STATEMENTS (2)

1. Choose a thesis statement from the other side of this page and identify the following parts:

- Background or Build-Up to the topic: _____

- The Main Event: _____

- The Impact of the topic: _____

- The Theme Connection: _____

- What must be proven in order for this statement to be true? _____

2. Consider your own working thesis and identify:

- Background or Build-Up to the topic: _____

- The Main Event: _____

- The Impact of the topic: _____

- The Theme Connection: _____

- What must be proven in order for this statement to be true? _____

- What evidence have you found to support this – or where might you look? _____
