Triumph & Tragedy in History

Think Like a Historian! Be a History Detective While Researching Your National History Day Project!
What exactly IS history?

History is, at its most basic level, the study of people and events that lived and occurred in the past. Historians are individuals who both study and write about the past, and they are often experts in their respective fields of study. Much like detectives, historians search for clues to answer questions. Historians rely on a collection of evidence, or sources, from a variety of places to find out the specific circumstances surrounding an event.

What are primary sources?

Primary sources are documents or artifacts which come from the specific period a historian is studying. If one is studying the Trail of Tears for their National History Day: Triumph and Tragedy in History project, a historical account, such as Alexis de Tocqueville’s observations on Choctaw removal, would be considered a primary source because it is a written record of his thoughts from the period. There are several types of primary documents; let’s take a look at a few examples.

Written Documents:

The majority of the research done by historians is based on written documents. One reason historians rely on this type of evidence is because it is the easiest to verify, or check if the content is true and accurate. Examples of written documents include things such as letters, diaries, and newspaper articles. When researching written documents for your National History Day: Triumph and Tragedy in History project, make sure your documents are from reliable sources.

Artifacts:

Artifacts are objects from the past. They can be almost anything, including: weapons, clothing, eating utensils, or tools. Artifacts have the potential to tell us a great deal about the people that created and used them or things they may not have written down by examining how an object was made, what it was used for, where it was found, and who it belonged to. For example, if one is studying Oklahomans and the Vietnam War for your History Day Project, a Huey helicopter like the one that can be found on display at the Oklahoma History Center would be an artifact you could use for your History Day project.
**What are secondary sources?**

Secondary sources are sources made after an event happened, generally by individuals who do not have personal experience with the event. Secondary sources are created through the analysis and interpretation of primary sources. Secondary sources offer an excellent starting point for your National History Day: Triumph and Tragedy in History project.

History books and encyclopedias are excellent secondary sources to begin your research with because they offer short summaries of the events and people you are looking to learn more about, and often a list of relevant primary sources. Other helpful secondary sources include documentaries, which cover a broad range of time and perspectives on a subject with a brief running time. Examining the primary sources used by your chosen secondary sources is an excellent way to build an understanding of what types of research materials might be available to you and prove most useful in completing your project.

**Images:**

Historians also use pictures, paintings, and prints in their research. Images can be from newspapers, photos, books, tapestries, paintings, or other types of art made during a specific time period. When using images, it is important to take note of the perspective the image is created from to give a better idea of why it was created and what point of view it might be trying to capture.

**Oral Histories:**

Oral histories are interviews that a historian conducts with a person who experienced an event in the past. These interviews can be recorded in multiple formats, including audio, video, and even as a written transcript. Oral histories differ from interviews primarily because they are usually conducted years, if not decades, after an event. While doing research for your National History Day: Triumph and Tragedy in History project, you can go to the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Library to find oral histories that have been recorded or written down for use as a primary source.
How do we know if evidence is reliable?

Historians rely on a wide range of sources to make their arguments, but they must also check their sources to make sure the information they provide is accurate. In order to prove accuracy, there are several steps a historian must ask.

The first thing a historian must do is to look at the evidence objectively; this means, without judgement. The perspective of the historian may differ from the creator of the source material, but the historian must remain neutral in order to fully understand and interpret the people and events of the period they are studying. When you do research for your National History Day: Triumph and Tragedy in History project, you will need to make sure that all of your sources for your project are non-biased so you do not present a biased project. To do this, you must be able to recognize different perspectives and opinions in the documents you use, so your interpretation can work around them.

The second thing a historian must do is place their source material in historical context. Several questions may be used to check the authenticity of a source. If it is written, who wrote it? What is the author’s perspective? Why did they write the document? When and where was it written? Is it a reliable source?

Why or why not? What historical events occurred around the writing of the document that may have affected its content?

Similar questions must be asked about a source if it is an artifact. Who made it? What was it used for? Where and when was it made? What is the maker’s perspective? (This question is particularly useful question when examining images.) Is it similar to other items found from this time period? What may have been happening in the world to prompt the creator to make this artifact?

Historians then have to look at other artifacts from the time period and compare them. Are there other documents or artifacts that share a similar story? Are there other documents or artifacts that disagree? If there are many to look at, which ones are more reliable and why?

Finally, once the historian has verified the reliability of the source, they must look at it closely to determine the significance of the object or documents. Please use these research tips, as well as the many resources available to you on the Oklahoma National History Day website; http://www.okhistory.org/historycenter/historyday


Images from OK History Center Curator Camp
Tackling the Theme:

“Triumph and Tragedy in History”
National History Day 2019

The 2019 theme, “Triumph & Tragedy in History,” offers the opportunity to explore many topics and time periods from local, national, and world history. The most important thing when considering the topic for your National History Day project is to choose a topic that interests you! You will be putting a lot of time and effort into your project and it will be much easier to stay interested if you are passionate about the subject. An effective way to think about this project is to think of it as an argument. What do you need to win an argument? Pretend you are arguing with a teacher, how many sources do you need to present a good case? What types of resources could prove useful while making your argument? How do you show how your topic fits the theme of triumph and tragedy?

Begin by considering what you think a triumph or tragedy means. Can an event be both a triumph and a tragedy for different individuals or groups? Might a single event be both a triumph and a tragedy for the same individual or group? Can triumph eventually lead to tragedy or vice versa? Use the 4Ts worksheet (the activity on the next page) to test a sample topic and see if it would make a good History Day project!

Although you might initially be drawn to large scale triumphs (military victories, important inventions, etc.) and tragedies (the Trail of Tears, the Spanish Influenza, etc.), think outside the box and focus on examining a triumph or tragedy that is not as well-known. Investigating a lesser-known topic or an Oklahoma history topic will make a more fascinating, captivating, and competitive entry! Many students are interested in things like sports, food, fashion, music, etc. Those are all great places to start! They can lead to the discovery and recognition of many historic triumphs and tragedies.

When you first begin considering a topic, start big: What time period or area interests you the most? Focus on a specific triumph or tragedy that occurred in this setting: Is there a specific event that you have always wanted to learn more about? Narrow your topic further: Is there a historical group or figure that was crucial to the triumph or tragedy?

For example, say you are interested in women’s history, specifically women’s suffrage. Narrow your focus from the national level to either regionally or locally. Did your town have a suffragette or anti-suffrage group? What were the motivations of each group? Identify key figures and motivations. Who were the key figures associated with the group and what methods did they use to convey their message?

Once you have selected a topic, the next step is to create a thesis, or main idea, for your project. Building off of our women’s suffrage example, a sample thesis statement would be: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of Oklahoma Territory fought for the right to vote in school board elections in 1890, an issue that eventually led to the triumph of women earning the right to vote.

Check out our website, http://www.okhistory.org/historycenter/historyday, for more resources to help you with your project!
SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN OKLAHOMA PRECEDED STATEHOOD BY ALMOST TWO DECADES; THE WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION (WCTU), EMERGED IN THE TERRITORY IN 1890.

By 1893, suffragists in Oklahoma experienced a minor triumph when they achieved the right to vote in school elections, though their direct political influence remained extremely limited because they were left out of other elections. In 1895, suffrage clubs emerged across the territory in cities such as Oklahoma City, El Reno, Perkins, and Kingfisher, as well as several others. Support for suffrage spread across the state as a result of the merger of the WCTU with the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), which led to the creation of the Woman Suffrage Association of Oklahoma. The establishment of a local organization allowed Oklahoma suffragists to tailor their message to appeal to the local community.

The statehood movement presented the next realistic opportunity for women in Oklahoma to achieve the right to vote. Near the turn of the century, Dr. Frances Woods, a representative of the NAWSA from South Dakota, traveled to the Indian Territory to assist in the organization of the Indian Women’s Woman Suffrage League of Indian Territory. In 1904 representatives from both Oklahoma and Indian territories met and established the Woman Suffrage Association of Oklahoma and Indian Territory.

With the passage of the Oklahoma Enabling Act in 1906 and impending statehood, suffragists renewed their call for the right to vote. Leaders of the suffrage movement, primarily from Oklahoma but including nationally prominent suffragists, lobbied a number of different groups in the hope that their message would reach and resonate with as many people as possible. Notable organizations included: the Grand Army of the Republic, Twin Territorial Labor Union, and the Women’s Relief Corps. The period immediately preceding statehood also saw the continued growth and expansion of suffrage clubs as the suffragist message further spread throughout the territory.

Although suffragists in Oklahoma and Indian territories organized an effective suffrage campaign, delegates to the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention voted against women’s suffrage. Led by the president of the convention, William H. “Alfalfa Bill” Murray, those against women’s suffrage claimed that integration of women into the electorate would weaken society, as it removed women from their traditional roles as homemakers.

Suffragists in Oklahoma experienced another tragedy with the failure of the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention to recognize their right to vote. However, Oklahoma suffragists remained active through their new organization, the Oklahoma Woman’s Suffrage Association, and waited until the next favorable political situation offered another opportunity for success. World War I brought an emphasis to the ideas of rights and citizenship and expanded the role of women outside the home, providing the next opportunity for Oklahoma suffragists. In 1917, the state legislature submitted a constitutional amendment for women’s suffrage which would be voted on in the next general election.
Oklahomans voted to approve State Question 97 on November 5, 1918, which gave women the right to vote in local, state, and national elections. The vote proved successful even over the opposition of the Oklahoma Anti-Suffrage Association, which formed specifically to oppose the state question. Less than two years later, on February 28, 1920, the state legislature ratified the Nineteenth Amendment which prohibited the federal government from denying citizens the right to vote on the basis of sex. The Oklahoma Woman’s Suffrage Association, a long-time supporter of women’s rights, disbanded shortly thereafter and made way for a new women’s rights organization, the League of Women Voters, which would take up the mantle of the suffrage organizations and work for women’s issues. The Nineteenth Amendment represented the triumph of the fight for women’s suffrage in both Oklahoma and the United States as a whole, built by decades of activity by suffragists.

Three decades of agitation for women’s suffrage in Oklahoma produced a number of both triumphs and tragedies. What are some of the specific events associated with women’s suffrage in Oklahoma that we might identify as either a triumph or a tragedy, or how might a specific event represent both ideas? How might anti-suffrage activists have thought about these events differently?


Cited:
Katz Drug Store, located at 200 West Main Street in downtown Oklahoma City, represented an important location for the Civil Rights Movement both at the state level and nationally. The location in Oklahoma City was part of a chain of stores that stretched across the region, and welcomed African American customers, though they were not allowed to be served at the lunch counter.

Even during the 1950s, Oklahoma had a long history as a segregated state. Segregation in the state developed both through local customs and laws. Segregation meant the enforced separation of different racial groups in a country, community, or establishment. When the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention met in 1906, delegates openly discussed the use of segregation in different spaces within the state. Although segregation did not become part of the state constitution, thanks to the intervention of Theodore Roosevelt who threatened to veto the document if it included the segregation of public transportation in the state, immediately after adoption of the state constitution the legislature passed laws that allowed segregation in many public places. Spaces that rapidly segregated in Oklahoma included restaurants, cemeteries, housing, and even hospitals. Katz Drug Store fit squarely within this framework of segregation, but in the late 1950s Oklahomans began to push back against segregation and sit-ins found important success.

Katz Drug Store fit squarely within this framework of segregation, but in the late 1950s Oklahomans began to push back against segregation and sit-ins found important success.

The sit-ins at Katz Drug Store began on August 19, 1958, under the leadership of Clara Luper, a history teacher from Dunjee High School in Spencer, Oklahoma. At the time, Luper also advised the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Youth Council in Oklahoma City. Under her leadership, a group of young African American men and women walked into the Katz Drug Store and ordered hamburgers and cokes at the lunch counter. When the staff and management denied the students service they simply remained in their seats. Students endured hostile behavior from members of the public, and the management threatened police involvement if they would not move. The sit-in continued for two more days until management eventually allowed them to order. Nonviolent protests, advancing the ideas of both Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi, proved successful in advancing the Civil Rights movement in Oklahoma, though without legislation the influence often remained limited to individual restaurants or stores.
Success at Katz Drug Store led Clara Luper to expand her use of sit-in protests across the state. Local protests found success across the state, though most notably in large cities including Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Lawton. Luper became known as the “mother” of the Civil Rights movement in Oklahoma. However, success was not solely the result of adult activism; children and teenagers played a vital role in protesting for full rights for African Americans in Oklahoma.

Downtown Oklahoma City experienced widespread construction during the urban renewal efforts of the 1960s and 1970s, and one of the buildings demolished to make space was the Katz Drug Store at 200 West Main Street. However, the memory of the sit-ins and their influence on Oklahoma City remain well known across the city and the state to this day.

Civil Rights activism provides a lens to look through to better understand the conflict between the African American community of Oklahoma City, as well as their supporters, and the state that actively limited their rights as citizens. What are some triumphs and tragedies from this period we can recognize in both the events at Katz Drug Store specifically and the wider Civil Rights movement in Oklahoma and the United States? How might the nonviolent approach used by Clara Luper and her students have shaped the reaction to or success of their activities?

For more information on the Civil Rights Movement in Oklahoma visit http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CI010

BELOW: Children from the NAACP Youth Council took part in sit-ins in 1958 to desegregate the Katz Drug Store lunch counter in downtown Oklahoma City. The late civil rights activist and teacher Clara Luper organized the Youth Council and served as adviser. (John Melton Collection, OHS.) Source: https://newsok.com/article/5602571/african-american-history-in-oklahoma.Contains-sit-ins-soldiers-entrepreneurs-and-more
Oklahomans participated in both major triumphs associated with the space program and tragedies that radically changed our relationship with space. July 20, 2019 will be the fiftieth anniversary of one of the major milestones of the space program, the Apollo 11 moon landing. Though no Oklahomans participated in the Apollo 11 flight, they proved vital to the advancement of the space program up to that point, and the continued success of the program afterwards.

In 1959, NASA selected the agency’s first group of astronauts, which included Leroy Gordon Cooper a native of Shawnee, Oklahoma. Cooper participated in both Project Mercury and Project Gemini, the first and second human spaceflight programs operated by NASA. His participation in these programs proved vital to the success of later manned missions, including Apollo 11, because they proved humans could survive in space for extended periods of time. Cooper also served as the backup commander for Apollo 10, which would be led by fellow Oklahoman Thomas Stafford. NASA selected Stafford to join the second group of astronauts in 1962. Stafford became the second Oklahoman in space as the pilot of Gemini 6 in December 1965 and then returned to space in June 1966 as the commander of Gemini 9. Both missions tested the viability of the meeting of two spacecraft in space, a maneuver which would be critical for the success of any attempts to reach the moon.

Although Oklahomans already played vital roles in the early manned spaceflight missions that NASA organized under Project Mercury and Project Gemini, all of the collected information and experience would be put to the test as the Apollo Program turned international attention squarely toward the moon. Thomas Stafford again played a vital role in advancing the United States space program as Commander of the Apollo 10 mission in May 1969. Apollo 10 enabled Apollo 11 to successfully land on the moon because the mission tested many of the parts and systems without the actual landing.
The Apollo 11 spaceflight lasted just over eight days, beginning July 16, 1969, with a Saturn V rocket launch from the Kennedy Space Center, and ending July 24, 1969 when the command module splashed down in the Pacific Ocean. On July 20, 1969, the lunar module, codenamed Eagle, triumphantly landed on the surface of the moon allowing astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin to exit the vehicle and walk around the lunar surface. This event secured the complete attention of the world and fulfilled President Kennedy’s goal that the United States would put a man on the moon by the end of the 1960s. The success of the Apollo 11 spaceflight also insured American dominance in the Space Race, a Cold War competition between the United States and Soviet Union concerning supremacy in spaceflight capability.

One of the most potentially tragic events associated with NASA also involved an Oklahoman. Fred Haise, a member of the Oklahoma Air National Guard and graduate of the University of Oklahoma, acted as the Lunar Module Pilot on the ill-fated Apollo 13. Apollo 13 launched as the third Apollo mission scheduled to land on the moon, but the explosion of an oxygen tank two days into the mission placed all three astronauts in severe danger which they only overcame through a series of makeshift repairs and the skill of the crew.
Although spaceflight in the United States during the late 1950s and 1960s remained largely the domain of men, the first female astronaut trainee called Oklahoma home. In August 1960, Geraldyn Cobb of Norman, Oklahoma went through NASA’s training program and emerged as the organization’s consultant regarding the use of female astronauts in the future. However, by 1963, NASA decided against using women in manned spaceflights and Cobb resigned from her position with the space program. Instead she devoted her life to performing humanitarian aid missions to the people of the Amazon rainforest.

Oklomans played a vital role in the success of the American space program organized through NASA during the late 1950s and 1960s as the agency made progress towards the goal of landing a man on the moon. The Apollo 11 moon landing represented a massive success for the American people, and emerged as an event that the entire nation took pride in. However, the missions of Project Mercury and Project Gemini, as well as the early Apollo Program proved absolutely necessary to its success. The American space journey captured a series of triumphs and tragedies, both major and minor, which culminated in the achievement of one of NASA’s founding goals-landing on the moon.

What are some of the triumphs and tragedies we can identify in Project Mercury, Project Gemini, and the Apollo Program? Could some of the events we have identified be both triumphs and tragedies? What might these events look like from a point of view outside the United States, possibly from the Soviet Union?

For more information, visit http://www.okhistory.org/kids/space.php