LESSON: PROJECT ORGANIZATION – THESIS DEVELOPMENT

Essential Questions: 1. What is a thesis statement? 2. How is a History Day thesis statement similar to or different from an English/Language Arts thesis statement?

Objective: At the end of this lesson students will be able to write a thesis statement for their History Day project.

Grade Level: 6 – 12

Time Needed: 90 minutes

Materials: Worksheet: Thesis Development, pencil, notes

Procedure

1. Ask students if they know the definition of a thesis statement. Based on their responses, expand on what they already know discuss the definition and role of a thesis statement. A thesis statement:
   - Tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.
   - Is a road map for the project. In other words, it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the project.
   - Directly answers the question asked of you. A thesis is an interpretation of a question or subject, not the subject itself. The subject, or topic, of an essay might be World War II or Moby Dick; a thesis must then offer a way to understand the war or the novel.
   - Makes a claim that others might dispute.
   - Is usually a single sentence somewhere in your first paragraph that presents your argument to the reader. The rest of the paper, the body of the essay, gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the reader of the logic of your interpretation.

2. Based on the experiences that students may have had in other classes, discuss what students might be familiar with for writing thesis statements in English class.

3. Go, write! (Just kidding). Using the Worksheet: Thesis Development, walk through a sample thesis writing process with a topic that students already know. Pick a topic that no one has – so you are not writing a thesis for a student. Abraham Lincoln and Rosa Parks are provided as samples. Before beginning, discuss topic narrowing with students: What specific issues are we going to focus on for either of those topics – we won’t be able to cover their entire life.

4. Get students to brainstorm what they already know about either topic. Write Abraham Lincoln or Rosa Parks on the board and list about five or six facts about either of them.

5. In looking at the facts on the board, it could be a great time to discuss the balance between interesting vs. important. Using some of the facts on the board, think also about information you want to include in your statement. If I am doing a project on Abraham Lincoln, is his birthday important? Should I put that in my thesis statement?


7. Once you get to the “why is this important” and “what was the impact” questions, it’s a good time to discuss how these are key questions for thesis statements. The answers to these questions will let people know why this topic is important to study.

8. Before writing the thesis statement, brainstorm and discuss the characteristics of a good History Day thesis. (Addresses a specific issue, discusses significance in history, has a theme connection)
9. Ask students to begin completing this worksheet for their own topic. Remind students that their thesis can – and should – change over time as they find more research.

Lesson Extension/Alternative

Individual Thesis Discussions: Use the outside resources such as History Day mentors, staff, parents, and other adults in the community to help students and sit with them to prompt them to answer questions.

Reverse Thesis Statement: Have a thesis statement on the board. Using the Thesis Development Worksheet, take it apart. Find the answers in the thesis statement (who, what, etc.). Then ask how this can be proven and help the students answer that question by giving examples of research and sources already discovered. The thesis statement is like a road map of the project. They should also find a clue for background, build-up, impact, and significance.

Thesis Pitfalls: If students have already written thesis statements, discuss common pitfalls in History Day thesis statements. Things to avoid when writing a thesis statement: hope, forever, always, dreams. These are very broad words and can be challenging to prove.

Current Events: Instead of using an historic topic as the class thesis statement, write one using a current event or popular culture issue/item as most students will be more familiar with it.

Additional Resources: The following resources may be useful in familiarizing students with the characteristics of good thesis statements:

- Shows the progression of the development of thesis statements, encouraging students to keep improving their thesis after the first draft.