

# LESSON: RESEARCH – HISTORICAL CONTEXT

**Essential Questions:** 1. What is historical context? 2. How does it fit in with my topic?

**Objective:** At the end of this lesson students will be able to understand historical context and its importance in building their historical narrative.

**Grade Level:** 6 – 12

**Time Needed:** 50 minutes

**Materials:** Students should bring to class note sheets they have already filled out and sources they can physically hold onto such as a printed article, book, photo, journal, or newspaper.

## Procedure

1. Start a movie that many students haven't seen, but is appropriate, in the middle. Consider older movies such as *Citizen Kane*, *Rear Window*, *Metropolis*, or any silent movie. Watch 10 minutes and then stop. Ask these questions:
  - a. *What do you think?*
  - b. *Are you confused?*
  - c. *What questions do you have?*
  - d. *Do you want to see more?*
2. As a class, discuss: *What happens when you start in the middle of a movie? Who only watches the middle? Do you walk into a theater in the middle?*
3. Explain that in most cases, we need set-up and/or background information to fill in holes in our project. To understand why things have happened you need to set up the context and what happened previously.
4. How does this apply to your History Day research? There are usually five sections to a History Day project.
  - a. Historical Context
    - i. **Background:** Information about the topic with big ideas. This is usually a description of the existing problem, condition or situation that will change as a result of the Main Event. What was the background in the class example of a project we saw in earlier lessons?
    - ii. **Build-up:** More specific information about the topic including events that directly lead to your main event. What was the build-up in earlier lessons?
  - b. **Main Event** (Heart of the Story): The heart of your story and the main focus of your project. What was the heart of the story in earlier lessons?
  - c. Historical Significance
    - i. **Impact:** The short-term impact of your main event. What was the impact from the story in earlier lessons?
    - ii. **Legacy:** Long-term impact of your topic, usually telling the reader why this is important in history. What was the historical significance of the story from earlier lessons? Why is that important in history?
5. Today we are looking at the historical context, meaning the background and build-up of your story. You are going to look at sources you have already gathered. *What keywords or search terms are going to help you? What new research questions do you need to write?*

6. Look back at the notes and sources you brought with you. *What do they already tell you about historical context? How do they fill in the background of the story? Do not look at new sources yet, only look at your current sources and notes to see if they give you clues and information.*
7. Think about the connection between the background and the main argument of History Day projects. *What is the connection between the build-up and the main argument? What is the cause and what is the effect? In the story from the introductory lesson, what is the connection between the main topic (heart of the story) and the background information given? What do people need to know to understand your story?*

### **Lesson Extension/Alternative**

**Model the Process with the Exhibit Board Layout:** Use the **Exhibit Board Layout** to accommodate learners who need reminders, have the definitions of the five sections on a sheet along with a graphic organizer to help them remember the differences between the sections.

**Background and Build-Up Checklists:** Some students need the sections broken down. Use the **Worksheet: Checklists for Background and Build-Up** sections to guide students through each of these parts.

**Explore Historical Context:** The **Worksheet: Historical Context** gives students guiding questions to begin thinking about what additional areas of historical context they may want to explore with their research, including issues both before and after the main events of their topic.