

Social Studies Research: Preparing Student Projects

(from the teaching archives of Dr. Glen Blankenship)

I. CHOOSE A TOPIC.

A. Social Studies Disciplines

1. ANTHROPOLOGY – People are survivors.
I am a survivor.
2. ECONOMICS – People are consumers and producers.
I am a consumer and producer.
3. GEOGRAPHY – People are earth dwellers.
I am an earth dweller.
4. HISTORY – People are descendants.
I am a descendant.
5. POLITICAL SCIENCE – People are citizens.
I am a citizen.
6. SOCIOLOGY/SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY – People are members of groups.
I am a member of many groups.
– People are individuals.
I am an individual.

[Ann Angell, Emory University]

- B. Think of a current topic about which you like to read and study; think of problems you would like to see solved.
- C. Look through newspapers, a variety of magazines (*Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Psychology Today*, *National Geographic*, etc.) and other current publications. Read current editorials, listen to radio and television news broadcasts.
- D. Brainstorm possible topics. Talk to parents, teachers, and other students about topics that may interest you.
- E. Identify any bias you may have concerning a possible topic. Determine if you can sort through the data and not be prejudiced.

II. FORMULATE AN APPROPRIATE RESEARCH QUESTION.

- A. List ten questions that deal with your topic.
- B. Ask each of these questions about your possible research questions:
 1. Can you do *original* research on the topic? (preferable)
 2. Is the topic relevant? Will the answer be of any benefit to you or your community? Ask “so what?” about the question.
 3. Does the question use words that need to be defined?
 4. Did you avoid questions with “yes” or “no” answers?
 5. Do you already know the answer to the question? (avoid)
 6. Are you biased or prejudiced about the topic?
 7. Will you be able to draw some kind of conclusion to the question?
 8. Can you find information in your community on the topic?

- C. Narrow your list of questions to three.
 - 1. Discuss the questions with parents, teachers, and friends.
 - 2. Choose the *best* research question.

III. DETERMINE THE PURPOSE FOR CHOOSING THE TOPIC AND QUESTION.

- A. Why have you chosen this topic?
- B. Write a paragraph explaining why.

IV. CHOOSE METHODS OF RESEARCH.

- A. Begin in the Media Center.
 - 1. Books
 - 2. Magazines (*use the Reader's Guide*)
 - 3. Newspapers (*scan indices for the past several years*)
 - 4. Government Documents
 - 5. Vertical Files
- B. Choose at least one (preferably 2 or 3) original means of research.
 - 1. Interviews
 - 2. Polls
 - 3. Oral Histories
 - 4. Case Studies
 - 5. Questionnaires
 - 6. Photographs
 - 7. Movies/Sound Recordings
 - 8. Experiments/Observations
 - 9. Maps
 - 10. Physical Remains (buildings, artifacts, landscapes)
 - 11. Unpublished Manuscripts (wills, letters, deeds, minutes, diaries, family Bible)

V. CONDUCT THE RESEARCH.

- A. Devise a timeline.
- B. Keep a daily journal of the progress (both successes and setbacks) of the progress of your research.
- C. Roadblocks may occur during the research process. When they happen, do not quit. Talk with your parents/teacher and revise the plan. Not finding an answer may be just as significant as finding one.

VI. SUMMARIZE THE DATA.

- A. Outlines/Essays
- B. Statistics (in the form of graphs, tables, etc.)
- C. Photography/Diagrams/Drawings

VII. DRAW A CONCLUSION.

- A. Answer the question using the data collected during the research. The project is of no use if you do not answer the question.
- B. Use decision-making charts to help you draw a conclusion.

VIII. DETERMINE A PRESENTATION FORMAT.

- A. Select a format (visual, written, dramatic presentation, audio, etc.)
- B. Use charts, graphs, photographs, drawings, maps, artifacts, diagrams, films, diagrams, political cartoons, murals, recordings, slides, videotapes, computers, etc.