



# Teens Take Over

*(In Useful,  
Non-Scary Ways)*

One way you can engage teens at your museum is to have them present their History Day projects as part of your programming. Photo courtesy of the Ohio History Connection.

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Every educator, program coordinator, and interpreter would love to see an active museum floor filled with articulate, excited teenagers. Wouldn't it be fantastic to hear them sharing stories, asking questions, and confidently engaging with the public?

The Visitor Experience Team at the Ohio History Center has been brainstorming ways to involve teens in our events and programs in a way that is meaningful, as well as doable. Like a lot of organizations, we struggle with logistics, like testing schedules, Human Resources, rules on supervision, and finding kids who have that spark: that love of history that we all know and want to foster.

What if we could find this seemingly magical group of kids and give them the museum? What would they do? What would they say?

We realized quite quickly that we already HAVE these kids, we just didn't know it.

History Day was started in Ohio in 1974. It was the first program of its kind, and is now a national competition. The Ohio History Day sees over 8,000 kids participate at the regional level and over 600 at the state level each year. Students from all over the state can participate in

five different categories as either an individual or group. They range in age from sixth graders through high school. The Ohio History Day Youth Contest provides an opportunity for fourth and fifth grade students to be part of the state competition in two different categories as either an individual or group.

What we're going to try at the History Center is actually pretty simple: invite History Day high school students into our museum and let them show, play, or perform their projects to an audience as part of the "real" programming. We're calling this set of teen-created programming History (every)Day.

Our Saturday program schedule might include a noted scholar doing a lecture, a History (every)Day documentary, and a guided tour led by an interpreter. We won't set the student work aside as by-kids-for-kids. For this to succeed, the students need to be given the same authority as any other presenter. This might be scary, but it might also be the spark that starts some amazing conversations between the staff, public, and the students.

This winter we are going to try this concept with two local schools that have robust History Day programs. We're targeting January and February so that the students are able to practice their presentations as part of our programming before regional competitions in March. Our current plan is to pick two Saturdays

during which we will integrate History (every)Day presentations into our regular weekend programming. We'll use the annual History Day theme (in 2016 it's *Expedition, Exploration and Exchange in History*) to unify all of the day's programs.

One of the goals of History (every)Day is to model a program that can be used at any historic site or public library across the state. That's where you come in. We'd like to invite you to try out the program for yourself.

We're getting together a PDF packet of sample judging sheets, tips, and general information on the History Day program to get you started. We can even help put you in touch with your History Day Regional Coordinator if you don't already have a contact. Let's start a conversation about how it's working and what we learn from supporting these students, while enriching our visitors' experience.

If you are interested in trying it out, please let me know. We can send you the materials when they are ready, and you can try it, adapt it, and run with it. Let's see what happens!

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