

For Middle and High School Students of History

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H.W. Brands was born in Oregon, went to college in California, sold cutlery across the American West and earned graduate degrees in mathematics and history in Oregon and Texas. He taught at Vanderbilt University and Texas A&M University before joining the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin, where he holds the Jack S. Blanton Sr. Chair in History. His latest book is *The Zealot and the Emancipator*.

The History Class That Changed My Life

When I was in ninth grade, my history teacher conducted an experiment. He divided his class

of thirty students into two groups. One group, the control group, followed the standard curriculum of lectures, textbook chapters, workbook pages, written assignments and tests. The other group, the experimental group, did something quite different. The experimental students simply read books. The books were not textbooks, packed with information, but biographies and historical novels, filled with fascinating people and riveting plots.

I happened to be one of the experimental students, and my experience in that ninth-grade class was a large part of the reason I became a history teacher and a writer of history books. I had been interested in things historical since I was a small child. I grew up in Oregon, and my grandparents had a summer house in the mountains along the final part of the Oregon Trail, the emigrant route from the East to the Willamette Valley. I and my brother and two sisters would pretend we were kids on a wagon train coming to Oregon. We would run around in the woods, make campfires, and sleep in an old wagon on my grandparents'

property. There was a nearby hike down an abandoned road that ran past the gravesite of a woman who had died on the Oregon Trail. No one knew just when she had died or under what circumstances, and so we would imagine that she had fallen ill or been kicked by a horse or bitten by a rattlesnake. No one knew her name, so we just called her the Pioneer Woman.

At night, in front of the fireplace in my grandparents' house, my mother or father would read to us from a book called *Children of the Covered Wagon*. It was a novel about life on the Oregon Trail, and the main characters were a set of siblings not unlike me and my siblings—or so I imagined. In fact, the book gave us ideas for the scenarios we would play out the next day in our own version of the pioneer story.

When summers would end, we would return to our own house, in Portland. But the adventures would continue. Portland is located just across the Columbia River from Vancouver, Washington, site of the historic Fort Vancouver, a trading post of

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the Hudson's Bay Company. The original fort had vanished, but the park service had built a replica. My grandmother liked to visit the fort, and she took us kids along. Another historical novel, called *Young Mac of Fort Vancouver*, told the story of a boy about my age whose parents died and who was sent to live with John McLaughlin, director of operations at the fort. Once more my imagination tied me to the past: in my mind, I was Young Mac, clambering around the fort, paddling a canoe across the Columbia River, and hunting for beavers with the local Indians.

All through elementary school, while I was reading about the kids on the Oregon Trail and at Fort Vancouver, and pretending to be one, it never occurred to me that kind of reading and mind play could have anything to do with school. Then, by chance, I found myself in the experimental group in my ninth grade history class, and all we did was that kind of reading. I suppose we must have written book reports, but I know we didn't take any tests or do any assignments from workbooks. The point of the experiment was to see what happened when students were given books that had been written not to convey information so much as to provide pleasure. The authors of textbooks know that their readers read the books because they have to; if the students don't, they will fail the course. The authors of the biographies and novels we were reading knew that most of their readers did not have to read them. The readers read them because they *liked* them.

And we did like them. At least, I did. That was the best class I took in all my years in school. And it had a lot to do with my becoming a history teacher. It convinced me that history could be fun if taught the right way. I taught in high school before I started teaching college, and for both my high school students and my college students I have treated history as a great story. I never ask my students about dates in history, and I rarely quiz them on information one could find in an encyclopedia or on the Internet. Instead I tell them stories: about real people, people often like themselves. These people go on adventures: Teddy Roosevelt to East Africa on a safari. But they also confront the same kinds of personal questions my students face: should Debbie Read trust boyfriend Ben Franklin's promise that he won't run off to London again and leave her behind? (She did, they got married—and he did run off to London again.)

At the beginning of each semester, I tell my students that I don't really care how much information they acquire in my class. These days, information is cheap and available at the touch of a phone. What I do care about is that they discover that the past is full of captivating people and stories. If they make that discovery, they will teach themselves history for the rest of their lives—much the way I have been teaching myself history since that ninth grade class. ■



JOIN THE NATIONAL HISTORY CLUB

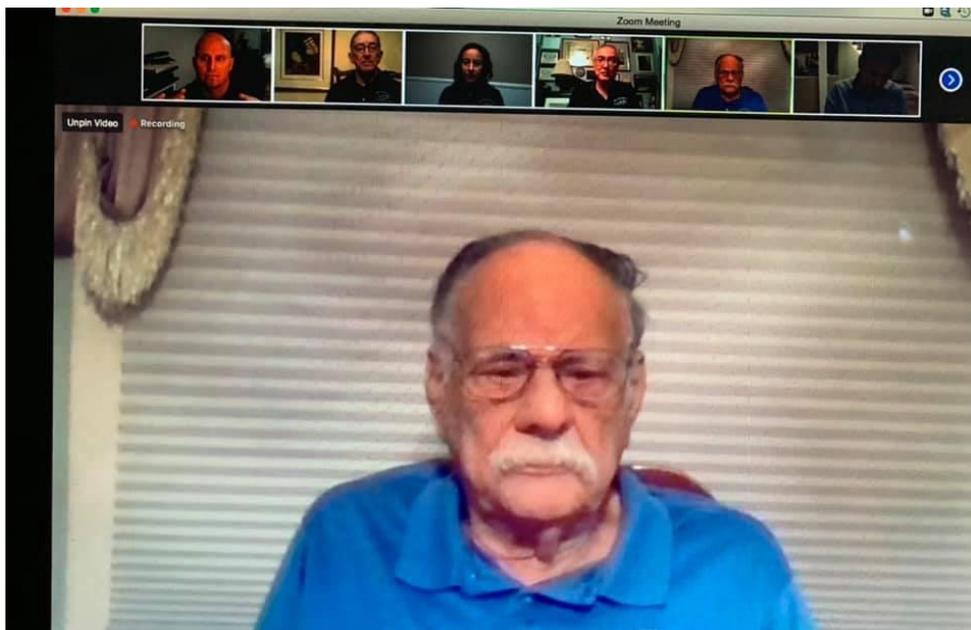
When you join the NHC, you join students and teachers from around the country learning, reading, writing, and living history. The NHC's main goal is to bring together students and teachers with a real passion for history, helping them learn from each other's ideas, experiences, and stories, which are distributed through our tri-annual Newsletter, monthly eBlast, and various award programs.

For more information on how to start a new club or enroll an existing one, please visit:
<https://www.nationalhistoryclub.org/joiningthenhc>

Access to the NHC network, which includes chapters in 45 states and over 18,000 members, is a great benefit of joining the NHC. We encourage you to read about other chapters in your state or across the country and explore new opportunities! To explore specific sites click on the bolded text to be redirected!



Former Port Authority Police Officer **Will Jimeno** was our October Zoom presentation to members of the NHC throughout the country. Mr. Jimeno spent 13 hours trapped in the rubble of the Twin Towers on 9/11 and was one of the first responders who went into the South Tower that day.



The NHC was pleased to hold a very special Veterans Day presentation that was attended by over 150 students and Advisors. We were joined by folks from the *USS Indianapolis* Legacy Education Committee, including **Dick Thelen**, a 93 year-old survivor. Mr. Thelen retold the story of the *USS Indianapolis* and its sinking and subsequent rescue. It was an inspiring story on a meaningful day!



Mineola High School (TX) seniors **Taylor Ihlenfeldt** and **Jonah Fischer** commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II on Sept. 2. They also read the names of the 16 men who died in the war from their town.



Sullivan High School (IN) was not able to hold their standard Veterans Day program this fall, but their club members created a Veterans Day video alongside members of the National Honor Society. This video was then sent along to their entire corporation --- two elementary schools, two middle schools, and their high school. Please check out the video at this [link!](#)



The Christian Home Educators Connection (MS) holding their first outdoor meeting of the school year!



Frankton High School (IN) students doing some headstone tracing during a local cemetery tour. Students learned about the founders of their town and other notables buried on the grounds!



Temple High School (GA) making a difference in their community by holding a voter registration drive this past October!



Welcome to Humphreys High School, a Department of Defense school in South Korea!



Franklin Central High School (IN) checking in during one of their monthly meetings this fall!

LESSONS OF LEADERSHIP CONTEST

Hometown Heroes - Honoring Our Community

* Guidelines:

We often recognize and honor figures of national prominence who have made a difference for our country. Yet, there are many individuals in our local communities who have had a sizable influence on our towns, cities, and states. These people are from all different eras and backgrounds: It's the educator who your school is named after who opened it back in the 1800s. It's the World War II veteran who fought for our country and has resided in your town for the past 50 years. It's the past mayor of your city or town who was the driving force behind modernizing where you live. It's the nurse or doctor who has been on the front lines this past year tirelessly doing life-saving work in their field. Hometown Heroes are all around us—even if sometimes we don't realize it—and it's time to honor their legacies.

The NHC encourages student members to select a figure (local or state-wide) and examine how that person's actions helped make a lasting and positive impact on history. We strongly encourage students to look for unique figures who may not be known to the general population. Contest entries can be submitted in any three of the following formats:

* An essay of not more than 2,000 words, supplemented with a thorough bibliography and endnotes. Entries may be submitted in either of the following forms: 1) Microsoft Word document or 2) PDF document.

* A documentary or PowerPoint presentation that reflects your ability to communicate your figure's importance, and also helps you develop skills in using photographs, video, graphic presentations, etc. Documentaries should not exceed more than 10 minutes, and sources used should be credited in an annotated bibliography.

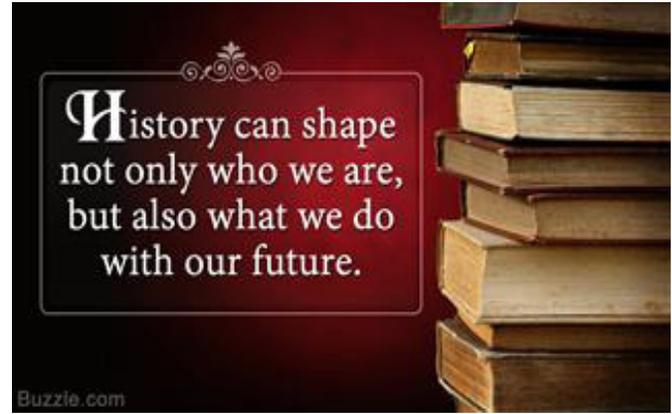
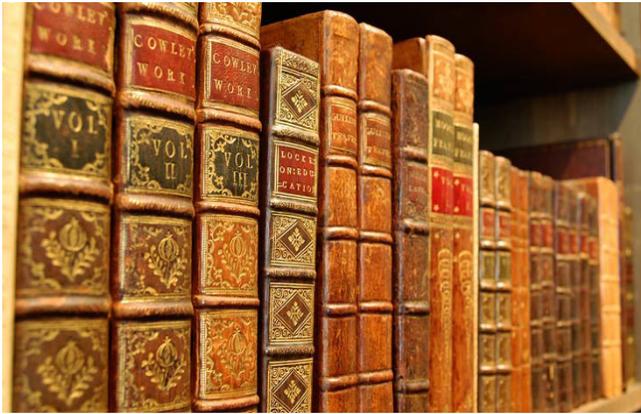
* A website that reflects your ability to use website design software and computer technology to communicate how your historical figure influenced history. Your website should be an interactive experience with a collection of web pages, interconnected with hyperlinks, that presents primary and secondary sources and interactive multimedia.

Entries must be received by April 10, 2021 and can be emailed to Bob Nasson at rnasson@nationalhistoryclub.org (please type "Lessons of Leadership" in the subject line). Submissions are judged by the NHC Advisory Board and winners will be announced at the end of April.

Awards:

First Place - \$1,000
Second Place - \$500 (one prize)
Third Place - \$250 (two prizes)

The NHC is proud to have the support of over 60 college history departments! We hope that any of our members who are interested in majoring in history in college will visit a college's website listed down below to find out more about the history department and its offerings.



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| American University | Marquette University | Texas Christian University |
| Baylor University | Massachusetts Institute of Technology | Union College |
| Boston University | Messiah College | University of Alabama |
| Brandeis University | Mount Holyoke College | University of Arkansas |
| Carnegie Mellon University | Northern Illinois University | University at Buffalo |
| Coe College | Northwestern University | University of Chicago |
| DePaul University | Oberlin College | University of Cincinnati |
| Drew University | Ohio State University | University of Colorado |
| Georgia Tech University | Princeton University | UMass Amherst |
| Gettysburg College | Rhodes College | University of Mississippi |
| Grand Valley State University | Rice University | University of North Carolina |
| Franklin & Marshall College | Rochester Institute of Technology | University of Pennsylvania |
| Harvard University | Rollins College | University of Rhode Island |
| Hofstra University | Santa Clara University | University of Tulsa |
| Indiana University | Skidmore College | University of Utah |
| James Madison University | Southern Methodist University | University of Vermont |
| Johns Hopkins University | Southwestern University | University of Wyoming |
| Lawrence University | Stanford University | Vanderbilt University |
| Louisiana State University | Suffolk University | Vassar College |
| Loyola Marymount University | Swarthmore College | Wake Forest University |
| Loyola University Maryland | Syracuse University | Western Carolina University |

NATIONAL HISTORY CLUB

The NHC would like to express our gratitude to the following people and organizations who make our important work possible...

John Abele	Smithsonian Institution
HISTORY®	Society of Architectural Historians
George Washington's Mount Vernon	The Concord Review
The HBE Foundation	The Churchill Centre
Agricultural History Society	The History List
American Association for State and Local History	Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund
American Civil War Museum	Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library & Museum
American Historical Association	Patrick Allitt (Professor, Emory)
Boyertown Museum of Historic Vehicles	Carter Bacon
Gilder Lehrman Institute	Peter Baldwin (Professor, UCLA)
HarperCollins Publishing	Rick & Barbara Berenson
History News Network	Will Fitzhugh
History 500	Joan & Rick Gier
Laurel Hill Cemetery	Bill Haponski
Museum of Florida History	Elizabeth Jones
National Council for History Education	William Jordan (Professor, Princeton)
National Vietnam War Museum	Rod McCaslin
National World War I Museum	Guy Rogers (Professor, Wellesley)
National World War II Museum	Gary Rowe
Omohundro Institute of Early American History	Henry Seng
Organization of American Historians	Art Snyder
Parkview High School (GA)	Rick Sperry
Penguin Random House	Lisa Wingate

The National History Club is a 501(c)(3) organization that relies on grants and donations to support efforts. If you are passionate about history and would like to contribute to our mission of promoting history at the secondary level please contact Robert Nasson (rnasson@nationalhistoryclub.org).