

The Humanities in Our Lives



THE VALUE OF HISTORY

In a national survey conducted in the early nineties, Americans expressed doubts when asked about the value of “history,” but spoke passionately about the value of understanding the past as a connection to family and a way of understanding contemporary issues and events. Skepticism about topics formally labelled “history” in the survey generally appeared rooted in negative classroom experiences at the K–12 level.

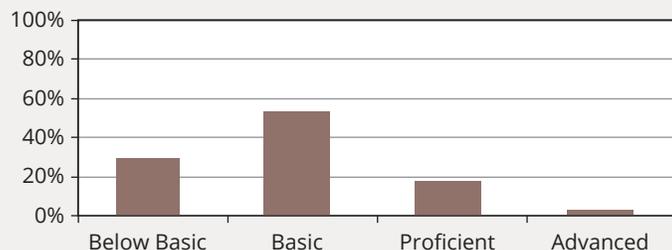
HISTORY IN SCHOOLS

History is one of the most widely taught subjects in the nation’s schools. At the high school level alone, the U.S. Department of Education estimates that more than seven million students took history courses in the 2011–12 academic year.

KEY FACTS

- Only 18% of American eighth-graders demonstrated proficiency on a national test of history knowledge in 2014, and the most recent test of high school seniors (in 2010) demonstrated even lower levels of proficiency.
- Among the more than 60,000 high school teachers of history in 2012, only 26% had both a college degree and certification in the subject (though almost 70% had both credentials in the larger field of social studies).

Share of Eighth-Graders Scoring at NAEP Achievement Level, 2014



INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

National History Day draws thousands of middle and high school students together each year, providing them with an opportunity to study and create history in a variety of forms. With competitions that begin at the local and state level, students conduct original research and present their work in skits, documentaries, posters, and papers. Experts in the subject provide feedback to students, and offer them encouragement to further develop their skills and interest in history.

“NHD students are better writers, who write with a purpose and real voice, and marshal solid evidence.”

An independent study conducted in 2011 found lasting benefits for students who participated in History Day. Relative to their peers, participants did better in their history classes, but also demonstrated greater proficiency in other academic activities as well as higher levels of civic engagement.

The Humanities in Our Lives series (#HumInOurLives) highlights the many and diverse forms of humanities activities in the nation, and key facts about the health of the field.

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For more on the broad trends that mark American engagement with various forms of the humanities, visit humanitiesindicators.org or email humanitiesindicators@amacad.org.

 **HUMANITIES INDICATORS**
a project of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences