**HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

**Sets the Stage**

History doesn’t happen in a vacuum. Events, people, and ideas are deeply shaped by the world around them – the political, social, intellectual, scientific, cultural, and economic realities of that time and place. Students need to show in their project how their topic fits within the historical context that surrounded it. Here are some ways to think about historical context:

**Background Events** – What were the events that lead up to this topic? Example: How did the conclusion of World War II set the stage for the Cold War? How did the Seven Years War lay the foundation for the American Revolution?

**Social Context** – What was the social environment like at the time? Example: Racism, segregation, and Jim Crow form the setting from which the Civil Rights Movement emerged. It’s also an important context for Jazz music, for Jackie Robinson, and a host of other topics.

**Intellectual or Scientific Context** – How did experts understand this issue or question at the time? Example: What did scientists believe about disease transmission during the Flu Pandemic of 1918? How did Social Darwinism influence popular culture, or politics, during the early 20th Century?

**Cultural Context** – What were the cultural norms in the community? Example: What was the prevailing view of a woman’s aptitudes and role in this time and place? What was the prevailing view of a man’s aptitudes and role? What behaviors were considered inappropriate for a man or a woman?

**Economic Context** – How did the economy shape peoples’ lives, choices, and decisions? Example: The Great Depression, crop failures, resource shortages.

**Other Contexts** – Can you identify other contexts that are relevant to your topic?

In many cases, your topic will center on a creative response, reaction, or attempt to change the prevailing circumstances of the time. A good understanding of the historical context will help you see and describe change over time, and to identify short- and long-term consequences and outcomes.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT FRAMES**

Pick 2 types of historical context that relate best to your topic from the word bank. Write a summary of each one and explain how it shaped your topic.

Background Events Social Context Intellectual Context Scientific Context

Political Context Economic Context Cultural Context Other Context (describe)

Historical Context 1:

Historical Context 2:

**SIGNIFICANCE IN HISTORY**

You need to do more than just tell us what happened; you need to explain why your topic matters. What changed? What didn’t change? Why is this important in history?

LONG-TERM CHANGES

SHORT-TERM CHANGES