Western Civilization Research Topics

<http://www.wcusd15.org/martens/history/researchpaper/Research%20Paper%20Topics.pdf>

Below is a list of possible research paper topics for World History. Please note that this is only a partial

list of possible topics. If you have other ideas, simply get them approved by your World History teacher.

Remember, however, that the topic you choose must deal with a world history topic—topics dealing with

the history of the United States will not be approved.

Also, keep in mind that this is only a list of topics, not thesis statements! Writing the thesis statement is

your responsibility. Your thesis statement must deal with an interpretation of the topic and is not a

simple report! For example, if you choose the Gulf War as your topic, do not write a report describing

the events of the war. Instead, you must develop a thesis that will lead you through an analysis, such as

the causes of the Gulf War, which is open to interpretation.

There will be a limit of two-three students per topic.

¾Human Evolution vs. Creationism: What is the truth?

¾Stone Age: How were humans able to survive the ice ages? How did the end of the ice ages impact

nomadic cultures? What were the causes and the effects of the Neolithic Revolution? What

function or purpose did the Neolithic cave paintings have in Neolithic society?

¾Creation Myths: What do creation myths (specify myth and culture) tell us about the culture that

created the myth? How did ancient cultures use deities to explain natural phenomena? Compare

and contrast the creation stories of Hebrew, Egyptian, and Babylonian cultures. How do the roles

of gods differ between the literature produced by different societies (e.g., Sumerian, Egyptian,

Greek, Hebrew, etc.)?

¾Confucianism: What impact did Confucius have on the development of Chinese thought and

culture?

¾Buddhism: Compare and contrast Buddhism as practiced in Japan, China, and Korea.

¾Christianity: What are the similarities between Christian and pagan rituals?

¾Impact of Geography on History: Since Egyptian and Mesopotamian geography are so similar, why

did the cultural and political history of these two regions differ so markedly? How did the lack of

arable land in Japan contribute to the Japanese culture? How did the lack of natural resources in

Greece contribute to the development of Greek culture? How did the harsh desert environment of

the Empty Quarter contribute to the development of the bedouin lifestyle of the Arabs?

¾Egyptian Mummification: What role did mummification play in Egyptian religion and/or the

development of Egyptian medicine?

¾Mystery of Stonehenge: Who built Stonehenge, and what purpose did it serve?

¾Mystery of the Nazca Lines (Peru): What explanation is there for these mysterious desert drawings

that can only be seen from space?

¾Mystery of the Lost City of Atlantis: What is the history behind the myth?

¾Phoenicians: Did the Phoenicians discover America?

¾Homer: Did Homer really exist?

¾Trojan War: Did the Trojan War actually occur, or was it a fictional event that exists only in the

myths of the Greeks? WORLD HISTORY RESEARCH PAPER TOPICS 2

¾Ancient Greece: Compare and contrast the cultures of Athens and Sparta and explain the

advantages and disadvantages of each. How did the Greek theater influence the morality of the

Greek culture? What was the moral structure (lesson) in Greek literature?

¾Olympic Games: Compare and contrast the ancient Olympic Games with the modern Olympic

Games. What were the reasons for the revival of the Olympic Games?

¾Etruscans: What were the origins of the Etruscans? How did their tomb paintings reflect their

culture and society?

¾Julius Caesar: What is the difference between Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar and the historical

interpretations of Julius Caesar? Was Caesar a hero or a villain?

¾Roman Empire: What contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire?

¾Byzantine Empire: How did the Byzantines contribute to the cultural schism between Eastern

Europe and Western Europe?

¾Dark Ages: Is the Dark Ages an accurate title for the medieval period?

¾Significance of the Battle of Tours

¾Feudalism: Why did feudalism develop and/or why did it decline?

¾Castles: What role did the castle play in medieval society?

¾Role of the Roman Catholic Church in Medieval Society

¾Cathedrals: How did the construction of the medieval cathedrals reflect the fact that they were

community endeavors? Compare and contrast the features of Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals.

¾Monasteries: What role did the monasteries play in keeping classical learning alive during the

Middle Ages?

¾Legend of King Arthur: Did King Arthur actually exist, or is he only a figure in British literature?

¾Legend of Robin Hood: Did Robin Hood actually exist, or is he only a figure in British literature?

¾Legend of Count Dracula: Who was the real Count Dracula, and how did he earn his reputation?

¾Santa Claus: Who was the real St. Nicholas, and how has the current image of St. Nicholas been

created over the ages?

¾Effects of the Crusades on Europe

¾Effects of the Black Death

¾Joan of Arc: Who was the real Joan of Arc? What impact did Joan of Arc have on France and/or

Europe?

¾Leonardo da Vinci: How did Leonardo typify the “Renaissance man”?

¾Role of the Printing Press

¾Elizabethan Theater: Did Shakespeare write his own plays? What role did the theater play in

Elizabethan England?

¾Causes and Effects of the Protestant Reformation

¾Causes and Effects of the Spanish Inquisition

¾European Exploration: What was the motivation of the Europeans to explore the rest of the world?

What impact did European exploration have?

¾Conquistadores in Latin America: What was the motivation of the conquistadores? What impact

did they have on Latin America?

¾Spanish Armada: What were the reasons for the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588? WORLD HISTORY RESEARCH PAPER TOPICS 3

¾African Slave Trade: Why did the Europeans and Americans turn to Africa for slave labor? What

were the evils of the African slave trade and the “middle passage”? What impact did the slave trade

have on Africa?

¾Scientific Revolution: What impact did the Scientific Revolution have throughout the world?

What impact did it have on religion?

¾Causes and Effects of the French Revolution/Reign of Terror

¾Napoleon’s Invasion of Russia: Why did Napoleon’s invasion of Russia fail? In what ways was

Napoleon’s invasion of Russia similar/different from Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union?

¾Industrial Revolution: What impact did the Industrial Revolution have on Europe? What role did it

have on European colonialism and imperialism? What role did it play in the development of the

utopian visions and the development of socialism and communism in Marxist theory?

¾Causes and Effects of 19th Century European Emigration

¾Unification of Germany: What impact did the unification of Germany in the 1870s have on the

balance of power in Europe?

¾Effects of European Colonialism in Africa

¾Political and/or Environmental Effects of the Suez Canal

¾19th Century Victorian Values: How did the Victorian values affect the roles of men and women?

¾Independence of India: Evaluate the role of Gandhi and his nonviolent resistance in achieving

independence for India. Compare the nonviolent resistance employed by Gandhi to the nonviolent

approach taken by Martin Luther King in the civil rights movement in the United States.

¾Russian Culture: How did Russian society and culture compare with the Russian society and

culture depicted in the literature of Dostoyevsky?

¾Causes and Effects of World War I

¾The Lusitania and Unrestricted Submarine Warfare: Was there a British conspiracy surrounding

the sinking of the Lusitania to get the United States involved in World War I?

¾Russian (Bolshevik) Revolution: Why did a communist revolution occur in Russia? How closely

did the Bolsheviks follow Marxist theory? What effects did the revolution have on the rest of the

world?

¾Communist Revolution in China: Why did a communist revolution occur in China? How closely

did the Chinese follow Marxist theory? What effects did the revolution have on the world? What

role did World War II play in the success of the communist revolution in China?

¾Hitler’s Mind: What motivated Hitler to become a totalitarian dictator and/or to attempt to

exterminate the Jewish race?

¾Hitler’s Rise to Power: What factors in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s allowed Hitler to come to

power, and/or what was the explanation behind Hitler’s widespread support and appeal?

¾Hitler and Napoleon: Compare and contrast the characters and role of Hitler and Napoleon.

¾Battle of Britain: Why was the Battle of Britain a turning point in World War II? What accounts

for the British success and/or the German failure in the battle?

¾Holocaust: What effects did the Holocaust have on Jews, the Zionist movement, and/or the world?

Compare and contrast the Holocaust to the Turkish massacre of the Armenians in World War I

and/or the “ethnic cleansing” of the Serbs in Bosnia following the break-up of Yugoslavia.

¾Dr. Mengele’s Medical Experiments: What do the experiments of Dr. Mengele demonstrate about

the cruelty of the Nazis during the Holocaust, and/or what role did these experiments play in the

Holocaust?

¾MacArthur and Caesar: Compare and contrast the characters and role of MacArthur and Caesar.

¾Effects of the Marshall Plan on Europe WORLD HISTORY RESEARCH PAPER TOPICS 4

¾Stalin’s Leadership of the Soviet Union: Compare and contrast the leadership styles of Stalin in the

Soviet Union with Hitler in Nazi Germany. In what ways did Stalin’s leadership of the Soviet

Union contribute to the beginnings of the Cold War?

¾Containment of Communism: What role did the Soviet Union play in the spread of communism?

Why did the West feel it was necessary to contain communism, and/or how successful was the

containment of communism?

¾Cold War: Why did the Cold War never become a hot war? Why did the Cold War end?

¾French Colonial Rule of Vietnam: Why did the Vietnamese want to rebel against the French

colonial rule, and/or what factors contributed to their success against the French?

¾IRA and Irish Independence: Why did the Irish seek their independence from the British, and/or

what factors contributed to their success? Are the tactics being used by the IRA today in an attempt

to unite all of Ireland justifiable? Why or why not?

¾Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe: What factors contributed to the fall of communist

governments in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s? What challenges must the

Eastern European nations overcome because of their communist past?

¾Challenges Confronting a Unified Germany: While Germany was politically united in the 1990s,

what factors continue to separate the former territories of East and West Germany?

¾Break-Up of Yugoslavia: What caused the break-up of Yugoslavia?

¾Chernobyl: What lessons can be learned from the Chernobyl incident? Evaluate how the Soviet

government handled the incident? How was the Chernobyl incident an example of the Soviet’s

disregard for the environment?

¾Fall of Communism in the Soviet Union: What factors contributed to the fall of communism in the

Soviet Union in the 1990s? What challenges do Russia and the other countries of the former Soviet

Union continue to face? Is there a greater threat of a nuclear war now that the Soviet Union has

collapsed than before? Is there a chance Russia will return to communism?

¾Arab/Israeli Conflict: What factors prompted the Jews to seek to create a Jewish homeland in

Israel? What factors have contributed to the Arab/Israeli conflict? What effects have the

Arab/Israeli conflict had throughout the Middle East and/or the world?

¾OPEC and the Arab Oil Embargo: What factors contributed to the formation of OPEC and/or the

beginning of the Arab Oil Embargo? What effect has the formation of OPEC and/or the Arab Oil

Embargo had?

¾Causes and Effects of the Iranian Revolution

¾Causes and Effects of the Iran-Iraq War

¾Causes and Effects of the Food Shortage in Africa

¾Apartheid: What factors prompted the South African government to begin the practice of

apartheid? What effects did apartheid have in South Africa? What factors contributed to the

abandonment of apartheid in South Africa?

¾Family Planning in China: Was the family planning program implemented by the Chinese

government necessary? Why has the problem been a success/failure?

¾Chinese Culture: What was the motivation for the foot binding of Chinese women, and how did it

reflect the position of women in their society? How have the status and role of women in Chinese

society changed from that of the traditional Chinese women?

¾Japanese Culture: What is the Japanese attitude toward suicide, and why did they develop such

attitudes?

¾Tiananmen Square Massacre: How was the Tiananmen Square demonstration a reflection of the

discontent of the Chinese people toward their government in general? What effects has the

massacre had within China, and/or what effects has it had on China’s relations with other countries? WORLD HISTORY RESEARCH PAPER TOPICS 5

¾Hong Kong: How did the British rule of Hong Kong influence its culture and development, and

how has the return to Chinese rule affected it?

¾Drug Trafficking in South America: Why have many of the people in some South American

countries turned to drug trafficking? How has the drug trafficking affected the relations between

these South American countries and the rest of the world?

¾World Terrorism: What factors were responsible for motivating some specific act of world

terrorism, a world terrorist group, or terrorism in general?

¾Chemical, Biological, and/or Nuclear Warfare: Do weapons of mass destruction make an effective

deterrent against attack? Why has there been an increase in the proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction? Is it ethical or moral to use or to threaten to use weapons of mass destruction on

another group of people? What role did these weapons of mass destruction play in the Cold War?

¾Population Growth in the World: What factors have contributed to the population explosion in the

world today? What potential problems does the population explosion pose to the survival of the

human race? What should be done to deal with the population problem?

¾Maoris of New Zealand: Examine the Maoris culture and how it has been changed since European

colonization.

¾United Nations: Has the United Nations been a success, a failure, or played no important role at all

in assuring world peace? Does the United Nations need to be reformed to better achieve its goals,

and if so, how should it be reformed? Is there a need for the United Nations today?

¾European Union: Why have most of the countries of Western Europe agreed to come together to

cooperate with the formation of the European Union?

¾Mystery of the Bermuda Triangle: Can the mysteries of the Bermuda Triangle be explained?