

Making History

by Ashwin Krishna

Personal



In the National History Day Contest, middle and high school students research a historical topic related to an annual theme and create a project—a documentary, exhibit, performance, website, or paper—on their topic. Students who win at the local level advance to the state, and then national competition.

When I was in eighth grade, part of my school's curriculum included creating a project for National History Day. The theme that year was Revolution, Reaction, and Reform in History.

I wanted my project both to feature an event that impacted world history and to connect to me in some way. Because my parents and grandparents are from India, I considered topics related to that country. I chose my topic, "Mahatma Gandhi's Nonviolent Civil Resistance: The 'Battle of Right Against Might'" because the movement was instrumental in India's gaining independence from Britain. I also chose it because, as a teenager in the 1940s, my grandpa actually participated in India's freedom movement and even saw and heard Mahatma Gandhi himself.

I decided to make a documentary because I enjoy working with technology and because I thought it would be an effective way to tell such a big story in a small amount of time. After choosing the topic and format of my project, I began to research my topic in earnest.

On Gandhi and Grandpa

Reading about the history of India, I was shocked to think that a country with such a rich history had once been a colony controlled by another country. To understand Gandhi's philosophy,

I read some of his speeches, including his famous Quit India speech, in which he called for determined, passive resistance to British rule. I also read some of his quotes and writings from the book *The Words of Gandhi*, which illustrated his views on daily life, cooperation, nonviolence, faith, and peace. In addition, I watched the movie *Gandhi*.

In my research, I learned that Gandhi first used nonviolent resistance to gain equal rights for Indians in South Africa, and after succeeding, applied similar methods in India. Using boycotts, fasts, marches, and other such protests, he led millions in a revolution that brought India independence and reform, including improvement in living conditions, education, the economy, and equal rights for millions. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., was deeply influenced by Gandhian philosophy, which served as a guiding force in his fight for civil rights. Gandhi's example continues to inspire reform movements across the world today, including Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring.

My research also included interviewing my grandpa about his experiences during India's freedom movement. He recalled buying cloth made in India as part of the effort to boycott British goods, and explained how, after Gandhi called on Indian lawyers to boycott the court system, his father had resigned as a government advocate, or lawyer.

I worked on my project at school and at home, gathering images and original video clips, selecting important events,

and eventually arranging the events into a compelling story. Using iMovie, I made the story into a 10-minute documentary, which I narrated with voice-overs. Later, I added transitions, effects, and background music, including an instrumental version of one of Gandhi's favorite devotional songs.

In February, after winning the local competition and qualifying for the state competition, I set to work improving my project based on the judges' comments. I added subtitles to the interview with my grandpa, and worked to more clearly show the connection between Gandhi's early visit to South Africa and the freedom movement in India.

From Snag to Success

In April, my family and I drove to Ohio State University in Columbus for the state competition. As other students presented their documentaries, I paid close attention to the questions the judges asked. When it was my turn, I gave the judges copies of my process paper and bibliography, set up my movie, and stood back to watch. I was distressed to see that the bottom of the screen was cut off, obscuring the subtitles I'd added. Because the judges from the district competition had suggested adding them, I was afraid this would cost me points.

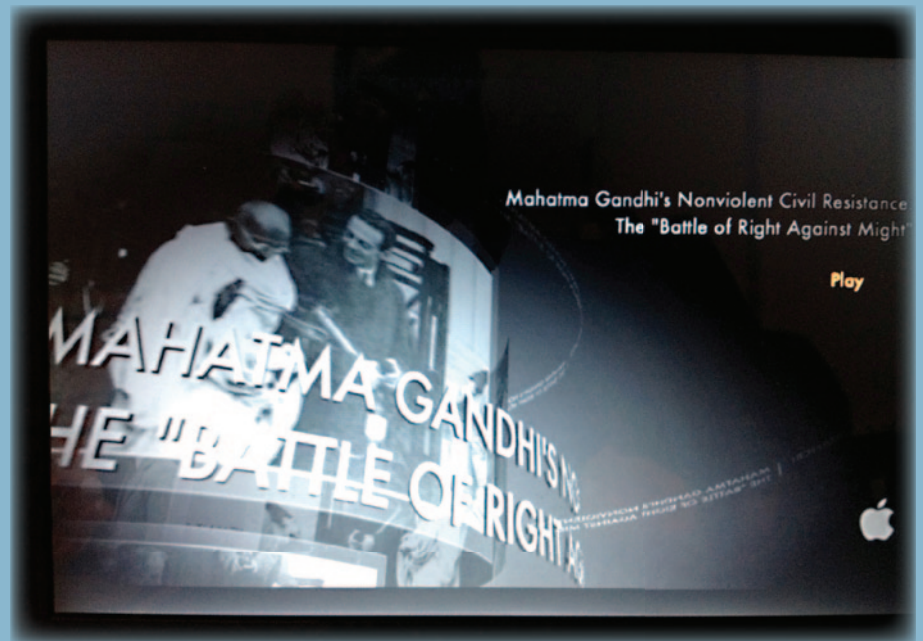
When the documentary ended, I was interviewed by the judges. The interview went well, and when the names of qualifiers for the next round were posted, I was excited to see my name among them. Fortunately, during the next round the movie fit the screen. This time, there was no interview. I awaited the awards ceremony, which would be held a few hours later.

At the ceremony, awards were presented in a variety of categories. Finally, the Junior Individual Documentary category winners were announced. When third place was announced and then second place, my project was neither one of them. I anxiously waited for the first place winner to be announced: "...and in first place, going to nationals for his project on Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent civil resistance, Ashwin Krishna!" I could hardly believe it, even as I walked up on stage to receive my medal.

Valuable Lessons

The day after school ended in June, my family and I traveled to the University of Maryland, where I would compete against nearly 2,000 other kids in the National History Day Contest.

As I stood next to the judges' table, my film opened with pictures of Gandhi and what *should* have been my voice narrating the introduction. But where was the sound?! I hadn't altered



The opening frame of Ashwin's documentary

the sound since I'd shown the film at the state contest, but even when the soundman turned the volume up all the way, it was difficult to hear my documentary clearly.

Although I didn't make it into the top three at nationals, I received a certificate of achievement and congratulatory letters from my state congressman and the Ohio House of Representatives. My family was proud of me, especially my grandpa, who attended all of the competitions. He was impressed with my documentary and happy for the chance to share his experience with me.

I will always value the experience I had in participating. I learned time management and research skills, and writing the detailed bibliography and process paper improved my writing skills and taught me how to pack a lot of information into as few words as possible. Meeting other kids at the competitions and seeing their projects expanded my views and knowledge as well. Best of all, I came to understand the significance of an important event in history and my family's personal connection to it. **i**



Ashwin Krishna completed his National History Day project as a student at Canton Country Day School. He is now a freshman at Hoover High School in North Canton, OH, where he is a member of the speech and debate team. He was a member of the state finalist team at the FIRST LEGO League Robotics Tournament, as well as a national finalist in the NAIS Virtual Science Fair. Ashwin has volunteered with Habitat for Humanity and enjoys tennis, traveling, and making hot sauce from homegrown peppers.

Learn more about National History Day at www.nhd.org.