

The National History Bee and Bowl – 2010-2011 Study Guide

1. What to study

History! There’s so much out there, that if your Executive Director were to include potentially everything that could come up here, this study guide would run on for thousands of pages. So just a few quick pointers to get you started.

First, history is going to be interpreted very broadly for the purposes of the National History Bee and Bowl. We know that some of you have a knack for the classic sort of names and dates. And while you (and everyone, but that’s another story...) ought to know not only the significance of 1066 and 1648, but also 117 A.D., 1453, and 1713, the National History Bee and Bowl go way beyond solely focusing on this sort of history trivia. Every subject has a history; every sort of history is fair game, provided that it’s something not too obscure for a smart high school student, something with lasting cultural significance, and provided that it lends itself well to a question. Let’s take a closer look at these three qualifications:

-Significant vs. Obscure

Depending on how a question is structured, and the level of the competition in question, what is significant enough for a possible answer vs. what is too obscure will vary. Here’s a typical schematic using English monarchs to give you a sense of what we mean:

	Easy Question	Typical Question	Hard Question	Too tough
Intramural (Bee only)/State Prelims	Victoria, George III, Elizabeth I or II	Victoria, George III, Elizabeth I or II	Charles I, George VI, James II	William IV, Edward I, Lady Jane Grey
State Playoffs and National Prelims	Victoria, George III, Elizabeth I or II	Charles I, George VI, James II	William IV, Edward I, Lady Jane Grey	William II (Rufus), Edward II, Henry III
National Playoffs	Charles I, George VI, James II	William IV, Edward I, Lady Jane Grey	William II (Rufus), Edward II, Henry III	All are fair game

Note the following caveat: None of this is set in stone, and particularly depending on how the questions are structured, a question with Queen Victoria as the answer could certainly come up in the National Playoffs. However, it is more likely that a more obscure king or queen will be the answer to a question there, as part of the fun of the harder rounds is that they allow the question writers to bring in new material. It IS however very unlikely that you’ll be seeing William Rufus or Henry III pop up in a State-level prelim game unless it is somehow just background information or something of that sort.

Trying to determine what is significant and what is obscure is often difficult, but you can get a good sense by comparing high school and college level games on the [Stanford Archive](#). Also, you can have a look at the [Jeopardy Archive](#), where (most of the time) the more obscure stuff is listed in the higher value clues

-Lasting Cultural Significance

One of the fun things about the National History Bee and Bowl is that we're breaking the rules regarding what you think of as history. Sports and entertainment are fair game, provided that we're talking about stuff that a culturally literate American should be aware of- especially if they didn't just happen within the last year or so. The Super Bowl? Sure, but more Joe Namath than Drew Brees (although, a question about the Saints could certainly end with "Name this 2010 Super Bowl champion.") Or from the world of entertainment, could you see Marilyn Monroe? You bet. Madonna? Yeah, she's been around long enough too. Britney? Lindsay? Snooki? Forget it. Even though "Jersey Shore" is now in its second season, we're not going to be asking questions about its history as it is decidedly NOT of lasting cultural significance. Maybe by National History Bee and Bowl XLVII or whatever, though your Jersey born and bred Executive Director sure hopes not.

Admittedly, this is a little arbitrary, but we're trying to strike a delicate balance between fun and relevant questions about people and events from the very recent past, and yet not get too far away from the material you'd come across in your high school history classes. We're not going to please everyone all the time, but your comments and feedback are always welcome, and we'll adjust things for the National Championships, if we get a sense that our balance is off a little at the State-level tournaments.

-What Makes for a Good Question

Some things just lend themselves better to questions than others, or especially to certain types of questions. It would be difficult to write a 4th quarter tossup with Michael Ventris as the answer at any level of the tournament, as almost everyone- to the extent they know him at all- knows him as the man who deciphered Linear B. So, there's not really enough material there to avoid a "buzzer race" at the end of the question, when the moderator says "For twenty points, name this man who deciphered Linear B" and three people ring in with a "reflex buzz." But, Ventris could be a 1st quarter answer in a National Championships playoff game, or he could turn up in the middle of a 2nd or 4th quarter question game at any level, where the answer was "Linear B." This might sound a little confusing, but knowing how to structure fair questions of this sort is essential to having matches that are decided primarily on knowledge, while still allowing for elements of gameplay to factor in enough to make things interesting.

Likewise, we're not going to start a question and lead you on to think the answer is Martin Luther King, when we're really going for Rosa Parks. These sorts of questions, known as hoses, are anathema to

serious academic competition. We're out to challenge you, not trick you. This also goes for special sorts of questions, like 60 second rounds, matching, or ordering questions. For the 60 second rounds, we've purposely kept these real short so you should be able to always get through all 8 questions. Nor should any 1 of the 3 categories you can pick from be much harder or easier than the others. And for ordering and matching questions, while these follow a different structure, a good team should still be able to ring in early, and we think teams won't mind 2 questions per game that are a little different, just to allow for some variety. Finally, we've especially tried to include questions that are interesting, wide-ranging, and even in some cases, have a bit of humor. Again, let us know if there's something that really rubs you the wrong way, but you're also free to tell us what you liked, and what you'd like more of too.

2. How to study

There's no one right approach for this, but here are 5 ways you might want to consider:

A. Run through questions.

You'll find a huge database of past high school quiz bowl questions here, at the [Stanford packet archive](#). Many of the questions here are college level, but there are lots of question packets at the high school level, and some that, while at the college level, specifically focus on history (and there's often a good amount of overlap between high school and college level, especially in the State playoffs and at the National Finals.) Running through any sort of questions can help you become more comfortable with academic competition, though you'll note that the exact format being used at National History Bee and Bowl tournaments follows the sample questions we've posted online as practice packets, and not the identical format of any other prior tournament.

B. Specifically study lists of items as well as certain people, events, and places that come up repeatedly.

While running through question packets is helpful, it's not necessarily the most efficient way to study. For that, you might want to look for, or construct your own lists of things that come up quite a bit. Just to give you some examples of these that WILL come up in competition, you'll definitely want to be familiar with the following:

1. American presidents and first ladies
2. Emperors, kings, queens and other royalty from Egypt, Rome, Britain, Spain, France, Germany, Austria, Russia and elsewhere
3. Famous African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native Americans
4. Famous women in history
5. Famous battles, especially from the Revolutionary, Civil, and the World Wars
6. Scientists who have had an impact on history
7. Famous artists, composers, and authors, especially those whose work has a historical focus

8. Famous philosophers and schools of philosophy
9. Events and figures from the history of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions
10. The history of countries and hotspots that have been making news over the past two decades (Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Syria, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, the Balkans, the Caucasus region, Venezuela, Colombia, etc.)

A great place to look online for information on these people, places, events, and concepts is at <http://www.nagt.com/YouGottaKnow/> This hasn't been updated in a while, but there's a lot of great information here, and besides, it's not as if the Civil War battles you gotta know have changed in the last five years anyway.

C. Seek out the following books (and other books too, of course), all of which have lots of great information. Be forewarned, though, all of these books to a certain extent go to a depth on some subjects that is greater than what you'll need.

1. [An Incomplete Education](#) By Judy Jones and William Wilson. Your Executive Director's all time favorite book. A great read, and chock full of fascinating information.
2. [Ken Jennings' Trivia Almanac](#) By Ken Jennings. Lots of great trivia (not all of it history related, though) from the man who brought you a 74 game Jeopardy winning streak.
3. [The New York Times' Guide to Essential Knowledge](#) Perhaps the most comprehensive, if not the most entertaining of the cultural literacy tomes.
4. [National Geographic Almanac of American History](#) One of the best sources for a good, thorough overview of what you need to know about American History.
5. [National Geographic Almanac of World History](#) Ditto for world history.
6. [The Best Trivia Book: History](#) Not sure if this is really true, but there's lots of stuff in here worth knowing for sure.

D. Keep your eyes open. You'd be amazed how much history is hiding in plain sight, in newspapers, magazines, even on TV shows, at the movies, and at sporting events. If you have an innate curiosity, if you're the sort of person who will hear a reference to someone or something in passing conversation and want to know why that's significant, if you want to get a better understanding of your world and why it is the way it is, not only are you going to do well and have a great time at the National History Bee and Bowl, you're setting yourself up for success in life.

E. Be aware of your weaknesses and work to improve them. Of course some things are going to be more enjoyable than others. The Beatles, Civil War battles, the Pragmatic Sanction, and the scientific advances of the Industrial Revolution are all going to turn up in questions. Like many students, though, you may

find the first two more enjoyable and have more prior knowledge about them than the latter two. A willingness to work together, especially as a team in the Bowl, to identify areas you need to improve on can make an enormous difference. When your Executive Director studied for his Jeopardy appearances, he studied everything from cooking terms to country music to 70's sitcoms to the tabloid exploits of reality TV stars. None of this was stuff he knew much of before, but it made a huge difference on the show and ended up broadening his horizons and introducing him to some neat things he was previously unaware of. If you approach the History Bee and Bowl in the same way (though obviously keeping a history focus), you'll be likely to meet with success as well.

3. Where to study

Well, use your history courses in school as a starting point. The National History Bee and Bowl are designed to reinforce a rigorous high school history curriculum, particularly at the AP or IB level, but that doesn't mean that the History Bee and Bowl are just for juniors and seniors or those in AP or IB history classes. A great teacher at any level can make a world of difference, as well as a willingness to dig a little deeper on your own. Moreover, even a frosh or sophomore can do very well at the History Bee and Bowl, particularly if you're a bit of a history buff to begin with. And of course, having experience in your first year or two of high school can be incredibly helpful for your junior and senior years.

Beyond the classroom, though, use your travels and free time as time to prepare, particularly in the weeks leading up to the tournament. Carry a list in your pocket of presidents, kings and queens, and other basics, and refer to it when standing on a line, on a ski lift, or riding in a car. Run through various facts in your head to get things into your long-term memory and so that they're that much easier to recall on short notice. Much of this is basic, but you'd be amazed how much of a difference this can make, especially at the State level.

4. When to study

Ideally you'll want to start preparing a month or two in advance of the State Bee and Bowl that you'll be participating in. Start dividing up that which you need to review among your team members. Identify the areas you want to improve on for the Bee. Stay extra alert in your history classes. You're all but guaranteed to encounter many things you've learned in your history classes at the Bee and Bowl.

As the tournaments approach, start running through questions and see if you're improving where you need to improve. Moreover, even if you don't have access to a buzzer system to practice with, have someone read you questions, and use a click pen or remote control to "ring in" so you get the hang of it. Get a sense for when is the right time to ring in with an educated guess, even if you're not 100% sure.

On tournament day, you should focus primarily on game play. That is, make sure you have fun with your teammates and know who is strong in what areas of history. Don't "poach" – if you're still unsure and someone is strong on your team in the particular field of history the questions is referencing, you might want to let them ring in first. Raise your buzzer high in the air to indicate to teammates that you know the answer and they should defer to you if the other team has already rung in incorrectly. If they have, wait until the question is finished, or at least until you know it 100% sure. However, you might want to still study on game day as well. Your Executive Director managed to win at least two tournaments in high school for his quiz bowl team solely because of something he had studied the morning of a tournament en route to the tournament site. You might have the same experience in the Bee or the Bowl too.

5. Who should study?

One effective way to form a History Bowl team might be to split up the various eras in history among your team members. Roughly speaking, with a team of four, you could have one person focus on American history until 1900, one person focus on American history since 1900, one person focus on World History to 1648, and one person focus on World History since 1648. Or, just divvy it up according to who is taking which history course in school this year. A team with someone taking World History AP, European History AP, US History AP, and Art History AP is likely to be more effective than a team with everyone studying the same material.

Of course, for the History Bee, you're on your own, so you may wish to prepare across all eras in any case. Keep in mind that even a little bit of preparation could make the difference as to whether you qualify for the State Bee, qualify for the National Finals, or even emerge as the National Champion. Particularly at the higher levels of the competition, we know that most students will be studying, so keep that in mind.

But moreover, you might use the History Bee and Bowl as an opportunity to learn about an aspect of history that you never encountered in class, but might be interested in. Never took Art History? Spend a few hours online learning about Giotto, Picasso, and flying buttresses. Always wanted to go to Australia but never got Down Under in your history classes? You might want to learn about the gunslinger Ned

Kelly and the bombing of Darwin. Do you keep hearing about Chechnya, Kosovo, and Iran in the news, but never heard them mentioned once in school? Well, you're not alone, but there's going to be a good amount of "21st Century History" at all levels of the National History Bee and Bowl. We won't ask you to name every mullah in Qom, but you ought to know the difference between Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei.

6. Why study?

Because you want to get smarter. Because you want to have fun and explore your world. Because you want to impress your coach and your teammates. Because one day you will: Finish the Saturday New York Times Crossword Puzzle/Impress your significant other/Show up some snotty person who thinks American kids are up to no good with what you've learned while studying. Because you're going to win big on a quiz show one day. Because you want to improve your grades in history classes and set yourself up for 800's on SAT subject tests and 5s on your APs. Because you are going through spelling and geography bee withdrawal. Because you want to improve your quiz bowl game. But most of all, if you're like the Executive Director:

Because you want to win.