A Guide to Varsity & Junior Varsity Division Competitions for Students in the USA

Featuring

The National History Bee & Bowl
US History Bee
International History Olympiad
National Political Science Bee
International Geography Bee
US Geography Championships
National Sports & Entertainment History Bee

www.internationalgeographybee.com   www.geographychampionships.com
www.historybowl.com/nationals/sports-and-entertainment-bee/

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**1. Introduction**

Welcome to International Academic Competitions! IAC is a global network of academic competitions for primary and secondary school students. This guide presents an overview and an introduction to our high school-level (i.e. Varsity and Junior Varsity Division) competitions available for students in the USA. Note that while these competitions are geared towards high school students, younger students and teams are also welcome to compete in the Junior Varsity Division.

Currently, IAC program offerings for students in the USA include the National History Bee and Bowl, the United States History Bee, the National Sports and Entertainment History Bee, the National Political Science Bee, the United States Geography Championships, the International Geography Bee, and the International History Olympiad. This guide will provide an outline of how these competitions work, and how you and your school (or homeschool association) can get involved. While this guide may not answer all your questions, it should give you a good sense of what you need to get started, and where to turn for more information.
Our Own History
The first IAC competitions, the National History Bee and Bowl, were founded in the summer of 2010 by David Madden, a former high school and college quiz bowl player who at the time was taking courses to become a history teacher himself. In the spring of 2010, David organized a history quiz tournament at his former high school in Ridgewood, NJ, which was attended by about 150 students from the NJ/NY/CT Tri-State Area. After the tournament, he realized that there was no nationwide history quiz competition for either individual students or teams. And thus, rather than becoming a history teacher in the usual sense, he founded the National History Bee and Bowl, the first IAC competitions.

In our second year, the National History Bee and Bowl expanded to include a Middle School Division, while the Varsity / JV divisions doubled in size, and the first International History Bee and Bowl tournaments were held in Europe and Asia. Since then, IAC has expanded to include two separate geography competitions (the US Geography Championships, and the International Geography Bee), a division in Canada as well as Australia and New Zealand, and the International History Olympiad. Tournaments overseas have now been held in over 25 countries, including as far afield as Nepal and Sri Lanka.

For Middle School and Elementary School aged students, we also offer the US Academic Bee and Bowl, National Science Bee, and National Humanities Bee, in addition to the National History Bee and Bowl and the two geography competitions. The US History Bee does not exist at the Middle School and Elementary School level however. For further information on our Middle School and Elementary School competitions, please see the official website for an overview at: www.iacompetitions.com/usa/middle-school-elementary/ and see www.nationalhistorybee.com for information on the Middle School and Elementary School Divisions of the National History Bee (as well as the Middle School Division of the National History Bowl).

At the high school level, our competitions are broken down into the Varsity and Junior Varsity divisions. For all history events in the USA, the Varsity Division consists of students in 11th and 12th grade and the JV Division consists of students in 10th grade and younger. In the History Bowl, Junior Varsity teams must consist entirely of students in 10th grade or younger. Younger students may also form all or part of a Varsity team but if even just 1 team member is in 11th or 12th grade, the team is considered a Varsity team. In the National History Bee, US History Bee, and National Sports & Entertainment History Bee, all 9th and 10th graders must play in the JV division, and all 11th and 12th graders must play in the Varsity division. The JV Division is open to students in middle and elementary school, as well as younger homeschooled students as well.

For the US Geography Championships and the International Geography Bee, the JV / Varsity cutoff is a birthdate to be consistent with the International Geography Championships, for which the US Geography Championships is an official qualifying competition at its National Championships. The cutoff birthdate is July 1 of the year 16 years before the year of the following International Geography Championships. Thus for the 2019-2020 school year, the cutoff date is July 1, 2004 – all students born before that date are considered Varsity regardless of grade, and may qualify for one of the four spots on Team USA at the 2020 International Geography Championships (to be held in Istanbul in the summer of 2020) For simplicity’s sake, the International Geography Bee uses this same date-based cutoff for determining its Varsity and JV age divisions for the National Qualifying Exam and National Championships in the USA.

The National History Bee and Bowl is contested in two stages at the Varsity and Junior Varsity levels. The first stage is the regional or state tournaments. The second stage is the National Championships. Please note that while certain tournaments may be designated as state championships, these function the same as tournaments that are called regional tournaments (i.e. all are open to all students, including those from out of state, none require prior qualification, and at all tournaments a student or team can qualify for Nationals in the same ways).
At all Varsity / JV level regional or state tournaments, both the History Bee (for individual students) and the History Bowl (for teams) are contested. The Bee and the Bowl are held at different times during the day, so everyone who wishes to can compete in both. We also hold qualifying exams during the lunch break for the US Geography Championships/International Geography Bee (the same exam at the qualifying level is used for both competitions at the National Championships level), the National Political Science Bee, and the US History Bee during the lunch break of the tournament. Each of the component competitions of a tournament (Bee, Bowl, NPSB, USGC/IGB, and USHB) has a separate entry fee (typically, $15, $85, $10, $10, and $10 respectively, though discounts for teams of 1 or 2 students and for bringing a buzzer apply, as do additional fees for late registration and not having a reader). Students and teams may enter whichever they wish, or all four events.

Teams (in the History Bowl) and Students (in the History Bee) typically play 5 preliminary rounds in the History Bowl and 3 preliminary rounds in the History Bee at a regional or state tournament. Those who finish in the top half of the rankings after the preliminary rounds in both the Bee and the Bowl qualify to attend our National Championships, which are held in late April in Arlington, VA and Washington, DC, based at the Crystal Gateway Marriott in Arlington. For 2020, Nationals will be held on April 23-26; for 2021, Nationals will be held on April 22-25. Students who finish in the top half of the USGC/IGB and USHB qualifying exam rankings at each tournament (or if their score places them in the top half of all students across the USA) also qualify for the National Championships of the National Political Science Bee, United States Geography Championships, International Geography Bee, and the United States History Bee (all held on the Friday of Nationals weekend, except the Political Science Bee, which is held on Thursday in the late afternoon and evening).

Each tournament is conducted on a particular set of questions – either A set, B set, or C set. A set questions are longer and more challenging than B set, and B set is very slightly more challenging than C set. Students and teams may play up to three times at a regional or state tournament, but they must always play on a different set of questions, of course. If one student from a school plays on a particular set, then no one from their school may play on that set again unless they secure explicit permission from NHBB to do this (if interested in this option for any event, please email director@historybowl.com).

The National History Bee and the National History Bowl both have students use a buzzer-system to ring in to answer the questions (as on certain TV quiz shows), and cover all aspects of history. US history forms roughly 40-50% of the questions; “world” history the other 50-60%, though the US History Bee consists entirely of American history questions (including the colonial period). Questions may reference the history of science, literature, the arts, religion, mythology, philosophy, historical geography, recent history, and the history of sports and entertainment, in addition to what is usually thought of when one thinks of “history.”

The US Geography Championships and International Geography Bee likewise ask questions on all aspects of world geography, with political geography, physical geography, cultural geography, environmental geography and historical geography all being referenced. Questions on American geography typically form no more than 25-30% of the questions in both of these competitions. While at the National Championships, the National History Bee and Bowl very closely resemble the regional and state competitions (just with somewhat more challenging questions), the National Championships of the USGC contains is entirely exam-based (and thus more similar in style to the International Geography Championships. The International Geography Bee though is very similar in style to the National History Bee, though with fewer preliminary rounds. Both geography events are solely individual-student competitions; there are no teams. The US History Bee National Championships is also played entirely in a buzzer-based format (comparable to the National History Bee but with all US history questions). Likewise, at Nationals, the National Political Science Bee is also played entirely in a buzzer-based format, with questions being taken from current events, international relations, political theory, political economy, domestic politics, politics of foreign countries, and governmental structures and institutions.
2. Regional and State Competitions

A. National History Bowl

The National History Bowl is contested at all of our Varsity and JV regional and state tournaments, and indeed, the majority of the time at each tournament is spent contesting the History Bowl. With rare exceptions, all regional and state tournaments are single-day events which are held on weekend or holiday days. Nearly all are held on Saturdays, though a few are held on Sundays or on Martin Luther King Day or Presidents Day. Tournaments usually begin with a check-in period beginning at 7:30 or 8am and an opening meeting at 8:30 or 8:45. Certain tournaments may begin a bit later. Tournaments will typically last until late afternoon. Smaller tournaments end around 4:00-5:00pm. Larger tournaments (with more playoff rounds) can last until 6:30-7:15. Since teams bow out of the playoffs in each round, only the last two teams (and perhaps, students on other teams from their respective schools) are still there at the very end of the day. Thus, most teams will be able to leave sometime between 3:00pm and 5:00pm. Each tournament has its own website at www.historybowl.com. These websites also contain information on the National History Bee regional or state competition being held that day at the same location, as well as the qualifying exams for the National Political Science Bee, US History Bee, and International Geography Bee/US Geography Championships, which are offered during the lunch break. Tournaments will also have the exact schedule of the day posted on their websites. These websites also show which question set a tournament is using, who is directing and coordinating it, and which teams will be attending.

Teams looking to attend a History Bowl must register for each individual tournament they wish to attend online at least eight days in advance at www.historybowl.com. Registrations 5-7 days in advance are permitted, but incur an additional $10 penalty fee per team. It is also possible to register in advance for the National History Bee and the qualifying exams, but this is not required (in other words, same day registrations at the tournament are permitted for the Bee and the exams). Teams do NOT need official school approval; indeed, if this is an issue, contact us, and you can play under an assumed name. However, all students on a team must attend the same school; this rule prevents all-star teams from forming, and the focus of the competition shifting to team recruitment, rather than knowledge. However, it is permitted for public middle school students to play on high school teams that they would normally feed into (this is not allowed for magnet schools). Up to four students may play at any given time on a History Bowl team. At regional and state tournaments, the maximum permitted team size is 6. Students can substitute in and out during quarter breaks in the Bowl rounds, or between rounds. There is no minimum team size; “teams” of 1 student are permissible. In fact, the 2013 Varsity National Champion in the National History Bowl was a single-student team.

Teams of 1 student play for $35 at a tournament. Teams of 2 students play for $70. Teams of 3-6 students play for $85. Teams receive a $10 discount for each functioning buzzer system they bring to a tournament. It is not required to bring a buzzer system, but it is required to bring one reader for every two teams or fraction thereof (e.g. a school bringing 5 teams must provide 3 readers) for each tournament, or a $75 penalty per missing reader is assessed. Teams not bringing a reader must notify the Tournament Coordinator for their event in advance if they are not bringing a reader or they face a further $50 penalty fee. Solo-student teams are exempt from the reader requirement if they are the only student competing in the Bowl from their school. Teams of 2 students are not exempt from bringing a reader, but can request that the reader requirement be waived by notifying their Tournament Coordinator at least 5 days in advance; this is not to be expected though.

At all tournaments, National History Bowl rounds consist of four quarters. For an explanation of how a round works, and the official rules, please see the Sample Match Videos, and the Game Format and Official Rules links on the website (located off the “Resources” tab on the menu bar) at www.historybowl.com. For further information on how tournaments are
structured, please see the “Tournament Format” link. Teams qualify for Nationals by posting a .500 winning percentage or better in their preliminary rounds or by winning a playoff game. Teams qualify for the playoffs based on finishing among the top teams at regionals. The number of teams making the playoffs can vary from two to thirty-two; it will be announced before the preliminary rounds begin how many teams will be making the playoffs at any given tournament. In rare cases, no playoffs may be played if one team finishes the prelims with a better record than any other team.

B. National History Bee

At almost all regional and state level tournaments, the tournament begins with three rounds of the National History Bowl. Then, usually around 11:15am, we break and then conduct the three preliminary rounds of the National History Bee. Students can sign up for the National History Bee on the day of the tournament, as long as they arrive by 10:45 at the latest. Students who do not choose to participate in the History Bee effectively have an extended lunch break, and should bring some schoolwork or other diversion. That said, the National History Bee is lots of fun too, so they should give it a shot.

At all tournaments, National History Bee rounds consist of 30 questions. Usually there are 5-8 students in a History Bee room who play at any given time. When a student reaches 8 points per round (1 point is scored for a correct answer, though being the third student incorrect on a question before the reader has finished reading incurs a -1 point penalty), that student is then done for duration of that round. This way, a student who is exceptional does not have a chance to answer all the questions to the detriment of the other students in the room. However, students who hit their quota of 8 points at any time in the round get 1-7 bonus points based on how quickly they finish. Thus 8 standard points + 7 bonus points makes 15 a perfect score for a round. A combined score of 40 or more is typically reached only a few times across the country in a given competition year.

At the end of the three preliminary rounds, students who finish in the top half of their respective draws (i.e. Varsity and JV) will qualify for the National Championships. Students who finish in the top quarter also qualify for the International History Olympiad. The top 2-32 students then make the finals (the number depends on how many students are in the draw). The format of the finals varies from tournament to tournament, but in almost all cases, it takes place in the mid-afternoon after the final two preliminary rounds of the National History Bowl, but before the National History Bowl playoffs commence.

C. US Geography Championships & Intl. Geography Bee

After the third preliminary round of the History Bee is over, tournaments usually enter their lunch break. During the early part of the lunch break, the National Qualifying Exam of the United States Geography Championships & International Geography Bee is offered (at the National Championships, the two competitions are contested separately). The same exam is used for both competitions. In rare cases, the lunch break is held at a different point in the schedule, but whenever it is held, the USGC/IGB exam will take place. Those students who choose to take the exam will still have time to get food though.

The National Qualifying Exam for the USGC/IGB is a 50 question multiple-choice test with 4 possible answers to each question. Past National Qualifying Exams and their answer keys are available for practice on the websites at www.geographychampionships.com and www.internationalgeographybee.com. Students receive 2 points for a correct answer and -1 for an incorrect answer. If an answer is left blank, 0 points are scored. Exams may be scored either during the tournament or reported to students in the week after the tournament by email. Students qualify for the National Championships by finishing in the top half of their age division at the site where they take the exam, or by finishing in the top 50% nationally of all students taking the exam. As with the National History Bee and Bowl, there are A, B, and C Set
versions of the Qualifying Exam, and the version corresponding to the National History Bee and Bowl question set on offer at each site is offered. Students only need to qualify for Nationals off any one version of the exam; they thus have up to 3 chances to do so. Note that beginning in 2019-2020, the A Set version of the USGC/IGB National Qualifying Exam will be based on the format and question distribution used by the AP Human Geography Exam, so that students who are preparing for this AP exam have a way to prepare and qualify for the USGC/IGB National Championships if they are interested.

Like the History Bee and Bowl Junior Varsity tournaments, the USGC/IGB Junior Varsity Division is open to elementary and middle schoolers. There are also separate younger age divisions for students who are in 8th grade or younger for USGC and IGB. For students in 8th grade and younger, they may participate in both the JV Division and the younger age division that corresponds to the grade they are in. See www.geographychampionships.com and www.internationalgeographybee.com for more information on how these younger Divisions for USGC and IGB work.

The USGC/IGB National Qualifying Exam can also be taken at a student’s school or with a homeschool advisor proctoring it. Contact info@geographyolympiad.com if interested in this method. This method costs $20.

**D. US History Bee**

The US History Bee National Qualifying Exam functions in an almost identical way to the National Qualifying Exam for the US Geography Championships and International Geography Bee. Both National Qualifying Exams take place during the lunch break at the State and Regional tournaments. Interested students are able to take both the USGC/IGB and USHB Exams at any state or regional tournament site. The US History Bee focuses exclusively on American history and should not be confused with the National History Bee (which has questions on BOTH American and world history). A minor structural difference between the USGC/IGB exam and the USHB exam is that while the USGC/IGB exam determines the Varsity / JV cutoff by birthdate, the US History Bee works like the National History Bee: Varsity is for 11th and 12th graders only and JV is for 10th graders and younger. While there is no separate Middle School division for the US History Bee, students in 8th grade and younger are welcome to compete in the JV Division as well. Aside from this difference in determining age divisions, the US History Bee National Qualifying Exam is also offered in three separate versions, and qualifying for Nationals functions the same way it does for the USGC/IGB exam.

**E. National Political Science Bee**

International Academic Competitions is debuting a new event for the 2019-2020 academic year: the National Political Science Bee. This competition has two stages, the National Qualifying Exam and the National Championships. The Qualifying Exam works identically to that of the US History Bee in terms of structure; namely, there are two age divisions (Varsity for 11th and 12th graders; JV for everyone younger), with three different versions of the exam, each having 50 questions, and students needing to qualify for Nationals by posting a score in the top 50% at their tournament site, or above the official National Median Score for their division on each exam. The National Championships of the National Political Science Bee are described in Section 3B of this guide. Note that the A Set version of the National Political Science Bee National Qualifying Exam will be based on the format and question distribution used by the AP American Government and Politics Exam, so that students who are preparing for this AP exam have a way to prepare and qualify for the NPSB National Championships if they are interested.

The National Political Science Bee is given during the lunch break of each Varsity / JV National History Bee and Bowl tournament, but note that the time to take all three exams (i.e. US History Bee, US Geography Championships/International Geography Bee, and National Political Science Bee is capped at 40 minutes). Thus students looking to do all three exams at one tournament site do not have more time than students looking to do just two exams (i.e. in both cases, students have 40
minutes). Most students take 10-15 minutes to complete an exam, though, so if students are being efficient, taking all 3 exams is certainly possible without being at a significant timing disadvantage.

3. National Championships

A. Schedule

The competition year for all Varsity and JV events held during the school year concludes on the last or second to last weekend in April with our annual National Championships. Typically, over 1000 students attend, along with over 200 teams competing in the History Bowl. It’s always an exciting weekend of competition, and we would be delighted for you and your school to join us! Nationals follows this general plan of events; specific times for each event can be found on www.historybowl.com under the Nationals tab on the menu bar:

Thursday late afternoon – National Political Science Bee Preliminaries (3 rounds)
Thursday early evening – National Political Science Bee Dinner Seminars
Thursday late evening – National Political Science Bee Playoffs (2 rounds)

Friday morning – US History Bee Preliminaries (6 rounds)
Friday early afternoon – US Geography Championships (3 part exam)
Friday mid-afternoon – US History Bee Playoffs (2 rounds, including JV Finals)
Friday late afternoon – International Geography Bee Preliminaries (3 rounds)
Friday early evening – National History Bee and Bowl Opening Ceremonies & US History Bee Varsity Finals
Friday late evening – Intl. Geography Bee Playoffs (2 rounds) and National Sports & Entertainment History Bee (2 preliminary rounds, 1 playoff round)

Saturday morning – National History Bowl Preliminaries (5 rounds)
Saturday afternoon – National History Bowl Upper Bracket and Consolation Rounds (5 rounds)
Saturday evening – National History Bowl Playoffs Part 1

Sunday morning – National History Bee Preliminaries (6 rounds)
Sunday early afternoon – National History Bowl Playoffs Part 2
Sunday late afternoon – National History Bee Playoffs (3 rounds)

Check the websites for the costs. Discounts are applied per team in the Bowl for bringing a buzzer system, for hosting a tournament, and for providing an experienced reader. At Nationals, providing a reader is optional (and incurs a discount for each portion of the competition that a reader can read for), as opposed to being mandatory at state/regionals. Teams of 1 or 2 students in the History Bowl also play for about 1/3 or 2/3 of the full team price respectively.

B. National Political Science Bee

The National Political Science Bee National Championships consists of 3 preliminary rounds of buzzer-based competition for all students. Approximately the top 20-35% of students in both age divisions then qualify for the playoffs, which consist of two rounds and which take place in the evening. The playoffs use the standard nationals playoff scoring system whereby questions are worth more points for quicker correct buzzes, and incorrect answers are penalized with negative points.
Between the preliminary and playoff rounds, however, competing students have a chance to participate in a dinner seminar and discussion group on a particular topic in political science. These seminars are moderated by influential people active in politics, public affairs, and public service, including politicians, government officials, members of the military, and members of the diplomatic community, among others. This gives students a unique opportunity to hear first-hand about how topics in political science are practiced in the greater Washington, DC area, and to gain insight into future careers in the field. The seminars and discussion groups will have anywhere from 10-25 students in each group, so that there will be chances for each student to raise discussion points that are of interest to them.

Further details on the National Political Science Bee can be found at [www.poltiicalsciencebee.com](http://www.poltiicalsciencebee.com) - this website will be launched by October 1, 2019.

### C. US History Bee

The US History Bee National Championships consists of 6 rounds of buzzer-based competition for all students. Approximately the top 20-35% of students in both age divisions then qualify for the playoffs, which take place in the afternoon and evening. Past questions from the US History Bee National Championships are available online at [www.ushistorybee.org](http://www.ushistorybee.org) to practice with. In 2019, over 200 students competed in the US History Bee National Championships.

Students are seeded for their preliminary round matches based off of their National Qualifying Exam scores and, if applicable, past performances at the US History Bee National Championships. In the playoffs, a separate scoring system is used that rewards quicker buzzes, but penalizes incorrect responses at all times; not just when a student is the third incorrect student before the end of the question.

The Junior Varsity US History Bee playoffs consist of two rounds; the Varsity playoffs consist of 3 rounds. The finalists among the Varsity students play during the Opening Ceremonies of the National History Bee and Bowl in the evening, typically in front of a crowd of 1000+ spectators!

### D. US Geography Championships

The National Championships of the US Geography Championships take place in the early afternoon on the Friday of Nationals weekend. The USGC Nationals consists of a three-part exam (Written Exam, Multiple Choice Exam, and Geography Skills Exam). The three parts of the exam are meant to approximate as best as possible the three components of the International Geography Olympiad. The top four students competing in the Varsity Division of the USGC win the right to represent the USA at the International Geography Olympiad each summer.

The three parts of the exam are weighed equally and students are then given a ranking on each exam once they have been graded. Students receive “rank points” for each exam in accordance with their order of finish on each exam. Whoever amasses the fewest “rank points” (i.e. the student with the highest overall scores across all three exams) wins. While JV students are ineligible to compete for a spot on Team USA at the International Geography Olympiad they obtain experience for when they become eligible, as the exams are the same for both JV and Varsity students. JV students compete against other JV students for their own National Championship title.

### E. International Geography Bee

The International Geography Bee US National Championships consist of three rounds of buzzer-based competition for all students. These use the same rules as for the US History Bee and National History Bee preliminaries, but all of the questions have a geography focus. The top students in both the Varsity and Junior Varsity Divisions advance to the playoffs that evening, while the top 50% of students at the National Championships qualify for the biennial IGB World Championships.
(the next IGB World Championships will take place in the summer of 2020; students can qualify for this in either the 2018-2019 or the 2019-2020 academic years).

In the playoffs, the playoff scoring rules that were used in the National Political Science Bee and US History Bee are also used for the International Geography Bee. Students competing in the International Geography Bee are ineligible to compete in the National Sports & Entertainment History Bee as the two competitions overlap. Students who compete in the International Geography Bee do not have to compete in the US Geography Championships (and vice versa) at Nationals, though by definition, if students have qualified for the one, they have qualified for the other.

F. National Sports & Entertainment History Bee

After the Opening Ceremonies of the National History Bee and Bowl conclude on Friday evening, the National Sports & Entertainment History Bee is held. No qualifying is needed to compete in this annual pop culture-themed event. Two rounds of preliminaries and one round of playoffs are held separately for both Varsity and Junior Varsity students. There is also an Adult division for coaches, parents, and other attendees who are above high school age. Further details, including past questions, are available on the National Sports & Entertainment History Bee website, available at: www.historybowl.com/nationals/sports-and-entertainment-bee/

G. National History Bowl

The National Championships for the National History Bowl begin during the final stages of the Opening Ceremonies on Friday evening with the annual “Opening Buzz” for the defending National Champion and their first-round opponent on Saturday morning (this is just one question for these two teams played in front of a large audience – the question does officially count toward the scoring, though). For all other teams, the National History Bowl National Championships begins on Saturday morning with 5 morning preliminary rounds for both Varsity and JV teams. These rounds are conducted in a round robin grouping of 6 teams. Teams that finish typically in the top 2 of these 6 then go on to play 5 more “Upper Bracket” rounds in the afternoon, while teams that finish in the bottom 4 of their morning group of 6 then go on to play 5 more rounds in the afternoon against teams with comparable finishes from the morning rounds (but are at that point ineligible to compete for the National Championship title).

On Saturday evening, the top Varsity and JV teams then qualify for the playoffs. The top teams compete in double-elimination playoffs (i.e. they must lose twice to exit the tournament), while teams with lower finishes that still make the playoffs compete in single-elimination status. However, even once a playoff team loses, they still play additional matches until their ultimate finish in the tournament has been determined. There is also a separate concurrent competition for the top “Small Schools” (i.e. non-magnet public schools with lower total enrollment).

The first rounds of both the Varsity and JV playoffs are held on Saturday evening; the remaining matches are held on early Sunday afternoon before the Bee playoffs. The playoffs at Nationals are a double elimination event for the top teams that make the playoffs and a single elimination event for the lower ranked teams that are still ranked high enough to make the playoffs.

H. National History Bee

The National Championships for the National History Bee are contested entirely on Sunday at the Crystal Gateway Marriot in Arlington, VA. They consist of 6 preliminary rounds for the standard competition. There is also a consolation competition for students who didn’t qualify but who wish to play the questions. Each round has 35 questions, but otherwise functions the same as the state or regional tournaments (students who exit on question 31-35 receive 0 bonus points). After the
preliminary rounds are done, the top students (the number will be a function of the number of students in the field; usually it is around 40 in each age division) will then qualify for the playoffs. The playoffs are held over 3 stages with the Nationals Bee playoff scoring system in effect. Usually about 350-400 students compete in the National History Bee at the Varsity / JV National Championships. Students who finish in the top half at the National Championships in either the National History Bee or on a team in the National History Bowl also qualify for the International History Olympiad, as do students who make the playoffs of the US History Bee.

4. International History Olympiad

IAC also organizes the International History Olympiad, which brings together students from around the world for an exciting eight days full of history-themed events and competitions every other summer. Past International History Olympiads have been held in Williamsburg, Virginia; Honolulu, Hawaii; and Berlin, Germany. The next International History Olympiad will be held in the summer of 2020 on a Carnival cruise in the Caribbean from July 19-26. Students are required to arrive in San Juan, Puerto Rico on July 18, unless they are taking part in the International Geography Bee World Championships, which are also taking place on the same cruise route from July 12-19. Events consist of various different History Bee and Bowl style competitions, along with other events, some of which are competitive, and some of which are not (e.g. field trips and seminars with historians or witnesses to history). To qualify for the Olympiad, students must finish in the top half at the National Championships in either the National History Bee or the National History Bowl in their division, compete on a team that wins a regional or state tournament in the National History Bowl, or finish in the top quarter of students at a state or regional tournament in the National History Bee.

US students at the International History Olympiad compete for their home state, unless they were born overseas or hold a foreign passport, in which case they can compete for their country of origin if they prefer. An official Olympiad champion is crowned off the rank points system (see the description of this under the US Geography Championships National Championships) from a written exam; a multiple choice exam, and the International History Bee World Championships. There are also two mandatory team events, including the International History Bowl World Championships (teams are composed of students from the same states or nationalities – students do not compete for their school here). A medals table is maintained; medals ceremonies, including national anthems/state songs and flag presentations, are held for each event. At the Olympiad, students compete in 4 separate age divisions: Varsity, Junior Varsity, Middle School, and Elementary.

The Olympiad is an unforgettable experience that for competing students is often the top highlight of their experiences as an academic competitor, providing a chance to meet like-minded and similarly talented students from around the world. The 28 medal events at the 2020 International History Olympiad will include the following:

- Art History Bee (with visual questions)
- Ancient History Bee
- Classical Music History Bee (with audio questions)
- International History Bee World Championships
- International History Bowl World Championships
- Visual History Bee (with visual questions)
- Aerospace History Bee
- Historical Geography Bee
- Popular Music History Bee (with audio questions)
- Recent History Bee
- Scramble (topic is only released a week prior to the Olympiad)
- Symposium (Research Paper and Defense)
- Battery Exam (400 question multiple choice exam)
- Civilization Computer Game Tournament
- Knockout quiz tournament
- Risk (board game) Tournament
- Civilization Scenario
- Great Trading Game
- Hexathlon Team Quiz Event
- Historical Simulation
- Caribbean History Exam
- South Asian History Exam
-Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics History Bee
-Sports History Bee
-U Pick / We Write (students select the preferred topic in advance)

For full details, including a draft schedule of events, full event descriptions, sightseeing options, logistics, costs, and the registration page, please see the Olympiad website at [www.historyolympiad.com](http://www.historyolympiad.com). For more information on the tournaments we run in other parts of the world, please see the links at [www.iacompetitions.com](http://www.iacompetitions.com).

### 5. Intl. Geography Bee World Championships

IAC also organizes the International Geography Bee World Championships, which are held in conjunction with the International History Olympiad during the week prior to the Olympiad. For 2020, the IGB World Championships will be held on a Carnival cruise in the Caribbean from July 12-19. Students will need to arrive in San Juan, Puerto Rico on July 11. Qualified students will be able to compete in both the IGB World Championships and the International History Olympiad.

The IGB World Championships will feature far more than just one buzzer-based competition. Attending students will compete in 10+ medal events and have a chance to meet geographically-talented students from around the world. Three of the events, a multiple choice exam, written exam, and a buzzer-based quiz tournament constitute the official International Geography Bee World Championship title events, though the other events will also feature medals ceremonies and be included in the medals table. Students can qualify for the 2020 IGB World Championships by posting a score of 75 or higher on any version of the USGC/IGB National Qualifying Exam or by finishing in the top 50% at the International Geography Bee National Championships.

Further information on the IGB World Championships, including full event descriptions, a draft schedule, logistics, costs, and the registration page can be found online at [www.igbworlds.com](http://www.igbworlds.com).

### 6. How to Prepare – Resources

Starting a team in the National History Bowl, or beginning to participate as an individual student in the National History Bee, US History Bee, National Political Science Bee, US Geography Championships, or International Geography Bee might look like a daunting task, but there are many available resources to help guide you in your preparations. The best of these is our past questions, so you can get a sense of what this year’s questions will be like. These are best accessed by following the instructions contained on this page: [http://www.historybowl.com/resources/study-guides-resources/](http://www.historybowl.com/resources/study-guides-resources/) Other links on the Resources tab on the menu bar at historybowl.com provide access to the Official Complete Rules and the Official Rules Summaries, as well as sample match videos, FAQs, and other useful information.

The only piece of equipment that is used for NHBB matches is a lockout buzzer system for at least 8 students (e.g. 4 on each team). NHBB recommends purchasing the 10 person Tabletop Officiator model from [www.andersonbuzzersystems.com](http://www.andersonbuzzersystems.com). This system has 3 major advantages over every other system out there. First, to the best of our knowledge, it is the cheapest system that contains all the functionality needed for gameplay. It retails for about $235 plus shipping. Secondly, this model (and NOT the Anderson “hand held” model) is very easy to set up. Since the buzzers are already attached to each other, typical set up or take down time is only about 2 minutes. Other systems can take up to 10 or more minutes and are far more cumbersome. Finally, the Anderson Tabletop Officiator model is very durable – we take them around the world for our international tournaments too – and as long as they are treated well, they very rarely break.
It is not required to have a buzzer system to attend NHBB tournaments, but we highly recommend it, since it will help your team practice in a fun setting that simulates tournament gameplay. Additionally, we offer discounts of $10 at regional or state tournaments or $30 at the National Championships for bringing buzzer systems that allow at least 8 people to play.

Finally, in terms of preparing for tournaments, most standard high school history textbooks and courses are very helpful, though you will also want to branch out a little bit. Reading *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Economist* can be very helpful for "recent history" questions, while a basic knowledge of world and US geography (especially world capitals!) is not only helpful for USGC and IGB, but for many National History Bee and Bowl questions too. Often, students may be guided to an answer based on geographic or linguistic clues within the questions (e.g. a reference to “Brussels” in a question about the history of Belgium or Italian-sounding names helping to clue students in to thinking about the history of Italy).

Also, don’t overlook a basic knowledge of the history of sports and entertainment. While that probably shouldn’t be the major focus of your preparation efforts, questions on classic movies, TV shows, songs, and famous moments in sports all do come up as well, and may be slightly beyond the scope of a standard history textbook. This will also serve you well if you choose to compete in the National Sports and Entertainment History Bee.

We also strongly urge you and your school to acquire a basic familiarity with the history of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America. Realistically, there’s not a tremendous amount of questions we can ask about here (since these topics are often neglected in schools). However, basic questions on the history of these regions come up at all tournaments and questions on more obscure topics from the history of these regions come up routinely at the National Championships. Your best guide here is likely to be past National History Bee and Bowl question packets. You might want to make notes from those packets, as much of that information is repeatedly referenced from one tournament to the next. It’s not overly difficult to master, but a little studying and preparation can go a long way here in particular. Don’t get bogged down with things that are far too obscure in general. Instead, stick with topics that have come up before in past questions – they are your best guide to what will likely be asked about in the future.

### 7. How to Prepare – Strategies

IAC competitions differ from certain academic competitions in that it is often possible to do very little preparation specifically for IAC events, and still achieve a decent degree of success in them. If students have typically done well in their history or geography classes, or have a natural interest in the subjects and have read a decent amount on their own in these fields, that can often lead to a fair amount of success, especially in areas of the country that do not have many active all-subject quiz bowl teams.

However, in order both to have as much fun with NHBB/USGC as possible, learn as much through the experience as possible, and succeed to the greatest degree (especially at Nationals), a certain amount of preparation is needed. There’s no “right” or “wrong” amount of time to put in preparing; nor is there a universally accepted way as to how to go about doing this. That said, we strongly urge you and your team to consider the following approaches to preparing for tournaments:

1. **Play high quality all-subject quiz bowl tournaments, not just National History Bee and Bowl (NHBB) events!**
   The National History Bee and Bowl (and IAC more broadly speaking) grew out of the national community of all-subject quiz bowl tournaments. At most, there are 4 or 5 chances to compete in IAC sponsored tournaments in a given year, but depending on your area, there could be as many as 20 other all-subject tournaments. Almost without exception, the best
students and teams at our National Championships also compete in these tournaments. Because the National History Bee and Bowl take a very broad view of history, perhaps over 50% of the questions at a standard quiz bowl tournament contain information that could also come up in an NHBB event. The more you play quiz bowl in addition to NHBB, the more you will learn and improve, and you’ll have more incentives to study and prepare on your own, since you’ll be able to put that knowledge to more frequent use!

However, do note that not all tournaments are created equal. While almost any tournament can give you a chance to test your knowledge, we advise you in particular to play tournaments written on “pyramidal” questions of the sort that NHBB uses. These questions are fairer and more informative than other styles, as they reward students with deeper knowledge. They also promote critical thinking by encouraging students to think through the topics being referenced in the questions in an attempt to find the correct answer. You can keep abreast of quiz bowl tournaments in your area, and with developments in quiz bowl in general through the online quiz bowl forums at www.hsquizbowl.org/forums/. Generally speaking, quiz bowl players and coaches are very willing to offer advice about both IAC sponsored events and quiz bowl in general.

2)  Be familiar with the style of our questions and game format, and don’t make avoidable mistakes!
This sounds easy (and it is), but it’s often overlooked by new teams and students. Be sure you know the basic rules of how our competitions work, and practice running games in the standard format. Two errors we often see among new teams are (1) when one team gets a buzzer question wrong, and then a player on the other team rings in before the end of the question and answers incorrectly. Remember that questions get easier as they go along, and since the first team to answer incorrectly can’t ring in again, the second team should wait until the question is done. Then, perhaps allow 1 second to allow a student who is certain to ring in; then, if no one has rung in after a second or so, someone can ring in and take an educated guess. Another mistake (2) we often see is mismanaging the clock in a 60 second round. If you don’t know the answer here, guess quickly or pass! Don’t spend too much time on one question, just go on to the next.

The basics of competition are not complicated, but some familiarity with the game format and rules can be very helpful towards ensuring success, especially among new students and teams.

3)  Practice systematically with your teammates (and on your own as well).
The majority of National History Bowl teams do practice at least a little bit with their teammates prior to tournaments, but not all practices are created equal. Does practice consist exclusively of reading old question packets, or is some effort made to ensuring that common topics are known by team members (perhaps through flashcard drills)? Do you “cross-train” by playing in all-subject quiz bowl tournaments (or even watching Jeopardy!)? That can be helpful too.

Above all, though, while practice should be fun, it should be conducted efficiently. A well-run 45 minute practice session accomplishes more than 2 hours spent getting distracted. Also, you will want to break experienced players and new players up, so as not to discourage new players from being overwhelmed. And we can’t emphasize enough the value of writing topics down in a study notebook! If you just read old questions or play old questions, that’s good. But if you figure out what topics are going unanswered and write them down, that’s great. We particularly recommend doing this for questions in a field (say, Roman history, or Chinese history) that you might be focusing on. Also, don’t feel as if you need to write down everything in a question, but instead, focus on the point in the question right before the point where you recognized the answer. That’s probably the next thing you should learn about that topic (since information towards the end of questions is referenced overall more frequently).

4)  Divide and conquer
In the National History Bee, US History Bee, National Political Science Bee, and USGC/IGB, you’re on your own, so this strategy won’t help you there. However, in the National History Bowl, it’s often helpful to split up various topics, or periods
in history with your teammates. Do you have someone who knows a bit about Asian history? You should, but it’s better to have just 1 person studying Asian history, than 3 people studying Asian history and no one studying Latin American and African history. Have a look at the Official Question Distribution file here [www.historybowl.com/official-rules/](http://www.historybowl.com/official-rules/) and then make sure all bases are covered. Also, don’t feel as if you need to split up areas equally among 4 teammates. If one student in particular is a strong player, or if one or two students show a capacity to take on increased studying commitments, then they should perhaps take more topics; letting the remaining students on the team be specialists. Even a team with 1 incredible player can benefit from having teammates who study particular topics in great depth and can score points whenever they come up.

5) **Focus on knowledge retention**
Finally, remember that IAC competitions have a very broad focus. This makes studying for them different from studying for a typical history test (where you are at some level going to forget things after the test is done, in order to prepare for the next one). Even if you are studying for a final exam or an AP exam, the emphasis is on studying for that one test. But since IAC competitions (and all-subject quiz bowl tournaments) reward knowledge of all aspects of history and geography at each tournament, and since tournaments are held on a recurring basis each year, you need to focus on long-term memory and knowledge retention. This is a different skill than cramming for a test, and takes time and repetition to master. However, in the long run, it’s a far more rewarding way of approaching education, as that knowledge is far more likely to stay with you into college and beyond, being useful in many instances in life.

You and your team can master this skill by keeping notes in a notebook, and frequently reviewing information until you “have it down cold.” Additionally, while the vast array of possible question topics may seem daunting at first, there’s a high degree of repetition from one National History Bee and Bowl question set to another (and to a lesser extent, from one set of quiz bowl questions to another). If you play and practice frequently, you’ll become a great player quicker than you ever thought possible. And you’ll find that history and geography courses become much easier too.

6) **If possible, start in middle school or elementary school!**
Many of the top high school players started playing when they were in middle school – or even elementary school! IAC organizes the National History Bee and Bowl for younger students too. Please see [www.nationalhistorybee.com](http://www.nationalhistorybee.com) for further details (this website has information on both the Bee and Bowl for younger students – not just the Bee). Note that the initial registration for middle schools and elementary schools to sign up for their divisions of the National History Bee is free of charge! The National History Bee and Bowl are structured somewhat differently for the younger age divisions, but at the regional and national level, the game works basically the same as it does at the Varsity and JV levels. Thus students who start competing earlier have a leg up by the time they reach 9th grade.

If you are a coach (or a motivated player), see if you can help start a middle school program at your feeder middle school(s). This will go a long way toward ensuring that motivated, experienced, and top-notch 9th grade players join your school or homeschool association’s team each year. Note that public middle school students can play on the team of the non-magnet high school their school predominantly feeds into. Private and public schools (as well as homeschool associations) that have both middle and high schoolers can have middle school students play together on their JV teams with 9th & 10th graders.

8. **How to Prepare – Logistics and Fundraising**

No guide for preparation for our competitions would be complete without a discussion of the logistics and fundraising that often go into making it possible to attend tournaments. Ideally, your school or homeschool association will be supportive of the participation of you and your team in our competitions. In the absolute best scenario, this would entail paying for
participation fees and travel to attend both National History Bee and Bowl and all-subject quiz bowl tournaments throughout the year, a trip to the National Championships, and a stipend for a coach. That, however, is relatively rare among schools, and especially among new teams. In many instances, a team will need to demonstrate a certain level of commitment and/or success, before the school administration decides to help with funding. And even here, it’s no guarantee.

To get around these hurdles, consider the following steps. First, while National History Bowl state and regional tournaments require a reader to be brought along with a team to a tournament, we do not require any sort of official participation from your school. While teams must be comprised of members entirely from one school, it does not have to be considered a school activity. Teams without school support can call themselves something else (or have their school name omitted from results posted online) if it helps make participation easier.

Secondly, consider appealing to a local historical society, museum, or local businesses for funding support. If you have a track record of success, or can explain to them that you are taking your preparations seriously, you may find fundraising to be easier than you think. Next, consider holding a fundraiser, which could be anything from a bake sale to a town-wide quiz tournament (where each team of 4 adults needs to pay $50-$100 per team, say). This could be an effective way to earn funding. If you are interested in conducting a quiz tournament of this sort, consider using past questions that are posted on the NHBB website (this is permitted), or if you want to access “pub quiz” style questions that do not use a buzzer system, email director@historybowl.com if you would like to acquire questions for this purpose free of charge.

Finally, in terms of logistical planning, consider forming an official club or team and designating one person to be responsible for administrative matters, such as registering for and paying for tournaments, and figuring out transportation to events. Ideally, this would be a coach, but on many teams, students take the initiative and handle these tasks (which is fine with us). Sometimes parents take the lead here too, especially on driving teams and students to tournaments, which is also fine (just remember to thank them next Mother’s Day or Father’s Day!) Again, there’s no right or wrong way to go about these logistical matters. The primary point is to make sure that someone is on top of them, and that they do not get overlooked amid your preparations that focus on studying and practicing. It doesn’t do you any good to have prepared for a tournament, only to not be able to attend due to financing or logistical difficulties

9. Further Information

We hope that this guide has given you and your school a good overview of how Varsity and Junior Varsity IAC competitions in the USA work, and what they have to offer. However, far more information is available at our websites. For further questions, please see the respective websites first:

www.iacompetitions.com - International Academic Competitions Worldwide Homepage
www.historybowl.com - National History Bee and Bowl – Varsity & Junior Varsity Divisions
www.nationalhistorybee.com - National History Bee and Bowl - Middle School & Elementary School Divisions
www.nationalpoliticalsciencebee.com - National Political Science Bee
www.ushistorybee.org - US History Bee
www.geographychampionships.com - US Geography Championships
www.historyolympiad.com - International History Olympiad
www.internationalgeographybee.com - International Geography Bee
www.igbworlds.com - International Geography Bee World Championships
www.historybowl.com/nationals/sports-and-entertainment-bee/ - National Sports & Entertainment History Bee

www.usacademicbowl.com - US Academic Bee & Bowl (all-subject quiz tournaments for 8th graders and younger only)

www.nationalsciencebee.com - National Science Bee (for 8th graders and younger only)

www.usacademicbowl.com/national-humanities-bee/ - National Humanities Bee (for 8th graders and younger only)

Additional requests for information may be directed to info@iacompetitions.com.

Thank you for your interest in our competitions, and we look forward to seeing you at one of our tournaments soon!