

Alaska History Day 2024

Topic Ideas for the theme “Turning Points in History”

Questions? Contact alaskahistoryday@gmail.com

When participating in the [National History Day](#) program, students in 6th-12th grades will produce a paper, documentary, website, performance, or exhibit on a topic of their choice.

Alaska history topics help students engage in their local/regional/state history and use the primary sources and other resources that our state has to offer, whether archival documents, museum objects, oral histories, etc.

Please note that many topics could easily be classified under multiple categories. We encourage you to read through the list in its entirety and consider how many topics might relate to several of these areas, including those where cross references are not noted.

Consider this list a starting point -

use the ideas here to begin your own research journey!

Bills, Laws and Court Cases as Turning Points:

- 1st Organic Act (1884)
- Davis et al. V. Sitka School Board (1906)
- 2nd Organic Act (1912)
- Indian Citizenship Act (1924)
 - Alaska Native peoples gained voting rights
- Indian Reorganization Act in Alaska (1936)
- King-Havenner Bill (1938)
- Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945
- Voting Rights Act (1965) in Alaska
- Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) - (1971)
- Passage of Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972)
- Tobeluk vs. Lind / Molly Hootch Case (1976)
- Indian Child Welfare Act (1978)
- Frank Vs State (1979)
- Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) (1980)
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990)
- Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (1996)
- Katie John case (2001)

Russian Colonization of Alaska as a Turning Point:

- Russian arrival to settle in Alaska (1780s)
- Tlingit attack on the Russian fort at Sitka (1802) / Russians return (1804)
- Departure of Gov. Alexander Baranov (1818)
- Russian Orthodox Mission work (Beginning around 1794)
 - and/or the work of Ivan Veniaminov (Beginning 1822)
- Smallpox epidemic in the 1830s
- Woody Island's role in ice trade and modern refrigeration
 - Russian American Ice Company (circa 1852-1872)
- Treaty of Cession (1867)

Turning points in Alaska Politics:

- The First Alaska Election (1912)
 - See also "Second Organic Act"
- Appointment of Ernest Gruening as Territorial Governor (1939)
- Statehood Committee (established 1949)
- Election of Thelma Buchholdt (1974)
- Establishment of the Alaska Permanent Fund (1976) and Permanent Fund Dividend (1980)

Turning Points in Education:

- Boarding Schools (Beginning 1878)
- Davis et al. V. Sitka School Board (1906)
- Establishment of the University of Alaska
 - Originally the Alaska Agricultural College & School of Mines (1917)
- Alaska Native programs transferred from Bureau of Education to Bureau of Indian Affairs (1931)
- Closure of King Island School (1959)
- Tobeluk vs. Lind / Molly Hootch Case (1976)

Turning Points Impacting Indigenous Communities and Rural Alaska:

- Indigenous Technologies and subsistence practices, migration and hunter-gathering
- Changes in village sites due to: environment, food sources, establishment of schools and churches
 - *Note: this topic might help students brainstorm about specific events in their community or region.*
- Impact of the Klondike and Alaska gold rushes on Alaska Natives
- Getting Power to rural communities and Power Cost Equalization
- Epidemics: smallpox, Spanish flu, tuberculosis (see also healthcare)
- Establishment of Native Boarding Schools (1878)

Turning Points Impacting Indigenous Communities and Rural Alaska (continued)

- Bombing of Angoon (1882)
- Meeting of the Tanana Chiefs with Judge Wickersham (1915)
- Indian Citizenship Act (1924) - Alaska Native peoples gained voting rights
- Transfer of Alaska Native programs from Bureau of Education to Bureau of Indian Affairs (1931)
- Indian Reorganization Act in Alaska (1936)
- Relocation of indigenous Alaskans on the Aleutian Chain during World War II / Unangan Internment (1942-1945)
- Removal of the school on King Island (1959)
- Duck-In at Utqiagvik (1961)
- Project Chariot (1958-1962)
 - See Also Project Plowshare
- Tobeluk V. Lind / Molly Hootch Case (1976)
- Chandler Lake surface exchange agreement regarding Arctic National Wildlife Reserve (1983)
- Katie John case (2001)

Impact of Religious Missionaries as Turning Points

- Impact of religious missionaries and the development of organized religion in Alaska on indigenous people, impact on Alaska Native culture
- Russian Orthodox Mission work (Beginning around 1794)
 - and/or the work of Ivan Veniaminov (Beginning 1822)
- Comity Agreement (1885)

U.S. Military Events and Actions as Turning Points:

- Bombing of Angoon (1882)
- Creation of the Washington-Alaska Military Communication and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) (1900)
 - See Also Alaska Communication System (ACS)
- **World War II and Alaska**
 - Lend-Lease Act (1941)
 - Construction of Whittier Tunnel as a strategic supply chain (1941-1943)
 - the building of the Alcan/Alaska Highway (1942)
 - Black Soldiers' role in building the Alcan Highway
 - Also transportation history
 - The World War II Aleutian Campaign (1942-1943)

- Relocation of indigenous Alaskans on the Aleutian Chain during World War II / Unangan Internment (1942-1945)
- Crash and subsequent recovery of the Aleutian Zero (Akutan Zero) aircraft during World War II (1942)
- Establishment of the 10th Rescue Squadron (1946)
 - Contribution to improved search and rescue procedures in Alaska
- **"Top Cover for America"**
 - Early Warning Air Defense Systems in Alaska (as protection against Soviet Bomber/Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) attack)
 - Construction of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line (1954)
- **Nuclear History in Alaska**
 - Construction of Ft Greely's Power Plant (1958)
 - Nuclear waste disposal in Western Alaska villages (1960s)
 - Nuclear Testing on Amchitka Island (1965-1971)

Turning Points in the Fight for Rights and Representation

(See also 'Laws and Court Cases')

- Racial Segregation in Alaska
- History of Redlining in Fairview and black culture in Anchorage
- Civil Rights Activism in Fairview

Turning Points in the Fight for Rights and Representation (Continued)

- Founding of Alaska Native Brotherhood/Sisterhood (1912/1915)
- King-Havenner Bill (1938)
- Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945
- Work of Elizabeth Peratrovich (1940s-1950s)
- Impact of Project Chariot (1958-1962) on fight for Indigenous rights
- Duck-In @ Utqiagvik (1961)
- Indian Child Welfare Act (1978)

Turning Points relating to Resource Extraction:

- Woody Island's role in ice trade and modern refrigeration
 - Russian American Ice Company (circa 1852-1872)
- Introduction of reindeer in western Alaska (late 1800s)
- The Gold Rush and its imprints of the natural resources vs all the Mines in Alaska today.
 - *Students may wish to consider a particular Gold Rush/Region*
- FE Company's arrival/ investment in Fairbanks (1920s)
- **Copper River Copper discovery (1900)**
 - How the Million Dollar Bridge, Kennecott mine, and Guggenheims brought industry to Alaska
 - Kennecott Mine Closure (1938)

Turning Points relating to Resource Extraction (continued)

- **Oil Industry**
 - Discovery of Oil at Prudhoe Bay (1968)
 - Passage of Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (1971)
 - Construction of the Alaska Pipeline (1975-1976)
 - Establishment of the Alaska Permanent Fund (1976)

Turning Points related to Fish/Fishing

- Growth of Alaskan fisheries and canneries- citizens decided to reduce commercial catch to where it is now (preservation for future fisheries)
- Commercial fishing vs subsistence fishing
 - *Students may wish to consider a particular region, community, or time period*
- Opening of the Bristol bay fishery (approximately 1890s)
- Start of fish and game management in Alaska (1920s)
- Pacific Salmon Treaty (1985)
 - Contribution to ongoing Fishing Industry issues in Alaska

Health Care Issues as Turning Points:

- Tuberculosis epidemic (beginning late 1700s/early 1800s)
- the smallpox epidemic in the 1830s
- Spanish Flu (1918-1919)
- Serum Run (1925)
 - Connection to Iditarod Sled Dog Race (see also, transportation)

Turning Points relating to Transportation:

- Iditarod/Serum Run (1925)
 - Legacy of dog mushing in Alaska (from 'need' for transportation to 'racing for sport and animal mistreatment issues)
- **Rail Transport Turning Points**
 - Construction of the Alaska Railroad (1914-1923)
 - Construction of the Copper Valley and Northwestern Railway (completed 1911)
 - Construction of Whittier Tunnel (1941-1943)
- **Aviation Turning Points**
 - Introduction of airplanes to Alaska (1913)
 - How they changed the territory (beginning in 1920s)
 - Ben Eielson's First Airmail Flights (1924)
 -

Turning Points relating to Transportation (Continued)

- **Aviation Turning Points (continued)**
 - Development of Anchorage as Air Crossroads (beginning 1946)
impact on UPS/Fedex, etc
- **Road Construction Turning Points**
 - The building of the Alcan/Alaska Highway (1942)
 - Black Soldiers' role in building the Alcan Highway
 - opening it to public traffic (1948)
 - the building of the 'Haul Road', (Dalton Highway) (1974)
 - later opening it to public traffic (1981/1994)
- Development of the Alaska Marine Highway System (1963)
- **Oil Transport Turning Points**
 - Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (approval– Nov 1973)
 - the building of the 'Haul Road', (Dalton Highway) (1974)
 - later opening it to public traffic (1981/1994)
 - *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill (1989)

Turning Points relating to Marine Mammals:

- Hunting and decimation of sea otter populations (beginning ca. 1742)
 - See also Russian colonization
- Sealing industry on the Pribilofs (beginning ca. 1799)
 - See Also Russian Colonization
- **Turning Points for Whales/Whaling**
 - “Yankee” whaling in the Bering Sea, Chukchi and Beaufort Seas
(Beginning late 1800s)
 - International Whaling Commission Whaling Moratorium/Ban
(1982)
- Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972)
- *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill (1989)

Disasters as Turning Points:

- Sinking of the *Princess Sophia* (1918)
- Nuclear waste disposal in Western Alaskan villages (1960s)
- 1964 Earthquake
 - caused changes in land use, building specs, etc.
 - Caused some communities to have to relocate.
- *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill (1989)

People who brought about turning points or whose lives represent turning

points:

- K'alyáan / Katlian (Battle of Sitka, 1804)
- Sheldon Jackson (1834-1909)
- Changunak Antisarlook - "Sinrock Mary, Queen of Reindeer" (1870-1948)
- Ada Blackjack (1898-1983)
- Della Keats (1907-1986)
- Elizabeth Peratrovich (1911-1958)
- Howard Rock (1911-1976)
- Charles "Etok" Edwardsen Jr. (1943-2015)

Other Turning Points:

- Prohibition/ Alaska "Bone Dry Law" (1917)
- 1967 Centennial commemoration of Alaska Purchase -
 - federal funding for local infrastructure projects (helped create/improve ~16 regional museums + local community centers)
 - Establishment of A67/Alaskaland/Pioneer Park in Fairbanks
- Influence of the Alaska State Troopers and the growth of law enforcement in the Great Land - rural enforcement, Vice enforcement during the Pipeline boom, and today with urban and rural differences

Recent Court Cases Relevant to Historical Issues

- The Stevens rider on annual Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (1996) appropriations since 2005
- The Cook Inlet Recovery Act^(Pub. L. 111-11) of 2010
- Yellen v Chehalis (2021)
- Sagoonick v. State (2022)