History Trivia Questions for Adults

Give your group a history round that spans civilizations, ideas, technology, and turning points.

Host guide / A4 / Adult trivia / 25–40 minutes

Read the guide privately first if this activity has hidden answers. Print single-sided at Actual size / 100%. Cut only sheets marked CARDS. Keep answer keys with the host.

What you need

- Printed question cards or a host screen
- Pens and score sheet
- A timer (optional)
- One host or a reader for each team

How to run it

1. Choose teams of two to five or play individually.
2. Read the prompt and allow 20–30 seconds for a response.
3. Award one point for a correct answer; accept equivalent wording.
4. Reveal the answer and read the short explanation.
5. Choose cards from at least six subjects for a shorter round.
6. Keep the answer key with the host, separate from player-facing prompts.

History across more than one era

The deck is organized to move across several periods and ways of understanding the past: calendars and mathematics, written records, civic change, infrastructure, conflict, and exploration. It includes U.S. history but does not treat one national archive or event as the whole story. Indigenous Maya knowledge and continuing Maya communities are presented as living history, not as an extinct civilization.

- Ancient Maya astronomy and calendars
- Printing and literary history
- Founding documents and rights
- Transportation and diplomacy
- World War II
- Spaceflight

Make history a conversation

A host can follow a reveal with a short “what surprised you?” prompt. Teams may compare what they learned in school or connect a historical technology to something people use now. If a card raises a broader question about whose experiences were recorded, invite discussion without letting the game imply that one source tells the whole story.

- Use teams for a social round.

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- Offer a pass on any question without penalty.

- Allow a brief discussion after the answer.

Care with historical wording

Historical dates and documents can be simplified in casual retellings. The cards distinguish adoption from signing, identify the limits of formal voting amendments, and name the specific Maya calendar being asked about. Source links point to institutions responsible for the records or public history described.

- Dates refer to the event named in the prompt.

- Modern communities are included where relevant.

- No question asks players to infer that a legal milestone instantly ended discrimination.

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CARDS / History Trivia Questions for Adults

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-001 / Ancient Americas What mathematical concept did ancient Maya scholars develop and use?	R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-002 / Ancient Americas What are the names of the two best-known Maya cyclical calendars?
R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-003 / Ancient Americas How many days are in the Maya Tzolk’in sacred calendar cycle?	R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-004 / Ancient Americas Which crop is central to many Maya origin stories and agricultural cycles?
R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-005 / U.S. founding era Who wrote the first draft of the Declaration of Independence?	R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-006 / U.S. founding era On what date did the Continental Congress adopt the Declaration of Independence?

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CARDS / History Trivia Questions for Adults

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-007 / Civil War and emancipation

On what date did Abraham Lincoln issue the final Emancipation Proclamation?

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-008 / Civil War and emancipation

Did the Emancipation Proclamation end slavery everywhere in the United States?

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-009 / U.S. constitutional history

How many amendments did Congress initially send to states as the proposed Bill of Rights?

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-010 / U.S. constitutional history

What year did the first ten amendments become the Bill of Rights?

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-011 / Voting rights history

Which amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits denying the vote on account of sex?

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-012 / Voting rights history

Which state supplied the final ratification needed for the Nineteenth Amendment?

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CARDS / History Trivia Questions for Adults

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-013 / Transportation history At Promontory Summit in which present-day state did the first transcontinental railroad join?	R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-014 / Transportation history In what year was the first transcontinental railroad completed?
R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-015 / Books and technology In which city was the Gutenberg Bible probably completed in the mid-15th century?	R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-016 / Books and technology What kind of type made Gutenberg’s Western European printing process distinctive?
R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-017 / Literary history In what year was Shakespeare’s First Folio published?	R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-018 / Literary history What is the First Folio’s significance for readers of Shakespeare?

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CARDS / History Trivia Questions for Adults

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-019 / Space age history

On what date did Apollo 11 launch from Florida?

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-020 / Space age history

Which Apollo 11 astronaut remained in lunar orbit while Armstrong and Aldrin walked on the Moon?

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-021 / World history

In which year did World War II begin in Europe after Germany invaded Poland?

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-022 / World history

What was the name commonly given to the Allied landings in Normandy on June 6, 1944?

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-023 / Diplomatic history

Which country sold the Louisiana Territory to the United States in 1803?

R_TRIVIA_HISTORY-024 / U.S. constitutional history

Where was the U.S. Constitutional Convention held in 1787?

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Host answer key

Keep this section separate from player cards. Accept equivalent wording where the meaning matches.

01. Zero.

The Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian describes the Maya as developing the mathematical concept of zero.

02. Haab and Tzolk’in.

The Smithsonian calendar guide discusses the Haab, the Tzolk’in, the Calendar Round, and Long Count.

03. 260 days.

The Tzolk’in combines 20 day signs with numbers from 1 to 13, producing a 260-day cycle.

04. Corn (maize).

Smithsonian material describes the close connection between corn, the solar cycle, and Maya calendar practice.

05. Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson drafted the document for a committee of five; Congress revised and adopted the text.

06. July 4, 1776.

The adoption date is July 4; the engrossed parchment was signed by delegates beginning on August 2.

07. January 1, 1863.

The Library of Congress dates the final proclamation to January 1, 1863. It applied to areas in rebellion and did not by itself end slavery nationwide.

08. No.

It applied to enslaved people in states or designated areas in rebellion, while leaving slavery untouched in loyal border states; the Thirteenth Amendment later abolished slavery nationally.

09. Twelve.

Congress proposed 12 amendments; 10 were ratified in 1791 and became the Bill of Rights.

10. 1791.

The National Archives records ratification of the first ten amendments on December 15, 1791.

11. The Nineteenth Amendment.

The amendment was ratified in 1920, after decades of organizing; discriminatory barriers continued to keep many women from voting.

12. Tennessee.

Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify on August 18, 1920.

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13. Utah.

The Central Pacific and Union Pacific lines met at Promontory Summit, Utah, in 1869.

14. 1869.

The National Park Service dates its completion to May 10, 1869.

15. Mainz, Germany.

The Library of Congress says printing was probably completed in Mainz late in 1455.

16. Movable metal type.

Gutenberg’s press used interchangeable metal type, enabling repeated printing of pages.

17. 1623.

The First Folio collected 36 plays and was assembled after Shakespeare’s death by fellow actors.

18. It is the first collected edition of his plays and preserves the complete text of 36 plays.

The Library of Congress record describes the Folio as the first collected edition and lists the plays it contains.

19. July 16, 1969.

The Apollo 11 crew launched from Cape Kennedy aboard a Saturn V rocket.

20. Michael Collins.

Collins piloted the command module Columbia while the lunar module Eagle descended to the surface.

21. 1939.

The NPS timeline marks Germany’s invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, as the beginning of World War II.

22. D-Day.

The NPS timeline identifies June 6, 1944 as D-Day, the Allied foothold in northern France.

23. France.

The Louisiana Purchase transferred the territory from France to the United States in 1803.

24. Philadelphia.

The National Archives account describes the convention that produced the Constitution in Philadelphia.

Hosting questions

Is this a U.S.-only history quiz?

No. It includes U.S. history alongside Maya history, print history, and global events.

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Are the questions suitable for a history class?

They are designed for adult social play; educators should review and adapt the scope for their curriculum.

Can players use the source links during the game?

The host can keep them for the answer reveal or share them for post-game reading.

References

Smithsonian NMAI explains Maya hieroglyphic writing and the invention of zero.

https://maya.nmai.si.edu/maya

Smithsonian Living Maya Time describes Haab and Tzolk'in cycles, including 260 and 365 days.

https://maya.nmai.si.edu/calendar/calendar-system

Smithsonian explains links among Maya observation of the Sun, corn, and calendar keeping.

https://maya.nmai.si.edu/maya-sun

National Archives states Jefferson drafted the Declaration, adopted July 4 and signed beginning Aug. 2.

https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/declaration-of-independence

National Archives records John Dunlap printed and distributed Declaration broadsides.

https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration/how-did-it-happen

National Archives explains 12 proposed amendments and 10 ratified in 1791.

https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/bill-of-rights

National Archives gives Tennessee ratification and the 19th Amendment's text and limits.

https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/19th-amendment

NPS records completion of the transcontinental railroad at Promontory Summit in 1869.

https://www.nps.gov/gosp/learn/historyculture/golden-spike-national-historical-park-facts.htm

LOC states Gutenberg Bible printing was completed about 1455 in Mainz using movable metal type.

https://wwws.loc.gov/exhibits/bibles/the-gutenberg-bible.html

LOC record states First Folio published in 1623 and contains 36 plays.

https://www.loc.gov/item/2021666879

NPS timeline marks 1939 invasion of Poland and June 1944 D-Day.

https://www.nps.gov/mapr/learn/historyculture/timeline.htm

NASA mission overview lists launch, crew, command module, and lunar module.

https://www.nasa.gov/missions/apollo/apollo-11/apollo-11-mission-overview/

U.S. State Department historian covers the 1803 Louisiana Purchase from France.

https://history.state.gov/milestones/1801-1829/louisiana-purchase

National Archives describes the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution/how-was-it-made

Original AI-assisted resource with AI editorial review. Independent human playtesting and physical printing have not been completed. Answer, listen, or pass.

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