



ROOTS & REELS Theme Manual

10 Potential Reels Themes

**INTERNATIONAL HISTORY COMPETITION
FOR YOUNG DIGITAL STORYTELLERS (13-27)**

What story from the past still speaks to you today?

- **Organised by:** IDMC - Institute for Democracy, Media & Culture
- **Initiated by:** EUSTORY
- **Supported by:** Körber-Stiftung



Before you choose a theme

30-second checklist

For any theme, your film should clearly show:

Your past

what story from history/memory you chose

Your sources

minimum 2 historical sources (photos, letters, archives, newspapers, monuments, interviews, etc.)

Your "why now"

why it matters today, to you and to others



1. The Story We Never Tell

Core idea

Family silence, taboo, missing chapters, "the locked drawer" in your home.

Hook (opening line)

"In my family, there's one story that ends mid-sentence."

Possible angles

war, migration, a lost family member, forbidden love, political fear, freedom, personal events ect.

2+ sources you can use

family album + interview with a relative / letter + object (passport, medal).

Why it matters today

How the absence of stories shapes what is remembered, discussed, and understood by younger generations.



2. One Street, Two Realities (Then vs Now)

Core idea

Your neighbourhood as a living archive: what changed—and who paid the price?

Hook

"This street looks new. But it remembers everything."

Possible angles

gentrification, post-industrial decline, housing crises, erased communities.

2+ sources

old photos/maps + city archive snippet / oral story + monument/street name.

Why now

links local change to today's inequality, migration, and belonging.



3. Border Objects (A Passport, A Suitcase, A Key)



Core idea

Tell history through one object that travelled (or couldn't).



Hook

"This key opens a door that doesn't exist anymore."

Possible angles

displacement, refugees, seasonal work, crossing risks, identity documents.

2+ sources

object + archival photo/document /
interview + border location footage.

Why now

borders are still shaping lives,
politically, emotionally, and
digitally.

4. Democracy Under the Table



Core idea

Everyday life under censorship/surveillance, what people whispered, hid, coded.

Hook

"My grandmother didn't fear the night. She feared the neighbours."

Possible angles

dictatorship memories, secret police, propaganda, resistance through art/music.

2+ sources

testimony interview +
schoolbook/newspaper/propaganda
poster / public memorial.

Why now

misinformation and surveillance are
back in new forms (social media,
data, polarisation).

5. Who Gets a Statue?



Core idea

Public memory wars:
monuments, street names,
missing heroes, uncomfortable
histories.

Hook

"We pass this statue every day.
But who decided it should be
here?"

Possible angles

colonial legacies, contested national heroes, gender gaps in commemoration.

2+ sources

monument site footage + municipal
records/article / interview +
museum/archival text.

Why now

public memory shapes identity,
politics, and who feels included.

6. The Factory That Raised Us (Work & Dignity)

Core idea

Workplaces as heritage: factories, mines, farms, what they gave and what they took.

Hook

"This building is empty now. But it fed half the town."

Possible angles

labour rights, women's work, child labour memories, industrial decline.

2+ sources

historic photos + worker interview / local newspaper + site footage.

Why now

cost-of-living, automation, gig work, fair wages, same struggle, new era.



7. The Environment Remembers



Core idea

Environmental damage + repair, told through one landscape: river, forest, coastline, mine.



Hook

"The river looks calm. But it carries a history."

Possible angles

pollution, disappearing landscapes, climate adaptation, forgotten disasters.

2+ sources

archival photo/news report + scientific/local report excerpt / elder testimony + location.

Why now

climate anxiety, justice, responsibility, what do we owe the future?

8. Myths, Legends, and the Real Story Behind Them

Core idea

A local myth vs the historical reality (and why the myth survived).

Hook

"Everyone knows this story. But nobody knows where it came from."

Possible angles

national myths, folklore, "invented traditions," hero stories that hide violence.

2+ sources

folklore text + archive/newspaper /
interview + place/object evidence.

Why now

myths can unite, but also
manipulate and erase.



9. History in Your Feed (Media, Manipulation, Memory)



Core idea

How TikTok/IG/YouTube reshapes the past—nostalgia, propaganda, trends, distortion.

Hook

"I learned this history from a meme. That's the problem."

Possible angles

misinformation, deepfakes, nostalgia aesthetics, "historycore," and algorithm bias.

2+ sources

example posts/screens + fact-check/credible article excerpt/archive source that contradicts it.

Why now

media literacy is democracy literacy, especially for young people.

10. The Future People Imagined (Retro-Futures)

Core idea

What people in the past thought "today" would look like, and what that reveals.

Hook

"They imagined flying cars. They didn't imagine burnout."

Possible angles

old schoolbooks, ads, utopian posters, childhood diaries, public plans.

2+ sources

vintage media (ad/poster/article) + interview/diary / archival planning document.

Why now

helps critique progress, tech promises, and what "development" actually means.



Mini toolkit

3 structures that always fit in 3 minutes

01

Object-led story

show object → flashback sources → "why now"

02

Place-led story

show place today → reveal past sources → "what changed + why it matters"

03

Two-voice story

older generation memory + your reflection + one public source to triangulate

Source + Ethics reminders (keep it clean)

- Use at least two sources and credit them.
- If you film people/interviews, think consent/privacy.
- If you reenact scenes, make it clear what's staged vs documentary.
- Any language is fine, but include English subtitles.

Website:



Questions?

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