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History and art to converge at free event

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MORE THAN 200 students from various school districts and private schools throughout Alameda County are preparing for this year's Alameda County History Day Competition, which will be held Saturday in Oakland.

Nearly 100 projects prepared by high school and middle school students — including documentary films, dramatic performances, Web sites and museum exhibits — will be on display from noon until 2 p.m. at the Oakland School for the Arts campus, 530 18th St. After the judging of the entries, an awards ceremony will take place at 3 p.m.

The public is invited to

the free event.

Established as a charter school a decade ago, Oakland School for the Arts now occupies several floors of the restored historic Fox Theater Building complex.

Winners of the county competition can advance to the statewide and national events, which will be later this year, says Al Minard, a local historian from

Fremont and an enthusiastic supporter of National History Day. Minard is also chairman of the county's Parks, Recreation and Historical Commission.

"Our California entrants did very well at the national finals last year," Minard told me by phone. "We had

a total of 18 finalists out of 32 entries, and our students received eight medals. We were the state with the most medals. These kids truly produced outstanding projects, and I know this year will be even better."

Minard is scheduled to be one of the judges in this year's local level competition.

I also reached Avi Black, who is coordinating the County History Day Weekend for the Alameda County Office of Education.

"We have been working to do broader outreach with this program so more students can find out about it and participate," Black said. "We are really pleased with the expanded opportunities and hope even more try out next year, especially in the urban districts."

The theme for this year's competition is "Innovation in History: Impact and Change." The focus is on historical examples of youth challenging injustice.

History Day is one of the Art Is Education activities spearheaded by the county's Office of Education. Art Is Education, now in its 10th year, is an annual countywide showcase held in March in which arts organizations, educators, artists and especially youths collaborate on celebrating the many ways learning happens through art.

Superintendent Sheila Jordan's office got back to me with her statement regarding her support for the history competition: "Too often educators are forced to think about education that is narrowly defined

by high stakes testing. Our office provides leadership and technical support to schools and school districts, assuring essential content areas like history, social studies, science and the arts, are a part of a well-rounded education for every child."

When I reach Jordan by phone, she told me she was really looking forward to attending the event and seeing firsthand how the participants present their history topics.

In conjunction with the Saturday competition, there will be an evening reception Friday at Oakland School for the Arts that will feature a conversation with civil rights figure Claudette Colvin. She grew up in Alabama and had her date with destiny as a 15-year-old in 1955.

Colvin refused to give up

her Montgomery bus seat to a white person, history files say, and was arrested, much like Rosa Parks, whose protest followed that same year. According to the files, Colvin's case resulted in the eventual desegregation of the Montgomery bus system.

Tickets and reservations to the Friday event, which starts at 5:30 p.m., are still available. Call Avi Black at 510-670-4329 for more information.

To learn more about Art Is Education visit www.artiseducation.org. Visit www.nationalhistoryday.org to find out more about the program. The Web site for the Oakland School for the Arts is www.oakarts.org.

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IN MY OPINION