

Historical Fiction

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Let's Work Together Teaching Guide

Dear Teacher,

History books ask students to read about the past and learn facts and details. Historical fiction, on the other hand, reaches students' emotions as they explore meaning through the characters and historical events to make sense of the facts and details. Historical novels also deepen readers' understanding of a time and place as they relive the past alongside characters they relate to and care about. As students come to know the inner lives and relationships of characters in historical novels, they can use this knowledge to better understand the characters' world. Let's introduce our students to a genre that not only allows them to experience history, but also teaches them about the joy and suffering, the interactions and loneliness, the fears and worries that people living during those times experienced!

Laura Robb

START WITH YOURSELF:

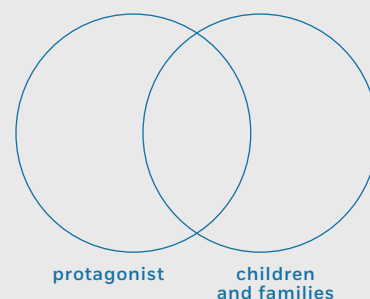
Get a read on the pulse of students' experience with historical fiction by asking them: *What do you know about historical fiction? What historical fiction have you read? Why did or didn't you enjoy the book?* If most students have not read historical fiction, use picture books to introduce them to the genre. You'll be able to find picture books appropriate for young learners as well as for students in middle and high school by asking your school and public librarians to suggest some.

Think aloud as you read, and highlight these elements: the historical period and what you learned, the protagonist, his/her problems, and antagonistic forces. Once you've modeled, ask students to pair-share about an element and discuss. After completing a picture book, students can:

- turn and talk about what they've learned about the historical period and then share with the class;

TEACHING TIP:

Using a picture book you've read aloud, model how to compare and contrast the protagonist with present-day boys and girls using a Venn diagram.



Use the overlapping circles to jot points that show how they are alike. On the outer part of the circles, jot differences. The Venn diagram you develop with students becomes a resource they refer to when completing their own Venn diagram.

- discuss the protagonist, his/her problems, the actions taken to solve problems, and the outcomes;
- identify antagonistic forces and explain how each one worked against the protagonist; and
- compare and contrast the protagonist's problems with problems students and families face today by showing how they are alike and how they differ.

Check out dozens of historical fiction books from your school's media center that are appropriate for your students. Display the books on three desks or small tables: easier books, books close to and on grade level, and books above grade level.

Model how you browse through a book to see if you might want to read it: study any pictures or photographs, read the information on the back cover or inside flap, and read the table of contents. Think aloud to show what you learned. Finally, read the first two to three pages or chapter if it's short. Now, tell students why you would (or wouldn't) choose to read this book. Reserve time for questions.

MOVE TO STUDENTS:

Invite students to find a comfortable space in the room and reserve time for them to read during each class. Help students divide their books into three to five reading chunks. Books that students select will vary in length, which means some students will read about three to four chapters and others about five to seven chapters before stopping to think and discuss. This works because stronger readers who choose longer books can read more.

Organize students into partners. Have pairs *briefly* retell the chapters they completed and then select one or two questions to discuss from the list below:

- What made you want to read this book? Did it meet your expectations? Explain.
- What have you learned about this historical period?
- What do you learn about family life and relationships between family members during this period?
- What kinds of struggles did the protagonist face? List three and explain how he/she dealt with each one.
- Would you enjoy living during the time of this book? Explain why or why not.

TEACHING TIP:

Set aside fifteen to twenty minutes for students to browse through books. By practicing browsing, readers learn to choose a book that interests them and that they can read.

TEACHING TIP:

Students should remain partners until completing their books. It's best if partners are no more than a year apart in reading level so they can learn from one another. In addition, if students want to read each other's books, say yes as their discussions have given them the background knowledge necessary to comprehend the books.

- What problem or conflicts does the main character face that you deal with in your life?
- How do the book's characters deal with problems such as not enough food, money, illness, or loss of a job?
- How do characters change? Did historical events change a character or was it another character or decision?
- What do you consider advantages to living during this time? Disadvantages?

In addition to the questions above, students can discuss any of the literary elements.

NOTEBOOK WRITING:

Invite students to compare and contrast in their notebooks. Refresh their memories by reviewing the charts they helped create. Then ask students to write their name and the date at the top of the page and underneath that, the title and author of their book. Students can set up their notebooks the way you set up each chart. In addition to compare/contrast, here are extra suggestions for notebook writing and drawing for younger students:

- Draw one or two things you learned about the historical period and write about the picture.
- Draw and write about what the protagonist was like at the beginning and at the end of the book.
- Complete a Venn diagram by drawing.
- Illustrate a favorite part or character and explain why it's your favorite.

Students in grades 3 and up can record what they learned about the historical period. They can also write a response to the question discussed with a partner or select a different question, jot some notes, and then write.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

for Engaging Students with Historical Fiction

- Create an illustrated timeline by choosing five key events in your book, placing them on a timeline, and illustrating each event. Write the book's title and author above your timeline.
- Design a mobile for a book talk, using a metal hanger. Draw pictures or find photos on the internet of four to five historical events in your book and attach each one to the hanger by punching a hole in it, threading yarn or string through the hole, and tying it onto the hanger. Present your book talk by discussing each event and why you selected it.
- Interview an important character in the book. Write the interview questions, have a classmate be the interviewer, and answer as if you are the character.
- Present a book talk from the protagonist's point of view. Include these details: your name, age, the time you lived in, and how one event and one person each changed your life or thinking.
- Make a book trailer or a podcast about the book.
- Imagine a series of text messages between you and the protagonist and write the exchanges on notebook paper.
- Find images on the internet that you can use in a photo essay of specific events in your historical novel. Put the images together in a book and write one to two sentences about each one.

TEACHER'S NOTES:
