



TEACHER RESOURCE

Teaching with Historical Fiction

Why Teach with Historical Fiction?

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Historical fiction presents history as a story

Children are drawn into stories in ways that they are not engaged by expository text. Historical fiction will likely keep the interest of students, form lasting impressions, and therefore foster more authentic learning than a textbook. Students find it easier to “see themselves” in history when it is presented as a story than when it is presented as expository text. This makes the study of history relevant to them.

Historical fiction gives history a human face

Studying history all too often means memorizing a parade of facts and dates. However, historical fiction tells the story of the past with all of its raw emotion and drama. In historical fiction, we are introduced to characters that experienced history as we experience our everyday lives.

Historical fiction emphasizes everyday life in the past

Rather than focusing on the unusually dramatic events and happenings such as the Boston Massacre, historical fiction often emphasizes the everyday and gives a more complete and true view of the past.

Through descriptions of everyday life, students learn visual and contextual clues about how people in the past lived, talked, dressed, etc.

Historical fiction helps students to see and appreciate multiple perspectives

In reading historical fiction, students encounter characters with different points of view. They also see how such differences in experience or opinion affect behavior. Furthermore, historical fiction helps students to understand that history is interpretive and that historians bring their own biases to the study of the past.

Historical fiction restores dimension to history

Textbooks often present history as one-dimensional—with issues appearing to be black and white or singlesided. But the issues of history, as we know, are much more complex and there are many shades of gray. When students consider history in many dimensions, they develop critical thinking skills as opposed to the rote memorization techniques fostered by textbook-centered learning.

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Historical fiction fosters connections between the past and present

The rich context presented in historical fiction helps students make comparisons with their own lives and times. As students follow the development of an issue over time, they come to see that their world is indeed a product of the past. The continuum of past, present, and future is much more apparent in historical fiction than in expository text.

Choosing Good Historical Fiction

From Terry Lindquist in "How and Why I Teach with Historical Fiction"

Select historical fiction that:

- Presents a well-told and historically accurate story
- Portrays characters realistically
- Presents authentic settings
- Is artfully told using historical facts
- Provides accurate information through illustrations
- Avoids stereotypes and myths

Sources

Lindquist, Terry. "Why and How I Teach with Historical Fiction." Scholastic. <http://teacher.scholastic.com/lessonrepro/lessonplans/instructor/social1.htm> (accessed April 24, 2009)

Nawrot, Kathy. "Making Connections with Historical Fiction." *Clearing House* 69, no. 6 (July-August, 1996). <http://ebshost.com.proxy.ulib.iupui.edu/ehost/delivery?vid=9&hid=106&sid=cb316>.