Chapter 10: Historical Fiction

What Is Historical Fiction?

Historical fiction is widely defined as a work of fiction set in a time prior to when it was written.

How Far in the Past Does a Story Qualify as Historical Fiction?

- The precise number of years is irrelevant.
- What matters most is the child’s perspective. A story set forty years ago qualifies as being about olden times to a child.
- Some books feature events that were contemporary at the time they were written, but with the passing of time, the situations have gained significance.

Time Periods Emphasized in Historical Fiction

- There are topics and periods in American history that have been written about most extensively: the American Revolutionary War, Slavery and the Civil War, the westward movement, immigration, and World War II.

Why Should Teachers Teach Historical Fiction?

- Historical fiction presents wonderful stories that children can “step into” for a rich aesthetic experience.
- Historical fiction is the most essential texts for students to read critically because of the very nature of history.
- Historical fiction for children is still considered a good place for a child to ‘enter into the conflicts, the suffering, the joys, and the despair of those who lived before us’ (Erin et al, 2003)

Significance of Historical Fiction

- Teachers want children to read historical fiction because children are naturally curious about the past, and historical fiction offers answers to some of their questions.
- Historical fiction help readers develop consciousness of how time and place influence who they are.
Significance of Historical Fiction
- Historical fiction makes it possible for children to encounter the complexities of historical events, where facts from the past become living, breathing drama, and significant beyond their own time, Levstick points out (Temple et al, 2011).
- It helps readers develop historical empathy by emphasizing human motives and ordinary people.

Significance of Historical Fiction
- Studies show that the inclusion of historical fiction in teacher education programs, and within history classrooms, may potentially have a positive impact on learning and result in higher levels of engagement with the subject.
- Historical novels provide a vehicle for learning about other people from the past (Howell, 2014).

The Evolution of Historical Fiction
- Sir Walter Scott is believed to be pioneer of historical fiction. He published his first piece, *Waverly* in 1810 and was later followed by others, including *Ivanhoe*.
- Audience: Young and old.
- Early historical fiction: adventure stories and many historical inaccuracies.

The Evolution of Historical Fiction
- Early historical fiction writers’ agenda for children: teaching students historical information.
- By the 1930s, many of historical fiction pieces had become romantic, and idealized views of the past that contained an overwhelming amount of information, Tomlinson et al emphasize (Temple et al, 2011).

Popular Historical Fiction Authors
- Sharon Kay Penman

Popular Historical Fiction Authors
- Elizabeth Chadwick (visit elizabethchadwick.com)
Popular Historical Fiction Authors
- Diana Gabaldon
- Bernard Cornwell
- Ken Follett
- Anya Seton
- C.W. Gortner
- Alison Wier
- Georgette Heyer

Contemporary Historical Fiction
- Popular Themes:
  - Building a world
  - Representing the Alien
  - Scientific Revolution
  - Alternate Timelines
  - Heroism
  - Societal Reforms
  - Diversity of Culture
  - Individuals Can Change the Future
  - Escape from the Present

Contemporary Historical Fiction: Popular Themes
- Shared Popular Themes: war, colonialism, coming of age, love, friendship, revolution etc.

A Significant Statement
- A balanced perspective that exposes children to both bright and dark sides of historical reality and the necessity of discussing competing visions and interpretations of historical events is essential (Erin et al, 2013). And that is what historical fiction does.

References