

Title of Session: Historical Fiction - General

Creator: Janet Beasley

Curriculum: NOVICE and ADVANCED

Definition: Historical fiction is based on historical facts regarding an era, event, or figure, and is woven with fiction to create a story.

Goals: By the end of the session enthusiasts will be able to distinguish basic features of historical fiction.

Tools:

Wipe off board or flip chart and appropriate markers

Items which appear historical:

Old keys

Old photographs

Old diary

Old shoes

Old hat

Old gloves

Old dress

Old books

Old kitchen utensils

Old tools

Other things you may have that appear historical

Ice Breaker:

- Bring as many of the items listed above as you can
- Put the items in the middle of the table
- Using one sheet of paper, start with one enthusiast and have him/her write a sentence about one of the items.
- Have the enthusiast make a small fold of the paper over their sentence, hiding the sentence.
- Have the enthusiast pass the paper to the person on their left.
- Have the new enthusiast choose an item and write a sentence about it.
- Have that enthusiast continue the fold of the paper over their sentence and pass it on.
- Once all enthusiasts have written their “secret” sentence, take the paper and unfold it. Read it aloud to the rest and see what kind of historical story developed from the dated items you presented.
 - Are the statements true, factual, etc.

- Or would researching each item been more helpful rather than writing from their own ideas.

Activity 1:

Writing historical fiction takes discipline, a passion for history, a desire to thoroughly research, and dedication to the craft of creative writing

Write the following bold points on your wipe off board or flip chart. Let the enthusiasts present their ideas before writing in the ideas below.

- **What are key elements that make a story a historical fiction** – Era, event, historical figure, or a combination of these
- **What are some specifics that would need to hold true in a historical fiction story** – dates, times, facts must be spot on
- **Is research important to write historical fiction** – Yes. A historical fiction author does not write from personal experience, but rather from extensive research. The fictional part is even subject to research to hold the continuity of the story's setting.
- **Where can you find historical research** - the internet is a great place, but beware, not everything on the internet is true. Be sure to double and triple check your information to make certain your dates, times, and places are spot on. Go to the library and pull out some books – both historical fiction and historical non-fiction. Get a feel for how historical fiction intertwines fact and fiction effectively. Another great way to gather information is to interview elderly people who may have lived or were a part of your era, event, or figure. If you do this, be certain to give them credit.
- **What dates classify as historical fiction** – For the most part the pros consider anything 50 years or older to classify as historical fiction. However, some will agree that events that have been deemed historical and have taken place before the 50-years-ago-guideline, may also fall into this category. If you are passionate about pursuing historical fiction as your genre and be recognized as a credible historian, to play it safe you will want to seriously consider historical eras, events, or figures dated 50 years or older.
- **Name some genres that you think would make interesting historical fiction** - fantasy, science fiction, a western, or paranormal
- **What basic creative writing elements can you use to deliver historical facts?**
 - **Exposition** – narrative or dialogue
 - **Narrative** – presenting facts in an entertaining way
 - **Dialogue** – spill the facts in conversation. Dialogue must sound authentic as opposed to repeating known facts
- **Should a bibliography be used in historical fiction** – It can be, depending on how and where you researched, and/or received your information. If your extensive research involves taking information from other historical

documentation be sure to keep records of where you found the information that you are using to add to the bibliography.

The historical era, event, or figure you choose does not have to be the focal point, but you still need to make certain the facts of each are correct. For instance you may choose to write an action-adventure story that takes place during the time period of the Boston Tea Party, or a romance between a fictitious man who served in the civil war under Robert E. Lee and a fictitious woman who lived next door to Ulysses S. Grant. Lee and Grant are not your main focus, but rather the identifiers to your era or event.

Activity 2:

Write the following prompts one at a time on your wipe off board or flip chart

- George tossed his bayonet and knelt next to his bloodied friend. The sounds of the canons seemingly disappeared as he focused on his friend's face. He felt tears well, then watched his friend's eyes barely open. When their eyes met they smiled at each other for the last time.
- Amelia slammed the heavy wooden door in a fit of rage and turned in fury. She clenched her fists and grunted when she looked down and saw her blue satin and crinoline now ripped, the missing clump dangling from the sealed hatchway. All she wanted was to come to America.
- Ben threw the stack of leather-strapped books over his shoulder, expecting it to be a simple walk home from school.
- The deputy started the siren and it wound up to a full blare. He found it hard to believe that an Edsel could pull away that fast.
- The door stood cracked open when the young couple arrived. They hesitated before they climbed down from the wagon and made their way to the rickety porch. Reluctantly the young gentleman pushed on the door. The couple took a few steps in together. The wooden floor creaked in the silence. The unplugged bullet holes piercing the log walls were unnerving. Neither Joshua nor Savanna were too keen on climbing the crooked ladder to the loft, but braved up and went. After all, it was grandma's house. What could possibly go wrong?

Read aloud the prompts below one at a time and discuss the following for each prompt:

- What elements make the prompt historical (era, props, clothing, dwelling, etc.)
- What aspects would each enthusiast need to research to carry on the story from each prompt

- Which prompt did each enthusiast find the most interesting and why

Discussion:

- Why did you choose to write historical fiction?
- Do you have any historical items at home – if so, what are they, how old are they, what is unique about them, what is the item’s story?
- Who is the oldest living person you know (family or otherwise)? What questions would you ask them if you had the chance to meet?

Session: Historical Fiction - General
Creator: Janet Beasley
Handout: NOVICE and ADVANCED

Definition: Historical fiction is based on historical facts regarding an era, event, or figure, and is woven with fiction to create a story.

Writing historical fiction takes discipline, a passion for history, a desire to thoroughly research, and dedication to the craft of creative writing

What are key elements that make a story a historical fiction?

What are some specifics that would need to hold true in a historical fiction story?

Is research important to write historical fiction?

Where can you find historical research?

What dates classify as historical fiction?

Name some genres that you think would make interesting historical fiction?

What basic creative writing elements can you use to deliver historical facts?

Should a bibliography be used in historical fiction?

The historical era, event, or figure you choose does not have to be the focal point, but you still need to make certain the facts of each are correct. For instance you may choose to write an action-adventure story that takes place during the time period of the Boston Tea Party, or a romance between a fictitious man who served in the civil war under Robert E. Lee and a fictitious woman who lived next door to Ulysses S. Grant. Lee and Grant are not your main focus, but rather the identifiers to your era or event.

NOTES:

Title of Session: Historical Fiction Sub Genres
Creator: Janet Beasley
Curriculum: ADVANCED ONLY

Goals: By the end of the session enthusiasts will have an idea of what separates historical fiction into subgenres and will recognize the traits of each.

Tools:

Flipchart or wipe off board and appropriate markers

Copy extra photo sheets included with Historical Fiction Sub Genres

Ice Breaker:

- Hand out extra photo sheets – photo may be found on Lady Violet Adventures website in The Writers Lab – download and print if you so desire
- One by one have enthusiasts identify whether the photo represents a historical event, era, historical figure, or a combination

Answer Key:

A (event) = The remains of the Dublin Bread Company at 6-7 Lower Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street) after the Easter Rising in 1916. Date: Definitely May 1916, if not the very end of April

B (figure and event) = Geronimo and fellow Apache Indian prisoners on their way to Florida by train, September 10, 1886. <http://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/26504>

C (event) = Sinking of the Titanic. April 15, 1912

D (era) = 1950's

E (era) = 1940's

F (event and era) = WWII

G (figure) = Abraham Lincoln

H (figure) = Jesse James

I (era) = Victorian

Activity 1:

On your wipe off board or flip chart list three columns: ERA, EVENT, and FIGURE. Ask enthusiasts to share some of their favorite historical events, eras, and/or figures and list them under the proper categories.

List the following questions one at a time on your wipe off board or flip chart and ask the enthusiasts for their input before sharing that included in the lesson.

What are three key elements that make a historical fiction?

- Era – a historical time period such as the French Revolution, The Great Depression, or Renaissance
- Event – a historical happening such as a war, catastrophe, or political shift
- Figure – A person such as a president, world leader, or game changer

How do you incorporate each element?

Era - The element of era is found in all historical fictions whether it is the main focus or only the setting. It is imperative that the author pay close attention to details and facts of the era no matter whether the era, an event or a figure is being used as the main historical focus.

Event – Not all historical fictions are based on an event. However, major historical events make for popular story lines while the plots take readers through fictional happenings such as weddings, family matters, hardships, etc. When focusing on a historical event for the story, fictitious characters are normally used with perhaps a mere mention of a historical figure to relate the reader to the time period. Your story may not be focusing on John Hancock, but rather the Declaration of Independence, though you mention his name.

Figure – Historical figures make great protagonists, or antagonists depending on the historical figure you select. Historical figures require additional research. You will need to understand their fashion in detail, how they acted and reacted during their era, and even what they ate to keep your story holding true to the historical portion.

Are all historical fictions a subgenre?

No. An example could be a story of the invention of the automobile. If your story focuses mainly on the invention of the automobile itself the story will fall into the category of historical fiction.

What makes a historical fiction fit into a subgenre?

If you're focusing on Henry Ford and his secret life your story could be considered a historical fiction mystery. Let's say you are writing about the invention of the automobile, but the main gist of the story focuses on a key figure's relationship it may fall under historical fiction romance. Another example would be if your story is set in the era of the Great Depression, but the main focus is that of a fictional haunting that

continues to disrupt people's lives you could consider it to be a paranormal historical fiction.

What are some mainstream genres with which subgenres could nicely merge?

- Mystery
- Paranormal
- Romance
- Westerns
- Nautical
- Fantasy

Why do they merge well with the above mentioned?

- **Mystery** – opens the door for key figures such as Sherlock Holmes
- **Paranormal** – historic buildings are often times the focal point for paranormal activity. A historical figure who was brutally murdered years before in the same location could be haunting it.
- **Romance** – Romance falls nicely into historical fiction when writing era or event. The era or event is used as the setting, but the romance can be the main story.
- **Westerns** – Many historical figures come from America's "old west" history. Focusing on characters such as Jesse James or Calamity Jane will end up portraying that "old west" era. And if you are using a historical figure, your era **must** match their time period.
- **Nautical** – if you're into pirates or Vikings this is your subgenre! Famous captains, admirals, and hard core warriors abound for you to explore.
- **Fantasy** – Historical? Really? Absolutely. Let's say your story is set in the French Revolution and all of your facts are straight, but in addition you create another fantastical element such as werewolves. Or your story could be set in biblical times. You hold true to the bible to develop your earthly setting, then you add in dragons.

Activity 2:

Regardless of the subgenre you choose, there is a risk of turning your historical fiction into a story that does not reflect the realness you are wanting to present. So what can you do to certain your historian readers and fans keep coming back for more of your historical fiction?

Keep it real!

Write the following bullet points one by one on your wipe off board or flip chart and allow the enthusiasts to share their ideas before revealing the additional information

- **Location, location, location**

- Every country has history. If you are writing about a specific country, land, city, etc. your research will need to include much history of the era you are writing within to correctly develop the setting of your story. Chances are the largest group of readers for your book in this case will be those from that area, or historians of that location. Allowing fictional descriptions to wander is not recommended when it comes to the facts of the location. For example, if daisies don't grow in the location you are writing about, then by all means don't mention daisies growing along the path.
- **Languages will be governed by era and location**
 - Using exact languages of a time period/era can become confusing to your readers if overused without explanation. Carefully weigh each word you choose. At times a more modern word can be used, as long as it is not slang or sounds out of place, to keep the pace moving, and not deviating from the feel of the era. For example in olden days people of the US referred to all refrigerators as a Frigidaire (a certain model of a refrigerator).
- **Dwellings and establishments must be specific to their eras and locations**
 - For example, a grocery store would not fit into a story that takes place during the caveman era. Nor would a ski lodge in the mountains be suitable for a story taking place in Florida.
- **Fashion is important**
 - Your fashion stems back to era. You will want to make certain your characters, historical figures or fictitious, are dressed to be believable.
- **Hair styles are ever changing, just as is fashion**
 - Make certain your characters' hair styles are termed the correct name when referring to such. Be sure to keep them era-specific.
- **What did they eat?**
 - Food is an important era and location revealer. You can bet when the day Revolutionary War was over nobody dashed out for fast food burgers or tacos.
- **Transportation can make or break a historical fiction**
 - If cars weren't invented yet, then by all means don't have your characters arriving and departing in a sedan. If you are in the era of early air travel, pay close attention to detail regarding how the planes looked inside and out, what the guests were served, and flight/travel time – these can be different when flying in a prop plane as opposed to a jet.
- **Sporting events have been popular all the way back to the days of gladiators and beyond**

- If your story is going to include a sporting event make sure your sport is true to its era (uniforms, apparatus, and records being broken).
- **Entertainment has also changed throughout time**
 - Movie theaters, swimming pools, and tablets weren't always around. You'll want to research what people did for entertainment during their era.
- **Health concerns are crucial**
 - Depending on how long ago your story is taking place health concerns will vary as there may have been no vaccines or treatments for the diseases contracted.
- **Commerce and trade are also historically governed**
 - Whether it is shape, size, appearance, substance, or worth money has changed throughout the years, so be sure to do your research.

Research is always your friend when it comes to historical fiction. But how do you know what to research?

- Choosing whether or not you are writing about an era, event, or figure will help steer your research in the right direction. Beware of only using the first “answer” you find in your research as not everything on the internet is always factual. Be sure to check, double check, and triple check the facts you are researching.

Do not write the facts from your own ideas, but rather from your solid research.

Discussion:

- 50 years from now, what do you think people will be writing about when it comes to their historical fictions novels?
- What is your favorite form of research?
- Which subgenre do you find most intriguing? Are you planning on using a subgenre? If so, what is it?

Session: Historical Fiction – Sub Genres

Creator: Janet Beasley

Handout: ADVANCED

What are three key elements that make a historical fiction?

- Era – a historical time period such as the French Revolution, The Great Depression, or Renaissance
- Event – a historical happening such as a war, catastrophe, or political shift
- Figure – A person such as a president, world leader, or game changer

How do you incorporate each element?

Era - The element of era is found in all historical fictions whether it is the main focus or only the setting. It is imperative that the author pay close attention to details and facts of the era no matter whether the era, an event or a figure is being used as the main historical focus.

Event – Not all historical fictions are based on an event. However, major historical events make for popular story lines while the plots take readers through fictional happenings such as weddings, family matters, hardships, etc. When focusing on a historical event for the story, fictitious characters are normally used with perhaps a mere mention of a historical figure to relate the reader to the time period. Your story may not be focusing on John Hancock, but rather the Declaration of Independence, though you mention his name.

Figure – Historical figures make great protagonists, or antagonists depending on the historical figure you select. Historical figures require additional research. You will need to understand their fashion in detail, how they acted and reacted during their era, and even what they ate to keep your story holding true to the historical portion.

Are all historical fictions a subgenre?

No. An example could be a story of the invention of the automobile. If your story focuses mainly on the invention of the automobile itself the story will fall into the category of historical fiction.

What makes a historical fiction fit into a subgenre?

If you're focusing on Henry Ford and his secret life your story could be considered a historical fiction mystery. Let's say you are writing about the invention of the automobile, but the main gist of the story focuses on a key figure's relationship it may fall under historical fiction romance. Another example would be if your story is set in the era of the Great Depression, but the main focus is that of a fictional haunting that continues to disrupt people's lives you could consider it to be a paranormal historical fiction.

What are some mainstream genres with which subgenres could nicely merge?

- Mystery
- Paranormal
- Romance
- Westerns

- Nautical
- Fantasy

Why do they merge well with the above mentioned?

- **Mystery** – opens the door for key figures such as Sherlock Holmes
- **Paranormal** – historic buildings are often times the focal point for paranormal activity. A historical figure who was brutally murdered years before in the same location could be haunting it.
- **Romance** – Romance falls nicely into historical fiction when writing era or event. The era or event is used as the setting, but the romance can be the main story.
- **Westerns** – Many historical figures come from America’s “old west” history. Focusing on characters such as Jesse James or Calamity Jane will end up portraying that “old west” era. And if you are using a historical figure, your era **must** match their time period.
- **Nautical** – if you’re into pirates or Vikings this is your subgenre! Famous captains, admirals, and hard core warriors abound for you to explore.
- **Fantasy** – Historical? Really? Absolutely. Let’s say your story is set in the French Revolution and all of your facts are straight, but in addition you create another fantastical element such as werewolves. Or your story could be set in biblical times. You hold true to the bible to develop your earthly setting, then you add in dragons.

Activity 2:

Regardless of the subgenre you choose, there is a risk of turning your historical fiction into a story that does not reflect the realness you want to present. So what can you do to certain your history buff readers and fans keep coming back for more of your historical fiction?

Keep it real!

Write the following bullet points one by one on your wipe off board or flip chart and allow the enthusiasts to share their ideas before revealing the additional information

- **Location, location, location**
 - Every country has history. If you are writing about a specific country, land, city, etc. your research will need to include much history of the era you are writing within to correctly develop the setting of your story. Chances are the largest group of readers for your book in this case will be those from that area, or historians of that location. Allowing fictional descriptions to wander is not recommended when it comes to the facts of the location. For example, if daisies don’t grow in the location you are writing about, then by all means don’t mention daisies growing along the path.

- **Languages will be governed by era and location**
 - Using exact languages of a time period/era can become confusing to your readers if overused without explanation. Carefully weigh each word you choose. At times a more modern word can be used, as long as it is not slang or sounds out of place, to keep the pace moving, and not deviating from the feel of the era. For example in olden days people of the US referred to all refrigerators as a Frigidaire (a certain model of a refrigerator).

- **Dwellings and establishments must be specific to their eras and locations**
 - For example, a grocery store would not fit into a story that takes place during the caveman era. Nor would a ski lodge in the mountains be suitable for a story taking place in Florida.

- **Fashion is important**
 - Your fashion stems back to era. You will want to make certain your characters, historical figures or fictitious, are dressed to be believable.

- **Hair styles are ever changing, just as is fashion**
 - Make certain your characters' hair styles are termed the correct name when referring to such. Be sure to keep them era-specific.

- **What did they eat?**
 - Food is an important era and location revealer. You can bet when the day Revolutionary War was over nobody dashed out for fast food burgers or tacos.

- **Transportation can make or break a historical fiction**
 - If cars weren't invented yet, then by all means don't have your characters arriving and departing in a sedan. If you are in the era of early air travel, pay close attention to detail regarding how the planes looked inside and out, what the guests were served, and flight/travel time – these can be different when flying in a prop plane as opposed to a jet.

- **Sporting events have been popular all the way back to the days of gladiators and beyond**
 - If your story is going to include a sporting event make sure your sport is true to its era (uniforms, apparatus, and records being broken).

- **Entertainment has also changed throughout time**
 - Movie theaters, swimming pools, and tablets weren't always around. You'll want to research what people did for entertainment during their era.

- **Health concerns are crucial**

- Depending on how long ago your story is taking place health concerns will vary as there may have been no vaccines or treatments for the diseases contracted.
- **Commerce and trade are also historically governed**
 - Whether it is shape, size, appearance, substance, or worth money has changed throughout the years, so be sure to do your research.

Research is always your friend when it comes to historical fiction. But how do you know what to research?

- Choosing whether or not you are writing about an era, event, or figure will help steer your research in the right direction. Beware of only using the first “answer” you find in your research as not everything on the internet is always factual. Be sure to check, double check, and triple check the facts you are researching.

Do not write the facts from your own ideas, but rather from your solid research.