1. Focus

Introduce the Mentor Historical Fiction Story

**Say:** As we become writers of historical fiction, we can learn a lot about the genre by reading or listening to historical fiction written by other authors. Today I’m going to read you a historical fiction story by Amanda Jenkins, who has also written several young adult novels. As I read, pay attention to some key features of her story, including the setting, the characters, and the main events. These are features of any fiction story. However, writers of historical fiction use these features in special ways.

**Say:** The title of the story is “The Strong and the Weak: Hammurabi’s Code.” The title contains a pair of opposites. I wonder what that has to do with Hammurabi’s Code? What does the title make you think of? Allow students to share their predictions or “I wonder” questions.

You may wish to display the story using the interactive whiteboard resources so that students can follow along as you read. If your class includes English learners or other students who would benefit from vocabulary and oral language development to comprehend the narrative, use “Make the Mentor Text Comprehensible for ELs.”

Read Aloud the Mentor Historical Fiction Story

Read aloud the text, stopping at some or all of the places indicated (or at other points you choose) to highlight three key features of a historical fiction story:
1. The story describes an authentic historical setting.
2. The characters lived or could have lived in the setting, and events that occurred or could have occurred.
3. The events did occur or could have occurred.

**Authentic Historical Setting**

**Page 8, after second paragraph. Say:** I already know a lot about where and when the story takes place. The author uses details such as “the temple complex” and “the streets of Babylon” to tell me the story is set in the Middle East in ancient times. The details about Ditanu’s working arrangement with Belshunu also tell me about the setting. In those early times, boys often became apprentices by working and living with master craftsmen to learn a trade.

**Details About Characters**

**Page 8, after second paragraph. Say:** The setting tells me the characters live in ancient times, but they also have qualities that remind me of people today. Ditanu is hardworking, talented, and conscientious. Belshunu has an eye for talent and believes in giving people chances. Belshunu must be a good teacher, too, because Ditanu is doing such good work.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:
- Listen to a historical fiction read-aloud to learn that historical fiction has an authentic historical setting, characters that lived or could have lived in the setting, and events that occurred or could have occurred.
- Discuss the setting, characters, and events described in the mentor text.

Preparation

**Materials Needed**
- Mentor text: “The Strong and the Weak”
- Interactive whiteboard resources
Details About Characters
After reading page 10. Say: The name Wife of Hudu-libbi suggests that this character is part of a traditional culture that places higher importance on men than women. But Ditanu’s first thoughts about her tell me she is intimidating and proud: “No one dared tell the widow . . . she should stay quietly at home.” Also, she can read, at a time when few men and fewer women had that skill.

Details About Events That Occurred or Could Have Occurred
After reading page 10. Say: The Wife of Hudu-libbi comes into Belshunu’s workshop to order a votive figure. This is an event that could have occurred at the time this story is set. In the sixth paragraph, the author blends historical fact with fiction. There really was an engraving with Hammurabi’s laws, and someone had to carve it. Belshunu could have been the man who carved Hammurabi’s code.

2. Rehearse

Respond Orally to the Mentor Historical Fiction Story

After reading the story aloud, invite students to respond personally to the story and to discuss their own ideas about the setting, the characters, and the events by asking such questions as:
• What did you visualize as you listened to the story being read aloud?
• Which characters did you feel you got to know best? In what ways?
• Which details helped you understand what life was like during this time?

Model the following sentence frames to supports ELs and struggling students:
• I visualized ______.
• I understand what life was like because ______.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: Remember, when you write a historical fiction story, you’ll want to create an authentic setting that fits the time and place where your story occurs. You’ll also want to describe characters who really lived or who could have lived then. The events in the story should dramatize things that happened or could have happened during that time, in that place.

Ask students to write a paragraph in which they describe any historical setting of their choosing or describe a character who could have lived in the past.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share their descriptions of a setting or character.

Make the Mentor Text Comprehensible for ELs

Beginning
Point to the illustration on page 8. Say: These men are carving stones. Point to the photograph on page 9. Say: This building is 4,000 years old.

Intermediate and Advanced
Display illustrations from pages 8, 10, and 15 of the story. Ask: What do you know about these tools? If you carved a sculpture from stone, what would it look like? Which rules, or laws, do you think a king would want to write down? What do you think of the writing on this stone? Encourage a background-building discussion about stone carving and sculpture, or rules and laws and ancient cuneiform writing.

All Levels
If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share the following English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: code/el código; temple/el templo.

Use the images provided on the interactive whiteboard resources to help ELs learn vocabulary and key concepts for the read-aloud.