1. Focus

Introduce Historical Fiction Writing

Display covers of Newbery award-winning historical fiction books. Use the sample think-aloud below as a model of how to talk to students about the range of topics in historical fiction. Use the historical fiction books as examples to explain that writers of historical fiction usually have some personal connection to their subjects.

Sample think-aloud. Say: I want to share some great historical fiction books with you. The stories in these books have taken me all over the world, to different cultures and centuries. A Single Shard is about an orphan in twelfth-century Korea who longs to make pottery. Bud, Not Buddy concerns a boy searching for his dad, a musician and leader of an African American band, during the Great Depression of the 1930s in Michigan. Number the Stars is about kids in Denmark during World War II when the German army occupied their country.

Say: You may have noticed that writers of historical fiction have a wide range of topics. I want to share where writers got the ideas for a few of the books I just mentioned. Linda Sue Park, the author of A Single Shard, is a Korean-American writer who grew up in Chicago and researched the book to learn more about her heritage. During her research for another book she read that twelfth-century Korean pottery was the best in the world. The story in A Single Shard grew out of her curiosity about that fact. Bud, Not Buddy is set in Flint, Michigan, where the author, Christopher Paul Curtis, grew up. He modeled characters in the book after his two grandfathers. One was a pitcher in the Negro Baseball League and the other was a bandleader in the 1930s. Lois Lowry says the idea for Number the Stars came from a story told to her by a good friend who grew up in Denmark. These are just a few examples showing that writers of historical fiction usually have some personal connection to their subjects.

Introduce the Purpose and Audience for Historical Fiction

Say: You may wonder why people write fiction set in historical times. Historical fiction helps me understand how people lived and felt long before I was born. When I read and write historical fiction, I learn that even though times change, human feelings remain pretty much the same. By blending history and fiction together, I can bring the past alive in a way that informational writing about historical facts may not be able to. And becoming absorbed in an adventure from the past is fun and entertaining. I imagine that the audience for the historical fiction I like to write includes anyone interested in learning about the lives and adventures of people in a particular time and place long ago.
2. Rehearse

Practice Telling Historical Fiction Story Ideas Orally

Invite students to work with a partner. Both students should tell their partner about a historical period or event that they have a connection to, based on a book, photograph, or object that they share. The partner listening should be prepared to retell this connection to the class. Students should explain how the book, photograph, or object helped them make the connection to the historical period or event.

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Historical Connections with the Class

Invite volunteers to tell how their partners used their book, photograph, or object to make a connection to a historical period or event. Use one or more of the following questions to engage students in discussion about the exercise.

Storyteller
- What is your personal connection to the book, photo, or object you selected?

Listener
- What is one question you might expect your partner to answer in a historical fiction story about the time period or event your partner selected?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We come from a wide range of places and cultures, which all existed before we were born. Photographs, books, and objects can help us make connections to earlier times. In the next several weeks, we will be making personal connections to historical subjects to help us bring the past alive in our historical fiction.

Encourage students to write a paragraph describing a personal connection they have to any historical time period or a particular event in history.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share the personal connections they have to historical time periods or events.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Meet with beginning ELs one on one while other students work with partners in the “Practice Telling Historical Fiction Story Ideas Orally” activity. Encourage them to describe the book, picture, or object they have selected in any way they can—with words or gestures. Expand on their ideas with simple sentences.

Intermediate
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice. Display simple sentence frames on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources and model how students can use them to describe a connection between the book, picture, or object they selected and a historical period or event. For example:

This _____ shows ______.
A long time ago, people used to ______.

Advanced
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice.

All Levels
If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: adventures/las aventuras; cultures/las culturas; historical/histórico(a).