Evaluate Ideas to Narrow the Focus

**Objectives**

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn how to use a rubric and idea evaluation questions to narrow the writing focus for a historical fiction story.
- Work with a partner to evaluate their own story ideas using the questions.
- Discuss the strategy and how they can use it in their own writing.

**Preparation**

**Materials Needed**

- Chart paper and markers
- Historical Fiction Ideas Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)
- Interactive whiteboard resources

**Advanced Preparation**

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Historical Fiction Ideas Evaluation rubric onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper.

**1. Focus**

**Explain the Process**

**Say:** Once we’ve brainstormed our ideas for writing, we need to narrow our focus and select the best idea to write about. We can ask different questions to help us narrow our focus. Rather than answering yes or no to each question, we can rate our answer by giving it a number. A number one means that we feel least comfortable and a number three means that we feel very comfortable with the idea. Ranking our answers provides us with more options than a simple yes or no. Let me show you how asking questions specifically about historical fiction and ranking my answers helps me choose the best topics.

**Model Evaluating Historical Fiction Ideas to Narrow Your Focus**

Display an evaluation rubric for historical fiction like the one shown for this lesson or using the interactive whiteboard. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample historical fiction ideas on the chart or substitute ideas of your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Fiction Ideas</th>
<th>How certain am I that I like this idea?</th>
<th>How certain am I that I can develop realistic, appealing characters and settings?</th>
<th>How certain am I that I can develop an engaging story problem and solve it in an interesting way?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>immigrating to America</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Americans living in our state in the 1800s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>living in Indonesia in the 1940s</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 3—very certain 2—certain 1—somewhat certain

Sample Historical Fiction Ideas Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)

**After first evaluation question.** **Say:** I like this idea for a story, but how much? I think it would be interesting to write about the famine in Ireland and how people had to leave to try to make a new life. What must the voyage across the sea have been like? How might someone have felt about leaving? I like this idea so I’ll rate this question a two. Write the number 2 in the appropriate column.

**After second evaluation question.** **Say:** When I write my story, I’ll need to choose characters and story events that people will enjoy reading about. I want to write a story that sounds like it really could have happened during this time.
period. I’m very certain that with some research that I’ll be able to do this. I’ll rate this question a three. Write the number 3 in the appropriate column.

After third evaluation question. Say: After I research this topic, I think I’ll be able to come up with an interesting problem for the characters to solve. Maybe the problem could be about someone getting sick on the ship and whether this person would make it to America. Or maybe it could be a problem that happens when the ship arrives in New York. Since I’m pretty certain my research will help me come up with a good story problem, I’m going to rate this question a two. (Write the number 2 in the appropriate column.) Now that I’ve rated each question for this idea, I’ll total my numbers. (Write 7 in the correct box.) A score of seven is pretty good, so this is a good idea for a story. But another of my ideas on the list might score higher. This will help me decide what to write about. Explain that as students evaluate ideas, they might end up with two or more ideas with the same score. If this happens, encourage them to use the following questions to help them choose between the ideas:

• Which idea do I think has the most interesting story problem?
• Which story idea would I most like to read about?

2. Rehearse

Practice Narrowing the Focus

Invite students to work with a partner to apply the evaluation rubric to one idea they have for a historical fiction story. If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Ideas

Bring students together and invite volunteers to share an idea they evaluated and how they answered the questions. Ask students to discuss how using a ranking system helped them choose an idea.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned the kind of questions we can use when we want to narrow our focus for writing a historical fiction story. We learned that using a rubric gives us more information about how we feel about an idea than a simple yes or no. Use these questions during independent writing time when you evaluate the rest of the historical fiction ideas you brainstormed.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their historical fiction topics during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite any students who have finished evaluating their ideas to share the topic they selected for their historical fiction story and explain why they chose it.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Work individually with beginning ELs to answer the questions on the chart.

Intermediate and Advanced

Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners as they evaluate their ideas for writing. For example:

I like/do not like this story idea because ______.
I can/cannot develop realistic, interesting characters because ______.
An interesting story problem is ______.
One way to solve the problem might be ______.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: interesting/interesante; problem/el problema; solution/la solución.