Research Background Information

1. Focus

Explain Researching Background Information

Say: Before we write our historical fiction stories, we need to research the time when the story takes place. Historical fiction has characters, settings, and events based on historical facts. The characters may be based on real people or made up. The dialogue is made up. But the information about the time period must be factually accurate. So, once we decide on the setting and time period for our stories, we do research to learn more about the historical background.

Model Researching Background Information

Display the modeling text and research chart using chart paper or the interactive whiteboard resources. As you think aloud, model taking notes on the research chart. Note: You will model using a portion of this chart in this mini-lesson and continue modeling with the chart in the next research mini-lesson.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:
- Learn about researching for background information for historical fiction.
- Practice researching for background information.
- Discuss the strategy and how they can apply it to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed
- Chart paper and markers
- Historical Fiction Events Research Chart (BLM 3)
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and the Historical Fiction Events Research chart onto chart paper.

Make copies of the Historical Fiction Events Research chart (BLM 3) for your class.

Modeling Text

Read aloud example 1. Say: My historical fiction story is about a family who migrated to the United States during the 1880s. The focus of my research is to find out why people left and what life was like on the ship to America. I found this reference that tells me something about the Irish Potato Famine. It gives me background information about the famine, which led many to leave Ireland in the mid-1800s. I’ll take notes on my research chart.

Read aloud example 2. Say: I found this reference that tells about another reason why people left. Not just from hunger, but because they could not pay their landlords. It also tells how many Irish people immigrated to America. This information will help me when I write my story. It will help me create believable characters who survived through real events.
Strategies to Support ELs

**Beginning**
Pair beginning ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity. Keep in mind that they will not be able to contribute many ideas orally. You will want to work with them individually to reinforce concepts while other students write independently.

**Intermediate and Advanced**
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.

---

**Read aloud example 3. Say:** This source gives me background information about the ships the emigrants traveled on to reach America.

**Say:** There are other questions I need to research before I write my story. I want to find out what daily life was like on the ship so I can describe my characters’ experiences accurately. Based on what I know about the famine, I can come up with some character traits, but I will be able to add more once I find out what their daily life was like.

---

### 2. Rehearse

Practice Researching Background Information

Invite students to think about what they need to know about their time periods. Invite students to tell a partner about their plans for researching their historical time periods. If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

---

### 3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** Today we learned that to make our historical fiction stories accurate, we need to do research. Using a research chart can help you decide on the types of information you want to find out.

Make BLM 3 available to students who are ready to research the background for their historical fiction stories 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 volunteers to share some of the information they discovered as they researched. Ask them how this will help them write an accurate historical fiction story.

---

**Backdrop Event:** Irish Potato Famine in Ireland; 1845–1852

**Location and Time:** 1855; traveling in steerage on a ship

**Points:**
1. Famine led to starvation, disease, and emigration between 1845 and 1852.
2. Starving families couldn’t pay landlords; left Ireland with hopes of better future.
3. Almost 3.5 million Irish entered U.S. between 1820 and 1880.
4. Ships they left on were crowded; terrible conditions; called “coffin ships”

**Historical Importance:**

**How People Lived:**
- Daily Lives:
- Culture of the Times:
- Character Traits:

Sample Historical Fiction Events Research Chart (BLM 3)