Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

1. Focus

Explain the Process

Say: When we brainstorm, we list many ideas that we could write about. Before we actually write, however, we need to narrow our focus. We need to select one idea. Sometimes we like all of our ideas! So what can we do? One way to narrow our focus is to ask ourselves some questions about our ideas and rate our responses to those questions based on a scale of one to three. One is the lowest rating and three is the highest rating. I'm going to show you how I evaluate my historical fiction ideas by rating responses to three questions.

Model Evaluating Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display a Historical Fiction Ideas Evaluation rubric like the one shown on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud the three evaluation questions. Use the sample historical fiction ideas on the rubric or list ideas of your own with which to model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Fiction Ideas</th>
<th>Do I like this idea?</th>
<th>Can I develop interesting characters and settings?</th>
<th>Can I develop an interesting problem and solution?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year in the New World</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Revolutionary War—fighting with the patriots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Renaissance Italy—working with Galileo</td>
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Scale: 3—very certain 2—certain 1—somewhat certain

Sample Historical Fiction Ideas Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)

Read aloud first evaluation question. Say: Well, I definitely like this idea. But how much do I like the idea? Studying this part of American history was so interesting—living in a log cabin with wild animals all around and not seeing another family for months, or even longer. And what must it have been like to be a teenager during this time? I think I’ll rate this idea a three; I am very certain I like it. Write a 3 on the chart in the correct box.

Read aloud second evaluation question. Say: When I write my historical fiction story, I will include many details. I’ll describe the setting and characters. One of my favorite movies is The Last of the Mohicans. The setting for the movie is the same as this idea. The North American landscape during this time period was beautiful. There were lots of untouched forests and rivers. Wild animals lived all around. I can definitely make the setting interesting. And my
Beginning Work individually with beginning ELs to answer the three questions on the chart. Instead of rating each question, have beginning ELs answer each question with a “yes” or “no.”

Intermediate Write and model the following sentence frames students will need as they discuss and evaluate their idea with a partner:

I like/I do not like this idea because ______.
I am very certain/certain/somewhat certain that I can ______.
My characters could be ______.
My setting could be ______.
The problem and solution could be ______.

All Levels If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: characters/los carácteres; history/la historia; problem/el problema; solution/la solución.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: Having many ideas is wonderful, but we have to narrow our focus. We just learned one strategy for narrowing the focus—using questions on a rubric to evaluate our ideas. You can use this same evaluation rubric when you are deciding which of your historical fiction ideas to write about.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their historical fiction topic 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 the historical fiction story topics they decided on using the Historical Fiction Ideas Evaluation rubric. Encourage students to discuss the decision-making process.