Develop Questions to Focus Your Research

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn how to develop research questions that focus on one historical fiction idea.
- Practice developing research questions based on one of their own historical fiction writing ideas.
- Discuss the strategy and how they can apply it to their own independent writing.

Explain the Process

Say: To write a well-developed historical fiction story, you need to know as much as you can about your chosen time period. The best way to research any idea is to ask yourself questions. Today I will show you how to develop research questions that will help you gather information about a particular time period.

Model Developing Research Questions

Display a Research Questions chart like the one below on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Use some or all of the sample think-alouds to model developing research questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What backdrop event(s) were taking place during this time period?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What was the geography and climate of this area during this time period?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. What character traits would a person need to survive in this area during this time period?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. What was everyday life like for people during this time period?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. What problems did people face during this time period?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sample Research Questions Chart (BLM 3)

Sample Think-Alouds

**Question 1.** Say: I’ve chosen to write a historical fiction story about life during the Early Colonial period in America. The first thing I’ll want to know is what was happening during this time period. I know my time frame is the 1600s, but what specific events were taking place? Were there wars? Conflicts with the English monarchy? Answers to these questions will help me set the mood for the story. They might also help me define my problem. My question could be, “What backdrop events were taking place during this time period?” Add to the Research Questions chart as you think aloud about each question.

**Question 2.** Say: A historical fiction story needs to have a strong setting because so many events happen as a result of geography and climate. My story will take place in what is currently New England. My question can be, “What was the geography and climate of this area during this time period?”

**Question 3.** Say: If I want to develop believable characters, I’ll need to know something about people who lived in this time period. My question will be,
“What character traits would a person need to survive in this area during this time period?”

**Question 4. Say:** I’ll also want to know about people’s daily lives. What did people do every day? What about schools? Where did people get supplies? To simplify my thoughts, I ask one question, such as, “What was daily life like for colonial people?”

**Question 5. Say:** To develop a strong problem and solution, I’ll need to know what problems colonial people faced. My question can be, “What problems did people face during this time period?”

### 2. Rehearse

#### Practice Developing Questions

Invite students to develop questions for the historical fiction ideas they have chosen. Invite one or more volunteers to share their questions. Reinforce the fact that writers research before they begin to write their historical fiction stories. 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 their research questions. Use the following prompts to discuss students’ questions:
- Why did you choose this question?
- What do you think you will learn from its answer?
- What other information do you think you will need before you begin writing?

### 3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We just learned how to develop research questions for a historical fiction story. Remember to use this strategy when you are gathering information for your story.

Make BLM 3 available to students who are ready to develop research questions for their own historical fiction stories during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this research strategy and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

### 4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share their research questions.

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### Strategies to Support ELs

#### Beginning

To illustrate the concept of developing research questions, show students photographs and books about the early colonial American times. **Say:** This picture shows [time period]. Point to information in the pictures as you use simple sentence frames, such as: “People had ______.” and “I see ______.”

#### Intermediate and Advanced

Encourage ELs to develop research questions using the following question stems:

- **What _____?**
- **Where _____?**
- **How _____?**

#### All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: geography/la geografía; problem/el problema; survive/sobrevivir.