



Levels 4, 12

Please read our *Writing Aids* section about Story Writing in general before proceeding to teach the lesson on Historical Fiction.

Define for your child as you begin the length of this project. For most students at Level 4, 5-7 pages (double-spaced) is about right; for older students, 10-15 pages is average.

Historical Fiction

Introduction

Historical fiction is a specialized (and much beloved) kind of story writing. The student takes a ready-made plot from actual history and, instead of using the expository genre to relate the facts, creates fictional characters who interact with historical ones so that the reader learns about the era of history in a new and entertaining way. Historical fiction is easier in some ways than other forms of story telling because the plot is mostly given from history. The student may need to imagine some details, but he doesn't have to create an entire world or even all of his characters. Historical fiction has its challenges: they are mostly associated with knowing the history of the time—down to fashions, cultural icons, and figures of speech of the day—and also knowing something of the lives of historical figures.

Tapestry plans recommend historical fiction projects for students at Levels 4 and 12. Obviously, there is a wide disparity of writing skills and maturity between these two levels. For younger children, the project is simply a new variety of story writing, and you need not be too particular about their historical accuracy or detail. For older students, though, we recommend that you be pretty strict with them about such details; let it be a challenge to them!

Our *Tapestry* writing assignment charts break down this multi-week assignment into bite-sized weekly chunks. The temptation with this is that students can feel that they have a lot of time, and weeks slip by before the project is well begun. If research is needed, figure that into the overall plan for this project, and be sure to provide your student with extra assistance finding resources that first week. You'll need to keep your eye on the big picture and keep your student accountable to weekly deadlines in order for him to complete this project in a joyful and manageable way.

Writing Historical Fiction

Please refer to the *Writing Aids* section on teaching Story Writing for details on this project. It has all the basic teacher information for leading the student through the fiction writing process. Below are a few details that are unique to composing historical fiction:

- * Some students will bite off a bigger chunk of history than they can chew in the limited scope of this multi-week project, so help them narrow the scope before they start. Ask your student to make a simple plot map that shows the main points he is interested in including; if the plots are too complex, help him to simplify them before he starts writing.
- * Real-life situations are complex, and your child is writing from history. You may need to help him keep the cast of characters for his story simple: no more than three main characters and only minor ones essential to the limited plot of the story itself. (For instance, if a historical figure has several siblings, but they don't come into the story, encourage your student to omit them altogether without any mention.) The beauty of good story telling is that the reader feels that he knows the characters. A bewildering array is not better than a simple story that truly draws one into the exciting world of the past!
- * In the prewriting phase, character sketches are still an excellent idea, both for historical figures and those your child adds to his story. (Refer to our teaching page "Character Sketch.") The sketches on the historical figures amount to mini-biographies; those on the fictional characters are just as described in the "Story Writing" section. Don't let your child get bogged down with historical figures: the purpose of this project is the narrative, not a full-blown biography!
- * Again, and for emphasis, we are just looking for Level 4 students to learn more about the era you are learning about in history. Their story doesn't need to be refined or minutely accurate. You know your child best; walk that line between correction and encouragement, and err on the side of the latter! There are plenty of years left for him to hone his skills in both history and fiction writing.