

Understanding Historical Fiction

Bring historical fiction to life with creative activities that let students journey to the past.



Objective

Students will investigate image clues and primary sources to draw conclusions about historical fiction, then create their own historical fiction book cover and blurb.

Time

40 minutes

Materials

- What Is Historical Fiction? poster
- *Rebecca: The Sound of Applause* book excerpt
- Draw a Book Cover! activity sheet
- Optional: Resource pack of images from poster and historical book covers

1 Hook students by having them examine the Ellis Island photograph on the *What Is Historical Fiction?* poster. Ask what they notice (e.g., photo is in black and white, old-fashioned clothes, no rolling suitcases, etc.). If you'd like, reproduce and hand out the larger versions of the poster images from the resource pack, or use photos or documents from the time period you are currently teaching.

2 Ask students what they think historical fiction might be. Build on their answers to explain that it's a mix of fact and fiction—an imaginary story set in the past that shows what life was like then. Often the characters in the story are made up, but the setting and some aspects of the plot are based on historical facts. Some characters may also be real people who lived during the time period.

3 Have students work in pairs to brainstorm what they think the people on the poster are doing and thinking. Prompts to get them started: *What might be in their bundles? What can you imagine about how the adults and kids are feeling based on their facial expressions and how they are sitting?*

4 Have them share their ideas with the class. Explain that they just made their own historical fiction, blending history with their imaginations.

5 Read students the excerpt on the poster and excerpt sheet from *Rebecca: The Sound of Applause*. Discuss, comparing 1914 with today. Prompts: *How did people travel, play, shop, and live then? Now?*

6 Explain that students will draw their own historical fiction book cover. Hand out the Draw a Book Cover! activity sheet along with historical fiction books for reference (or book covers from the resource pack). After the activity, have students share their creations in groups.

Supporting All Learners

To add scaffolding or support ELLs

- Give sentence starters: *In 1914, people wore.... Now they wear....*
- Sort pictures of clothes and transportation from 1914 and 2019 on a Then and Now chart.

To increase the challenge

- Have students conduct research on a specific time period before making their book cover.

Extension

- Students investigate another era and make a Time Travel brochure with images and text to show what life was like then.