

Historical Fiction Practice Activities

Historical Fiction is a style of writing depicting made up stories set during a specific time period of history. History, in this place, means time that occurred at least one generation ago.

Historical Fiction Settings

- Are the key to this genre.
- Settings must be absolutely authentic.
- Every detail of everyday life (homes, transportation, clothing, food, technology, etc.) must be accurate for the time period.

Historical Fiction Characters

- Could be real people from history.
- Could be made up characters placed in the historical time period.
- Could be a combination of real people and made up characters.
- Must be credible, even if not real people.
- Language, dress, and mannerisms must fit with the past culture.

Historical Fiction Plots

- Deals with social problems or controversial issues of the time period.
- Looks at the struggles, conflicts, and emotions of day-to-day life of people living before us.

Anachronism

- Inconsistent details within the time period being described.

Aboard the Orphan Train

It was 1917. Eli Porter gripped his small satchel and followed the other children onto what he'd heard called the "Orphan Train."

He'd been told that the ride would be long. The train would leave New York City filled with orphans, looking for a new home. At stops along the way, men and women from the towns would gather. Some would be eager to welcome a child into their family. Others sought a child who could help on the farm or with housework.

When Eli's own parents had died, he'd been sent to Saint John's Orphanage. Heartbroken, he'd run away more than once. Each time, he was found and sent back.

"That boy's a runner, isn't he?" the gardener said to Sister Maria.

"Eli misses his parents. He needs time to adjust to life without them," Sister Maria said.

A few months later, Sister Maria told the children about the Orphan Train. The children were excited about the opportunity to meet new parents. Eli however, was wary.

"What if they're cruel? What if all they want me for is work?" he worried.

As the train rolled through the countryside, Eli fidgeted, his stomach in knots. "I'm not taking chances," he decided. "When this train stops, I'm running away."

A few days later, the Orphan Train slowed to a halt. Eli saw a crowd waiting at the station. He grabbed the satchel from under his seat, and waited for the train doors to open. "With this crowd, it'll be easy to escape," he thought to himself.

Just then, Eli glanced out the train window and noticed a man and woman looking at him. The man tipped his hat and the woman waved. Both smiled at him, and their eyes were kind. Eli swallowed, shuffling his worn boots.

The train door opened, and the youngest children were ushered out. Eli hung back, last in line. He scanned the fields and woods where he could hide out, but then he saw the man and woman walking toward him. In their hands they held a small Roosevelt teddy bear with a red ribbon around its neck.

When Eli saw the stuffed animal he knew in his heart that everything would be okay. Eli, still holding his satchel, started walking down the aisle of the train towards his new family.

First, please read the story, "Orphan Train."

Next, answer the following questions:

1. Describe the setting of the story. Does this fit within Historical Fiction?
2. Describe the main character in the story. Does he fit within Historical Fiction?
3. Describe the plot of the story. Do you feel this plot fits within Historical Fiction? Why/why not?
4. Explain to a family member or friend why this story is a good example of Historical Fiction.

Finally, take some time and look up more information on the real Orphan Train. See how accurate this author was in writing about this event in history. Were there any anachronisms?