thinking ALOUD
Making Sense of Literacy

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY
The Land of the Pharaohs
Setting
(historical fiction)

The Importance of Setting

Setting is the most important literary element of historical fiction. These settings should provide readers with an accurate, vivid picture of life during the time period depicted in the story, requiring the author to research the time period thoroughly. Authors must know how people lived, what they ate, what kinds of homes they had, and what artifacts were a common part of their lives.

When writing for children, skillful authors weave the details of everyday life, clothing, and food into the story line in order to create local color and interest. Authors also include dialect or quaint expressions within the dialogue to give conversations a flavor of the time. While some "thees" and "thous" provide young readers with a feeling of authenticity, including too many can leave them confused, just as overly long descriptions are boring and distracting.

Bringing History to Life

Since children are unable to travel back in time to understand the past, historical fiction can recreate a sense of history that is far livelier than what textbooks can provide. Readers of historical fiction should read critically, however, as some authors of historical fiction may take more liberties with details in order to present a "good story." Readers should ask themselves, "Are the historical details accurate?" in order to determine what the time period was really like.

References:

Freeman, E. B. & Levstik, L. (1988). Recreating the past: Historical fiction in the social studies curriculum. *The Elementary School Journal, 88*(4). 329-337.

Gillespie, J. T. (2008). *Historical fiction for young readers (grades 4-8): An introduction.* Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Read, Write, & Think. (2004). *Historical Fiction.* NCTE/IRA Retrieved from: http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:cRjk9hK5doEJ:www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson404/HistoricalFictionDefn.pdf+historical+fiction+settings&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESif-j246FdB7CM_m_zTYbRaAF9ZM9nYGqsc0PMAmNAn4cTeih1hisOpyjqxpXZg8Jlxv31MCECZ0eB9RD_dXULSLXq86H2IPz74mW6NRto58VAX1QOydWgxPFUkPiHMqLY5-0bO&sig=AHIEtbTCXaBM-BGP6FQ5rJ_LTqE6rvNBHA