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Writing Historical Fiction, Part 1

Writing Historical Fiction

In this LightUnit, you will have the opportunity to write a historical fiction story. Historical fiction is a genre of writing that combines elements of both fiction and nonfiction. It is narrative writing in which the main character is fictional, but the setting is historically accurate. Historical fiction is a fictitious story usually set during a significant event or time period in history.

Because historical fiction is based on history, the historical setting defines many details for the writer. The details of the story, such as clothing and dialogue, must be historically accurate as well as the location in which the story is placed.

In addition to characters and setting, historical fiction has a plot, just as other stories do. The main character has a problem that needs to be solved, and actions must lead to a resolution that solves the problem at the end of the story. This plot propels the story.

A writer of historical fiction must be acquainted with the historical era in which his story is placed. This step usually requires research. The writer will read sources, such as historical documents and books, and will perhaps even travel to the setting of the story, if possible.

Here is an example of a historical fiction story based on the sinking of the *Titanic*.

Charlie could hardly believe he was actually sailing on the *Titanic*, headed for America. This ship had filled the newspapers back home in England, and he and his friends had talked of little else for weeks. This ship had many phenomenal features. It was so luxurious that it had a heated swimming pool, a gymnasium, and a library, and its special design made it unsinkable. He felt privileged to be a sailor on the *Titanic*'s maiden voyage! He had not thought he would be so lucky, but he had just been hired days ago. There had not been time for him to get acquainted with all the safety features of the *Titanic*, but why bother with all those unnecessary details when the ship could not sink?

Charlie thought about the family he had left in England, his mother and his two younger

sisters. He knew his mother was reluctant to let him go on this voyage, but she had not wanted to deprive him of this rare opportunity and his family needed the money he would earn. Since his father had died three years ago, his mother had struggled to earn enough to keep him and his sisters fed and clothed.

As he had boarded the ship four days ago, his mother had embraced him. "I'll pray for you every day, son," she had whispered. "Make sure you go to church and read your Bible every day." He knew she had barely kept back the sobs, and he could hardly bear to leave her. But he was so glad he had come. He was enjoying his job, and everything about the voyage thrilled his sense of adventure.

Today was Sunday. He had been on duty in the morning, and so he had missed the church



Lesson 1

service. This evening, however, there was a hymn singing for the second-class passengers. He decided that attending the singing would honor his mother's request to go to church. He entered the second-class dining saloon and joined the passengers who had just finished supper. He heartily joined in the singing. The last hymn sung was "For Those in Peril on the Sea." Charlie had heard it many times before, having grown up near the sea, but somehow tonight, it seemed to affect the crowd in a way he had never witnessed before. Many, men and women alike, were weeping before the song was finished. After the song, the group dispersed, and Charlie returned to his room to get a good night of rest before his shift early the next morning.

Loud cries and knocking woke Charlie. In a daze, he stumbled to the door.

"What's wrong?" he asked his fellow sailor, who banged on the door in a state of panic.

"We've hit an iceberg!" Sean cried. "All hands are needed on deck."

"What? How?" Charlie's mind felt numb. This ship was supposed to be unsinkable. How could there be any danger?

"The ship was going way too fast. C'mon! Help me wake people! We don't have any time to lose."

Charlie raced through the corridors, banging on doors and yelling the horrific news that the ship was sinking. Some people responded quickly. Others turned away in disbelief, believing it was impossible for this ship to sink.

After warning as many people as he could, Charlie headed toward the lifeboats. By now, many lifeboats had already been lowered. Would he be able to get on one? Since he was a man and a crew member, he would be one of the last to have a chance to board.

As he entered the area where the lifeboats were being loaded, chaos met his eyes. He immediately wished Captain Smith had not canceled that lifeboat drill yesterday morning. Dumbfounded, he watched as Second Officer Lightoller allowed only women and children to board the lifeboat, using his gun to keep the men from going first.

Charlie knew his time was running out. The ship was sinking fast, and the deck was starting to tilt. Words from the hymn singing echoed through his mind, *Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee, for those in peril on the sea!* A pang tore through Charlie's heart as he thought of his mother and the grief his death would cause her. "Dear God," he pleaded, "please save me somehow for my dear mother's sake."

The *Titanic* was so low in the water now that waves began washing people off the upper deck. Charlie followed the example of others and held tightly to the rails. Finally, when all other hope failed, he dived into the frigid ocean. Pain seared through his body as he tried frantically to stay afloat in the freezing ocean. Miraculously, his eyes caught sight of an overturned lifeboat with other men clinging to it. He grabbed hold of it. Officer Lightoller, who was also clinging to the boat, took charge. Under his direction, Charlie and the other men managed to climb aboard and stay afloat until another ship, the *Carpathia*, reached the area.

As Charlie climbed aboard the rescue ship, he could hardly believe he was still alive. His mind would forever be scarred by the horrors of this night, but his heart would forever be grateful to the One who hears those who cry when in peril on the sea.

Writing organizers will help you collect information and plan the story. Here is part of the research notes page and the entire writing organizer for this story.



Historical Fiction Research Notes

Source: "Titanic," *T World Book Encyclopedia* by William H. Garzke, Jr.

Details:

ship believed to be unsinkable due to its design, p. 300

ship hit an iceberg about 11:40 p.m. on April 14, 1912, p. 299

ship sank, p. 299

Source: *The Titanic Sinks* by Thomas Conklin

Details:

many crew members recently hired and unfamiliar with ship, pp. 11-12

ship very luxurious with gymnasium, heated swimming pool, and library, pp. 15-16

Sunday, April 14, church in dining saloon, p. 23

Historical Fiction Organizer

Setting	Characters	Plot
Historical Event The Sinking of the <i>Titanic</i>	Historical Captain Smith Second Officer Lightroller	Problem The <i>Titanic</i> is sinking, and Charlie has no hope of being rescued.
Time April 14, 1912 11:40 p.m.—disaster begins 2½ hours later—ship sinks		Actions Charlie prays. Charlie holds on to the rail. He jumps and grabs hold of an overturned lifeboat. Officer Lightroller's direction keeps them from sinking.
Location North Atlantic Ocean en route from Southampton, England to New York City	Fictional a sailor named Charlie from England Charlie's sailor friend Sean	Resolution Charlie is taken aboard the rescue ship <i>Carpathia</i> and is saved.

A Circle your choice of the following historical topics or choose your own with your teacher's approval.

- ☐ 1. a. the Pony Express
 b. the Oregon Trail
 c. Columbus' voyage to America
 d. Noah and his sons building the ark
 e. a South Pole explorer
 f. building the pyramids
 g. _____



B Fill in the Historical Fiction Notes Page on page 60 as you research.

- 2. Using an encyclopedia and one or two other books, research your topic. Put details in your own words. Include the titles and page numbers of the books where you found your facts.

Review

C Underline the correct word. Circle *positive*, *comparative*, or *superlative*.

3. The harvest this year is **more bountiful**, **bountifuler** than last year.

positive

comparative

superlative

4. The new variety of pumpkins was the **less productive**, **least productive** of the three we planted.

positive

comparative

superlative

5. Marilyn's fall arrangement is **beautiful**, **beautifuler**.

positive

comparative

superlative

D Underline each singular indefinite pronoun. Write *s*, *pn*, *do*, *io*, or *op* to label its function.

6. Mom offered each of the children a warm chocolate chip cookie.
7. The evangelist challenged everyone to spend more time in prayer.
8. David was one of the ministers at the ministers' meeting last evening.

E Diagram the sentence. Diagram *ice storm* as a compound noun.

9. The glistening landscape and bent branches showed the effects of the ice storm.

Penmanship

○ **F** Using your best handwriting, copy the sentences.

Adoniram Judson worked among the people of Burma for many years. He translated the Bible into the Burmese language.



Spelling – Patterns

Spelling Words

apprehension	corrosion	incision	possession	region
collision	decision	incisor	precise	religion
concise	erosion	occasion	precision	scissors
conclusion	exclude	opinion	recluse	secluded

The Latin word *cludere* meant “to shut up; to enclose.” Words formed from *cludere* have the roots *clud* or *clus*.

G Write the spelling word that fits each description. Circle each root that comes from *cludere*.

10. _____ to keep someone out of a place or group
11. _____ hidden from plain sight; removed from easy access to society
12. _____ someone who avoids social contact
13. _____ a reasoned opinion or the end of something, such as a game or a program

The Latin word *cidere* meant “to cut.” Words formed from *cidere* have the root *cis*.

H Write the spelling word that fits each description. Circle each root that comes from *cidere*.

14. _____ a cutting device that uses two sharp blades that slide past each other
15. _____ the degree of exactness or refinement in measurements
16. _____ a choice that has been made
17. _____ saying much in few words; writing that is short and to the point
18. _____ a cut, specifically a cut made during surgery
19. _____ meticulously or carefully on-target
20. _____ one of the front teeth that is especially good for cutting

I Write the Section 1 spelling words in your notebook.