

HISTORICAL FICTION LESSON PLAN

Pre-Visit Activity for Animating History

Objective: This activity will help students understand the intricacies of historical fiction and better prepare them for their upcoming *Animating History* workshop with the MOV!

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- 1) Summarize the key components of historical fiction
- 2) Differentiate historical fiction from other genres, such as history or fiction
- 3) Critique historical fiction as a tool for the reconstruction of the past

With these new skills, your students will be prepared to create their own piece of historical fiction during the Animating History workshop.

Time required: approx. 45mins

What is Historical Fiction?

Historical fiction consists of any work whose content is produced by the imagination and is based on, or concerned with, events in history or historical time periods. Given this broad definition, historical fiction can take many forms, including but not limited to:

- 1) Depictions of real historical figures in the situations they experienced
- 2) Depictions of real historical figures in imagined situations
- 3) Depictions of fictional characters in documented historical events
- 4) Depictions of fictional characters in fictional events, but within the context of a real historical time period

When creating a piece of historical fiction, it is important to pay close attention to the details of the story (settings, clothing, mannerisms, etc.) to ensure that they fit the time period in which the narrative takes place. It is important to represent an era as accurately as possible.

As this is also a work of fiction, artistic license is permitted--so long as it does not deviate in significant ways from established history. Characters and/or events might be made up but they are always based on what we think people would have been like or what we think might have happened during this era.

Historical fiction is always set in the past, but those elements which are fictitious can differ from story to story (e.g. characters, events, dialogue, etc.). Oftentimes fictitious elements are used in order to:

- a) Add detail to the story
- b) Make the narrative more interesting
- c) Enable readers/viewers to understand the past
- d) Foreshadow later events
- e) Illustrate key themes
- f) Develop a character

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Joe Fortes Video

Description of Story

This animated short film tells the story of Seraphim "Joe" Fortes, one of Vancouver's most beloved citizens. Born in the West Indies, Joe Fortes immigrated to Vancouver in 1885 and spent much of his time swimming in English Bay. A self-appointed lifeguard at first, he became so famous that in 1900 the city of Vancouver finally rewarded him with a salary for doing what he loved best. During his more than 30-year career, Joe taught thousands of people to swim and saved over a hundred lives. Yet there were some who did not respect Joe because of his skin colour. Through his determination, kindness, and love for children, Joe helped shift racial attitudes.

Introduction to the film

This is a cut-out style animated film, made by a professional crew. The film took five years to produce. During its production, the filmmakers came to the Museum of Vancouver to observe and study artifacts from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This research enabled the filmmakers to more accurately portray this era. For example, the filmmakers spent time looking at photos of Vancouver's boardwalk to ensure they accurately depicted it in the film.

Watch the film on the National Film Board's website: <https://www.nfb.ca/film/joe>

Play the video for your class. While they are observing the film, students should make note of the things featured in the film that they believe are FACT and those that are likely FICTION. For example:

FACT	FICTION
The setting is a real place	Some of the dialogue is made up
Joe was a real person	Some of the events are fictionalized (e.g. Joe's early years in Vancouver)
The Great Vancouver fire happened	Some of the supporting characters are fictionalized
Joe saved children during the fire	The clothing the characters are wearing
Racism was pervasive in Vancouver in the late 1800s/early 1900s	

- While some elements of the film have been made up or embellished, they are appropriate and plausible given the historical period in which the movie is set. When your students are creating their own films at the MOV, it is important that they follow these same principles.

Concluding discussion

To recap what the students have learned, have them discuss the following issues:

- 1) How can we distinguish fact from fiction in animated films?
- 2) How can historical fiction be used to understand the past?
- 3) Is historical fiction a useful tool? What are the pros and cons of this genre for the retelling of history?