

SIX STEPS FOR WRITING HISTORICAL FICTION

Use the following six activities to work through the research and creative process as you get to know your historical event, characters and writing style.

“Historical fiction is about spicing up the past with your own imagination.

BE BRAVE! You’re not breaking some kind of taboo by writing about real people in the real past.”

- Rachel Qitsualik

- 1. KNOW THE EVENT.** Choose a moment in history that you can be passionate about. This may be an event of national and historical significance that has resonated with you or something of personal or community significance.
TASK FOR STEP 1: *Brainstorm events in history that you find interesting. For additional ideas, try looking through your history textbook to see if you can find an event in history that you would like to see told from an Aboriginal perspective.*
- 2. KNOW THE CONTEXT.** Keep in mind that very few events occur without some connection to others. It is important to know what came before and after the event you choose. Do some research on the time period of the historical event of your choice.
TASK FOR STEP 2: *Create a timeline including events leading up to the setting of your story and subsequent events as well.*
- 3. KNOW THE LAND.** Geography shapes a culture more strongly than any other influence. Imagine yourself standing on the land where your story place. Look around you. What do you see? What is the weather like? What animals and plants are available in this area? Are there lakes? Rivers? An ocean?
TASK FOR STEP 3: *Write or draw a description of the land to have this as a reference throughout the writing process.*
- 4. KNOW THE PEOPLE.** You could choose to write about real people who were involved in the historical event (eg. Louis Riel in the Northwest Rebellion) or perhaps you would like to tell the story from the perspective of a person who may not have made it into the history books. Whether the characters in your historical event are real or invented, it’s best to know them as well as possible.
TASK FOR STEP 4: *Decide on the main characters in your story. Create a chart listing each of the characteristics you want your characters to have including appearance, clothes, occupation, attitude, family life, belief system and any other characteristics you think may affect how they respond to change or turmoil.*
- 5. KNOW THE STYLE.** Some writing style options include: third person narrative (telling the story as if the narrator is watching from the sidelines); first person narrative (the narrator is involved in the events taking place “I watched as it all took place in front of my eyes...”; journal entry (telling the story through the diary entries of a participant in the event); or flashbacks (going from events in the past to the present day to show how the event affects the current situation).
TASK FOR STEP 5: *Decide on the writing style you would like to use. Visit a library and ask a teacher or librarian to help you find a book or story written in the style you choose. To read examples of different writing styles from previous top ten finalists in the Writing Challenge, visit the “Contest Guidelines” page of the contest website.*
- 6. KNOW THE POINT.** Make sure you can answer these questions: Why do you want to write about this historical event? What are you trying to prove or reveal to your readers?
TASK FOR STEP 6: *Before you start writing, record your answers to the above questions. When you are finished, revisit your answers to make sure you have achieved your goal.*