

Which Was Is Not Considered Historical Fiction? You Are A Teacher That Is Setting Up A Classroom Library

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As a teacher preparing to set up a vibrant and engaging classroom library, one of your key goals is to curate a diverse collection of books that not only captivates students but also enriches their understanding of different genres. Among these genres, historical fiction holds a special place, blending storytelling with historical context to bring the past to life. However, an important question often arises: which books are truly considered historical fiction, and which are not? Clarifying this distinction is crucial to creating an accurate and educational library that aligns with curriculum goals and fosters a love of reading. This article will explore what constitutes historical fiction, highlight examples of books that are not considered historical fiction, and provide guidance for educators in selecting appropriate titles for their classroom libraries.

Understanding Historical Fiction

Before delving into what books are not considered historical fiction, it's essential to understand what this genre entails.

Definition of Historical Fiction

Historical fiction is a literary genre where the story is set in a specific historical period, often featuring real events, settings, or figures, but with fictional characters and narratives woven into that context. The genre aims to provide readers with a sense of the time period, culture, and historical circumstances, often blending fact with fiction to educate as well as entertain.

Characteristics of Historical Fiction

- Set in a recognizable historical period
- Features historically accurate details and settings
- Includes fictional characters interacting with real events or figures
- Often explores themes related to the era, such as social issues or cultural norms
- Provides educational value alongside engaging storytelling

What Books Are Not Considered Historical Fiction?

While many stories set in the past fall under the umbrella of historical fiction, several types of books are often mistaken for or labeled as such but do not strictly meet the criteria. Recognizing these distinctions helps in selecting books that accurately fit the genre and serve their educational purpose.

1. Modern Fiction or Contemporary Novels

These stories are set in the present day or recent times and do not explore past historical periods.

- **Example:** "The Hate U Give" by Angie Thomas — set in contemporary America, addressing current social issues.
- **Why Not Considered Historical Fiction:** The setting and themes are contemporary, not rooted in a past era.

2. Science Fiction and Fantasy

Speculative genres that involve futuristic technology, imaginary worlds, or supernatural elements are not considered historical fiction unless they are explicitly set in a historical context.

- **Example:** "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" by J.K. Rowling — set in a fictional magical world, not historical.
- **Why Not Considered Historical Fiction:** The story does not take place in a real historical setting, and the primary elements are fantastical.

3. Biographies and Autobiographies

While these books are about real people and real events, they are categorized as nonfiction, not historical fiction.

- **Example:** "The Diary of Anne Frank" — a true account of Anne Frank's life during WWII.
- **Why Not Considered Historical Fiction:** They are factual accounts, not fictional stories set in history.

4. Historical Nonfiction

Works that aim to present factual, researched accounts of historical events, such as history textbooks or scholarly works, are nonfiction, not fiction.

- **Example:** "Guns, Germs, and Steel" by Jared Diamond — an academic exploration of human history.
- **Why Not Considered Historical Fiction:** Their purpose is educational, not storytelling with fictional elements.

5. Time Travel Stories

Some stories involve characters traveling through time, which can blur genre lines.

- **Example:** "The Time Machine" by H.G. Wells — involves time travel but is primarily science fiction.
- **Why Not Considered Historical Fiction:** The core element is speculative science, not a fictionalized account of a historical period, though the story may include historical themes.

Criteria to Distinguish Historical Fiction from Other Genres

Understanding the specific markers that define historical fiction can aid teachers and librarians in making informed selections.

Setting in a Recognizable Past Era

Books considered historical fiction are explicitly set in past times—whether centuries ago or more recent decades—that can be identified as a distinct historical period.

Incorporation of Real Events or Figures

While fictional characters drive the story, there is often a backdrop of real historical events or figures, giving the narrative authenticity.

Fictional Characters Interacting with History

The presence of fictional protagonists navigating a real historical context is key to the genre.

Educational and Cultural Relevance

These stories often aim to teach about history, culture, or social issues pertinent to the era depicted.

Examples of Books That Are Not Considered Historical Fiction

To clarify further, here are some specific titles that, despite their historical settings or themes, are not classified as historical fiction:

- **"Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl"** — a true diary, nonfiction
- **"The Martian" by Andy Weir** — set in the future, science fiction
- **"The Fault in Our Stars" by John Green** — contemporary young adult novel, no historical setting
- **"Cinderella" (folklore or fairy tale)** — traditional fairy tale, not rooted in history

Guidance for Teachers Setting Up a Classroom Library

When selecting books for your classroom library, understanding what qualifies as historical fiction will help you create a meaningful and accurate collection.

Focus on Accurate Historical Settings

Choose books that clearly depict real historical periods, with attention to detail and authenticity.

Mix Fiction with Factual Content

Include titles that blend engaging storytelling with educational value, such as novels that explore social issues of a particular era.

Balance Genre Diversity

While emphasizing historical fiction, include biographies, nonfiction history books, and other genres to provide students with a well-rounded understanding of history.

Utilize Recognized Classics and Contemporary Works

Select a mix of timeless classics like "Number the Stars" by Lois Lowry and newer titles that resonate with students, such as "Inside Out & Back Again" by Thanhha Lai.

Be Mindful of Age Appropriateness

Ensure that the content and complexity of the books are suitable for your students' grade levels.

Conclusion

Distinguishing which books are considered historical fiction and which are not is vital for educators aiming to build an informative and inspiring classroom library. Recognizing that historical fiction involves stories set in the past with fictional characters interacting within real historical contexts helps in making intentional choices. By including authentic historical novels and avoiding misclassification of genres such as contemporary fiction, fantasy, biography, or science fiction, teachers can foster a love of history and reading among students. As you set up your classroom library, keep these guidelines in mind to curate a collection that is both educational and engaging, inspiring young learners to explore the rich tapestry of human history through compelling storytelling.

Remember: The goal is to provide students with a variety of books that accurately represent history while sparking their curiosity and imagination. Happy library building!

Frequently Asked Questions

What distinguishes historical fiction from other genres in a classroom library?

Historical fiction features stories set in a specific historical period, often incorporating real events or figures, whereas other genres may not focus on historical settings or accuracy.

Which type of book is NOT considered historical fiction?

A fantasy novel set in a fictional world with no connection to real historical events or periods is not

considered historical fiction.

Can contemporary novels be classified as historical fiction?

No, contemporary novels set in the present day are not considered historical fiction; this genre typically involves past time periods.

Is a biography considered historical fiction?

No, biographies are non-fiction; they present factual accounts of an individual's life, unlike historical fiction which is fictionalized.

What about science fiction stories—are they considered historical fiction?

Generally no, science fiction explores futuristic or speculative concepts and is not classified as historical fiction unless set in a specific past era with historical elements.

Would a memoir be considered historical fiction?

No, a memoir is a non-fiction account of personal experiences, whereas historical fiction is a fictional story set in the past.

Are fairy tales or folktales considered historical fiction?

No, fairy tales and folktales are traditional stories that are not set in specific historical periods and are not classified as historical fiction.

Which of these is NOT a characteristic of historical fiction: fictional characters, real historical settings, accurate historical details, or futuristic themes?

Futuristic themes are not characteristic of historical fiction, which focuses on past historical periods.

Why is it important to include a variety of genres, including non-historical fiction, in a classroom library?

Including a variety of genres exposes students to different storytelling styles and perspectives, enriching their understanding and fostering a love for reading across multiple interests.

Additional Resources

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When curating a classroom library, one of the most important considerations is selecting books that

not only engage students but also enrich their understanding of different genres. Among these, historical fiction holds a special place, offering a blend of storytelling and historical context that can foster empathy, critical thinking, and a love for history. However, not all books that feature historical settings qualify as true historical fiction. As educators and librarians, understanding the distinctions is essential to building an accurate and meaningful collection. This article explores what constitutes historical fiction, examines common pitfalls, and clarifies which works do not belong in this genre, ensuring your classroom library is both diverse and genre-appropriate.

Understanding Historical Fiction: Definitions and Characteristics

What Is Historical Fiction?

Historical fiction is a literary genre that combines fictional stories with historical settings, events, or figures. The core purpose of this genre is to entertain while providing insight into a particular period, often blending factual history with imaginative storytelling. A hallmark of historical fiction is its commitment to historical accuracy in setting, language, and social customs, even as the characters and plotlines are fictional.

Key characteristics of historical fiction include:

- Accurate historical setting: The story takes place during a specific time period, with attention to detail regarding the social, political, and cultural context.
- Fictional characters or real historical figures: The narrative may feature entirely fictional characters interacting with real figures or events.
- Integration of historical facts: The plot weaves real historical events or conditions into the story, often to deepen themes or character development.
- Authentic language and customs: Dialogue, descriptions, and social behaviors reflect the era, adding authenticity.

Why Is Accurate Genre Identification Important?

Correctly identifying historical fiction ensures that students receive accurate representations of history and that educators foster critical thinking about the difference between fact and fiction. Misclassification can lead to misconceptions, especially if students take fictionalized accounts as factual history. Therefore, understanding the genre's scope and boundaries is vital when selecting books.

Common Books That Are Not Considered Historical

Fiction

While many books feature historical settings or themes, not all qualify as historical fiction. Here are some categories and examples of works that should be distinguished from true historical fiction:

1. Historical Nonfiction

Historical nonfiction includes biographies, memoirs, essays, documentaries, and scholarly works aimed at informing or educating about historical facts.

Examples:

- The Diary of Anne Frank (edited diary entries)
- Guns, Germs, and Steel by Jared Diamond (nonfiction analysis)
- Team of Rivals by Doris Kearns Goodwin (biography of Lincoln)

Why they are not historical fiction:

These works are grounded in factual research, aiming to inform rather than tell a fictional story set in the past. They provide factual accuracy and are typically written by experts or witnesses.

2. Fantasy and Science Fiction with Historical Elements

Some fantasy or sci-fi works incorporate historical elements or settings but are primarily speculative or fantastical.

Examples:

- The Inheritance Cycle by Christopher Paolini (fantasy set in a medieval-like world)
- Dune by Frank Herbert (futuristic setting with historical influences)
- His Dark Materials by Philip Pullman (alternate worlds with historical inspirations)

Why they are not historical fiction:

Their primary focus is on speculative worlds, magic, or future societies, not on recreating or exploring real historical periods authentically. While they may draw from history, their stories are fundamentally fictional and imaginative.

3. Mythology and Folklore Collections

Books that compile myths, legends, and folklore from various cultures.

Examples:

- Mythology by Edith Hamilton
- The Norse Myths by Neil Gaiman (anthology of Norse legends)

Why they are not historical fiction:

These works are based on traditional stories, myths, and legends rather than historical events or periods. They serve to preserve cultural narratives rather than depict historical realities.

4. Contemporary Fiction with Historical Settings but No Historical Focus

Some modern novels are set in historical settings but do not aim to accurately portray history.

Examples:

- The Other Boleyn Girl by Philippa Gregory (historical setting but highly dramatized)
- The Book Thief by Markus Zusak (set during WWII but with fictional narration)

Why they are not considered true historical fiction:

While these books are set in historical periods, their primary focus is on character drama, stylistic storytelling, or allegory, rather than providing a faithful, detailed portrayal of the era.

Specific Examples of Works That Are Not Historical Fiction

To clarify further, here are specific titles often mistaken for historical fiction but which do not fit the genre:

- "The Hobbit" by J.R.R. Tolkien: Set in a fantastical world with medieval influences, but entirely fictional.
- "The Hunger Games" by Suzanne Collins: A dystopian future with historical themes but not rooted in real history.
- "Brave New World" by Aldous Huxley: A speculative future society, not historical fiction.
- "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu: A classical treatise on military strategy, factual but scholarly, not fiction.
- "The Diary of a Young Girl" by Anne Frank: While based on real events, it is a primary source document and not a work of fiction.

Guidelines for Teachers When Selecting Books for a Classroom Library

To ensure your library offers authentic and valuable historical fiction, consider the following guidelines:

1. Check the Genre Classification

Most publishers and bookstores label books clearly. Look for categorizations like "historical fiction" or "historical novel" on the cover or in bibliographies.

2. Evaluate the Author's Intent and Research

Research the author's background and the book's reviews. Is the book intended as entertainment, educational, or factual? Does it cite historical sources or rely solely on imagination?

3. Analyze the Setting and Characters

Determine if the story authentically captures the social, cultural, and political aspects of the period. Are characters portrayed with nuance, and does the setting reflect real historical conditions?

4. Cross-Check with Historical Facts

Compare the book's depiction of events with reputable history sources. If significant inaccuracies are present, it might not qualify as true historical fiction.

5. Use Reputable Book Lists and Resources

Consult established lists from educational organizations, libraries, or literary critics that specialize in historical fiction for young readers.

Conclusion: Building an Accurate and Engaging Classroom Library

Creating a classroom library that effectively combines educational value with student engagement requires discernment in selecting books. While stories set in the past can enrich understanding, it's crucial to distinguish true historical fiction from works that are nonfiction, fantasy, mythology, or speculative fiction. By understanding the defining features of historical fiction and being vigilant about genre boundaries, teachers can curate a collection that provides authentic historical perspectives, stimulates curiosity, and encourages critical thinking.

Ultimately, including a variety of genres—such as nonfiction accounts, mythologies, and well-researched historical novels—can offer students a comprehensive view of history and storytelling. The key lies in clarity and accuracy, ensuring that our classroom libraries serve as both educational resources and sources of inspiration for young minds exploring the past.

In summary:

- Historical fiction combines fictional storytelling with accurate historical settings and contexts.
- Works like biographies, myths, fantasy, and speculative fiction, even if set in historical periods, are not considered historical fiction.
- Careful vetting and understanding genre distinctions are essential for building an effective classroom library.
- A well-curated collection encourages students to appreciate history, storytelling, and the power of imagination.

By implementing these guidelines, educators can create a rich, accurate, and inspiring literary environment that nurtures a lifelong love of history and reading.

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