

Historical Fiction Book Clubs

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Photography by Peter Cunningham

HEINEMANN ♦ PORTSMOUTH, NH



To Virginie, who reminds me to live the future I want today. —Pablo

To Stacey Fell, whose relationship with kids, books, and history is a wondrous nexus. —Mary

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Filling in the Backstory



IN THIS SESSION

TODAY YOU'LL teach students that readers of historical fiction learn not only the evolving story as they read, but also the backstory of both the protagonist and the historical times in which the story is set.

TODAY YOUR STUDENTS will have a long stretch of reading time—perhaps half an hour—and they'll continue the important work that readers do as they start a historical fiction novel. They'll get to know the characters and figure out what's going on, coming to understand more of the backstory behind both the characters' lives and the historical context and jotting super-abbreviated timelines to keep track of the unfolding story (and backstories). You can take time to check in with students about their reading volume, gathering a few into a small group as needed to give support. Readers will have time for a brief club meeting today.

GETTING READY

- ✓ Display the “Readers of Historical Fiction Ask . . .” anchor chart and prepare to add to it (see Connection and Link). ✨
- ✓ Provide each club with Post-it notes to use when constructing timelines (see Active Engagement).
- ✓ Access Character strand of “Bands of Text Complexity in Literature” to help students tackle the work in their band of text complexity (see Conferring and Small-Group Work). ✨
- ✓ Prepare chart paper to jot a few questions to help students think about how to have the best club discussions (see Share).
- ✓ Make sure clubs have a place to keep their folders to accumulate their resources and shared tools in (see Share).

MINILESSON

CONNECTION

Channel students to talk about what's happening in their novels. Be sure your invitation is open ended—just ask, “What's happening?” without further instructions.

"As usual, readers, will you sit with your club when you come to the meeting area? Today, you'll be talking not just with your partner but with all the members of your club." Students began to assemble. "As we wait for everyone to join us, will you take a second to remind your club members of what has happened so far in your club book?"

I listened as students talked, and then convened the class.

Point out that some students talked about the character, some about the situation, and that historical fiction readers need to be keeping both in the forefront of their minds as they read.

"Readers, here's what I'm noticing: when I asked you to talk with your club about what has happened so far in your book, some of you are thinking especially about our first question: 'What kind of person is the main character?' You've been thinking what the main character says and does, and how this shows the kind of person he or she is.

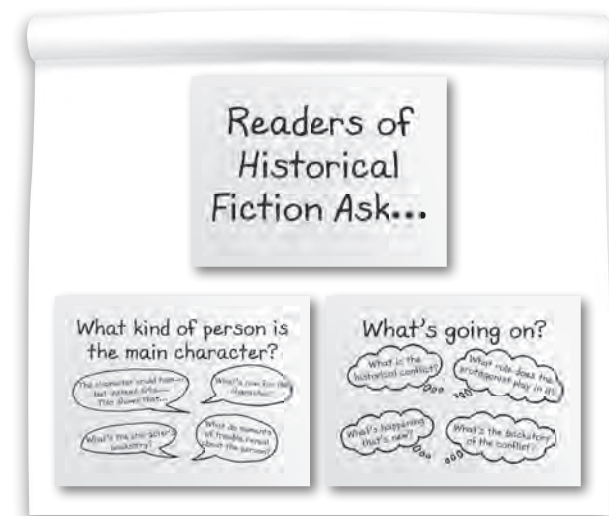
"Meanwhile, others of you have been thinking more about the second question"—I gestured to the bullet, 'What's going on?'—"and you were just talking about events in the historical world in which your story is set.

"Will you think for a moment about whether your first instinct was to think about the personal storyline of your main character, or whether you thought more about the larger events occurring in the world of your story, in the situation?" I let there be twenty seconds of silence.

"I'm asking you to think about whether you tend to be a big-picture or a personal-storyline kind of reader, because either way, when reading historical fiction, it's important to remember to push yourself to keep both things going in your mind most of the time. It's almost like you need to make two timelines as you read—the main character's timeline, and the historical timeline."

❁ **Name the teaching point.**

"Today I want to teach you that as you read on in your book, you'll not only make two timelines—a personal and a historical one—but also, you'll add onto *both ends* of those timelines. Yes, you'll learn about new things that are happening in the evolving present, but you'll *also* learn about the backstory of both the people and of the situation."



TEACHING

Draw on a familiar novel to make the point that readers of historical fiction not only learn what's happening next on both the character's and the situation's timeline, they also learn backstory.

"Some of you know the book *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry. On the very first page of that book, three girls are racing down a street in Copenhagen, and German soldiers who are on the street corner call 'Halte!' As you read on, you follow the sequence of events in those characters' timeline: the girls stop, one of them (the Jewish girl) is especially nervous, they soon reach home and tell their parents . . . If you, as a reader, were making a little timeline in your mind of the events in these characters' lives, you could add the unfolding events onto the right side of their personal timeline.

"But the important thing is that meanwhile, as you read on in *Number the Stars*, you could also start to fill in the story of what happened *before* the German soldiers ordered those three girls to stop. Some of the events that happened before the book begins are personal: the big sister to two of the girls died somehow, just before her wedding day, one isn't sure how yet. Other events are historical: the German soldiers have been in Copenhagen for three years, goods (including coffee) have become restricted, brave Danish resisters have exploded factories that could have become suppliers for the Nazis." As I spoke, I made two small timelines.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Channel club members to co-construct Post-it timelines of their novels, adding to both the present and the past of two timelines—one showing the protagonist's evolution, the other showing history.

"I've put some Post-its in the middle of each of your clubs. Will you and your club members take a few minutes and see if you can make a super-quick timeline that shows the evolving stories of your people, and of your place? Be sure you are adding to both ends of your timeline, especially filling in some of the backstories of your novel."

After kids worked for a few minutes, I asked for their attention for just a minute. "I'm glad that some of you are thinking carefully about how tiny details in the story often reveal the backstory. For example, Walter Dean Myers never paused the story of *Patrol* to explicitly give us the backstory. He never came right out and said that the narrator has been in Vietnam for a while before this story occurred. But like all authors of historical fiction, Myers has the character's smallest actions be revealing ones. Remember this part?"

Shots! A firefight!

I dive to the ground.

My heart beats faster.

"The text never comes right out and shows that the soldier had been there for months, but those actions show that he has learned to survive. I'm going to give you a chance to talk with your club again, but this time, before you do, will you

*We know that a lot of kids who come of age in elementary units of study know *Number the Stars* from their fourth-grade Historical Fiction Clubs unit. If you know a more recent or otherwise famous book or movie (e.g., *Titanic*), you can reference that.*

Your students will only make the barest start at these timelines before you need to move along in the minilesson, but even if they don't accomplish a lot, they will have had a taste of what this sort of thinking feels like and they'll be more apt to do this whenever they are reading their own novels.

take a second to reread a key part of your book? Just skim over it. But notice specific details that reveal the backstory of either the main character, or of the world in which the story is set.”

LINK

Rally students to read their shared novels, drawing on all they have learned so far.

“Readers, I know you are eager to have some time to dive back into your novel. You’ll have about half an hour to read today, so put your bookmark twenty to thirty pages ahead of where you are now, and push yourself to read at least that many pages. As you read, keep in mind that readers of historical fiction aren’t just reading along on autopilot. You have tons of work to do, so you need to be alert to all that you’re learning as you read.” I added to the anchor chart.

ANCHOR CHART

Readers of Historical Fiction Ask . . .

- What kind of person is the main character?
- The character could have . . . but instead s/he . . . This shows that . . .
- **What’s new for the character?**
- **What’s the character’s backstory?**
- What’s going on?
 - What is the historical conflict?
 - What role does the protagonist play in it?
 - **What’s happening that’s new?**
 - **What’s the backstory of the conflict?**

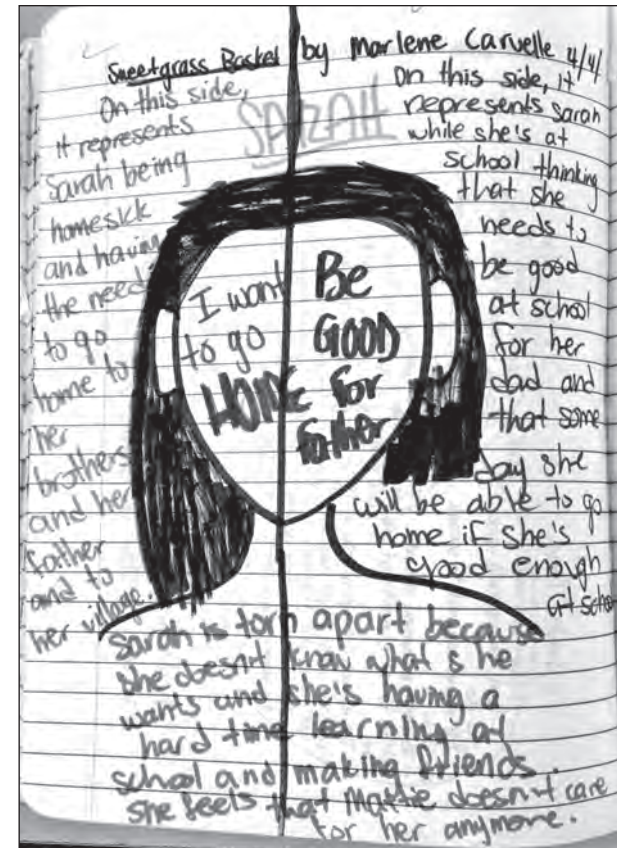


FIG. 2–1 This reader considers the different sides of her character, and how the character may be torn by internal conflict as well as by the historical conflict.



Helping Readers and Clubs Make Smart Reading Goals

YOU MAY WANT TO ASK KIDS to leave their reading logs, or whatever record they keep of their reading (see *A Guide to the Reading Workshop: Middle School Grades* for easy, kid-chosen options such as apps, calendars, etc.), open on their desks, so you can study them quickly as you circulate. Look for the page goals that clubs are setting, knowing that it's important for students to be in a reading zone of at least forty to sixty pages every day, across school and home. If your class has a strong reading ethic, then you may want that zone to be more like fifty to seventy pages, which is about twenty-five pages in class and another twenty-five at home.

So, first, check any club that is setting page goals that seem small, and gather them close. "I'm worried about your reading life," you might say. "One danger of reading with a club is that it can slow your reading down too much, if you're not careful. Adult clubs don't go like that. When you go to college, you come to class each week, having already read the whole story or play. When you're in an adult book club, you usually come having read the whole novel. In your book clubs, your volume doesn't have to be that high—you don't have to read the whole book before coming to class next—but you want to be closer to an adult model. So, can you rethink your goals, looking for the closest chapter ending that will keep you in a reading zone of about forty to sixty pages across the day and night, as many days a week as you can? That may mean you need more time for reading and less for talking or writing. Figure it out, and I'll come back in a few minutes to see your new plan." Then, make yourself a note to check back in with these readers regularly, even to text them or call them, to help them meet these more ambitious goals.

Next, you might gather your strongest readers, the ones who read dozens of pages a night, who devour books. Pull these readers together, and suggest that they ask themselves, "Is my book club reading fulfilling my independent reading life?" Chances are, unless these readers are all in one club, that it's not. If they are in a club together, then suggest they read as ambitiously together as they do alone. Assuming they are not, then you might suggest that avid readers often find they need an additional, independent book, to fulfill their independent reading life. Then, they have choices. They could each choose an independent book they love, and that will be their weekend and

pleasure reading. Or, they could each choose another historical fiction book, to deepen their knowledge of the genre. Or, they could even choose a series of historical fiction books together, and have a "dark ops" book club that meets in the shadow of their regular book club! The main thing is that you inspire these avid readers to take care of their reading life while they also read with a club.

Finally, you'll have a few readers whom you are worried about, because historical fiction is hard, and perhaps these readers were just getting going with a series that was helping them read more, something like *Dragon Slayers' Academy* or *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. These readers, too, need another book, in fact, a whole series, going, while they read for their club. For these readers, worry less about their club volume, and more about their independent reading volume. Helping these kids move up levels of text complexity is going to happen because they read hundreds of pages, steadily working through series. Make yourself a note that you'll want to return to these readers with some small-group work to help them tackle the work in their band of text complexity (see the online resources for support for character work across Bands of Text Complexity). For now, make sure they have additional books in hand, series on tap, and partners to talk with and encourage each other.

You may also notice a few students who are lagging in their reading because they don't seem swept up in their novels. If this were a different unit—if the kids weren't reading as a club in books for which you need to have multiple copies—you'd probably counsel those readers toward different books. That's obviously not an easy option in this situation, so you'll need to work on building enthusiasm for the books that you do have. The easiest way to help those readers get connected to their novels is to read a page or two of the book aloud to them, doing so in ways that draw them into the text. If you have an audio version of the text, you might see if you can find a way for them to listen to the first chapter together. Sometimes it works to ask kids to read portions of the first chapter to each other—some kids love that invitation. And always, you can simply talk about the drama of the book in ways that draw them into it. Read trailers on the back covers of books as your mentor text!



SHARE

Clubs Talk About Their Work—And How They Are Working As A Club

Suggest club members talk first about how to be supportive club mates for each other, and then encourage them to talk about their co-constructed timelines of their shared novel.

“Readers, today for the first time, you’ll have a chance to talk with your whole club about the book that you are reading. Before you talk about your book, take just a moment to actually talk about the club. You’ve all been in lots of book clubs, and in lots of other sorts of small groups, and I’m pretty sure you have ideas about what makes these interactions work, and what makes them not work. Will you start your club by sharing some of your hopes for how your club can be the best thing in the world for you as a reader?”

Students talked, and as they did, I jotted key subtopics onto a prominently displayed board:

How can we support each other's reading?

How can we each contribute fully to our club?

What are the predictable problems?

What should we try NOT to do?

After a bit I said, “I know you could continue talking about how to have an effective club, but I also want you to have time to talk about your book, and in particular to work on building two timelines that capture the main events in your protagonist’s life, and in the history of the era in which your story is set. Has more happened? Have you learned more backstory? Talk about that.

“As you’re working today, keep in mind that you have a folder for your club. That folder is where you, I, and any club member can add resources to support your work. For instance, perhaps you come up with some ways to question the text, or insights about your novels, or passages that are worth returning to. It’s also going to be your legacy to anyone who wants to duplicate this club later in the year. After all, you don’t have to wait for a teacher to set you up with book clubs. You can be in a book club anytime, and your club folder will support future readers.”



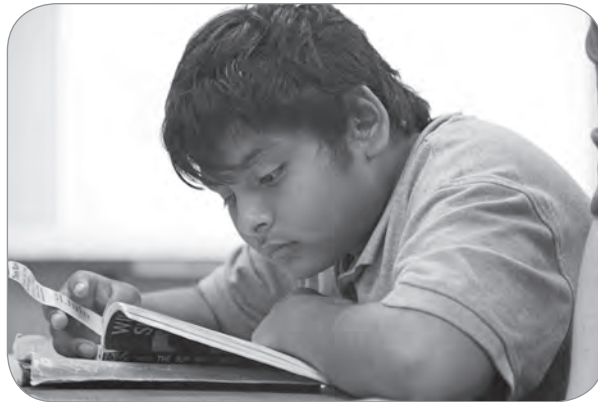


DOING THE WORK YOUR BOOK IS ASKING YOU TO DO

Readers, tonight before you continue reading your shared novel, will you decide on what the most important work is that you need to be doing? Set up the page of your notebook so that you can do some quick jottings as you read, or after you read, in ways that help you do that work.

If you are thinking about the timeline of your protagonist's life, you might make a timeline. If you are wondering how history intersects with that first timeline, maybe you'll layer in a historical timeline and consider how these timelines intersect.

If the more important work to be doing right now is to be making a family tree of all the characters in your book, or growing theories about a secondary character, or doing anything else . . . do the work that the book is asking you to do. Be prepared to show your work to your club mates tomorrow.





Session 8

Read-Aloud

Readers Become Students of an Era

GETTING READY

- ✓ Convene students in the meeting area, with their club, thought partner, notebooks, and novels.
- ✓ Prepare your second read-aloud, which should provide a different perspective on the same historical events as your read-aloud from Bend I. We recommend “Ambush” by Tim O’Brien, from *The Things They Carried*. ✎
- ✓ Display and prepare to add to the “Readers of Historical Fiction Ask . . .” anchor chart from Bend I (see Conducting the Read-Aloud and Link). ✎
- ✓ Have on hand the “Band of Text Complexity” character strand (see Independent Reading). ✎

IN THIS SESSION

TODAY, through read-aloud, you’ll teach students that when historical fiction readers become fascinated by an era, they read multiple texts about that time period, each one giving them a different perspective and window on that era.

TODAY YOUR STUDENTS will have an abbreviated time to read because it is a read-aloud day. They’ll begin (or continue) reading a second club text, set in the same era as the first, doing all the work that good readers do. They’ll also think about how the two texts provide different views of an era.

CONNECTION

Remind your students of times they’ve been obsessed by something to help them imagine themselves becoming students of a historical era or event.

“Readers, will you think of a time when a friend sort of dragged you to do something—to play Pokémon Go, to listen to a band, to look over his (or her) collection, to ride a skateboard . . . and you sort of went along to please that friend? It was sort of, ‘Oh, all right.’ But in the end, you got really interested in that thing—Pokémon, or that band, or the collection, or the skateboard. And in just a bit, that interest became *your* interest, and you were almost more obsessed than your friend? Has that ever happened to someone here?” I asked, signaling for kids to give us a thumbs up if that ever happened to them.

Noting that a number of kids were all in with this idea, I gestured for them to tell kids near them the specifics of what happened.

Reconvening the class, I said, "My hope is that something similar will be happening in this class. Last week, some of you knew the author and the era in which your book was set even before the week began, and when you knew which book your club would be reading, you were all in. Others of you were sort of pulled along by your club mates. Some of you were even a little reluctant to be reading about *that* era . . . I confess, I was one of those somewhat reluctant people at first. I'm not that into war, so at first I was *iffy* about the idea of reading about the Vietnam War. Some of you may have thought, 'Ancient Rome? Really? Nothing more modern?'

"But my hope is that you've turned around on your era—I know I have on mine—and you find yourself kind of interested in that era. If you find sparks of interest in yourself, in life, you want to fan those sparks because you want to be the kind of person who is really interested in lots of things. That's the mark of an intelligent, interested person.

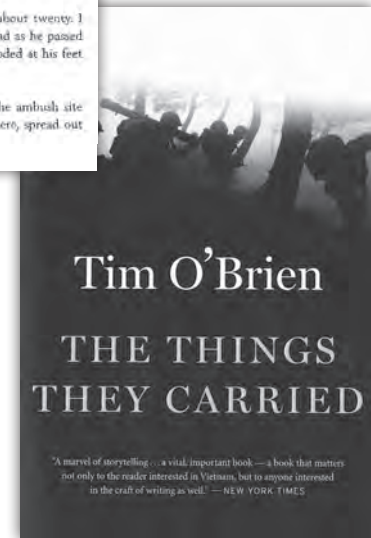
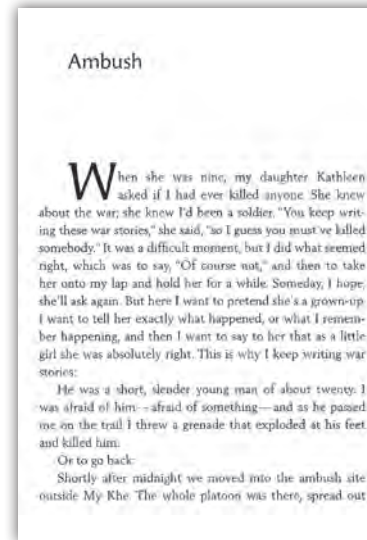
"And when readers of historical fiction become interested in an era, they read on, becoming invested in it."

Introduce the new work students can engage with as they read their second novels, and introduce your new read-aloud.

"When readers become interested in an era and read more than one story set in that time, each story gives them a different window to that time period. One story gives readers a window to see certain things about the era, and another story provides a different window that gives a view of that same time. The two views help readers to construct ideas about the era that are more complex, because readers are reminded that different people could experience the same time very differently.

Even though I wasn't expecting to get drawn into the Vietnam War, I personally am glad to read about another person's experience of the war, aren't you? One of the most famous texts about the Vietnam War is a book, written by Tim O'Brien, that tons of adults have read, called *The Things They Carried*. Tim O'Brien did fight in the war, and he has published a memoir about his experiences. This book is a collection of linked, fictional stories that follow a cast of characters in a company called Alpha Company.

"We're going to read one of these stories. It's called 'Ambush,' and it starts with the narrator, Tim, telling about a moment after the war. Then it flashes back to the war."

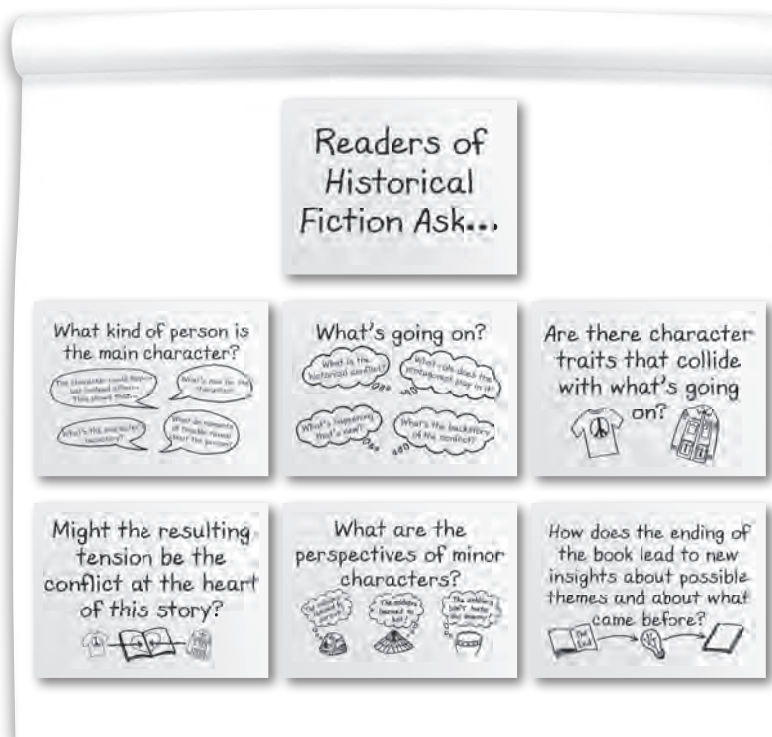


A tightly focused preview of the read-aloud will help students orient themselves to the text and extract greater meaning from it. Tracking the passage of time in a new text can be tricky; the more you can anticipate and address challenges like this in your introduction to the text, the better.

CONDUCTING THE READ-ALoud

Remind students of the work that they've done in their first novel, and to apply that work to other stories. Then, read the first part of the story.

"As we read this story, let's remember to do the work that all readers of historical fiction do," I said, gesturing to the anchor chart from Bend I.



"This story will be giving us our second window onto the Vietnam War, so as we read, let's notice what we see about the war that strikes us. Remember, when you start a new historical fiction text, it's often a bit disorienting for a moment. You have to ask, 'Who is this person?' and 'What's going on?' Let's do that first. Then soon, we'll be talking and thinking about how the view from this window is both like and unlike the view from *Patrol*." I read aloud:

"Prime the pump" for students by previewing the thinking work they'll need to do.

“Ambush” by Tim O’Brien

When she was nine, my daughter Kathleen asked if I had ever killed anyone. She knew about the war; she knew I’d been a soldier. “You keep writing these war stories,” she said, “so I guess you must’ve killed somebody.” It was a difficult moment, but I did what seemed right, which was to say, “Of course not,” and then to take her onto my lap and hold her for a while. Someday, I hope, she’ll ask again. But here I want to pretend she’s a grown-up. I want to tell her exactly what happened, or what I remember happening,

and then I want to say to her that as a little girl she was absolutely right. This is why I keep writing war stories:

He was a short, slender young man of about twenty. I was afraid of him—afraid of something—and as he passed me on the trail I threw a grenade that exploded at his feet and killed him.

Help the class orient themselves to the new text by noting who the narrator is in relation to the conflict, and by channeling partners to talk about whatever struck them about this view of the era.

“Whoa. I was definitely asking, ‘Who is this person? What’s going on?’ Weren’t you? And that question, ‘Where is this person in relation to the conflict—in this case, the war? Is this guy a soldier in the middle of a war?’”

The kids chimed in that no, he’s a soldier after the war. I nodded. “So this is a different window to the war. This story is being told by a soldier *after* the war is over. What are you struck by?” I motioned for partners to talk, and I listened to one or two partnerships that were close to me.

“It’s a man who was a soldier; he fought in the war,” one reader said.

“He killed people,” her partner added. “He killed a young man with a grenade.”

“This soldier doesn’t want to talk about it,” one student said.

“But he still remembers it, and writes about it all the time,” his partner responded.

Read on, inviting students to do the work that historical fiction readers do, while also thinking about how this view of the war is similar to and different from the view from their previous text.

“Readers, this is a different window, isn’t it? If we’re making timelines of the personal story and of the historical story—and thinking how those timelines are intertwined—this timeline begins many years after the war. Let’s keep reading, and see what you notice about how time unfolds.”

I looked back to the story and read these lines again:

“Ambush” by Tim O’Brien

When she was nine, my daughter Kathleen asked if I had ever killed anyone. She knew about the war; she knew I’d been a soldier. “You keep writing these war stories,” she said, “so I guess you must’ve killed somebody.” It was a difficult moment, but I did what seemed right, which was to say, “Of course not,” and then to take her onto my lap and hold her for a while. Someday, I hope, she’ll ask again. But here I want to pretend she’s a grown-up. I want to tell her exactly what happened, or what I remember happening,

and then I want to say to her that as a little girl she was absolutely right. This is why I keep writing war stories:

He was a short slender man of twenty. I was afraid of him—afraid of something—and as he passed me on the trail, I threw a grenade that exploded at his feet and killed him.

“I’m struck by the way this story jumps around in time. I know that is one of the challenges of historical fiction, because many of these books do that. Are you wondering about whether this soldier, like our first soldier, might be sort of a pacifist? It seems like he isn’t comfortable talking about the war, even years later, right? Yet he also can’t forget the war, so that’s why he keeps writing about it.

“But what I’m wondering, and I bet you are too, is this: Was he that way back then, while he was in the war? Was he tired of killing then, when he threw that grenade? Was his view of the war similar to the view we were given in *Patrol*, or different?

“Let’s read on.” I continued, reading slowly:

He was a short, slender young man of about twenty. I was afraid of him—afraid of something—and as he passed me on the trail I threw a grenade that exploded at his feet and killed him.

Or to go back:

Shortly after midnight we moved into the ambush site outside My Khe. The whole platoon was there, spread out in the dense brush along the trail, and for five hours nothing at all happened. We were working in two-man teams—one man on guard while the other slept, switching off every two hours—and I remember it was still dark when Kiowa shook me awake for the final watch. The night was foggy and hot. For the first few moments I felt lost, not sure about directions, groping for my helmet and weapon. I reached out and found three grenades and lined them up in front of me; the pins had already been straightened for quick throwing. And then for maybe half an

hour I knelt there and waited. Very gradually, in tiny slivers, dawn began to break through the fog; and from my position in the brush I could see ten or fifteen meters up the trail. The mosquitoes were fierce. I remember slapping them, wondering if I should wake up Kiowa and ask for some repellent, then thinking it was a bad idea, then looking up and seeing the young man come out of the fog. He wore black clothing and rubber sandals and a gray ammunition belt. His shoulders were slightly stooped, his head cocked to the side as if listening for something. He seemed at ease. He carried his weapon in one hand, muzzle down, moving without any hurry up the center of the trail. There was no sound at all—none that I can remember. In a way, it seemed, he was part of the morning fog, or my own imagination, but there was also the reality of what was happening in my stomach. I had already pulled the pin on a grenade. I had come up to a crouch. It was entirely automatic. I did not hate the young man; I did not see him as the enemy; I did not ponder issues of morality or politics or military duty. I crouched and kept my head low. I tried to swallow whatever was rising from

You may want to use physical gestures to denote the shift in time in the parts of the story. The more you dramatize your thinking work through your performance and intonation, the greater your students’ comprehension and transfer into their own reading work.

my stomach, which tasted like lemonade, something fruity and sour. I was terrified. There were no thoughts about killing. The grenade was to make him go away—just evaporate—and I leaned back and felt my mind go empty and then felt it fill up again. I had already thrown the grenade before telling myself to throw it. The brush was thick and I had to lob it high, not aiming, and I remember the grenade seeming to freeze above me for an instant, as if a camera had clicked, and I remember ducking down and holding my breath and seeing little wisps of fog rise from the earth. The grenade bounced once and rolled across the trail. I did not hear it, but there must've been a sound, because the young man dropped his weapon and began to run, just two or three quick steps, then he hesitated, swiveling to his right, and he glanced down at

the grenade and tried to cover his head but never did. It occurred to me then that he was about to die. I wanted to warn him. The grenade made a popping noise—not soft but not loud either—not what I'd expected—and there was a puff of dust and smoke—a small white puff—and the young man seemed to jerk upward as if pulled by invisible wires. He fell on his back. His rubber sandals had been blown off. He lay at the center of the trail, his right leg bent beneath him, his one eye shut, his other eye a huge star-shaped hole.

For me, it was not a matter of live or die. I was in no real peril. Almost certainly the young man would have passed by. And it will always be that way.

"Let's pause there, readers. Take a second to jot." I jotted as well. After a minute, I said, "Share."

"He wanted to stop the grenade, but it was too late," began one partnership. "He said he wanted to warn the young man."

"He was so afraid. Just like the narrator in *Patrol*. He said he was terrified."

Another reader read her notes, "I did not hate the young man. I did not see him as the enemy."

"But he killed him," said her partner. "Almost before he decided to do it. He couldn't stop it."

Say a little bit about the window this story offers, and then chart what is similar and different across the two read-aloud stories.

I called students back. "It is interesting because what strikes me is these aren't as much personal views of the Vietnam War, as two views of war. You could almost call these both, 'Portraits of the War.' I know you have already been talking about those things readers of historical fiction are always talking and thinking about," and I gestured to the anchor chart from Bend I. "Will you talk about how this story gives you a view of this war that is like—and unlike—the view that *Patrol* gave us?"

As the students began to talk, I displayed a two-column chart, with one column labeled "The views are similar because . . ." and the other, labeled, "The views are different because . . ." Then I listened, filling in Post-its that captured what I heard.

Convening the class, I recapped what I'd heard, putting Post-its on the chart as I spoke. "Hmm, . . . so you're saying that both stories show us young men who have already learned to survive, and as part of that, they learn to kill. And you've said that in both, the soldiers don't hate the enemy."

I tapped the other column, and said, "This one is harder to put into words. Will you talk together about the differences between the two texts? I'm going to tell you two important things. First, when comparing two stories, you can compare the facts—the timelines of what happens to people—or you can compare the different ways that people respond to what happens to them. And second, it is almost always going to pay off to think about how different stories are written differently, and to think, 'What's the important thing about the way these different stories tell about the same topic, but tell it differently?'"

The views are similar because...	The views are different because...
The soldiers learned to survive!	
The soldiers learned to kill.	
The soldiers DON'T hate the enemy!	

The views are similar because...	The views are different because...
The soldiers learned to survive!	The soldier in <u>Patrol</u> doesn't kill his enemy. The one in <u>Ambush</u> does.
The soldiers learned to kill.	
The soldiers DON'T hate the enemy!	Time moves differently in the stories.

A t-chart can help students compare and contrast across texts.

This time, after listening, I convened the class and said, "I agree with you that for the soldier in *Patrol*, the assignment to kill seems more horrible. The soldier in today's story is acting somewhat more automatically, though you get the sense that after he almost unthinkingly killed the young man, he's taking in what he did, right?" I added a Post-it to the second column.

"And another thing is that in the two stories, things happen at different speeds. Remember in *Patrol*, when he is assigned to kill, he stares at an old woman, and sees the rivers of age in her face? It's like time has slowed down. And here in 'Ambush,' it's almost like the opposite. Time speeds up, things happen so fast that the soldier kills before he even knows it." I added another Post-it to the right column.

Read on, inviting students to continue to think about how this story fits with the earlier story you read aloud.

"Maybe, across both these stories, in different ways, we're learning that this war made it hard to think?" I nodded pensively at readers and added, "Let's read on, and see how else this story fits with our earlier story."

I finished reading:

For me, it was not a matter of live or die. I was in no real peril. Almost certainly the young man would have passed by. And it will always be that way.

Later, I remember, Kiowa tried to tell me that the man would've died anyway. He told me that it was a good kill, that I was a soldier and this was a war, that I should shape up and stop staring and ask myself what the dead man would've done if things were reversed.

None of it mattered. The words seemed far too complicated. All I could do was gape at the fact of the young man's body.

Even now I haven't finished sorting it out. Sometimes I forgive myself, other times I don't. In the ordinary hours of life I try not to dwell on it, but now and then, when I'm reading a newspaper or just sitting alone in a room, I'll look up and see the young man step out of the morning fog. I'll watch him walk toward me, his shoulders slightly stooped, his head cocked to the side, and he'll pass within a few yards of me and suddenly smile at some secret thought and then continue up the trail to where it bends back into the fog.

"Oh, wow, we've come back full circle in time, and it's after the war now. What are you thinking? And how does this fit with our first story?" I gestured to partners to turn to each other.

"He can't forgive himself," one partner said.

"But he should," said another. "The man was his enemy. And he was armed. His job was to kill them."

"Maybe," agreed his partner. "But when he thinks about him after the war, it's like he pretends he let him live."

LINK

Invite students to continue this way of thinking, where they think across stories in an era, with the stories they are reading inside of their club.

"It's giving me the chills, readers, thinking about this soldier, so many years after the war, still imagining that moment—only when he imagines it, he imagines the young man alive, going past him and up the trail.

"It is so interesting to keep going, to read another story, and another, and each one gives us a slightly different window on historical events. As you go off to read today, why don't you keep going with this work? Remember to do the work that all historical fiction readers do," and I gestured to the "Readers of Historical Fiction

As students turn and talk, you might coach them with comments that are transferable. Give feedback that can be applied to other stories on other days.

Ask . . ." anchor chart. "And will you also consider how the second historical fiction story you read gives you new windows into the era?"

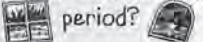
"I'll start a new anchor chart for us. You'll have a chance to meet with your club tomorrow. Today, why don't you try to get a lot of reading done?"

**ANCHOR
CHART**

Readers of Historical Fiction Ask . . .

- What kind of person is the main character?
 - The character could have . . . but instead s/he . . . This shows that . . .
 - What's new for the character?
 - What's the character's backstory?
 - What do moments of trouble reveal about the person?
- What's going on?
 - What is the historical conflict?
 - What role does the protagonist play in it?
 - What's happening that's new?
 - What's the backstory of the conflict?
- Are there character traits that collide with what's going on?
- Might the resulting tension be the conflict at the heart of this story?
- What are the perspectives of minor characters?
- How does the ending of the book lead to new insights about what came before?
- **How do other stories set in this same era offer a different window into the time period?**

How do other stories set in this same era offer a different window into the time period?



INDEPENDENT READING

Coaching readers as they move into slightly harder novels

Your clubs should have started or be starting their second text by now. You'll want to make sure they are on track to move into a third book by the end of this bend. Some clubs, perhaps those reading around levels R/S/T where the books are shorter, may even be ready to start a third soon. While clubs won't all start a new book on the same day, it would be good to check in on any club that hasn't started a second title to see if they need some help fitting reading into their lives, or setting thoughtful reading goals, or supporting their club members, or perhaps choosing a picture book or short story for a second text. You may find it helpful to insert some short texts or picture books into students' club folders, so that they can accumulate more narratives from the era. Some clubs may also decide to choose a film to watch over a weekend. With short stories, picture books, and films, you can increase students' volume of stories, and engagement with the genre, even if their volume of pages read isn't where you'd like it to be.

If some clubs are about to start a new story, and members of the club are at slightly different reading levels, remember that you can give students a leg up by giving a quick, vivid introduction to their new story. "This is a story about . . . it's got this fascinating character . . . when it starts, the character is . . ." Even a brief orientation can help readers begin their reading with a stronger sense of what's going on.

If students are moving up a band of text complexity (see *A Guide to the Reading Workshop: Middle School Grades* for more details about bands of text complexity), you might consider introducing them to some of the particular challenges, and therefore the kinds of reading work, of this band, especially in terms of character work.

SHARE

The Dangers of Overgeneralizing from Individual (and Fictional) Perspectives

"Readers, in a moment, you'll have a second to check in with your club. You'll just have enough time to say how many pages you want to read—to set your goals. Tomorrow, you'll have time for a more significant club meeting, and you can gather your thinking together. It will be especially interesting to see how your two stories give you similar or different windows on the era.

"I want to give you one tip as you do this work: Sometimes we'll get so wrapped up in our character's perspective that we tend to think he or she represents whole groups of people. For instance, I might be tempted to say, 'All soldiers who fought in wars hide their stories from their families,' or 'All soldiers become pacifists.' But I can't generalize that from the one story I read here, and I can't generalize across wars. Some of you are

reading about Resistance fighters during World War II, for example, and they don't seem like pacifists at all. Those causes were so different, perhaps. There is something different about every war, and every historical event, just as there is something different about each individual. So keep in mind that you want to be measured in how you extrapolate opinions from individual characters, in novels, and in history."

I gave students a moment to check in with their club, to set goals for tomorrow.

SESSION 8 HOMEWORK

COMPARING AND CONTRASTING AS YOU READ



Tonight, read on in your second novel. As you do so, try to read this novel while keeping in mind the prior novel you read, so that you're thinking about how the experiences, situations, and perspectives of these characters are similar and different. Mark any important places that you want to talk about with your club, and do any jotting that will help you hold onto this thinking.