

## ***Authenticating Historical Fiction: Rationale and Process***

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### ***Abstract***

*In merging social studies education with language arts, classroom teachers are utilizing selections of historical fiction to teach critical literacy skills while also meeting social studies standards. While most of the selections used for teaching history and social studies themes are strong in terms of literary merit, they may be deficient in providing information that is authentic or historically accurate. The purpose of this manuscript is to provide teachers and teacher educators with a definition of historical fiction, concerns regarding the use of historical fiction in the classroom, and a rationale and rubric for authenticating historical fiction.*

### ***Introduction***

Social studies teachers assume the responsibility of leading students to information that is historically accurate and valid. One way that educators have tried to meet this responsibility is through the use of historical fiction literature in the classroom (Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, and Pierce, 2000; Lindquist, 1997; Levstik, 1993). Historical fiction allows readers to become more involved in the everyday lives of people, including their trials and triumphs, against the backdrop of a historical setting. Social studies educators are finding less time to devote solely to social studies due to testing constraints and the myriad of other required activities that demand educators' attention in the classroom (Rock, T., Heafner, T., Passe, J., Oldendorf, S., Byrd, S., & O'Connor, K. 2004). With the stakes of standardized tests increasing the pressure within the classroom, it is imperative that any curricular activity serve as a tool to meet the demands placed on classroom teachers without adding to existing academic responsibilities.

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This has prompted some teachers to seek avenues for meaningful integration with other subject areas. The authentication process introduced below offers substantial integration with several language arts skills in addition to developing critical thought processes, classroom communication skills, and historical understanding. The two main goals of this paper are: 1) to share research that supports the integration of an authentication process whereby students engage in meaningful learning activities and critical thinking processes while reading literature that maintains high historical accuracy and literary merit, and 2) to provide an explanation and guide for classroom application of the aforementioned authentication process. These two goals are subsumed throughout the paper within the following six categories/sections: 1) definition of historical fiction, 2) rationale for the use of historical fiction in the classroom, 3) considerations for selection of historical fiction, 4) categories & issues involving the authentication of historical fiction, 5) a "how-to" for classroom application of the authentication process, and 6) an authentication rubric to assist students and teachers in exploring the authentication process.

### ***Historical Fiction***

Since historical fiction has become an increasingly important tool for social studies teachers (Sipe, 1997), it is important to understand what constitutes historical fiction as well as decide how this tool will help meet curriculum goals. Galda and Cullinan (2002) describe historical fiction as a distinct genre consisting of "imaginative stories grounded in the facts of our past" (p.205). They later elaborate: "Historical fiction differs from nonfiction in that it not only presents facts or re-creates a time and place, but also weaves the facts into a fictional story. Historical fiction is realistic—the events could have occurred and people portrayed could have lived—but it differs from contemporary realistic fiction in that the stories are set in the past rather than the present" (p.205).

Reed (1994) offers more clarification by differentiating between "historic fiction" which purports to "reveal history and true character of historic figures" from "historical fiction" whose purpose is to "bring history to life" (p.121). Armstrong (1999) suggests that: "...historical fiction takes all those things that *were* (the history) and turns something that *was not* (an imagined story) into something that *could have been*" (p.16).

***Rationale for Integration of Historical Fiction***

Teachers must select their classroom resources carefully due to limited time allocation for subjects as well as financial limits. Some reasons for introducing historical fiction in the classroom are detailed below. Norton (2003) notes "children who read historical fiction gain an understanding of their own heritage" as well as "...knowledge about the peoples, values, beliefs, hardships, and physical surroundings common to various periods" (p.413). She adds "Children cannot actually cross the ocean on the *Mayflower* and see a new world for the first time, or experience the arrival of the first Europeans on their native shores, or feel the consequences of persecution during World War II. They can imagine these experiences, however, through the pages of historical fiction" (p. 412).

Sipe (1997) suggests that students may benefit from understanding multiple viewpoints in history in two ways: they may exhibit increased tolerance for others in contemporary society as well as an increased ability to evaluate our own culture. Finally, Nawrot (1996) adds that historical fiction also "... depicts life beyond the context of students' own lives and time. Student readers can be helped to make connections between the past and the present, to follow issues over time to see their development, and to begin to see their world in context and to understand that the past has helped shape the present. That knowledge can lead students to understand that decisions made in the present will determine the future" (p.343).

Textbook publishers face a tough challenge in presenting an immense body of knowledge and skills for students on a specified grade level. There will routinely be criticism of how material is presented or of information that has been omitted for various reasons. Historical fiction offers teachers a classroom complement to the text that can be examined for viewpoints either absent or minimized within the textbook. Researchers espousing the benefits of trade books due to the limitations of texts are plentiful. Lindquist (1997) reasons that she has used historical fiction in her classroom because it catches the kids' attention, it provides a common classroom experience, it bridges past and present, and presents people as complex in comparison to the scant details offered in the children's text.

Lasky (1990) adds that "...the textbooks have been telling us partial truths and then telling it as a slant" (p.161). In regards to teaching history through historical fiction, Sipe (1997) argues that the abundance of quality historical fiction and nonfiction trade books on the

market represent a vast improvement over the representations imbedded within school textbooks in their presentation of material and the recency of research presented.

Tomlinson, Tunnell, and Richgels (1993) describe texts as repositories of information that students read and memorize without developing judgment or perspective. They further add that historical trade literature is a needed supplement because it "emphasizes human motives, human problems, and the consequences of human actions. In historical literature, facts, names, and dates are woven into the story as part of the setting. When facts are an integral part of a compelling story, they are much more interesting and of more immediate consequence to a young reader than when presented in lists and pseudo-prose collections, as in a textbook" (p.52).

Tomlinson, Tunnell, and Richgels (1993) suggest that another reason for using trade books is because they feature more opportunities to investigate human motives and realize the consequences of character actions better than textbooks. The same researchers also conducted an in-depth study comparing the textual similarities between social studies textbooks and tradebooks covering the same material. Their results actually revealed that the sample of tradebooks contained more complex sentence structures, more extensive word choices, and deeper topic exploration than the texts (Richgels, Tomlinson, & Tunnell, 1993). Despite the more advanced language structures imbedded within the tradebooks, children found them easier to comprehend than the textbook accounts.

Finally, Jacobs and Tunnell (2004) emphatically state why they believe history textbooks are inadequate: "The people are missing! The best one-word definition of history is, in fact, 'people'. Without human beings, whose emotion and actions influence the times, there is no history" (p.117).

A common concern when using historical fiction is that it may contain information that is misleading, outdated, or simply wrong. Levstik and Barton (2001) describe some recent historical fiction as "...blatantly inaccurate, cursed with tunnel vision, and mired in romanticism...historical events are rearranged or facts are omitted to avoid controversy" (p.110). Short (1997) cautions that the use of a novel in isolation may not be enough to present the facts completely. In fact, some authors may manipulate historical facts in order to fulfill their own writing agendas. When using literature in the classroom, it is recommended that an authentication process be provided for novel

studies whereby students engage in the act of determining the historical accuracy of the narrative. Including this in the learning process encourages students to identify the facts that may have been inserted to enhance the plot development or sensationalize the story.

Award-winning author Karen Hesse states her beliefs regarding authenticity in novels intended for children and young adults in the following passage: "If the writer is creating historical fiction which is going to ultimately end up in the classroom as a supplement to the curriculum, that writer is responsible for portraying that period as close to the facts as humanly possible" (Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, and Pierce, 2000, p. 548).

Selecting appropriate material encourages children to research the events, people, and places mentioned in novels and promotes research skills thereby engaging them in interdisciplinary activities and critical thinking. Not only are students reading for pleasure, but they are also reading expository texts in efforts to validate some of the events communicated by the authors. In essence, children are taking ownership of the material that they consume. Brown (1998) adds using these historical texts can "lead students into intriguing activities that require purposeful research, critical analysis, and synthesis of information" (p.8). The authentication of events and references within the context of children's literature is a starting point for teachers and students in determining if the books they are reading are historically valid.

### ***Book Selection***

After teachers decide to utilize historical fiction, consideration should be given to quality literary selections. Levstik and Barton (2001) worked with teachers who expressed trepidation when choosing historical fiction for their students because they felt they lacked the historical knowledge backgrounds needed to select accurate and well-written literature. Another group of researchers (Apol, Sakuma, Reynolds, & Rop, 2003) actually presented their students (pre-service teachers) with substantial evidence that the book they were reviewing, *Sadako*, (Coerr, 1993) contained several cultural and historical inaccuracies. In spite of this information, the students "chose to believe the truth of the story and based their choices about teaching this literature to children on their pre-existing assumptions" (p.429). This suggests that the teachers responsible for modelling the critical reading and research skills required for authentication could also benefit from the process. In an

effort to allay concerns from classroom teachers who rarely have time for outside research, a plan for selecting and authenticating historical fiction literature is presented below.

Once a time period or historical event has been chosen as a focus, teachers may consult with several sources to select books to meet their curricular needs. Possible sources include the list of Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People published yearly in *Social Education*, children's literature textbooks, and recommendations from fellow teachers and librarians. Teachers should begin by acquiring as many sources as possible related to the topic and time period. The books gathered should include all related genres including additional historical fiction, biographies, informational books, and reference materials. Donelson and Pace Nilsen (1997) note "The best way to show young readers that there are different opinions and different ways of looking at history is to encourage the use of several books on the same subject. When a topic is to be studied, instead of assigning all students to read the same book bring in individual copies of various books, so that students can choose. Encourage them to trade with one another, to skim, and to read excerpts" (p.189).

Lindquist (1997) reveals that she also uses picture books to assist in the authentication process because "They are the first step in building intellectual knowledge about a place, a period, or a group of people". She later adds "History is hard for many children. They have no reservoir of analogies to draw from to help them out" (p.2). Also, any maps, photographs, or historical artifacts that could be used to validate information in the selected literature will be helpful.

Additionally, any primary sources connected to the story will likely prove to be an invaluable source to use when authenticating the literature. Donelson and Nilsen (1997) add "Relying on primary sources goes a long way toward keeping authors and subsequently their readers from wallowing in nostalgia" (p.188). With the introduction of computers into many contemporary classrooms, students have the opportunity to use the Internet as another authentication source. Experts, however, warn against relying too heavily on information gleaned from Internet sites. Lindquist (1997) explains "I provide students with more and more opportunities to evaluate who the information on the Internet is coming from. Kids need to understand that just because someone says it on the Net doesn't make it true" (p.10).

### ***Authentication Categories/Issues***

As suggested thus far, quality selections of historical fiction provide a natural context through which students engage in social studies while also meeting other curricular expectations. The next consideration is utilizing the trade books not only for investigating social studies concepts, but also in the exploration of literary devices that influence readers' experiences with books. The six categories outlined in this section have been established to identify authentication issues. These categories serve as the investigative topics and are used on the authentication rubric, included in this article, to assist students and teachers when exploring literature.

### ***Romanticized Accounts of the Historical Event/Time Period***

Lukens (2003) states "When the writer exaggerates the bad or good of the times, the resulting historical fiction may suffer from sensational or sentimental tone" (p.17). Lindquist (1997) adds that quality research will allow the students to discern whether the account described was typical of the time period or a more unusual instance. By employing multiple sources the students will be able to compare notes from their journals regarding the different books they've read with any available primary sources to determine if the author has embellished or sensationalized the historical accounts depicted in the literature selection. One example of a romanticized account could be nostalgia. Jalongo and Renck (1984) note that a book including nostalgia may still meet standards for quality but books that are "...Nostalgic first, and literary second, often deteriorate into contrived ruminations into bygone days and have limited appeal for anyone but the author" (p.37).

Brown (1998) addresses this phenomenon when discussing *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* ( Avi, 1990). She notes that although the novel paints a compelling narrative, the reader is asked to suspend historical judgment in order to accept the plot of a young woman who defeats a cruel captain aboard a trading ship crossing the Atlantic in the 1830s. Brown (1998) suggests that by the end of the book Charlotte has been cast as so heroic "that she seems hardly human, more mythic than mortal" (p.7). MacLeod (1998) also found the story of Charlotte Doyle lacking in historical accuracy. She also lauds the story as an enticing adventure story but states the events which took place on board the ship are "preposterous".

Other popular books that were questioned for their authenticity included Newbery Honorees *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985) and *Catherine, Called Birdy* (Cushman, 1994). MacLeod (1998) notes that nineteenth century social mores appear to be at odds with the events within *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, including the fact that Sarah would have travelled from New England to the Midwest alone as well as the fact that she stayed in the Witting home with a man not related to her without another woman being present.

MacLeod (1998) suggests that if the trial courtship had failed and Sarah had returned home to New England, she may have done so without her reputation intact. Next, the issue of work in this short novel is addressed. The harsh realities of an agrarian lifestyle during the time period selected for this book are not fully revealed. MacLeod suggests that it is unlikely that Sarah would have had the opportunity to frolic with the children in the cow pond for an afternoon swim due to the demands of tending to the farm. Finally, the interchange of chores between Papa and Sarah (Papa baking bread and Sarah plowing and reroofing the barn) is "more New Age than nineteenth century" (p. 29). *Catherine, Called Birdy*, (Cushman, 1994) a novel set in medieval times also includes an independent and resourceful female protagonist. The problem of historical authenticity arises when Catherine questions many of the social structures of medieval life, including the role of females. MacLeod (1998) explains that children during this period of history were without any rights and were at the total disposal of their father's wishes. Although these books have both been commended for their story, the aforementioned researchers are suggesting that they also be reviewed for their authenticity.

Cushman (2001) counters MacLeod's assertions and states that the stories of *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985) and *Catherine, Called Birdy* (Cushman, 1994) are certainly plausible for the time period. She adds that the character for Sarah was actually based on the letters of Elinore Pruitt Stewart, a female homesteader, who travelled west and assumed the maternal role for an unknown family. Cushman adds that Stewart's letters were descriptive regarding the difficult labor required for farm life, but also mentioned times for parties and picnics. This exchange exhibits that even experts within the field may have differing opinions regarding the authenticity of certain materials but the constructivist nature of the authentication process would allow students and teachers to form their own opinions regarding the works based on their own research. Although recent research (Groce, 2004) has shown



that the frequency and quality of female protagonists has risen steadily over time, any possible stereotypical behaviour should be "...interpreted based on the context of the culture and the time period of the novel" (p.28).

Noted children's author Katherine Paterson (1985) has stated that she would not falsify history for the sake of providing strong, but historically inaccurate portrayals of females; "...my books will never be politically correct—that is they will always run the risk of offending someone. My characters will never be blameless role models for today's children and youth" (p.91). Macleod (1998) reiterates the importance of this topic: "...many novels play to modern sensibilities. Their protagonists experience their own societies as though they were time travellers, noting racism, sexism, religious bigotry, and outmoded belief as outsiders, not as people of and in their cultures" (p.31).

Another author in the field of historical fiction, Kathryn Lasky, (1990) commented that her responsibilities as a writer did not include serving as a mouthpiece for contemporary political agendas, social trends, and moral voices, even if they represent worthwhile issues. She does however worry "... about a feminist literary backlash where all women in books are competent, strong, and organized, pack wonderful school lunches, and have biceps like Amazons" (p.165). Finally, author Diane Stanley weighs in on the topic: "...we must be careful not to create new myths and falsifications in our zeal to get rid of old stereotypes and bias" (Stanley, 1994).

### *Viewpoint: Author's background*

Historian Robert Darnton (1999) posits that all artifacts and data mined and subsequently disseminated by the researchers has actually been through two processes of selective inclusion: "You may open a box of manuscripts and confront information in the form of letters or diaries or memos. But this raw material isn't raw at all. It's cooked. Every document embodies some rhetorical convention, argues for some hidden agenda, must be read between the lines and related to all the surrounding documents" (p.15). Authors are a product of many things including all of their experiences, schooling, culture, and the times in which they live. Sipe (1997) notes that authors "... filter experience through a perspective which is inescapably partial, positioned, and ideological. To understand this is to understand the necessity of listening to multiple interpretive voices. The implication for teachers (at

all levels) is clear: give students the opportunity to hear these multiple voices. As well, teachers and students can discuss and expose the author's particular ideological slant, asking what historical interpretation seems to be valorized in the book" (p.252).

Berkhofer (1993) suggests that historical texts could be influenced by the author's moral, political, intellectual, and philosophical background and experiences. Other researchers feel that "Every generation of historians, to some degree, reinterprets the past by using the concerns of the present as a lens" (Galda and Cullinan, 2002, p.207). Finally, Zarnowski (1998) states that "written sources are not neutral or interchangeable. A writer sees the world from a particular point of view and from a particular social context. Writers also have different motives. Because of these differences, the works they produce differ.

### *Date of publication*

Taxel (1984) further suggests that contemporary attitudes and events around the date of publication of the historical fiction literature may also affect the author's views. His examples included the comparison of two Revolutionary War novels. He notes that *Johnny Tremain* (Forbes, 1946) was written during a time when many Americans were involved in the war effort and were supportive of the troops overseas. Conversely, *My Brother Sam is Dead* (Collier and Collier, 1974) was published during the Vietnam Conflict and conveys a markedly different view of the same war. Macleod (1998) coupled *My Brother Sam is Dead* (Collier and Collier, 1974) and *Hang for Treason* (Peck, 1976) as two novels that portrayed the Revolutionary War through a similar lens. She notes that when the country was divided over the Vietnam War, "...these authors looked back at the American Revolution and saw, not idealism, but the coercion hypocrisy, cruelty, and betrayal that are part of any war, in any country" (p.26).

Another book recently reviewed for connections between contemporary concerns during the writing of the book and elements within the work centered on *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* (Speare, 1958). Schwebel, (2003) noted that the novel may have been influenced by McCarthyism as it transformed the nation during the early 1950s. Several themes inherent within the book were also central to the issues brought to light during Senator McCarthy's accusations during this time period, including tolerance of differences as well as justice for the accused. She also suggests that Speare's work may have been influenced

by Arthur Miller's work, *The Crucible* (1953) which was published before the downfall of the Red Scare in the mid 1950s.

Similarities between the novels include: the female main characters were only a year apart, both were orphaned and consequently lived with uncles who often bemoaned their presence, the characters both complained of working like slaves for their new guardians, and they were both involved in a witchcraft trial, albeit in different circumstances (Schwebel, 2003). The critical analysis of publication date and author's perspective will grant students another opportunity to gather evidence in the authentication process.

### *Stereotypical Descriptions*

Jacobs and Tunnell (2004) note that stereotypes alienate because they perpetuate negative views of a certain group or subset of people but counter that well written books for children can represent cultural minorities as individuals, which still allows room for individual differences while creating characters of a variety of cultural groups. They note the example of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor, 1976) in which Mildred Taylor does a masterful job of creating a full range of character identities including T.J., a dishonest and cowardly son of a sharecropper, and Cassie, the cunning and resourceful female protagonist, both of whom are African-American.

Noted author Katherine Paterson (2001) suggests that the flaws of a character make them no less lovable, but rather exposes their humanness. When traditionally underrepresented groups do not have a strong presence in the historical fiction literature of the selected period or are characterized authentically, but in demeaning and subservient roles, teachers may balance the books with other selections from biography or contemporary realistic fiction, when applicable, which may characterize members of the cultural minority in a stronger light. These additional books should also be coupled with class discussions featuring dialogue focusing on what has changed and what is acceptable in contemporary society.

Hickman (2001) states that she often searches for a balance between authenticity and meaningful roles for females: "When I am reading in my critical-theory mode, I might look for a character who is not only true to the record but who embodies qualities that would be useful against the injustices of our time as well as her own" (p.97).

Under suggestions for evaluating historical fiction, Donelson and Nilsen (1997) posit that a good historical novel features "An authentic rendition of time, place, and the people being featured" (p.190). If that is juxtaposed with Hancock's (2004) suggestions for evaluating historical fiction which state that "No attempt should be made to shelter the reader from the realities of the time period" (p.147), and Jacobs and Tunnell's (2004) assertion that "History should not be sugarcoated" (p.119), then two ideals appear to face each other in direct opposition.

Jacobs and Tunnell (2004) cite the entrance of new realism within the field of children's literature in the 1960s which brought forth a greater depth of honesty for younger readers. MacLeod comments further on this topic: "Children's literature, historical as well as contemporary, has been politicized over the past thirty years; new social sensibilities have changed the way Americans view the past" (p.27). A reinterpretation of historical events based on contemporary social equality concerns poses a dilemma because the literature often evades "...the common realities of the societies they write about" (p.31).

Norton (2003) captures the dilemma in the following passage: "Teachers, librarians, and parents may confront a shortage of high-quality stories about members of racial and ethnic minority groups...and materials that depict the literary, cultural, and historical influences of minorities. However, children's literature should present honest, authentic pictures of different people and their cultural and historical contributions" (p.95). Norton later presents her criteria for selecting historical fiction. Within the list, questions relevant to this topic include: "Do the characters' experiences, conflicts, and resolutions of conflicts reflect what is known about the time period?" and "Do the characters' actions express values and beliefs that are realistic for the time period?" (p.413).

Noll (1995) asserts that literature for children has predominantly reflected the views of the dominant culture of our society and that the continuation of stereotypical literature that continues to be written and published reveals that "authors, illustrators, and publishers are either ignorant of or unconcerned about the social and political impact of their books" (p.30).

Readers of historical fiction should be aware of overgeneralization such as grouping all Native Americans into a homogenous group with similar characteristics and cultures. Galda and Cullinan (2002) warn "Noteworthy historical novels do not *overgeneralize*; they do not lead the reader to believe, for example, that

all Native Americans are like those portrayed in any one story. Each character is unique, just as each of us is, and while the novelist focuses on one person in a group, it should be clear that the character *is* only a person, and not a stereotype" (p.208). Anderson (2002) adds "This gross over-generalizing rests on an assumption that something identifiable is shared by *all* members of a group" (p.173).

### ***Notable Omissions or Expansions***

Students may discover events through their research that were omitted from the historical account in the literature because they were either not germane to the story or were not verifiable. Authors may also choose to embellish accounts or rearrange chronological events to make the narrative flow more smoothly. In either case, the deviation from the factual account is not problematic because it takes creative license to weave history and narrative into a quality historical fiction piece. The problem actually arises when students internalize the embellished or partial accounts as an unbiased historical account of the event. Darnton (1999) believes students should understand "...history is an interpretive science, not a body of facts; that it involves argument from evidence, not mere information; that it has no bottom line but is, by its very nature, bottomless" (p.15).

Sometimes, an author will omit details or entire events to avoid controversial topics within the novel. Levstik and Barton (2001) note that a "biography of Andrew Jackson, for instance, may barely mention the forced evacuation of the Cherokee, while books on Columbus often ignore the impact of exploration on the inhabitants of the 'New World' " (p.110). Zarnowski (1999) elaborates, "Decisions about facts influence how a story is told and what conclusions are reached. By introducing young readers to several versions of the same event, we can help them see that history involves selecting and interpreting facts in order to tell a story" (p.37). Often, author notes will prove to be a good starting place for readers to begin researching the events of the book. The notes will usually grant the reader some insight into author perspective and how close the story approximates history.

In *Lily's Crossing* (1997), Patricia Reilly Giff tells the reader at the close of the story that her own experiences growing up on the east coast during World War II inspired her to tell the story of Lily, the protagonist whose experiences mirrored many of those the author faced in the summer of 1944. At the conclusion of *Mississippi Trial, 1955*, an

account of the Emmett Till murder and subsequent trial that provoked the ire of America and initiated the Civil Rights movement, Chris Crowe provides a succinct, yet informative historical note. In the note he explains to the reader "This novel is a work of historical fiction. Though Hiram Hillburn, R. C. Rydell, and many other characters in this story never existed, the events directly related to Emmett Till's kidnapping, murder, and the trial of his killers is true, and the material from *The Greenwood Commonwealth* is presented as it actually appeared in 1955". Finally, Lois Lowry included an afterword in *Number the Stars* (1989) that described thorough evidence substantiating issues within the Holocaust resistance story including the personal sacrifices made by the Danish people and the decision to destroy the ships of the Danish navy rather than have them fall into the hands of their Nazi oppressors (Lukens, 2003).

### *Anachronistic Details*

An anachronism, something that is mistakenly placed in the wrong time period, jeopardizes the credibility of a historical fiction selection because historical accuracy is a defining aspect of this genre. Russell (2001) addresses this concern: "An anachronism in a historical novel suggests carelessness in research and casts suspicion on historical accuracy" (p.221). Cai (1992) explains why an anachronism in a trade book created for children could have an impact on a student's learning: "...children usually have little or no background knowledge of history, and when they approach historical fiction, their minds are almost a *tabula rasa*. Any incorrect information imprinted on their minds will not be easy to erase" (p.282).

Anderson (2002) relays the story of one author who conducted her research using primary materials from the Appalachian Culture Center, the Rural Life Museum, as well as consultations with local historians when working on *But No Candy* (Houston, 1992). After taking great measures to authentically portray the events and details within the story, the author was shocked when it was published containing several anachronistic illustrations. One example included children wearing black rubber soled shoes resembling the popular Converse All Stars. Houston stated that rubber was conserved during the era portrayed in the story (mid 1940's) for military use and that the canvas shoes portrayed did not become popular until several years later.

Schwebel (2003) located another anachronistic instance within *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* (Speare, 1958); "In the middle of the book, Andros arrives in Hartford to claim the Connecticut charter on the evening of October 31, a date meaningless to seventeenth-century Englishmen, but not to Speare's contemporary readers. Although Halloween was not celebrated in New England— or even England— during the seventeenth century, Nat and his mates pull a Halloween prank that lands them in the town stocks" (p.210).

The setting of the story as well as the language and thoughts of the characters are other areas to consider when reviewing literature for anachronistic details (Levstik and Barton, 2001). Galda and Cullinan (2002) suggest guidelines for reviewing these variables "In evaluating historical books, look for settings that are integral to the story and are authentic in historical and geographical detail" (p.208). They also add "language should be in keeping with the period and the place, particularly in dialogue...the character's thoughts should also reflect the time and place. Any metaphors, similes, or images that describe what a character is thinking or feeling should be appropriate to the setting...when evaluating language in historical fiction, look for language patterns and word choices that are authentic and in keeping with the mood and characterization" (p.208).

Karen Cushman (2001) noted that she received negative feedback from teachers and librarians regarding the use of the terms "piss" and "privy" in the novel *Catherine, Called Birdy* (1994). She countered that her choice of language was not only authentic, it already represented an attempt to present young readers with appropriate language: "They should see the words that I left out! Back then *piss* was the accepted term, the polite term" (p.101).

### ***Classroom Application***

Before beginning an authentication exercise with students, they should first understand the genre of historical fiction and its blending of a narrative story with historical record. They should also be aware that authors may present inaccurate or biased accounts, albeit unintentionally, when writing about historical events. Cynthia DeFelice (1998) described a situation in which she averted making a large error in one of her books: "My editor arranged to have the manuscript of *Lostman's River* read by a Seminole Indian, and it's a good thing. There are two Seminole dialects, the Muskogee and the Mikasuki, and the one

I had first used was not the one the Everglades Seminoles would have spoken" (p.33).

Finally, they should realize their role is to develop historical judgment by "weighing evidence and holding conclusions to be tentative pending further information" (Levstik, 1993) which will require critical thinking and research skills. The reading of a variety of sources and the subsequent comparison of accounts and facts is at the heart of the authentication process. Sipe (1997) suggests that even the strongest literature for students is not enough for students to develop critical skills in research and historical understanding. He states students should be actively involved in the same process historians use when researching and writing history.

Levstik and Barton (2001) note that "Students are less likely to spot errors in unfamiliar topics" (p.113) so the students should be allowed an extended time for immersion into the literature related to the topic. They suggest the teacher should advocate critical reading of the texts by inviting "students to compare different versions of historical people and events, noting where sources differ, and researching to find the most supportable facts" (p.113). Lindquist (1997) describes the process, a joint endeavour between students and teacher, with her own students "We look for incongruities as well as confirmations. We try to discover what has been included and what has been left out" (p.3). She later elaborates: "When I read a book aloud to the class, I model how to look at the sources of information used by the author and the illustrator" (p.3). Donelson and Nilsen (1997) add "The best way to show young readers that there are different opinions and different ways of looking at history is to encourage the use of several books on the same subject" (p.189).

The process of students keeping a journal of what they have read can serve several purposes. Initially, it will serve as their record of research and be a valuable resource when compiling data at the conclusion of the authentication process. Also, students will have the opportunity to develop their writing fluency and other integral skills such as analyzing, drawing conclusions, and comprehension.

After the students have compiled their data evaluating the historical fiction selections based on the authentication categories outlined in this article and have had small and large group discussions regarding different interpretations discovered in their research, they should be able to answer questions posed at the outset of the project, including issues related to historical accuracy and bias. It may be helpful



to provide a rubric for students regarding the various attributes to review in the authentication process. A template for a rubric is provided in the next section that could be altered to fit varying grade levels and project goals. The template is consistent with the authentication categories featured in this article.

Finally, students may present their information orally as well as in written form. End products could take the form of a paper with a research tone or a more graphic representation featuring multiple Venn diagrams, charts, and web-based diagrams accented by text for clarification. At the conclusion of the process, students will have had the opportunity to develop several critical thinking skills including interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating. Other skills developed include the ability to gather appropriate information and manipulate data, develop and present policies and arguments, construct new knowledge, and finally to refine interpersonal and organizational skills in small group settings (Lindquist, 1997). Another benefit might include an appreciation of the tenuous nature "...as well as the rigor involved in the attempt to make sense of the past" (Darnton, 1999, p.15).

After completing the process once with extensive guidance and facilitation, learners should become more autonomous when they begin the process again. While the process of authentication can appear daunting and time consuming the first time, the rewards for the social studies teacher and his/her students are great. Lindquist (1997) explains it this way: "Helping students look for errors, biases, and misinterpretations is one of the major roles we play as teachers. This kind of intellectual detective work is not only appropriate but essential to the continued growth and development of our students' understanding of history and acquisition of knowledge" (p.13).

### ***Authentication Rubric***

As previously mentioned, the following authentication rubric is a method by which students and teachers can apply critical thinking and research skills as they work through the authentication categories and issues outlined in this article. The rubric can be modified to meet the needs of varying grade levels, yet it is broad enough to apply to most selections of historical fiction. Students can use information from the rubric to transfer to other visual devices such as Venn diagrams or webs.

| ROMANTICIZED<br>ACCOUNTS                                 | VIEWPOINT   | STEREOTYPICAL<br>DESCRIPTIONS | NOTABLE<br>OMISSIONS<br>or<br>EXPANSIONS      | ANACHRONISTIC<br>DETAILS |
|--|---|-------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| (nostalgia?)   | (author's<br>background)                                  | (overgeneralizations)         | (omission due to<br>viewpoint)                | (cultural references)    |
| (evidence of<br>unlikely events for<br>the time-period?) | (date of<br>publication)                                  | (race or gender)              | (omission due to<br>potential<br>controversy) | (illustrations)          |
|  | (corresponding<br>national or<br>international<br>events) | (class or language)           | (expansion due<br>to viewpoint)               | (setting)                |
|  | (anything<br>influencing<br>author's point<br>of view)    |                               | (expansion due<br>to controversy)             | (language)               |

### ***Conclusion***

In order for this process to be successful, teachers should buy into the process and be willing to serve as a willing facilitator of the research process. VanSledright and Kelly (1998) noted in their study involving fifth-graders and their experiences learning American history that "...searching historical accounts for information without well-developed tools to evaluate the quality of that information did little to enhance students' critical reading and historical understanding" (p.260).

Another study (Roser and Keehn, 2002) revealed that students who had engaged in multiple sources on a given social studies topic had successfully reduced misconceptions regarding the topic as well as experiencing increases in content and concept knowledge. The researchers also noted the students exhibited an increased willingness to work in co-operative groups, to support their ideas with evidence, a willingness to listen to other students discuss the concepts and even elaborate on their thoughts, and build summaries based on multiple pieces of evidence (Roser and Keehn, 2002).

Sipe (1997) notes that "...adding another layer to our understanding of historical fiction, and in giving us a richer and more nuanced view of the interrelationships between history and fiction, the authors of historical fiction also facilitate the type of discussion which may lead to a commitment to social justice and a more inclusive society"

(p.255). Schwebel (2003) adds that "By allowing students to do the work of historians, piecing together construction of "truth" over time, history is presented to students as it really is: not the study of the past, but the study of the past in the present" (p.214).

Finally, MacLeod (1998) captures the essence of why it is important for students to become critical consumers of historical fiction: "But people of the past were not just us in odd clothing. They were people who saw the world differently; approached human relationships differently; people for whom day and night, heat and cold, seasons and work and play had meanings lost to an industrialized world. Even if human nature is much the same over time, human experience, perhaps everyday experience, is not. To wash these differences out of historical fictions is not only a denial of historical truth, but a failure of imagination and understanding that is as important to the present as to the past" (p.33).

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