

WRITE YOUR OWN HISTORICAL FICTION:



FAQs for TEACHERS and some basic tips for YOUNG WRITERS

FAQs:

Q: *Is there a word limit?*

A: No, that's completely open, and the entries we receive each year vary from a single page to a more detailed tale told through several 'mini-chapters' and running to several A4 pages. Some young writers like to include an illustration or a 'cover' page, and that's OK too. As a rough guide, we'd suggest a maximum of around 3000 words, but entries with a higher or lower word count will be accepted.

Q: *Do stories have to be typed?*

A: No, we're happy to accept handwritten work as long as it is legible, and in the case of primary children, this can be in pencil.

Q: *Do the stories have to focus on any particular historical event or time period, or place?*

A: No, again this is completely open – in fact, we encourage our young writers to explore a time, subject and place that particularly interests them. Some might be inspired by something your school has been exploring. Your story can be set in any place and time in world history, however please remember that some topics and events in history are controversial and/or highly emotive. Please ensure that topics covered are age appropriate so that students can approach these with the right level of maturity and understanding. Also, please remember that 'history' doesn't necessarily mean a long time ago – some young writers might find inspiration for stories from the reminiscences of older family members.

Q: *Why only three entries per school? We want to encourage as many pupils as possible to take part.*

A: We couldn't agree more! Please do encourage as many of your pupils as possible to create their own story – or even stories, if they'd like to write more than one. What usually happens is that schools first hold their own competition, with the three winners then being sent on to us. That way, as many young people as possible get involved, while the number of entries to the national competition remain within manageable levels.

SOME BASIC TIPS FOR YOUNG WRITERS

Remember this is a STORY not an ESSAY. You're not writing to impress your teacher with your detailed knowledge of history – you're writing to bring a little bit of history alive to people your own age, and to draw them into the story with characters they may love, or hate, or identify with, and a story that makes them want to go on reading to find out what happens. The historical setting must be accurate, even down to the names you give your characters, so you'll need to know the time period and location of your story (as well as any real historical figures involved) well enough to do this.

Choose a period, place, event or person that really interests you: That way, if you need to do a bit more research to give depth and accurate context to your story, you'll enjoy doing it, and some of your enthusiasm will come across to the reader as well.

Think about how you want to tell the story and who will tell it: Will you write it as if you are one of the main characters, who is living or observing the story, and sharing their thoughts on what is happening? ('I did this I was frightened' We call this 'First person' writing)? You can even tell the story from the viewpoint of two different people, if you want to give a more rounded picture. Or will you tell it like you're reporting on what happened, able to look at it from different people's points of view? ('She said He looked frightened ... They couldn't believe' We call this 'Third person' writing). Both have their advantages and disadvantages, so choose which you feel most comfortable doing.

Characters are really important: They can be:

- A real historical figure linked to a real event (you will need to be sure you get your facts right!)
- A real historical figure but at a time of their lives when there's very little – or no – recorded history of what they were doing, for example, when they were a child or teenager. Then you wouldn't have to match recorded facts, but you would have to know enough about the person, and what life might have been like for them at that age in that particular period and place, for people to read your story and think 'This is believable, it might have happened'.
- A completely fictional character - someone you've made up – perhaps an ordinary person swept up in an extraordinary historical event, or someone whose story shines a light on how very different life was for people, especially children, in that time and place. Here you'll need to know enough accurate detail about day to day life in your chosen historical setting to make it come alive.

Characters don't need to be human - we've had stories from the point of view of animals too.

Remember your characters probably won't have as much knowledge of the broader history behind their story as you do: You have the advantage of looking back at the past through the eyes of lots of historians who have researched this in detail. Someone living through an event or in a particular period of history would probably have a much narrower view.

You need a good beginning that draws the reader in quickly, so don't put too much background information in too soon. You can fill this in later. For example, if your story is about Viking raiders, you wouldn't want to spend your first paragraphs telling your readers all about yourself, your family, your home and your village. You might start with a sentence like 'I was walking home along the cliff path when I looked out to sea and saw the Viking longships ...' and then, as you run to sound the alarm, you can start giving a bit of information about the people and place you are racing to save. Some people find it helps to plan a definite beginning, middle and end of the story – it's certainly good to think what end you are working towards – will it be sad or happy or a mixture of both? But once you've got the beginning right, everything else tends to come more easily.

Good luck!

