

Connecting Literature to History

- RL.7.9** Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.
- CCR.R.9** Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
- CCR.R.10** Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.



Understand the Standards



Many of us groan when we are asked to read or study history. Historical fiction is a fun and enjoyable way to learn real history. It contains ordinary characters—people with whom we can identify—meeting and interacting with the celebrities of their day. People continue to read and enjoy historical fiction because it shows kings and queens, and heroes and heroines, having conversations and quarrels just as we do ourselves. When we read historical fiction, we understand that famous people from the past really lived, just as we do, and felt emotions and temptations like our own.

Words to Know

fiction
historical fiction

Fiction consists of imagined stories. **Historical fiction** is a special category of fiction in which the author retells true stories in an imaginative way. In most historical fiction, imaginary characters interact with real ones and take part in actual historical events.

Study this table to understand the differences between fiction and historical fiction.

Fiction	Historical Fiction
Characters are imagined.	Many or all characters are real people who actually lived; often, they interact with imagined characters.
Dialogue is imagined.	Dialogue is imagined but may be based on real conversations and include actual quotations.
Plot is imagined.	Plot includes events that really happened—often major events in history, such as the American Revolution.
Settings can be imagined or real.	Settings are specific times and places in which the real characters actually lived.



Guided Instruction

Read the passage. Then complete the activities.



from *An Old-Fashioned Girl* by Louisa May Alcott

In this episode from Alcott's novel about the fictional Shaw family, Mrs. Shaw entertains her grandchildren and their friend Polly with stories about treasures she has saved from her past.

"I choose this," said Polly, holding up a long white kid glove, shrunken and yellow with time, but looking as if it had a history.

"Ah, that now has a story worth telling!" cried grandma; adding, proudly, "Treat that old glove respectfully, my children, for Lafayette's honored hand has touched it."

"Oh, grandma, did you wear it? Did you see him? Do tell us all about it, and that will be the best of the whole," cried Polly, who loved history, and knew a good deal about the gallant Frenchman and his brave life.

Grandma loved to tell this story, and always assumed her most imposing air to do honor to her theme. Drawing herself up, therefore, she folded her hands, and after two or three little "hems," began with an absent look, as if her eyes beheld a far-away time, which brightened as she gazed.

"The first visit of Lafayette was before my time, of course, but I heard so much about it from my grandfather that I really felt as if I'd seen it all. Our Aunt Hancock lived in the Governor's house, on Beacon Hill, at that time. . . . the Governor wanted to give a breakfast to the French officers, and Madam, who was a hospitable soul, got up a splendid one for them. . . ."

"The time when I saw Lafayette was in 1825. Uncle Hancock (a sweet man, my dears, though some call him mean now-a-days) was dead, and aunt had married Captain Scott. . . . Old Josiah Quincy was mayor of the city, and he sent aunt word that the Marquis Lafayette wished to pay his respects to her.

"Of course she was delighted, and we all flew about to make ready for him. Aunt was an old lady, but she made a grand toilet¹, and was as anxious to look well as any girl."

"What did she wear?" asked Fan, with interest.

"She wore a steel-colored satin, trimmed with black lace, and on her cap was pinned a Lafayette badge of white satin.

"I never shall forget how *b-e-a-utifully* she looked as she sat in state on the front parlor *sophy*², right under a great portrait of her first husband; and on either side of her sat Madam Storer and Madam Williams, elegant to behold, in their stiff silks, rich lace, and stately turbans. We don't see such splendid old ladies now-a-days."

¹ made a grand toilet: dressed in her best gown

² *sophy*: British term for "ghost"

Guided Questions

What clue(s) does the story give that it is going to begin talking about a real, historical person?

Aside from people, places, and events, what else in the story might be historical?

“I think we do sometimes,” said Polly, slyly.

Grandma shook her head, but it pleased her very much to be admired, for she had been a beauty in her day.

“We girls had dressed the house with flowers; old Mr. Coolidge sent in a clothes-basket full. Joe Joy provided the badges, and aunt got out some of the Revolutionary wine from the old Beacon Street cellar.

“I wore my green and white palmyrine, my hair bowed high, the beautiful leg-o’-mutton sleeves that were so becoming, and these very gloves.

“Well, by-and-by the General, escorted by the Mayor, drove up. Dear me, I see him now! a little old man in nankeen trousers and vest, a long blue coat and ruffled shirt, leaning on his cane, for he was lame, and smiling and bowing like a true Frenchman.

“As he approached, the three old ladies rose, and courtesied with the utmost dignity. Lafayette bowed first to the Governor’s picture, then to the Governor’s widow, and kissed her hand. . . . The last thing I remember was hanging out of the window with a flock of girls, watching the carriage roll away, while the crowd cheered as if they were mad.

“Bless my heart, it seems as if I heard ’em now! ‘Hurrah for Lafayette and Mayor Quincy! Hurrah for Madam Hancock and the pretty girls! Hurrah for Col. May! Three cheers for Boston! Now, then! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!’”

Guided Questions

Work with a partner to explain which aspects of the passage you just read are imagined and which are historical fact. Use the library or Internet to help you complete the following chart.

Imagined characters	
Real historical people	
Time and place in which the story is set	
Imagined events	
Real events	



On Your Own

Answer the questions based on the passage.

1 Which character in the passage is not a real person from history?

- A Aunt Hancock
- B Grandma Shaw
- C Lafayette
- D Mayor Quincy

2 Why does Mrs. Shaw treasure her encounter with Lafayette?

- A because she is patriotic
- B because she is vain about her appearance
- C because she is related to the governor's widow
- D because she is old and sentimental

3 What effect does Grandma's story have on Polly and Fan?

4 The breakfast for the French officers might have taken place, but John Hancock was not governor at the right time to have hosted it. Why do you think the author changed the facts in her story?

Read the following historical account. Then complete the activities that follow.



from Dorothy Quincy: Wife of John Hancock With Events of Her Time (1905)
by Ellen C. D. Q. Woodbury, Her Great-Great Niece

It has been stated that Lafayette, "in his exertions for securing the liberties of America and France, had reduced an estate yielding two hundred thousand livres a year income to the trifling sum of twenty thousand livres annual revenue."- He longed to see the United States again, and in 1824 landed at Boston, where they gave him a grand ovation. The streets were "profusely decorated with arches; and during his progress for more than three miles all the bells in the city rung." Business was suspended, the whole town adorned in holiday attire; the French and American colors prevailing." Every roof, balcony, window and steeple was in requisition by the excited multitude."

General Lafayette, seated in a barouche drawn by four white horses, came slowly through the crowd massed on each side of the street, careful not to crush the welcoming populace extending their homage and congratulations. In Tremont street, amid the plaudits of the hundreds of voices

filling the air amid the waving of handkerchiefs of fair dames, a chronicler says, one face arrested his attention; it was that of the widow of Governor Hancock. She was seated on the balcony of a house then called Colonnade Row. Though it was many years before that he had been entertained at her home, he recognized the lady, and, with ready courtesy, ordered the carriage stopped in front of the house. Rising, he placed his hand over his heart and made a profound obeisance, which was gracefully returned. Then followed peals of soul-stirring shouts from the interested spectators.

- Elevate** 5 Compare and contrast the historical account with the one that Mrs. Shaw gives. What do you think accounts for the differences? Which account appeals to you more, and why?



- 6 With a partner, choose a historical novel that interests you both, such as *The Three Musketeers* or *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*. Read a summary of the text. Then, research the historical period or event on which the novel is based, and explain how the novel and historical account compare.

