

## Chapter 3

### Young Historians: Coming Face to Face with the Past

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## What Is history?

- History is a narrative of the past
- Historical method:
  1. Locate pertinent information
  2. Examine sources for accuracy
  3. Organize information into narrative

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## Sources of History

- Primary Sources: written and nonwritten clues produced at the time of the event
- Secondary Sources: evidence from someone at another time who didn't witness the event

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## Why History Is Important

- By studying the past, young citizens will be better prepared to judge the present and future
- *"Without history, a society shares no common memory of where it has been, of what its core values are, or of what decisions of the past account for our present circumstances"* (National Center for History in Schools (1996))

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## How Should History Be Taught?

- Historical Narratives: Chronicles of real events that tell a story
  1. Historical fiction
  2. Biographies
  3. Folk literature
- Historical narratives have the power to evoke emotion
- Children must also have opportunity to write their own narratives

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## Historical Fiction

- Historical Fiction: Realistic story set in the past
- Gives children opportunity to vicariously experience history
- Selection Guidelines
  1. It must tell an interesting story
  2. It should be accurate and authentic
  3. It should reflect the spirit and values of the times
  4. It should contain authentic language
  5. It should provide insight into today's problems

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## Biographies

- Biographies: Tell the stories of the lives of real people
- Biographies of exemplary heroes provide superb models of citizenship
- Best biographies characterize the main character as true to life
- Should recognize individuals as real human beings with both strengths and weaknesses

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## Guidelines for Selecting Biographies

1. Story should be well-researched
2. Story should be carefully documented
3. The narrative of the person's life should be fast moving
4. The writing should be clear and readable

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## Folk Literature

- Folk literature: Fables, myths, legends, and folktales
- Stories handed down by storytellers for generations
- They reflect those cultures' beliefs, values, lifestyles, and histories
- They help children understand a culture's past through its values, beliefs, and customs
- Carefully research the story content and place the story in context when using it

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## Textbooks

- Provide a broad overview of the topic to be taught
- Provide extensive treatment of subject matter organized from one grade to another
- Comprehensive teacher's manuals assist teachers
- Beginning teachers find textbooks valuable
- Textbook-based instruction can be effective when topic is connected to children's lives and is enhanced by resources and activities

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## Writing Historical Narratives

- Social studies provides contexts to write frequently and purposefully
- Children exposed to historical narratives develop an interest in using the styles of their favorite authors

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## Elements of a Narrative

- Setting: described early in the story; helps reader create picture of distinctive times
- Characters: the physical and emotional attributes; look, dress, feel
- Plot: sequence of events; the action; contains three parts-
  1. A problem, conflict, or difficulty
  2. Roadblocks
  3. Solution

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## Storypath

- Begin by having children work in small groups to create a setting for the topic
- Children should create a mural to illustrate setting
- Children should then create characters
- Children then gain deeper understanding of the topic by learning about the chronology of the topic (the plot)

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## Primary Sources

- Connection with the past
- Power to arouse interest
- Written evidence versus nonwritten evidence
  1. Written evidence: anything written down that gives historians clues about people and past events (documents, diaries, letters, songs etc.)
  2. Nonwritten evidence: artifacts (photos, paintings, coins, furniture, tools, etc.)

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## Children's Simulated Historical Documents

- Children should have opportunity to create simulated written documents
- Teacher should review components of the writing process before creating simulated documents

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## Simulated Period Newspapers

- Offer thought-provoking writing form
- Children express the content they are learning
- Children can also use other newspaper formats such as the front page, editorial column, political cartoon, sports section, real estate, help wanted, classified, movie review, fashion page, food guide, advice column

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## Diaries

- Short, private accounts of and reactions to daily events
- Children come into contact with human emotions, values, and attitudes of the past
- Chronicle the events of people's lives

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## Letters

- Friendly letters and diaries are conversational in style and express the writer's account of important events
- Model letters from the past help children develop conversational style of writing

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## Oral Histories

- Someone telling stories of personal experiences related to particular places or times
- Children can also create simulated oral histories
- Interviews: Conducting interviews is a superb way to introduce children to the process of collecting oral histories

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## Nonwritten Sources: Artifacts

- Artifacts: photos, paintings, coins, furniture, tools, clothing, dishes, etc.
- Help historians reconstruct the story of human life
- Cemeteries hold historical clues
- Assemble a collection of artifacts and documents related to a historical topic or theme

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## Historical Inquiry

- Children should engage history the way historians do
- Meaningful historical inquiry comes from personal questions
- Children investigate historical problems, often expressed in the form of questions

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## Museums

- The world outside the classroom is a powerful learning experience
- Visiting living history or reenactments can help children visualize period clothing, houses, furnishing, tools and other artifacts
- Investigate museums within your community

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## Chronology

- Students demonstrate that they understand chronological organization of history when they can organize events and people into major periods of time and explain relationships between those people and events
- Use event chains and graphic timelines

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