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## Relevant History: Using Historical Fiction to Make History Engaging

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Relevant History: Using Historical Fiction to Make History Engaging

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts in Teaching

Hamline University

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

History class has long been seen by many students as being an uninteresting, unengaging, and otherwise boring class. Students often find history to be a pointless topic to study, and much can be done in the name of keeping students engaged (Rodwell, 2013). As a history teacher, it is important to challenge myself and my students to engage fully and academically in history. One way in which I have found myself and my students have been able to find history engaging is through the works of historical fiction; movies, novels, and otherwise. For this reason, I ask the question, *How can teachers incorporate works of historical fiction in their diverse, differentiated classrooms in order to engage students in the learning of history?* This is an important question on the basis that history is an important topic. Without engagement in the learning of history, students lack an understanding of the importance of events and the implications they have had on today.

Through the use of telling these fictitious, yet historically plausible stories, students will be more eager and able to engage actively with the content they are learning. A dry lesson on the battle of Normandy can turn into an intense showdown between different soldiers and their varying sides in the war. Similarly, learning about topics such as slavery and colonization through the lens of historical fiction (along with primary and secondary sources) can bring students into the historical moment. Thus, students are learning not only the names and dates of these events but also the importance of them—and this is ultimately the goal. The more interest a student has in what it is they are being taught, the more engaged they will be and the more learning will take place. Historical fiction has the power to transport readers into a story taking place in the past,

whether real or imagined (Mickel, 2012). This provides an opportunity for teachers to create an inviting and appealing atmosphere for the learning of history. No longer is history class dull and inapplicable, because when students have a vested interest in what they are learning, they are more likely to learn overall (Rodwell, 2013).

### **Why Historical Fiction?**

I came to this project partially because of my love of stories. From a very young age, I was introduced to the likes of the Harry Potter series throughout my adolescence as well as the Magic Treehouse books at a younger age, which were always one of my favorites in elementary school. My mother would buy me whatever book I wanted, and I almost always wanted to read something where the main characters lived somewhere I had never been, or in another time period altogether. When I entered middle and high school, my love of these stories took the back burner, as I was asked to read textbook after textbook, and my extracurricular life filled up. For years, and through my undergraduate education, I stopped reading for pleasure nearly altogether. I knew it was a good practice, but I simply did not seem to have the time or patience to read, as I could not even keep up with the amount of reading I was being asked to do in my studies. When I decided I wanted to become an educator, I picked Social Studies for a few different reasons. I wanted to teach students about stories of the past, and the ways in which these stories have influenced our present. I also wanted to teach students about the ways in which humans relate to each other. As I graduated with my bachelor's degree in Sociology, it was apparent to me that Social Studies was a good fit for me as an educator.

The project I have created is focused on my belief that students need to be actively interested and engaged in the work they are doing in order for them to actually

gain an understanding of the topic they are studying. In this case, that topic is history. In order for students to be actively engaged, a standard that should be applied in classrooms is that students need to be able to see themselves in the story or event they are learning about. Students often find themselves sitting in the rows of over-crowded high school classrooms (or sometimes, online classes), taking down repetitive notes that last for slides upon slides as the teacher drones on. This system works for some students, but absolutely not *all*. They study the notes, remember the key terms and definitions, key dates and historical figures for the test, and then the next time they are asked about this, they have forgotten the information altogether. I know this pattern, because it was mine.

My favorite days in history were the ones where we did *anything else*. Did we get to watch a movie that day? Did we make posters? Did we have a class debate/discussion? Those were the days that stuck out because I was not being *taught* at. I was in the process of actively learning, because I was engaged in the story itself. I was discovering history, rather than being told what it was. This is one of the reasons why I believe that historical fiction is a useful tool for teaching. It allows for a discovery of the events that took place while adding in what textbooks cannot: curiosity and storytelling.

When I first made the decision to pursue teaching, I wanted to pick a subject that I would mesh well with, because I know there is an extensive amount of dedication it takes to create well-rounded and lively lesson plans. I did not want to be an educator that asked their students to sit in the same spot for seven hours a day, being lectured at by teachers who use the same slides year after year. I soon realized the amount of time and effort being an effective and ever-changing teacher takes. I remember the first time I was assigned to create my own lesson plan. I planned out everything from where I was going

to stand to the exact words that would come out, down to the last second. It was at this moment that I realized that this level of planning was not sustainable. However, I did not want to be a teacher that gave up on her mission of being flexible and engaging in the classroom. Therefore, to combat the extensive planning, I needed to find a way to bring to life the stories that history tells, without having to craft every single lesson from absolute scratch. That is when I thought of one of the most influential books of my life.

In *The Book Thief*, Zusak (2007) tells the story of a young Russian girl, named Liesel, who is adopted by a German family in World War II during Hitler's Nazi regime. She falls in love with books and stories, and throughout the film, the war becomes increasingly relevant and vividly divisive to young Liesel trying to make sense of the world around her. Even though the story was a fictional one, the effects it had on me felt as real as anything. I felt as though I had lived there, too, as much as a 16 year old girl in the 2000's could. As I read the book in my sophomore year of high school by my own accord, I could not help but think that it was exactly those types of stories I so very much longed for in my history class. I wanted to know what it was like to experience that moment, not just learn about what happened like some recitable checklist. I took that experience with me when, several years later, I decided I wanted to become a teacher myself. Thus, the plan to interweave instruction with historical fiction was born out of a desire to bring to life the stories of those who came before us, so that their power and legacy could carry on to future generations.



## **Personal Experience**

One potential roadblock of a style of curriculum that requires a fairly extensive amount of reading is this: students are not reliable readers. I have proven this myself, while being a student. I regret to say that there has never been a class that I have taken where I have kept up with the readings consistently. Not in middle school, high school, or higher education. As much as I would have liked to keep up with said readings, I was and am not a very fast reader, needing to take time to re-read and process. I was also involved in several extracurricular activities that kept me busy from dawn to dusk. As a high school student, I would wake up in the morning to go to school, sports, and work all in the same day, getting home at around 10:00 pm every evening. The last thing that I cared about was reading the book(s) that were assigned to me as homework, and in the age of the internet, online book summaries were my best friend. I could look up the chapters I missed and learn just enough about the story to (1) pass the quiz, (2) slide by in the discussions, and (3) ruin any chance of me actually engaging in the book. At the busiest time of my life thus far, I cared not about the content I was learning, but about the grade that appeared on my record.

The reason I did not care to do the readings was not that the topics did not interest me—as I have pointed out, I was very interested in the topics themselves. But as a high school student with a full plate already, I was not interested in spending the small amount of time I had to myself doing more homework than I had to, especially homework that felt like busywork.

## **Rationale**

The notion that students do not read assigned material clearly does not apply to every student. There are plenty of kids who actually go home and do the readings like they had been assigned. However, in addition to students who will be too busy to keep up on readings, on top of that, there are also others who simply will not *want* to do the readings. Some students will be English Language Learners, others will have reading or learning disabilities, some will have no proper access to online resources, and some will be *too engrossed* in everything else they have going on in their lives, from family matters to financial stress, to even consider focusing on history class (Carter, 2016). As educators, we have to be decisive in the amount of homework we are giving students, and if the goal is for them to actually engage in the work, then we need to design our homework in such a way that they *want* to do it, as well as being able to fit it into their busy, busy lives (Hooley et al., 2013).

## **Conclusion**

The question begs, *How can teachers implement works of historical fiction in a classroom of diverse, differentiated learners, with the intention of getting the students actively engaged in the process of learning history?* This is where my project comes into play. The goal for this project is to study the ways in which different professionals have incorporated historical fiction into their classes, explore how to get students to actually read the books and readings they have been assigned to, and do it in a way that is making sure that we are teaching *history*, not someone's fictional story. I have designed a curriculum that answers these questions; a style of teaching that projects a love of learning, reading, stories, and critical historical analysis. If educators can develop

students who love to dive deeply into the experiences of the past, then we can prepare them for a brighter future, where they examine events, people, and topics through a critical lens.

Historical fiction does the work that almost no biography or textbook can do. It livens the story, bringing it to a fully *engrossing* level of engagement (Johnson & Ebert, 1992). As it sits in the realm of fiction, it seemingly allows for a more nuanced story to take place. After all, it is called “fiction” for a reason. But history is about teaching about the past—about fact, right? For this reason, shouldn’t history teachers stick to textbooks and autobiographies, and primary and secondary sources, as to avoid teaching off of biases and opinion? Not necessarily. A well-rounded history education can look like the process of learning how to dissect historical information, no matter where it is from or what it is labeled as (Sullivan, 2019; Quam-Wickham, 2016). On top of this, historical fiction is not meant to be the sole provider of what students learn in the history classroom. It is a supplement, meant to engage students and to bring to life the stories of those they are learning about. It does not replace biographical accounts or primary source documents. It gives students an additional avenue to explore their interest in history - and maybe, just maybe, it will cause another student or two to find history to be a fascinating and worthwhile class.

This project is a look at the practices for incorporating novels, as well as other forms of historical fiction stories, into teaching history class. It is to be used as a guide for teachers who, like me, want to create an engaging classroom environment where students feel connected to what they are learning. In chapter two, I discuss in detail much of the literature surrounding this subject, conducting a thorough literature review, coming

out with trending themes, issues, and questions surrounding the implementation of historical fiction in the classroom. In chapter three, I discuss the process of designing my curriculum and many of the details surrounding why I chose to create it the way that I did, and in chapter four, I discuss the implementation of this project, summarizing its key takeaways, and providing a basis for how educators can use it.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

Much literature surrounding the topic of using historical fiction in the history classroom comes from a desire for students to be engaged in the work they are doing, and wanting to fill in the missing narratives in history (Da Silva et al., 1998; Herz, 1981; Johnson et al., 1992; Rodwell, 2013). However, the process of using historical fiction in the classroom can seem to be a daunting task, as there are questions regarding the relevance of historical fiction and literature in the history classroom, student engagement with history and literature, and reading strategies to make sure that students are actually comprehending what it is that is being taught. My research question, *How can teachers implement works of historical fiction in a classroom of diverse, differentiated learners, with the intention of getting the students actively engaged in the process of learning history?*, comes with caveats surrounding these themes. In this chapter, these themes are discussed in detail, exploring some of the literature surrounding the topic.

#### Relevance of Historical Fiction

The importance of teaching history in an engaging way is crucial to student comprehension. Much has been written on the topic of historical fiction being an avenue to expanding history education. This section unpacks some of the major literature surrounding this topic, why it is pertinent to my project, and exploring the ways in which historical fiction is a useful tool in the social studies classroom. Historical fiction can be used in conjunction with other sources, as it is a useful resource to broaden a student's understanding of the past by means of historical narrative (Da Silva et al., 1998; Herz,

1981; Johnson et al., 1992; Rodwell, 2013). A common stumbling block with history class today is that many students simply lack interest (O'Donnell, 1973; Rodwell, 2013; Walsh, 2006). Historical fiction does the work of bringing readers closer to historical events and brings meaning to the facts and dates one learns in history.

In social studies, there are several concepts educators want their students to grasp: the timeline of people, places, and events, the importance of them, and the implications they have had on the present day. Historical fiction novels, and forms of historical storytelling (films, comics, etc.), can help with all of these concepts (Herz, 1981; Johnson et al., 1992; Rodwell, 2013). For example, *Assassin's Creed* is a popular video game series that follows the stories of different historically based characters who live through interesting and important events throughout history. These video games have become a cult favorite, hosting an impressive 95 million players worldwide. Although the game has violent themes, they follow the storylines of the American Civil War, Greek Mythology, the French Revolution, and more. Some educators have begun to use this game (without the gory details) to enhance their teaching. It provides a richly detailed visual for students, who may even play these games without realizing their educational value. The format that these teachers use is called "Discovery Tour", and takes out the gore and violence, turning the game into an educational prop for students and teachers to use. The first factor in determining whether to use historical fiction in the history classroom depends on its ability to be an effective learning tool to accomplish these educational goals. According to Johnson and Ebert (1992), historical fiction is useful in that it brings meaning to the events and dates through rich storytelling. The authors also discussed the ways in which students need to feel connected emotionally to what they are learning, to

which historical fiction can play a major role. The authors pushed for students to have choice and voice in the decision-making process, and that this will act as a student motivator. Another voice on the idea of needing to relate to material comes from Francois (2013), who believes that reading is a powerful tool to help students, no matter the school setting, find themselves relating to material.

Rodwell (2013), an Australian educator, explained that while history is considered a compulsory subject, it is also one of the lowest in terms of student interest. This means that while history is seen as needing to be an essential function of school education, there is much work to be done in the realm of creating a space where students feel connected to what they are learning. In chapter one of his book, Rodwell rationalized that historical narrative is an effective tool in doing this. Combined, this makes a compelling argument towards the use of historical fiction. Narrative, which is found often within the borders of English classes, is useful in history class as well. Rodwell stated:

Narrative is a personal engagement between the author and the reader, often embracing real and enduring social and personal contradictions, such as injustice and betrayal, love and revenge, dream and disillusion. (p. 24)

This quote implies that historical narrative is a powerful tool to pique the interest of the reader, because it breaches the line between past and present. It allows for an exploration of the story being narrated.

An argument against the use of historical fiction in the history classroom may be that historical fiction is just that—fiction. It lives outside of the realm of what is considered fact. While some may argue that the purpose of history class is to teach facts about what has happened in the past, it is also the case that historical documents, whether

they be primary, secondary or tertiary sources, are a product of their time, and thus are subject to bias and interpretation (Da Silva et al., 1998; Sanders, 2018). Another way to say this is that history is a discipline of speculation, investigation, and interpretation because historical products are a consequence of the culture and time that they came from. Because of this, history can be viewed as being both factual and speculative because there are oftentimes debates and mystery surrounding the origin of who is writing said historical documents and what their bias may look like. Discussion and investigation also plays an important role in learning history as a result of this. Many times, there are omissions from historical documents that would allow for a larger picture to be developed, whether it be voices that are missing or large chunks of time that are brushed aside quickly and with little mention in textbooks (Da Silva et al, 1998; Rodwell, 2013). This means that a solid amount of work in classroom instruction needs to be done on the expansion of the historical narrative of human history in order to give students a fuller picture of what “actually” happened. In other words, multiple perspectives of historical events must be present and discussed in order to garner student comprehension on why events are recorded in the ways that they are.

According to Herz (1981), certain elements need to be present in order for historical fiction to be a useful tool. It is argued that there should not be manipulation with historical factual events in order to make the story more exciting, but that the writer should work within the constraints and context of the setting that they are writing about. If this is not done, however, Herz referred to these as “costume” novels. To this point, there is found to be a “good” historical fiction, as well as a “bad” historical fiction in



terms of relevancy to educational value, and as educators, it is important to know the difference, especially when assigning readings to students (Herz, 1981).

In the case of high school students using historical fiction, Herz (1981) also identified that historical fiction is useful in that students more fully understand the historical events taking place in a novel when it is tied to the plot, character, and themes of a novel. They are more committed to seeing the story through because it interests them, and they are more likely to remember the events because of the impact the story had on their learning.

### ***Conclusion***

These sources, along with others, show the multiple ways in which historical fiction can be a useful tool in the history classroom, and the relevancy of having engaging sources for students to delve into. One sees historical fiction as being useful in that it acts as a passport to the past, and that using specifically chosen historical fiction novels in combination with other sources allows for a richer, more detailed and nuanced understanding of historical events for the students experiencing the lessons. However, there are challenges and hurdles to overcome when trying to use historical fiction in the history classroom that go beyond trying to identify its advantages and relevancy in the world of history. In the next section, discussion revolves around the importance of student engagement, specifically in the realm of the social studies context, and the literature surrounding best strategies for student engagement, including the process of building classroom environments and expectations from students to make sure they have a choice in the readings that they are being required to do.

## **Student Engagement Importance and Strategies**

Many teachers begin the career of teaching with the hope of running a classroom full of students who are fully engaged and interested in being successful learners. However, shortly after being introduced to the actual classroom, one may quickly find out that there seems to be a problem with student engagement. Teachers find students who really seem to not care about their education (Walsh, 2006). On top of this, when students do try and participate in class discussions, some feel as though they have nothing of value to contribute to the conversation (Hall, 2016). This section of the literature review focuses on student engagement and the role that the teacher plays in encouraging students to use their voice, not only generally in the classroom, but also in their assignments, historical fiction related, or otherwise. To first explore this topic, literature is broken down surrounding specific student needs that are seen to be requirements for effective student engagement.

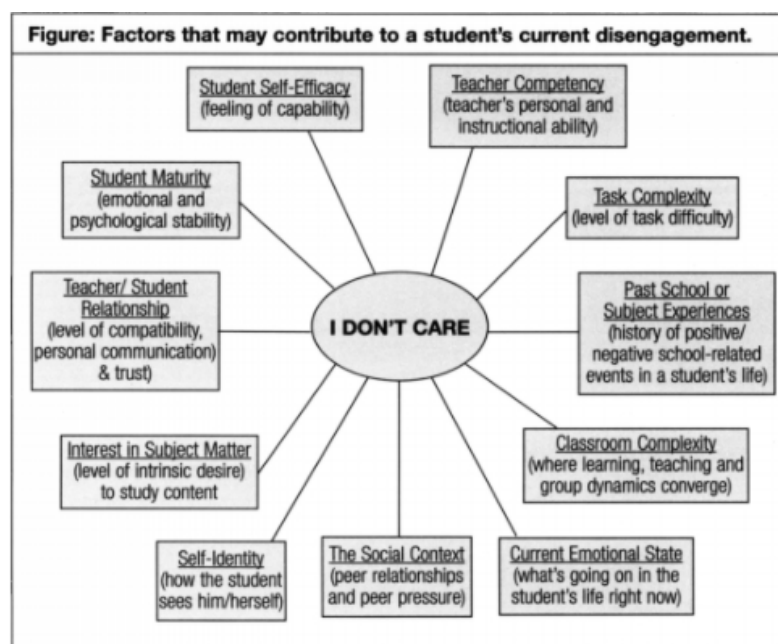
### ***Fostering a Positive Classroom Environment***

The first factor that is important to note when talking about engagement, however, is that there is no foolproof way to engage students (Moosa, 2019; Walsh, 2006). Walsh (2006) stated that disengaged students have often formed a defense mechanism, that it is not specifically only about defiance, but that it is a complicated problem that requires a practiced and complex solution. He explored the idea that a student's "I don't care" has several meanings that may change from day to day, as is seen in Figure 1. In order to fully understand what is making a particular student not participate in class at any given moment, one needs to figure out which of these situations is happening within the student. This can be a difficult task when a teacher has large classes, and quite frankly, it

is very unlikely that a teacher will be able to successfully commit to this practice with every student, every day.

### Figure 1

*Student Disengagement Factors (Walsh, 2006)*



In order to do the work, Keyes (2019) stated that there are two major practices that teachers can commit to in order to make students feel as though their engagement is encouraged and wanted by the teachers; fostering relationships with students, and employing participatory teaching practices in the classroom. Walsh (2006) also asserted that there were three things a teacher should do in order to engage students more effectively: Take time to (1) get to know your students, (2) talk to your students, and (3) don't take their inaction or disengagement personally. He argued that these three things would help teachers create a classroom environment that promotes positive reinforcement that will eventually lead to winning over reluctant learners, and slowly break down the

walls of disengagement, meaning that students will begin to engage in class the more you are consistent with caring if they do, without being punishment-oriented.

These ideas may seem like broad, unattainable goals that sound nice to achieve, but are overly ambitious. However, there are certain solidified plans that can promote these ideals in the classroom that a teacher can look to. These include using student interest inventories, learning style assessments, implementation of student choice in assignments, and having clear, step-by-step instructions for the tasks at hand (Keyes, 2019; Walsh, 2006). Doing these things, while keeping in mind that students need time to warm up to the teachers and classroom around them, can contribute to higher levels of engagement from students, which, no matter if it is with the historical fiction novel or a class discussion, is the ultimate goal.

### ***Student Engagement in Texts***

When it comes to student engagement with historical fiction, one needs to broaden the span of literature to include other educational texts, as well, in order to fully explore the reasons that students disengage from reading texts, and what teachers can do to promote text engagement. For example, student engagement with textbooks is an important factor to consider when thinking about assigning readings. A study by Harniss, Caros, and Gersten (2007) showed that the type of textbook may result in higher or lower engagement and content acquisition. This means that students, depending on the text they are reading, engage at different rates. Based on this, one can conclude that a student should have choice in what it is that they read, and there is literature to back this up. A study done by Hall (2020) showed that students are more likely to engage with texts when they personally find them interesting and fun to read. However, a certain level of

personal reading efficacy is required for this; Hall (2020) also found that students who felt as though they were not confident in their reading ability had less motivation to read on the basis that they believed it would be too difficult for them to do. The study also stated that if the goal is to get students to read more widely and deeply, that there are certain things teachers can do to promote this. These include fostering positive engagement and experiences with reading on a regular basis, avoiding labeling students as “types” of readers, and to normalize struggling while reading (Hall, 2020). This suggests that student engagement is partially the result of a compilation of past experiences, both positive and negative, and the level of promotion of reading in the classroom.

Another factor in student engagement with texts comes not just from the actual reading of the text itself, but also from the ability and willingness to contribute in group discussions about the text. Hall (2016) stated that students, often without knowing it, carry around a reading identity, often promoted further by the idea of the single-story student; if you tell a student that they are one thing over and over again, that is what they become. From this story that they have created in their heads around what kind of reader (or student) they are, a habitus forms and power structures emerge between students. Students who feel as though they are competent readers often contribute more, while students who feel as though they are not competent readers tend to contribute less in group discussions (Hall, 2016). From this, it may be concluded that a teacher’s goal should be to break up the idea of the single-story student, promote discussion between students, avoid calling on the same students over and over again, and work to break the habitus of the power structures the students have created without realizing it.

One way that this may be achieved is by the use of crowdsourcing (Bohney, 2019). Crowdsourcing, according to Bohney, is defined as “allowing a group of ‘outsiders’ to contribute ideas, solutions, content, or labor—often anonymously—to a project, almost exclusively via the internet” (p. 45). In the classroom, this often looks like using shareable documents that students can contribute to anonymously. This may be done through services like Google Docs or Slides, where multiple students can be contributing to the document simultaneously, and without fear of being singled out in front of the class. Bohney (2016) also went on to say that while sometimes, students may look like they are contributing seemingly meaningless responses, do not assume as such—sometimes, these responses are actually students engaging in the activity the way that they can and have critical thinking skills behind them, even if it is not automatically clear. Bohney also discussed the idea that with enough of these crowdsourcing activities, this is another way that students may begin to break out of their shells, and participate in class more regularly.

### ***The Impact of Teacher Confidence on Student Engagement***

In the same way that students’ perceived sense of their own ability affects their engagement and success in the classroom, an educator’s sense of ability in the classroom has an effect on the way the classroom runs as well. At the very least, it appears as though teachers that feel as though they can produce effective student engagement are the ones who do (Keyes, 2019; Moosa, 2020; Shoulders & Krei, 2015; Walsh, 2006). One such study on the topic found that teachers rank their ability level differently based on the experience they have in the classroom and the level of education they hold (Shoulders & Krei, 2015). This study also explained that this self-efficacy produces better results for

students in the classroom. This means that students with teachers who feel as though they are capable of teaching well will have better results overall. Of course, this may be frustrating news to hear for teachers who do not feel as though they have confidence in their ability, or are just starting their teaching career.

Keyes (2019) conducted a study of Chicago high school students, ranking their teachers and the traits that produced the students' favorite and non-favorite teachers. Within the list of traits that the "favorite" teachers held were the following: establishing trust between teacher and student, and implementing a growth mindset. The growth mindset is this idea that failures are not these "end-all, be-all" results, but rather that failure is how we learn, and we can grow from the mistakes that we make in order to do better next time (Seaton, 2018). Teachers that instill a growth mindset into their classroom must do so for themselves, as well. Teachers will have lessons that go awry and will say the wrong things at some points, but if a growth mindset is at the core of the classroom, failures should not cause self-efficacy to go down, but rather, should help both teacher and student to feel as though they have the ability to do the task at hand. This idea is backed up by literature from Seaton (2018) who conducted a study on empowering teachers to move toward a growth mindset over several training sessions. The results showed improvement that held up over the three-month period.

One way in which teachers could implement a growth mindset is by listening to student feedback. Moosa (2020) discussed that a number of educators use reflective practices to realize where there are differences in expectations between student and teacher, and where these differences can be improved upon by the teacher. Using student feedback is also supported by Walsh (2006) and by Keyes (2019). These authors promote

the idea that using student feedback through anonymous surveys and questionnaires is a useful and effective tool in promoting student engagement. Focusing back on teacher confidence in ability, Walsh (2006) also stated that it is imperative that teachers do not let student disengagement or “antagonism” personally affect them. He talked about the ways in which teachers are often targets of emotional attacks from students, who may be feeling negative about schooling in general. He emphasized the importance of a slow and steady buildup of positive reinforcement from teachers, and that teachers should do their best to not respond with anger, frustration, or disappointment, as these things will only lead to further amounts of disengagement from students (Walsh, 2006).

### ***Conclusion***

Student engagement in the classroom is a complex beast, ranging from the individual student’s history surrounding school, to the personality of the student, to the confidence level that the teacher exudes. However, there are certain aspects that one can take away from these ideas. In order for students to be engaged, it seems as though there are certain criteria that teachers can strive to accomplish within their classrooms. These range from instilling a growth mindset, pushing students to participate in small group discussions, crowdsourcing documents, to giving students positive reinforcement while engaged in texts (Hall, 2016; Keyes, 2019; Moosa, 2020; Shoulders & Krei, 2020; Seaton, 2017; Walsh, 2006). All of the topics discussed in this section are different ways in which students can and will engage in history class, whether or not each individual literature suggested here focused specifically on engaging students in history class. On top of this, historical fiction is a route that teachers can take to do some of the specific methods of inquiry suggested by these authors. Methods such as participating in



discussions, giving students choice, and applying student ideas in class all promote the idea that learning is a participatory process, and these factors are important to consider when implementing historical fiction in the classroom. In the next section, literature surrounding specific reading strategies are discussed, aimed at promoting engagement and the acquisition of knowledge through novels and other sorts of historical fiction works.

### **Factors Promoting Successful Reading in Secondary School**

In order for students to succeed in classes that require reading novels, as is the case if one wants to incorporate historical fiction into the classroom, teachers must put in effort to teach and promote positive reading within the classroom. There are many ways in which to do this, from teaching specific reading strategies, giving students opportunities to discuss the books they are reading with peers, and actually carving out time in class to read. In this section, the literature surrounding different methods of promoting successful reading for a differentiated and unique classroom of students is explored.

#### ***Student Voice in Reading***

A vastly important factor in learning how to best assist students in their reading journey is to listen to what students are saying about how they feel about reading, including *what* they are reading, *why* they are reading it, and *who* is being represented in the stories they are reading. If a teacher focuses just on what other teachers are saying without looking at literature that explores student voice, then they will unfortunately be missing a large part of the puzzle. According to Gambrell (2015), the most important factor in motivating students to read is that it needs to feel applicable to life. Gambrell

argued that the goal should be to push towards a “more authentic” reading experience that could be re-enacted outside of the classroom environment and still look similar. She argued that the motivation of students comes from feeling success, but with the caveat that the success comes from texts that challenge students, yet not overly so (Gambrell, 2015). This indicates that in order for students to feel as though they are successful readers, they must be met with a feeling of personal achievement. A similar trend is found when we look at literature surrounding student responses to the ways in which they read, both in their feelings of personal achievement and their motivation to read what has been assigned (Accorso, 2016; Crivilare, 2019; Mann, 2000). One such study found that in one particular school, secondary students reported that they spent less than 10 minutes a day outside of class on academic reading for all subjects combined (Crivilare, 2015). This could deem to be a challenge when thinking of assigning novels to read to students. However, when Accorso (2016) researched student perspectives on their reading interest and performance, it was found that students had *more* interest in doing reading than they chose to do on their own, for they felt they had choice, as well as could connect their identity to the characters described if it was from their own decision in seeking out the story.

### ***Allowing Student Choice***

According to these results, there seems to be a difficult situation for teachers in which students both feel as though they want choice in what they read yet do not feel as though they have time for reading. To this problem, there seems to be two scenarios that have shown promise in making strides in student reading and comprehension of books. The first of such is to provide students with books of their interest and choice. According

to one author, giving students choice is one way to empower them and get them excited about learning (Wieck, 2020). According to Coppens (2018), a research-backed approach to promoting both student choice and engagement in reading is to have a classroom library. Coppens went on to explain the process she used to create an atmosphere of reading in her classroom. She stated that it is very important to have an organizational system to your library, broken down into different themes/genres, and that there should be a large variety of books (fiction, nonfiction, informational, etc), for this will ensure that each student should be able to find something of interest. On top of this, Coppens explained that at the beginning of every class period, she held what she called a “book talk” where she shared a book from her classroom library that related to the topic at hand during that unit/lesson. Coppens argued that doing this will help reluctant readers by allowing them to explore books that they may normally not find interesting (Coppens, 2018). Hughes-Hassel (2008) also found that while there was not any fool-proof way to promote reading, students were most likely to be motivated about reading when their teachers were motivating them from within the classroom with a wide variety of materials.

Another way in which we can allow student choice in the content and way they read, similar to having a classroom library, is to implement actual time during class to what has been coined as “sustained silent reading time” (Coppens, 2018; Gardiner, 2001; Meyers, 1998). It is commonly found that students simply do not carve out time in their day to read, whether it be assigned for school or recreationally (Crivilare, 2015; Tatro, 2020). This is based on the notion that student lives, especially in secondary school, fill up with extracurricular activities and the possibility of jobs, depending on the age of the

student. Crivilare (2015) explained that reading outside of school drastically decreases as students age from primary to secondary school. This is where the idea for taking class instructional time for reading comes into play. The process of taking class time to promote reading can look like 10 minutes at the beginning of class to be taken for “sustained silent reading” in which students spend that time diving into the books they are reading (Guthrie et al., 2013). Gardiner (2001) argued that when he implemented sustained reading time during his classes, the student responses were widely positive, as students felt as though they were gaining literacy skills, as well as comprehension skills.

### ***Specific Reading Strategies***

One of the distinct ways that teachers can promote a positive reading classroom is by teaching students specific reading strategies. However, there are some things that are a requirement for these strategies to be effective (Guthrie et al., 2013). Firstly, they must be able to be easily implemented, and not take up too much extra time for the students. Secondly, the reading strategies need to feel like they have a purpose for helping students comprehend either the language being used in the books, the purpose of what they are getting out of this reading experience, or both. In this section, literature surrounding strategies that have been shown to be effective in creating these results is discussed.

According to Tatro (2020), students may not like assignments that have them stop several times throughout the reading process, because they would rather just enjoy the reading process without the distractions of additional homework on top of the reading. However, for many readers, including students who read at below grade level, and English Language Learners, it actually is helpful for students to have reading strategies involved in the process (Yazdani, 2015).

Sullivan (2019) also suggested that “deep reading” is a requirement for successful academic reading, because it leads to reflective and transactional writing. On top of this, it was suggested that historical texts require deep reading because of the historical context in which they take place (Sullivan, 2019). One way to do this is through the practice of prediction making.

One specific strategy called Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) is successful with students because it prompts them to make predictions and assumptions about the material they are reading (Yazdani, 2015). The DRTA process involves predicting scenarios about the text, reading the text, and then coming back to the predictions made and proving or disproving them (see Figure 2). Yazdani concluded that using DRTA in the classroom improved students' reading comprehension skills because it pushed them to contemplate with what they were reading and actually have a written document explaining if they were right or wrong in their assumptions (Yazdani, 2015).

## Figure 2

*Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) Process (Yazdani, 2015)*

Prediction:	Pages Read:	Was I Right?	Why/How?

Another specific reading strategy to have students try who do not want to have excessive amounts of additional work to do is to have students “read with a pencil” and teach them appropriate ways to mark up books to point out specific details that catch their attention, or to highlight parts or words in the reading that confused or troubled them

(Kleon, 2018). According to Kleon (2018), reading with a pencil is the process of “existing in this middle ground between reader and writer” (Kleon, 2018, para. 4). He argues that by jotting down notes, circling important or interesting things, and making comments, you are connected more deeply and reading closer in the process of doing so. An important thing to consider is that if students are marking up the books from your collection of books, to have a system in place for certain markings, so that as students cycle through books, even if there are markings, they are neat and organized in their markings. This can be done by assigning certain symbols to certain situations, such as is seen in Figure 3. Both of these strategies are just two of the many that can be implemented to create an environment where reading can be successful to all different types and levels of readers.

### **Figure 3**

#### *Reading with a Pencil*

☆	Main Point
!	Surprised Me
?	Confused Me
♡	Love this part
→	Connection to class

### ***Conclusion***

In order to successfully implement reading larger texts in the classroom, it appears as though there are a few major themes teachers may benefit from. These themes are as

follows: Allowing students to have choice in their assessments and readings, and providing students with easily applicable reading comprehension strategies (Accorso, 2016; Coppens, 2018; Crivilare, 2015; Gardiner, 2001; Gambrell, 2015; Sullivan, 2019; Yadzani, 2015). This means that it is possible to create a classroom where students actually enjoy reading, rather than dreading it—an important consideration if one wants to incorporate historical fiction into the curriculum.

### **Discussion on Literature**

The themes discussed in this literature review are not comprehensive. This project has been researched for use in the General Education classroom in particular. Nonetheless, it can be modified to include alternative learning scenarios as well, depending on the situation. This being said, the discussion on the literature has three main themes touched upon; historical fiction relevancy, student engagement, and reading strategies are the most important when considering using historical fiction to liven up history class. In terms of historical fiction relevancy, there is significant evidence that points to historical fiction being a useful and engaging tool on the basis that history is limited in its views, and students need to be interested in what they are learning (Johnson et al., 1992; Rodwell, 2013).

In terms of student engagement, there is significant evidence that giving students as much choice as possible, along with allowing students to feel as though they belong in the classroom are essential to the implementation of not only historical fiction curriculum, but more broadly, any curriculum (Coppens, 2018; Gambrell, 2015; Tatro, 2020). This means that students need to feel as though they have a place in the classroom, and that they belong in the desks they reside in. Finally, reading strategies that are easy to

implement in the classroom, and are shown to be effective in their results are at the core of what kinds of strategies should be implemented in any history classroom that reads novels (Yadzani, 2015). These strategies may look like smaller reflective practices, writing in the margins, and providing time in class for reading to happen.

In chapter 3, I discuss my process of creating a curriculum that incorporates historical fiction for the history classroom. I explore literature surrounding the creation of a successful curriculum, and unpack what that looks like for the creation of my own curriculum.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Overview

#### Introduction

To better understand the role that historical fiction plays in the development of curriculum for history class, it is imperative to dive into the process of what it looks like to actually *create* a curriculum from scratch. In the previous chapter, I broke down the different ways in which historical fiction is useful in the classroom, including the relevancy of historical fiction, to student engagement, to reading strategies. In this chapter, I discuss details surrounding the process of creating my project, from the intended audience and setting to the theories behind the curriculum itself. In order to best address the question *How can teachers incorporate works of historical fiction in their diverse, differentiated classrooms in order to engage students in the learning of history?*, it is imperative to discuss these elements to understand the curriculum as a whole.

#### Process of Design

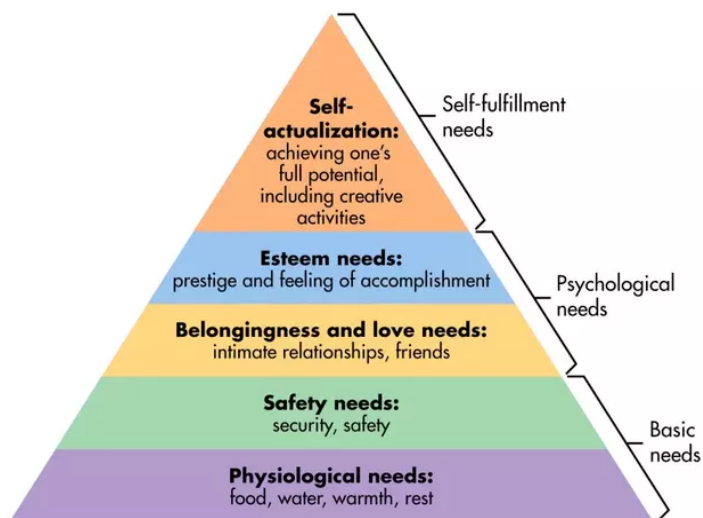
With the intersectionalities of the students in mind, I felt it necessary to create a curriculum that was fully inclusive of all identities and leaves room for growth and understanding. Therefore, I used both the humanistic learning theory (Maslow, 1943) as well as Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) when building my curriculum. In the following section, I explain why I believe these learning theories fit nicely within my curriculum and the purpose of its creation in the first place. The first of these theories, the humanism learning theory, created by Maslow in the early 20th century, focuses on the idea that humans are inherently good. Growing from this

assumption, this theory works through the idea that if humans' needs are being met, then they will naturally gravitate towards bettering themselves through learning.

Maslow is highly regarded for his famous "hierarchy of needs" which is a pyramid in which shows how and when learning can take place, under the assumption that there are certain needs that are a prerequisite for learning or growth to take place (Pearson & Podeschi, 1999). See Figure 4 for an example. Within this pyramid representation of Maslow's theory, one finds five different levels of needs. On the bottom are the most basic needs for survival: food, water, rest. At the top of the pyramid are psychological needs and self-fulfillment needs (growth needs). Maslow's argument for these comes from his idea that there is a difference between growth needs and survival needs, and that while survival needs are a prerequisite for growth needs, they are not always met when learning is taking place (McLeod, 2020).

#### Figure 4

*Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943)*



Maslow's theory has come under fire by Marxist and Postmodern theorists (Pearson & Podeschi, 1999). The criticisms come from Maslow's assumption that

humans have an inherent moral good, and that they are individuals assigned to reaching their own destiny. They see this theory as one being rooted in power and a social “elite”, as only those who may ever achieve the “self-actualization” Maslow talks about are those on the top of society, or the ones in power. If teachers create their curriculum with the idea that each student in our class is an individual with wants and needs that reach beyond the dimensions of our four classroom walls, then they can more effectively teach to the students with where they are currently at within the subject. This is why I have chosen the humanistic learning theory approach as an anchor for this project.

The other theory chosen as an anchor is the sociocultural theory by Vygotsky (1978). The reason I have chosen this theory alongside that of Maslow’s Humanism is that while Maslow’s approach focuses on that of individuals and their personal needs, the sociocultural theory explores the impacts that society has on each individual. In the classroom, this “society” looks like students learning from their peers, teacher, and the materials they are learning from. Thus, the curriculum has an effect on the development of the students (Jamarillo, 1996). Vygotsky’s theory operates out of the assumption that students learn through social interaction, thus, the culture that they are born in and develop in creates much of what the individual student learns.

Using these two theories, both humanism and sociocultural theory, I believe I have been able to develop a curriculum that represents a diverse viewpoint while heightening student choice and reflection within their own work in the classroom as well as at home and in their communities.

## **Project Description**

In addition to the theories on which I have based my curriculum, I have chosen to create the curriculum using Wiggins and McTighe's (1998) "backward design" approach to curriculum creation. According to these authors, the backward design approach calls for the curriculum to be made by first thinking of the concepts and themes, the ultimate goal of the units first, rather than planning out individual lessons. The following concepts and themes are what I have based my two-week long curriculum on, each being discussed at some length within the book being used:

1. Land Ownership and Colonialism
2. Revolution and Activism
3. The Formation of Governments
4. Slavery and Freedom

The intent of these themes is to portray a nuanced and multi-faceted approach to teaching early United States history, in this case, particularly the Revolutionary War. The reason in which I have chosen this particular time period to be represented in my curriculum with specific emphasis on the use of historical fiction is because this period of time is one that existed before television, before the use of radio, and during a time when much of the population was considered illiterate. This means that this period of time is one where historical fiction's benefits of exploring the untold stories can more fully be brought to life, as primary source texts are fewer in number to come by and harder in nature to access. There are also books and resources also used that are biographical in nature. This is because the use of historical fiction in curriculum should not be the only source of information. There are amazing accounts of real people's lives, and whenever

possible, these should be used in conjunction with the fictitious works, to compare and contrast and to lead discussion.

The five themes follow the general storyline of the founding of the United States. The first theme, Landownership and Colonialism, focuses on the stories of Native Americans and their plight with the arrival of European colonizers looking for new life in the “New World”, with a focus on how Native Americans saw the American Revolution. The second theme, Revolution and Activism, will likely be the one where students see much of their connections to the book, as well as with the Slavery and Freedom theme.

It should be noted that I called these ‘themes’ rather than ‘units’ for a few particular reasons. Units can suggest a beginning and an end, but the themes listed here are meant to flow together throughout the semester or year-long class. For example, there is not an end to the colonial legacy of the founding of the United States, particularly for the lives of Native Americans and the wider diverse community. Therefore, the Land Ownership and Colonialism theme, while being more heavily focused on at first, is a part of the entire story, rather than being mentioned at the beginning of the year and then not touched upon again. Inside of the curriculum, the incorporation of books, discussion topics, and assessments throughout the semester are designed to make this commonality between themes throughout the historical timeline known. As this is a two-week long curriculum, I would recommend using the themes presented throughout the course, beyond the reach of this curriculum, in order to fully encapsulate the meaning behind them.

### **Setting and Audience**

The intended audience for this project is any educator who wishes to cultivate student engagement by incorporating historical fiction texts in the curriculum. The setting I have designed this project for is a 7-8th grade United States history class, of approximately 20-30 students. It has been created to be implemented in a differentiated classroom, containing a mixture of activities that honor student learning styles, interests and backgrounds. Additionally, the curriculum is created with the assumption that students participating in this classroom will have a range of identities, including but not limited to race, sexual orientation, gender identification, and religion, and it is ultimately important to allow for these (Carter, 2016).

### **Assessment**

In order to assess whether or not this curriculum is achieving the goal of getting more students actively engaged in the learning of history, it is a requirement that students are able to give feedback throughout the course. I have included two different student feedback surveys in the curriculum for which students are able to give their thoughts and opinions on the material. The teacher can then choose whether or not to change the layout of future classes, and can plan their lessons according to their own classroom's needs. The summative assessment gives students choice, by allowing them the opportunity to create a book project of their choosing based on the novel selected. This allows the teacher to evaluate student learning in a way that gives students a chance to showcase their strengths.

### **Timeline**

The time it took to create this project was a total of one year and five months, from start to finish. I began working on this project in January of 2021, and I finished it

in the Spring of 2022. During the first spring semester, much of the work focused heavily on the preparation of creating a curriculum from scratch, as I looked into literature surrounding the topic. After that, I began to create the curriculum using Wiggins and McTighe's (1998) backwards design approach. Crafting the curriculum was the most time consuming part of this project, and took approximately 60 hours to complete, from start to finish. The overall process and designing took longer than I originally had anticipated, but I believe that the product I have created has turned out to be a useful and informative curriculum.

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter, I discussed the reason for creating a curriculum for a secondary US History class using Maslow's (1943) humanistic learning theory and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) in conjunction with one another. I also discussed the layout of the themes involved in my historical fiction curriculum. In chapter 4, I discuss the implementation of and limitations of this curriculum project, providing examples from the project itself.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

#### Introduction

This project attempted to look at different practices of using historical fiction in a history classroom setting. I have created a curriculum that, with proper implementation, can assist teachers who are looking to bring an element of both literature and engagement to their history classes. Throughout this project, I looked to answer this question: *How can teachers incorporate works of historical fiction in their diverse, differentiated classrooms in order to engage students in the learning of history?* In doing so, I found that teachers can incorporate historical fiction as an effective way to potentially increase student engagement with other classroom materials. The first chapter of this project discussed my coming to the project, from reading works of fiction and wanting them in my classes, to going to school for teaching and seeing a lack in student engagement on a wide scale, specifically in history classes. Chapter two of this project is where I explored in depth the literature surrounding my topic, discussing in detail the different strengths and challenges that come with incorporating historical fiction. The strengths explored included filling in missing historical narratives (Da Silva et al., 1998; Herz, 1981; Johnson et al., 1992; Rodwell, 2013) and heightening student engagement (Shoulders & Krei, 2020; Seaton, 2017; Walsh, 2006), while challenges that may arise when implementing historical fiction in the history classroom include the following; relevancy of fictitious works in history class (Herz, 1981) and actual student engagement levels with texts (Hall, 2016; Keyes, 2019; Moosa, 2020). To combat these challenges, the literature review also explored requirements for student achievement while using



historical fiction. These included easy, applicable reading strategies (Yadzani, 2015), the implementation of student choice (Keyes, 2019; Walsh, 2006), and building a strong relationship with students in order to best assess their motivation and engagement with the texts/classroom materials (Walsh, 2006). In chapter three, I explained the process by which I created the project/curriculum itself. Now, in chapter four, I reflect on the process as a whole and discuss ways in which I believe this project will be most beneficial to teachers looking to use it.

### **Overview of Curriculum**

The two-week long curriculum focuses on the American Revolution, and utilizes the historical fiction book, *Chains* (Anderson, 2008). As stated previously, the reason this specific historical timeline has been chosen is for this purpose: it is commonplace for students to be able to find fiction or biographies from different historical periods, but this is a timeframe where much of the biographical material that is available to students does not do the work of being engaging and interesting for students at the middle grade levels. As it is prior to photographs or television, the effects of bringing to life the stories of the time are more widely applicable. Additionally, the primary source documentation of the time can be difficult for students, especially middle school students whose language acquisition and reading comprehension is still developing. Primary source documents often use “Old English”, and have grammatical choices that can be hard for students, and even teachers, to decipher. This is why I have chosen this time period and specific book.

The curriculum includes the following elements: 10 Minnesota State Standards-aligned Lesson Plans with student objectives, all sources used, all activities used and lesson plan information used (slideshows, handouts to students, videos). The

design of the curriculum follows this general trend: students are assigned a section to read, then have two to three days to read the assigned section. On the days in which the reading is not due, the class will consist of either primary source document activities, or a teacher-led lesson on an element/event of the book they are reading. For example, in the book, Anderson (2008) explores George Washington's character and a plot to assassinate him. After the students have been asked to read this section, the curriculum allots a space to explore George Washington's views on slavery, and later, explores the story of the attempted assassination. This back-and-forth pattern is purposely placed throughout the curriculum and serves the primary purpose of allowing students time to read their assigned pages while also filling in information about the time period through the use of primary and secondary sources. This gives students the opportunity to be able to understand and explore the time period they are reading about with primary and secondary source examples to solidify their understanding of the period, while the book itself is fast paced, which may lend itself to higher engagement with students.

The work of historical fiction that I have used for this curriculum is a middle-level novel, *Chains* (Anderson, 2008). *Chains* is the story of a young slave girl named Isabel and her sister Ruth. In a twist of fate, the sisters, who were to be given freedom at the passing of their owner, are sold to cruel owners who are loyalists to the King and sent to live with them in New York during the early days of the revolution. After befriending a slave by the name of Curzon who is owned by a patriot, Isabel becomes a spy for the patriots, hoping to secure freedom for her and her sister by reporting information about her owners to the patriots.

For this curriculum, students read part one (the first 24 chapters) of the book to ensure enough time to allow students adequate reading of the material provided. It is recommended that the students read part two at their teacher's discretion, whether using a similar layout or not. Part one leaves students on a "cliff-hanger", so their interest in the story itself may lend them to want to continue the book. The novel is also the first in a series of three from the author, so it is my recommendation, if students like the story, to continue the entire series with them; if not to be read in class, to at least own the series in their classroom library for students to be able to check out.

A major objective throughout this curriculum is that students will be able to understand the importance of hearing multiple perspectives on topics in history such as war and slavery. The Revolutionary War was fought for freedom from the British, and *Chains* (Anderson, 2008) explores this, touching on the complex history of a nation born from a want for freedom while holding an entire race captive and in bondage. The main storyline allows students to view freedom as a complex issue, as Isabel fights for her and her sister's freedom from their owners by spying for the patriots, later trying to join the British army in hopes for emancipation there, and wrestling with the idea that we are all equal, yet some members of society own others (Anderson, 2008). This curriculum is an attempt to make this complexity known in a way that students will be willing and interested to access.

### **Strengths**

This curriculum came into existence with the purpose of making a more engaging history class for students, and that is one of its strengths. *Chains* (Anderson, 2008) has been given multiple awards in historical fiction and is a fairly popular book to use in

schools. The book is home to many Social Studies themes: Slavery and Freedom, the formation of Governments, Revolution and Activism, and Land Ownership and Colonialism are all an integral part of the storyline, even if not specifically mentioned. It also provides for a nuanced and multi-faceted approach to teaching and learning about the history of the American Revolution. It helps students think critically about a time period while exploring the narrative of the American Revolution from multiple perspectives, digging into the decisions people of that time had to face. The back of the book also includes common questions and facts about the time period, with the author's anecdotes. For these reasons, this book was chosen for the curriculum.

Another strength of the curriculum is the implementation of the feedback surveys. These surveys allow students a voice to be able to tell the teacher what their thoughts are on the book, classroom activities, and discussions surrounding the book. It is my hope that these feedback surveys would give students and teachers the opportunity to learn from each other in order to improve the course and the curriculum in any way possible.

The curriculum is designed with many reflective questions throughout the two week time period. These reflection questions may be used at the teacher's discretion, but allow for another avenue of gauging where students are with the material, while seeing them critically think about the five themes touched on throughout the curriculum. The "essential questions" listed, to middle level students, may seem inaccessible or too complex to answer at first glance, but the goal of the reflective questions throughout is to allow the students to grapple with those big, essential questions in smaller, more natural steps.

Lastly, a strength of the curriculum is the implementation of student choice in their final project. As stated previously in chapter two, in order for students to be engaged in the classroom, it is important that there be some level of choice. Whether this be in the books they are reading, the projects that they do, or even where they sit, allowing students choice to some degree makes them feel like they are an active participant in the classroom. This curriculum's final project allows the students to choose one of six options, ranging from a book report to acting out different scenarios in a group setting. This allows students to play on their individual learning styles or try something different altogether.

### **Limitations**

The largest limitation of this curriculum may be its central focus on the early days of the American Revolution, and its use of one historical fiction novel. For all due purposes, the curriculum, to be used in its entirety, would have to be used in that particular classroom setting, so as to get the most benefit out of it. However, as discussed above, a teacher who wishes to implement historical fiction in a history classroom can still utilize bits and pieces of this curriculum, i.e. its pattern, its reflective questions, or its discussion questions for students. The pattern of assigning reading and following up with a deeper dive of topics touched on in the book could be used with any historical fiction work, as per the teacher's discretion.

The use of one historical fiction novel may also be a limitation. The curriculum includes multiple "book talks", where students are told about another book related to the topic. However, a way in which this curriculum would be improved upon would be the implementation of multiple historical fiction readings from different books, and allowing

students to choose the book itself. This, again, is something that would be up to the teacher's discretion, but is certainly something that I myself would explore doing.

Another possible limitation of this project pertains to the reading level of the students. As previously mentioned, students who are struggling readers may get discouraged easily or have a difficult time accessing the information. The curriculum may still be used in these cases, but the teacher should be sure to make specific alterations based on their classroom needs to make sure that meaning is being constructed from the readings. This may be done through different differentiation strategies.

Lastly, my goal from the beginning of this project was to create an entire semester-long curriculum that ebbed and flowed through different themes and had students exploring the time period from pre-Columbian America up to the Civil War. This, however, was not within the scope of the project I was able to produce, as there was a timeframe within which I had to complete the project. This is, however, something that I highly recommend for teachers looking to incorporate historical fiction.

### **Implications**

Throughout the creation of this project, it was my goal to create something that would benefit the educational community. In its finished product, the curriculum is something that teachers can take into their own classrooms. The impact of this project is in its ability to engage students in critical thinking about themes like race, colonialism, and freedom surrounding the formation of the United States. It accomplishes this goal in a way that is non-threatening to students and advantageous to expanding the narrative of the Revolutionary War to include voices that may often be overlooked in middle school history classes. The curriculum also allows students to engage in the learning of History

in a way that is usually reserved for English classes. This expands students' ability to read in order to learn, rather than learning to read.

### **Conclusion**

This project has attempted to answer this question: *How can teachers incorporate works of historical fiction in their diverse, differentiated classrooms in order to engage students in the learning of history?* In studying this question, I found that historical fiction is a useful source in a history class if it is used successfully within certain parameters. As a history educator, I look forward to being able to use this project in my own classroom, and I welcome other educators to use it as well in their own classrooms.

When I first began this project, I struggled with the scope and size of the project I wanted to complete, and what type of project I wanted to complete. In pursuing the creation of this project, I landed on creating a curriculum for the sole purpose of wanting to create something that other educators could look to for inspiration or ideas, and have something they could actually take into their classroom and physically use, if it accurately fit their class. While creating the project, I grew tremendously as an educator. The process of designing a curriculum allowed me to develop my educational principles in more detail. Researching current and past literature surrounding the topics pushed me to question how and why I view education in certain lights. It is my hope that this project has completed that mission, and will continue to assist history teachers in the future to engage students in the discovery of history through stories like the one used in this curriculum.





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