

Extended Research / Creative Writing Project: The Jewel and the Key

Learning Objective: Students explore a model of research using historical fiction. They then use research skills to create a historical fiction piece.

Grade Level: Middle School through Freshman College Composition. This can easily be modified to suit different levels of students.

Note: *Quite honestly, with 50 minute periods, this class plan can be done in full over several class periods.*

Understanding the Use of Research in Historical Fiction through Textual Analysis:

1. Highlight any or all of the following chapters for focused reading: 11 (The Scottish Play) and 12 (The Usurper Himself) 13 (Two Gentlemen) and 14 (Timber War).
 2. In at least ONE chapter, have them identify details that bring the time period to life. They should be as specific as possible.
 3. In small groups have students work together to bullet-point these details.
 4. Ask each group to make a claim (a debatable statement) about the time period, supporting their claim with the details in the text. Report out to larger group
 5. In small groups again, students brainstorm what research questions the author might have asked in order to create the world portrayed in the chapter(s). Example: What was the death toll in the battle of Arras? How large was the regular U.S. Army before entry into World War One? What kind of propaganda was used to influence people's opinion about the war?
-

Research Component:

- If this is a history class, ask students to select one time period / event / historical figure you have covered or will be covering in class.
- Introduce them to resources for historical research. Please ask them to develop a bibliography that is at least half books!

- If you have an academic database available (such as Gale Virtual Reference Library or Oxford Reference) please let them know that the information they get there will be more reliable than anything they will find on a quick Google search.
 - If they are restricted to a Google search, help them learn how to evaluate websites for accuracy and balance.
 - Tell them first to take notes for strong background information on their topic.
-

Creative Writing Component:

1. Imagine a character through whose eyes you would like to experience the historical world you have researched. As an example of character building, have them throw out all the aspects of character: beliefs / mannerisms / relationships / interests / physical characteristics / class / race / gender / faults / best qualities, etc.
2. As an example, have them analyze Reg Powell as he appears in the chapters they focused on. Can they identify some of these characteristics for him?
3. Build your own character: Identify characteristics. Write a resume for him/her. Write a letter she/he might have written.
4. Have students envision a scene which places this character right in a dramatic moment in the past they have researched.
5. After writing a first draft, they can return to the idea of research questions. Remembering the kind of questions the author had to ask in order to write the scenes they read in *The Jewel and the Key*, they should brainstorm a list of questions they have to answer in order to fill in details for their own historical fiction piece.
6. Rewrite – Peer Review
7. Teacher review – give them comments on content as well as presentation!
8. Final rewrite
9. Presentations in class. Keep these relatively short. Students can read their most exciting paragraph out loud, share their most interesting research discovery, wear costumes or play music from their time period. They can turn their writing into a play and perform it with other students. Some of my students put together graphic novels and project their artwork as they present.