

BARTON

LIBRARY

Dare to know

Historical Fiction

Fiction set during a recognizable historical period.

A genre in which stories take place in the past, typically fifty years before the time of publication. Another common distinction is that the author is writing from research rather than personal experience. These books often center around imaginary characters experiencing real historical events. The story is often enriched by historically accurate details from the specific time period. The goal of historical fiction is to maintain authenticity around the time period, with a focus on accurately portraying customs, traditions, and events of the time. Author E. L. Doctorow once commented, “The historian will tell you what happened. The novelist will tell you what it felt like.” It is not uncommon in historical fiction for fictional characters to interact with real-life figures. Some stories that feature a love story could fall easily into historical romance, but true historical fiction tends to focus more heavily on the history, using it as an essential element of the storytelling rather than simply a setting for the book. Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (1819), Emma Orczy’s *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905), Thornton Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927), Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* (1928), John Dos Passos’s *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), Arturo Ustar Pietri’s *Las Lanzas Coloradas* (1931), William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon* (1940), Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Paul Scott’s *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966), and George McDonald Fraser’s *Flashman* (1969) are classic examples.

Common Elements

Authentic periods in history
Real historical places
Historical conflicts
Accurate dialogue

Vivid descriptions
Realistic characters
Plots that mix real situations and fictional events

Benefits of Reading

Makes history come alive for the reader
Immerses reader in a historical story that feels real
Allows readers to make connections between past and present that might otherwise be obscured by dry facts
Teaches readers about the successes and

mistakes of the past, and the decisions that influenced them
Helps readers to improve their understanding and assessment of past and current events, and to make better decisions for themselves

Modern Literary Examples

<i>1876</i> (1976) by Gore Vidal	Saunders
<i>Alexander, God of War</i> (2012) by Christian Cameron	<i>The Little Book</i> (2008) by Selden Edwards
<i>Alias Grace</i> (1996) by Margaret Atwood	<i>The Manningtree Witches</i> (2021) by A. K. Blakemore
<i>The Anubis Gates</i> (1983) by Tim Powers	<i>The Master of Verona</i> (2007) by David Blixt
<i>Aztec</i> (1980) by Gary Jennings	<i>Memoirs of a Geisha</i> (1997) by Arthur Golden
<i>Blood Eye</i> (2012) by Giles Kristian	<i>Men of Bronze</i> (2004) by Scott Oden
<i>The Books of Jacob</i> (2014) by Olga Tokarczuk	<i>My Name is Mary Sutter</i> (2010) by Robin Oliveira
<i>Calgaich the Swordsman</i> (1980) by Gordon D. Shirreffs	<i>The Needle in the Blood</i> (2007) by Sarah Bower
<i>Calico Palace</i> (1970) by Gwen Bristow	<i>Nick</i> (2021) by Michael F. Smith
<i>Circling the Sun</i> (2015) by Paula McLain	<i>The Nightingale</i> (2015) by Kristin Hannah
<i>Cloudsplitter</i> (1998) by Russell Banks	<i>Outlander</i> (1991) by Diana Gabaldon
<i>Courting Julia</i> (1993) by Mary Balogh	<i>The Pillars of the Earth</i> (1989) by Ken Follett
<i>The Far Pavilions</i> (1978) by M. M. Kaye	<i>A Quilt for Christmas</i> (2014) by Sandra Dallas
<i>The Flight Portfolio</i> (2019) by Julie Orringer	<i>Red Sorghum</i> (1987) by Mo Yan
<i>A Gentleman in Moscow</i> (2016) by Amor Towles	<i>The Road Beyond Ruin</i> (2019) by Gemma Liviero
<i>The Good Lord Bird</i> (2013) by James McBride	<i>She Walks in Beauty</i> (2010) by Siri Mitchell
<i>Havana</i> (2003) by Stephen Hunter	<i>Shogun</i> (1975) by James Clavell
<i>If I Never Get Back</i> (1990) by Darryl Brock	<i>Tipping the Velvet</i> (1998) by Sarah Walter
<i>Kane and Abel</i> (1979) by Jeffrey Archer	<i>The Walking Drum</i> (1984) by Louis L'Amour
<i>The Last Cherry Blossom</i> (2016) by Kathleen Burkinshaw	<i>The Witches of New York</i> (2017) by Ami McKay
<i>The Liars' Gospel</i> (2012) by Naomi Alderman	
<i>The Lincoln Highway</i> (2021) by Amor Towles	
<i>Lincoln in the Bardo</i> (2017) by George	