Unit 3 – Historical Fiction Book Clubs and Related Informational Reading: Tackling Complex Texts

Mid-November to December (Level 3 Reading Benchmark: T/U)

Welcome to the Unit

Every year Hollywood seems to split its time making blockbuster films and television shows out of two unlikely genres that at first glance might surprise you: action and historical fiction. These films consistently fill up movie theaters and viewers’ imaginations. (For real mega-blockbusters, the formula just begs to combine action and historical fiction - ala *Indian Jones.* ) It seems pretty clear why action would draw audiences - the drama, the heart-pounding edge of the seat feeling. And yet, we seem to be just as drawn to historical fiction. Historical fiction offers us the opportunity to be lifted out of ordinary lives and imagine lives of great adventure and heroism. For children, especially, it allows them to live vicariously through the eyes of historical children who act so much more grown-up, with so much more responsibility (and freedom) than they have in their fifth grade lives.

Historical fiction also creates an opportunity for you to build directly off the work your students did in this genre in fourth grade. That is, last year was their first crack at looking toward historical fiction as a genre which helps readers learn to tackle complex texts, through close reading and in the company of friends. Historical fiction is inherently complicated—it happens in a time and a place the reader has never inhabited, the characters are entangled in historical and social issues of grand significance, and the events of the story are intimately related to real historical events. And historical fiction lends itself to pushing students to read across fiction and nonfiction. You’ll teach children to turn to their nonfiction books and articles when seeking to understand more about a time period or when trying to understand a historical backdrop. Your goal is for your kids to emerge from this RWP unit of study as knowledgeable readers who have new confidence in tackling complicated literature (R 5.10).

In prior units, students learned to bring agency and intellectual independence to their reading and they strengthened their ability to study characters. Students developed more nuanced ideas about characters and began to compare characters and themes across texts. You will support students in building on and extending this work and the work of prior
years’ teaching during this unit. While your students likely studied historical fiction before, their books were likely not as complex as they are apt to be now.

The essentials of this unit closely follow the unit that was researched and documented in *Tackling Complex Texts: Historical Fiction Book Clubs* from the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading*.

**Overview**

**Essential Question:** How can I draw on all I know about reading historical fiction to rise to the challenge of reading even more complex historical fiction texts? How can I read in a way that lets me trace themes in these stories and think about the author’s craft?

- **Bend I: Deep Comprehension and Synthesis of Complex Story Elements**
  How can I help my students to get lost in the grand drama of historical fiction while also attending to the challenging work of tracing setting, plot, and characters across a text? How can I develop a deeper understanding of the characters and the setting by learning about that period in time?

- **Bend II: Interpreting Complex Texts**
  How can I help my students draft and revise their interpretations based on their growing understanding of both the story and the interpretation itself?

- **Bend II: Becoming More Complex Because We Read**
  How can I almost write the story of my own reading—noticing things in the text that perhaps no one else notices, thinking and questioning what I see, letting nonfiction spark new ideas.

Bend One focuses on deep comprehension and synthesis of complex story elements, as well as on launching book clubs with high levels of engagement and independence. With support from a book club, readers will re-use strategies from the past and perhaps learn new ones in order to keep track of (often multiple) plotlines, of unfamiliar characters, and of shifts in time and place. Like synthesis, envisioning too will hold new challenges, in part because they are reading higher level books than last year. Because the time, place, and political circumstances mentioned in their historic novels may be unfamiliar and because the setting is more than a passive backdrop and contributes so actively to the plot, and the expectation of many books at these higher middle grade levels is that students will learn about a time period through reading, readers will need help, from the very start of their historic fiction novels, to see and feel the worlds of their stories. Bend Two focuses on
interpretation, especially on paying attention to perspective and point of view, and on carrying ideas across a text. There is also a new emphasis for fifth graders this year to look closely at the author’s use of craft and structure as vessels for meaning (RL 5.5 & 5.6). Eventually, you’ll want to teach children to compare and contrast these stories “on their approaches to similar themes and topics” (RL 5.9). Bend Three helps readers move across texts, both fiction and nonfiction, developing readers’ thematic understanding and potential as social activists. You’ll teach children to turn to their nonfiction books and articles when seeking to understand more about a time period or when trying to understand a historical backdrop. Then too, you’ll teach them that after reading nonfiction we take a fresh look at the theories we’ve developed about our stories and see implications for living our present lives from what we have learned about the past.

CCSS / LS Standards Addressed in this Unit

This unit addresses many standards, but there are few that we want to especially highlight. The first is that students will again be determining themes in their stories from details in the text, including how characters respond to challenges, the work of Standard 5.2. In addition, as the unit will immerse students in reading across a genre, they will have multiple opportunities to compare and contrast characters within a text and across texts as well as themes across texts. Thus, this unit addresses standard 5.3 and 5.9, which expect this deep compare and contrast work from your fifth graders. There is also, as mentioned, a new emphasis for fifth graders this year to look closely at the author’s use of craft and structure as vessels for meaning, the work expected by standards RL 5.5 & 5.6. And, as in all units, students will be expected to deeply ground their thinking in text evidence. Across the unit students will be explaining what texts say explicitly as well as drawing inferences and quoting to support their points, the work of Standard 5.1.

Getting Ready

As you get ready to teach this unit, you will want to make sure that your students have lots of historical fiction books at their instructional reading levels. You will also want to make sure that there are enough nonfiction articles to support cross genre reading for deeper comprehension of the texts and you’ll want to do some prep work to make sure clubs are established before beginning the unit. The following guidelines may be useful as you prepare for this unit:

- Gather historical fiction books at different levels for clubs
Gather Historical Fiction Books at Different Levels

Before beginning this unit of study, the most important question is: do you have enough historical fiction books so that students can read books at the appropriate level, and make choices about what they read? All our studies, and those of Richard Allington, show that students need to be reading with high volume and high interest all of the time—and we know that interest and choice go hand-in-hand. This means that within the unit, you'll need enough books at your children’s just-right levels so that they can still choose books they want to read. Don’t put a reader in books that he or she cannot read or doesn’t want to read just so that the reader can “be in the unit.” Be particularly thoughtful of the needs of your struggling readers. Even more than others, these students need to be reading a lot, and they need to read books that they find fascinating. So first, look at your book choices and do everything possible to gather many titles at various levels. You will also need to do some good book talks about the books that you have available, so you can lure your children to them. We included some “time travel” books, such as Magic Tree House, so as to make available more lower level books for students. The American Girl historical fiction novels, with their accompanying nonfiction texts, are also good choices.

If possible, you’ll want to create sets for your readers of books on a time period and include some lower level texts so that readers can develop background understanding and vocabulary of the time period before tackling more complex novels. So if you have a group reading about World War Two, in addition to books like The Upstairs Room, The Devil’s Arithmetic, Daniel’s Story, and Snow Treasure, you might also include a few picture books like The Butterfly, A Cello for Mr. O, and Rose Blanche, as well. You can refer to the list of historical fiction categorized by time period on our website to help you to make these sets.

If you are lucky enough to be reading this write-up with time to sort, sift, order and trade, you might consider shaking up your library a bit. Perhaps find out which books were used a lot by your school’s fourth grade team, if they taught this unit last year, and make sure those are placed in a special section in your library, calling students’ attention to the old favorites. Some students won’t have been able to read them independently last year, but will be able to now, and might be thrilled to test their new muscles with these familiar
texts. You might consider putting in a book order - whether books for purchase or through the library system - to bring in titles that are new (or at least new to the students!). You might consider swapping books with another classroom - or perhaps even a colleague at another school - if you know fresh books might just be what your students need most.

Collect Some Nonfiction Materials on the Time Periods the Clubs will Be Studying

This unit will also help you to teach children how to read across fiction and nonfiction. You’ll teach children to turn to their nonfiction books and articles when seeking to understand more about a time period or when trying to understand a historical backdrop. Then too, you’ll teach them that after reading nonfiction we take a fresh look at the theories we’ve developed about our stories, asking: “What might I have misunderstood?” or “What more do I understand about this character’s experiences and actions now?” With the support of multiple texts on the same time period, children will be able to “determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases” (CCSS RI 5.4), “compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g. chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts” (RI 4.5) and “Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent” (RI 5.6).

If possible, you’ll want each book club to have a text set containing multilevel books dealing with their one historical era, so that easier texts may introduce an era and scaffold the understanding of the harder texts set in the same era. Of course, you’ll also fall back on your previous assessment notes on individual readers to ascertain that books in each club’s text sets conform to the reading levels of the children within that club. Typically, you’d want to have at least one book in the set that is decidedly lower in level than the reading levels of the children in that club—this book may serve as a crutch for understanding the historical details referenced in the harder texts. You will want to set up inter-textual baskets of books for each book club. For the club that is reading Bud Not Buddy, for instance, you might also hand them a basket full of nonfiction texts and articles on The Great Depression.

Another option for schools which have more access to technology is to create digital baskets for students to peruse. These can be used whether students have tablets, laptops or desktops. Some teachers take time to bookmark or simply gather a page of URLs for various online resources. These might include: virtual museums, newsreel footage, powerful images, audio clips of music from different time periods, audio clips of radio shows and famous speeches, and video clips of documentaries or news broadcasts (RI 5.7).

Across the unit, you will want to take advantage of opportunities to support students in moving across fiction and nonfiction. You will want to teach children when to consult the
nonfiction books that make up their text sets. Here are a few possibilities for when to consult nonfiction:

- When we have questions about a place, event, person or issues in our club books we can scan the table of contents and index to see if our nonfiction books can help us get the answers to our questions.
- When hitting roadblocks trying to visualize a time or place, nonfiction video and audio clips can help us make more concrete images in our minds.
- When as a club we can't understand why people are treated a certain way, rules that govern the people or roles that certain characters in our books have, we can consult our nonfiction books to gain a deeper understanding of the context around the characters and how that might influence what is occurring in the story.
- When issues of religion, gender, race, class and culture confuse us we can consult our nonfiction books.
- When a character’s decisions actions, behaviors and motivations leave us wondering, we might think that he or she is constrained by the time period in which she or he is living so we would want to read up on these constraints.
- When we see evidence of power and we don’t know why one person has more power than others, we might want to research the time period in which they are living to see if we can get information that might help us understand who has the power and why they have it.

**Choose Your Read Aloud(s)**

During this unit of study, you will want to read aloud a variety of historical fiction and informational texts. Several times throughout the unit, you’ll want to provide opportunities for engaging students in studying sections of text closely, rereading key parts of the text, summarizing the text and discussing their thinking, referring explicitly to the text for evidence. You will want to pose questions which ask the students to reconsider the text and move to high-levels of comprehension, synthesizing and interpreting the text and analyzing it through speaking and writing. (The TCRWP’s Teaching Toward the Demands of the Common Core will offer examples of these kinds of questions and support you in developing your own.) Close reading provides the opportunity to study a shorter section of text, analyzing and discussing its nuances. This will be a perfect complement to your longer read-alouds, which allows for the opportunity to discuss thinking across a broader swath of text.

The published unit uses Lois Lowry's gripping and moving *Number the Stars*. To us, this beautiful and powerful story is the perfect choice for fifth graders. The level of interpretation that can be done with this text is limitless and the content is mature. The Lexile Level of this book is 670L, which places it around a third grade level. We stand by the
Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
Reading Curricular Calendar, Fifth Grade, 2014-2015
Unit Three - Historical Fiction Book Clubs and Related Informational Reading: Tackling Complex Texts

...idea that the emotionally mature content of this book and the high level reading work that can be done make it a complex text for fifth graders. And know that Fountas and Pinnell have leveled it as guided reading level U. That said, if your fourth grade colleagues taught historical fiction last year, they might have also used this text as a read aloud. You will want to check in with them on this. If you find that your fourth grade team did use the text, this definitely does not preclude you from using this powerful text! On the contrary, the students having prior experience will very likely help them to now move past focusing on simply following the plot and making predictions. We encourage you to name for your students that you have chosen this text precisely because they did read it last year. But this year, as fifth graders, they will be looking at it with a stronger, deeper sense, watching it in much the same way as anyone who has watched a movie before becomes an expert on it and can say so much more than someone who has only viewed it once. Of course, you might also decide that you would prefer to use a different text - whether it’s because you have another favorite historical fiction novel, or else you simply prefer to offer your students variety. If you decide to go with that option, you might want to make sure your chosen text includes some of the same elements of complex characters, layered meaning, and finely wrought craft and structure.

We also suggest that you might read some picture books so that students can practice comparing and contrasting how authors approach similar themes and topics as a class. Here are some picture books about World War II that we especially recommend, which nicely complement Number the Stars:

- The Butterfly by Polacco
- Rose Blanche by Innocenti
- The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Demark by Deedy
- Star of Fear, Star of Hope by Hoestlandt
- The Cats in Krasinski Square by Watson

Plan to use your read-alouds to anchor this unit. If you decide to have students reading books from a variety of time periods, your class read-aloud could also switch time periods.

You’ll want to seize the power of read aloud to tackle difficult skill work head-on. Read not only historical fiction but nonfiction, urging children to make connections and talk across the two. Engage the class in dose readings of critical passages, mining the author’s words for ideas and new understandings. Teach children to think not just about the story, but about the author’s intent. You might start read aloud with a small snippet from a book and then pause to ask, ‘Why did the author just do that? What does he or she want us to know, think, feel?’

Duplicate with permission only.
Please contact permissions@readingandwritingproject.com
DRAFT 2014-2015 ©
Read aloud is also an important time to support accountable talk. Help children talk longer and stronger about ideas, to listen more intently, and to cite evidence as they build theories. In turn-and-talk you might say things like:

- “So the main character is facing a big problem. Turn and talk to your club how you think she may try to solve it.” (prediction, interpretation, intertextuality)
- “Hmm, I’m thinking that if I were this character in this situation, I might have done something different. Stop and jot what you would do. Keep in mind what you know about that time.” (interpretation, envisioning, accumulating the text)
- “So far we’ve gathered a lot of details about the setting! Stop and jot how you think the setting is affecting the main character.” (determining importance, interpretation)
- “How do you think what just happened will affect the character? Turn and tell your partner.” (prediction)
- “How does this situation compares to other experiences or situations we’ve read about?” (intertextuality)

Establish Clubs Prior to the Unit Starting

You’ll want to continue book clubs in your room this month. If you established clubs in the last part of the previous unit, you may decide to keep the same clubs working together. Or, you might decide based on your assessments of students and observations during the previous unit, to re-organize your clubs. In the days before this unit begins, pay attention to which students you think could work together well. You’ll want the students who read at around the same instructional levels to be together in clubs but you’ll also want to take friendships and other aspects into account (if at all possible). Keep in mind that you will want all this work of establishing clubs to be settled before the official launch of the unit so that students can devote their valuable reading time to doing just that!

Prepare to Support Students’ Abilities to Handle Increasingly Complex Texts

Throughout this unit, you’ll want to make sure you continue to bolster children’s growing abilities to handle increasingly complex text. This unit is designed to support that work—just make sure that students are in books that represent the point of opportunity for them. Matching readers to books doesn’t mean that they’re all reading easy-as-pie texts, nor, of course, does it mean that students are struggling through texts that are too difficult without support. It means that they’re encountering that magical mix of challenge and support that ensures engagement. You will probably want to talk up the fact that reading clubs provide readers with the group solidarity that allows each member to aspire to grow, reaching toward more ambitious goals. One way to do this is to be willing to tackle texts that are more complex and nuanced than the ones read before.
If you are moving some readers into challenging texts, in addition to the support of a club, you can also provide those readers with book introductions, film versions of the start of a book, or background information on the time period given in the form of oral storytelling. Often parents are willing to help out by reading a few chapters aloud to a reader and talking deeply about them—this is very helpful at the start of a book, especially. Parents can help also simply by reading the same book, in sync with a reader, and talking with great interest about the book.

**Participate in Your Own Adult Book Club**

The unit is organized so that children are in the frequent company of friends, reading shared historical fiction from a particular era with support from a book club. In order to support your children to engage deeply in book club conversations, we encourage you to participate in your own adult reading club before the start or alongside this unit, giving yourself and your colleagues an insider’s perspective on the work that you are asking children to do. Use this unit as an excuse to pick up that new historical fiction book you’ve been dying to read, whether it’s Avi’s latest for middle grade readers or Phillipa Gregory for adults, and gather a few friends to read and discuss it with.

**Assessment**

You probably will want to engage in formative assessments, using these to inform your teaching. It is invaluable to spend some time at the start of the unit to do some informal assessments. The data from such assessments have helped teachers’ learn from their students’ work and plan or tweak the plans for the unit, right from the start. You have options for how to collect this data. You might study students’ independent jotting about their books, looking to see what they already know about character work and making larger interpretations as well as analyzing craft and structure. You might give one of the Informal Reading Literature Assessment available on Treasure Chest to schools who work with the Project closely. These are aligned to specific CCSS standards and allow you to assess students’ thinking about reading at their own independent reading levels. Another option is to embed questions within a read aloud which address work you want to target in this unit. So for example, you might read aloud a historical fiction book that falls within the higher end of the four-five text complexity band, perhaps at a level T or U. As you read a part of the book aloud plan for places where you’ll prompt children to stop and jot.

“Why did the author include this setting/quote/description/etc.?” you might begin. “Write a bit about your ideas and don’t forget to give evidence from the text to support it!” And
later, “What might the theme or lesson of this story be? How did the author show this?” Collect these prompted responses and assess them using the Reading Literature Learning Progression. What level are your students on their ability to interpret? You may decide, also, to use the “Analyzing Word Choice, Structure, Point of View” strands to assess students’ understanding of authors’ choices. These continua will help you place children at a specific level, and provide ideas for what students must do to move to higher levels.

After you have collected your children’s responses, you may then lay them alongside the Reading Literature Learning Progression and assess students’ written responses using the progression as a guide. At the end of the unit, you’ll likely plan to repeat this same assessment (or a similar one) to measure student growth. Likely, you will find the “Growing Ideas about Characters and Relationships”, “Making Larger Interpretations”, and “Analyzing Word Choice, Structure, and Point of View” strands helpful to you.

Let’s look for example at a slice of the progression for assessing “Making Larger Interpretations”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When the author seems to want me to think about a deeper meaning or message, I almost hear “Ding, ding, ding,” and I pause to think, “What’s the author trying to say about life?” These parts often come when a character makes a choice, realizes something big, etc.</td>
<td>Right from the start, I read well-written literature expecting that the text will have something important to say about life. When the character responds to challenges, makes choices, experiences realizations or seems to change, I’m especially apt to grow ideas. I look closely at a key moment, a quote, a choice, a reoccurring image, etc. and think whether that bit is part of a pattern. I know that big meaning can live in parts of the text that are small and that the details can reflect the whole. I test my tentative thoughts as I read, looking for parts that confirm or challenge my thoughts. I can talk or write about an idea, supporting my thinking with exact details and examples from the text.</td>
<td>Even as texts get more complicated, I can find parts that signal deeper meanings and messages. As I encounter new details my thinking evolves. My ideas shift to encompass all parts of the text. I can think, discuss and write about the role of key parts of the story in conveying larger messages. I can say how these parts, key moments, etc. fit together to convey ideas and I can cite evidence to support my thinking. I can entertain different ideas I am getting from a text as I read. As I read, text cause me to wonder things about people, life and these are questions that are not always ones that can be answered.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After encountering parts of the text that make me think about the theme, I read on, following that idea across the text as I read. I can talk or write about the idea, supporting my thinking with exact details and examples from the text.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Duplicate with permission only.
Please contact permissions@readingandwritingproject.com

DRAFT 2014-2015 ©
You may also decide to ask students to write an interpretive literary essay about that historical fiction text, in which they write about and develop a big idea. If you need to be more directive, prompt them to write about what the text is really about, about life lessons the text is teaching, making sure to support their ideas with clear evidence from the text. You'll have a great ‘before teaching’ story to contrast with your ‘after teaching’ story. This data will then help you think about how to take your students from where they are to where they need to be. See pages 22-25 in Volume II of Tackling Complex Texts for a details about the framework for assessing literary essays.

This assessment will be particularly useful for you because there are several ways that this unit can and does overlap with the fourth grade historical fiction unit. You will want to know what places you will want to reinforce with additional teaching to shore up places they still need to work on from last year, and other places where you can build off of their strong foundation and move more quickly into more challenging and complex fifth grade (perhaps even higher!) skills and concepts.

**Bend I: Deep Comprehension and Synthesis of Complex Story Elements and Parts**

The big goal for Bend One is for readers to be able to read complex texts with deep comprehension, with support from a book club to keep track of multiple plotlines, many characters and shifts in time and place. Readers will also investigate the special role of setting in their historical fiction novels to inform their understanding of the story. Additionally, they will learn to accumulate and synthesize details and use essential reading tools such as timelines, graphic organizers, lists of characters, and so on.

You might start this by taking a part of your read aloud book and putting it up on the document camera to study it closely, asking your students to read and reread the text together. We suggest you teach them to notice the words the author chose to describe a character or place. Instruct them to pay attention to the feeling, mood or tone of the event and change their voices to match this, thinking about how and why the author created that mood. Parts of the text can be read and reread pulling on information learned earlier to understand what is really happening. You will also want to show students how two parts can be closely studied side by side to bring out change, revision of thinking, and that they can synthesize these parts to see a new possibility or a different perspective.

If you opted to stay with *Number the Stars* and a focus on WWII, one way to start this work would be to begin with a picture book such as Roberto Innocenti’s *Rose Blanche*. As you read (and analyze the pictures), you’ll teach your students to really synthesize the clues.
about what kind of place this is. That means not only identifying the place and time (a small
town in Germany during World War II), but also paying attention to details that clue the
reader in to what kind of place it is—what the mood or atmosphere is. In *Rose Blanche*, for
instance, the town is beginning to have trucks full of soldiers, and the streets are becoming
crowded and dangerous, and there are flags with swastikas on every building. You point
out a few, especially revealing details, saying, “The author could have included any details,
but he chose details like *old, broken toys* and *the soldiers won't slow down* to reveal
something to us. Let’s think about why the author might have included those details. What
might he be trying to let us know about this place?” You can guide your students to see that
the mood is oppressive and scary to the narrator, Rose. If your students did similar work
last year, or are simply ready for more, you might push that thinking by having them start
to think about the relationship between all aspects of setting (place, time, mood) and
themes or messages the text is putting forward.

Readers who have had a steady diet of realistic fiction often let the settings in their novels
fly by them. If you picture the setting in *Wonder*, for example, there’s a classroom, a
bedroom, a kitchen, but none of it ever plays an especially important role in the novel. This
is especially true for readers who are not yet reading at 5th grade level. The settings in N-
O-P-Q books also tend to be fairly static. Wayside School is described once at the start of
the story, but the place itself does not undergo major developments as the plot of the book
unfolds. Instead, the setting provides the backdrop. Then, too, in books below levels P or Q,
the story could often be transplanted to a different setting without the entire plotline
changing. Once readers progress to higher levels of text difficulty, the settings often become
less familiar and more dynamic and also more essential to the story. In more complicated
texts, though, especially stories in the R-S-T band and above, the setting becomes
significant. It may even function as part of the problem that a character has to overcome—
sometimes by leaving altogether, such as in stories that describe Jewish families escaping
the Holocaust or Irish people migrating to a new land because of the famine. A natural
disaster, or invasion by a hostile enemy, might change the setting completely. The setting
may operate at a symbolic level, too: the dust of the prairie may mean more than simply
that the land is dry. In the U-V-W band and above, there might also an expectation that
readers have some literary background, so some have settings which rely on students’
prior knowledge (literary or otherwise), or else their ability to look outside the text for
more information.

Apart from teaching your students to be alert for clues about the physical setting, you
might also want to explore the setting as an emotional space as the story progresses,
particularly those readers who are reading books at those higher bands of text difficulty. Is
this the kind of town where people are good to each other or where groups fear and
mistrust each other? Is it a place that is on the brink of change or that has been swept up in
a war? What is the mood of this place?
Then too, you'll teach readers to pay attention to descriptive, transitional passages that tell about daily life—for example, about how a character gets from one place to another. You'll teach that these can't be bypassed because they often reveal a great deal about the world in which the story is set. Readers need to infer all that is implicit in what is given to them. Part of this involves reading with attentiveness not just to the concrete facts of the setting, but to tone and mood. Readers should come to realize that nothing that happens in a story is included accidentally. If the lightning flashes and the dark clouds rumble, the impending storm is included in the story for a purpose, and readers profit from thinking, "Why might the author have made it storm just now? What am I supposed to be thinking?" These will be new questions for your readers. They'll emerge from their study of settings more prepared to tackle the complex shifts in settings in any novel. You may want to refer to session I in Volume I of *Tackling Complex Texts* starting on page 2 to support your teaching of this work. You might begin frame a teaching point along these lines, "Readers here's the thing: all of you already know what the setting is in a story. It's the place where the story, or scene, happens. But today, I want to teach you that in historical fiction, because the setting will be inevitably unfamiliar to us, we have to really pay attention not just to what the place looks like, but what it feels like- not just its physical details but its emotional atmosphere."

As students read further in their books, they will encounter shifts in the setting and it will be important for them to compare and contrast the physical and psychological elements of these places. This will also help students do the work, outlined in the Common Core State Standards, of comparing and contrasting “two or more characters, settings, or events in a story...drawing on specific details in the text.”

You’ll likely want to coach into clubs right away. That’s because no single reader will notice as much, or synthesize as many details, as a small group of readers. So, as you did in earlier club units, you'll coach your students to listen carefully to each other, build on each other’s comments, and honor relationships so that every club member feels valued. You might teach this work by saying, "Readers, as we begin to invent ideas about reading clubs, I want to also teach you that it’s important in any club, to take care of relationships within that club. We do that by making sure that we’re creating work, where each member will feel a part of something important, and where each member will always feel supported by the group.” Session II starting on page 28 in Volume I of *Tackling Complex Texts*, offers further information about teaching this lesson. (Be sure to check out the chart, "Playing Your Part In Deep Club Talk" on page 43 in Volume I in *Tackling Complex Texts*, for some great
“Readers, as we begin to invent ideas about reading clubs, I want to also teach you that it’s important in any club, to take care of relationships within that club. We do that by making sure that we’re creating work, where each member will feel a part of something important, and where each member will always feel supported by the group.”

As students are gathering up key details about the setting to grow theories about the role of the places within their texts, you might see them overlooking details about characters. If this is the case, you’ll likely want to remind your students that historical fiction, from the very first page, presents the reader with a tremendous amount of crucial information not only about the kind of place the story is set, but also about the kind of people who will occupy the story. In these novels, as in all good novels, details matter. If you learn something on page two, or in Chapter One, it’s because you’re going to need it later in the story. Historical fiction, at the levels at which your children are probably reading, moves swiftly. Readers need to gather a lot of information quickly. And so you’ll teach your readers to accumulate and synthesize details. You’ll want to teach your readers some strategies for quickly synthesizing details and that they can pin these to an imaginary “felt board” where they can keep track of all the incoming information. You might say something like, “Specifically, I want to teach you that when grown-ups in my book club and I begin reading our historical fiction books, we found ourselves almost tacking up information we’d need to know on mental bulletin boards. At the start of our books, there was so much information flying past us as we read that we felt as if a lot of our mind work was spent catching the important stuff and almost sorting it so that we began to grasp the who, what, where, when, and why of the book.”

“Specifically, I want to teach you that when grown-ups in my book club and I begin reading our historical fiction books, we found ourselves almost tacking up information we’d need to know on mental bulletin boards. At the start of our books, there was so much information flying past us as we read that we felt as if a lot of our mind work was spent catching the important stuff and almost sorting it so that we began to grasp the who, what, where, when, and why of the book.”

You may find it helpful to show a short film clip, such as the trailer for the film adaptation The Book Thief, to demonstrate to readers how much information is usually given at the start of a historical fiction text. Right away, information about multiple important characters, their world and way of life, and the challenges and conflicts they face is thrown at the reader. Some readers who need extra support in this work find that talking about a film clip helps them visualize while also raising their engagement and their ability to pay attention to detail, and they can bring this experience of visualizing and engagement then to their books.
Here are some questions/prompts that you might teach club members to use to support this work:

- How has the author created mood through setting details?
- How does the change in the settings affect the mood, or tone, of the story?
- Why has the author included these details?
- What can you tell about this society from this passage?
- Which detail from the story best helps you understand why ________ (a character) displays______ (a particular response/emotion)?
- Why does the author most likely include __ in the story?
- What message does the author get across to readers through______ (character’s responses)?
- An important contrast in the story is between...

(You can see TCRWP’s Teaching Toward the Demands of the CCSS, available to schools who work with the Project closely, for more examples of questions.)

As your readers begin to realize the sort of details that matter most in their stories, they’ll also begin to notice gaps in their knowledge, perhaps from places where time moves fast or where there are flashbacks. Essential reading tools such as time lines, graphic organizers, and lists of characters, which your readers may not have needed for a time, now become important tools again. This is key, because one thing you’ll be teaching is that good readers don’t wait for a teacher to tell them how to use their comprehension strategies. Strong readers know that as their books get harder, they have to work harder, and you want to ensure that they know how to do this. A reading curriculum, like a writing curriculum, spirals. As students move up levels into harder books, they’ll find that they need to consciously harness comprehension strategies that were helpful to them in the past. You’ll model much of that crucial reading work, showing your students how to use multiple strategies to make sense of what they are reading. You’ll remind them to use their pencils as they read. You’ll remind them that sometimes they’ll need to reread on the run, (which they worked on making a habit of mind in fourth grade), so that they can more easily tackle the kinds of complicated texts that face them this year. But, you will also likely need to teach them that in some of the higher levels of texts (levels R and higher), rereading doesn’t always help. Sometime the only way to make sense of all that is happening in a text is by reading forward. Often, with more text under our belts, things that were confusing at first become clear. For example, in the first chapter of Number the Stars, we don’t really know why are first the girls are so frightened of the soldiers. No amount of rereading would have helped that. The only way we can figure out the reasons for their fear is by reading forward.

Timelines will be particularly important. In historical fiction, it’s often useful to create a timeline of historical events, as well as a timeline of pivotal moments for the main
character. That way, you and your readers can begin to analyze the relationship between the main character and historical events. When does history affect the main character, and vice versa? It’s important for historical fiction readers to understand that the characters exist in a relationship with history. Ultimately, this understanding will help readers with any complex novel, as characters never exist in a vacuum, but are always affected by the social pressures, community norms, and forces around them. Historical fiction novels simply require readers to wrap our minds around a greater volume of context. There is the personal story of the main character, the subplots of side characters and the historical backdrop of an era, all with their own changing time lines. It is not always clear at the outset that these different timelines bear any connection to each other or that they are intertwined.

We at the TCRWP suggest you’ll want to teach readers new to this genre (and especially those new to texts at Levels P-Q and beyond) how to keep track of several simultaneously unfolding time lines or plots. To help readers see that they need to synthesize across the text and be aware of how time works in the story, you might say something like, “Today I want to teach you that when skilled readers read any complex story, and especially when we read historical fiction, we are aware that time is one of the elements in the story that is often complex. Specifically, we are aware that the spotlight of the story is continually not on the here and now. Sometimes the story harkens back to events that have already occurred, earlier in the story or even before the story began” (You may also want to refer to session IV starting on page 70 in Volume I of Tackling Complex Texts for further information on how to make readers aware of the element of time).

The sample student work on page 87 in Volume I of Tackling Complex Texts is a great example of a mental model that students used to keep track of the time element in their stories. On pages 94 and 95 in Volume I, you will find many examples of times lines created by students as they not only plotted the personal timeline of the characters in their stories but also the historical timelines.

Next, readers are probably ready to start thinking about the point of view of the main character, which may be radically different than the reader’s point of view. That is, the main character experiences the world differently than the reader. So it’s critical to be able to suspend our own judgments, and then try to compare and analyze how and why the main character behaves the way he or she does. When we realize that the soldier who stops Annemarie and Ellen from running in the street is a Nazi, and that Ellen is Jewish, and that he is not their local friendly policeman, we are able to understand why Ellen is speechless with fear in the first scene, and how brave Annemarie is to stand up to the soldier - because we are understanding it from her perspective. The reader has to separate his or her own perspective and frame of reference from that of the character—a skill emphasized in the Common Core State Standards. You might let readers know about this critical work in
Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
Reading Curricular Calendar, Fifth Grade, 2014-2015
Unit Three - Historical Fiction Book Clubs and Related Informational Reading: Tackling Complex Texts

perspective by saying, “Readers try to understand the decisions characters make, and we do this in part by keeping in mind that the character’s behavior is shaped by what is happening in the world in which the character lives, that is, by the historical context. And here’s the thing: When different characters respond differently to one event, it is helpful to readers to muse about this, asking ‘Why?’ Usually, when different characters act differently this reflects the fact that each of those characters plays a different role in the world and therefore is shaped differently by the times.”

“Readers try to understand the decisions characters make, and we do this in part by keeping in mind that the character’s behavior is shaped by what is happening in the world in which the character lives, that is, by the historical context. And here’s the thing: When different characters respond differently to one event, it is helpful to readers to muse about this, asking ‘Why?’ Usually, when different characters act differently this reflects the fact that each of those characters plays a different role in the world and therefore is shaped differently by the times.”

For further support to teach this lesson, see session VI starting on page 104 in Volume I of *Tackling Complex Texts*.

Students may also begin to discuss how the story might have been told differently if it were being told by a different character and this is the work that the Standards expect of fifth graders when they are asked to consider how who the narrator is shapes how events are told. Building on what they already know—that texts will be told very differently when they are told by a character within the story or a removed outsider—you will then help them to see that the choice of who tells the story is a deliberate one made by the author and for good reason (CCSS RL 5.6). How would *Number the Stars* be different if it were told by Annemarie herself or by Ellen? What would be changed? What would be lost or gained in those different choices? You might craft a teaching point like, “Today I want to teach you that who tells the story affects how it is told. One way to think about how the choice of narrator influences the telling of the story is to consider how the story might have been told differently if it were being told by someone else—one of the other characters, perhaps. You can reread a scene and ask, ‘How might this scene have been told differently if it were told by a different narrator? What details might have been included/excluded? What is gained or lost by the author choosing this narrator to tell the scene?’”

“Today I want to teach you that who tells the story affects how it is told. One way to think about how the choice of narrator influences the telling of the story is to consider how the story might have been told differently if it were being told by someone else—one of the other characters, perhaps. You can reread a scene and ask, ‘How might this scene have been told differently if it were told by a different narrator?’”

Here are some questions you might coach students to ask themselves or others to consider how the way a scene is told might be influenced by the narrator.
Analyze How Who the Narrator is Influences the Telling of the Story

- If a different perspective was used to present this scene, what details might have been included/excluded? Why?
- If a different perspective was used to present this scene, how might the mood and tone of the scene be different? Why?
- If a different perspective was used to present the scene, how might the reader understand things differently?
- What might be gained or lost by the author choosing *this* narrator to tell the scene/presenting this scene through *this* perspective? Why might the author have made this choice?

As students begin to analyze the point of view of their characters, these are the first steps that they will take toward coming to understand the likely point of view of the author who crafted this story. If you have decided to use film clips throughout this unit, a great share session to work on this concept is to have students reconsider the camera angle of the first clip they saw. What if the camera was focused on another character. What would the viewer see? How would that change the story? Have the students ‘direct in-the-air’ to imagine what that film clip would look like.

Bend II: Interpreting Complex Texts

As children are now reading with attentiveness to setting, empathizing with characters in their historical fiction novels and noticing their complexity, they will now be able to embark upon the heady intellectual work of interpretation in Bend Two. They will begin to linger in texts, alert to details that will help them see how themes are revealed. It’s easy for children to get caught up in the action of historical fiction, and the alluring settings, but you’ll want to teach them that just as the realistic fiction books they’ve read are about more than just plot, so are historical fiction books. Students will need to look beyond what’s happening to uncover the ideas and themes that underlie the books they read during this unit, especially as these books become more complex. In this part of the unit, you’ll teach your students that reading is about drafting and revising ideas. You’ll do this work with your students first within one text, then across texts, and finally between texts and their lives. You’ll teach your readers to grow nuanced ideas and to read to be changed by the new worlds and characters we encounter.

As a fifth grade teacher, you are well aware of how much independence and agency are the cornerstone of all learning this year. The work in this bend is no different. It’s crucial to understand that this interpretation work is not about teaching kids to recite back an idea that a teacher gives them. You will not tell them “the theme” of a book or send them off to
seek evidence for an idea they did not develop themselves. You will not skip the hard intellectual work that kids need to do to grapple with themes. Instead, your goal is that your students learn to articulate significant ideas about their books, that they learn to revise those ideas on their own, and that they learn to reconsider, elaborate on, and defend those ideas in the company of other readers.

You’ll begin the interpretation work in this TCRWP unit, therefore, by teaching your students to author their own responses. Too often, in too many places, kids are taught that they don’t matter in the curriculum. Not here. Not in your classroom. You’ll teach your students that what they bring to texts matters. You’ll show them that what they notice in texts is intricately related to their personal and ethical concerns, to the history they bring to the page. You may also reveal how your history informs your own reading response, showing how you sometimes read as a big sister or sometimes as a victim of bullying or sometimes as an expert on a historical time period. Your students don’t need to know this, but you’ll be depending on the reading response theories of Louise Rosenblatt. You’ll teach that the meaning of a text lies between the book and the reader. It exists in the union of the words on the page and the mind reading those words. What really matters is that your kids learn that they matter—that what they bring to reading shapes their understanding.

As you teach this first lesson, you’ll emphasize that just as no one can tell a reader what or how to think about a story, there is no “right” idea about a story. Each reader brings his or her own history to a book, so that what you might think is important, such as how Annemarie struggles to be a good friend, might be different than what I focus on, such as that she is a better friend than she is a sister. I might notice that because I too struggle to be a decent sibling—it feels harder than being a loyal friend. It’s crucial to teach your students that their own responses and feelings matter. Otherwise, they’ll be waiting for you to tell them what to think! Session VIII starting on page 2 in Volume II of *Tackling Complex Texts* is a great resource to support your teaching. Further you will find several examples of student responses that reflect what readers notice and respond to in their books.

If you notice your students are just racing through the books without much thought, you’ll probably then want to teach a lesson where you encourage your readers to pause as they read, lingering in certain passages—usually the extra dramatic or surprising ones, where they feel as if there is a sense that what is happening now is connected to other parts of the story or could be tremendously important to the character’s development. It’s almost as if those parts of the story are written in bold. Readers linger in those parts, jot about them, reread them with their clubs, compare their thinking, connect them to other parts, and have long discussions about them again and again. Often readers come away from certain passages with big ideas they are going to carry with them for the rest of the book.
You can expect your readers, once they have some big ideas, to need support in grounding those ideas in details. So again, you’ll teach your readers that in good books, details matter, and that perceptive readers accumulate and string together details. It matters, for instance, that Annemarie finds a Star of David imprinted in her palm after clutching Ellen’s necklace to hide it from the German soldiers. As your readers begin to follow ideas, they can keep track of details that support those ideas, and details that lead them to related ideas as well. They’ll learn to be extra alert readers, just as alert fans notice so much more at a baseball game than do inexperienced viewers. You’ll teach your readers to almost wear special lenses as they develop ideas—lenses that help them maintain a focus on some of those ideas as they read. They’ll keep those ideas—those interpretations—in mind as they read, thinking, “Ah yes!” or “Huh? That doesn’t fit.” Perhaps they will want to jot themselves notes about the lenses they plan to read with each day. That way, clubs won’t end up losing track of their ideas, or losing their focus. This is a great time to again study the Reading Literature Learning Progression, perhaps focusing on the Making Larger Interpretations strand. Students might jot their ideas about larger meanings they are starting to see conveyed in their books and study their responses against the progression, supporting each other in raising the level of their work.

The main goal of this part of the TCRWP unit is for kids to value their own ideas about books and then hold onto these as they read, grounding them in details, deepening them, and sharing them with others. But it’s important, too, that children remain open to new ideas. We want them to be able to widen their thinking, not holding so steadfastly to one or two ideas that they cannot embrace changing thoughts and interpretations as they push further into their books. So we suggest that you end this part by teaching your students that good stories are about more than one idea, and that to read a book with complexity is to be open to a journey of thought, not just a single thought. You’ll also want to nudge kids to revise their understandings as these change. Too often, young readers may reject or ignore parts of the story that don’t fit an idea they came up with early on. So you’ll teach them that it’s okay to change their minds as you read and as they listen to the ideas of their fellow book club members. Thoughtful readers keep our horizons open as we read, and we use conversation as well as our individual observations to broaden our understanding (You can see session XII starting on page 86 in Volume II of Tackling Complex Texts for further support in teaching this lesson). You might say to your readers, “Today I want to teach you that although it is really important to fashion ideas and to care about them, it’s also important to be open to new ideas. You don’t want to read, or to talk, like you are determined not to let your mind budge even an inch. One reason to talk and to read, both, is to learn. In a good book, as in a good conversation, you can feel your thinking being changed.” (You can see session XII starting on page 86 in Volume II of Tackling Complex Texts for further support in teaching this lesson.)
Another piece you will likely want to spend some time teaching into, you likely visited during the first bend in this unit: the role of author’s craft and structure. Much of the first bend in the unit was about the beginning of the book - those first few pages or chapters and how they fit into the body of the text as a whole. You might have even had conversations with students during read aloud about why the author would have made the choices he or she did. Now, with your students firmly entrenched in historical fiction reading, you likely will want to explore more about authorial decisions. For example, you might say, “We’ve talked a lot about the role of beginnings in historical fiction. Today I want to teach you that those are not the only chapters that help readers deepen your understanding of books. Authors of all novels, not just historical fiction, include each chapter and order them just so for reasons. One tool for helping readers understand themes in books is to notice how the text is structured - how the chapters fit together - how the events included or not included can be signposts to deeper meaning.”

The interpretive work students do in Bend Two of historical fiction can parallel some of the work they will later do in social issues book clubs—reading to foster social justice. They can learn to raise burning questions in their book clubs about why history unfolds the way it does, how individual stories bear witness to suffering and courage, and what lessons we can take from characters’ experiences. Their jottings and conversations will grow as you coach into this synthesis work, helping them place two ideas next to each other in order to form a new, more nuanced, one. The ‘Thought Prompts’ on page 96 in Volume II of Tackling Complex Texts, can provide them support to grow their ideas. The book club work will be tremendously important here as your kids learn that their ideas are more powerful in coalition than when they work alone. Indeed, one of the most significant lessons of this RWP unit, and we hope one of the most lasting, will be that children’s greatest strength lies in building thoughts off their talk with each other.

You’ll want to facilitate such talk by providing literary language for some of the things readers are intuitively seeing in their books but can’t precisely name. You might teach readers to use allusions, figurative language, and symbolism to convey ideas that are not easily contained in ordinary language. For example, you might say, “Authors have many tools they can use to craft their stories. One of those tools is symbolism - an object or setting or something else that stands for something more thematically significant. Historical fiction is often rich with symbolism that not only points us to deeper themes in the novel's time period, but in our own time as well.” You can then teach students that
Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
Reading Curricular Calendar, Fifth Grade, 2014-2015
Unit Three - Historical Fiction Book Clubs and Related Informational Reading: Tackling Complex Texts

astute historical fiction readers, are ever on the lookout for symbols, imagery, metaphor - or anything else the author crafted, which feels significant.

Another accessible way to teach these higher level interpretation skills based on authorial intent, is to show a clip of a television show popular in your classroom or a music video. Don’t worry if it’s not historical fiction. In fact, it might be better if it’s not because the transference will be higher. One music video some RWP staff have used is “What does the fox say?” by Ylvis. It is a very strange video with dramatic changes in costume, setting and music. Students can easily spot how and when the setting changes, for example. The singer starts inside a typical house, wearing everyday clothes, then makes a shift to a dark forest, suddenly wearing a costume. Because the changes are so sudden, and evoke such a response from the viewers, it is easy for students to see the choices of the ‘author’ as well as the effects they have on the reader. Because of the drama, students don’t simply stay on retelling what they saw. Instead, they immediately jump to interpretation work. Why did this happen? What could it mean? It is a smart idea to jot down the observations students make and the questions they have during these pop culture discussions. Then, later, perhaps a day later, have the students analyze the work they did as viewers, and how they can apply these same skills as readers.

Students might be tempted to go on an “author’s craft scavenger hunt”, which can feel rather literary and fun at first, but wise teachers push past simply finding those literary moves, and guide students towards using them as breadcrumbs towards themes and messages.

Bend II: Becoming More Complex Because We Read

As now your students are becoming adept at interpretation, they will be ready to move towards developing their critical reading skills, examining the text from the lens of perspective and power, in Bend Three. In this final bend, students will be developing ideas across books, reading nonfiction to inform their reading of historical fiction and considering implications of reading about the past for their present lives.

The Common Core State Standards ask students to not only separate their perspective from that of the main character, but also to discern the various perspectives of different characters within a story. Fifth graders are asked to compare and contrast characters within a story, describing each of them in-depth. You’ll teach your readers, therefore, to look closely at a scene and imagine the different points of view that characters in that scene bring to the action. How might the young German soldier feel who is searching for hidden Jewish children in Annemarie’s apartment? How might young, Jewish Ellen feel at that moment, as compared to Annemarie? There is abundant information in the text about
Annemarie’s inner thinking and emotions, but the reader can only imagine Ellen’s feelings from her silence—and only a critical reader would pause to consider the soldier’s point of view. So you’ll be teaching into critical literacy at this point in the unit as well. And you’ll be helping your readers to become more empathetic and imaginative, as well as more observant and discerning. You might begin this teaching by crafting a teaching point such as “Readers, it is easy to understand the story from the perspective of the main character, to step into the shoes of the main character, and it is much harder to step into shoes of the other characters. Today, though, I am suggesting trying to step into the shoes of those other characters helps us understand the bigger picture of what our stories might really, really be about.” (You can see session XIII starting on page 100 in Volume II of *Tackling Complex Texts* for further support in teaching this lesson. You may also want to show your students Lily and Maxwell’s stop and jots on page 111 in Volume II of *Tackling Complex Texts* as models of how to consider the story through the eyes of more minor characters.)

Another way to teach into critical literacy is to teach your students to re-analyze their stories, or parts of them, through the lens of power. This work often leads them to new thinking, especially for readers of this age, who haven’t often thought about power and resistance, although they may feel powerless often. You’ll teach your students to ask themselves who has power, how is power visible, what forms can power take, and how does power shift. You might say, “Today I want to teach you that looking at our books with the lens of power leads to all sorts of new thinking. When we investigate who has power, what form power takes (how you see it), and how power changes, that helps us find huge meanings in books.” Then you can show students that, for instance, power is not always about weapons or physical strength. In the end, it is not physical prowess that defeats the Germans’ attempt in *Number the Stars* to round up the Jews in Denmark. It is the power of community, integrity, and collective courage.

If you are reading, *The Yellow Star* you might point out the actions of King Christian X and pose the question, How do the actions of King Christian influence the power of the Nazis? You can also involve students in doing this work by having them consider key scenes from *The Butterfly* by Patricia Polacco. We find that the scene where Monsieur Marks is dragged
from his shop by Nazi soldiers is a powerful place to stop and consider power. Students can consider: Who has power here? Who participating in maintaining those power structures? Students will notice that the Nazis soldiers have power but you can also push them to think about the actions of the townspeople. You can push them to look closely at key details. People turned away, put their hands over their mouths and said nothing. (If students need more support, you might ask more specific questions “Do Monique and Denise’s actions keep power the same or attempt to change it? What could they have done instead? What do you think about this?” They are bystanders, letting the events happen. Students will begin to realize that fear of bystanders keeps power structures in place, as well. This part of the text also provides strong visual support to illuminate power struggles of the time. The chart on page 146 titled, ‘Predictable Questions to Investigate Power’ is a good resource to help students explore power in the books they are reading. Sample student work around exploring power on pages 145 and 146 will give you an idea of what you can expect students to do when they examine their texts with the lens of power.

If you haven’t done so yet, you’ll want to make sure that your students now have the opportunity to read some nonfiction alongside their fiction. This doesn’t have to mean that you create enormous text sets, ravage your libraries, and do big book orders. You could simply type up some statistics, or download some simple fact sheets or articles. Knowing how many children died in the Holocaust, for example, gives the reader an even greater sense of what was at stake when the Johansens took it upon themselves to hide Ellen in Number the Stars. It’s also helpful to have some images, so that students can use these as references while they envision. Even though children will have learned that the books they are reading are set during real life events, they may experience these events and characters at a certain distance because they are reading about them against the backdrop of fiction. It is one thing to read about Blanche Rose’s plight or Lise and Peter’s bravery and quite another to see photographs of Anne Frank and Miep Gies and other real people who experienced the Holocaust, or other historical events, firsthand. If you have access to technology, encourage students to sift through digital bins filled with virtual museums, audio clips of witness accounts, video clips of news reels. There is a wealth of multidimensional historical records and experiences available online that can fill in gaps and bring a more current human element to their reading.

Even a little nonfiction can help spark new ideas, you can let your readers know, telling them, “Readers we often turn to nonfiction to spark new ideas about our novels. Just as two sticks light a fire when they’re rubbed together, we can rub some bits of nonfiction up against parts of novels and see ideas ignite.” (For further help in teaching this lesson, you may want to refer to session XVI starting on page 154 in Volume II of Tackling Complex Texts.)
As your readers add in nonfiction reading, you’ll hope to see them begin to talk about ideas across texts—both fiction and nonfiction. The idea that war teaches children to grow up fast, for instance, is true not only in *Number the Stars*, but also in *The Butterfly*, and also in any images you download from the American Holocaust Museum site. This work, of realizing that an idea a reader has in one text can be true in another text, is revolutionary for young readers. They’ll begin to see themes everywhere. So you won’t have to build text sets around themes—in fact, you don’t want to. You want your readers to begin to imagine that each text they read can be read in comparison to other texts, almost as if they are making virtual text sets. You'll teach your readers, then, to look closely at themes across texts. You might gather your students and say something like, “Today I want to teach you that it is important when we read to think about people, places, events— and also about ideas. When you have thought about an idea in one story, sometimes that thinking helps you find ideas in another story.”

As students begin to look at similar themes across their texts, here are some common themes that you might see them noticing:

- Sometimes in life we don’t know how brave we are until we are tested
- Sometimes in life people go to any end to save a friend
- Those who do nothing to stop injustice are making a choice to let it happen
- We don’t always appreciate what we have until we lose it
- Sometimes in life people are afraid of change
- Doing what you believe is right is not always easy
- People can hurt others out of fear for themselves
- Power is unequal--some groups have more than others
- Sometimes people become more committed to fighting for a cause when something happens to someone they love

(Session XVII starting on page 164 in Volume II of *Tackling Complex Texts* will offer you further ideas to support your teaching of this work. You may also want to refer to sample student work around this lesson on pages 172 and 173 in Volume II of *Tackling Complex Texts*)
Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading Curricular Calendar, Fifth Grade, 2014-2015  
Unit Three - Historical Fiction Book Clubs and Related Informational Reading: Tackling Complex Texts

- War tears apart families
- Violence seems to lead to further violence

As students begin to determine these and other themes across their texts, you'll want to see them discussing how authors are revealing these themes. This work is something the Common Core State Standards emphasizes--how each text develops a theme (5.9). You'll want students to be comparing and contrasting multiple books with the same theme, analyzing carefully and using details as evidence for their ideas. You might show them that one way to compare how authors convey themes is to study how characters respond to challenges. In *Number the Stars*, Anne Marie responds by going to any lengths to keep her friend safe while Daphne and Monique in *The Butterfly* let their fear overcome their concerns for others. One author is showing that in times of danger, sometimes we put our fears aside to do what is right for our friends and the other author is showing that in times of danger, sometimes we let our fears overcome what we know is the right thing to do. Some questions that students might ask themselves and others around this critical work:

- What theme is present in both stories?
- How have the authors approached the topic differently?
- What ideas are supported by both stories?
- How did each of the characters react differently to conflict? What messages does the author seem to be trying to convey through those reactions?

Another way to compare and contrast stories in historical fiction and their approaches to theme is new to fifth grade this year. That is, readers can look across texts with similar topics and entertain the idea that the different authors might have been using their stories and the choices they made in their stories to make commentary on our lives today. We might remind students that these stories, while based in a real time period, are, after all, fiction. The authors chose the time period they wrote about. They chose the events to highlight in their stories. Since an oft repeated adage is that history repeats itself, many historical fiction writers say that they choose certain epochs and events because of their ability to say something about our world today. Could the decision to highlight a friendship in *Number the Stars* be a message from Lois Lowry that no matter how hard our world today can feel, other people have also maintained loyal and strong friendships through difficult times? Or, perhaps the story more closely could mirror something that the students read in their current events story? Could there be a current war or conflict that has similar themes to the ones running through one of their novels? Could the author be using this past time period as an analogy for that one? Or could the author be saying something about those themes traveling through time? You can well imagine how this type of thinking about their present day issues on the micro (their families, their neighborhoods, their schools) and the macro (their state, country, planet) level could lead them to some interesting comparisons and interpretations. It will be important if you decide to do some
Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
Reading Curricular Calendar, Fifth Grade, 2014-2015
Unit Three - Historical Fiction Book Clubs and Related Informational Reading: Tackling Complex Texts

exploration in this area to keep students’ conversations firmly grounded in their citations of texts, or else they could easily lose sight of the interpretation work in reading.

Still another way, to use comparison to deepen thinking is by teaching your students the art of allusion. Sometimes, readers want to say so much about a story, yet they struggle to find words that contain thoughts so big. Rather than searching for all the right words, they can compare the story or the character to another story or character who is familiar to their audience. You can help readers to see this by saying “Today I want to teach you that sometimes we have all this huge stuff to say, for which no ordinary words will do. We can use the same techniques that authors use to say things that are just too big for words. One of the things we can do is we can reference a beautiful detail, significant theme, or lasting image- from a story we all know, and by doing so, we conjure up that whole story, and people who know it say, ‘Ah yes, yes. I know what you mean.’ That’s called making an allusion, and literate people do this all the time.” You can illustrate this complex work by letting readers know that if a reader says, for instance, that the main character in the story he or she is reading is as clever and self-sacrificing as Charlotte in Charlotte’s Web, we know what that means. So saying that a character grows up fast, like Annemarie, or pays a price for her courage, like Rose Blanche, will convey huge meaning. The Common Core State Standards name the ability to make allusions as a key part of understanding literary traditions and archetypes—the foundations of cultural literacy. (You can see Session XVIII starting on page 176 in Volume II of Tackling Complex Texts for further support in teaching this lesson.)

Be sure to also check out the chart on page 186 in Volume II of Tackling Complex Texts, ‘Passionate Interpretations Might Say..’ to see ways to help students record their responses to their books, as they think what the book may be really about.

Students will begin to develop a repertoire of strategies for analyzing how authors approach themes differently. Here are a few possibilities of elements that can be compared/contrasted across texts to help students analyze how different authors approach themes:

* We Can Analyze How Different Authors Approach Themes by Comparing and Contrasting:
  * moments of choice
  * times when character(s) respond to trouble
  * moments when characters feel conflicting emotions
  * perspectives authors have chosen
  * physical and psychological settings
  * parts where images, objects, etc. seem to resurface
  * parts where minor, seemingly unimportant characters resurface
And Asking:

- What can I learn from these moments?
- What does each author seem to be trying to really say?
- What might the author be trying to say about our life today?
- How is each author approaching a theme in his/her own way?

As you bring this TCRWP unit to a close, invite children to step back a little from the historical worlds they’ve stepped into, and from the heady interpretation work they’ve been doing within and across texts, to think more largely about the meaning these tales bear for their own lives—and for the world at large. What does it mean to them, for example, that Mama in *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* covers up the offensive notations in her seventh grade students’ texts so that they do not have to be humiliated by seeing these every day? How are we affected by that decision and by the school’s response of firing her? What can we learn from Annemarie’s decision, in a moment of high stakes, to rip off her best friend’s Star of David necklace, which identifies Ellen’s Jewishness and now potentially marks Annemarie, too? There are lessons in these defining choices that characters make, and you’ll want your students to think deeply about them, to be affected by them, and to live differently because of them. The chart titled, ‘Characters Make Choices’ on page 199 in Volume II is a great tool to use to teach this lesson. The anchor chart ‘Making Our Way Through Historical Fiction’ on page 207 in Volume II of *Tackling Complex Texts*, sums up all the strategies taught in this unit.

**Integrating the Unit with Social Studies**

In the historical fiction writing unit, students will be collecting as many new insights as possible about the time period they will ultimately write about; therefore, you might choose to align your social studies instruction with your historical fiction reading and writing work so students have multiple opportunities to explore this time period. For example, in social studies your students might be learning about the Westward Expansion through discussions, trips, film clips, and primary documents—all the while collecting jottings about what they are learning about the period, talking in partnerships and clubs, and creating whole-class word walls and charts gathering their understandings. Simultaneously, in reading workshop, your students will need to read historical fiction...
from various time periods (so that you can keep everyone “in books”), one of which one might be the Westward Expansion. During read-aloud time, you could highlight books set within the Westward Expansion.

Of course, just because you are studying the Westward Expansion doesn’t mean that your students can’t take on related, but broader, topics in their book clubs—one that focus on stories of “war” or “oppression” or “change.” When children read one historical fiction text after another, this provides an excellent opportunity for them to compare texts. This kind of intertextual reading work supports a richer understanding of historical fiction in general. Another way to go, if you feel your social studies materials are not broad or supportive enough, is to lean more heavily on the reading workshop work paired with your social studies unit—using historical fiction book clubs and read-alouds of picture books, short texts, or novels as points of research for your readers.

In both your content study and your TCRWP reading workshop, you may use word charts, time lines, visuals, and maps to record class understandings of the concepts, events, places, and vocabulary. You will likely also decide to make a variety of nonfiction texts available so that students can supplement their reading of historical fiction with informational texts. It’s helpful to have nonfiction texts with lots of images, so that students can use these as references while they envision. If there are any crucial historical events in the stories your students will be reading, try to include some texts that explain these events and give some background information on them. Include maps as well, so students get an idea where the stories they are reading take place.

Social studies is also a perfect time to teach children to write quick essays about the time periods their clubs are reading about. Begin by showing readers how to generate several big ideas as they read about a time period, then pick one idea to fast draft into an essay.

We believe these quick essays will help students to develop and support their thinking. These essays will address the Common Core expectations that students “write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information (W 5.1) These quick essays will not only strengthen their skills in opinion writing, though, but will also deepen the reading work they do. The Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of comparing and contrasting (R 5.6) integrating information for multiple sources (R 5.9), and supporting ideas with key details (R 5.1), all of which students will need to do as they craft these fast essays.