Creative Historians Project Overview

*“Bombardment, barrage, curtain-fire, mines, gas, tanks, machine-guns, hand-grenades - words, words, but they hold the horror of the world.”*

-Erich Maria Remarque, “All Quiet on the Western Front”

*"History is always changing behind us, and the past changes a little every time we retell it."*

-Hilary Mantel



# Context and Relevance

Over 100 million people have been killed in wars in the 20th century. In this century, our world has been devastated by two World Wars, as well as innumerable smaller conflicts between and within nations. Despite the well-documented horrors of war, the phenomenon continues. As I type this, the United States is embroiled in the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, and is contemplating further military involvement in Syria. However, in the nightly news we tend to see a high-level analysis from people who may or may not be on the ground fighting in these conflicts. This provides us with a one-dimensional understanding of war. Soldiers in wars throughout history have struggled to make sense of their experiences in many ways, and to communicate those experiences to a public who may not be immediately able to connect with the intensity of war. In their literary works, these authors use all of the tools at their disposal to communicate the truth of their experience of war, in hopes that their audience will understand the effects of war in a more personal, visceral, and complex way. Guy Vanderhaeghe once said, "History tells us what people do; historical fiction helps us imagine how they felt." Your job in this project is to help modern Americans understand an aspect of WWI or WWII through the eyes of people who lived it.

# Project Overview

For this project, you will be doing the work of a creative historian, and will ultimately be writing a piece of short historical fiction (5-7 pages) that illuminates an aspect of WWI and WWII through the eyes and experiences of your central character(s).

**Part 1: Models and Content Knowledge**

In the first part of this project, we will work together to build some basic frameworks and content knowledge about WWI and World II. We will be reading the novels All Quiet on the Western Front and Slaughterhouse 5 and using these as our model for our own historical fiction. We will study the causes and major movements of WWI and WWII, and will develop frameworks for what it means to write an effective piece of historical fiction.

**Part 2: Research**

In the second part of the project, you will be engaging in historical research in order to bring your characters and your story to life more vividly. You will choose a time and location to focus on in your story, and will build a solid base of historical knowledge about that specific time and place that will help you to create a detailed story. In addition, you will decide on a truth of war that you want to communicate through your short story.

**Part 3: Writing, Revising, and Publishing**

On to the real work! In the final part of the project, you will be engaging in a rigorous and detailed critique process, looking carefully at stories for plot-arc, round characters, setting, historical context, and writing style. You will engage in an intensive revision process, and will ultimately publish your story in our class book.

# Essential Questions

1. What causes nations to choose to fight such deadly wars so close together?
2. What were the experiences of people who lived through WWI and WWII, and how can you effectively use historical fiction to communicate those experiences?
3. What truths about war and the soldiers’ experiences can fictional stories illuminate?
4. How did the experience of war change between WWI and WWII?

# Objectives

By the end of this project, you should have the following skills and knowledge well in hand.

**Essential Project Skills: By the end of this project, students will be able to…**

1. Effectively annotate a text for theme, character, and questions.
2. Use various discussion strategies to verbally communicate ideas that are grounded in a close reading of the text during Socratic Seminar.
3. Uses various web resources effectively to find accurate historical information about the era you’ve chosen.
4. Critiques specifically for different techniques used in historical fiction, and provides detailed written feedback to other authors about how to improve their stories.
5. Use various sentence level and wordsmithing techniques, including NPAs and verbal phrases, to make the story fluid and specific.
6. Use accurate historical details from your research to bring the world you are writing about to life for the reader, makes reasonable inferences where specific data is not available.
7. Create round characters who are complex, motivated by desires, and who change during the story.
8. Analyze literature for plot arc, and write a story that uses plot arc and conflict to drive the plot.
9. Writes in a vivid and specific way to immerse the reader in the story.

**Content Knowledge:**

1. See attached WWI and WWII Content Rubric. The “Got It!” Column is the column you should focus on!

# Project Challenge Extension Options:

In order to receive credit and possible recognition for completing the challenge extension, students must complete ALL of the following elements. You will need to show me these elements as you complete them.

**AQotWF and S5 Annotations**

In your annotations, you must track the development of two major themes of the book that you identify in addition to your other annotations.

**AQotWF and S5 Seminar Reflection**

In your seminar reflection, you will be required to write an additional paragraph that analyzes the development of one of the themes you identified.

**Research (complete at least one of the following):**

1. Research 2 additional elements
2. Have at least 5 of your sources be primary sources
3. Incorporate an analysis of your source into your research notes

**Fiction Writing Piece (complete at least one of the following):**

1. Use 3 additional literary devices that you found in AQotWF or S5 in your own story to enhance the writing.
2. Do not use a single adverb in your story.
3. Tell the story from two different perspectives (will need to adjust research for this as well).
4. Incorporate at least one primary source document into your story in a seamless way.
5. Other? If you have a proposal, please let me know!

# Exhibition!

For the exhibition of this project, we’ll be publicly exhibiting our work and doing selected author readings at the Durango Public Library. Our exhibition will likely take place in late October- more details to come!

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