**Instructional Focus**

**NARRATIVE: IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS OF HISTORICAL FICTION**
Stories, or the narrative genre, are often divided into subgenres such as adventure and historical fiction. The setting in historical fiction stories is a real time and place in the past. Although characters can be real or imaginary, the details in the story provide information about the time, place, and people’s lives. Historical information is sometimes given after the story.

**Instructional Approach**

**SHARED READING**
Transparencies 20a and 20b: Discovery in the Desert
“Outside the Gates” Student Book 5b, p. 10

Selection available on audio CD.

**Expectations**

**LANGUAGE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>O: Oral</th>
<th>R: Reading</th>
<th>W: Writing</th>
<th>ML: Media Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>O</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrate an understanding of appropriate speaking behaviour in a variety of situations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>Analyze/explain how the characteristics of texts—literary, graphic, informational—help communicate meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>Make supported judgements and draw conclusions about ideas/information in texts</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>W</strong></td>
<td>Generate ideas about a topic and identify those most appropriate for the purpose</td>
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**About This Selection**
This historical fiction story is set in 1943 in occupied Czechoslovakia. A young girl, imprisoned in a ghetto, risks her life for a few scraps of food for her sick mother.

Some students may find some vocabulary and concepts challenging, but the clear descriptions support the text, and the simple sentence structures make this story accessible.

**PD What Research Says about Genre**
Through immersion in a genre, students develop an internalized sense of why an author would select a particular genre for a particular purpose, the power of a particular genre to convey a message, and the rhetorical constraints and possibilities inherent in a genre. (NCTE, 2004)

**Reflecting on Your Practice**
How can I support students in recognizing the different genres that they encounter?

**ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ongoing Observation</th>
<th>Differentiated Instruction</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Students who understand will</strong></td>
<td><strong>If students do not understand,</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key Assessment Questions</strong></td>
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<td>• identify characteristics of historical fiction</td>
<td>• use A Closer Look at History (see Differentiated Instruction: Extra Support, p. 20)</td>
<td>• What are the characteristics of historical fiction stories? Provide an example of each characteristic from “Outside the Gates.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• provide an example from the story of each characteristic</td>
<td>For extra challenge,</td>
<td>• How does knowing the characteristics of historical fiction help the reader understand what is read?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• explain how knowing the characteristics of historical fiction helps the reader understand what is read</td>
<td>• use Reading Historical Fiction Novels (see Differentiated Instruction: Extra Challenge, p. 24)</td>
<td><strong>Assessment Tools</strong></td>
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<td>BLM 2: Oral Language Tracking Sheet</td>
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<td>BLM 6: Strategy Rubric Strip—Identifying Characteristics of Historical Fiction</td>
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**Shared Reading**

Use Transparencies 20a and 20b: Discovery in the Desert and their related teacher notes in Transparencies for Shared Reading and Modelling to model how readers use characteristics of historical fiction to help them understand what they read.

**Before**

**ACCESSING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE**

1. To activate students’ thinking about how stories and history can work together, ask:
   - **What books, TV shows, or movies have you read or seen that are set in the past?**
2. To focus on the setting and theme of “Outside the Gates,” ask:
   - **What do you know about World War II?** *(many countries, including Canada, joined forces to fight Germany, Italy, and Japan; 1939–1945)*
   - **What do you know about how Jews were treated at that time?** *(they were imprisoned by Nazis and forced to live in certain areas in very bad conditions; were sent to concentration camps, or death camps, where millions were murdered)*

**During**

**INTRODUCING THE TEXT**

1. Invite students to look at Student Book page 10. Ask:
   - **What do the title, heading, and illustration tell you?** *(place and time: Terezin, Czechoslovakia, 1943; the main character is a girl)*
   - **What do you predict this story will be about?** *(life in a ghetto)*

Show students the location of Czechoslovakia on a map or globe and explain that it is now divided into Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

**Vocabulary**

- **enticing** attractive, alluring
- **ghetto** a part of a city where people who share some characteristic, such as being poor or using a certain language, live as a group away from others
- **gurgled** made the sound of bubbling, flowing water
- **kohlrabi** a type of cabbage
- **resolved** decided firmly
- **sapped** weakened or drained gradually
- **scorcher** a very hot day
- **shuffling** walking without lifting your feet
- **sludge** thick, soft mud or ooze

**Strategy Tip: Read ahead, read back**

Show students how to read on to finish a sentence, paragraph, or section, and then to read back to see if the meaning of a word becomes clearer. For example, “resolved” in this story (page 12): by reading back we know the character is “determined” and by reading on we know that she will steal food “no matter what.”
Hannah lay still, watching several girls slowly raise themselves off their bunk beds and move to the doorway. Why would my roommates ever volunteer for work, Hannah wondered. Working in the ghetto usually meant doing something disgusting like cleaning the toilets or sweeping the streets. It meant using up the strength that had already been sapped from months of starvation. It seemed like Hannah’s stomach constantly gurgled and ached from lack of food. It was a feeling that had become strangely familiar. Here in the ghetto there was hardly anything to eat—one meal a day, if you could even call it a meal. A plate of cabbage with a slice of bread and margarine.

Hannah shut her eyes and tried to return to sleep. When was the last time I had a decent meal, Hannah wondered dreamily. It was probably months—months since she and her parents had been forced out of their home in southern Czechoslovakia, along with thousands of other Jewish families, and imprisoned behind the walls of this ghetto.

Pavel called out, “The children who come with me will work in the garden.”

Hannah rolled over once more and sat straight up. This was worth volunteering for! The vegetable garden provided food for the Nazi guards stationed in the ghetto. Working in the garden was a chance for Hannah to go outside the gates of the ghetto. Even more enticing, this was a chance to steal some food—a tomato or kohlrabi if you were lucky. Hannah raised her arm. “I’ll come,” she said.

With his ten volunteers behind him, Pavel turned and walked out of the dormitory. The group marched down the long stairway of the girls’ building and outside. It was a warm August day and Hannah could tell that it would be a scorcher.

Outside the Gates

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Differentiated Instruction: ELL

Making links to personal experience is an important part of reading. However, for students who have been refugees, this selection may trigger bad memories, and could result in behaviours such as avoidance or acting out. Having opportunities to talk about their experiences may be therapeutic for these students and enlightening for their classmates—but it should not be forced. The more you know about each student’s cultural background and experiences, the easier it will be to make sound decisions about how to proceed.

Explicit teaching and discussion of the characteristics of historical fiction and associated vocabulary are important for English language learners. Support understanding by ensuring that concepts such as characteristic and authentic are clarified by rephrasing and giving concrete examples. Creating simple charts and recording examples of historical fiction characteristics as each selection is being discussed provide students with visual cues that can be revisited throughout the unit and during the assessment activities. The writer’s use of italics and figurative language might be problematic. Support language development and comprehension by unpacking these techniques and having students keep lists of other examples from previously read selections.

2. Read Understanding Text Patterns on page 10 aloud and tell students they will be finding out about life in Terezin in 1943, and learning the characteristics of historical fiction stories.

READING AND DISCUSSING THE TEXT

1. Read aloud the first three sentences. Ask:

   • Where do you think the girl is? (a camp; a dormitory)

2. Let students read the sticky note on page 10 and then to the end of the page. Ask:

   • Who is the main character? (Hannah Adler, aged 12)
   • Who is Pavel and why is he in the room? (he organizes activities for children; he wants volunteers for work)

Discuss the meaning of “ghetto” and why Hannah might be in one.

3. Ask students to read the sticky note on page 11 and then the first paragraph to find out what Hannah does in response to Pavel’s request. Ask:

   • How does Hannah respond? (lies on her bunk; wonders why anyone would volunteer)

   • What details about life in the ghetto does the author give? Find the words that describe the experiences. (cleaning toilets; sweeping streets; strength sapped from months of starvation; stomach gurgles and aches from lack of food; one terrible meal a day)

4. Let students read the second paragraph on page 11. Ask:

   • What information does the author provide about the real events that happened? (Hannah and her parents were forced out of their home in southern Czechoslovakia and imprisoned in the ghetto, along with thousands of other Jews)
5. Encourage students to read to the end of Student Book page 11. Ask:

- Why is Hannah excited to work in the garden? (she could go outside the ghetto gates; it’s a chance to steal food)

6. Ask students to examine the illustration on pages 12 and 13 and then read the sticky note. Then have them read page 12 to find out about life in Terezin. Ask:

- What picture of ghetto life do the illustration and the story’s details paint for you? (ghetto was walled and had guards; was packed with people moving slowly; had feeding stations; trains brought more people; it seemed sad and scary)

- What words help paint that picture in your mind? (shuffling; crammed; “like ants in an ant colony”; mourners; terrified; disease; death)

- What has Hannah resolved to do? (steal food for her sick mother)

7. At this point in the story, review the time frame and the details that the author provides about it by asking:

- How long has Hannah been in the ghetto? Do you know for certain? (on page 11, the author says it was probably months; no, we don’t know for sure)

- What details tell you information about the time frame? (she is accustomed to disease and death; she knows the routines; she can’t remember the last time she had a decent meal)

Differentiated Instruction: Extra Support

A Closer Look at History

Find some photographs in books or an encyclopedia related to the ghettos and the Holocaust. Use the pictures to help students understand that the story is set in a real time and place in the past. You might work with students to create a time line of the major events leading up to and during World War II. Invite students to imagine what kinds of experiences or stories people in the photographs might have had. Then compare students’ ideas with the problems and experiences Hannah faced in the story. During your discussion, refer to the characteristics of historical fiction, listed on Student Book page 10. Clarify any challenging vocabulary.
Hannah and the others continued winding their way through the streets of the ghetto, until they finally reached the outer wall. Ghetto police were leaning against the wooden gate, their rifles slung over their shoulders. They eyed the group of children and spoke briefly with the youth leader.

“Rechts gehen!” one of the guards shouted. “Walk on the right!” Hannah and the others snapped to attention and quickly moved to the side of the road. These police were nasty, and no one wanted to cross them. Finally, the guard raised a large wooden barrier and the children passed underneath and into the outside world.

Suddenly, Hannah was surrounded by colour. There were green fields and red and yellow flowers. The sky was bluer than it ever looked inside the ghetto walls. It was as if someone had lifted a grey veil off a painting. Butterflies floated above Hannah’s head. Birds sang. Even the sun looked brighter.

The filth, sludge, and hunger of the ghetto were forgotten. Nazi guards watched and patrolled from a distance. But Hannah didn’t care about the guards. She only cared about holding onto this feeling of freedom.

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**About the Author: Kathy Kacer**

Kathy Kacer’s parents came to Canada in the 1940s as survivors of the Holocaust. Their experiences inspired her to share her family’s history. After working as a psychologist for many years, Kathy began to write about the things she had heard from her parents. Her first book, *The Secret of Gabi’s Dresser*, which tells the story of how her mother survived the Holocaust, was published in 1999. It was nominated for and won several awards, including the Silver Birch Award and the Canadian Jewish Book Award. It has since been adapted into a play.

Kathy has written several other award-winning books, many of which are enjoyed worldwide in translated versions. Her stories are primarily historical fiction or true stories about the Holocaust, and are aimed at young audiences.

Besides writing, Kathy also speaks to educators and writers about teaching sensitive material to young people, writing children’s literature, and how to write from real-life experiences. She visits schools and libraries as well, teaching children about the importance of remembering and understanding what happened during the Holocaust.
10. Ask students to read the sticky note and then the first two paragraphs on Student Book page 14. Ask:

- What problems does Hannah face? (she is planning to steal food for her sick mother, but if she’s caught, she could be killed)

- How do you know she could be killed? (Pepik slides his finger slowly across his throat, which is a sign for killing)

- Why do you think the author includes that information? (that’s what happened to people at that time and place in history)

- How does Hannah feel when she hears Pepik’s warning? (determined)

- What would you do in Hannah’s situation, and why?

11. Let students read to the end of page 14. Ask:

- How does this story make you feel? Why?

- Do you find it hard or easy to identify with Hannah? Why?

Have students share any questions they have about the story, and invite answers from other students. Then say that the Historical Note on page 15 might help them understand the story.

12. Read the Historical Note on page 15 aloud and ask students to study the photograph. Then read the sticky note and invite responses from students about how the information helped them understand the story.

Pepík, the old Jewish man who supervised the garden, greeted the young workers. “Now, my young friends,” growled Pepík, “line up for the shovels and I’ll put you to work.”

Pepík barked orders at the children. “And no stealing,” Pepík said, gesturing over one shoulder. “If the Nazi guards catch you...” Pepík took one finger and slid it slowly across his throat. I don’t care if it’s dangerous, thought Hannah, I’m going to get some food for Maminka.

Hannah grabbed her shovel and began turning mounds of dirt over into small piles. She bent forward, pulling long stringy weeds from between the rows of tomatoes. Before long, the sweat was pouring from her brow.

Somewhere in the field one of the girls began to sing. Hannah added her voice, digging into the ground in rhythm with the beat.

Several hours passed and all too soon, it was time to stop. That was a good job,” Pepík said, nodding in approval as he collected the shovels.

The walk back to the ghetto was slow, as if every child wanted to hang onto these last seconds of freedom. Who knew when they might be allowed outside again?

Just before entering her dormitory building, Hannah dug deep into her pocket and curled her hand around the vegetables she had managed to steal from the garden: three carrots and two tomatoes.

“For Maminka,” she murmured.

**Word Study**

**Descriptive Language**

1. Ask students to demonstrate what the words “snapped to attention” mean. Then ask them to just *stand* at attention and comment on how *snapped* suggests more than *stand*. Point out that the author of “Outside the Gates” used descriptive language such as this to help readers picture the setting and events.

2. Give another example, from page 12: “women shuffling by.” Encourage students to demonstrate what *shuffling* means, and then to demonstrate *walking by* or *going by*. Ask students to comment on the difference the choice of words makes.

3. Invite students to work in pairs to skim the selection to find words that help to paint a picture in the reader’s mind.
After

These questions and activities give students the opportunity to share and consolidate their learning about characteristics of historical fiction. You may use BLM 2: Oral Language Tracking Sheet and BLM 3: Small-Group Observation Tracking Sheet to track student progress through the unit.

REFLECTING ON THE STRATEGY

1. Refer students to the list of characteristics of historical fiction on page 10. Ask:
   - How does this story show the characteristics of historical fiction stories? (the setting was real; Hannah’s experiences were authentic; the details describe real conditions: starving, forced work, crowding, sickness, death; the problems of hunger and having to steal food were real)

2. Ask:
   - How does knowing the characteristics of historical fiction help you to understand what you read? (I know the setting is important; I know to watch for details about characters’ experiences and problems; the information is meant to help me learn about a time in the past)

ORAL: DISCUSSING THE TEXT

1. What risk did Hannah take? (she risked her life to steal food for her mother)

2. How did you feel when reading about Hannah walking back to the ghetto? Were you surprised that she was not caught?

3. How long ago did this story take place? (64 years [from 2007])

4. What might Hannah’s reaction be if she were to read the story today? Would it be different from yours? (yes: she would have far more pictures in her mind, and it might bring back really bad memories)

5. Why do you think the author wrote this story? (to teach us about the ghetto and what happened to Jewish people during the war; to bring history alive and make it more real for us by taking us back in time; to help us imagine what it was like to be a prisoner)

6. Do you think it is important for us to know about experiences such as Hannah’s?

WRITING: POEM

Ask students to write a poem that expresses the difference between “inside the gates” and “outside the gates.” Encourage them to refer to the story for details and for descriptive words that they could use in their poems. Students can share their writing in small groups. Remind students to store their poems in their writing folders.
**WRITING: SCENE FOR THE STORY**

Ask students to picture the possible scene between Hannah and her mother when Hannah gives her the stolen food. Encourage them to jot down some ideas about what the characters would say to each other. Ask students to work in pairs to write the scene. It could be either a descriptive paragraph with dialogue or just a few lines of dialogue. Students could present their scenes in a role-play. Remind students to store their work in their writing folders.

**Differentiated Instruction: Extra Challenge**

**Reading Historical Fiction Novels**

Invite students to explore the school library for other historical fiction stories about the Holocaust. Students could set up a display of the books they discover. Encourage students to read one of the books and then write a short paragraph about historical facts they learned from it. Their paragraphs could be posted near the display for other students to read.

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**ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checking Progress</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Assessment Questions</strong></td>
<td>For students who need extra support with understanding the characteristics of historical fiction, use “The Stonehook Schooner” in Student Book 5b, pp. 16–19, for guided reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students may respond to the Key Assessment Questions either in writing or orally in a conference. Ask:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• What are the characteristics of historical fiction stories? Provide an example of each characteristic from “Outside the Gates.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How does knowing the characteristics of historical fiction help the reader understand what is read?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Record individual progress on BLM 6: Strategy Rubric Strip—Identifying Characteristics of Historical Fiction.</td>
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**Strategy Rubric Strip: Identifying Characteristics of Historical Fiction**

A full-size version of this rubric, suitable for recording assessments, is provided on BLM 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>identifies characteristics of historical fiction</td>
<td>with limited effectiveness</td>
<td>with some effectiveness</td>
<td>with considerable effectiveness</td>
<td>with a high degree of effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provides an example from the story of each characteristic</td>
<td>with limited effectiveness</td>
<td>with some effectiveness</td>
<td>with considerable effectiveness</td>
<td>with a high degree of effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explains how knowing the characteristics of historical fiction helps the reader understand what is read</td>
<td>with limited effectiveness</td>
<td>with some effectiveness</td>
<td>with considerable effectiveness</td>
<td>with a high degree of effectiveness</td>
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**Cross-Curricular Application**

- applies the skills involved in this reading strategy in other areas of the curriculum

• with limited effectiveness | with some effectiveness | with considerable effectiveness | with a high degree of effectiveness