

Historical Fiction for Young Adults

Listed below are books of historical fiction. Books set in the recent past are included here along with books with more distant historical settings. These books vary in the difficulty of both the text and the content. Not all books are appropriate for all readers. (Annotations from Library of Congress).

Almond, David. ***The Fire-eaters***. In 1962 England, despite observing his father's illness and the suffering of the fire-eating Mr. McNulty, as well as enduring abuse at school and the stress of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Bobby Burns and his family and friends still find reasons to rejoice in their lives and to have hope for the future.

Alvarez, Julia. ***Before We Were Free***. In the early 1960s in the Dominican Republic, twelve-year-old Anita learns that her family is involved in the underground movement to end the bloody rule of the dictator, General Trujillo.

Anderson, Laurie Halse. ***Fever, 1793***. In 1793 Philadelphia, sixteen-year-old Matilda Cook, separated from her sick mother, learns about perseverance and self-reliance when she is forced to cope with the horrors of a yellow fever epidemic.

Anderson, M.T. ***The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing: Traitor to the Nation: Vol. 1: The Pox Party***. Various diaries, letters, and other manuscripts chronicle the experiences of Octavian, a young African American, as he is brought up as part of a science experiment in the years leading up to and during the Revolutionary War.

Avi. ***Crispin: At the edge of the world***. Sequel to: *Crispin, the cross of lead*. Branded as traitors by the king's authorities, Crispin and his guardian, Bear, flee to coastal towns in fourteenth-century England, where they perform a musical juggling act and bond as a family after befriending a disfigured girl.

Avi. ***Crispin: The Cross of Lead***. Falsely accused of theft and murder, an orphaned peasant boy in fourteenth-century England flees his village and meets a larger-than-life juggler who holds a dangerous secret.

Blundell, Judy. ***What I Saw and How I Lied***. In 1947, teenage Evie, smitten by a handsome ex-GI who seems to have a secret hold on her stepfather, finds herself caught in a complicated web of lies whose devastating outcome changes her life and that of her family forever.

Bredsdorff, Bodil. ***The Crow-Girl***. After the death of her grandmother, a young orphaned girl leaves her house by the cove and begins a journey which leads her to people and experiences that exemplify the wisdom her grandmother had shared with her.

Brenaman, Miriam. ***Evy's Civil War***. In Virginia in 1860, on the verge of the Civil War, fourteen-year-old Evvy chafes at the restrictions that her society places on both women and slaves.

Bruchac, Joseph. ***Code Talker***. After being taught in a boarding school run by whites that Navajo is a useless language, Ned Begay and other Navajo men are recruited by the Marines to become Code Talkers, sending messages during World War II in their native tongue.

Carvell, Marlene. ***Sweetgrass Basket***. In alternating passages, two Mohawk sisters describe their lives at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, established in 1879 to educate Native Americans, as they try to assimilate into white culture and one of them is falsely accused of stealing.

Chambers, Aiden. ***Postcards from No Man's Land***. Alternates between two stories--contemporarily, seventeen-year-old Jacob visits a daunting Amsterdam at the request of his English grandmother--and historically, nineteen-year-old Geertrui relates her experience of British soldiers's attempts to liberate Holland from its German occupation.

Chevalier, Tracy. ***The Girl with a Pearl Earring***.

Choldenko, Gennifer. ***Al Capone Does My Shirts***. A twelve-year-old boy named Moose moves to Alcatraz Island in 1935 when guards' families were housed there, and has to contend with his extraordinary new environment in addition to life with his autistic sister.

Chotjewitz, David. ***Daniel Half-Human and the Good Nazi***. In 1933, best friends Daniel and Armin admire Hitler, but as anti-Semitism buoys Hitler to power, Daniel learns he is half Jewish, threatening the friendship even as life in their beloved Hamburg, Germany, is becoming nightmarish.

Clinton, Cathryn. ***A Stone in My Hand***. Living in Gaza City in the late 1980's, eleven-year-old Malaak and her family are touched by the increasing violence between Israelis and Palestinians when first her father disappears and then her older brother is drawn to the Islamic Jihad.

Cofer, Judith Ortiz. ***The Meaning of Consuelo***.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. ***Bud, Not Buddy***. Ten-year-old Bud, a motherless boy living in Flint, Michigan, during the Great Depression, escapes a bad foster home and sets out in search of the man he believes to be his father--the renowned bandleader, H.E. Calloway of Grand Rapids.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. ***The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963***. The ordinary interactions and everyday routines of the Watsons, an African American family living in Flint, Michigan, are drastically changed after they go to visit Grandma in Alabama in the summer of 1963.

Cushman, Karen. ***Catherine, Called Birdy***. The thirteen-year-old daughter of an English country knight keeps a journal in which she records the events of her life, particularly her longing for adventures beyond the usual role of women and her efforts to avoid being married off.

Cushman, Karen. ***Matilda Bone***. Fourteen-year-old Matilda, an apprentice bonesetter and practitioner of medicine in a village in medieval England, tries to reconcile the various aspects of her life, both spiritual and practical.

Cushman, Karen. ***The Midwife's Apprentice***. In medieval England, a nameless, homeless girl is taken in by a sharp-tempered midwife, and in spite of obstacles and hardship, eventually gains the three things she most wants: a full belly, a contented heart, and a place in this world.

Cushman, Karen. ***Rodzina***. A twelve-year-old Polish American girl is boarded onto an orphan train in Chicago with fears about traveling to the West and a life of unpaid slavery.

D'Adamo, Francesco. ***Iqbal***. A fictionalized account of the Pakistani child who escaped from bondage in a carpet factory and went on to help liberate other children like him before being gunned down at the age of thirteen.

Danticat, Edwidge. ***The Farming of Bones***. In 1937, on the Dominican side of the Haitian border, Amabelle, an orphaned maid to an army colonel's wife, falls in love with Sebastien, an itinerant sugarcane cutter, but their relationship is threatened by the violent persecution of the Haitians.

Donnelly, Jennifer. ***A Northern Light***. In 1906, sixteen-year-old Mattie, determined to attend college and be a writer against the wishes of her father and fiance, takes a job at a summer inn where she discovers the truth about the death of a guest. Based on a true story.

Dorris, Michael. ***Morning Girl***. Morning Girl, who loves the day, and her younger brother Star Boy, who loves the night, take turns describing their life on an island in pre-Columbian America; in Morning Girl's last narrative, she witnesses the arrival of the first Europeans to her world.

Draper, Sharon. ***Copper Sun***. Two fifteen-year-old girls--one a slave and the other an indentured servant--escape their Carolina plantation and try to make their way to Fort Moses, Florida, a Spanish colony that gives sanctuary to slaves.

Duble, Kathleen Benner. ***The Sacrifice***. Two sisters, aged ten and twelve, are accused of witchcraft in Andover, Massachusetts, in 1692 and await trial in a miserable prison while their mother desperately searches for some way to obtain their freedom.

Ellis, Deborah. ***The Breadwinner***. Because the Taliban rulers of Kabul, Afghanistan, impose strict limitations on women's freedom and behavior, eleven-year-old Parvana must disguise herself as a boy so that her family can survive after her father's arrest.

Friedman, D. Dina. ***Escaping into the Night***. Thirteen-year-old Halina Rudowski narrowly escapes the Polish ghetto and flees to the forest, where she is taken in by an encampment of Jews trying to survive World War II.

Frost, Helen. ***The Braid***. Two Scottish sisters relate their experiences after their family is forcibly evicted from the island of Barra and separated, with one sister accompanying their parents to Cape Breton, Canada, and the other staying behind with their grandmother.

Glatstein, Jacob. ***Emil and Karl***. In Vienna, Austria, in 1940, two nine-year-old boys, one Jewish and one Aryan, are classmates and best friends when events of the Nazi occupation draw them even closer together as they fight to survive and escape together.

Hesse, Karen. ***Aleutian Sparrow***. An Aleutian Islander recounts her suffering during World War II in American internment camps designed to "protect" the population from the invading Japanese.

Hesse, Karen. ***Out of the Dust***. In a series of poems, fifteen-year-old Billie Jo relates the hardships of living on her family's wheat farm in Oklahoma during the dust bowl years of the Depression.

Hesse, Karen. ***Witness***. A series of poems express the views of various people in a small Vermont town, including a young black girl and a young Jewish girl, during the early 1920s when the Ku Klux Klan is trying to infiltrate the town.

Hodges, Margaret. ***Merlin and the Making of the King***. A retelling of three Arthurian legends, "The Sword in the Stone," "Excalibur," and "The Lady of the Lake," which feature Merlin, King Arthur, and other familiar figures.

Hoffman, Alice. ***Incantation***. During the Spanish Inquisition, sixteen-year-old Estrella, brought up a Catholic, discovers her family's true Jewish identity, and when their secret is betrayed by Estrella's best friend, the consequences are tragic.

Hoffman, Mary. ***The Falconer's Knot***. Silvano and Chiara, teens sent to live in a friary and a nunnery in Renaissance Italy, are drawn to one another and dream of a future together, but when murders are committed in the friary, they must discover who is behind the crimes before they can realize their love.

Kadohata, Cynthia. ***Kira-Kira***. Chronicles the close friendship between two Japanese-American sisters growing up in rural Georgia during the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the despair when one sister becomes terminally ill.

Kerr, M. E. ***Slap Your Sides***. Life in their Pennsylvania hometown changes for Jubal Shoemaker and his family when his older brother witnesses to his Quaker beliefs by becoming a conscientious objector during World War II.

Krisher, Trudy. ***Uncommon Faith***. In 1837-38, residents of Millbrook, Massachusetts, speak in their different voices of major issues of their day, including women's rights, slavery, religious differences, and one fiery girl named Faith.

Lasky, Kathryn. ***Broken Song***. In 1897, fifteen-year-old Reuven Bloom, a Russian Jew, must set aside his dreams of playing the violin in order to save himself and his baby sister after the rest of their family is murdered.

LaFaye, A. ***Worth***. After breaking his leg, eleven-year-old Nate feels useless because he cannot work on the family farm in nineteenth-century Nebraska, so when his father brings home an orphan boy to help with the chores, Nate feels even worse.

Levine, Ellen. ***Catch a Tiger by the Toe***. In the Bronx, New York, during the McCarthy era, twelve-year-old Jamie keeps a terrible secret about her family, but when the truth is exposed, her parents lose their jobs and she is fired from the school newspaper.

Lester, Julius. ***Day of Tears***. When gambling debts and greed enter into the Butler household, Pierce Butler decides to host the biggest slave auction in American history and breaks a promise by selling Emma, his most-valued slave and caretaker of his children--a decision that brings about unthinkable consequences.

Mazer, Harry. ***A Boy at War: A Novel of Pearl Harbor***. While fishing with his friends off Honolulu on December 7, 1941, teenaged Adam is caught in the midst of the Japanese attack and through the chaos of the subsequent days tries to find his father, a naval officer who was serving on the U.S.S. Arizona when the bombs fell.

Mazer, Harry. ***Heroes Don't Run***. To honor his father who died during the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor, seventeen-year-old Adam eagerly enlists in the Marines in 1944, survives boot camp, and faces combat on the tiny island of Okinawa.

Mazer, Norma Fox. ***Good Night, Maman***. After spending years fleeing from the Nazis in war-torn Europe, twelve-year-old Karin Levi and her older brother Marc find a new home in a refugee camp in Oswego, New York.

McKernan, Victoria. ***Shackleton's Stowaway***. A fictionalized account of the adventures of eighteen-year-old Perce Blackborow, who stowed away for the 1914 Shackleton Antarctic expedition and, after their ship *Endurance* was crushed by ice, endured many hardships.

Meyer, L.A. ***Bloody Jack : being an account of the curious adventures of Mary "Jacky" Faber, Ship's Boy***. Reduced to begging and thievery in the streets of London, a thirteen-year-old orphan disguises herself as a boy and connives her way onto a British warship set for high sea adventure in search of pirates.

Meyer, L.A. ***Curse of the blue tattoo : being an account of the misadventures of Jacky Faber, midshipman and fine lady***. After being forced to leave her ship, Jacky Faber finds herself attending school in Boston, where, instead of learning to be a lady, she roams the city in search of adventure, and learns to ride a horse.

Meyer, L.A. ***In the Belly of the Bloodhound***. Jacky Faber and her classmates at the Lawson Peabody School for Young Girls in Boston are kidnapped while on a school outing and transported in the hold of a slave ship bound for the slave markets of North Africa.

Meyer, L.A. ***Under the Jolly Roger : being an account of the further nautical adventures of Jacky Faber***. In 1804, fifteen-year-old Jacky Faber heads back to sea where she gains control of a British warship and eventually becomes a privateer.

Morpurgo, Michael. ***Private Peaceful***. When Thomas Peaceful's older brother is forced to join the British Army, Thomas decides to sign up as well, although he is only fourteen years old, to prove himself to his country, his family, his childhood love, Molly, and himself.

Moses, Shelia P. ***The Legend of Buddy Bush***. In 1947, twelve-year-old Pattie Mae is sustained by her dreams of escaping Rich Square, North Carolina, and moving to Harlem when her Uncle Buddy is arrested for attempted rape of a white woman and her grandfather is diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor.

Myers, Walter Dean. ***The Glory Field***. Follows a family's two hundred forty-one year history, from the capture of an African boy in the 1750s through the lives of his descendants, as their dreams and circumstances lead them away from and back to the small plot of land in South Carolina that they call the Glory Field.

Napoli, Donna Jo. ***Bound***. In a novel based on Chinese Cinderella tales, fourteen-year-old stepchild Xing-Xing endures a life of neglect and servitude, as her stepmother cruelly mutilates her own child's feet so that she alone might marry well.

Napoli, Donna Jo. ***Breath***. Elaborates on the tale of "The Pied Piper," told from the point of view of a boy who is too ill to keep up when a piper spirits away the healthy children of a plague-ridden town after being cheated out of full payment for ridding Hameln of rats.

Park, Linda Sue. ***A Single Shard***. Tree-ear, a thirteen-year-old orphan in medieval Korea, lives under a bridge in a potters' village, and longs to learn how to throw the delicate celadon ceramics himself.

Paterson, Katherine. ***Lyddie***. Impoverished Vermont farm girl Lyddie Worthen is determined to gain her independence by becoming a factory worker in Lowell, Massachusetts, in the 1840s.

Paterson, Katherine. ***Jip: His Story***. While living on a Vermont poor farm during 1855 and 1856, Jip learns his identity and that of his mother and comes to understand how he arrived at this place.

Paulsen, Gary. ***Nightjohn***. Twelve-year-old Sarny's brutal life as a slave becomes even more dangerous when a newly arrived slave offers to teach her how to read.

Paulsen, Gary. ***Soldier's Heart: A Novel of the Civil War***. Eager to enlist, fifteen-year-old Charley has a change of heart after experiencing both the physical horrors and mental anguish of Civil War combat.

Peck, Richard. ***The River Between Us***. During the early days of the Civil War, the Pruitt family takes in two mysterious young ladies who have fled New Orleans to come north to Illinois.

Peck, Richard. ***The Teacher's Funeral: A Comedy in Three Parts***. In rural Indiana in 1904, fifteen-year-old Russell's dreams of quitting school and joining a wheat threshing crew are disrupted when his older sister takes over the teaching at his one-room schoolhouse after mean, old Myrt Arbuckle "hauls off and dies."

Peck, Richard. ***A Year Down Yonder***. In 1937, during the Depression, fifteen-year-old Mary Alice, initially apprehensive about leaving Chicago to spend a year with her fearsome, larger-than-life grandmother in rural Illinois, gradually begins to better understand and admire her grandmother's unusual qualities.

Phelan, Matt. ***The Storm in the Barn***. When faced with everyone's tensions in the Kansas Dust Bowl, Jack encounters the strange Storm King who withholds the badly needed rain and tells Jack that he won't release the rain until everyone worships him. Jack knows that he must defeat him in order to release the rain the the Storm King holds. Graphic novel.

Rees, Celia. ***Pirates!: The True and Remarkable Adventures of Minerva Sharpe and Nancy Kington, Female Pirates***. In 1722, after arriving with her brother at the family's Jamaican plantation where she is to be married off, sixteen-year-old Nancy Kington escapes with her slave friend, Minerva Sharpe, and together they become pirates traveling the world in search of treasure.

Rees, Celia. ***Witch Child***. In 1659, fourteen-year-old Mary Newbury keeps a journal of her voyage from England to the New World and her experiences living as a witch in a community of Puritans near Salem, Massachusetts.

Roy, Jennifer. ***Yellow Star***. From 1939, when Sylvia is four and a half years old, to 1945 when she has just turned ten, a Jewish girl and her family struggle to survive in Poland's Lodz ghetto during the Nazi occupation.

Ryan, Pam Muñoz. ***Esperanza Rising***. Esperanza and her mother are forced to leave their life of wealth and privilege in Mexico to go work in the labor camps of Southern California, where they must adapt to the harsh circumstances facing Mexican farm workers on the eve of the Great Depression.

Sáenz, Benjamin Alire. ***Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood***. As a Chicano boy living in the unglamorous town of Hollywood, New Mexico, and a member of the graduating class of 1969, Sammy Santos faces the challenges of "gringo" racism, unpopular dress codes, the Vietnam War, barrio violence, and poverty.

Schmidt, Gary D. ***Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy***. In 1911, Turner Buckminster hates his new home of Phippsburg, Maine, but things improve when he meets Lizzie Bright Griffin, a girl from a poor, nearby island community founded by former slaves that the town fathers--and Turner's--want to change into a tourist spot.

Sedgwick, Marcus. ***The Foreshadowing***. Having always been able to know when someone is going to die, Alexandra poses as a nurse to go to France during World War I to locate her brother and to try to save him from the fate she has foreseen for him.

Spillebeen, Geert. ***Kipling's Choice***. In 1915, mortally wounded in Loos, France, eighteen-year-old John Kipling, son of writer Rudyard Kipling, remembers his boyhood and the events leading to what is to be his first and last World War I battle.

Spinelli, Jerry. ***Milkweed***.

Springer, Nancy. ***The Case of the Missing Marquess: An Enola Holmes Mystery***. Enola Holmes, much younger sister of detective Sherlock Holmes, must travel to London in disguise to unravel the disappearance of her missing mother.

Stolz, Joelle. ***The Shadows of Ghadames***. At the end of the nineteenth century in Libya, eleven-year-old Malika simultaneously enjoys and feels constricted by the narrow world of women, but an injured stranger enters her home and disrupts the traditional order of things.

Straight, Susan. ***A Million Nightingales***. When she is sold away from her family, Moinette begins to prepare herself for an escape to freedom, journeying through a world of brutality, sexual violence, loss, and struggle to find her way out of the bonds of slavery.

Sturtevant, Katherine. ***A True and Faithful Narrative***. In London in the 1680s, Meg--now sixteen years old--tries to decide whether to marry either of the two men who court her, taking into account both love and her writing ambitions.

Thal, Lilli. ***Mimus***.

White, Ruth. ***Tadpole***. In rural Kentucky in 1955, Serilda Collins, single mother of four lively girls, discovers that her orphaned nephew is being subjected to brutality.

Winspear, Jacqueline. ***Maisie Dobbs***. Private detective Maisie Dobbs must investigate the reappearance of a dead man who turns up at a cooperative farm called the Retreat that caters to men who are recovering their health after World War I.

Wiseman, Eva. ***Puppet***. A fictionalized account of the last blood libel trial in Hungary in 1882 is told through the eyes of Julie, a friend of the murdered servant girl Esther and a servant at the jail where Morris Scharf, the accused, is imprisoned.

Yep, Laurence. ***Dragon's Gate***. When he accidentally kills a Manchu, a fifteen-year-old Chinese boy is sent to America to join his father, an uncle, and other Chinese working to build a tunnel for the transcontinental railroad through the Sierra Nevada mountains in 1867. Sequel to "Mountain light."

Yep, Laurence. ***The Traitor***.

Yolen, Jane, and Robert J. Harris. ***Girl in a Cage***. As English armies invade Scotland in 1306, eleven-year-old Princess Marjorie, daughter of the newly crowned Scottish king, Robert the Bruce, is captured by England's King Edward Longshanks and held in a cage on public display.

Zindel, Paul. ***The Gadget***. In 1945, having joined his father at Los Alamos, where he and other scientists are working on a secret project to end World War II, thirteen-year-old Stephen becomes caught in a web of secrecy and intrigue.

List compiled by Diane Linenbroker

Updated: October 4, 2010