

# Historical Fiction

The genre of historical fiction in the field of children's literature includes stories that are written to portray a time period or convey information about a specific time period or an historical event. Usually the event or time period is about 30 years in the past.

Some well-known examples are Karen Cushman's *Catherine, Called Birdy* and *The Midwife's Apprentice*, and Christopher Paul Curtis's *The Watsons go to Birmingham—1963* and *Bud, Not Buddy*.

In historical fiction, setting is the most important literary element. Because the author is writing about a particular time in history, the information about the time period must be accurate, authentic, or both. To create accurate and authentic settings in their books, authors must research the time period thoroughly. They must know how people lived, what they ate, what kinds of homes they had, and what artifacts were a common part of their lives.

Historical fiction books—whether they are picture books, transitional books, or novels—may have characters who are either imaginary or who actually lived during the time period. Settings also may be real or imaginary. The plot events may be documented historical events or they may be fictional. If they are fictional, it means that the author created the events for the telling of the story. The fictional characters, settings, and plot events must be portrayed authentically as if they actually *could* have happened.

A classic example of historical fiction is *Johnny Tremain*, a 1944 Newbery Medal book. The primary setting is Boston in 1773. The book contains both real and fictional characters, real and fictional settings, and real and fictional events. The book is successful because of author Esther Forbes's extensive historical research and knowledge of the time period and her skillful blending of history and fiction into a believable story.