

## Making History and Literature Come Alive

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*“If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.”*

*Rudyard Kipling*

Making history come to life for students can make all the difference in their retention of information presented to them. What better way to bring history to life for them than to combine it with literature of the same time period? Providing students opportunities to “experience” a certain period in history will give them lifelong memories while adding to their building blocks of knowledge.

Ideas to consider:

### **1. Room Décor**

When setting up your classroom, consider adding touches of the time period theme for decoration (prints, knights’ helmets, hieroglyphics, sculptures, etc.). When students enter your room they will immediately be reminded of what they are studying that year. This is also a nice way to introduce visitors to the period of history each grade level is learning.

### **2. Student’s Roles**

Label your daily “helpers” roles with some aspect from the historical period you are studying. Some used at our school are: (medieval) Head Knight and Head Damsel; (ancient Egypt) Pharaoh, Vizier, and Scribe; (ancient Greece and Rome) Curator—*from the Latin word cura (to take care of)* and Hermes—*messenger of the gods, this student runs errands*; (US History/Government) Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Speaker of the House, Secretary of State.

### **3. Classroom Timeline**

A great source for continual introduction and review is the use of a Timeline. Set it up at the beginning of the year with a cross in the center so that you can have dates for B.C. and A.D. As an event, author, composer, or artist is introduced throughout the year, add a picture or title to the timeline.

### **4. Literature**

Choose literature which has the same time period as the history your students are learning. Your librarian is a wonderful resource for helping you choose read-aloud books that also are in the same time period. Our school has a Book Week which ends with a Character Parade. That offers teachers, as well as students, an opportunity to dress up as a character from a book their grade level is reading or has read that year.

## 5. Music

An article from the *International Literacy Association Daily*, January 8, 2018, states, “A growing body of research suggests that music education enhances literacy skills that facilitate all other learning.” Setting historical facts, dates, or concepts to music will bring joy to the “singers” while cementing information into their minds.

## 6. Assemblies

Preparing for presenting information at Assemblies is a great way for students to review, review, review. Our students have the privilege of presenting things they are learning at weekly Assemblies. Students memorize lines, Bible verses, and songs to present a snapshot of their daily educational routine. (e.g. Beowulf is read by our fourth graders in the fall. The students wear Viking helmets they made from cardboard and march onto the stage to the tune of Viking music. They present the story of Beowulf acknowledging the theme of “Light versus Darkness”.)

## 7. Special Days

The crème de la crème for making history and literature come alive is to devote a large portion of a school day—or even the entire day—to culminate the students’ learning. This requires a great deal of planning and organizing, but is well worth it to see the faces of your students light up. If you are blessed to have active parental involvement, this is a great day to have them take the reigns. Since fourth graders at Geneva School of Boerne study Medieval Times and read Beowulf, King Arthur, and Prince Caspian, the special day they have is a Medieval Feast and Faire. On a specified day during October the 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers take their students on a hike (on our campus) to a treed area we affectionately call Sherwood Forest. Our Latin teacher plays the trumpet and leads our students in a procession to this area—all teachers are dressed in medieval attire. One by one the students draw a stick from an oversized pewter goblet. Each stick is labeled with the name of a role in the Feudal System. That becomes the role which that student will research, write a paper on, prepare a project on, and dress as on the day of the Feast and Faire. The Feast and Faire day, which is later in the year, begins with students presenting at Assembly. Afterwards, parents and other grammar school classes visit the fourth grade classrooms where students have displayed their projects and tell the visitors about them. The Fourth Graders then go to our Lyceum where talented parents have transformed the room into a medieval castle-like setting. During the day, the students “live” the life of medieval people—dining, jousting, catapulting, practicing archery, etc. It is truly a magical day.