

Knight School

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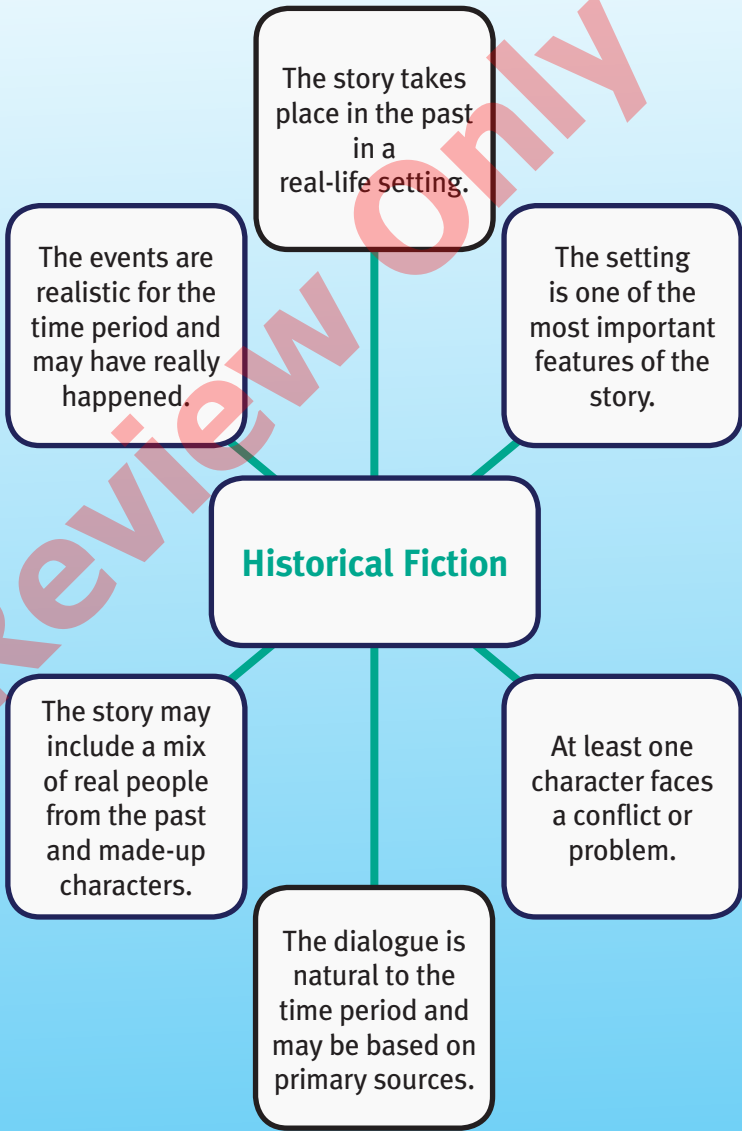


**HISTORICAL FICTION
LITERATURE**

Level	U/50
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Historical Fiction

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The Mock Knight



“And so, we finally meet,” I say to the knight standing across from me on the jousting field.

I can feel the knight mock me with his grin as he swings his sword through the air. He is fast and clever, but I am faster still.

I lunge at him, my sword eager for revenge. I land a blow across his chest, yet it isn’t enough to stop his advance.

The crowd of spectators in the viewing stands gasp.
Whooooosh!

The knight's sword goes whistling past my head. I stumble back, and before I can recover, he swings again. He narrowly misses me a second time.

The crowd goes wild as I spin and aim for his chest.

"Ahhhhh," the knight shouts as he falls to the ground. I spread out my arms in victory. I am the victor of the Knights Grand Tournament.

The crowd roars my name. "Will! Will! ... WILL, come here right NOW!"

I drop my wooden sword. Oh yes, that is actually my father roaring my name. Unfortunately, the match is only a figment of my imagination, and the knight is just a dummy made of metal and wood.

"WILLOW!" Father calls again from inside his workshop.

I stop the fake knight from spinning and take my helmet off, letting my long hair tumble out.

"There you are, Willow," Father says, stepping out of his workshop into the yard.

Father looks fatigued. He's been working tirelessly for many months making weapons for the annual Knights Tournament. It is a great honor to craft weaponry for the biggest tournament of the year. However, without an apprentice to help, it is also exhausting.

I help out some by making the dummy wooden swords for the Pages Challenge, which is before the Knights Tournament.

"Please go to the port and see if the *Graciella* has docked," Father says. "The ship is carrying some brass plating for me. I can't finish the lance Lord Malcolm ordered for the Knights Tournament without it."

Nodding, I pick up one of the wooden swords and test its balance. It is evenly weighted and has a fine grip; too bad the Master of the Joust had us make them so light.

“I don’t understand why they won’t let the pages fight with heavier swords. How will they ever learn to be real knights? If girls were allowed to be pages, I’d insist on fighting with a real weapon, not a toy,” I say.



Father laughs. "If only all people had your courage."

"It's not fair," I say, as I slash the air with the dummy sword. "I'm stronger and faster than any page in England, even Cedric. Yet I can't train with or compete against them in the Pages Challenge because I'm a girl."

"I'm sorry, Willow, we can't change how things are. You have to accept the customs," Father says.

The bell on the front gate rings, halting our discussion.

"If I'm to finish all these swords, I can't be interrupted again," Father says, running his hands through his hair. "Send them away, Willow. But if it's Cedric, tell him I'll have Lord Malcolm's weapon ready by the morning."

"Yes, Father." I wipe my hands on my apron and tidy my hair.

"And Will," Father says, handing me a few pennies, "while you're at the port, buy some of that cinnamon you've been wanting to taste. Though I'm afraid this won't buy very much."

I kiss Father on the cheek and take my leave.

I am glad to see that it isn't Cedric at the front gate. We had grown up together, and he had always been somewhat sour. But ever since he started training with Lord Malcolm, Cedric had become even more insufferable than before.

Instead, a page I had never seen before waits at the gate. His cheeks are flushed, as if he'd run for miles in the hot sun. His expression is gloomy, as if he had just attended a funeral.

"Pardon me," the page says. "Is this the home of the renowned sword smith?"

"It is," I say. "But you're too late if your lord wants to order a weapon for the tournament."

The poor boy looks miserable, but the knight's helmet in his hands looks worse. It has a large dent on the visor, preventing it from closing.



"Please," the page says. "I will pay whatever the cost."

"How did this happen?" I ask.

"I ... I was down at the docks, and ... well ..."

I shake my head. One of a page's principal duties is to safeguard his knight's helmet. Clearly, something happened and this boy had failed. He doesn't speak—only stares down at his feet.

"Come in," I say opening the front gate. "Let's see if my father can help you."

"*Gracias*," he says. "I mean, thank you. Sir Rolando will have my head if he knows about it."

"Wait," I say. The boy nods. "He's my uncle," he says.

"Father will definitely help you then!" I grab his arm and lead him into Father's workshop.

"I've been waiting all year to see Sir Rolando fight," I say, nearly breathless with excitement. "The match between Rolando and Lord Malcolm is the banner event of the Knights Tournament! You're so lucky to learn from him. What's your name?"

"Leandro. Call me Leo."

"Nice to meet you," I say. "I'm Willow, but you can call me Will."

"I met another girl named Will once, in India. Actually, her name was Wilpreet, but I called her Will."

"You've been to India?" It is hard to conceal my envy.

"Si," Leo nods. "We've traveled as far as any ship can go, all the way to the Far East."

The Pages Challenge

I show Leo around Father's workshop while Father examines the helmet. Leo's eyes grow with amazement. He wants to know the name of everything in the shop and how it all works. The way he admires the tools of Father's trade, you'd think he's landed in some exotic land, not a smith shop.

"You're lucky, Leo," Father finally says. "I'll be able to hammer this out without any damage to the visor."

"Thank you so much, sir," Leo bows his head and salutes from his heart. "How can I repay you?"

"Perhaps you two could go down to the port and run that errand for me," Father says with a smile.

Leo pales at the mention of the port, but he bows again and says, "It would be my honor, sir."

As we walk down the cobbled street to the port, Leo says, "I noticed the training equipment in your yard. Who trains at your house?"

"I do. Father likes me to test out the swords he makes."

I wait for Leo to say something about girls not being good fighters, but he simply smiles and says, "You're very lucky to have a master craftsman for a father."

The dock is bustling with activity. Knights from all over Europe parade through the crowd, and their pages trail behind them. Ships of all sizes are making port, offloading shipments of exotic spices, silks, and brightly colored fruits from faraway lands. I can't understand most of the people who shout in their foreign tongues. It doesn't matter to me, though; all I can hear is the call of adventure.

Leo and I quickly retrieve Father's shipment and then join the long line to the spice merchant's stall.

While we wait, I pepper Leo with questions about his travels with Sir Rolando.

"Where was your favorite place to visit?" I ask.

"China," Leo says. "The knights there are called warriors, and their swords are made with Tao. They have the most intricate designs on the hilts. They're works of art." He has a dreamy look in his eyes. It is the first time since we reached the port that he isn't nervously looking over his shoulder.

