Comparing Fictional and Historical Portrayals

Name: _____	Date: _____	Score: _____ / 10

Quick Review

A historical fiction story uses real time periods and real kinds of events but invents specific characters, dialogue, and scenes. A historical account reports what actually happened, with sources and dates. Both can be useful — but each makes different promises to the reader. Watch for what the fiction adds and what the history alone can tell you.

PART 1 — READ

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Two Versions of a Storm at Sea (1909)

=== Story Excerpt: The Lamp Room (historical fiction) === Maeve had been the assistant keeper at Inishbeg Lighthouse for three months on the October night the storm came in from the northwest, and she was, at thirteen, the youngest person on the island who knew how to trim the lamp. Her father, the head keeper, had taught her in August with the patience of a man who had himself been taught by his own father in the same room. The lamp at Inishbeg was a paraffin-fueled, clockwork-driven mechanism that had to be rewound every two and a half hours through the night, or the light it threw — visible nineteen nautical miles out to sea on a clear evening — would slow, dim, and finally stop. At 11:42 p.m., the wind tore the wooden shutter off the eastern window of the lamp room with a sound Maeve would later describe, in her own diary, as "the snap of a great glass bone." Her father, who had been about to climb the stairs to rewind the mechanism, was knocked sideways by a gust that came through the broken shutter and pinned his shoulder against the iron railing. Maeve heard him call out once. She climbed past him without speaking, because she understood, in that exact moment, that the lamp would stop in eleven minutes if no one wound it, and that the ships off the western shoal — there were three of them, she had counted them at sundown — were depending on the light. Her hands shook for the first three turns of the crank. By the fourth, they did not. When the head inspector from the coastal service came out the following spring, he asked Maeve to describe what she had done. She told him, in seven sentences, exactly the order of her actions — the call she heard from her father, the climb past him, the four turns of the crank, the return downstairs, the bandage on her father's shoulder, the relighting of the wick in the lamp room at 11:51, and the second rewind at 2:13 a.m. The inspector wrote it all down. He did not ask her how she had felt. She was glad, she wrote in her diary that night, that he had not.

=== Historical Account === Lighthouse keeping in the British Isles and Ireland in the early twentieth century was a family occupation in many remote stations. At smaller installations — particularly island lights such as those off the western coast of Ireland — the position of "assistant keeper" was sometimes filled by a member of the head keeper's immediate family, including, in documented cases, children as young as twelve or thirteen. Paraffin-vapor lamps with clockwork mechanisms were the dominant lighting technology between roughly 1880 and the 1920s, before electrical conversion. The clockwork drives required rewinding at regular intervals — typically every two to four hours, depending on the model — to maintain consistent lamp rotation and flame height. The Inishbeg Lighthouse Service Records, archived at the Commissioners of Irish Lights, document a severe northwesterly storm in October 1909 that damaged shutters at three west-coast stations, including Inishbeg. The Inishbeg log for that night records that the head keeper was "injured in the lamp room" and that the lamp "was kept in service through the night" by another member of the household. The keeper's name is recorded; the assistant's name in the household is not, although a marginal note refers to "the daughter, age 13, in attendance." The same archive contains an inspection report from the following spring, in which the assistant is interviewed; the original interview transcript does not survive, but the inspector's summary describes her account as "orderly and precise." No further details about the assistant's experience that night are preserved in the official record.

PART 2 — PRACTICE

Use BOTH the story excerpt and the historical account to answer each question. Pay attention to what each text does — and does not — tell you.

1. Both texts agree on which of these facts?

A. The assistant keeper's name was Maeve.

B. A storm in October 1909 damaged a shutter at Inishbeg Lighthouse, the head keeper was injured, and the lamp was kept in service by a household member, age 13.

C. The assistant keeper's diary survives in the official archive.

D. The head inspector personally praised the assistant in a long published letter.

2. Which detail is in the FICTIONAL story but NOT in the historical account?

A. The assistant's exact thoughts, including her noticing three ships off the western shoal at sundown.

B. The date of the storm (October 1909).

C. The fact that paraffin-vapor lamps had clockwork mechanisms.

D. The fact that the head keeper was injured in the lamp room.

3. Which detail is in the HISTORICAL account but NOT in the fictional story?

A. the metaphor "the snap of a great glass bone"

B. the inspector's summary describing the assistant's account as "orderly and precise" — and the fact that the original transcript does not survive in the archive.

C. Maeve climbing past her injured father to rewind the lamp.

D. the seven-sentence interview the assistant gave the inspector.

4. Why might a HISTORIAN say that the fictional version's description of the moment — "the snap of a great glass bone" — should NOT be quoted as evidence of what actually happened that night?

A. Because historians never accept anything written about a storm.

B. Because that phrase is presented in the fiction as the assistant's diary entry, but the historical account confirms that the original interview transcript does not survive AND no diary is mentioned in the archive — the phrase is invented by the author.

C. Because storms in 1909 never produced sharp sounds.

D. Because the phrase is too short to be useful.

5. What does the FICTIONAL story do that the historical account CANNOT do?

A. It gives the reader the date of the storm.

B. It gives the reader the inside of Maeve's experience — her hands shaking on the first three turns, her decision to climb past her father, the way she counted the ships at sundown — none of which are in the surviving record.

C. It documents the rewinding interval of paraffin-vapor clockwork lamps.

D. It names the location of the lighthouse.

6. What does the HISTORICAL account do that the fictional story CANNOT do?

A. It places the events inside a documented, sourced context (the Inishbeg Service Records, the inspector's summary) that lets a reader check what is preserved and what is not.

B. It gives the reader Maeve's exact dialogue with her father.

C. It quotes the diary entry the assistant wrote that night.

D. It describes the wind tearing a shutter off the eastern window.

7. Read the historical account: "The keeper's name is recorded; the assistant's name in the household is not, although a marginal note refers to 'the daughter, age 13, in attendance.'" What does this tell us about WRITING historical fiction based on this record?

A. The novelist can invent the assistant's name AND her interior experience, because the record does not preserve them — but should be honest with the reader that those parts are imagined.

B. The novelist must use the assistant's real name exactly as it appears in the archive.

C. The novelist should pretend the assistant did not exist, because she is not named in the record.

D. The novelist should ignore the historical record entirely and make up the storm date too.

8. Which sentence BEST describes how the two texts WORK TOGETHER for a Grade 7 reader?

A. The historical account proves every detail of the fictional story is true.

B. The historical account gives the verified frame (storm + injured keeper + 13-year-old kept the lamp running), while the fictional story imagines a specific INSIDE for that frame (a name, a diary line, hands that shake on the first three turns) — together they let a reader feel and check the past at once.

C. The two texts disagree on every major fact and cancel each other out.

D. The fictional story is more reliable than the historical account.

9. Identify TWO specific details that appear ONLY in the FICTIONAL story (not in the historical account). For each detail, explain in 1-2 sentences why a NOVELIST might invent it AND why a HISTORIAN could not include it.

_____

_____

10. Imagine a classmate says, "I read the fictional story, so now I know everything that really happened at Inishbeg Lighthouse in 1909." Using BOTH texts, explain in 3-4 sentences why this is a misunderstanding — AND explain what the fictional story DOES add that the historical account does not.

_____

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Answer Keys

1	A	**B**	C	D	6	**A**	B	C	D
2	**A**	B	C	D	7	**A**	B	C	D
3	A	**B**	C	D	8	A	**B**	C	D
4	A	**B**	C	D	9	See below			
5	A	**B**	C	D	10	See below			

Explanations

1. B	All three facts in B appear in BOTH texts (storm + damaged shutter + injured keeper + 13-year-old household member kept the lamp running). A is fictional only ("Maeve" never appears in the historical account); C contradicts the archive (the transcript does not survive); D invents a published letter.
2. A	Interior thoughts — counting ships at sundown, the diary's "snap of a great glass bone" — are exactly what fiction can invent and a historical record cannot supply. B, C, and D appear in the historical account.
3. B	The archive note about the surviving SUMMARY (and the missing transcript) is in the historical text only. A, C, and D are in the fictional story.
4. B	A historian sticks to what the record actually preserves; the archive contains a summary, not a transcript, and no diary. A overclaims; C is silly; D mistakes brevity for usefulness.
5. B	The story's gift is interior experience. A, C, and D all live in the historical account.
6. A	Sources, archive locations, and a clear note of what is preserved are exactly what a historical account offers. B and C invent material the record does not preserve; D belongs to the fictional version.
7. A	A 13-year-old daughter is documented; her name and inner life are not — so a novelist invents responsibly and names that invention. B contradicts the record's gap; C ignores documented existence; D recommends ignoring sources.
8. B	Frame from the record, inside from the fiction — that is the honest pairing the texts model. A overclaims; C is wrong (the two texts agree on the frame); D reverses reliability.
9.	**Answer:** Strong answers name two clearly fictional inventions. Examples: (1) the diary line "the snap of a great glass bone" — a novelist invents this to give the storm a felt sound for the reader; a historian could not include it because no diary survives in the archive; (2) the detail that Maeve counted three ships off the western shoal at sundown — a novelist invents this to give Maeve a reason to act (people are out there); a historian could not include it because no source preserves what the assistant noticed at sundown; (3) the exact seven-sentence interview Maeve gives the inspector — a novelist invents this to dramatize the meeting; a historian could only report that the inspector's summary called her account "orderly and precise" because the transcript does not survive; (4) Maeve's father pinning his shoulder against the iron railing — a novelist gives a specific physical injury; a historian only has the log's phrase "injured in the lamp room." NOT acceptable: details that ARE in the historical account; only one detail; details with no explanation of the novelist's reason vs. the historian's limit. Two details, each one followed by a why-for-the-novelist AND a why-not-for-the-historian.

10.	**Answer:** Strong answers do BOTH jobs. The misunderstanding: the fictional story invents specific names, dialogue, diary lines, and interior thoughts that the surviving record does not preserve — the archive only documents the storm, the damaged shutter, the injured keeper, the 13-year-old daughter "in attendance," and the inspector's summary calling her account "orderly and precise." Treating the novel's invented details as facts would mistake imagined material for documented material. What fiction adds: the inside experience — "her hands shook for the first three turns... by the fourth, they did not" — gives the reader a felt sense of the night that a coastal-service log cannot give. Acceptable variations: any answer that names the gap in the record AND names a specific interior detail fiction provides. NOT acceptable: answers that say the fiction is "just made up" without naming the documented frame; answers that defend the classmate's claim; answers with no quoted or paraphrased detail. Two halves: (1) what the fiction INVENTS that the record does not preserve; (2) what the fiction can do (interior feeling) that the historical account cannot.

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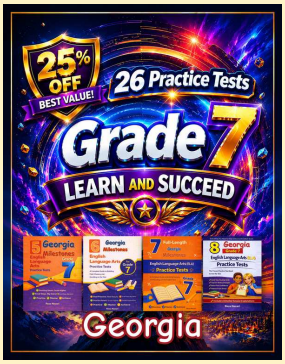

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