

Judging the Past

Use clear criteria to evaluate a historical novel and connect it to other accounts.

9-10R9 "Choose and develop criteria in order to evaluate the quality of texts. Make connections to other texts, ideas, cultural perspectives, eras, and personal experiences. (RI&RL)"

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details Chen uses to judge the novel's reliability, circle details about perspective, and number the comparison to another kind of text so you can see how each piece of evidence supports an evaluation.

More Than Accurate Dates

- ① When evaluating a historical novel, readers need more than a list of accurate dates. Literary critic Mara Chen proposes three criteria for judging a book about a real event: reliability, perspective, and artistic force. Reliability asks whether the setting, actions, and language fit available evidence. Perspective asks whose experiences receive attention and whose are missing. Artistic force asks whether scenes, patterns, and word choices help readers understand the event's human stakes. These criteria fit historical fiction because such books make claims about the past while also using invented characters and plots.
- ② Chen applies the criteria to *Harbor Lights*, a novel set during the 1918 influenza pandemic in a coastal city. The book accurately shows that public gatherings were restricted and that many families faced sudden loss. Yet its narrator is the daughter of a shipping-company owner, and dockworkers appear mainly as unnamed helpers. Chen compares this choice with letters and oral histories from workers' families, which describe crowded housing and fears of lost wages. That connection reveals a limitation: the novel's narrow viewpoint makes economic hardship less visible than it was in many residents' lives.
- ③ Still, Chen does not reject *Harbor Lights*. She praises a repeated image of closed windows, which links private grief to the city's effort to slow disease. She also notes that the daughter's growing awareness of her family's privilege can prompt readers to question which stories become official history. Compared with a textbook chapter that summarizes public-health policies, the novel creates emotional immediacy, while the textbook provides broader context. Chen concludes that the novel is powerful but incomplete. Readers should value its craft and use accounts from other social groups to test and extend its version of the past.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What three criteria does Chen choose for evaluating a historical novel?

2 How do the workers' letters and oral histories change Chen's evaluation of *Harbor Lights*?

3 Why does Chen call the novel powerful even though it is incomplete? Use one detail about its artistic force and one detail about its perspective.

4 What does Chen's comparison with a textbook chapter suggest readers should do when evaluating a historical novel?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Choose a historical, realistic, or dystopian text you know well. In 90 to 120 words, name three criteria that fit its genre, evaluate the text using specific evidence, and connect it to another text, idea, era, cultural perspective, or personal experience.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline details Chen uses to judge the novel's reliability, circle details about perspective, and number the comparison to another kind of text so you can see how each piece of evidence supports an evaluation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What three criteria does Chen choose for evaluating a historical novel?	Reliability, perspective, and artistic force.
2	How do the workers' letters and oral histories change Chen's evaluation of <i>Harbor Lights</i> ?	They show crowded housing and fears of lost wages, revealing that the novel's narrow viewpoint makes economic hardship less visible.
3	Why does Chen call the novel powerful even though it is incomplete? Use one detail about its artistic force and one detail about its perspective.	Its repeated image of closed windows links private grief to the public effort to slow disease, giving it artistic force. However, its focus on the shipping owner's daughter leaves workers' experiences less visible.
4	What does Chen's comparison with a textbook chapter suggest readers should do when evaluating a historical novel?	Readers should value the novel's emotional immediacy but use broader accounts, such as textbooks and accounts from other social groups, to test and extend its version of the past.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would evaluate Lois Lowry's *The Giver* by its world-building, complexity of perspective, and thematic impact. Its controlled community has clear rules about family units, jobs, and memories, so the invented setting feels believable. The story stays close to Jonas, which makes his discovery of pain and color immediate, but it gives less access to characters such as Fiona. Its strongest effect is showing that safety without choice can cost people their humanity. Like Kurt Vonnegut's *Harrison Bergeron*, the novel questions enforced sameness. Lowry's quieter, developing conflict makes that warning more personal.

Accept equivalent descriptions of the three criteria and passage-based explanations of the novel's strengths and limitations. For the open response, accept varied criteria and connections when the student clearly explains why the criteria fit the chosen text and supports the evaluation with accurate evidence.