

50 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

Stone Soup Creative Writing Project

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PROJECT FOR WRITERS

HISTORICAL FICTION: USING FACT FOR PLOT AND YOUR IMAGINATION FOR THE REST

MENTOR TEXT:

“War Boy” by Phillipe B. Visser (age 11)

Florie woke in a cold sweat. She gazed out the window. Four Germans stood nearby, rigid and erect, guns strapped over their shoulders. Another German stood atop the building’s bare roof, staring relentlessly through a pair of binoculars.

WRITING TIP:

Blend fact with fiction. Phillipe’s story is based on his family’s history. Phillipe starts with the fact of his father’s survival in World War II. He then builds this into an engaging story using the techniques of fiction writing. These include strong characters and vivid descriptions. Use your imagination to help the reader feel like they were there—even if only a few of the real-life details were actually recorded.

TURN THE PAGE to read THE FULL PIECE.

ACTIVITY

USE YOUR IMAGINATION TO BRING A TRUE STORY TO LIFE

STEP ONE: GATHER THE FACTS

Talk to your parents or grandparents about your family’s history. Learn about an important event in that history. Get the facts written down. It is very possible that most of the details have been forgotten—details like what people looked like, exactly what they said, and so on. But don’t despair! What has been forgotten you will reinvent with your imagination just as Phillipe did.

STEP TWO: RESEARCH TO FILL THE GAPS

You may need to go to the library or online to do some background research. This is something all historical novelists do. You may need more information about a historical event (like a war) or a country your family comes from. Look for photos from the time and place you’re writing about too. Images can show you what people ate and wore, or how they interacted. These details add color, flavor, and texture to your story.

STEP THREE: DRAFT YOUR FAMILY STORY

Notice how Phillipe uses scenes in his story. One technique he uses is to jump from one scene to another without transition. This is a technique common in movies: the story is told in scenes, with the camera cutting from one place to another. Notice how this strategy adds to the sense of tension in his writing. As you draft your family story, you may find it useful to think of it in short scenes. Where might each scene have happened? What might the people have been doing or saying to one another?

Once you finish your story, share it with your family.

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MENTOR TEXT

War Boy

by Phillippe B. Visser (age 11)

It was the terrible winter of 1944. "The Starving Winter" it was called. With no electricity and food, it was a horrible time for the Dutch. They awoke at each dawn, only to wait in barren, desolate streets for the rationed supplies. It was then that the weight of the German occupation grew heaviest on the shoulders of the people of Holland.

Holding a plate of food, Florie slipped downstairs. As she watched the Jewish dentist and his wife slowly eat, her thoughts turned elsewhere.

For three years, Jan and she had housed these people who had narrowly escaped the sealed fate that awaited them in a concentration camp. She knew of the danger in which she was putting herself, Jan, and their son Karl by aiding these helpless humans, for the Germans had been searching relentlessly for the Jews. It seemed they would never stop.

Inside the dim shape of German headquarters in Amsterdam, Meneer Van Stuban received the mail for the German officers. In German he saluted his superior, "Heil Hitler!"

The German nodded, grabbed his mail, and ripped it open. A pale, white letter fluttered to the ground.

Van Stuban stooped to pick it up, gave it to the German officer, and was dismissed. The German's eyes, amazed, shifted in their sockets

as he read the letter:

To the German Commander in Amsterdam,
Heil Hitler!

There are Jews hidden at the following
address:

Frans Van Mieriisstraat 178
Amsterdam

Immediately, he stood straight and called for his officers. He ordered the address to be watched and thoroughly searched.

Florie woke in a cold sweat. She gazed out the window. Four Germans stood nearby, rigid and erect, guns strapped over their shoulders. Another German stood atop the building's bare roof, staring relentlessly through a pair of binoculars.

Florie raced downstairs and flung the cellar door open wide. Before her was a bare and empty room. She slammed the door shut and ran to her husband.

"Jan, where is the dentist and his wife?"

"They left in the middle of the night. They have gone somewhere more safe."

Florie's sigh of relief was overwhelmed by fear as she prepared to meet Germany's wrath.

In the silence of the night, Florie's breast heaved up and down in melodic cadence. All was quiet.

She awoke with a start, frightened by a

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War Boy

(continued)

huge, rocking explosion. Again it rang out. She heard a high-pitched scream of terror and rushed upstairs to where her baby slept.

Fearing for his life, she ran outside and handed him to a panic-stricken neighbor. The neighbor carried the helpless boy off to the safety of her home.

After returning to her house, Florie heard loud voices at the door. Jan was there, arguing with some Germans who, hearing the explosion, had raced over. Gas in a forbidden gas lamp had caused the explosion, so her husband was under suspicion of using gas illegally.

Suddenly, the argument ended. The soldiers searched the house. One of them went down to the cellar, where a huge amount of coal was stored.

The Germans dragged Jan away and threw him into a van as black as death. The sobs of a saddened Florie Visser rang out. And then the night was silent again.

The doorbell rang, echoing throughout the house. With a friendly creak, the door opened, revealing a lone figure. He was wrapped in a long, black cloak which fell to his knees. His eyes glistened brightly and his face wore a wide, placid grin. His

presence here meant one thing: danger!

In a heavy German accent, he spoke. "I am here for some fuel." His grin turned to a deadly smile.

Florie shifted about nervously. "What fuel?" she asked innocently, as she sensed a slight hesitation on the stranger's part.

The German, pulling out a shiny knife, spoke again. "You do not know the fuel I am talking about?"

Abruptly, two shots rang out, sending the German running desperately for cover.

Jan!!

Heavily, Florie lifted the spoon toward her mouth. Suddenly, loud cheering sprang from the open window. She could hear shouts of joy sung by relieved people.

Florie glanced out from behind a shade. A large crowd had gathered in the streets— an endless mass of swarming, joyous humans. The war was over! But much damage had been done.

Most of Florie's family had been destroyed in concentration camps, and the Visser family was nearly exterminated. Only Karl, Florie's son, had survived the war.

War boy. . . and my father.