

Producing a (Hi)story

Just when you thought you were finally able to write a decent historical research paper, replete with clear thesis statement, penetrating insights, dazzling conclusions, and properly cited references you are now asked to produce a historical fiction. The thought may intrigue you, puzzle you, or simply terrify you. You may, at this very moment, be thinking: "He's got to be kidding—I thought this was a history course, not creative writing! I'm no writer; how in the hell does he expect me to do this!?"

Fear not, for you will find that: a) there's more "creative writing" in history writing than you thought—histories are stories, after all; and b) you know how to tell a story because you do it all the time with your own experiences. The only twist this time is that your material will be some other people's experiences. Writing about the unfamiliar historical events and experiences of others in a familiar form of your choosing will, I hope, engage you in a way that will provide you with both a deeper and a more enjoyable understanding of the historical subject matter, in this case modern Japanese history. Trust me—you can do it, you will learn something, and you will have some fun at it.

You will choose (with guidance from me and your peers) the subject and format: short story, play, film script, comic strip, a series or exchange of letters, diary or memoirs, trial transcript, newspaper articles, a cycle of popular songs, an epic poem, slide show, or whatever. This project will be fashioned in four phases spaced out throughout the semester:

Phase 1: Preliminary Biography and Project Pitch, due Friday, Oct. 4

The Preliminary Biography consists of a one-page biographical note on a Japan-related historical figure from 1800 to 1952 ("Dare desu ka"), two books and/or articles concerning the subject which are in our library (include call numbers) or which can be obtained through inter-library loan, and at least three significant questions that you would ask that historical figure if she or he were available. This is intended as a *possible* seed for a project.

The Project Pitch that you should attach is a typed one-page proposal of the subject matter and anticipated format. The proposed project need not treat the same historical figure as in the Preliminary Biography nor does it have to be biographical in nature. You are free to center your project on a protest movement, a battle, a trial, an industry, a natural or human-made disaster, a work of art, a building, a city, etc. For whatever reason, you may set on a path different from your Preliminary Biography, but the project described on this sheet should be your road map to the next phase of your project....

Phase 2: Rough Cut, due Friday, Nov. 15

About 5 pages, typed. This should be a representative section (about 1/3 to 1/2) of your Final Cut. It should as polished as possible and be accompanied by a neatly typed outline (a kind of "trailer") of the content of the rest of your production.

Phase 4: Final Cut, due Tuesday, Dec. 11

Ten to fifteen pages (or whatever it takes). In addition, instead of traditional footnotes, you should attach a page-long narrative "Post Script" explaining what sources you used where and how, especially how you fictionalized them.