

## How To Write History for Kids, in Non Boring Ways

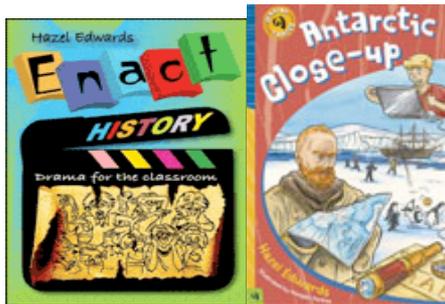
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*'Isn't history just about old, dead people?'* 10 year old.

No.



Using anecdotes which are mini stories can change kids' attitude towards history.

Extraordinary, so-called 'ordinary' people deserve to have their stories told in the context of their times.

Motives matter. So does understanding why someone might have acted that way in those circumstances. That's what provides children with the opportunity to identify, see things from another perspective and appreciate quiet courage.

History is his and her story. It's about how people solved problems or invented new ways of doing things better. It's also about things going wrong, whether war, prejudice, loss or climactic disasters. History is high gossip about people, not just dead dates and boring facts.

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My 'Writing a Non Boring Family History' workshops are for 'Genis' (genealogists). Using the facts in the form of anecdotes about what went wrong, and setting them in context, the stories live. I call it 'anecdultery'.

It's all in the way the story is told. Not just the style, but also the format.

- Consider audio on Ipod?
- DVD of photos with captions?
- Memorabilia?

I've been commissioned to write around memorabilia, such as the Mawson expedition telescope from the National Museum's collection, about 'heroes' such as Weary Dunlop, but the most challenging has been creating classroom plays around historic characters and events in the Enact: History series. When content

links to curriculum, plays offer triple value: a chance to read aloud, to act and for the audience to think about the ideas content.

### Challenges in Writing History for Kids

1. **Including a reader-aged child and telling from their perspective, in non technical vocabulary and to the word limit.**
2. **An involving perspective. E.g. Simpson's donkey or STAY (Stuck There All Year) the stolen, plastic donation dog taken on Antarctic expeditions.**
3. **Distilling extensive research to a few scenes. E.g. In writing 'Antarctic Close Up' I read many books about the Mawson expedition and historic Antarctica as well as using my first-hand expedition experience.**
4. **Non violent action. Sport or war are overly represented because it's easier to dramatise running or fighting. Much harder to show lab whitecoats, microscopes and test-tubes as dramatic fact.**
5. **Censorship? Exclude gruesome, criminal details? What if a modest partner did the work for which the famous leader was given historic credit?**
6. **Someone has a good idea! Hard to dramatise cerebral action, except with a voice- over in multi-media.**
7. **Copyright issues Using quotes, songs or music of the period.**
8. **Over simplifying to good and bad. Life wasn't that simple, but the sentences might need to be.**

### Differences between fact, faction and fiction?

**Faction** is a dramatic compromise where the setting may be factual but events have been dramatised for readability or characters may be composites of those observed or researched, plus imagination. Legal reasons include in case you get sued or descendants are unhappy with your interpretation of their ancestor.

**Faction is often a realistic compromise if you're writing to interest a child audience.**

How I Work:

- Keep a WIP (work in progress) diary of the challenges.
- Title as first clue Antarctic Close Up includes the telescope memorabilia, but is also a version of John Collinson Close's name.

History doesn't date but interpretations change. I wrote a play about political activist Vida Goldstein, *before* she was an electorate.

## Hazel Edwards' Books With Historical Links

**Antarctica Closeup** ISBN 9781876944544 \$A11.95 Interactive website  
[www.nma.gov.au/play/making\\_tracks](http://www.nma.gov.au/play/making_tracks).

**Enact: History** ISBN 9781921454714 ([Teaching Solutions](#)) Student-actors check facts and evaluate, as well as have fun playing around with historic role models.

ISBN 0 86806700-8 - **Writing A Non-Boring Family History** Ghr Press 2011

ISBN 1-876580 39 9 - **Right or Wrong?** Teachers' Notes. [www.phoenixeduc.com](http://www.phoenixeduc.com) 'with Goldie Alexander., Sth African edition 2007

New Frontier Publishing; [www.newfrontier.com.au](http://www.newfrontier.com.au) 'Fred Hollows & Weary Dunlop in Aussie Heroes series for 7-10 year olds.

