ACTIVITY:
Writing Historical Fiction

Summary:
Using their research and a photo of an artifact found at Ashland as a springboard, students will write fictional accounts of life on the estate before the Civil War. See the “Every Object Has a Story” PowerPoint presentation for images of artifacts.

Length of Time: 3-5 class sessions

Materials:
• “Every Object Has a Story: Personal Items and Toys from the Ashland Estate Privy” PowerPoint
• “Ceramics From the Ashland Privy: Reconstructing the Past” PowerPoint
• For each student, a copy of the Planning Guide for Historic Fiction, Setting Web, Character Web, Action and Reaction Chart, and Storyboard.

Instructions:
Discuss the elements of historic fiction with your students. Historic fiction is a story that could have happened sometime in the past.

In this case, aspects of the setting are pre-determined. The story will take place at Ashland prior to the Civil War. The story may take place anywhere in the buildings, outbuildings, grounds, or environs of the estate. You may determine the season, weather, and time of day.

You will, of course, have to invent specific characters, but they must behave in ways that people of that time period would have acted. For example, your characters will not watch TV or use expressions like “wazzup?”

The Character Web will help you to brainstorm key elements about your character. The Action and Reaction chart will allow you to create a map of your character’s emotional responses to the various incidents in the plot. Indicate how your character will show the emotion through something they say or do.

You can also include actual historical characters in the background of the story, such as members of the Clay family.

The springboard for your story will be one of the artifacts found at the estate. You can use observations of the artifacts seen during a field trip, artifacts from the “Ceramic Artifact” PowerPoint, or artifacts from the “Every Object Has a Story” PowerPoint. Your story must tell who owned the artifact, how it was used, and how it came to be broken or discarded.

Your story may be written as a short story (with a conflict and a resolution); as a “slice of life,” which shows a typical day in the life of someone who lived on the estate, or as an encounter between your character and a historical character.
Planning Guide for Historical Fiction

1. What is the setting (year and place) for your story?
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

2. What season of the year will it be in your story?
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Complete and attach a “Setting Web” or other notes about the setting.

4. List any important events that were happening at the time of this story (a war, exploration, migration, social changes, etc.).
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

5. Describe your main character, including his or her age, family, and social status.
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_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

6. Write a paragraph describing what life was like for your character. Include chores, difficulties, favorite things, etc.
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

7. Complete and attach a Character Web.

8. Will the historic events you listed in #4 be important in your story? If so, how?
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

9. Complete and attach an “Action and Reaction” chart and a storyboard.
Describe or Draw Each Element That Helps to Create the Setting in Terms of Time and Place

- Season and weather
- Building or buildings
- Room or rooms
- Clothing of the period
- Setting Web
- Tools or equipment of the period
- Grounds (outside)
- Year and any background events taking place
- Sounds and scents
Character Web

Character’s Name:

Wants:

Dreams:

Family:

Age, gender, role in life:

Fears:

Jobs, chores or hobbies:

Created Using Kidspiration (www.inspiration.com)
Action and Reaction

Action ➔ Reaction

Action ➔ Reaction

Action ➔ Reaction

Action ➔ Reaction

Social Studies  Historic Archaeology  •  5