

The Blue Boys

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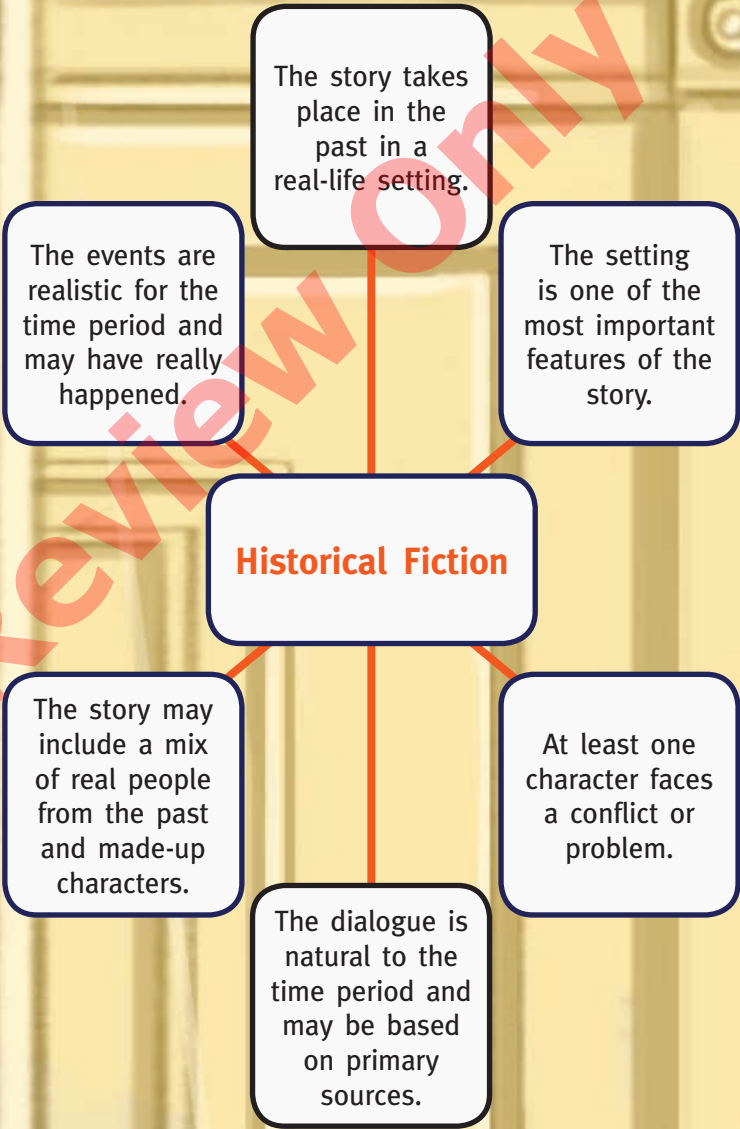


**HISTORICAL FICTION
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The Real Blue Boy

The Blue Boy is a famous oil painting by English artist Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788). In this life-size painting, a boy stands, facing forward with a mysterious look. He wears shiny blue pants, called knee breeches, and a matching jacket, called a doublet.



The painting was first displayed in 1770 at the Royal Academy of Arts in Great Britain. The boy was likely a real person named Jonathan Buttall. He was the son of a wealthy merchant who was a friend of the artist.

Buttall owned the painting until he lost his fortune. It was then sold to a politician, and then to an artist, and later to an earl. In 1921, Henry Edwards Huntington, a railroad owner, purchased *The Blue Boy* and shipped it to the United States.

The Blue Boy was highly valued from the start. Many people wanted prints of it. After being sold to Huntington, the painting was displayed one last time in London, and ninety thousand people went to view it.

The painting is now kept at the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens in San Marino, California. *The Blue Boy* is its most famous image and remains a magnet for visitors from all over the world.



Jonny's Wish

"Line up, please, and remember: no gum," says Ms. Shields, the art teacher. "Jonny, please remove your baseball cap."

"I don't know, Ms. Shields. I don't think the class is ready for what's under here," Jonny says.

The class laughs, but Ms. Shields does not. She looks at him hard, and he takes off his baseball cap.

“Thank you. Now please use your inside voices, and say hello to our tour guide, Mr. Patrick.”

The guide waves. “Welcome to the Huntington Library,” he says.

Jonny shouts, “Library? I thought this was a museum.”

“Inside voice,” says Ms. Shields, as her students laugh again.

“This is a library?” a few students repeat.

Mr. Patrick smiles. “You’ll see that our library is also a gallery—and a whole lot more. Now let’s begin our tour.”

As the class follows the guide, Jonny notices an older boy playing a video game on a smartphone.

The older boy nods at him but keeps playing.

“Man,” Jonny says, “I wish I had one of those.”

Jonny tugs at his pocket with his dad’s old flip phone inside. He does not realize his class has moved on to the next gallery without him.

“Hey, Jonny!” his classmates call. “Jonny, come over here.”

Jonny's friend Mark runs over and tugs at his arm.

"What's up?" Jonny says, as he follows Mark to the next room.

"Dude, come see," Mark says. "There's a kid in a painting that looks like you."

The students crowd around a life-size painting of a boy who looks just like Jonny.

"The boy's confident pose and smile have made *The Blue Boy* Huntington's most sought-after or, should I say, popular, artwork," says Mr. Patrick.

"Hey, this blue kid looks cool," Jonny says. He poses like the boy in the painting.

The students laugh and all start talking at once.

"He looks rich. Was he rich?"

"Did he live in a mansion?"

"Is he a prince?"

"The boy in the painting was not a prince," says Mr. Patrick, "but his family lived in Britain. His father made a lot of money in hardware, and his family was affluent, very wealthy."

“No way! He was rich, from hardware, like nails and doorknobs and stuff?” Jonny asks.

“What was the kid’s name? Something fancy?”

“His name was Jonathan,” says Mr. Patrick.

“That’s my name!”

The class laughs again, and Jonny smiles.



“So how much is this picture of ‘me’ worth?”
Jonny asks.

“Mr. Huntington bought the painting for a large sum. It would be \$9.3 million in today’s dollars,”
Mr. Patrick replies.

The class oohs and aahs.

“Is it okay to take a selfie?” a girl asks.

“Photos are allowed,” says the guide, “but no flash please.”

While most of the students pull out their phones to take pictures, Jonny stares at the painting and thinks, *That must have been the life, to be rich like that. Live in a big, fancy house. Get anything you want.*

‘Would you be so kind to fetch my laptop, please? And could you do a spot of my homework for me? It’s so terribly difficult.’

Man, I wish I had a life like that.

Jonathan's Wish

Jonathan cannot stop fidgeting. It isn't easy to pose for hours. He stands before the painter, tugging at his tight lace collar.

"If you would stop moving," the painter says, "we'd be done much more swiftly."

The boy sighs.

*I've been standing here for hours, day after day.
My feet hurt, and these breeches itch my legs so.
This is no fun! I wish I were anywhere but here.*

