

## Historical Fiction Introductions

Excerpt from *All the Light We Cannot See* (Doerr, 2014):

### Leaflets

At dusk they pour from the sky. They blow across the ramparts, turn cartwheels over rooftops, flutter into the ravines between houses. Entire streets swirl with them, flashing white against the cobbles. *Urgent message to the inhabitants of this town, they say. Depart immediately to open country.*

The tide climbs. The moon hangs small and yellow and gibbous. On the rooftops of beachfront hotels to the east, and in the gardens behind them, a half-dozen American artillery units drop incendiary rounds into the mouths of mortars. (p. 3)

Excerpt from *Fever 1793* (Anderson, 2000):

### August 16th, 1793

*The city of Philadelphia is perhaps one of the wonders of the world.*

—Lord Adam Gordon  
Journal entry, 1765

I woke to the sound of a mosquito whining in my left ear and my mother screeching in the right. “Rouse yourself this instant!”

Mother snapped open the shutters and heat poured into our bedchamber. The room above our coffeehouse was not large. Two beds, a washstand, and a wooden trunk with frayed leather straps nearly filled it. It seemed even smaller with Mother storming around.

“Get out of bed, Matilda,” she continued. “You’re sleeping the day away.” She shook my shoulder. “Polly’s late and there’s work to be done.”

The noisy mosquito darted between us. I started to sweat under the thin blanket. It was going to be another hot August day. Another long, hot August day. Another long, hot, boring, wretched August day.

“I can’t tell you who is lazier, Polly or you,” Mother muttered as she stalked out of the room. “When I was a girl, we were up before the sun . . .” Her voice droned on and on as she clattered down the stairs.

I groaned. Mother had been a perfect girl. Her family was wealthy then, but that didn’t stop her from stitching entire quilts before breakfast, or spinning miles of wool before tea. It was the War, she liked to remind me. Children did what was asked of them. And she never complained. Oh, no, never. Good children were seen and not heard. How utterly unlike me. (pp. 1–2)

Excerpt from *A Night Divided* (Nielsen, 2015):

### Chapter One

*When I want the west to scream, I squeeze on Berlin.*

—Nikita Khrushchev, Soviet Union premier, 1958–1964

There was no warning the night the wall went up.

I awoke to sirens screaming throughout my city of East Berlin. Instantly, I flew out of bed. Something must be terribly wrong. Why were there so many?

Although it was a warm morning, that wasn’t the reason for my sweaty palms or flushed face. My first thought was that it must be an air raid—my parents had described them to me from the Second World War. I pulled my curtains apart, expecting the worst. But when I looked out, my heart slammed into my throat. Not even the darkest part of my imagination could have prepared me for this.

It was Sunday, August 13, 1961, a day I would remember for the rest of my life. When a prison had been built around us as we slept. (p. 1)

Excerpt from *The Book Thief* (Zusak, 2005):

**Death and Chocolate**

First the colors.

Then the humans.

That's usually how I see things.

Or at least, how I try.

**\*\*\*HERE IS A SMALL FACT\*\*\***

**You are going to die.**

I am in all truthfulness attempting to be cheerful about this whole topic, though most people find themselves hindered in believing me, no matter my protestations. Please, trust me. I most definitely can be cheerful. I can be amiable. Agreeable. Affable. And that's just the A's. Just don't ask me to be nice. Nice has nothing to do with me. (p. 3)

Excerpt from *When the Emperor Was Divine* (Otsuka, 2002):

**Evacuation Order No. 19**

The sign had appeared overnight. On billboards and trees and the backs of the bus-stop benches. It hung in the window of Woolworth's. It hung by the entrance to the YMCA. It was stapled to the door of the municipal court and nailed, at eye level, to every telephone pole along University Avenue. The woman was returning a book to the library when she saw the sign in a post office window. It was a sunny day in Berkeley in the spring of 1942 and she was wearing new glasses and could see everything clearly for the first time in weeks. She no longer had to squint but she squinted out of habit anyway. She read the sign from top to bottom and then, still squinting, she took out a pen and read the sign from top to bottom again. The print was small and dark. Some of it was tiny. She wrote down a few words on the back of a bank receipt, then turned around and went home and began to pack.

When the overdue notice from the library arrived in the mail nine days later she still had not finished packing. The children had just left for school and boxes and suitcases were scattered across the floor of the house. She tossed the envelope into the nearest suitcase and walked out the door. (pp. 3-4)

Source:

*Anderson, L. H. (2000). Fever 1793. New York: Simon & Schuster.*

*Doerr, A. (2014). All the light we cannot see: A novel. New York: Scribner.*

*Nielsen, J. A. (2015). A night divided. New York: Scholastic.*

*Otsuka, J. (2002). When the emperor was divine: A novel. New York: Knopf.*

*Zusak, M. (2005). The book thief. New York: Random House.*