The Historical Fiction Book Club Questions Pack

Fact, Fiction & the Space Between - discussion cards for the novels built from the record: invented scenes, real people, period detail, research rabbit holes & endings history already spoiled

Free sample - two real pages from the pack: The Host's Quick-Start (p.3) and The Fact-Fiction Line - Set A (p.9, four full cards: FL1 The Line, Plainly Drawn, FL2 The Invention That Earns Its Place, FL3 The Invention That Costs Too Much, FL4 The Verdict on the Line). The full pack holds 64 cards, 304 questions and 30 pages. Run a real historical discussion night from the sample alone. Print at 100% on US Letter or A4.

The Host's Quick-Start: A Historical Discussion Night in Five Moves

Move 1 - The Charter (5 minutes). Read the two lines that protect the night, from the Spoiler Charter & Record Charter on page 4: the invention line ("we discuss the novel's inventions up to the agreed point; nobody is ambushed by a plot twist") and the record line ("a historical outcome anyone could look up is never treated as a spoiler - and never used as a weapon against a member who did not know it"). Ask who has finished, without apology from anyone who has not, agree tonight's spoiler ceiling in one sentence, and ask the table's starting question: what did each member already know about this period before page one - one sentence each, no corrections yet.

Move 2 - The Opener (10 minutes). Play Card AW1 (page 23), the Anywhere opener: place the book on its era line - century, place, and the one event, custom or object that now stands for the whole period in your head. Every member can answer, finished or not, and the room learns in ten minutes whether tonight's argument will be about accuracy, about people, or about how the past felt from inside.

Move 3 - The Two Sets (35-50 minutes). Play two themed sets chosen for *your* book using the picker in How to Use the Cards (page 5). Default pairing for a first historical night: The Fact-Fiction Line - Set A (page 9) - the pack's signature set - plus whichever of Real People as Characters (page 11), Period Detail & Daily Life (page 12) or Endings History Already Spoiled (page 21) your book is richest in. Deal the cards round the table; the person holding a card reads its questions aloud and answers first, briefly, before the table opens up.

Move 4 - Scores & the Vote (10 minutes). Fill in the Historical Scorecard (page 27) line by line, by show of hands where the table splits: fact-fiction balance, period immersion, real-people fairness, research texture, bias awareness, known-ending payoff. Then take the vote on page 28 - stay in this era, same era with a new author, or a new era entirely - with the total page count of each candidate and any content the club needs flagged written down *before* anyone votes.

Move 5 - Lightning & the Shelf (10 minutes). Close with one Lightning Round page (pages 25-26) read at pace, answers in one breath, no defences allowed. Transcribe the night's two record lines - the fact-fiction verdict from Card FL4 and the known-ending sentence from Card EH4, if played - onto Our Club's Historical Shelf log (page 29), photograph the scorecard for the club chat, and confirm the next meeting date before anyone stands up.

Timing plans. *60 minutes:* Charter 5 - Opener 5 - one set played in full (pick the set your book is richest in) 30 - Scorecard only, vote by show of hands 10 - Lightning, one page only 10. *90 minutes:* the five moves as printed above. *120 minutes:* add a third themed set after Move 3 (Research Rabbit Holes, page 13, or Present Eyes & Period Bias, page 17, are the richest third sets), a break after Move 3, and both Lightning pages in Move 5.

If the room is quiet: shrink Card PD1 to a single-object round - everyone names one object from the book they could describe blindfolded - then defend those objects as a table. **If the room is split:** go straight to Card AW7, The Honest Mixed Review, and let the disagreement be the evening; it is a better night than polite agreement. **If the room turns into a history lecture:** return to the novel - ask what the disputed fact *does in the scene*, which is the question this pack always asks second and generic history talk never asks at all.

The Fact-Fiction Line - Set A

The pack's signature set: every historical novel draws a line between what the record holds and what the novelist supplied - and this set asks, with evidence, where the line was drawn and whether each crossing earns its place.

FL1 - The Line, Plainly Drawn

Best moment: the opening card of any historical night - draw the line before you judge it.

1. Where does this book draw its fact-fiction line - which kinds of things are documented (events, dates, public words) and which kinds are supplied (private scenes, thoughts, conversations no one recorded)?

2. Which single scene are you most confident actually happened in something like the form the book gives it, and what makes you confident - the record, the author's note, or the scene's own texture?

3. Which single scene are you most confident the author invented outright, and what gave the invention away - a convenience, a symmetry, a feeling too neat for the record to hold?

4. If the author had been forced to print one symbol in the margin of every invented scene, would this book gain or lose power for you - and what does your answer say about what you came for?

FL2 - The Invention That Earns Its Place

Best moment: core - the defence round for the novelist's craft.

1. Name the invention in this book that does the most real work - the scene, meeting or letter that never happened but without which the documented truth would stay invisible or unreadable.

2. What does that invention let the reader understand about the period that a straight summary of the facts could not have carried?

3. Does the invention respect the shape of the record around it - arriving where the documents fall silent and leaving before they speak again - or does it bulldoze documented facts out of its way?

4. State the test you are applying: what must an invention do, in this genre, before you will call it earned rather than merely enjoyable?

FL3 - The Invention That Costs Too Much

Best moment: the prosecution round - every table has one invention it cannot forgive.

1. Name the invention that cost this book the most of your trust - a coincidence imported into a documented life, a modern convenience dressed in period clothes, a famous figure bent out of shape to serve the plot.

2. Was the damage done by the invention itself, or by discovering it - would the book have kept your trust if the author's note had admitted this one plainly?

3. Once that trust was spent, did you start doubting scenes the author had not invented - and is that suspicion the book's fault or the genre's unavoidable tax?

4. If you could delete exactly one invention and leave the hole in the story visible, which would you delete - and what would the honest hole teach the reader that the filled version hides?

FL4 - The Verdict on the Line

Best moment: close the set with a verdict the table must record.

1. As a table, sort this book's inventions into three piles - earned, forgiven and unearned - and name the one invention the table most disagreed about placing.

2. Did the book move its own line as it went - stricter with famous events, freer with private lives, or the reverse - and was that drift a design or a drift indeed?

3. Whose interests did the inventions mostly serve: the reader's understanding, the protagonist's reputation, the plot's convenience, or the author's thesis about the period?

4. Give the set's verdict for the club record, in the pack's terms - inventions earned, inventions mixed, or inventions unearned - and cite the scene that decided you.

Host notes - The Fact-Fiction Line - Set A: Play Set A before any other themed set on a first historical night; FL1 draws the line every later argument will cite, and FL4's verdict is transcribed to the shelf log. Quiet-room rescue: ask FL3's first question round the table, one invention each, no defence required - the room warms itself prosecuting kindly.