



**MY  
RESEARCH  
FOR A  
FIRST PERSON NARRATIVE  
OF**

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(name of my historical figure)

by

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**Historian/Researcher/Scriptwriter/Actor**

**With the help of  
RIDE INTO HISTORY**

**SM**

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## HOW TO CREATE A FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVE

- Decide on your time period and think about what kinds of things interest you
- Find your person (someone you will enjoy being with who lived an interesting life)
- Set a deadline by making a commitment to perform for a group on a given date
- Wear an article of your character's clothing while you work
- Surround yourself with pictures (photocopies?) of your character & the setting
- Plan your time, allowing time to revise and to rehearse
- Look for both primary (from the time) and secondary (usually by historians) sources
- Write (take notes, scribble thoughts) as you research
- From the beginning, write as if you were your character (first person [I, me], using active voice)
- Ask questions of your sources--what do you want to know? Keep a list of where you found your information
- Keep a list of questions for which you have not found answers
- To find out what questions you have forgotten to ask and answer, have someone interview you in character as though they were a reporter. Ask them to prepare questions before the interview, but let them make up more as they talk with you.
- Select stories from your character's life based on her or his relationship to national, regional, and local events--events important to a lot of people, including your audience; be relevant!
- Find stories that explain the decisions that your historic figure made that changed history; look for conflicts--was it difficult for your person to make the decision that changed their life?
- Choose stories that focus on that for which your character is best known, and stories that illustrate personality and help explain motivation for later behavior
- Think constantly about how your character felt about what was happening so that you can appeal to the emotions of your audience
- Create the flavor of the time in your script--sights, sounds, tastes, smells
- Use language appropriate for the time that your audience can understand
- Listen to people talk--notice how stories are not always linear--sometimes to go from point A to point B they go by way of C, D, and Z
- Listen to voices, and how people raise and lower their voices with emotion
- Watch how people use their bodies, their hands, their faces while talking
- Write your audience into your script (who are they and why are they there?)
- Be believable. British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge wanted to evoke a "willing suspension of disbelief" in his audiences. We can't travel back to see Calamity Jane . . . or can we?! We believe we do when watching Joyce Thierer as Calamity Jane. . . .

RESEARCH, WRITE, PRACTICE, REVISE, RESEARCH, PRACTICE . . . .  
MORPH YOURSELF & ENJOY!

Put a Picture of Your Character Here

## COSTUME PLANNING

costume complete

Character: \_\_\_\_\_ H/R/S/A: \_\_\_\_\_

Your historic figure's **occupation/s**: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Year** from which you will be speaking: \_\_\_\_\_

**Context/physical location** from which you will be speaking (a picnic, an encampment before a battle, a press conference, concerned friends at home?): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### CLOTHING NEEDS

Item of Clothing	Description	Have at home	Ride into History	Other Source (describe)
Head Covering				
Shirt/blouse/waist/dress				
Vest/apron				
Jacket				
Suspenders/belt				
Jewelry/neck tie				
Pants/skirt				
Socks				
Shoes/boots/foot covering				

**Basic Information and the  
Immediate Context of My Historical Figure's Life:  
Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How**

What **names** and/or titles did your character have? What did people call her or him?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Birth** date \_\_\_\_\_ Where \_\_\_\_\_

**Death** date \_\_\_\_\_ How \_\_\_\_\_  
(Remember, though, that when you are in character you cannot talk about your own death!)

**Most important events** (You can put more events on the back of this page.)

- **Event** (what are you famous for?)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Where did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_

When did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_

- **Another major event in your life**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Where did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_

When did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_

- **Yet another major event in your life**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Where did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_

When did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_

- **And another major event**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Where did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_

When did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_

## **The Larger Historical Context**

What events were going on in your historical figure's community and country, and in the rest of the world around the time she or he lived? How did those events affect your historical figure?



## The Human Context

Who are some of the **people who were important** in your character's life, and why have they been important?

1) Person's name \_\_\_\_\_

Why important: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2) Person's name \_\_\_\_\_

Why important: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3) Person's name \_\_\_\_\_

Why important: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4) Person's name \_\_\_\_\_

Why important: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5) Person's name \_\_\_\_\_

Why important: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6) Person's name \_\_\_\_\_

Why important: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7) Person's name \_\_\_\_\_

Why important: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Contemporaries

Who were my colleagues and friends? What kind of relationships did we have?

**How am I like and different from my colleagues?** As an expert on your historic figure, people will want to know how "you" are like and unlike other such figures with whom they are aware. For instance: The most stunning difference between Amelia Earhart and other women pilots is that Amelia had a determined publicist, so she actually made her living by writing and talking about flying, not by flying itself

## Interesting Stories about My Character and Where I Found Each One

(So I can find them again if I need to, and tell other people how to find out more)

Short Description of Story	Where I Found the Story
Story I	
Story II	
Story III	
Story IV	
Story V	

## Contradictions Between Sources

Historians want to find three sources that lead to the same conclusion. What do you do when one source says one thing and another source says something that contradicts the first source? (This is a common challenge for historians.)

**1) Compare the sources.** Is one more believable than the other? Why? (Some things you might look at include: when the work was written, who it was written for, who wrote it, and who published it. Maybe you can find a book review that tells some of these things.)

**2) Look at other recent sources.** First, look at the most recent source which is written by someone you think you can trust to have done good research. Did that person find the same contradiction you found? If so, what did that person say about the contradiction? Does their explanation make sense to you?

**3) Look at primary source material.** Maybe other researchers overlooked some clues or did not ask all of the questions. Maybe, for instance, you can find and talk to someone who actually remembers the event in question and ask them what they think happened.

**4) After you have done the above, take a stand.** Decide what you think happened and why you think it happened that way.

Here are some of the contradictions that Ride into History scholar/performers have resolved:

1) Joyce Thierer: Did Calamity Jane really write the letters to her daughter?

2) Ann Birney: Was Julia Archibald Holmes or Amelia Earhart's mother the first woman to climb to the top of Pike's Peak?

## **Primary Sources About the Life and Times of**

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(Look at the list of definitions to find out how primary and secondary sources differ.)

## **Secondary Sources About the Life and Times of**

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(Look at the list of definitions to find out how primary and secondary sources differ.)

## **Overcoming Obstacles**

Put yourself in the mind of your character and answer one or both of these in first person ("I").

What was the most difficult thing you ever had to do? How did you do it?

What was the most difficult decision you ever made? Why was it difficult?

(write name of your historical figure above)

## as Decision-Maker and as Influenced by Others' Decisions

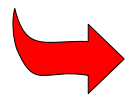
**History is the story of the decisions we have made over time--and the story of how we have explained those decisions.**

What conflicts did your character face? Were the conflicts with her or his own feelings, with other people, with natural forces, or combinations of these?

What decisions did your character make to resolve these conflicts? What can you learn about this person from the choices that she or he made?

How did some of the decisions affect others? Describe what happened as a result of those decisions. This would make a good chart, which you can do on another piece of paper or the back of this one. Make notes here:

more



Decision-making, page 2

**What events in your character's community, country, and the world influenced her or his decisions?** [An example: When Amelia Earhart was in college the United States entered the European War (World War I). She left college to work in a military hospital helping wounded soldiers, which is where she first met the pilots who first took her to an airstrip. Maybe if there had been no war she would never have decided to become a pilot.]

## Is My Character a Hero?

What obstacles, what difficult challenges did she or he have to overcome in her or his life?

Were any of these obstacles personal weaknesses? It is said that no one is perfect. A truly brave person, for instance, is afraid. That's right. A truly brave person fears for their own safety, but sets aside their fear to do something for someone else. Part of being a hero is working around your faults. What faults did your character have, and when might we have seen evidence of those faults?

What strengths did she or he have?

## The Setting of the Script

**Date** from which I will be speaking as my character (date, month, and year; time of day--you might choose to change this to coincide with the real time of day):

**Place** from which I will be speaking as my character (indoors, outdoors; community, state, nation; what can you see from here?):

**My audience's role** (when they go back in time to meet me, who do they become, why are they there listening to me, and how will I address them? "Friends, Romans, countrymen: Lend me your ears . . . ."):

**Why** you have chosen this setting:

## What Do I Know about My Audience?

You have two major responsibilities: to be accurate in your representation of historical happenings, and to be entertaining. To entertain an audience it helps to know something about them. The following questions are to help you focus on any target audience.

Ages:

Occupations:

What do you think they have in common that might be relevant to your narrative and style?

What will they know about your character before they meet you?

Why will they enjoy your character?

## Ride into History's Historical Performance Definitions

**Artifacts**--individual material culture objects from the past

**Character**--a person portrayed in a play or first person narrative

**Composite character**--a fictional person created to represent many different people

**Farb**--derogatory term used by reenactors to describe someone whose garb and gear are not completely accurate

**First-person narrative**--a story told from the perspective of an individual other than the storyteller/writer/performer (first-person means the use of "I" or "we")

**Great wo/man history**--tells the stories of leaders of large groups of people and suggests that the better characteristics of that individual are shared by his or her followers

**Historical anachronism**--a "glitch" when something from a future time ("chron") is superimposed on an earlier time--an impossible ("ana") combination of ideas or objects

**Historical context**--other events things that were happening at the same time as the event at which we are looking

**Historical figure**--a particular person who lived in the past

**Historical mindedness**--an awareness of what happened when, which enables us to avoid historical anachronisms

**History**--the story of the decisions we have made over time, and the story of how we have explained those decisions

**Living history**--carrying out daily activities as close as possible to the manner in which they were pursued at a designated time and place in the past (individual identities are not important--related to social history which is interested in how categories of people lived)

**Material culture**--physical objects which surround us that are made or shaped by humans

**Monologue**--a one-person performance (first person narratives are a type of monologue)

**Personae**--the identity taken on by an individual participating in a reenactment

**Popular culture**--entertainment (music, art, video, etc.) consumed by large groups of people

**Primary source**--information coded (written, photographed, or recorded in some way) at the time of a particular event or later by someone who was a participant in the event

**Props (properties)**--items of material culture used in a play or other dramatic performance

**Reenacting**--"play acting" a particular recorded event in history such as a battle of the signing of an important document or a fur-traders' rendezvous

**Secondary source**--information recorded during or after an event by someone who was not a witness to the event

**Social history**--the daily life of categories, or groups, of people

# Quest Sheet

(a question I'm trying answer)

Question

Sources/Steps:

Location of possible sources:

A ONE-DAY FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVE!

Fill this out as though you were your historic figure, describing the five "w" 's and the "h" that journalists use, and you will have a short first person narrative!

• **My name is** \_\_\_\_\_ . [*Who* are you?]

• **I made a decision that changed history. I decided that I would** [*What* did you do?]

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• **Let me tell you what happened. It was** [Date; *When?*] \_\_\_\_\_

[Place; *Where?*] \_\_\_\_\_ .

• **At that time,** [Describe the historical context—what else was happening in your state, in your country, in the world? This might help explain *why* you made the decision you made.]

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• **Before that time I had been** [*What* had you been doing before you changed history? This tells more about *Who* you are and *Why* you did what you did.]

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• **And then,** [*How* did you make the decision to do what you did? *How* did you do what you did that changed history?]

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• **As a result,** [*What* happened because of the choice that you made?]

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