

MWRA September 24, 2021
Historical Fiction – Family Sagas

Benchmark title - *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi

So many characters! Was it hard to keep track?

Not hard to keep track of characters, lots of different points of view. Each chapter had some brief mention of prior character so it was easier than expected to keep the thread moving from one chapter to the next.

Some readers may not like the short story aspect, the fact that characters don't remain throughout the whole book. On the other hand, the alternating family lines and short story aspect takes the pressure off of having to remember every person individually.

Impressed that author could pull off themes of emotional trauma throughout so many different characters and situations.

Readalikes –

The Family Orchard by Nomi Eve.

Homegoing has also been compared to *Roots*.

The Twelve Tribes of Hattie by Ayana Mathis.

Appeal – lots of detail, description, strong sense of time and place,

How important is the accuracy of history in historical fiction?

-Like learning something new in a piece, something not known before

-So much good narrative non-fiction today, which could overlap with this genre.

Technical definition of historical fiction is that it is written by someone who is not a contemporary of the time in the book. So *The Great Gatsby* technically isn't historical fiction because Fitzgerald lived during that time; it was contemporary fiction at the time.

Gone with the Wind written in 1926 but from family stories

Second Titles

The Thorn Birds by Colleen McCullough

Mentioned as readalike for *The Red Tent*. Set in Outback of Australia, early 1920s. Multi-generational. Cleary family – Irish immigrants living in New Zealand. Struggling to get by. Father's sister who lives on big sheep ranch invites his family to come take over the ranch and inherit it when she dies. Second main plot is romance between daughter Meggie and local priest. Biggest problem with story is that he's 27 and she's 9 when they meet. Loved it in high school but did 180 on that based on the romance storyline. Prose is really good and setting description are fantastic.

Read-alike *Peyton Place*.

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan

Found this book confusing, more than *Homegoing*. Four sections with four chapters each. Follows four mothers and their daughters. One mother has passed away so her chapter is written from daughter's perspective. Difficult to keep stories straight. Mothers' stories take place in China while daughters' stories occur in the US. Lots of cultural and other barriers. Some similarities in some stories, which added to confusion. May not be true historical fiction because author is in same timeframe as daughters in story. Sadder than expected given title.

The Inheritance of Orquidea Davina by Zoraida Cordova

Two plot lines – one in 1950s, one contemporary. Woman born in Ecuador under unlucky star. Uses magic to make her way up to small town in Texas (?). Present day narration is about relatives getting notice to come to her to get their inheritance. Some magical realism. Recommend to anyone who liked *The Night Circus*. Debut novel. Beautifully written.

Red at the Bone by Jacqueline Woodson

Story of Melody beginning at her 16th birthday. She was born to teen parents, one from a wealthy family and one not. Not very long. Prose is beautiful. So descriptive, detailed. Characters are extremely well-rounded. Parents are flawed.

Pachinko by Min Jin Lee

Takes place in Korea, Japan, and US. Begins in 1800s. First part involves a woman who gets pregnant as a teen but ends up married to another.