

One of the most entertaining things for me about writing, whether it be fiction or nonfiction, is the adventure of researching subject matter. Obviously, when I am writing nonfiction, facts are essential. In my forthcoming nonfiction children's book *Madam Pantaloons*, I am dealing with a real historical figure about whom, unfortunately, source material is very sparse. (A word about source material – I love primary source texts above all else. Think in terms of diaries, letters, official documents, newspaper articles, and so forth.)

I had enough facts to outline the protagonist's life, but I spent many more fun hours researching the setting for the tale. How did European immigrants reach San Francisco during the California Gold Rush? How did they travel from there to Sacramento and on to the gold mines? What were the camps like? How did women dress in 1849? What were the tools used to mine the gold? How and what did they eat? You get the idea. I learned a lot and had a great time finding images to illustrate the text.

In the case of the novel that I am working on, I needed to research the conditions the Menominee Indians lived under in Wisconsin in 1932. What was their agreement at that time with the U.S. government? How were the children educated? How did the tribe run their timber business? What did the interior of a typical Menominee dwelling look like? For plot purposes, I also had to know the laws about deer hunting and the prevalence of certain prey animals at the time. I even had to look up laws governing squatters' rights. The internet was a rich source indeed.

All of this is to say that the life of a writer is an adventure of discovery. What are you interested in? Do you want to delve into your family's background or try to solve a long-lost family mystery? Are you fascinated by true crime tales? Do you want to know the history of your hometown, or describe the art of growing a perfect tomato? I'm being a bit silly here, but there are more topics to write about than any one mind can categorize. And only you can tell your version of the story that you choose.