

Biography Reading Unit of Study

Created by The Curriculum Corner

These plans are designed to accompany the downloads available at The Curriculum Corner.

Preparing Your Library

Biography is a genre that can sometimes easily be neglected in classrooms with regards to informational text studies. We suggested giving it a try because it's one that can be truly engaging for lots of students.

The key to getting students excited about a study of biographies is to have many relevant and appropriately leveled texts for all of your various readers.

You might even want to think about having a class discussion (or present an interest inventory) to find out who your students might be interested in learning about.

Once you know their interests, take some time to visit your school and local libraries. Add to your book basket by picking up some favorites at your favorite used bookstore or ordering from Amazon. You will keep interest and engagement high if students are reading about people who are relevant to their interests and lives.

Immersion

We believe that immersing students in books and letting them develop their own “noticings” is a great way to begin many language art units.

Be sure your collection of biographies includes a variety of options. You will also want to be sure that your collection contains as many of the biography text features as possible.

We have included a *Biography Noticings Anchor Chart* that you can use with your kids during or after their immersion experience. Or, you might choose to record your students noticings on a blank chart (which we have also provided).

What We Learn From Biographies is another tool you can use to get your students familiar with this genre. It is an anchor chart that contains characteristics of many biographies.

We have also provided two *Find the Biography* resources that require students to distinguish between different genres. Begin by giving small groups two different types of texts. You can give them literature & biographies *OR* give them biographies & another type of informational text. They will need to flip through the books to determine differences. They can write their ideas on the organizers. If you don't want them to write on these organizers,

another thought would be to just have them do a similar activity with Post-It notes.

Yet another resource is our *Biography Text Feature Checklist*. This would be a good tool to use to facilitate a class discussion as you flip through some biographies together. Check off when you see the specific text features listed within the books. This is also provided in a black & white version with a space for student's name in case you want to use it as a literacy center activity.

Another way to get students familiar with the biography genre is to share them during your read aloud time. Choose a few examples that will be of high interest to your students, but that might be above their reading level.

As you read the books or chapters aloud during your regular read aloud time, you can touch on the ideas you are teaching during your reading block.

Focus on Author's Purpose

You might want your students to think more deeply about why specific biographies have been written. Obviously the purpose of a biography is to inform, but thinking about the reasons an author has to write the biography can help students to determine importance.

Our goal as teachers is to help students pull out the purpose. You can use this half sheet *Focus on Author's Purpose* during a mini-lesson or at literacy center. There is also a page of *Author's Purpose Exit Slips* you can use as a quick check.

An extension of this could be our *Biography Search*, which is intended to be used as a literacy center as well. Once students are able to determine why biographies have been written about specific people, then you could have them search through a stack of books to find different categories.

Thinking About Background Knowledge

Activating schema is an important part of students becoming strong readers. A goal for teachers is for our students to think about what they already know before learning new information.

We have created two *Building Background* organizers for students to record their background knowledge. Choose the one that you feel best fits your specific students.

Your students might not be ready to begin reading appropriately high interest biographies and gathering information to share. We have come up with a few different ways for your students to begin to pull out important information from the biographies they are reading.

One way for students to begin focusing on important information from biographies is to have them begin to take simple notes. Students need guidance so that they don't copy complete sentences or paragraphs from books. *Biographies: When Will I Take Notes* is an anchor chart that will help them begin to figure out what to write when taking notes. If you have other ideas about how and when you want students to take notes, you can use our blank template to write your own ideas on.

Our *Life Outline* resource is a simple way for students to break down personal information from the biographies they are reading into portions of time in a subject's life.

We have also included nine different *Graphic Organizers* that you can introduce to your students as they begin to read. These cover a range of skills.

There is also a cause & effect organizer that will get your students thinking about how particular events have affected the lives of the people they are reading about.

You might also want to try our set of *Important Information Bookmarks*. These can be used for students to mark text.

Students simply insert them into the book at the appropriate places. They then go back to them to share information with the class or to fill out one of the organizers.

Influences

Most biographies share the impact that others had on the subjects' lives. These influences can be either positive or negative. Whichever case is true, we want students to be able to name those people who were crucial to the success or failure of the person and why.

This task may be difficult for students, so we suggest that you choose a short, simple biography to read to the class. You will then discuss the influences in the subject's life. Identify why they had a positive or negative effect. Finally, fill out one of our two organizers with the students so that they can understand their use.

Biography Reading Response Prompts

You can cut these 8 prompts apart, assign to students and glue into reading response notebooks.

Character Traits

While reading biographies you will want to focus on the character traits of the biography subjects. Many times it is these character traits that serve as the author's purpose.

For materials to use in focusing on those traits, you can check out our [Character Traits](#) post. You will find a range of lists of character traits and activities to use during reading workshop.

Sharing Student Learning

You will want your students to be able to share their learning as they read and learn. There are so many different ways they can do this. Below we have shared some of our own resources and ideas.

[Biography Brochure](#) – This template can provide your students with an outline to create a brochure focusing on the individuals they are reading about. Choose the template that fits your students.

[Simple Biography Books](#) – Once your students have read many biographies, you might have them create simple books to share with younger students. We have created templates for both female and male subjects. You will find them with handwriting and standard lines. You will find this download here: [Simple Biographies – Books](#)

[Timelines](#) – Of course biographies lend themselves well to student-created timelines. Our students always love using PowerPoint for timelines, but good old-fashioned posters are always great visuals too!

Wax Museums – Another popular way to share student learning for this genre is the Living Wax Museum. Students view pictures and dress up as their characters. They memorize as much as possible and stand at-the-ready to tell others about their lives. These can be fun presented during the school day to other classes. Or, make it an evening event where parents would be able to watch.