

Biography Mini Unit for 1st Grade

by Kris Miller

Standards and Objectives:

Standard 8: Students will write daily to communicate effectively for a variety of purposes.

Objective 1: Prepare to write by gathering and organizing information and ideas.

- a. Generate ideas for writing by reading, discussing literature and informational text, looking at books, being read to, and reflecting on personal experiences.

Objective 2: Compose a written draft.

- a. Draft ideas on paper in an organized manner.
- b. Select appropriate words to convey meaning.

Objective 3: Revise by elaborating and clarifying a written draft.

- a. Revise to add details.
- b. Write in complete sentences.

Objective 4: Edit written draft for conventions.

- a. Edit writing for capitals in names, first word of a sentence, the pronoun “I” and correct ending punctuation.
- b. Edit for spelling of grade level-appropriate words.

Objective 4: Use fluent and legible handwriting to communicate.

Objective 6: Write in different forms and genres.

- c. Produce traditional, narrative stories as a shared writing activity.
- d. Share writing with others using illustrations to add meaning to published works.
- e. Publish group and individual products.

DAY 1

Time needed: 30-40 minutes

Objectives: Students will prepare to write by experiencing the genre through published books, class discussion, and teacher modeling.

Materials:

- Beverly Cleary: Martin, Patricia Stone. (1987) *Beverly Cleary*. Florida: Rourke Enterprises
- Biographies previously read as read-alouds
- Chart paper for interactive writing
- Various colors of marking pens
- Students writing booklets

Mini Lesson (20-25 minutes): Introduce students to writing biography by reading Beverly Cleary or another biography about a children’s author such as Roald Dahl: Meeks, Christopher. (1993) *Roald Dahl*. Florida: Roarke Enterprises

- Say, “Today we are going to read a special kind of book that tells about someone’s life. This type of book is a factual story called biography. In this book, the main character is a real author who writes books for children. Even though the book is about an author, it was written by one author *about* another one. As we are reading this book, be thinking about how the writer organized the book to help us learn all about Beverly Cleary. When we are finished reading, you can tell me the important things you learned about her.
- Read text stopping periodically to briefly discuss how the author organized the book.
- After reading, do an interactive writing activity to make a short list of information the children learned about the author. Be sure to include birth date, parent’s names, important events, what made her who she is, why she became an author, what she has accomplished, etc.
- When the list is finished, use another color pen or marker to add labels for each type of significant information on your list, using the words “birth date, parents, accomplishments, talents”, etc.
- Briefly compare the other biographies used as read-alouds to the information on the chart. Ask, “Who is this book about? Does each one tell the same kind of information from someone’s life that Beverly Cleary does?”
- Tell the students that you could tell the same kind of information about your own life. On another paper or the board, write the label words with a space after each one, and then write a brief list of your important information such as birth date, parents, and so on. Be careful to include everything you have labels for on the interactive list.
- Using your list, write 5 to 10 sentences about your life on chart paper.
- Say, “When I write about my own life I am actually writing what we call an *autobiography*”.
- Explain to the children that they are going to have a chance to be a biographer today. They will be writing about the person they know best—themselves! Tell them they should follow your example and list their important information.

Accountability/Assessment (5-10 minutes): Have students take out their writing booklets and turn to a blank page. Tell them to first write the labels you used for the interactive list and for your information, with two or three blank lines after each one. Next, they will go back and fill in the information about themselves using just a few words to tell about each.

As students are working, walk around the room stopping briefly with each student to make sure they are making a simple autobiographical list.

Author’s Chair (5 minutes): Have a few students share the information on their list.

Accommodations: Allow students to use pictures if necessary. Another student could also be a scribe for a struggling writer.

Day 2

Time needed: 40-45 minutes

Objective: Students will help compose, through interactive writing, a biography of the school principal or other school personnel using yesterday's list of types of information in a biography combined with questions written today.

Materials:

- Get permission from the principal or other school personnel to have them come into your classroom to be interviewed by the students.
- Another biography not previously read to the students
- Chart paper and pens
- Students writing booklets

Mini lesson (25-30 minutes): Review biography and its requirements. Remind students that biographies are a true story about someone's life. They tell about the important events and accomplishments of that person.

- Read a short biography book to the students. Stop periodically to compare it to the one read yesterday.
- Use shared writing to have students help make a list of the types of information this author used to tell about the character in today's story. Compare today's list to yesterday's. What is the same? What is new? Use a different color pen to circle any type of information that may be new.
- Ask, "Could we write a biography of our school principal? Do we know all the information we need to be able to write the same kind of information you wrote about yourselves yesterday? How could we get the information we don't know? Who would be the best person to ask about her life?"
- Say, "Let's make a list of the questions we want to ask the principal about her life?" Guide the students to make a list of five or six questions they could ask the principal. Be sure to include dates, names, childhood information, talents and accomplishments.
- Choose spokesmen to ask each question. Have them practice asking their questions to one partner, then to another one before having the principal come in to the room.
- Suggest to students that they may want to take notes—as easy as writing just important words—to help them remember the things she tells them. You could also have two or three "designated note takers".
- With the principal in the classroom, have students take turns asking their questions. You may want to take notes in case students have trouble recalling

specific information later. Have students thank her for visiting and helping with their project.

Accountability/Assessment (5-10 minutes): Have students take out their writing notebooks and begin writing all the information they can remember about the visit. Tell them you will be looking for sentences about what the principal told them in the interview. Remind them that some of them will be sharing during author's chair time.

Author's Chair (5-10 minutes): Have a few students share what they wrote. After a couple of students have shared, ask if anyone else has information that has not been shared yet. Remind them that when they are writing biography it is important to be sure the things they write are accurate, and that they don't leave out parts of the person's life that are interesting.

Using what the students wrote, quickly compile 8-10 sentences on chart paper about the principal. Save for later editing.

Accommodations: Allow students to use invented spelling or pictures if needed.

Day 3

Time needed: 40-45 minutes

Objective: Students will organize ideas gathered while using a class generated list of questions to interview a friend and write a biographical draft of someone else in the class.

Materials:

- Questions used to interview the principal—Put these on the board so the children can see them from their seats.
- Marking pens
- Students writing booklets or blank writing paper

Mini lesson (5-10 minutes): Review steps learned so far about writing biography. Direct the students to look at the information written yesterday. Look at both the questions and also at what they put in their personal notebooks about the principal.

- Quickly review the interviewing process used yesterday. Remind students that they used specific questions, practiced asking them, and then took notes to remember important information.
- Say, "Yesterday we interviewed the principal together and wrote about her life. Today we are going to be interviewing someone else important. You will each ask all the questions, and you will each answer all the questions. Yesterday we interviewed an adult. We learned about when she (went to college, got married, had children . . .). The people we will talk to today have not done some of those things so our questions may need to be a little different. We still have the list of questions we used yesterday. Let's look at them and see which ones we could use for a seven year old."

- After looking at the questions, cross out the ones that would not be appropriate for young children. Then help the students decide what additional questions they want to ask their friends. Add them to the list. Be sure to include what they are good at, things they don't like, and what they want to be when they grow up.
- Seven or eight questions are plenty for young children. Put them where they are easily seen from anywhere in the room.
- Divide students into pairs. Have each student practice asking the first question to his partner. Then have a few children give their partners answer to the group.
- Remind the class that you will be watching for some children to share interesting, unusual, or new information about their friends.

Accountability/Assessment (20-30 minutes):

- Partners should find a quiet spot in the room to interview each other. They will take turns asking and answering each question. They could use their writing booklets or a blank paper to record their partner's answers to the questions. They should be recording as much information about their friend as they are capable of.
- As you walk around, look for good questioning, students who are recording information about their friend, and help any who are struggling with recording information.

Author's Chair (5-10 minutes): Because students will want to share what they learned about their friends, use small groups of six to eight today instead of one large group. That way everyone will be able to share before they get bored.

Accommodations: Use a pre made fill-in-the-blank form to interview the friend.

Day 4

Time needed: 30-40 minutes

Objective: Students will create a list of questions to interview a parent, and start writing a parent biography using information they already know. (Note: This lesson could be divided into two days.)

Materials:

- Biography questions used previously
- Students booklets

Mini lesson (10-15 minutes):

- Say, "When you live in the same house as someone else, you may think you know a lot about that person. You may be amazed at how much you don't know though. Sometimes interesting things happened before you were born. You may not know much about when your mom or dad was little. Some parents are good at telling stories about their lives, but most of them don't talk about it much."

Today we will start working on a biography of one of your parents to help you learn more about them.”

- Tell students something you learned about your own parent. (ex.: My own mother hated sports, but we found out when she died that she was on a championship basketball team.)
- Ask if anyone knows something unusual about a parent that they could share with the class.
- Say, “It sounds like we all know some great stuff about our parents! This is the kind of information good writers like you should put on paper!”
- Have the students decide which parent they would like to write about today.
- Say, “Today you will have two jobs. The first will be to write what you already know about your mom or dad. We were doing just that when we shared stories a few minutes ago. You could start by writing what you told *us*. Be sure to write what they are good at and what they do with you.”
- Say, “The second will be to write down some questions you need to ask them to learn what you don’t already know. We made a good list of question that we used to learn about the principal and about our friends in our class.”
- Say, “Let’s go to our seats and start by writing everything you already know about your parent. I will tell you when we have about 5 or 6 minutes left so you can start on your list of questions.”

Accountability/Assessment (15-20minutes): Have students take out their writing booklets and turn to a clean page. Encourage them to write everything they can before starting on their list of questions for what they don’t know. As you conference with students, look for interesting information that could be shared with the class. Complement students on items they are writing that are biographical.

The questions that students wrote should be taken home tonight and answered so they will be ready for the next lesson.

Author’s Chair (5-10 minutes): Have some students share one thing about their parent that they think is the most unusual or interesting.

Accommodations: Some students may need a scribe. A parent volunteer, aide, or another child could help with this.

Day 5

Time needed: 40-45 minutes

Objective: Students will use personal knowledge of their parents along with answers to yesterday’s questions to compose a written draft of their parent biographies.

Materials:

- Two or three biographies with catchy beginnings

- Student booklets
- The notes you wrote as a class about the principal or some notes you wrote about your own parent

Mini lesson (5-10 minutes): Students will be compiling their information today using what they wrote yesterday and the home research.

- Say, “Today I will show you how to put all your information about your parents together into a draft of a story that you can later publish.”
- Use the notes about the principal or your parent to show students how to put the sentences together in a logical order. Show students how the order can be changed by cutting the parts of the story apart and taping them together in a different place. Everything about their childhood may be put together. What makes them a great parent could make a good ending.
- Tell the students that when we write a biography, we should start with something that will make people want to read it. Show them the examples you have ready or use some from the internet if actual books are not available.
 - “He was born with the name George Herman Ruth, Jr. But he is better known as Babe.” (www.biographyforkids.com)
 - “Harry Houdini was one of the greatest magicians of the twentieth century whose incredible feats amazed audiences.” (www.biographyforkids.com)
 - “You’ve seen his name on millions of candy bars. But you probably don’t know all the different ways he tried to make life sweeter for others.” (www.biography.com/bio4kids/)
 - “Have you ever dreamed of flying freely through outer space surrounded by a sea of stars? Mae Jamison fulfilled that dream. She became the first African-American woman to blast into outer space.” (www.timeforkids.com)

Accountability/Assessment (15-20 minutes): Remind students that as you go around the room you will be watching for how they put their stories together today. Tell students to begin by reading what they already have. Are there pieces of information missing? Does it make sense? If the order needs to be changed they can use scissors and tape. Remind them to start with an interesting beginning. They should try to spell the words correctly as much as they are able.

Author’s Chair (5-10 minutes): Let a few students share what they wrote and what they changed in their story.

Accommodations: Some students may need a partner to help them with the drafting process.

Day 6

Time needed: 40-45 minutes

Objective: Students will edit their drafts for spelling of grade-level appropriate words, revise it to add details, and use legible handwriting to create a final draft.

Materials:

- A rough draft paragraph of the principal biography written on the board or poster paper with some errors in capitalization, punctuation, and spelling sight words, as well as a sentence that could be worded more smoothly
- Editing checklist
- Students rough drafts
- Paper for final drafts
- Crayons, markers, pens for illustrating
- A few published biographies

Mini-lesson (5-10 minutes): Today will be the final lesson on writing biographies. Remind the students of the steps they have been through: interviewing, taking notes, writing rough drafts, and making it interesting. Today they will publish their story and illustrate it.

- Draw student's attention to the paragraph on the board. Read it together.
- Ask if there are any questions about what is written. Does it need more information anywhere? Ask students to be the editors and find the things that need to be fixed.
- Have one student at a time come up, cross out the mistakes, and write it correctly.
- Remind students to check the word wall for sight words that must be spelled correctly and remind them to make their best effort on the other words.
- Show students the editing checklist and have them check the paragraph on the board to make sure they have done everything on the checklist.
- Show students the published biographies and ask what they notice about the book. Read a page or two and ask students to look at the picture. "Does it match the story?"
- Tell students that they need to have a partner conference and read their rough draft to someone else. Does it sound smooth? Is something missing? Do they need to change a word to make it more interesting? Together they should decide if any part of their stories needs more information or doesn't make sense.
- Show students the paper or booklet you want them to use for their final copy.
- Tell them you will be coming around to see what editing they have done, and that you will be looking for best work on handwriting and illustrating.

Accountability/Assessment (20-25 minutes): As you move around the room today, check for students who are editing, not just copying what they already have onto the final paper. Remind them to read sections aloud to hear how they sound. Encourage students to use the word wall to check spelling, change words or phrases to make their story better, and use best handwriting. Ask them to explain how their illustration matches the words.

Final accountability: Has each student written a biography of a parent, checked off each item on the editing checklist, and completed a final draft with illustrations?

Author's Chair (5-10 minutes): Have the students you observed share their editing experience with the class.

Accommodations: Have someone type the story if necessary for some students.

My Editing Checklist

| | | |
|---|------------|-----------|
| I added details to make my story interesting. | Yes | No |
| I used the word wall to help me spell the sight words. | Yes | No |
| I put a capital at the beginning of each sentence and each name. | Yes | No |
| I put a period at the end of each sentence. | Yes | No |
| I used my best handwriting. | Yes | No |
| My pictures match my story. | Yes | No |

Name _____

Biography Interview Form

Name of the person interviewed

-

Personal Information

-
-
-
-

Talents or Accomplishments

-
-
-

Likes or Dislikes

-
-
-

What He or She Wants To Do

-
-