

Writing a Biography

By Jean Hansen

Mini-Unit Objectives: Introduce the genre of biography writing to the students. Give students a chance to experience biography reading and writing.

Lesson 1: Introduce the Biography Genre

Utah Core Standard 8; Objective 6—Write in different forms and genres

Lesson Objective: Introduce the genre of biography to students.

Materials: Published biographies (see list at end)

Time: 40-60 minutes

Introduction: Ask the students what they know about one of the students in the class (arrange with the student before hand). Let the students share what they know about the student.

Pose the question, “How might we find out more information about this student?”

Lesson: Introduce the idea of what a biography is. Show the students many different published biographies. Immerse the students in reading different biographies about different types of people; i.e. historical figures, sports stars, scientists

Discuss with students that a biography is the story of a person’s life written by someone else. Sometimes the person is alive and can be interviewed, but sometimes they have died and the writer has to interview other people or do research to find out information.

Biographies can tell about a life from birth to death, or can tell about a specific time in a person’s life.

Closing: Leave books out in the classroom for students to look and read until the next lesson.

Lesson 2: Questioning and Information Gathering

Utah Core Standard 8; Objective 1—Prepare to write by gathering information

Lesson Objective: Introduce questioning to students by reading a biography together

completing some questions about the story together.

Materials: Knockin' On Wood by Lynne Barasch (2004)
Questioning Sheet on document camera

Time: 30 to 40 minutes

Lesson: Review what a biography is and the books we read in the first lesson.
Explain that today we are going to practice looking for answers from a published biography.
Put the Questioning sheet on camera
Go over the questions so that the students know what they are listening for as we read the story together.

Read the story. Allow students to raise their hands to comment when they think they heard an answer to one of the questions. Discuss my thoughts with the students as we complete the questions together.

Closing: Talk together about how we looked for answers. Explain that a biographer doesn't have a published book to look at. They have to interview or research information about the person, and by asking questions, they can begin to write the story.

Lesson 3: Questioning a person

Lesson Objective: Introduce the idea of information gathering. Interviewing is one way to get the information you need for your story.

Materials: Students' writing journals, question prompts (from lesson 2)

Time: 40 minutes

Lesson: Begin by reviewing our questioning from lesson 2. Remind the students that biographers do interviews to find out answers to their questions. Explain that they are going to have the chance to interview one of their classmates to learn more about them.

They will interview their partner and then trade places and their classmate will interview them.

Give the students the question prompts, but make sure they know that they can ask other questions that they think of themselves.

They will take notes in their writing journals.

Let the students do their interviews. Walk around and help as needed. This would be a great time to begin conferencing with some of the groups.

Closing: Let the students know that we will be using the notes they took to begin

writing their own biography.

Lesson 4: Begin the writing process

Utah Core Standard 8; Objective 2—Compose a written draft

Lesson Objective: Begin the writing process using information gathered from interviews.

Materials: Teacher notes

Time: This lesson will take several writing times.

Lesson: The first part of this lesson is **teacher-directed**. Show the students questions and answers that teacher noted in interviewing a fellow teacher. Begin the writing process by deciding the order to put the information. Make an outline using the notes. Explain to the students that the outline will allow the teacher to begin writing the biography.

It is important that this section is walked through aloud and written for the students to hear and see the teacher's thought process.

Allow the students to begin their writing process. Let them decide what information they want to include in their biography, and put the events and ideas in the order they want to use them.

This is the perfect time to begin conferencing with the students. Walk around the class and look for students struggling to arrange the information.

Closing: This lesson will continue as students work on their biography piece.

**At this point, the teacher needs to decide how far into the writing process the students are ready to go. If they are familiar with the writing process, the students can work through drafting, clarifying, editing, and publishing their biography. The teacher should continue to conference through the process with the students keeping track of the conferences.

Lesson 5: Sharing

Lesson Objective: Allow students to share their writing with a group.

Time: 30 to 40 minutes

Lesson: Talk with students about how to comment and critique someone else's writing, and talk with them about how to listen to other's comments about their own writing.

Put students in groups of 6. Allow each student time to share the biography they have written with their group. Allow group to comment on the biography and information given.

Bring the class together and draw a couple of names to share with the whole class. Celebrate the writing the students have completed by reviewing the steps taken in the biography writing process.

Closing: A great way to close this unit would be to have each student prepare a final copy of their biography and present it to the classmate they were writing about. The biographies could also be combined into a class introduction book that could be displayed at Parent-Teacher Conferences or a school reading night.

Assessment: Assessment should take place through the unit orally in the teacher directed sections, group or one-on-one during conferencing, and at the end during the share sessions. The final copy could be the final assessment to determine those students who understood the genre and writing process.

Questioning Prompts

Name of person

Important dates and places

birth _____

death (if dead) _____

Family information

What interests did they have as a child? _____

Did anything sad happen to them? _____

Did anything happy or exciting happen to them? _____

What other interesting facts can you find out? _____

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