



Lesson: Introduce the Elements of Biographies

Biographies have overlapping qualities of fiction and nonfiction texts. Similar to fiction, biographies are meant to read like a story with a beginning, middle and end. They are about main characters whose life stories show struggle, conflict and resolution. Their lives often exhibit great achievements. As nonfiction, biographies use different text structures such as a description, sequence, comparison, cause and effect, or problem and solution. They often have informational text features (e.g., headings, timelines, photographs and captions). Students will want to capitalize and extend upon their current understanding of character development and nonfiction as they read their biographies.

"So what then sets biographies apart from other nonfiction?" you might be asking yourself. Biographies are about real people. The information is true! While the stories of people's lives might read like fiction, their text features and organization all work to enhance the meaning and understanding of the character and setting. Don't let your students overlook biographies' nonfiction qualities! In this lesson, students listen to a read aloud of a biography and compare its characteristics to other familiar genres. They discuss why its elements make it nonfiction, its similarities with fiction, and what sets it apart from other nonfiction books.

Objectives (Key concepts, skills and knowledge)

- Understands the characteristics of biographies
- Recognizes that biographies often exhibit certain text features
- Learns that biographies are a type of nonfiction
- Compares and contrasts biographies to fiction and nonfiction
- Communicates ideas in writing

Common Core State Standards

Reading 5,6,9, 10 Writing 2, 9 , 10 Speaking and Listening 1

Evidence of Student Success

- Describes how a biography is different from previous genres studied
- Identifies text features
- Shares examples of biographies
- Answers in writing "What is a biography?"

Recommended Read Alouds

- *Molly Bannaky* by Alice McGill
- *Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman* by Kathleen Krull
- *Teammates* by Peter Golenbock
- *Dear Benjamin Banneker* by Andrea Davis Pinkney
- *George Washington's Mother* by Jean Fritz
- *Young Orville and Wilbur Wright: First to Fly* by Andrew Woods
- *George Washington Carver* by Andy Carter and Carol Seller
- *Diego Rivera: An Artist's Life* by Sarah Vazquez
- *Happy Birthday, Martin Luther King* by Jean Marzollo
- *Jacob Lawrence* by Mike Venezia
- *A Picture Book of Frederick Douglass* by David A. Adler
- *Frida Kahlo* by Mike Venezia
- *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* by Peter Golenbock and Paul Bacon

Preparation

Read Lesson .

Provide an assortment of biographies and autobiographies for students to peruse.

Prepare a concept map.

Review the text features of biography.

Choose a biography read aloud to share.

Have chart paper and markers available.

1. Differentiate Genres

20 minutes

Share with students that they are beginning the biography genre today. Although fiction and biography share characteristics, a biography is an informational text with many of the elements learned from the social studies unit. As you read aloud a biography, ask them to pay attention to how the book is an example of nonfiction.

Discuss

After the read aloud, begin comparing the previous genres studied to the biography. How was it like fiction? What text features and elements did it have that made it similar to the informational texts read during the social studies unit? The class will have more opportunity to examine and compare the genres in the next activity.

2. Compare Different Biographies

15 minutes

For students who are new to biographies, show them the read-aloud biography and other biographies you have in your classroom. Give them some time to look at the texts to see what they can discover about biographies. Ask students to write in their Writer's Notebook the text features they see in their biography. Then ask them to exchange books with a partner and repeat the exercise. Have them compare notes to see if either of them identified characteristics the others hadn't.

List Text Features

After students have had some time to write and compare their observations with each other, discuss and list as a class text features they noticed among biographies. Discuss why the author included the text features or wrote the book in the format they did. How do the features and format help them understand more about the person's life?

3. Discuss: What is a biography?

5 minutes

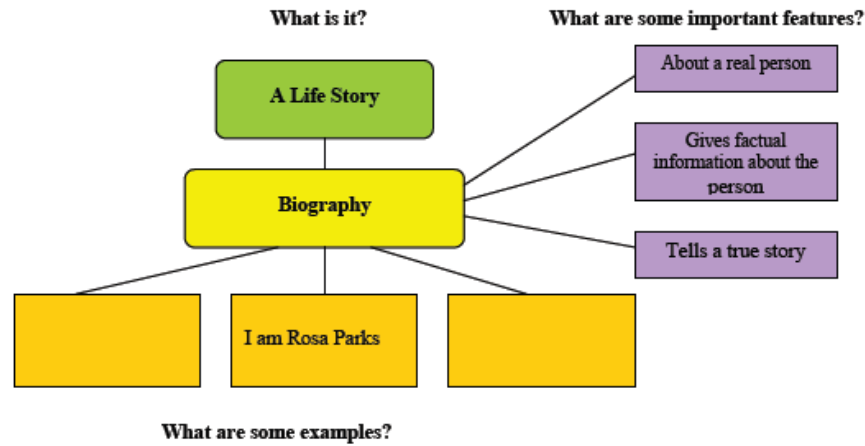
Use a concept map (see below) to help students answer these questions:

What is a biography?

Can you think of some examples of biographies that you know about or have read?

What are some important features of a biography?

Concept Map



Help your students understand the differences and similarities between biography and the other two genres of fiction and nonfiction. Review with your students that genres help you characterize different types of books. Understanding the different characteristics of a genre will help them organize their thoughts to better comprehend what the book is about and why it was written. See below for a comparison diagram to help you and your students see the similarities and differences between fiction, informational texts, and biographies.

Comparing Fiction, Nonfiction and Biographies

	Fiction	Nonfiction (informational texts)	Biographies
Text Structures	Beginning, middle, and end	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Series of paragraphs with main ideas and supporting details Possible text structures: description, sequence, compare and contrast, cause and effect, problem and solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning, middle, and end Series of paragraphs with main ideas and supporting details Possible text structures: description, sequence, compare and contrast, cause and effect, problem and solution
Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Characters Setting Plot Problem and Solution Theme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Factual information Theme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting Factual information about a real person Theme
Print Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue Titles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bold print Italic print Colored print Bullets Titles Subtitles Labels Captions Pronunciations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bold print Italic print Colored print Bullets Titles Subtitles Labels Captions Pronunciations
Graphic Devices	Illustrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charts Diagrams Maps Photographs Timelines Tables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charts Diagrams Maps Photographs Timelines Tables
Organizational Aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Table of contents Preface Epilogue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Table of contents Preface Sidebars Glossary Appendix Index 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Table of contents Preface Sidebars Glossary Appendix Index
Types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Realistic fiction Historical fiction Folktales Fairy tales Science fiction Fantasy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informational texts Encyclopedia entries Newspapers Magazines Journals textbooks Biographies Autobiographies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biographies Autobiographies
Forms	books, poems, films, documentaries, plays	books, articles, letters, encyclopedia entries, textbooks, memoirs, diaries, journals, poems, films, documentaries, obituaries, plays	books, articles, letters, encyclopedia entries, textbooks, memoirs, diaries, journals, poems, films, documentaries, obituaries, plays

Using large chart paper, fill in a genre study chart for biography with students. Help students list the definition and characteristics of biography. Explain

how biography has characteristics of both fiction and nonfiction, yet is situated within the nonfiction genre because it is comprised of factual information. Here are some guiding questions:

- How would you describe fiction/nonfiction/biography?
- How do authors organize the text?
- What similarities do all fiction/nonfiction/biographies have?
- Where might you find this kind of writing?
- What fiction/nonfiction/biography texts have we read?

GENRE STUDY CHART

	Fiction	Nonfiction
Definition	The text is a story that didn't really happen or is make-believe.	A text containing real or factual information.
Characteristics	A story with a beginning, middle, end, characters, plot, setting, problem, and solution	A series of paragraphs with main ideas and supporting details. Text features- headings, subheading, bullets, bolded print, timelines, captions and photographs, charts, and sidebars <i>(add other text features as you encounter and discuss them in text).</i>
Types	Realistic Fiction, Historical Fiction, Folktales, Fairy Tales, Science Fiction, Fantasy	Autobiographies, Biographies <i>(See below.)</i> , Encyclopedia entries, Newspapers, Magazines, Journals, Textbooks
Books we have read	<i>Something Beautiful</i> <i>Cool Crazy Crickets</i> <i>Chicken Sunday</i>	<i>Wagon Train</i> <i>Journey of a Pioneer</i> <i>The Trail of Tears</i>

Biography
Tells the life of real people.

A factual account with illustrations, organizational features, photographs, lifelines, accuracy of facts, graphic features, setting, theme, and a structural pattern.

(Leave this area blank- write in read-aloud titles and student books after you read each one.)

4. Write: What is a biography?

15 minutes

In their writing journals, students take the time to answer the question “What is a biography?”. They should explain that it is an informational text about a real person. Oftentimes, there are text features such as a time line, photographs, a table of contents, and chapter headings. (An autobiography is a biography of the author writing about him or herself.)