

CHAPTER 7

Whose Life Is It, Anyway? Biographies in the Classroom

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For many people, the scope of young adult literature includes only novels. Unfortunately, this limited definition prevents many young adult readers from experiencing the benefits of reading nonfiction materials.

Biographies and autobiographies are two nonfiction genres that can be used successfully to motivate young adults to read. After all, look at the popular reading materials that flood the supermarkets and convenience stores. Teen magazines offer tantalizing glimpses into the lives and loves of musicians, actors, sports figures, and other cultural icons. A few years ago, my granddaughter Cali, who was 13 at the time, was enthralled with unauthorized biographies of the bands 'N Sync and the Backstreet Boys, which have led her to read biographies of other pop icons over the years. And before you readers feel inclined to sneer at this type of reading, be reminded that over the past few decades, numerous biographies of pop musicians and television stars have been driven up the bestseller lists by teen readers.

Of course, I am not suggesting that these drugstore biographies provide literary experiences for teens, but I am suggesting that the interest in reading biographies is present. As teachers, we need to tap into that attraction and extend teens' interest in the biography genre. Literary, reading, and writing skills can be incorporated into a classroom study of biographies. Moreover, biographies and autobiographies also can provide a successful transition from the English language arts classroom to other content area classes. After a study of these genres, students also might want to try their hands at writing their own autobiographies, or biographies of family, friends, and community members.

Why should we consider using biographies and autobiographies in the classroom? How can we begin using biographies in the classroom? How can we

select biographies that reflect the very best the genre has to offer YA readers? What kinds of activities are logical extensions of the study of biographies in the classroom? These are the questions addressed in this chapter. The purpose of this chapter, then, is threefold: First, it examines the criteria for evaluating biographies for young adults. Then it discusses how to integrate biographies and autobiographies in the English language arts classroom, as well as across the curriculum. Finally, this chapter presents some thoughts on using biographies and autobiographies in writing scenarios, and highlights the works of several writers of biographies for teens. An annotated bibliography of biographies for young adult classrooms is included at the end of the chapter.

The Benefits of Biographies in the Classroom

Before we begin a discussion of the *how* and *what* of using biographies and autobiographies in the classroom, we need to talk about the *why*: Why should



BODY BIOGRAPHY

Direct students to choose a character from the story they have read. The next step is for the students to create a human silhouette for their character. Students will be relaying important aspects of this character's life through writing and illustrating. Students need to decide where specific information should be placed in relation to parts of the body. An example would be to place the character's loved ones in the heart area of the silhouette or the character's goals in the spinal area. Other ideas to help guide students are as follows:

- All writings and illustrations should be based on the text.
- Remember to include admirable traits or discouraging qualities.
- Choose colors to reflect the mood of the character in certain situations.
- Include symbols that could be associated with the character.
- Use poems as writings. Poems can reflect the character's outward actions, the character's inner self, or how others perceive the character.

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egocentric adolescents care to read about the lives of other people? Why is it important that we include this genre in the classroom? What benefits can result from a study of biographies?

The most important reason we have for sharing biographies and autobiographies with our students is this: This genre extends students' opportunities to identify with a diverse group of people. As Barbara Samuels notes in her chapter on multicultural literature, students feel affirmed when they read books that reflect their cultures (see Chapter 3 in this volume). To view the need for this diversity, walk into any classroom in any town and ask students to name for you famous women in U.S. history, or famous African American scientists of the 20th century, or famous Hispanic Americans who have contributed to U.S. society. Now wait through the silence and accept the handful of answers students offer. It becomes instantly clear that despite changes in our textbooks and continued commitment to multicultural education, students are still not exposed to as much diversity as we would like. Biographies can provide students the chance to meet a wide range of people—people whose accomplishments might not warrant a footnote in a history, math, or science textbook, but people who reflect the rich diverse heritage of the United States.

Biographies and autobiographies can also allow students to encounter a plethora of role models. Imagine reading about the heroic actions of Andrea Castanon Ramirez Candalaria, the nurse who ministered to the wounded at the siege of the Alamo (Munson, 1989). Or perhaps learning that the golf tee was invented in 1899 by Dr. George F. Grant, an African American, in a time when African Americans were not permitted to compete in golf tournaments (Miller, 1999). Maybe students will meet Sadako Sasaki, a young Japanese girl whose dream of peace after the bombing of Hiroshima in World War II did not die, although her young life ended due to leukemia; her friends collected money to erect a statue in Peace Park, which is engraved with this message: "This is our cry. This is our prayer. Peace in the world" (Coerr, 1979). Unless we pull biographies into the classroom, our students might miss these and the dozens of other opportunities to meet people who lived quiet, purposeful lives.

Biographies and autobiographies can be used in classrooms to supplement information that already appears in textbooks. No matter how current our texts may be in any content area, they become dated. Also, unless we wish to have 10-pound textbooks, some people and their contributions will be either omitted or given brief space. This does not refer only to content area classrooms; we need only look as far as the anthologies in our English and reading classrooms. Applebee's 1992 study of the classics most frequently covered in high school

English classrooms reflects a stunning paucity of works by people of color or authors from countries outside of the United States and Great Britain, so students might not know much about the lives and works of Zora Neale Hurston or Tomas Rivera. Biographies and autobiographies can supplement what is presently in the textbooks and allow students a wider window through which to view their world.

A fourth reason for incorporating biographies and autobiographies into the classroom is that this literature meets the stated reading needs and interests of some of our students. Surely, my granddaughter is not the only teen who loves reading about the stars of contemporary culture! This year, as I worked with a group of at-risk middle school students, I found that one of their favorite books was Gary Paulsen's *Guts* (2001), the true-life stories behind *Hatchet* (1987) and the other books about Brian Robeson. Paulsen's previous slice-of-life autobiography, *Woodson* (1990), also remains popular with readers. As Moss notes in her chapter on nonfiction, genres such as biography and autobiography might be just the vehicle for transporting students from school-time to lifetime readers (see Chapter 5 in this volume).

The Good, the Bad, and the Silly: What Is the Difference?

So now that we know that bringing biographies and autobiographies into the classroom is important, we want to be certain that the books we include meet some standards. How can we ascertain the quality of works in this genre? Knowing the evaluative criteria for the genre will help us ensure that the reading experiences we provide are worthwhile for our students.

Does the Book Tell a Good Story?

First and foremost, we want to provide our students with reading materials that are both interesting and informative. Giving teens books that do not use the techniques of good fiction might be counterproductive. How can we expect students to become interested in reading biographies and autobiographies unless the books we ask them to read are fast-paced narratives that engage students as readers? Good biographies and autobiographies hook readers, so the first place to focus our examination is on the opening pages of a book. What is in the first paragraph to make teens want to read on? How long before readers are actually introduced to the subject of the book?

Involving students in the evaluation is critical. Begin by visiting the school or public library and checking out as many different biographies as permitted. Be sure to include books about contemporary cultural icons—that is, figures from the sports and entertainment industries—as well as figures from history. Bring the books to your classroom and do the following exercise, a quick activity called Pass It On: Place one biography at each seat. Tell students they will have 3 minutes (or more, depending on your particular students) to begin reading the book in front of them. Assure them that if the book is less than engaging, they only have to bear it for 3 minutes. Have them begin reading. At the end of 3 minutes, ask students to pass the book they are reading along to the person on the right (or the left, or in front, or behind, or whatever). Give them another 3 minutes and pass the books along again. Repeat this process at least 5 times (you have only taken 15 minutes at this point). After the students have had a chance to pass several books along, ask if anyone found a book that might be worth another 3 minutes or more. What did that book do to engage the reader?

By the end of the Pass It On activity, you and your students should have a good idea of the techniques authors use to engage readers as well as some titles that students would find interesting to read on their own. Make a list of these books, or simply allow students who found interesting books to begin reading them. You can then work individually with the students who have not found interesting reading material, or allow them to visit the library to find some suitable reading material. This activity gives students the chance to select books that appeal to them. If more than one student expresses an interest in the same book, teachers can either recommend other similar titles or allow students to form reading groups based on their similar interests. An alternative might be to have students drop out of the rotation in Pass It On once they have found a book of interest to them. This puts the book out of circulation at that point. By allowing for some selection, we increase the likelihood that students will actually read the books.

Are the Facts Accurate?

This just flat-out makes good sense: Of course we want the biographies and autobiographies we use in the classroom to get the facts right. But how can those of us who generally are not expert in the lives of many people tell whether or not the facts are accurate? There are several sources that can offer us assistance in guaranteeing high quality, accurate biographies and autobiographies. Journals that focus on book reviews are one such source. Ask the school media specialist for issues of *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, or *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)*,

which present careful reviews of contemporary works for teens. Your media specialist might even be willing to prepare a list of recent books he or she would suggest for your students.

At the same time, given decreased budgets, the cost of new books mentioned in these journals might be prohibitive. Therefore, retrospective collection development aids might be of more use. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) publishes aids such as *Books for You* and *Your Reading* every 3 years. These volumes present annotations of books for high school and middle school, respectively. Your media specialist can also prepare a list of books already in the school collection that are accurate and authentic examples of quality biographies and autobiographies for teens. Professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) generally have available lists of recommended books for the individual content areas. Rely on the work of those more expert in the field to help assess books using the accuracy criteria.

Is the Person Presented as a Round Character?

For too long, biographies created mythical characters, people with whom students could hardly be expected to identify. Remember the old chestnut about George Washington never telling a lie? Can we really expect our students to relate to a character who has no flaws, no real human foibles? What our students need is a complete picture of the subject of the book, a person who has strengths and weaknesses, a REAL person with whom to identify. Take, for example, Jean Fritz's



BIO-CUBE

- Cover a cube-shaped box with paper.
- Choose a character from a story to use for this activity.
- On one side of the cube, write the name of the character.
- On the other five sides, list traits of that particular character.
- Encourage the students to use words with different fonts, drawings, and color to make that character come to life through description.

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biography of General Sam Houston in *Make Way for Sam Houston* (1986). Fritz presents the story of this larger-than-life Texas statesman in terms that today's readers can understand. Houston's childhood is not idyllic; his older brothers tease him. His adult life is plagued with challenges, as well, and although Houston meets some of these challenges, others defeat him. This realistic portrayal of someone who could easily be characterized as a legendary hero makes Sam Houston more accessible to today's teens. They can see some of their own strengths and weaknesses reflected in the life of this great leader. Presenting subjects with warts and all, so to speak, is paramount for a good biography for our students.

Easy as A-B-C: Autobiographies and Biographies Across the Curriculum

Now that we have determined that our selections are appropriate for the classroom and our students, how can we make connections across the curriculum? The simplest method of establishing the connection is by selecting biographies and autobiographies that present subjects from the pages of those content area textbooks. Subjects might include famous people from art, music, history, science, mathematics, sports, and the like. However, a more intensive cross-curricular unit might develop from a thematic unit of study. By selecting a broad theme, it is a fairly simple matter of bringing in the various disciplines. Examine, for instance, a theme such as "Making Decisions." In reading and English classes, students can read various pieces about people who are faced with tough decisions and, ultimately, have to live with the consequences of those decisions. Social studies classes might examine historical figures who have had to make difficult choices (such as the decision to use the atom bomb during WWII, decisions made to secede prior to the Civil War, or the decisions of the Civil Rights workers to disobey the Jim Crow Laws). Science classes can focus on topics such as scientific and medical ethics (such as euthanasia or animal experimentation), topics in which big decisions are crucial. Creative arts classes such as music, art, and dance can discuss the choices artists make during the creative process. By keeping the theme broad, the possibilities for connections across content areas are more numerous.

Write All About It!

Making the connections to other content areas is a wonderful way of getting students to see that the various disciplines are related. However, once students

have completed discussions, we must find some way of taking their newfound knowledge and applying it in a new situation in order to assess the effectiveness of their learning. Developing quick and motivating assignments is as crucial as selecting the very best books to share with students. After all, if we kill their love of reading with overly dull and lengthy assignments, we have gained little in our battle to create lifelong learners. So, how can we hold students accountable for their learning in ways that might improve the chances for future connections to books? The following activities are a few that have worked in middle school and high school classrooms.

Writing a Reading Autobiography

This activity dates back many years to the college classroom of G. Robert Carlsen (1980). As Carlsen began each semester teaching courses in literature for young adults, he would ask his students to write about their own reading as children, as teens, and as adults. The tradition of writing a reading autobiography became part of the routine for some of Carlsen's students, including Dick Abrahamson, my college professor. At the beginning of each school year, I ask my students (at both the college and the secondary levels) to write their reading autobiographies. This activity helps me to see immediately which class members are already avid readers, which students might need a bit of extra motivation or guidance because they have become dormant readers, and which students have had such powerfully negative experiences with books and reading that I need to work closely with them to reestablish a connection to books early in the year.

I usually limit the reading autobiography requirement to three pages, typed and double-spaced. I ask students to address the following questions:

- What are your earliest memories of reading?
- What do you remember about reading outside of school?
- How do you think you learned to read?
- What are your reading experiences at school?
- What did you like to read as a child? as a teen? as an adult?

I ask students to complete these autobiographies by the end of the first week of class, and I allow one class period for students to begin to outline. You can share these autobiographies anonymously with the class and discuss what they have in common in terms of positive and negative reading experiences. I generally

write comments in the margins as I read these pieces, noting surprise when a student mentions a book or author I love or noting dismay when a student relates a negative experience with books in a classroom.

I evaluate these papers with a basic check/minus system—either the student has completed the assignment or he or she needs to revise and resubmit. Assigning a numeric grade to someone’s memories and experiences is too dicey, although that does not mean I cannot make comments about the quality of the writing. Often, this first piece of writing gives me direction for what writing, grammar, and usage issues I will cover early in the semester. More important, this assignment allows me the chance to see students as individuals who bring a variety of experiences to the classroom.

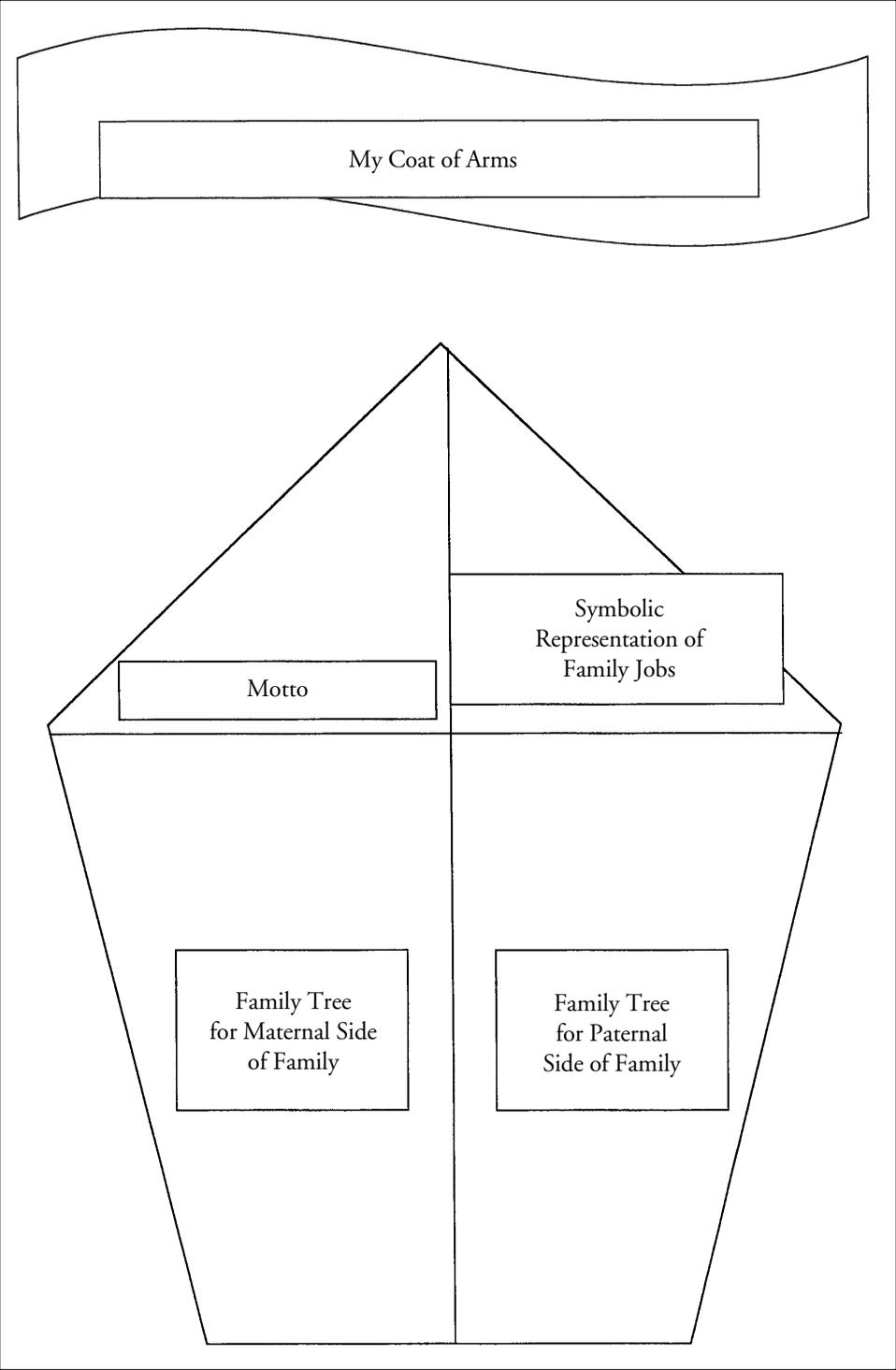
Coat of Arms

We have all seen the kiosks in our shopping malls that offer to locate our family’s coat of arms (or perhaps to help us design one of our own). My husband’s family has a coat of arms, one he proudly displays on our walls. He is descended from French Huguenots, and the family name has been part of the history of the southern United States since the 17th century. He can trace his family back to the original descendant who crossed from France more than 300 years ago. However, I am only a third-generation American, and one with a varied ancestry as well. There is no single coat of arms in existence that could represent my family fully. Whatever their situation, students might enjoy creating their own coat of arms, a family crest that is reflective of the lives of their parents and other relatives.

To create a coat of arms, students must first conduct some research into their families. Questions and procedures can be brainstormed as a class in order to ensure uniformity, or students can be left on their own to develop questions and interview procedures. Once students have completed the background research, they can prepare a coat of arms. You can provide the “shell” of the final product and even designate that each coat of arms be divided into a set number of pieces with specific information to be graphically represented in each piece (see Figure 7.1).

Again, some more choices can be allowed in completing this project. After the coats of arms have been finished, students can present brief oral explanations of the choices they made in their projects. This assignment can be combined with other activities such as “A Profile of Me” or “Writing Our Own Stories,” two activities we will look at next.

FIGURE 7.1 Coat of Arms Guide



A Profile of Me

For this activity, you will need butcher paper (preferably white or neutral color), an overhead projector, markers, magazines that can be cut up, scissors, and paste. Put students into pairs. Their task is to trace the profile of their partner onto the butcher paper using the overhead projector to create the profile. Once the profiles have been drawn, students are given time to locate and cut out pictures and text in the magazines that reflect their interests, hobbies, likes, dislikes, and so forth. Then they create a collage, gluing the pictures and text onto the paper profiles. Students can also attach a paragraph or two at the bottom of each profile to explain the choices of words and photos included in the profile. If students omit their names, classmates might see if they can identify one another. Similarly, at Open House, parents could also try to locate their child's profile.

This activity takes little class time, but it provides us with rare glimpses behind the facades that so many of our students hide behind. There are many variations of this activity, as well, that can be used to teach skills. For example, instruct students to select only collective nouns or other parts of speech for various areas of the profile, and you have a quick and relatively painless grammar lesson.

Writing Our Own Stories

A logical follow-up to reading biographies and autobiographies is to ask students to write their own autobiographies. If we have carefully selected the models of this genre, students should be able to accomplish this task more readily. First, we must decide if we want students to write about their own lives or the lives of other people. Beginning with autobiographies or biographies of family members or classmates makes for the simplest approach. The research process will certainly be easier to complete.

For a brief writing project, students might emulate the biographical styles of authors who write for younger readers. Examine the resplendent picture book biographies of Diane Stanley. In 32- to 48-page picture books, Stanley provides an interesting and informative text. Though the picture books might run 48 pages, the actual text for these books is quite limited. Students could be instructed to design a picture book of a specific length (e.g., 48 pages) with "X" number of words per page (which teachers can adjust to meet the needs and abilities of the students and the curriculum) plus illustrations and/or other visuals. A PowerPoint or other multimedia presentation is one alternative to this picture book assignment. This rather simple approach to writing is best if used at

the outset of a school year. However, as the days of the school year wind down and students need activities to distract them from the approaching days of summer vacation, a more involved writing project might be in order.

For a longer project, help students brainstorm a list of topics to cover in the biographies. Each topic can serve as an individual chapter. Each chapter might be one paragraph or one page in length. Teachers can, again, adjust the length of the writing to meet the needs and abilities of their students. Then ask students to select about five of those topics for their biographies. Such a list might include

- The night I had my worst scare
- The person I admire the most
- Wishes, hopes, and dreams
- The teacher from the Black Lagoon
- Treasures under my bed
- A perfect day for me
- TROUBLE!
- My first night out
- Adventures in babysitting
- What I would never do
- Take it from me
- A dark and stormy night
- Vacation blues
- I grew up here
- My best friend in the world
- Hide and seek
- When I am in charge
- My special place

Some Authors to Know

A handful of authors produce biographies and autobiographies that are consistently recognized as exemplary of the genre. These authors provide entertaining and informative books for teens. The subjects of their writing are diverse and include the famous, the infamous, and the everyday. As you begin to select those books that you will bring into the classroom, you may wish to begin with works by some of the following people.

Jean Fritz

Jean Fritz first came to prominence during the frenetic days of the U.S. Bicentennial. Her short illustrated biographies of the country's founding fathers proved immeasurably helpful in classrooms. Fritz soon branched out and began writing biographies for secondary students. *Bully for You, Teddy Roosevelt* (1991) is one example of the Fritz Formula for Biographical Success. In the opening pages, readers meet a young, sickly Teddy Roosevelt, who suffered from such severe asthma that doctors suggested he be driven around in a carriage at top speeds to

try to force air into his lungs; some doctors even advised that he puff on cigars to toughen his lungs. From the opening chapter, readers will be captivated, eager to learn more about this figure from U.S. history.

Fritz does not disappoint. She makes each and every one of her subjects come to life by offering readers insights into their day-to-day lives. Her careful research includes numerous primary sources, which she notes in her bibliography. In addition, she shares with readers her notes for each chapter. It is easy to see, then, how she discovered that Sam Houston stood over 6 feet tall and wore only a size 7 shoe (Fritz, 1986). These bits and pieces of personal information deepen students' interest in the subject. More important, they make the subject come to life for today's readers.

Other Fritz biographical subjects include James Madison (1989), Pocahontas (1983), and Harriet Beecher Stowe (1994). Once students have read one of the outstanding biographies by Fritz, a great follow-up is to direct them to Fritz's autobiography, *Homesick: My Own Story* (1982), and have students discuss what traits and experiences Fritz shares with her subjects.

Russell Freedman

Seldom does nonfiction of any kind receive critical acclaim and awards. The exception to this rule seems to be the work of Russell Freedman, whose Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books include biographies of Abraham Lincoln (1987) and the Wright brothers (1991). The defining characteristic of a biography by Freedman lies in the array of photographs, diagrams, and other artwork that accompany a lively text. It is difficult to turn a page of a Freedman book without encountering some illustration. For secondary students, this serves two purposes: First, it breaks up the text and makes it appear more manageable. Second, the illustrations elaborate and expand on the text, giving readers a concrete example of what is being discussed.

Freedman's research ethic is exemplary. As part of his research for the biography of the Wright brothers, he spent a night in the house that Orville and Wilbur designed. This interest in the day-to-day lives of his subjects is apparent in Freedman's writing as well. From Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1990) to Martha Graham (1998) to Louis Braille (1997) and Native American leaders (1988), from inventors to world leaders, Freedman's biographies are a sure bet for quality.

Students who have read a biography by Freedman might also investigate the research process of this incredible author. How, for example, does Freedman select a topic? How does he go about his research? What about the photos and other illustrative medium? Locating interviews with this author will give students

a deeper insight into the writing process, especially as it pertains to nonfiction. Interviews with young adult authors appear regularly in journals such as *School Library Journal*, *The ALAN Review*, *Horn Book*, and *Teacher Librarian*. Interviews with authors are also available online. Check the publishers' websites as well as sites maintained by authors themselves.

Jim Haskins

Leaders in the African American community are frequently the subjects of biographies by Jim Haskins. From cultural icons such as Spike Lee (1997a) and Louis Farrakhan (1996) to military leaders like Colin Powell (1997b), Haskins provides readers with interesting and insightful biographies. Haskins's collective biographies are perfect for classroom use because they present quick glimpses into the lives of a wide assortment of prominent African Americans. The brief entries in collective biographies such as *African American Military Heroes* (1998a), *Black Eagles: African Americans in Aviation* (1997c), *Outward Dreams: Black Inventors and Their Inventions* (1992), and *African American Entrepreneurs* (1998b) will whet students' appetites for more information.

One interesting way to use Haskins's work is as a model for student writing. After students have completed reading a full-length biography, ask them to write about their subject as though he or she were to be included in a forthcoming collective biography. Students could work in groups with this assignment. Together, they could write the introductory and connecting text that would string together the various biographies and make the entire collection a coherent and cohesive whole.



BIOGRAPHY COLLAGE

Using magazines, scissors, and glue, have students create collages that have pictures to represent protagonist, antagonist, setting (time and place), conflict, plot, and theme of any biographical novel. The collage must be all cut and paste—no drawing or handwriting permitted. Students then explain their collages to the class in an informal oral report. This activity can also be used with any fiction book.

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Kathleen Krull

Like Haskins, Kathleen Krull has written many collective biographies. Her work provides students not only with motivating reading material but also with excellent models for their own writing. In her various collections, Krull brings to life famous contributors to the fields of art (1995a), music (1993), politics (1998), sports (1997), and literature (1994). For example, in *Lives of the Musicians: Good Times, Bad Times (and What the Neighbors Thought)* (Krull, 1993), readers learn about famous composers such as Mozart and Bach as well as the lesser known contributions of Nadia Boulanger and Charles Ives. In a few short pages, Krull gives information sufficient to understand the contributions of the individual to the field. Additionally, she provides endnotes (cleverly labeled “Music Notes”), which serve as tantalizing teasers and invite readers to learn more about the subjects. The charming caricatures by Kathryn Hewitt add to the attraction of Krull’s work.

Students could well use Krull’s writing as models for their own work. Indeed, Krull has written a biography of another famous writer in the lives of our teens, Paula Danziger (1995b), which will be useful to aspiring writers in our classrooms.

Diane Stanley

Although Diane Stanley’s books are classified as picture-book biographies, the intricate illustrations, the well-researched text, and the careful attention to detail make these books reach beyond an elementary audience. Secondary teachers might find her biographies of William Shakespeare (1992) and Charles Dickens (1993) useful when introducing the works of these famed authors. Stanley’s biographies of leaders such as Cleopatra (1994), Shaka, King of the Zulus (1988), Peter the Great (1999), and Queen Elizabeth I (1990) make a natural connection to the social studies curriculum. Other Stanley biographies include the winner of the 1998 Orbis Pictus Award, *Leonardo da Vinci* (1996), and a biography of Joan of Arc (1998). Stanley’s husband, Peter Vennema, served as her research assistant for several of her picture-book biographies and is listed as a coauthor on those titles.

Not only will the text of these biographies provide readers with excellent models for writing, the illustrations deserve close attention as well. Stanley’s paintings reflect the style of the period when the subject lived and provide information about the subject, which elaborates the text. The cover of *Leonardo da Vinci*, for example, features a classically posed portrait of da Vinci on the front and a mirror image of the painting on the back cover. Within the text, readers

discover that da Vinci was adept at producing mirror writing, hence the choice for the cover art. As a cross-curricular connection, the art teachers in the school could assist students in an examination of the art in Stanley's works.

Final Thoughts

Now, more than ever before perhaps, sharing biographies and autobiographies with adolescents is important. Too many surveys of teens indicate that the people they most admire are the rich and famous of our contemporary culture. Although there is nothing wrong with admiring the skill and talent of athletes and entertainers, today's students need to extend their identification to include the unsung heroes of our culture: political leaders and activists, researchers and scientists, historians and geographers, teachers and other professionals. In order to provide students the opportunity to explore career options, we need biographies that present an ever-growing range of choices. What are the possibilities of future vocations? Which people, living here and around the world, are shaping the events of today? What accomplishments need to be not only acknowledged but celebrated? Biographies give us the tools to enrich the lives of our students now and in the future.

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ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BIOGRAPHIES FOR YOUNG ADULT CLASSROOMS

Beals, M.P. (1995). *Warriors don't cry: A searing memoir of the battle to integrate Little Rock's Central High*. New York: Archway.

Beals was one of the Little Rock Nine, nine teens selected to be the first African Americans at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. What should have been the carefree times of high school were instead dark days of taunting and torture. Beals manages to relate the awful incidents of her ordeal with a total lack of bitterness, a real model for today's youth.

Coerr, E. (1979). *Sadako and the thousand paper cranes*. New York: Dell Yearling.

Sadako Sasaki survived the bombing of her hometown of Hiroshima only to fall prey to the aftereffects of the atom bomb. Though she died of leukemia before reaching adolescence, her message of peace so touched her peers and people around the world that her story continues to resonate today.

Frank, A. (1993). *Anne Frank: The diary of a young girl*. New York: Bantam.

This classic autobiography remains a favorite of teens who recognize in Anne so many of the emotions in their own lives. Reading this title along with other books recounting real-life experiences of the Holocaust, such as *No Pretty Pictures* by Anita Lobel, will allow students a chance to see that World War II affected the lives of countless youth.

Levine, E. (1995). *Freedom's children: Young Civil Rights activists tell their own stories*. New York: Avon.

The title of this book is quite descriptive. Levine located and interviewed people who were children and teens during the days of the Civil Rights movement. She records their narratives about marching with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., about the bus boycotts, and about the lunch room sit-ins. Most of all, readers will get a sense of the incredible courage of these youngsters, who stood up for their convictions even though it might have meant imprisonment or perhaps death.

Lobel, A. (1998). *No pretty pictures: A child of war*. New York: Greenwillow.

Anita Lobel was only 5 years old when the Nazis began their occupation of her native Poland. In simple, objective detail she recounts the years spent hiding to save her life, including a stint in a concentration camp. Lobel, best known for her Caldecott award-winning picture books, has written a memoir sure to rivet readers.

Meltzer, M. (1998). *Ten queens: Portraits of women of power*. New York: Dutton.

The large format of this collective biography makes it a feast for the eyes. Great illustrations add to the brief glimpses into the lives of 10 women who led their people in good times and bad. Included are well-known rulers such as Elizabeth I and Eleanor of Aquitaine, along with less familiar figures such as Queen Zenobia of Syria and Queen Christina of Sweden.

Morey, J., & Dunn, W. (1996). *Famous Hispanic Americans*. New York: Cobblehill.

The lives of 14 Hispanics are detailed in this collective biography. All are contemporary figures who come from a variety of backgrounds. From athletes like Felipe Alou and Gigi Fernandez to stand-up comic Paul Rodriguez to fashion designer Caroline Herrera and

ballet dancer Lourdes Lopez, there are many opportunities within these pages for students to learn more about the contributions of these individuals.

Munson, S. (1989). *Our Tejano heroes*. Holmes Beach, FL: Panda Books.

This collective biography examines the lives of Hispanics living in Texas, from its early fight for independence from Mexico to contemporary times.

Paulsen, G. (1990). *Woodsong*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

This slice-of-life autobiography discusses how Paulsen's views on nature were changed by his experiences with his beloved sled dogs, his sole companions on the grueling Iditarod race in Alaska. Readers will be moved from tears to laughter as this master storyteller survives freezing temperatures, irate wildlife, and a host of other challenges.

White, R. (1992). *Ryan White: My own story*. New York: Signet.

White's unforgettable tale of living with AIDS is simple and honest. More important, it is a biography about someone close to the age of its readers, making it even more accessible. Pair this one with Susan Kuklin's *Fighting Back: What Some People Are Doing About AIDS* to give readers more information on the subject.

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Young Adult Literature in the Classroom

Reading It, Teaching It, Loving It

Joan B. Elliott and Mary M. Dupuis, Editors

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This collection explores the reasons that young adult literature is so popular, and offers ways that it can be used in the classroom. The chapters are divided into three sections—Responding to Reading, Exploring Genres, and Studying Authors—and cover a range of topics such as book reviewing, poetry, picture books, and author studies, to name a few. The book concludes with an appendix with a list of YA literature websites.

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It, Anyway? Biographies in the Classroom" (Teri S. Lesesne); (8) Poetry Pathways for Teens" (Rosemary Chance); (9) "When I Hear a Poem, I Want to Write" (Arlene H. Mitchell); and (10) "Picture Books for Older Readers: Passports for Teaching and Learning across the Curriculum" (Carol J. Fuhler). Under Section III, Studying Authors, are these essays: (11) "Empowering Young Adult Readers and Writers through Author Study" (Lynne R. Dorfman); and (12) "Getting the Most Out of an Author's Visit: Multiple Perspectives" (Joan B. Elliott and Suzann