

# UPDATING Fundamentals - Writing Biography

Content Area: **English Language Arts**  
Course(s): **Generic Course**  
Time Period: **6 weeks**  
Length: **6-8 Weeks**  
Status: **Published**

## Unit Overview

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The word “biography” comes from the Greek words “bios,” meaning “life,” and “graphein,” meaning “to write.” Studying biography gives students the opportunity to read and learn about inspirational people who have made a difference to many. As writers of biographies, students will express their opinions about the subjects they write about and include researched facts and details that highlight the subjects’ achievements and influences. Biographers write about people who interest and inspire them. Through biographies, writers express their points of view or opinions about a subject—typically one they hold in high regard. People they admire and respect from the past or present are worthy subjects for students’ biographical writing.

In this unit of study, students will explore the purposes and features of biographies as both readers and writers. As students listen to the unit mentor texts, they will examine the differences and similarities among these features and how they influence readers. Students will analyze the structure of biographies and take note of how some chronicle a person’s life, from birth to death, while others focus on a particular time or achievement. Students will also see how different biographers present the important events, accomplishments, struggles, and personal traits of a person’s life, as well as how they use word choices and tone to convey their admiration for and opinions of the people they write about. The biographies students publish will express their opinions of and information about subjects of their choice.

The mentor text biographies selected for this unit give students a chance to explore inspirational people who lived during various time periods, came from different cultural backgrounds, and had various influences on a variety of topics and/or issues such as sports, politics, human rights, the environment, literature, and beyond. The books in this unit of study can be used seamlessly within your social studies, science, and reading curricula, as well.

## Transfer

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Students will be able to independently use their learning to...

-What kinds of long term, independent accomplishments are desired?

- Engage in discussions about various subjects, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own ideas clearly;
- Learn about many influential and historical subjects and understand the time in which they lived and what they accomplished;
- Form opinions of the various people studied based upon the accomplishments and attributes discussed;
- Support their point of view or opinion with reasons, facts, and details;
- Understand the purpose and structure of biography;
- Include a beginning that introduces their subject and expresses their opinion or point of view;
- Conduct research to build knowledge on their subject and develop their biography with information from various sources;
- Include facts and details to support their opinion and inform readers;

- Create an organizational structure where related information is grouped together and linking words and phrases connect ideas and show the passage of time;
  - Provide a concluding statement or section; and
  - Follow the writing process to publish a biography of a subject of their choosing, which includes planning, researching, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.
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For more information, read the following article by Grant Wiggins.

[http://www.authenticeducation.org/ae\\_bigideas/article.lasso?artid=60](http://www.authenticeducation.org/ae_bigideas/article.lasso?artid=60)

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## **Meaning**

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### **Understandings**

Students will understand that...

- What specifically do you want students to understand?
- What inferences should they make/grasp/realize?

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### **Essential Questions**

Students will keep considering...

- What thought provoking questions will foster inquiry, meaning making and transfer?

## Application of Knowledge and Skill

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### Students will know...

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Students will know...

What facts and basic concepts should students know and be able to recall?

### Students will be skilled at...

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Students will be skilled at...

What discrete skills and processes should students be able to use?

## Academic Vocabulary

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**Instructional Vocabulary:** The Instructional Vocabulary are words derived from the discussions and instructions outlined in each lesson.

achievement(s)	generate ideas	role model
acknowledge	genre	secondary source
additional	Glossary	select an idea
admire	heritage	selected discography
affect	history	self-reflection
background knowledge	influence	significant
biographical texts	information	simile
biography	informative	structure
challenges	inspire	struggles
character	introduce/introduction	subject
chronological order	lead	suspense
collecting	logically	synthesize
common features	main idea	theme
compare	mentor texts	thesis
compare and contrast	metaphor	time line

concluding statement	monologue	writing process
conclusion	motivate	
concrete details	narrow down	
conduct research	organization	
contrast	overcome obstacles	
Dedication	potential subject	
describing	primary source	
develop(ed)	publishing	
diaries	purpose	
drafting	recognition	
editing	reference	
engaging	reflection	
environment	research(ing)	
essay	revise	
explore	revising	
extra features		
facts		
features		
focus		

### **Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary - Mentor Texts**

Mentor Text

Tier 2

Tier 3

### **Learning Goal 1**

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### **Immersion IRA Day 1 Target: What Is Biography?**

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- Students will begin to discuss and define the purpose and identify the characteristics of biographical writing.

## **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **IRA Day 2 Target: Writing to Inform**

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- *Students will continue to explore features of biographies, focusing on how biographers use facts and details to inform readers and bring their subjects to life.*

## **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **IRA Day 3 Target: Author's Craft**

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- Students will continue to build understanding and discuss author's craft and style used in writing a biography.

## **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **IRA Day 4 Target: Author's Purpose**

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- Students will recognize that biographies are written with a specific purpose and discuss how writers include information and details that support their central idea or message.

## **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **IRA Day 5 Target: Features of a Biography**

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- Students will compare and contrast two mentor texts to understand that although biographies contain

common features, writers can have a different approach.

## **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Learning Goal 2**

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Students will independently

Select all applicable standards from the Standards tab.

Be sure to include the Anchor Standards for ELA, the Practice Standards for Math, the English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, and the applicable Technology standards.

### **Mini-Lesson 1 Target: Generating Ideas I: Biographers Write About Role Models**

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Biographers often write about role models.

- Students will think about the role models in their own lives as subjects for their biographies

## **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Mini-Lesson 2 Target: Generating Ideas II: Subjects From History to Celebrate and Appreciate**

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Biographers often write about people they want others to think about or appreciate.

- Students will think of subjects from history worthy of recognition or appreciation as potential subjects for their biographies.

## **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Mini-Lesson 3 Target: Generating Ideas III: Inspirational Subjects We Know Well**

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Biographers often write about people they already know a lot about, such as family members, people in their local communities, or close friends.

- Students will think about the people they know well who could become the subject of their biographies.

### **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Mini-Lesson 4 Target: Selecting: Selecting a Subject for a Biography**

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Writing biographies requires writers to research their subjects, so it is important that they select a subject of strong interest about whom resources are available for research.

- Students will select a subject for their biographies whom they are interested in and excited to research using several sources to build knowledge.

### **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Mini-Lesson 5 Target: Collecting I: Know Your Subject**

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Biographers take stock of what they know is important about their subjects in order to plan their research.

- Students will recall relevant information they already know about their chosen subjects to help them think about the research that needs to be done.

### **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Mini-Lesson 6 Target: Collecting II: Interesting Questions Lead to Interesting Findings**

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Biographies are not just a compilation of facts about a subject; they also include interesting and insightful information about the subjects.

- Students will begin their research using questions to gather interesting and detailed information about their subjects.

### **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Mini-Lesson 7 Target: Collecting III: Research Planning – Primary and Secondary Sources**

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Biographers use primary and secondary research sources to collect information on their subjects.

- Students will plan their research and consider the types of primary and secondary sources they can use to find the answers to their questions about their subjects.

### **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Mini-Lesson 9 Target: Collecting V: Finding Out What We Have to Say**

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Biographers often write with themes in mind in order to say something about their subjects that will enlighten and sometimes surprise their readers.

- Students will consider their own perspective and reflect on the theme or focus of their biographies.

### **Mini-Lesson 10 Target: Drafting I: Organizing Our Biographies**

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In order for readers to fully embrace a biography, related information must be grouped logically, conveyed clearly, and have a general focus.

- Students will consider different structures to accomplish this task.



### **Mini-Lesson 11 Target: Drafting II: Introductions That Hook**

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Introducing a topic clearly is essential to providing focus to a biography.

- Students will use their outlines from the Drafting I lesson to craft engaging and clear introductions.

### **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Mini-Lesson 12 Target: Drafting III: Concluding With Coherence and Credibility**

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Biographers often conclude their texts in ways that leave readers understanding the importance of the subject they have read about.

- Students will conclude their biographies with a statement or section that relates to the information presented and leaves readers with a clear understanding and appreciation for their subjects.

### **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Mini-Lesson 13 Target: Revising I: Linking Ideas**

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In order to create cohesion, writers link ideas within and across categories of information.

- Students will learn how linking words are used to move readers from one idea to the next and then add these words and phrases to their biographies

### **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Mini-Lesson 14 Target: Editing I: Use of Pronouns**

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Writers use pronouns to make their sentences less repetitive, and proper use of pronouns is critical to

maintaining clarity.

- Students will understand how the proper use of pronouns will help make their biographies less repetitive and clearer for their readers.

## **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Mini-Lesson 15 Target: Editing II: Reading as an Editor**

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It is important for writers to read their work as editors in order to ensure that their writing follows the conventions of standard English.

- Students will read their drafts as editors and use an editing checklist to ensure that their biographies are clear and free of errors.

## **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Mini-Lesson 16: Publishing: Author's Note**

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For readers of biographies, an Author's Note provides insight into the author's intentions and motivations and requires that the author reflect on his or her intention and process.

- Students will craft an Author's Note for their biographies.

## **Formative Assessment Opportunities**

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### **Student Self-Reflection**

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At the end of a writing project, students need to spend time reflecting on their work, the process, and the product.

## **Summative Assessment**

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## **21st Century Life and Careers**

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Select all applicable standards from the applicable standards

## **Formative Assessment and Performance Opportunities**

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*Approximately 2 weeks into the unit, administer*

*As you approach the completion of the unit*

## **Accommodations/Modifications**

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*Please see lesson-specific accommodations listed within each target above.*

## **Unit Resources**

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## **Interdisciplinary Connections**

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