

**Lesson Title:**

Writing American War Biographies

**Subjects:**

U.S. History, U.S. Government, Civics, Economics

**Suggested Time:**

Three 50-minute class periods

**Grade Levels:**

7-12

**Essential Questions:**

How can a person's decisions and actions change his/her life?

Why does a person decide on a course of action at a particular time in his/her life?

**Learning Targets:**

- Students will be able to engage in a research project about a person involved in an American war, and describe key events from that person's life.
- Students will be able to work cooperatively in groups of three and produce a biography that adds new insight into an individual in American history.

**Overview:**

This lesson explores the lives of people who contributed to various war efforts. It begins with a list of people that students will research. In the process of writing about each person, students will increase their understanding of the person, the war, and the context surrounding that time period of American history.

A student-written biography is a powerful strategy for teaching writing, reading, history, geography, and cooperation skills while learning about a person and a time period. In this lesson students will work with a partner to create a focused biography highlighting key events from a person's life. Unlike most approaches to writing biographies, these will not focus on all aspects of a person's life but rather on three key events, turning points, or critical moments. Students work in teams of 3 to write the biography, with each student being responsible for one of the three events. These "writing teams" work together to research the person, develop a collection of events, identify the three key events, and write about each event. All the while, they are peer editing their work, learning about the writing process, developing research skills by investigating a historical figure, and engaging in deep cooperative and interdependent work.

**Procedure:**

NOTE: To make a clear connection to the "Why War: The Causes of Conflict" exhibit at the Flight Heritage Collection, the people who are the subjects of these biographies are examined in the exhibit. This will allow students to consider their biography in light of the collection's biography, and even assess the accuracy of the exhibit based on what they learned.

Before the lesson begins, select from the attached list the people about whom students will be writing (this is in the document <Bio Names1.docx>. Each person has a short paragraph introduction. The FHC has biographies about people from eight American wars:

- Revolutionary War - 4 people
- War of 1812 – 4 people
- Civil War – 3 people
- World War I – 3 people
- World War II – 5 people
- Korean War – 2 people
- Vietnam War – 3 people
- First Persian Gulf War – 4 people

For example, if students are learning about the War of 1812, they would learn about 4 different people.

*Warm-up:*

Place students into groups of three and assign them one person from the attached biography list. More than one group will likely be researching the same person. This will allow for students to compare their research with the information another group is learning about the same person. Begin this part of the lesson with a brainstorm session as a class about how to find information on an historical person. List these on the board. Ideas from students might include:

- Using Google to find internet sites
- Beginning a search at Wikipedia
- Looking in a textbook from class
- Asking someone about that person

After this list is formed, ask students: “How can you be sure the information you find is accurate and reliable?” Direct the conversation so students recognize the need for multiple sources supporting the same idea or fact.

*Step 1. Students learn about their person.* This is the first chance for students to begin investigating. They may watch a video, read a book, search the internet, or follow any of the ideas listed on the board during the warm-up activity. In this first step, students work in groups and gain information and insights about their person’s life. They can practice note-taking skills, reading skills, and research skills as they work to learn about the person. In their groups of three, students begin to share notes about what they are learning.

*Step 2. Brainstorm a list of events from the person’s life.* After a day of research, each group will create a list of 25 to 30 events from the life of the person they are research. Literally, everything they learned can be on the written down from the brainstorm. The purpose of Step 2 is to have students enhance their learning by reflecting on all the information, facts, and insights they collected. If more than one group is researching the same person, then it is often helpful for the different groups to compare their lists.

*Step 3. The groups choose the three key events (e.g., turning points, interesting events).* Working from the list created in Step 2, each group selects what they think are the three most

important events about from their person's life. This is a hard task for students, because many important events are passed over in favor of others. The teacher can guide the students to focus on a particular theme, and then have them select key events around this theme. With people from the War of 1812, for example, a theme could be to identify key events where the person was courageous, or did something that should be remembered. After selecting the three events, each group member selects one event; this is the event about which they will learn and write.

*Step 4. The teams of students write their "chapters."* Each group member will write one chapter about one event. With three members in the group, three key events from the person's life will be explored. To keep this as a focused activity, ask student to keep their chapter to about 300 words (about ½ of a page). The chapters are simply their telling of what happened. Students use descriptive writing, and all the writing components needed to be persuasive writers. Step 4 is best accomplished by have the students follow this 6-part writing process:

1. engaging in pre-writing
2. drafting
3. self-editing
4. peer-editing
5. revising
6. sharing

Each chapter must fit with the other two chapters written by their group members, so the group members must stay in communication with each other as peer editors as well as co-authors.

*Step 5. The team compiles the biography.* In addition to writing the chapters, the team finds a map of their choice that they think will enhance the biography, and a timeline. The map integrates some geography, and the timeline assists with historical/chronological thinking. For example, if students were writing a three-chapter biography on Rosa Parks, the map could show where Alabama in on a map of the U.S, or it could show the bus route that Rosa Parks was on when she was arrested. The timeline could list several other events in her life, or even a list of key events in the Civil Rights Movement. Eventually, the chapters, map, and timeline are compiled, and the biography is given a title.

*Step 6. The biography is "published."* The final version can become a printed "book," kept as an electronic file, published to a class website, etc. Groups should be given opportunities to read each other's books, because it will help them understand more about the particular war, and the people involved in it. For example, students will learn additional information about the War of 1812 after reading four biographies written by their peers.

**Extension Activity #1:** If the groups want more of a challenge, have them illustrate each chapter/event. Representing text with an image promotes higher-order thinking such as synthesis and creativity. Further, students could write a poem, a short play, or a song instead of a "chapter" about each event. Any of these genres help students carry out an investigation of the person.

**Extension Activity #2:** During the visit to the “Why War: Causes of Conflict” exhibit at the Flying Heritage Collection, students look to see how the person/subject of their biography is portrayed in the exhibit. Students can assess the accuracy of their conclusions, compare the key events they selected, and discuss why that person should be remembered in history. Students could also assess how well the exhibit portrays their biography subject. Having just researched and written about the person, students have some expertise and can provide feedback to the FHC staff about what is well represented, and what could be done to improve the biographies.

**Extension Activity #3:** The list of people described in the FHC exhibit can be expanded. Selecting a person in the exhibit allows for students to compare their work with that of a museum curator/historian, but many other people can help students understand a war. When selecting additional people, choose someone who will be interesting to the students, has multiple perspectives/materials about his/her life available, and allows for the development of a theme or idea that relates to the theme or war being learned in the classroom. If possible, the teacher will select a person who is underrepresented or mis-represented. For example, George McGovern is best known for being a U.S. senator and candidate for the presidency. He is under-represented as a [World War II](#) pilot of the [B-24 Liberator](#) and as a history professor. As a pilot he flew 35 missions over [German-occupied Europe](#), receiving the [Distinguished Flying Cross](#) for landing a severely damaged plane with no casualties. Rosa Parks, mentioned above, is another possible subject for a biography. She was mis-represented as a tired old woman who did not want to move out of her seat on a bus. In reality, she was only 41, and made the decision not to move knowing full well that she would pay a price for doing so.

### **Language Support:**

To aid those with limited English proficiency or others who need help with academic language, place them in groups with at least one student who speaks English as a first language. The handout on risk factors can also be given to ELLs the day before this activity, and ELLs should be told which risk factor they will examine.

### **Standards:**

#### **Washington Standards (EALRs/GLEs)**

##### **8th Grade Social Studies**

###### **EALR GLE GLE Description**

- |         |       |  |
|---------|-------|--|
| History | 4.3.1 | Analyzes and interprets historical materials from a variety of perspectives in U.S. history (1776—1900). |
|         | 4.3.2 | Analyzes multiple causal factors to create positions on major events in U.S. history (1776 – 1900).      |

##### **9th and 10th Grade Social Studies**

###### **EALR GLE GLE Description**

- |        |       |  |
|--------|-------|--|
| Civics | 1.3.1 | Analyzes the relationships and tensions between national interests and international issues in the world in the past or present. |
|--------|-------|--|

- History 4.2.1 Analyzes how individuals and movements have shaped world history (1450—present).
- 4.2.3 Analyzes and evaluates how technology and ideas have shaped world history (1450—present).
- 4.3.2 Analyzes the multiple causal factors of conflicts in world history (1450 – present).
- 4.4.1 Analyzes how an understanding of world history can help us prevent problems today.

### **11th Grade Social Studies**

#### **EALR GLE GLE Description**

- History 4.2.3 Analyzes and evaluates how technology and ideas have shaped U.S. history (1890— present).
- 4.3.1 Analyzes differing interpretations of events in U.S. history (1890—present).
- 4.3.2 Analyzes multiple causes of events in U.S. history, distinguishing between proximate and long-term causal factors (1890—present).
- 4.4.1 Analyzes how an understanding of United States history can help us prevent problems today.
- Skills 5.1.1 Analyzes the underlying assumptions of positions on an issue or event.

### **12 Grade Social Studies**

#### **EALR GLE GLE Description**

- History 4.2.1 Evaluates how individuals and movements have shaped contemporary world issues.
- 4.2.2 Analyzes how cultural identity can promote unity and division.

### **Common Core State Standards:**

#### **Build Social Studies Literacy through Reading and Writing Common Core State Standard for ELA & Literacy in Social Studies Grades 9-10**

Edies » Grade 9-10

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/9-10/>

Key Ideas and Details:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3

Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

Craft and Structure:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5

Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6

Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7

Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8

Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

## **Build Social Studies Literacy through Reading and Writing Common Core State Standard for ELA & Literacy in Social Studies Grades 11-12**

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/>

Key Ideas and Details:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Craft and Structure:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines *faction* in *Federalist* No. 10).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5

Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.10

By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

**NCSS C3 Framework (College, Career, and Civic Life)**

Dimension 1: Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries

Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools

Dimension 3: Argument Writing

Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action