

BREATHING LIFE INTO BIOGRAPHIES

WHY SHOULD STUDENTS READ BIOGRAPHIES?

- ❖ Biographies empower kids with knowledge: When students read about humorous incidents or problems in historical figures' lives, they get to know these men and women as real people.
- ❖ Biographies help boost self-esteem: Many heroes had unhappy childhoods, problems or handicaps. Discussing how they overcame these troubles helps kids deal with similar difficulties.
- ❖ Biographies are fun: John F. Kennedy said, "All history is gossip," and almost everyone likes a little gossip! Also, kids are curious — they want to know why famous people did what they did.

GET THE MOST OUT OF BIOGRAPHIES

- ❖ Brainstorm a word web before reading a biography. Write down everything students say, even if it's wrong.
- ❖ Concentrate on what interests kids (relationships, habits, food): help them identify with their heroes and heroines.
- ❖ Look for nicknames and quotes. How was the famous person's childhood similar to a modern-day childhood?
- ❖ Put life today in perspective: thanks to Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, we can surf the Web — and order pizza!
- ❖ Talk about what students feel makes a famous person particularly brave, funny, clever, etc.
- ❖ Read about other people of a particular era to get a sense of the issues that affected celebrity.
- ❖ Record important events from a biography on a time line. (Most historians agree that learning the order in which events happened is more useful than memorizing specific dates.)

ENHANCE LEARNING WITH BIOGRAPHIES

- ❖ Encourage students to read about a few important people from an era before they study that period (to gain prior knowledge) or after (to summarize a unit).
- ❖ Ask kids questions such as, "Was she right to ...?" or "How would life be different if he had ...?"
- ❖ Isolate a "happenstance" in a biography. Have kids speculate on how history might have been different if this event hadn't happened.

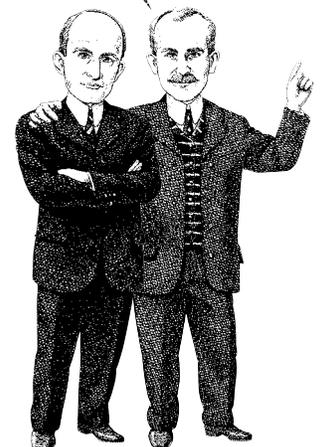
One of my rules of inventing is listen to children. They might have ideas we've never thought of.



I felt so proud and lucky to be born and grow up in Prince Edward Island.



Wilbor and I read about other inventors and studied how birds fly.

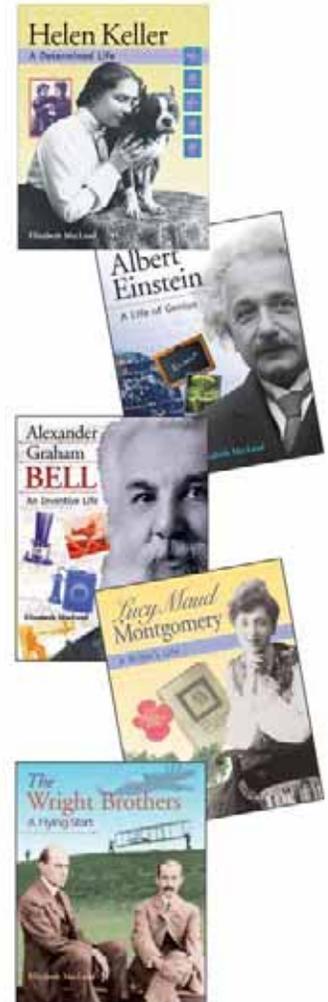


- ❖ Have students write to a famous person, explaining how what she did affected lives years later.
- ❖ Collect criteria for "greatness." Education? Personality? Opportunity? What else?
- ❖ Get students to read several biographies and compare them using charts, Venn diagrams or essays. How did famous people approach the same subject? How did they influence their world?
- ❖ Use biographies to discuss tolerance of or discrimination against women, minorities, etc.



EXTEND STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH BIOGRAPHIES

- ❖ Have kids write biographies: include gossipy details, use an unusual point of view, describe the qualities this person had that helped him succeed or write about a classmate, etc.
- ❖ Act out imaginary talk shows, with students playing the roles of famous people.
- ❖ Fill a backpack for a celebrity. What personal items do students think each person would carry?
- ❖ Create a Hero Calendar; celebrate famous people's birthdays with costumes, activities, etc.
- ❖ Have students write letters or diaries as if they were a famous person, or write letters to the notable man or woman.
- ❖ Let kids design a monument or stamp about a famous person, or write a poem, song or eulogy.
- ❖ Help students make bookmarks, posters, trading cards or scrapbooks about a celebrity.
- ❖ Brainstorm a top ten list of reasons why a famous person is important.



Helen Keller: A Determined Life
1-55337-508-4 hc
1-55337-509-2 pb

Albert Einstein: A Life of Genius
1-55337-396-0 hc
1-55337-397-9 pb

Alexander Graham Bell: An Inventive Life
1-55074-456-9 hc
1-55074-458-5 pb

Lucy Maud Montgomery: A Writer's Life
1-55074-487-9 hc
1-55074-489-5 pb

The Wright Brothers: A Flying Start
1-55074-933-1 hc
1-55074-935-8 pb

BIOGRAPHY WEB SITES

<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/biograph.htm>
www.amillionlives.com
www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/people.html
www.aande.com/class/bioexper.html
www.education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson185.shtml