1. Focus

Explain Secondary Sources

Say: Another type of source you can use for your biography research is called secondary. Secondary sources describe or explain the original information from primary sources. In a secondary source, information has already been gathered for you instead of you gathering it from a primary source (by conducting an interview, for example). Secondary sources are one step away from the primary source. Examples of secondary sources you might find for a biography include newspaper or magazine articles, encyclopedia articles, biographies, and dictionaries. Secondary sources will give you background information about your subject and the time in which he or she lived. They may also help explain events from the subject’s life.

Model Locating Information in Secondary Sources

As you think aloud, model looking for information in one or two secondary sources.

Sample Think-Aloud

Say: For my biography about my father, I’d like to include some background information, something about the times in which he lived. The things you experience and your way of life is affected by what’s going on around you in your country and in the world. This background information will come from secondary sources, books I can find about the time when my father was younger. My father was born in 1937. I’m going to see if I can find some books about what life was like in the United States at this time so that I can write about what it was like for my dad growing up.

Model opening the book, looking at the table of contents, and reading a short passage aloud.

Say: This is interesting information. I’m going to place a bookmark here so that I can come back and read more and take notes for my biography.

Display the book about the United States. Say: Here is another secondary source that will tell me about what daily life was like in the United States when my dad was in high school and college.
2. Rehearse

Practice Locating Information in Secondary Sources

Ask students to work with partners and share their subjects and some facts about their subjects’ lives. Ask partners to brainstorm ideas for secondary sources they could use for researching their biography subjects.

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Ideas

Bring students together and invite volunteers to share the ideas they generated with their partners. Ask students to discuss how they can apply this strategy to their independent research.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: Today we learned about secondary sources and about locating information in secondary sources. Using secondary sources is an important part of researching your biography subject. Secondary sources give you background information about your subject, and they help explain events from your subject’s lifetime.

Encourage students to locate secondary sources they can use to research their biographies during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite students to share secondary sources they found that provided them with relevant information for their biographies.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Pair beginning ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity. Keep in mind that they will not be able to contribute many ideas orally. You will want to work with them individually to reinforce concepts while other students write independently.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the small-group activity.