Describe Places and Events in a Person’s Life

1. Focus

Explain Words That Describe Places and Events in a Person’s Life

Say: Good biography writers choose descriptive words to tell about the important events in a person’s life. They don’t just say, “first this happened, then this, then this.” The purpose of describing events and places in a biography is to give readers a deeper understanding of the person’s life and impact on the world. So writers use precise words and colorful details to give readers a better sense of the places and events that shaped the person. Today I’m going to show you how to include descriptive words to tell about places and events in a person’s life so you can use this strategy in your biography writing.

Model How Writers Use Words That Describe Places and Events in a Person’s Life

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

1. In 100 B.C.E., Gaius Julius Caesar was born into a noble but impoverished family.
2. In 75 B.C.E., pirates seized Caesar’s ship as it sailed toward what is now Turkey. . . . Caesar scoffed at his captors.

Modeling Text

Read example 1. Say: In this sentence, the writer describes Caesar’s birth. She gives a specific date for the event, and she also goes beyond simply saying, “Caesar was born in 100 B.C.E.” She uses his full name and says he was born into a “noble but impoverished family.” I understand something about how the status of his family affected Caesar’s life. The writer’s choice of specific wording helps me understand the subject of the biography right from the start.

Read example 2. Say: Again, the writer gives a specific date and place for this event in Caesar’s life. She tells that the ship was sailing toward “what is now Turkey.” This helps the reader, because a modern reader might not know the old name for the area. Also, instead of merely saying that Caesar’s ship was captured the writer tells who captured it and uses the strong, precise, active verb seized. The writer uses another strong, active verb when she uses the word scoffed to describe Caesar’s response to the pirates. These strong words highlight this event in Caesar’s life because Caesar later hunts down the pirates and executes them.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:
- Identify words that writers use to describe places and events in a person’s life.
- Practice using words that describe places and events in a person’s life.
- Discuss how they can apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed
- Chart paper and markers
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation
If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and practice text onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, write the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper to support ELs.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Words That Describe Places and Events in a Person’s Life

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

As a young woman, Suri traveled across the country.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with partners to rewrite and add to the sentence using words that describe places and events. Remind students to use specific names of places, active verbs for events, and interesting details about things that happened. Invite them to invent such details as necessary. Pairs of students should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class. They should be ready to explain the details they added to the practice text to describe places and events in the subject’s life.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentences and explain the word choices they made to describe places and events. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they write their own biographies.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned that words that describe places and events in a person’s life are an important part of a biography. The word choices writers make help readers understand a biography subject’s life and his or her impact on the world. As you write your biography, remember to use precise and active words to describe the events and places in your subject’s life.

Ask students to identify a section of their biographies where they can use active words to describe places and events. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite volunteers to read aloud a section of text in which they found interesting ways to describe places and events.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Display photographs of various places using the interactive whiteboard resources or photos you have gathered. Invite beginning ELs to use any words they can to describe what they see in the photos (for example, they can describe colors, how busy or calm a place looks, what the weather is like, and so on). Help students orally compose a complete sentence about a photograph and then write it on paper.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity. Supply the following sentence frames to help them complete the practice activity:

Suri traveled to ______.
Then she went ______.
She saw ______.
It was ______.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: biography/la biografía; describe/describir.