Analyze the Features of a Biography

1. Focus

Explain Genre Features

Say: You can identify what genre you are reading by paying attention to features of that genre in the text. For example, if you read a text that has characters, a setting, and a plot, along with themes such as space travel, and elements based on scientific fact, chances are you are reading science fiction. If you notice many opinions, along with arguments that support those opinions, you are probably reading a persuasive text. Biographical texts have special features, too. Today we are going identify and analyze what those special features of a biography are.

Build a Class Genre Features Anchor Chart

Say: I want you to think about biographies you have read before. Think about what those biographies have in common with each other. We’re going to build an anchor chart to summarize the characteristics, or features, of most biographies.

Display a blank chart like the one shown here on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Also distribute copies of the chart on BLM 1 to students. In the left column of the chart, record features of biographies as students discuss them. (Students will complete the right column later in the lesson.) If necessary, use the following questions to help students identify the features:

- How does a writer usually begin a biography?
- What details of a person’s life are included in a biography?
- How does the writer help the reader understand the subject’s personality?
- What kinds of sources does a writer use to tell you about the person?
- How does the author tell you why the subject is important to read about?

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:
- Identify biography genre features to create a class anchor chart.
- Listen to a biography mentor text and identify the features of the genre in the text.

Preparation

Materials Needed
- Mentor text: “Cleopatra”
- Chart paper and markers
- Biography Features (BLM 1)
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the blank Biography Features chart onto chart paper.

If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biography Features</th>
<th>Examples from the Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starts with a strong hook</td>
<td>page 19: “What is it about Cleopatra . . .?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives the subject’s birth date and birthplace</td>
<td>page 19: “Cleopatra was born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 69 B.C.E.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes the subject’s family, childhood, and important events</td>
<td>page 20: “When Cleopatra was 18, her father, Ptolemy XI, died, leaving her and her 10-year-old brother to rule together.” page 21: Cleopatra became queen of Egypt. page 24: Cleopatra formed an alliance with Antony, and they fell in love. page 26: Antony and Cleopatra were defeated at Actium by Octavian. Antony died. page 27: Cleopatra poisoned herself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes the subject’s personality and characteristics</td>
<td>page 19: “Cleopatra was highly intelligent and courageous, a wise administrator, and fiercely loyal . . .”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Biography

Read Aloud a Biography

Before rereading “Cleopatra,” point out the right-hand column on your chart and on students’ BLMs. Explain that you are going to read aloud a biography and that students should listen carefully. Explain that after the reading, students will work in small groups to complete the chart by recording examples of each genre feature. Read aloud the text. Note: You may wish to project the text using the interactive whiteboard resources so that students can follow along.

2. Rehearse

Analyze the Mentor Text

Form small groups of students to complete the second column of the graphic organizer on BLM 1. If you are using the interactive whiteboard resources, invite students to revisit parts of the text using the interactive whiteboard as they look for examples in the text. 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 examples they found in the text as you read it aloud. Record students’ findings on the anchor chart. Post the anchor chart for students to refer to throughout the unit.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: As you work on your own biography, keep in mind that most biographies include the features we have captured in our chart. We’re going to post this chart on the wall so you can use it to remind yourself of the genre features as you write.

As students brainstorm ideas, encourage them to consider how they will incorporate features of the genre into their biographies.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share the topics they have brainstormed or chosen to write about.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Pair beginning ELs with fluent English speakers during the “Analyze the Mentor Text” small-group activity. Keep in mind that they will not be able to contribute many ideas orally. Work with ELs individually to reinforce concepts while other students write independently.

Intermediate

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the small-group activity. Write the following simple sentence frames on chart paper and model how students can use them to contribute ideas in the group:

One feature of a biography is ______.
A biography includes ______.

Advanced

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