Brainstorm Ideas Using Topics from Content Studies

1. Focus

Explain the Brainstorming Process

Say: Brainstorming is an important step for writers. It’s a time for us to search our minds for all the possibilities for creating a piece of writing and then write them down so we remember them. When we brainstorm for a biography, one thing we can do is think about interesting people from science or history—people we’ve learned about but would like to know more about. Let me show you how brainstorming helps me generate ideas for a biography.

Model Brainstorming Using Ideas from Science and Social Studies

Bring in fifth and sixth grade science and social studies texts or resources to display as you model for students. Use them to demonstrate how they can be helpful in sparking memories of interesting subjects for a biography. Use the sample think-aloud to help you develop your own brainstorming model. Demonstrate by recording ideas on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources as you model brainstorming.

Sample think-aloud. Say: I’ve been remembering people we’ve learned about to help me think of interesting people whose lives I could write about. I’ve always been fascinated by the American Civil War and some of the people who played a role in it. When I studied the Civil War in school, I learned about Sojourner Truth. She was amazing! She helped stop many of the great injustices that people accepted back then. I’m going to list her as an idea for a biography. Also, I have always been interested in the role Abraham Lincoln played. I think he was one of the most interesting presidents we’ve learned about. Then there are the rulers and warriors from the ancient world that we’ve studied. I can think of two I’d like to write about—Aristotle and Alexander the Great. I’m very interested in both of these people, and I’d like to write about their lives. I’ll add them to my list, too.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn a strategy for brainstorming ideas for a biography by using textbooks and resources from science and social studies.
- Tell partners about interesting people they have learned about from their studies in content areas.
- Contribute to a class list of biography ideas.

Preparation

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers
- Social studies and science textbooks and resources
- Writer’s notebooks
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, you may wish to copy on chart paper the questions for practicing brainstorming. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper.

Preparation Tip

If students’ science or social studies textbooks or folders are not readily available in the classroom, ask students the day before this lesson to bring them to class. Explain that the books will be used as tools for brainstorming.
2. Rehearse

Practice Brainstorming Ideas from Social Studies and Science

Ask students to work with partners to brainstorm using ideas from social studies and science. To prompt their thinking, tell them they can refer to their social studies and science texts to get ideas. Remind them to record their ideas in their writer’s notebooks. Students can share the following information about their ideas:

- Who is an interesting person I’ve learned about in social studies or science?
- What makes him or her interesting?
- Would I like to learn more about the person?

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

Share Ideas

Bring students back together and ask them to share the names of the interesting people they brainstormed. As students contribute ideas, add them to the list you started earlier. Reread the list and discuss some of the reasons students think the people are good choices. You may also point out that, often, another writer’s idea can lead us to one of our own.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned that looking back at books we’ve used in science and social studies is one way to brainstorm ideas for a biography. Use your texts as you brainstorm for the biography you will write. Ask yourself about people you would like to know more about.

Encourage students to apply this strategy when they brainstorm 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 volunteers to share some of the ideas for biographies they are excited about.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Invite beginning ELs to look through science and social studies books they are using this year or those they used last year and choose someone they think is interesting. Encourage students to tell you what they know about the person using whatever words they can. As students talk, write down key words and help students use them in simple sentences to talk about the person they chose.

Intermediate and Advanced

Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners about their ideas for writing a biography, for example:

An interesting person to write about is ______.
He/She was ______.
He/ She is interesting because ______.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: biography/la biografía; interesting/interesante; science/la ciencia; social studies/los estudios sociales.