Use Direct Quotes in a Biography

1. Focus

Explain Using Direct Quotes

Say: When we write a biography, we are doing our best to bring our subject to life on the page. We want our readers to know when our subjects were born, where they lived, what they accomplished, and how they died. We also want them to get a sense of our subjects’ personalities, thoughts, feelings, and special characteristics. One way to bring a subject right onto the page is to include actual words spoken by the subject or words from someone who knew the subject well. Today I’m going to show you how you can select and use direct quotes in your biographies to help your subjects come to life for your readers.

Model Using Direct Quotes in a Biography

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

Frederick launched a weekly abolitionist newspaper called The North Star, serving as both an editor and a writer. In one issue, he wrote: “The white man’s happiness cannot be purchased by the black man’s misery.”

Modeling Text

Ask students to listen for a direct quote as you read the modeling text aloud.

Say: This paragraph has a great example of a direct quote from the subject, Frederick Douglass. The quote comes from Douglass’s newspaper, The North Star. We know it’s a direct quote because the writer of the biography introduces it with the words, “In one issue, he wrote . . . “ The quote gives readers a sense of the power of Douglass’s beliefs. It also demonstrates that he was a highly skilled writer.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Direct Quotes

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

My partner told me what his/her favorite sport is.

Practice Text

Pair students and ask them to talk to their partners about their favorite sports. Then ask students to rewrite the sentence and add a direct quote from their partners. Pairs of students should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentences including the direct quotes. Ask students to compare their new sentences with the original practice text and tell which is better and why. Record students’ sentences and post them as models for students to use as they revise their own biographies.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that using direct quotes can add strength to a biography. We can include direct quotes from our subjects, or we can include quotes from people who knew the subjects. Remember, a good biography describes the subject’s personality and characteristics. It tells about what was important in the subject’s life. As you write your biographies, remember to use direct quotes to add weight to the telling of your subject’s life and times.

Ask students to identify a section of their biographies that they can improve by using a quote from their subject (or someone who knew the subject). 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 sections of their biographies in which they used a quote from their subject (or someone who knew the subject).

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Show students that quote marks go around words spoken as dialogue. Display examples of simple dialogue from a book or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read each sentence aloud. Explain that quote marks go around words that other people say.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.