1. Focus

Explain Using Third Person Voice in a Biography

Say: In a biography, I am telling about someone else’s life. I use a third person voice, with pronouns such as he, she, or they. A third person voice takes the attention away from me as the writer, and focuses it on my subject’s characteristics and experiences. A third person voice allows me to examine my subject from a distance, to describe my subject in ways one can’t describe one’s own self, and to enrich the writing with details about the person’s surroundings that the person may not have even known. Today I’m going to show you how to use a third person narrative voice when you write a biography.

Model How Writers Use Third Person Voice in a Biography

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

Modeling Text

Read the paragraphs and ask students to listen for the author’s use of the third person voice. Point out that the subject of the biography is Sojourner Truth, but she was still known as Bell during the times described in these paragraphs.

After paragraph 1. Say: In this paragraph, the writer ties major events to the specific circumstances of her subject’s life. She says that the new law passed in 1817 “changed Bell’s life.” When the writer gives me information about the law, she ties that information back to her subject with the phrase including Bell’s children. She is telling about her subject from the third person perspective.

After paragraphs 2 and 3. Say: The writer focuses on Bell’s actions in response to outside events. Again, the writer has removed herself from the text with the third person voice. I also notice that the writer adds excitement with the third person voice by describing another person’s dishonorable action—John Dumont’s breaking of a promise—to set up Bell’s dramatic response. Using third person voice gives biography writers freedom with the information they include and the language they use to tell about events.
**2. Rehearse**

**Practice Using the Third Person Voice**

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Explain that the sentences tell part of Sojourner Truth’s story in a first person voice—an imagined account from her point of view.

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I decided to start going to the meetings for some people called abolitionists. At first, people didn’t seem to want to hear me speak. I did it anyway. I just told my story and sang my songs. After a while, people quieted down. I suppose they wanted to hear my story after all.

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**Practice Text**

Ask students to work with partners to rewrite the sentences using a third person voice. Invite them to tell the story as a biography writer would, adding details that they can remember about Sojourner Truth and her times. If necessary, remind them of the important role that abolitionists played in history. Remind them that the reason Sojourner Truth quieted audiences was that she had a very interesting story to tell and she was a skilled speaker. Encourage students to use language that a person might not use to tell about themselves, but that a biography writer using the third person could. Students should write down their sentences and be prepared to read and explain their use of third person voice.

**Share Practice Sentences**

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentences and explain how they used the third person voice.

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**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning**

Work with beginning ELs to practice generating oral sentences in the third person using the sentence frames below. Invite students individually or in pairs to perform actions while the other students use the sentence frames to describe the actions:

- **He** ______.
- **She** ______.
- **They** ______.

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**Intermediate and Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice.

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**All Levels**

If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: biography/la biografía, person/la persona, voice/la voz.