Analyze the Features of a Biography

1. Focus

Explain Genre Features

Say: You can identify what genre you are reading by paying attention to the features of that genre in the text. For example, if you read a text that has characters, a setting, and a plot, chances are you are reading a story. If you notice many opinions in a text, you are probably reading a persuasive text. Biographical texts have special features, too. Today we are going to 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 BLM 1 to students. In the left column, record features of biographies as students discuss them. (The right side of the chart will be completed later in the lesson.) If necessary, use the following questions to help students identify the features:

- What does a writer need to do to get a reader to read more of the biography?
- What details of a person’s life are included in a biography?
- How does the writer show characteristics and personality of the writer?
- What kinds of quotes might you find in a biography?
- What kinds of people make good subjects for a biography?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biography Features</th>
<th>Examples from the Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gives the subject’s birth date and birthplace</td>
<td>page 19: This information is given at the beginning of the biography.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes the subject’s family, childhood, and important events</td>
<td>page 20: “The Nealys were cruel to Bell. They whipped her when she did not understand their orders.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes the subject’s personality and characteristics</td>
<td>page 21: “Strong and hardworking, she learned to speak English fluently, but she never lost her Dutch accent.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes the subject and/or people who knew the subject</td>
<td>page 24: “Truth is powerful and it prevails.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains the subject’s impact on the world.</td>
<td>page 27: “Even after the war ended in 1865 and slavery was abolished, Sojourner continued to speak and travel around the country.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Biography Features Anchor Chart (BLM 1)
Read Aloud a Biography

Before rereading “Sojourner Truth,” 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 to the text to identify examples of the genre features in the text. Explain that after the reading, students will work in small groups to complete the chart by recording examples of each genre feature in the text. Read aloud “Sojourner Truth” from *Frederick Douglass/Sojourner Truth*. Note: You may wish to project the text using the interactive whiteboard resources so that students can follow along.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: As you work on your own biographies, keep in mind that most biographies include the features we have captured on our chart. We’re going to post this chart on the wall so that we can refer to it to help us remember these features.

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.

2. Rehearse

Analyze the Mentor Text

Form small groups of students to complete the right-hand 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 whiteboard as they look for the 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 as they think about the biographical text features they will include in their own biographical writing.

Strategies to Support ELs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning</strong></td>
<td>Pair beginning ELs with fluent English speakers during the 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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **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 in this biography is ______.  
One example of the feature is ______. |
| **Advanced** | Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the small-group activity. |