Using the Lessons

For ease of use and to help you establish a consistent routine in your writer’s workshop, every day follows a consistent 4-step gradual-release structure.

**Step 1: Mini-Lesson—Focus**

Teachers explain and model the lesson focus section to the whole class. Each focus section includes think-alouds and step-by-step instruction for effective modeling.

### Objectives

In this mini-lesson, teachers will:

- Launch the biography writing unit of study.
- Establish themselves as biography writing mentors by sharing examples of biographies.
- Model how writers think about their subjects.

**Students will:**

- Talk about what makes someone a good subject for a biography.
- Discuss how the time during which a subject lived affects that person’s biography.

### Preparation

**Materials Needed**

- Examples of biographies from the classroom or the school library
- Interactive whiteboard resources

**Advanced Preparation**

Have a selection of biographies ready for the model portion of this lesson. Make sure to include biographies of men and women from diverse backgrounds and time periods.

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

#### Introduction: Think About the Subjects of Biographies

**Focus**

Display a variety of biographies for students to view. Include biographies of people from different walks of life and time periods. Use the sample think-aloud below as a model of how to talk to students about what factors make someone a worthy subject for a biography.

**Sample think-aloud.** *Say: These books are biographies. They tell about the lives of real people. Some of these people are still alive and others lived long ago. There are biographies about scientists, athletes, and politicians. But not all of these biographies are about people who achieved amazing things or were heroes. For example, this biography is about Adolf Hitler. He was not an admirable person, and he caused the deaths of millions of innocent people. But all of the people in these biographies, including Adolf Hitler, had qualities that made authors want to write about them. What do you think some of those qualities might be? (Allow responses.)

**Say:** Biography writers choose subjects whom they feel other people should know about for some reason. These subjects have had an effect on humankind in some way, whether it was positive or negative. These subjects may have made important discoveries that changed history or may have demonstrated remarkable acts of leadership or courage. And sometimes they show us the darker side of human nature. They help us get inside the mind of someone who affected the world in a negative way. Biographies don’t have to be about famous people. Sometimes a biographer researches the life of someone people have never heard of. Biographers read primary sources, such as journals, newspapers, and magazines, and learn firsthand about someone’s life. For the next several weeks, we are going to read, write, and share biographies with each other. In the process, we’ll learn about all kinds of subjects.

**Introduce the Purpose and Audience for Biography Writing**

*Say: Most of us are curious about other people’s lives. Sometimes we read biographies to learn about how real people lived at different times in the past. Sometimes we read them because the subjects are role models who inspire us. And we also read biographies to be entertained. Think how many people read celebrity biographies over summer vacation. They read these biographies to experience the glamorous life of a well-known performer. And, of course, we read biographies in school to help us learn about the subjects we are studying. We learn about people who made important contributions to science and history. Biography writers help us explore the lives of interesting or remarkable people. They try to give us a balanced, complete picture of the whole life of a person, from birth to death. They do this by studying many sources of

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2. Rehearse

Practice Talking About Biographies

Invite students to work with partners. Both students should identify at least two people they think would make worthy biography subjects. Students should tell their partner what time period each person is from and why the person would make a good biography subject.

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

Share Biography Ideas with the Class

Invite volunteers to share their ideas for biography subjects with the class and to explain why they chose that person and what sources they might use to research that subject. Use one or more of the following questions to guide discussion:

• How easy or difficult was it to generate ideas for subjects?
• In what ways have these subjects had an impact on us?
• Thinking about all of the ideas our class generated, what generalizations can we make about biography subjects?

Step 2: Mini-Lesson—Rehearse

Students work with a partner to practice and discuss the lesson focus prior to independent writing.

Step 3: Independent Writing and Conferring

Students write independently at whatever stage of the writing process they are in. If appropriate, students apply the mini-lesson focus. Teachers use Strategies to Support ELs and the Responsive Prompts to Support and Scaffold Writers (on the flip chart) to meet individual students’ needs.

Step 4: Share

Each day’s workshop ends with 2 or 3 students sharing how they applied the mini-lesson focus to their own writing.