

Very First Biographies™

Teaching Guide

Easy Lessons, Writing Reproducibles & Read-Aloud Profiles
to Help You Build Literacy Skills With Very First Biographies



New York • Toronto • London • Auckland • Sydney
Mexico City • New Delhi • Hong Kong • Buenos Aires

**Teaching
Resources**





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Introduction

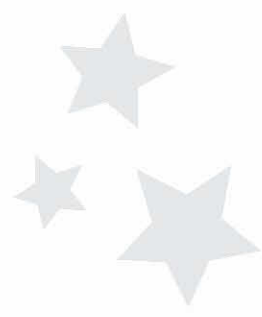
As teachers, we want to give our students a well-rounded education. We want them to grow up to be productive, inspired citizens of the world. One way to achieve this goal is to share the stories of those who have paved the way before them; trailblazing men and women whose efforts are still apparent in children’s lives every day. It’s obvious that teaching history is an invaluable part of students’ education—but when is the right time to start? The answer is now.

That’s right—it is *never* too early to begin teaching children nonfiction, and neither history nor biography is an exception to this rule. After all, children just love a good story—and some of the most riveting stories in our heritage are true tales about real people! What could be more suspenseful than Harriet Tubman’s many dangerous trips by night along the path of the Underground Railroad? What is more inspiring than Barack Obama’s ascension to the highest office in our nation? And it can’t get much more exciting than Sally Ride boarding the *Challenger*, about to blast off into space! These stories aren’t just the ones children “ought” to know—they’re the ones children will love to hear, over and over.

That’s where the *Very First Biographies* program comes in. We’ve chosen 16 of the most remarkable people in American history to represent our cultural heritage, and we’ll help you introduce them to even the youngest learners at a level they can understand. The emergent-reader text is both engaging and developmentally appropriate, while the read-aloud companion pieces provide more detailed information about each subject. Included in the program, you’ll find:

- five full-color copies of each book, allowing for individual, partner, and small-group instruction
- read-aloud sheets with detailed information about each biographical subject, saving you the time of doing research
- a reproducible draw-and-write activity sheet for each title, inviting children to make personal connections with history
- hands-on classroom activities to celebrate children’s learning
- and much more!

The *Very First Biographies* program combines all the benefits of emergent literacy materials with all the advantages of a full course of content knowledge. Plus, children will get to meet some pretty special role models along the way. After all, the first step in forming the great leaders of tomorrow lies in making them great *readers* today!



How to Use the Program

You're ready to start using the *Very First Biographies* program in your classroom today—all you need are the books and this all-inclusive teaching guide.

Biographies

To create an attractive display for the biographies, just use the storage box. Remove the lid and place the box on a shelf, table, or countertop at children's eye level. You can display all 16 titles at once on the three tiered shelves. Of course, you may have your own classroom library display system; but whatever the case, these attractive, full-color titles are sure to fit right in. Their size is just right for little hands, and with five copies apiece, you'll have plenty of books to go around. The illustrations are attractive and appealing, and the print size is designed for emergent readers. Most pages have only one or two lines of text, so children can build confidence easily.

Read-Alouds

Included in the guide, you'll find a read-aloud information sheet for every biographical subject featured in the program. The read-alouds are great for providing fun facts and additional background information that children will want to know, yet may not be able to read on their own. However, you'll find that you won't have to alter the text a bit—the information is written in kid-friendly language, so you can read straight from the page!

Reproducibles

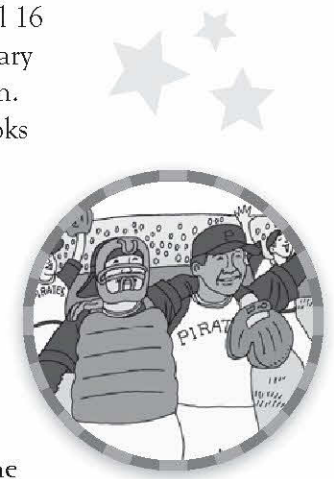
Following each read-aloud page, you'll also find an interactive reproducible activity sheet for each biographical subject. These draw-and-write activities are designed to be open-ended, so they will adapt to any level; students can write, dictate, or draw as much as they like. The reproducibles also give children a chance to share their personal response to each subject, making the historical figures come alive. As is true in any content area, when children can relate the subject matter to their own lives, the material is far more likely to stick with them.

Extension Activities

Starting on page 9, you'll find a quick and easy hands-on activity to celebrate the life of each amazing person featured in the program. These activities are not only fun, but also extend children's learning across different curricular areas. For instance, children can use their fine motor skills to make a "powdered wig" like George Washington's; learn basic science concepts as they make a balloon "rocket" to celebrate the accomplishments of Sally Ride; and practice social skills as they learn to solve problems peacefully like Martin Luther King, Jr.

Graphic Organizers

In this guide you will also find three graphic organizers that can be adapted for use with any book in the program: a Character Quilt for exploring a subject's traits, a Venn Diagram for comparing and contrasting two subjects, and a Story Sequence Chart for practice with Beginning, Middle, and End. Again, these organizers are suitable for any skill level, allowing students to use writing, drawing, or a combination of the two to depict their thinking.





Teaching the Biographies

Follow these tips to get the most out of the *Very First Biographies* books in your classroom.



Instructional Settings

With five copies apiece, *Very First Biographies* are perfect for teaching in small groups, or as an addition to your independent reading library. For group settings, use the reading and leveling tips that follow. For independent reading, you can display the books in the attractive storage box, which provides tiered shelving, or place them in a genre-labeled basket or tub. You may also wish to create individual reading packets for students by placing a biography in a self-sealing plastic bag along with other books at their level.

General Reading Tips

Following are some general strategies to keep in mind when sharing the books with children.

* BEFORE READING

As with any subject, it's always a good idea to activate children's prior knowledge, which gives them a foundation upon which to build their learning. Even if children have never heard of the person you'll be reading about, there is sure to be some aspect of this person's life that children can relate to. For instance, before reading about Rosa Parks, you might ask children to recall a time when they have been treated unfairly. Then tell them they will be reading a book to find out what one woman did to stand up for herself.

Be sure that you've read the book yourself, as well as the read-aloud sheet, before you share the biography with children. This way, you'll be prepared to set the scene for them before reading. Give them a little background about the time and place.

Use the previewing strategies you would use with any book: preview the cover and title, and take a picture walk. Invite children to make predictions based on the illustrations. You may also encourage them to point out chronology and setting clues, such as clothing and hairstyles.

* DURING READING

Take time to discuss any unfamiliar words or specific content vocabulary in the text. If appropriate, encourage children to use context and picture clues for help.

Take pauses to track children's comprehension. You can ask questions directly related to the text (*What did Orville and Wilbur Wright build when they were young?*), as well as more interpretive, open-ended questions (*How do you think the brothers felt when their flying machine did not work? What does it say about them that they kept trying?*).

* AFTER READING

Encourage children to ask questions and share their personal reactions. How do they feel about the person and his or her accomplishments? How would they describe the person to somebody else? Does the person have qualities that remind them of anyone else they know?

Give children more information by sharing the read-aloud sheet on the subject. You can also have children complete the reproducible activity sheet (see page 8 for tips). In addition, don't forget to check out the hands-on activity provided (activities begin on page 9).

More after-reading ideas might include writing a letter or postcard to the person or role-playing events from the person's life through dramatic play.

Using the Books at Different Levels

The books in the *Very First Biographies* program are especially designed for grades Pre-K–1. Here are some tips on how to help children get the most out of the books at each developmental level.

* PRE-KINDERGARTEN

Show children how to hold their own copies of the books, pointing out that books are read from front to back and from left to right. Encourage them to identify key parts of the book, such as the cover, title, words, and pictures.

As you read aloud to children, show them how you track the print and give them a signal to let them know it is time to turn the page.

As children become more familiar with a title, you might like to try echo reading: read aloud a sentence and have children repeat it after you.

* KINDERGARTEN

At this level, children may recognize sight words in the text, such as *to, the, for, are, he, she,* and so on. During your preview of a book, invite children to point out any words they recognize.

As you read aloud, invite children to track the print and chime in on the words they know. For less familiar words, encourage children to use their emerging decoding skills. Build on their knowledge of sound-symbol relationships to help them “sound it out.”

After several readings of a title, try doing a choral reading. Track the print as you read aloud as a group.

* FIRST GRADE

By first grade, children may be able to read much of the text themselves. During your preview, pre-teach any sophisticated words in the text (usually content vocabulary). Point out the word, read it aloud, and have children echo it after you. Go over the word's definition, using the word in a few contexts.

Have children read the book softly to themselves as you listen in, helping with decoding words as necessary. You might want to stop children after every couple of pages to ask comprehension questions about what they have read so far.

After several readings of a book, you might invite pairs to do a partner reading or encourage individual children to take turns reading a page of text aloud.



Using the Read-Alouds and Reproducibles

Use these tips to make the most of the read-aloud information sheets and reproducible activity sheets included in the guide.

Using the Read-Alouds

After reading a *Very First Biography* with children, you can share further information on the subject with the read-aloud sheet provided. You'll find the sheets in this guide, beginning on page 17. (Subjects are listed in alphabetical order by last name; see the table of contents on page 3.)

The read-alouds are written in kid-friendly language, so you will most likely be able to read straight from the page. As with the biographies themselves, however, pause periodically to focus on unfamiliar words or content vocabulary, saying the word aloud and having children say it after you. Then discuss the word's definition.

You can also take breaks to check on children's listening comprehension. Can they summarize the information they have heard so far, using their own words? What new things have they learned from the biography about the person that they did not know before?

Keep in mind that you can also use the read-aloud pages to foster home-school connections. Simply copy a class set and send the sheets home with children, along with a short note. Explain to families that their child has been learning about this person's life, and ask them to read aloud the information with their child. You might also suggest a quick activity, for instance, children might draw a picture of the person on an index card and write the facts from the Fact Box beneath it to make a sports-inspired "biography trading card" to bring back to class.

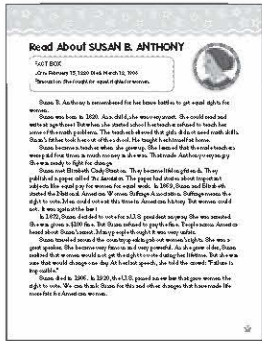
Using the Reproducibles

The reproducible activity sheets provide a great way to extend children's learning through personal response. You will find these sheets following each read-aloud page, beginning on page 18. Copy a class set and provide children with pencils and crayons to complete the activity.

Each sheet focuses on a key event or character trait, and asks children a question that helps them relate the biographical subject to their own life experience and interests. You'll find that each sheet includes space for both drawing and writing, so the activity can be adapted for any skill level. Children can represent their thinking through writing, drawing, dictating, or any combination of these.

You can use the reproducibles for a group guided activity or place them in a center as an option for choice time. Simply place a few copies of the book in the center, and make sure you're on hand to explain the directions, if needed. You can also send the reproducibles home along with the read-aloud sheets (see above) and invite family members to work on them with children.

Once children have completed their sheets, post them on an eye-level bulletin board or wall and use them as a jumping-off point for further discussion. As children relate their own lives to the life of the subject, their understanding of the material will deepen.



Extension Activities

Use these fun, hands-on activities to extend children's experiences with each subject.

Susan B. Anthony There's no better way to celebrate Susan B. Anthony's life than to take a vote! Choose an issue appropriate to your classroom. For instance, you might vote on a book to read at story time, whether to have pretzels or crackers for snack, or even have children choose between two stuffed animals for a class mascot. Create a ballot using symbols or words to show their choices, and have children check a box to show their vote. Collect the ballots in a basket, bag, or box and tally them up, and then post the results!



Johnny Appleseed If it weren't for Johnny Appleseed, we might not have so many wonderful foods made from apples! Try a twist on the traditional apple-variety taste test by having children taste different apple products. You can ask families to bring in donations such as applesauce, apple jelly, apple butter, and apple pie. List the foods across the board, let children taste each one, and have them place a check mark beneath the one they like best. Then analyze the results together.



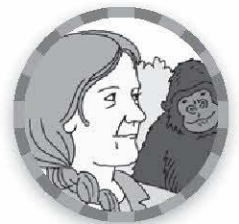
Roberto Clemente Roberto Clemente was great at baseball, and he was great at helping others. Play a simple game that combines both! Gather in a circle and pass a baseball (or any type of ball) around as you play some music (such as *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*). Stop the music at random intervals. Whoever is holding the ball must name something he or she can do to help someone else! It can be something as big as *feed hungry people* or as small as *clean up a game with a friend*. Play until each child has had a chance to share an idea.



Christopher Columbus Make mini-models of Columbus's ships! Cut out the cups from a clean egg carton and paint each cup brown, both inside and out, for the hull. Cut several large and small sails from white paper, about 1½" squares and ¾" squares. Attach the large sails to toothpicks by placing a line of glue on one sail, rolling the toothpick in the glue, and then sandwiching another sail on top, pressing together to seal. Do the same for the small sails using toothpicks broken in half. You can also create double-sails by placing a small sail on the end of a toothpick and a large sail in the middle. Place a little play-dough in the bottom of each "hull" and insert a few toothpick sails to complete each ship.



Dian Fossey Did you know that like human fingerprints, every gorilla has a unique noseprint? That's how scientists identify them! You can collect children's noseprints by placing a dab of non-toxic, washable fingerpaint on each child's nose and having children press their noses on paper. Another option is to use photos of children, cutting them to show only their noses! (Make sure to write children's initials on the back of their print or photo.) Then pin the noses on a bulletin board and try to guess whose is whose!





Helen Keller Learn a few phrases in ASL, American Sign Language. Teach children how to say “thank you” by touching the tips of the fingers of one hand to the lips, palm flat and facing in, and then moving the hand forward and out, ending with the palm facing up. Practice saying “hello” by holding one hand to the forehead, flat palm facing out, and then moving the hand forward and down (similar to a salute). You can also say “I love you” with one handshape: with the palm facing out, fold down only the middle and ring fingers.



Martin Luther King, Jr. Martin Luther King, Jr. worked to solve problems of unfair treatment in a peaceful way. Help children practice the same skill by engineering an “unfair” experience, for example, hand out stickers only to children who are not wearing sneakers. Then give erasers only to children who *are* wearing sneakers. How do children in each group feel? What is the best way to solve the problem? Lead children to see that physical action, such as trying to take one another’s gifts, would only cause more problems. The best thing they can do is speak out and tell you why your method of gift-giving was unfair. To end the experience, make sure that each child receives both gifts.



Abraham Lincoln Make stovepipe hats like Honest Abe’s! Provide each of the children with a large paper plate and have them cut out the centers to make a brim. Instruct children to paint the brims black, and let them dry. Then help children staple or tape a cylinder of black construction paper to the inside of the brim, and attach a round circle of black construction paper to the top of the cylinder to complete the hat. For a more secure fit, you can punch a hole in each side of the brim and thread with strings of yarn, tying the two strings beneath children’s chins.



Barack Obama Get your class into the “Yes we can!” spirit by participating in some community service. Choose a project appropriate to the needs of your neighborhood. You can have a canned goods drive and donate the proceeds to a homeless shelter; collect pet food or treats and donate to an animal shelter; make cards for children who are in the hospital; visit a senior center and perhaps put on a performance; help the environment by cleaning up a park; or donate gently used toys to children in foster care. It is never too early for children to learn the importance of giving back!



Rosa Parks Thanks to Rosa Parks, the seats on the bus—and everywhere else—are for everybody. Reinforce this idea with a cute craft. Create or obtain a template of a bus in side view, with windows for the driver and passengers. Make a copy for each child and let children color in the bus. Then provide old magazines and have children cut out pictures of people’s faces, encouraging them to choose faces of different colors, genders, ages, and so on. Let children glue a face in each window. You can display the buses on a wall and use them to spark a discussion about diversity.



Sally Ride Make a “rocket” right in the classroom! Thread a long piece of string through a drinking straw. Then stretch the string from the floor to the ceiling tightly, tying each end to something stable. If this is not possible, you can also make a horizontal rocket, stretching the string across the room. Move the straw to the bottom end of the string and then blow up a balloon. Pinch the tip to keep it inflated, and use tape to attach it to the side of the straw. When you’re ready to launch, let go of the balloon tip and watch your “rocket” shoot up, up, and away!