



TEACHER RESOURCE

Teaching with Biographies

Why Teach with Biographies?

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Biographies illustrate how individuals shape history and history shapes individuals

Biographies allow students to see how an individual's actions can influence the course of historical events, but they also show how historical events change individuals. Thus, teaching history with biography can help students see how they fit into the historical narrative.

Biographies take personality into account

By showing how factors such as gender, race, education, etc. influence a person's biases, biographies bring history to life and help students to see history makers as human.

Biographies make the study of history fascinating

Biographies bring personal drama to the past, drawing students in to the study of history in a way that expository text does not. This means greater interest in the study of history and information retention for your students.

Biographies can help to counter a Eurocentric view of the past

Biographies provide great examples of how people of color, women, and people with disabilities have made important contributions to the past. They can also show the shortcomings of those long considered to be the heroes of our past. In other words, biographies help teachers to bring different perspectives to their teaching of the past and to show that people and issues of the past are multi-dimensional.

Biographies encourage students to explore the larger context of historical events

The human interest factor of biographies incites a natural curiosity to find out more. When students relate to the men and women who have made history, the facts of history become more interesting to them.

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Choosing Good Biographies for Teaching History

- Select biographies that tell the story of the past through the perspective of those who have been relegated to the sidelines of history.
- Select biographies about individuals whose lives illustrate broader historical themes and trends.
- Use biographies that reinforce topics discussed in previous lessons
- Use biographies that illustrate how the individual has shaped history as well as been shaped by it.

Sources

Fronda, Michael P. "Using Biography to Teach AP History." http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/courses/teachers_corner/29471.html (accessed September 3, 2009).

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