**Interviewing and Writing Biography**

Jonas Sauder

“Lives of great men all remind us we can make our lives sublime.

And, departing, leave behind us footprints on the sands of time.”

*Values of Researching and Writing Biographies*

1. Cultivates respect for older generation through “conversation between the generations.”

2. Develops a real sense of history grounded in people.

3. Helps children connect “recent” events studied in history books to a real life.

4. Introduces children to primary sources.

5. Produces an original document with academic, cultural, family, historical, and personal value.

6. Stimulates children to think of important things in life and hear advice from an older person.

*Skills Practiced*

1. Live interviewing, conversation, and note-taking.
2. Writing skills: outlining, rough draft, revision, proofreading, polishing a final copy.

*Steps in the Process*

1. Teach children how to interview.
2. Discuss interview process.
3. Try to have real conversation.
4. Ask tactful questions that touch on human interest.
5. Pursue interesting threads that develop.
6. Try to stimulate storytelling.
7. Practice note taking.
8. Invite a well-chosen older person to be interviewed by the class.
9. Teacher guides the interview process.
10. Students are assigned to ask questions and enter the interview process.
11. Students write up the interview.
12. Share results, noting the elements that add interest.
13. Discuss what could / should have been included or deleted.
14. Assign students to choose a biographee.
15. Grandparents, older people in local congregation, an older neighbor or friend are good choices.
16. If the person chosen lives at a great distance, the telephone or a tape recorder can be used.
17. Additional people who know the biographee should be interviewed.
18. Extensions or adaptations of the project.
19. If biographee is deceased, students can…
20. read diaries and letters if available.
21. interview people who knew the biographee for stories.
22. study pictures and artifacts.
23. For someone with a very eventful life, choose one segment only.
24. Writing
25. Break the task into successive steps,

teach each one,

have a due date for each step, and

grade each step.

1. Teach and practice note taking, outlining, rough draft, having a family member critique

and edit, revising, and proofreading / producing final copy.

1. Encourage a readable, interesting style:
2. Storytelling format
3. Balance: various parts of life, events, work, play, troubles, humor, friends, etc.
4. Conclude with person’s advice and some sayings.
5. Share results in some way with others: school program, booklet, or circulating copies.
6. Miscellaneous
7. Allow plenty of time—some interviews will be difficult to schedule.
8. Introduce project to parents and solicit their support and involvement.
9. Have students share tidbits from their notes occasionally to maintain interest.
10. Provide support and help along the way; allow time in class to work on organizing and writing.

*Suggested Components of Project*

Due Date: Assignment

1. \_\_\_\_ First installment of notes

1. \_\_\_\_ Complete set of notes and first 50 words of the paper (an introductory paragraph)

Include interview dates, and names of people interviewed.

1. \_\_\_\_ Outline and first 250 words
2. \_\_\_\_ Complete copy of rough draft, signed by two people who read and gave comments
3. \_\_\_\_ Final copy; at least 1000 words.

*Model Score Sheet*

Preliminary assignments: possible points earned points

1. First installment of notes 5 \_\_\_

1. Complete notes & introduction 10 \_\_\_
2. Outline and first 250 words 10 \_\_\_
3. Complete rough draft 15 \_\_\_

Final Copy:

1. Information (amount of material included) 10 \_\_\_
2. Style (written in readable, interesting way) 15 \_\_\_
3. Balance (covering various parts and events of life appropriately) 15 \_\_\_
4. Length (1000 word minimum) 10 \_\_\_
5. Mechanics (spelling, usage, punctuation, grammar) 10 \_\_\_

**Total 100** \_\_\_

Extra points for: 10