

INTRODUCTION

This unit specifically targets historical figures examined during the “Faces of America” video segments, and in the text for the following units:

- Unit 18: *By the People, For the People* (1929–1942)
- Unit 19: *Postwar Tension and Triumph* (1940–1963)
- Unit 20: *Egalitarian America* (1945–1980)
- Unit 21: *Global America* (1974–present)

In this session, participants will develop lesson plans for helping their students learn about historical figures through the process of writing biographies. The principal intent behind student-written biographies is to ensure that the students deepen their understanding of the subject within his or her time period. Consider what students might learn if they studied about women, artists, scientists, or “everyday people,” rather than notable politicians. Studying and writing about each has its place in understanding American history, and biography writing allows for an in-depth examination of people in particular eras. In addition, participants will review lesson plans and the historical thinking skills provided by the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS).

The following are some of the NCHS Lesson Plans that use biographies:

- “Speech as My Weapon: Emma Goldman and the First Amendment”
- “Infinite Patience, Indomitable Will: Ralph Bunche, His Struggle for Peace and Justice”
- “The Great Experiment: George Washington and the American Republic”

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this session, teachers will

- re-examine how the Internet provides access to primary source materials;
- review the historical figures examined in Unit 18, Unit 19, Unit 20, and Unit 21, and consider the importance of helping students learn about these individuals;
- develop classroom lesson plans that guide students through the process of writing biographies;
- connect biographies to key historical issues, movements, events, and/or ideologies.

Session Preparation — Participant Prerequisites

Prior to this session, participants will need to download the list of NCHS Lesson Plans that are listed in the introduction (Emma Goldman, Ralph Bunche, George Washington) and read them. The lesson plans can be downloaded from the *America's History in the Making* Web site at <http://www.learner.org/channel/courses/amerhistory>. From the homepage, click on Unit 22, then download the NCHS Lesson Plans.

OVERVIEW

This session shifts the focus from teachers learning American history to teachers writing lesson plans to help their students learn about people in the American story. This focus on individuals was emphasized during the “Faces of America” video segment in each unit. Biographies allow for studying about famous, not-so-famous, and ordinary Americans who were part of building the nation. Oftentimes, we tend to focus on the “great” and “important” people, neglecting the contributions and historical impacts of people who are misrepresented or underrepresented. Studying and writing about the lives of all Americans provides a more accurate and compelling portrait of America.

Previous sessions have included prompts for the participants to consider how to bring this content into their classrooms (e.g., the reflection questions), but this unit also provides a concentrated segment of time for developing lesson plans.

Participants should think about the time needed to allow their students to learn about the subject of the biography, as these lesson plans will require more than one class period. Part of the process for learning about historical figures is to engage in online research and to utilize historical thinking skills. As a result, this session also provides time to review these skills.

Before You Begin

Before the day of the workshop session, familiarize yourself with the Session Preparation that the participants were asked to complete prior to attending this session. Review this facilitator’s guide. Be sure to prepare the correct number of overheads and handouts needed for each activity.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- This *America's History in the Making* facilitator’s guide
- Overhead projector and colored pens
- Multiple copies of handouts (in the Appendix of this guide)
- Pens and paper for participating teachers and facilitator
- Chalkboard, blank transparencies, or overhead for reporting out

OVERHEAD AND HANDOUT INSTRUCTIONS

1. Using Appendix A, “Using Primary Sources on the Web,” (also available in Unit 12, Appendix H), make one handout for each participant.
2. Using Appendix B, “Units 18–21 Biographies,” create an overhead transparency and one handout for each participant.
3. Using Appendix C, “Biography Planning Guide,” create one handout for each participant.
4. Using Appendix D, “Critique Questions,” make an overhead transparency.

Facilitator’s Note: You may want to prepare overheads of the reflection and discussion questions for teachers to reference during the workshop activities.

Warm-up and Activity 1 (25 minutes)

In this warm-up activity, participants will revisit the digital research skills from Unit 12, *Using Digital Technologies*. These skills will become part of the lesson plans they will design for use with their students.

Part 1 (5 minutes)

Give each participant a copy of “Using Primary Sources on the Web” (Appendix A), and ask them to read over this listing of five categories of resources available online.

Part 2 (20 minutes)

In the large group, have participants share experiences they have had using the Internet resources listed in “Using Primary Sources on the Web” (Appendix A). Ask the participants to share specific successes in how they facilitated student use of these sites, especially when students accessed these sites during class time. This is meant to be a time for teachers to remember the use of the Internet for online resources AND to share strategies and techniques for helping students use the Internet for enhancing their learning of American history.

Activity 2 (35 minutes)

In this activity, participants will review the individuals described in Units 18, 19, 20, and 21. This activity begins with a review of the people who were the focus of the “Faces of America” video segments. It then extends to other historical figures examined in the unit sessions.

Part 1 (20 minutes)

Project overhead the list of the twelve figures examined in the previous four units: “Units 18–21 Biographies” (Appendix B), and give each participant a handout of the same list.

Ask the participants to consider, as a whole group, the following questions for each of the twelve historical figures:

1. What contribution(s) did this person make to American society?
2. What can we learn about American history from studying his or her story?
3. How should this person be remembered?

Part 2 (15 minutes)

Ask the group to brainstorm other historically significant people from these time periods who were not portrayed during the “Faces of America” segments. As participants suggest names, write them down on a blank overhead, or add them to the “Units 18–21 Biographies” overhead. Ask the same questions posed for the first group of historical figures. Encourage the participants to write the names and contributions in their notes: This will help them remember important ideas about each person, and it will facilitate the next activity.

Activity 3 (70 minutes)

This activity allows time for participants to develop classroom lesson plans: They will help their students write a biography about one of the people listed in Activity 2. Remind participants that a key reason for writing biographies is to attain a deeper understanding of American history through learning about an individual person.

Ask participants to develop a plan to guide students through the process of writing a short biography. This biography should highlight three or four major events in a person's life. These events could be turning points, or they could be significant events that influenced this person and/or influenced history. A minimum of five classroom sessions will be needed to allow students to produce biographies, so teachers should think in terms of developing a series of lesson plans (possibly up to ten sessions).

As the activity begins, have the participants reflect on the components of the NCHS biography lesson plans that they read prior to this session. The NCHS lessons focus on the lives of George Washington, Ralph Bunche, and Emma Goldman. Discuss with the group the following questions:

- How do these lesson plans use primary sources?
- What historical thinking skills are used in these lessons?
- How well do you think students will learn about the person examined in each lesson? Provide examples to support your answer.

Encourage participants to work individually or in pairs. Be sure that participants think about connecting biographies to key historical issues, movements, events, or ideologies.

To help direct the teachers' time during this activity, give each participant a copy of the Biography Planning Guide (Appendix C). This will guide teachers through the following four steps as they develop their lesson plans:

1. Learning about the subject within the context of his or her own era and experience
2. Selecting key events/turning points
3. Preparing the chapters
4. Compiling the text

Activity 4 (20 minutes)

This activity serves as a conclusion to the session, and provides participants with the opportunity to share their lesson ideas with others. This sharing has two primary purposes: First, participants can receive feedback from colleagues about the lesson ideas they just created; second, teachers can exchange these newly created lesson ideas with each other.

Place the “Critique Questions” (Appendix D) on the overhead for participants’ reference as they offer each other critique and feedback: How will the plans promote student learning of American history?

1. Is it clear how students will learn about the historical figure they are researching?
2. What feedback will make this lesson plan more effective?

Allow opportunities for teachers to exchange e-mail or other contact information so they can request copies of the others’ lesson ideas. (Sharing of contact information should be voluntary.)

Have teachers share their responses to the following reflection questions:

Reflection Questions

1. How do biographies help personify historical time periods?
2. How could this process enrich your students’ understanding of history?
3. How else might students develop and exhibit their understanding about a person other than writing a biography?
4. How would making a poster, creating a poem or song, producing a video, or designing a mural help students understand the people, places, and eras in American history?
5. What are advantages and/or disadvantages of these alternative ideas?

APPENDICES – *Classroom Applications 4*

- A: “Using Primary Sources on the Web”
one handout for each participant
- B: “Units 18–21 Biographies”
overhead transparency; one handout for each participant
- C: “Biography Planning Guide”
one handout for each participant
- D: “Critique Questions”
overhead transparency

Appendix A: Using Primary Sources on the Web

1. Consult major collections of primary sources.

The following reputable sites link to thousands of primary sources.

American Memory: Historical Collections for the National Digital Library [<http://memory.loc.gov/>]

Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy [<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/avalon.htm>]

Making of America: 19th c. books and magazines [<http://moa.umdl.umich.edu/>]

2. Browse a history subject directory.

Subject directories are useful when you are interested in seeing a broad variety of sources on your topic. Some subject directories include annotations and evaluations of sites. Useful subject directories for history include but are not limited to:

History Matters: The US Survey on the Web [<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/>]

World Wide Virtual Library: History [<http://vlib.iue.it>]

3. Use a search engine.

Search engines are useful when you are researching a narrow topic or trying to locate a specific document. When searching, use specific terms rather than broad terms. For example, search for “emancipation proclamation,” not just “slavery,”; search for the “battle of Chancellorsville,” not “civil war.” Some popular search engines are:

Google [<http://www.google.com>]

AlltheWeb [<http://www.alltheweb.com/>]

altavista [<http://www.altavista.com/>]

AskJeeves [<http://www.askjeeves.com>]

4. Get recommendations from other teachers or librarians.

Many libraries compile lists of recommended history sites. Some examples include:

NYU’s Internet Resources for History [<http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/research/hum/history/internet.htm>]

UVA’s History Subject Guide [<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/subjects/history/>]

UW’s History on the Web [<http://www.lib.washington.edu/subject/history/web.html>]

Check your school’s Web site to see if any “special links” exist. Perhaps a librarian updates the Web page with his or her favorite links, or links for students pertaining to specific subjects.

5. Find artifacts, cartoons, maps, photographs, posters, sounds, art works, or films and videos.

Going to a major collection of photographs is the best way to find a historic image. Also, use a search engine to try a topic search or image search. Some major collections include:

American Memory: Historical Collections for the National Digital Library [<http://memory.loc.gov/>]

New York Public Library Digital Library Collection [<http://digital.nypl.org/>]

Additional information on finding and using primary sources effectively can be found at:

<http://www.lib.washington.edu/subject/History/RUSA/>

Appendix B: Units 18–21 Biographies

1. What contribution(s) did this person make to American society?
2. What can we learn about American history from studying his or her story?
3. How should this person be remembered?

Unit 18: *By the People, For the People*

Will Rogers
Ann Marie Low
Henry Ford

Unit 19: *Postwar Tension and Triumph*

Rachel Carson
Keith Little
Robert Oppenheimer

Unit 20: *Egalitarian America*

Louis Armstrong
Tom Hayden
Marlo Thomas

Unit 21: *Global America*

Shareda Hosein
Phyllis Schlafly
Tulio Serrano

Appendix C: Biography Planning Guide

I. Briefly describe:

- The grade level
- The subject of the biography with a brief explanation for students: Why will this person be the focus of their efforts? In other words, how will learning about this person help students connect to key historical issues, movements, events, and/or ideologies?
- At least one objective addressing each of the following areas:
 - Historical Content
 - Historical Thinking Skills
 - Online Research Skill (optional)

II. Describe how you will facilitate each of the following steps in biography production:

Step 1: Learning about the subject within the context of his or her own era and experience

How might you help your students engage in the following?

- Data gathering strategies
- Online research
- Other needs?
- Student research
- Note-taking skills

Also, consider whether students should work/research/write individually or in teams. This decision will direct the type of classroom activities you will develop in the following steps. Many Web sites are dedicated to biographies, and they provide an excellent starting point for students.

Step 2: Selecting key events/turning points

How might your students complete the following tasks in writing their biographies?

- Selecting important events or themes
- Determining the three or four key turning points or significant events in a person's life
- Including a timeline, map, or other visual aid
- Selecting one event over another
- Assigning chapters to team members (if in groups)
- Other needs?

Step 3: Preparing the chapters

How will you provide time for students to complete the following?

- Individual research and writing
- Final draft writing
- Peer editing
- Other needs?

Step 4: Compiling the text

How will you facilitate students as they complete the following tasks?

- Arranging the material
- Arranging chapters in order (these may be organized in chronological order, or some other appropriate order such as by theme)
- Other needs?

Appendix D: Critique Questions

1. Is it clear how students will learn about the historical figure they are researching?
2. What feedback will make this lesson plan more effective?
3. Allow opportunities for teachers to exchange e-mail or other contact information so they can request copies of the others' lesson ideas. (Sharing of contact information should be voluntary.)



NOTES
