Year 6 Non-fiction Unit 1 – Biography and autobiography

Biography and autobiography (3 weeks)

Generic information skills:

This is a relatively free-standing non-fiction unit, and could be taught at any stage of the autumn or spring terms in Year 6. However, whenever it is taught, the level of reading and writing expected and the word, sentence and presentation skills integrated within it must clearly build on from previous learning and towards end-of-year expectations. It can be purposely linked to other areas of the curriculum.

Phase 1

Children explore the biography of a particular person as presented in a range of different texts, on paper and on screen. They build up a picture of the life from the various perspectives offered, as well as discussing and evaluating the differences between the texts.

Phase 2

Children access the same biography from an audio or audio-visual source, make notes and then prepare and give an oral presentation to answer some key questions about the person's life.

Phase 3

Children reread and analyse some of the biography and autobiography texts, identifying key language, structure, organisation and presentational features as preparation for writing.

Phase 4

Following teacher modelling, children set their own writing challenge and, based on a range of biographical information, write biographies (or simulated autobiographies) of the person concerned, selecting their own approach and medium, as required by the purpose and audience.

Overview

- Having pooled information on a topic, construct and follow a plan for researching further information.
- Routinely appraise a text quickly, deciding on its value, quality or usefulness. Evaluate the status of source material, looking for possible bias and comparing different sources on the same subject. Recognise rhetorical devices used to argue, persuade, mislead and sway the reader.
- Select the appropriate style and form of writing to suit a specific purpose and audience, drawing on knowledge of different non-fiction text types.
- Evaluate the language, style and effectiveness of examples of non-fiction writing such as periodicals, reviews, reports, leaflets.
• In writing information texts, select the appropriate style and form to suit a specific purpose and audience, drawing on knowledge of different non-fiction text types.
• Establish, balance and maintain viewpoints.
• Revise own non-fiction writing to reduce superfluous words and phrases.
• Distinguish between biography and autobiography, recognising the effect on the reader of the choice between first and third person, distinguishing between fact, opinion and fiction, distinguishing between implicit and explicit points of view and how these can differ. Develop the skills of biographical and autobiographical writing in role, adapting distinctive voices, for example of historical characters, through preparing a CV; composing a biographical account based on research or describing a person from different perspectives, for example police description, school report, newspaper obituary.
• When planning writing, select the appropriate style and form to suit a specific purpose and audience, drawing on knowledge of different non-fiction text types. Use the language conventions and grammatical features of the different types of text as appropriate.

1998 Framework objectives covered:

Year 6, Term 3: T19 and T22 review a range of non-fiction text types and their characteristics, discussing when a writer might choose to write in a given style and form; select the appropriate style and form to suit a specific purpose and audience, drawing on knowledge of different non-fiction text types.

Year 6, Term 1: T11 and T14 distinguish between biography and autobiography; develop the skills of biographical and autobiographical writing.

Objectives

To ensure effective planning of literacy teachers need to ensure they plan for all elements of literacy effectively across the year ensuring that assessment for learning is used to plan and amend teaching. It is essential that core skills such as phonic strategies, spelling, and handwriting are incorporated into these exemplar units to ensure effective learning.

Most children learn to:

(The following list comprises only the strands, numbered 1 through 12, that are relevant to this particular unit. Where there are relevant Steps in Learning for an objective, a link has been included.)

1. Speaking
   • Use the techniques of dialogic talk to explore ideas, topics or issues

2. Listening and responding
   • Make notes when listening for a sustained period and discuss how note-taking varies depending on context and purpose

4. Drama
   • Devise a performance considering how to adapt the performance for a specific audience

6. Word structure and spelling
   • Spell familiar words correctly and employ a range of strategies to spell difficult and unfamiliar words
• Use a range of appropriate strategies to edit, proofread and correct spelling in their own work, on paper and on screen

7. Understanding and interpreting texts

• Appraise a text quickly, deciding on its value, quality or usefulness
• Understand underlying themes, causes and points of view

8. Engaging with and responding to texts

• Sustain engagement with longer texts, using different techniques to make the text come alive
• Compare how writers from different times and places present experiences and use language

9. Creating and shaping texts

• Set their own challenges to extend achievement and experience in writing
• Use different narrative techniques to engage and entertain the reader
• Select words and language drawing on their knowledge of literary features and formal and informal writing
• Integrate words, images and sounds imaginatively for different purposes

10. Text structure and organisation

• Use varied structures to shape and organise texts coherently
• Use paragraphs to achieve pace and emphasis

11. Sentence structure and punctuation

• Express subtle distinctions of meaning, including hypothesis, speculation and supposition, by constructing sentences in varied ways

12. Presentation

• Use different styles of handwriting for different purposes with a range of media, developing a consistent and personal legible style
• Select from a wide range of ICT programs to present text effectively and communicate information and ideas

Prior learning

Check that children can already:

• Identify and discuss the language and organisational features of information texts.
• Identify and discuss elements of persuasion when they encounter them in texts.
• Identify and discuss the comparative advantages of using words, images and sounds when communicating through multimodal text.
• Understand how texts are and can be adapted to suit different purposes and audiences.

Teaching sequence phase 1

Note: Children working significantly above or below age-related expectations will need differentiated support, which may include tracking forward or back in terms of learning objectives. EAL learners should be expected to work within
the overall expectations for their year group. For further advice see the progression strands and hyperlinks to useful sources of practical support.

**Reading, retrieving information and making notes (4 days)**

**Teaching content:**

- Select a particular person as the subject of an extended biographical study. (The person could well be chosen to fit in with other curriculum work, although the availability of a range of appropriate resources will also need to be considered.)
- Assemble several different biographical sources of information on the selected subject including reference books, ICT and other multimodal sources, and presentations in a variety of media.
- Begin by exploring together a particularly engaging source of information of the life of the subject, for example a multimodal text on paper or on screen. Identify and make notes on the main events in the life. Begin to create a life line (a biographical time line) to capture these.
- Explore other contrasting versions of the same life (possibly, for example, paper texts or extracts, contemporary accounts, news accounts). Discuss the purpose and audience of each, different perspectives, possible bias, etc. and relate these to the language and other communication devices used. Make notes and adapt or extend the information on the life line as new information and insights are gained (involving some shared work and some independent work in pairs or groups).
- Explore together an autobiographical version of all or part of the same life (real or simulated), for example a diary or weblog. Compare and contrast it to the biographical versions already read. Ask: How is it different? Why? Does it change our view of the subject? Make notes and add to the life line a more subjective view of events (involving some shared work and some independent work in pairs or groups).

**Learning outcomes:**

- Children can evaluate the reliability and usefulness of biographical information from different sources.
- Children can understand the terms ‘biography’ and ‘autobiography’ and can use them appropriately.
- Children can extract and interpret information effectively from biographical and autobiographical sources.

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**Teaching sequence phase 2**

**Listening, analysis and oral presentation (3 days)**

**Teaching content:**

- Through discussion and debate (class and group) identify some key evaluative questions about the biographical subject that will illuminate or explain the person's life, importance or fame, for example How did Tolkien's life influence his writing? What made Florence Nightingale such a special nurse?
- Allocate one key question to each of several groups. Together watch or listen to an audio or audio-visual version of all or part of the subject's life, for example a radio or TV documentary or film. In pairs, children make notes of any information that might help answer the key questions. Then in groups, children compare and combine evidence and conclusions and feedback.
- In pairs or groups, children undertake further research to answer the key questions using a range of the sources from phase 1. They make notes and use maps, etc. to collate evidence and possible conclusions.
- In groups, children prepare and make a short oral presentation to the rest of the class, possibly using visual support - an interactive whiteboard (IWB), presentation software, etc., providing an answer to the key question based on evidence and reasoned conclusions.
- Use question and answer, discussion and debate to further unpack the presentations.
- Compare and evaluate both the answers to the key questions and the way they were presented.
Learning outcome:

• Children can research, prepare and present orally a reasoned account of a particular life.

Teaching sequence phase 3

Reading and analysing biography and autobiography (2 days)

Teaching content:

• Returning to some of the different examples of biography used in phase 1, identify and analyse some of the important structure, language and organisational features of each. Evaluate effectiveness in terms of purpose and audience. List and compare features and identify common elements of effective biography.
• Briefly return to the autobiography examples from phase 1. Identify and analyse features. Model rewriting a short section of one of the biography texts as if it were autobiography, demonstrating features discussed and listed. Children rewrite a different short section as autobiography. Evaluate whether identified features have been used effectively.

Learning outcome:

• Children can recognise the structure and language, organisational and presentational features of different forms of biography and autobiography.

Teaching sequence phase 4

Writing biography and autobiography (6 days)

Teaching content:

• Children are provided with (or find for themselves) a range of biographical resources, for example short pieces of information, photographs, diary extracts, relating to the life of a particular person. This should be different from the person used in phases 1, 2 and 3 and different for each child, pair or group but again could be related to and drawn from other curriculum work, such as characters already studied in history, or based on children's own experience, for example a grandparent. To keep within time constraints for this phase, the subject matter and amount of information may need to be limited, (e.g. a day, week or year in the life of…). In pairs, children read or examine and discuss the information.
• Drawing on a similar (but distinct) set of resources, the teacher models a brief oral narration of the life. Children work with a partner to do the same, drawing on their resources.
• Model the writing of part of a biography or autobiography based on the materials. In demonstrating, show how to construct sentences in a variety of ways to convey subtlety of meaning and use punctuation to clarify that meaning.
• Discuss the audience and purpose for the writing, and model various alternative formats, for example multimodal presentation, paper recount or autobiographical diary of a weblog, drawing on the examples from phase 1 and the features identified in phase 3.
• Children set their own writing challenge and then plan, draft, write and improve a biography or simulated autobiography, based on the material about their selected person, and make their own selection from the range of explored and demonstrated mediums and styles (including ICT and multimodality) as appropriate to their purpose and audience. In writing, they will explore constructing sentences in a variety of ways to convey subtlety of meaning and using punctuation to clarify that meaning.
• At appropriate times, use response partners to support re-drafting and editing of writing. Share for discussion examples of children's writing in progress. Model editing and improving writing linked to the agreed success criteria and children's needs.
• Share and evaluate writing outcomes.

**Learning outcome:**

• Children can write an effective biography or autobiography selecting language, form, format and content to suit a particular audience and purpose.

**Objectives for strands 6, 11 and 12**

Throughout the unit, children should focus, as and when appropriate, on the word structure, spelling and presentation objectives identified in the first section above.

**Complete teaching sequence**

Note: Children working significantly above or below age-related expectations will need differentiated support, which may include tracking forward or back in terms of learning objectives. EAL learners should be expected to work within the overall expectations for their year group. For further advice see the progression strands and hyperlinks to useful sources of practical support.

**Phase 1: Reading, retrieving information and making notes (4 days)**

**Teaching content:**

• Select a particular person as the subject of an extended biographical study. (The person could well be chosen to fit in with other curriculum work, although the availability of a range of appropriate resources will also need to be considered.)
• Assemble several different biographical sources of information on the selected subject including reference books, ICT and other multimodal sources, and presentations in a variety of media.
• Begin by exploring together a particularly engaging source of information of the life of the subject, for example a multimodal text on paper or on screen. Identify and make notes on the main events in the life. Begin to create a life line (a biographical time line) to capture these.
• Explore other contrasting versions of the same life (possibly, for example, paper texts or extracts, contemporary accounts, news accounts). Discuss the purpose and audience of each, different perspectives, possible bias, etc. and relate these to the language and other communication devices used. Make notes and adapt or extend the information on the life line as new information and insights are gained (involving some shared work and some independent work in pairs or groups).
• Explore together an autobiographical version of all or part of the same life (real or simulated), for example a diary or weblog. Compare and contrast it to the biographical versions already read. Ask: How is it different? Why? Does it change our view of the subject? Make notes and add to the life line a more subjective view of events (involving some shared work and some independent work in pairs or groups).

**Learning outcomes:**

• Children can evaluate the reliability and usefulness of biographical information from different sources.
• Children can understand the terms 'biography' and 'autobiography' and can use them appropriately.
• Children can extract and interpret information effectively from biographical and autobiographical sources.
Phase 2: Listening, analysis and oral presentation (3 days)

Teaching content:

- Through discussion and debate (class and group) identify some key evaluative questions about the biographical subject that will illuminate or explain the person’s life, importance or fame, for example *How did Tolkien’s life influence his writing? What made Florence Nightingale such a special nurse?*
- Allocate one key question to each of several groups. Together watch or listen to an audio or audio-visual version of all or part of the subject’s life, for example a radio or TV documentary or film. In pairs, children make notes of any information that might help answer the key questions. Then in groups, children compare and combine evidence and conclusions and feedback.
- In pairs or groups, children undertake further research to answer the key questions using a range of the sources from phase 1. They make notes and use maps, etc. to collate evidence and possible conclusions.
- In groups, children prepare and make a short oral presentation to the rest of the class, possibly using visual support - an interactive whiteboard (IWB), presentation software, etc., providing an answer to the key question based on evidence and reasoned conclusions.
- Use question and answer, discussion and debate to further unpack the presentations.
- Compare and evaluate both the answers to the key questions and the way they were presented.

Learning outcome:

- Children can research, prepare and present orally a reasoned account of a particular life.

Phase 3: Reading and analysing biography and autobiography (2 days)

Teaching content:

- Returning to some of the different examples of biography used in phase 1, identify and analyse some of the important structure, language and organisational features of each. Evaluate effectiveness in terms of purpose and audience. List and compare features and identify common elements of effective biography.
- Briefly return to the autobiography examples from phase 1. Identify and analyse features. Model rewriting a short section of one of the biography texts as if it were autobiography, demonstrating features discussed and listed. Children rewrite a different short section as autobiography. Evaluate whether identified features have been used effectively.

Learning outcome:

- Children can recognise the structure and language, organisational and presentational features of different forms of biography and autobiography.

Phase 4: Writing biography and autobiography (6 days)

Teaching content:

- Children are provided with (or find for themselves) a range of biographical resources, for example short pieces of information, photographs, diary extracts, relating to the life of a particular person. This should be different from the person used in phases 1, 2 and 3 and different for each child, pair or group but again could be related to and drawn from other curriculum work, such as characters already studied in history, or based on children’s own experience, for example a grandparent. To keep within time constraints for this phase, the subject matter and amount of information may need to be limited, (e.g. a day, week or year in the life of…). In pairs, children read or examine and discuss the information.
- Drawing on a similar (but distinct) set of resources, the teacher models a brief oral narration of the life. Children work with a partner to do the same, drawing on their resources.
• Model the writing of part of a biography or autobiography based on the materials. In demonstrating, show how to construct sentences in a variety of ways to convey subtlety of meaning and use punctuation to clarify that meaning.
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• Children set their own writing challenge and then plan, draft, write and improve a biography or simulated autobiography, based on the material about their selected person, and make their own selection from the range of explored and demonstrated mediums and styles (including ICT and multimodality) as appropriate to their purpose and audience. In writing, they will explore constructing sentences in a variety of ways to convey subtlety of meaning and using punctuation to clarify that meaning.
• At appropriate times, use response partners to support re-drafting and editing of writing. Share for discussion examples of children's writing in progress. Model editing and improving writing linked to the agreed success criteria and children's needs.
• Share and evaluate writing outcomes.

Learning outcome:

• Children can write an effective biography or autobiography selecting language, form, format and content to suit a particular audience and purpose.

Objectives for strands 6, 11 and 12

Throughout the unit, children should focus, as and when appropriate, on the word structure, spelling and presentation objectives identified in the first section above.

Assessment

Assessing Pupils' Progress

In this exemplified unit we have identified the 'main' assessment focuses for reading and writing. However, it is important to remember that teachers should interpret and adapt the teaching sequence to meet the needs of particular classes and this may affect the types of evidence which it is desirable and possible to gather.

In order for a judgement to be made against writing assessment focuses 1 and 2 it is important that children are given space and time to develop their own ideas and define their own purposes for writing. Opportunities to plan for this will arise throughout the literacy curriculum as well as through the application of skills across the curriculum.

The suggested outcome for this unit is a biography (or simulated autobiography) of a chosen person. The teaching of this unit should support the collection of evidence against Reading assessment focus 6 (identify and comment on writers' purposes and viewpoints and the overall effect of the text on the reader) and Writing assessment focus 1 (write imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts).

Evidence against a variety of assessment focuses will be collected at many points during the teaching sequence. Independence and opportunities to make decisions are integral to children's development in reading and writing, and it will be important to collect evidence of achievement against the assessment focuses from occasions where children can demonstrate some independence and choice away from direct teaching.

Suggestions for the collection of assessment information against a range of assessment focuses are found below.
Opportunities for assessment

The following are examples selected from the teaching content for this unit of work that will support planning for effective assessment as an integrated part of the teaching and learning process. Evidence gathered during this ongoing work will contribute to the periodic assessment of pupils' progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning outcomes</th>
<th>Example of teaching content and assessment opportunities</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Approach to assessment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children can understand the terms 'biography' and 'autobiography' and can use them appropriately.</td>
<td>The children explore the differences between biography and autobiography during guided reading sessions. The group recap on the conventions of biographical writing and these are displayed in a table on the IWB. While the group read an allocated section from a chosen autobiography, they are asked to consider and note conventions and features of autobiographical writing. When returning to the text these features are shared and noted in the table alongside the biographical features. The children are encouraged to refer to the text to support their findings.</td>
<td>Children's oral responses and written notes. Teacher observation, questioning and discussion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children can extract and interpret information effectively from biographical and autobiographical sources.</td>
<td>Children are given a range of materials which give versions of a chosen person's life. These materials include autobiographical accounts: interviews, web blogs and extracts from websites; and biographical accounts: magazine articles, news reports, other websites, video clips, etc. The children work in small groups to examine accounts and information on a key event in the person's life, grading the biographical and autobiographical texts based on a continuum – least reliable to most reliable. They consider each source, its reliability and possible bias: Why was this account written? Who is this written for? Who is the author and what might their bias be? How does this affect our view of the events or subject? The children discuss their justifications for their decisions and these are noted on sticky notes. When these investigations are complete the groups are invited to move to other tables where they discuss another group's justifications. They may change the rankings and add further justifications and these are done using different-coloured sticky notes. Finally the groups join together to share their investigations and agree on the rankings before the teacher takes feedback from each group.</td>
<td>Children's discussions and oral responses. Annotated texts, children's notes. Teacher observation. Teacher questioning.</td>
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Key aspects of learning

For further information, see the booklet Progression in key aspects of learning (Ref: 0524-2004) from Learning and teaching in the primary years: Professional development resources (Ref: 0518-2004G).

Enquiry

Children will identify their own key questions about a particular life, and then locate the evidence to answer it within a range of sources.
Information processing

Children will identify relevant information from a range of sources on paper and on screen and use this as a basis for both oral presentation and writing.

Evaluation

Children will present information orally and in writing. They will discuss success criteria, give feedback to others and judge the effectiveness of their own work.

Reasoning

Children will construct reasoned arguments based on available information and evidence.

Empathy

Through discussing and writing simulated autobiography, children will need to imagine themselves in another person's position.

Communication

Children will develop their ability to discuss and debate issues in respect of both the form and the content of the biographical texts they are reading and writing. They will often work collaboratively in pairs and groups. They will communicate outcomes orally, in writing and through using other modes and media.