

English Language Arts

Resource Guide

PART II.D

Connecting Lives2

NOTE: This document is a work in progress. Parts II and III, in particular, are in need of further development, and we invite the submission of additional learning experiences and local performance tasks for these sections. Inquiries regarding submission of materials should be directed to: English Language Arts Resource Guide, Room 681 EBA, New York State Education Department, Albany, NY 12234 (tel. 518-474-5922).

Connecting Lives: Biography Unit **BIG BOOK**

ELA
1

LISTENING & READING – *students will*

- ▲ select information
- ▲ support inferences about information/ideas
- ▲ compare/synthesize information

SPEAKING & WRITING – *students will*

- ▲ present information clearly
- ▲ observe basic writing conventions

ELA
2

LISTENING & READING – *students will*

- ▲ read variety of literature
- ▲ identify distinguishing features

SPEAKING & WRITING – *students will*

- ▲ present personal responses to literature
- ▲ present responses to/interpretations of literature
- ▲ write stories, poems, literary essays, plays

ELA
3

LISTENING & READING – *students will*

- ▲ evaluate their own/others' work

SPEAKING & WRITING – *students will*

- ▲ express opinions
- ▲ monitor/adjust for competent performance
- ▲ monitor/adjust to the standards for particular genre
- ▲ use standard English

ELA
4

LISTENING & SPEAKING – *students will*

- ▲ listen attentively/recognize
- ▲ take turns speaking/respond to others' ideas
- ▲ express ideas/concerns clearly/respectfully

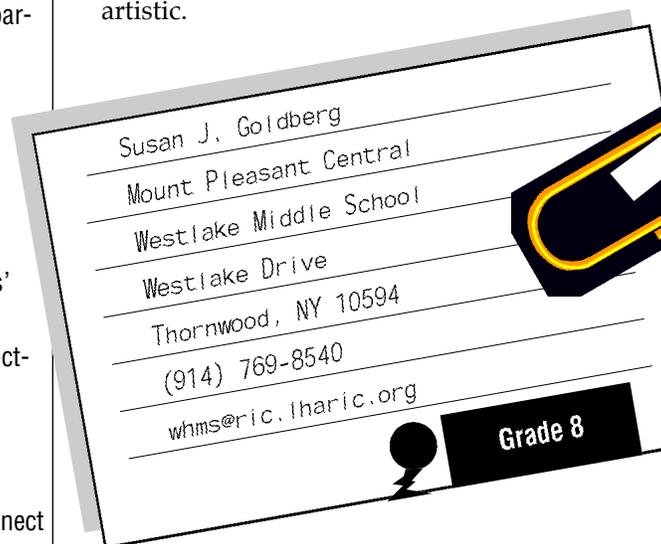
READING & WRITING – *students will*

- ▲ use appropriate language/style
- ▲ make effective use of language to connect

Supplies:

- construction paper in assorted colors, approximately 18" X 24"
- heavier stock, same size, for covers of big books
- binding machine
- plastic "comb" bindings
- glue sticks
- scissors
- markers
- rulers

We frequently require our students to read biographies, but they rarely have the opportunity to share and compare what they read. In this project students work in cooperative learning groups to create **Big Books** in which they connect the lives of those about whom they have read. This project requires students to self-select books, use higher level thinking skills to find connections among diverse individuals, work cooperatively to justify their ideas, and be creative and artistic.



Objectives

Each Student Will:

1. select and read a biography.

(Students are free to read about any person, historic or contemporary, and without regard to fame. However, students will be directed to select biographies written as literature, not strictly as reference sources)
2. practice library and computer skills.
(Students will use the school library during class and on their own time. They may need to use the public library and other computer resources.)
3. find common themes to connect their biographies.
4. work cooperatively in heterogeneous groups.
5. write journal responses to their reading.
(Response journals should be maintained during reading. Two passages and responses will be included in the **Big Book**.)
6. employ artistic and creative means of exhibiting their work.
7. follow directions and adhere to deadlines.
8. demonstrate their ability to communicate clearly in standard written English.
(Both individual and collaborative writing will be required.)
9. in each group, produce one **Big Book** entitled, *Connecting Lives* in which each biography is represented.

Procedures

Each Student Will:

1. read and discuss, in class, excerpts from biographies and/or autobiographies, approaching these as a literary genre.
2. have approximately 4-5 days to select a biography or autobiography to read on their own.
(All books must be approved to be sure students have found books appropriate for the assignment and their reading level.)
3. have approximately one week to ten days to read at least half of their book.
4. do double entry responses in their journals.
Example:
 - quote a line or brief passage
 - respond to this passage, write questions about it
 - describe a scene
 - comment on it, respond, question, etc.
(This technique will be modeled using the biography excerpts in literature text.)
5. after completing at least half of the reading, come to class prepared to provide the following information about the subjects of their biographies:
Name
Nationality
Birth and Death Dates
Major Accomplishment
Major Problems
(Students will write this information on 3 X 5 cards.)
6. after filling out their cards, walk about the classroom, looking at one another's cards until they find common qualities or characteristics which connect the lives of the subjects of their books.
(Students will form groups of 3 or 4. Once the groups are formed, the index cards will be stapled together and held by the teacher.)
7. continue to read and complete their biographies at home.
(Group work on the **Big Books** will begin in about a week when all students have finished their books.)
8. meet in their groups and cooperatively complete the project as outlined in the student assignment sheet.
(Rubrics for group and individual work will be discussed.)
9. assess their own work using the *Evaluation Sheet*.
(The teacher will use the same *Evaluation Sheet* to arrive at individual and group grades.)

I found this to be an ideal way to increase the amount of non-fiction that my students read while giving them the opportunity to select reading in which they had an interest.

This unit is successful because it provides for differentiated instruction in a heterogeneous class. It allows all students to participate in higher level thinking in making connections and analyzing biographies, yet it allows more advanced readers to be challenged with more difficult reading material.

All four learning standards are addressed, and students may select biographies which are connected to other learning standards in other curricular areas.

CONNECTING LIVES

Biography Unit Big Book

Group Member	Subject of Biography
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Each group will produce an oversize book entitled **Connecting Lives**. Each person in the group will be responsible for one or more pages of the book. These pages will be devoted to the subject of the biography or autobiography read by that group member. In addition, each group will write, cooperatively, a **PREFACE** which will explain how the lives of the people in the book are connected. This preface should be at least one half page long and it must be typed. The names of the group and the subjects of their books should be included on a **TITLE PAGE**. Decorate a **COVER** with appropriate pictures and words.

Each page of the book should be made of construction paper and should have the required material mounted neatly on it. All written material must be typed. All original art work should be colorful and neat. Any cut-outs or photocopied material must be neatly trimmed and securely fastened. This book will be bound and displayed.

INDIVIDUAL SECTIONS OF THE BIG BOOK MUST INCLUDE ALL OF THE FOLLOWING: (individual grade)

- _____ 1. Name of the person about whom the biography or autobiography is written.
- _____ 2. A picture of this person.
- _____ 3. Title and author, publisher and copyright date of the biography or autobiography. Use correct bibliographic form.
- _____ 4. A one page summary of the book.
- _____ 5. A quote from the beginning or first half of the book and a quote from the end of the book. Next to each quote, an explanation in a sentence or two of why this is an important quote and a response to it. (Use Response Journal.)
- _____ 6. Two obstacles or problems this individual faced and how each was overcome or faced. (This information may be included in the summary.)
- _____ 7. Two or more pictures or drawings which represent the individual symbolically. For example: A baseball for Babe Ruth or a picture of the White House for JFK. These could represent the individual's profession, talents, likes, dislikes, etc.

BIG BOOK EVALUATION SHEET

GROUP GRADE

1. COVER (5 pts.) _____

2. TITLE PAGE (5 pts.) _____

3. PREFACE (10 pts.) _____

4. GENERAL APPEARANCE (5 pts.) _____

_____ x 4 = _____

TOTAL = 25 PTS.

INDIVIDUAL GRADE

1. SUMMARY (10 pts.) _____

2. QUOTES AND RESPONSES (4 pts.) _____

3. OBSTACLES (2 pts.) _____

4. PICTURES (3 pts.) _____

5. FACTS (3 pts.) _____

6. GENERAL APPEARANCE (3 pts.) _____

_____ x 4 = _____

TOTAL = 25 PTS.

Cooperative learning has long been seen as a desirable practice in middle school. This unit gives students the opportunity to work cooperatively, yet there are specific expectations for the individual as well as the group.

Although this unit has succeeded, there are several challenges facing the teacher. Helping students find literary biographies at appropriate reading levels takes planning with the school librarian. Together, the teacher and librarian can build a collection of appropriate biographies. I discourage students from reading those slim, picture-filled biographies designed primarily for research reports and encourage books filled with memoir and personal reflection. Funding for the materials for big book production must be attended to well in advance of the actual unit, also. Finally, students will need guidance in the formation of their groups. It is essential that the students convince the teacher that their groups have a strong connecting theme.

CONNECTING LIVES - RUBRIC FOR GROUP PAGES

	4	3	2	1
COVER	Colorful, creative layout that is very neat and easy to read. Includes all req. info and pictures.	Neat, clear and colorful. Includes names of all blog subjects and some pictures.	Sloppy. Lacks information and color.	Very messy. Lacks necessary information. Unclear.
TITLE PAGE	Contains title, names of group members & books they read. Attractively typed.	Title of Big Book and names of group members. Some information about books read.	Big Book title and names of group members.	No title and/or incomplete information about group.
PREFACE	Creatively & well organized essay about how the indiv. lives are connected. Uses specific evidence to support ideas.	Clearly written essay showing how the lives are connected. Uses adequate evidence to support ideas.	Brief overview of how the lives are connected. Weak support for ideas. Gram. & sp. errors.	Unclear overview of books read. Attempts to show connections, but lacks organization and support. Many gram. & sp. errors.
APPEARANCE	Very attractive and very neat pages. Well organized.	Adequately put together. Neat.	Could be neater. Lacks interest. Poorly organized.	Messy and disorganized.

CONNECTING LIVES - RUBRIC FOR INDIVIDUAL PAGES

	4	3	2	1
SUMMARY	Clearly & creatively written to express main ideas with out retelling the whole book. Includes specific ex. of main themes.	Clearly written account of book, including main themes with adequate support.	Very brief overview of book lacking adequate support. Doesn't express main ideas of book. Some gram. errors.	Unclear account of book lacking in any specifics. Many grammatical errors.
QUOTES	Relevant quotes with thoughtful explanations and personal responses to each.	Quotes with brief explanation and some personal responses.	Brief quotes with either explanation or personal response.	Only one quote. Lacks explanation and/or responses.
OBSTACLES	Details of two significant obstacles & specific ways these were overcome.	Brief description of 2 obstacles and how each was overcome.	Only one obstacle described.	Incomplete information.
PICTURES	More than 3 clear, colorful, artfully arranged and securely attached pictures.	Two or three clear pictures securely attached.	Two or fewer pictures poorly attached and/or trimmed. Unclear.	Insufficient and/or inappropriate pictures, poorly secured. Unclear.
FACTS	Name of individual and all bibliographic information in correct form.	All facts included. Some errors in form.	Some facts omitted and/or in incorrect form.	
APPEARANCE	Colorful, creative layout that is very attractive and easy to read.	Neat, attractive layout. Easy to understand.	Lacks neatness, minimal color. Lacks clarity.	Messy, unclear layout. Not attractive. Falling apart.

INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL



Linda Brent, a black girl born and raised as a slave, experienced more pain than most of us will experience in our whole lives. As a young child, she lived with a kind relation, her brother, and her loving grandmother. When her mother died, she was sold to the Flint family. Her rightful owner was her young daughter. As Linda grew older she discovered that her master, Dr. Flint, was trying to sexually harass her. She became frightened and angry, and tried to get her master to sell her to a man who wanted to marry her. She did it by bearing two children with another man. Despite her efforts her master refused to sell her. Even after hearing of the horrible punishments inflicted upon slaves, she decided to run away. In an attempt to fool her master she stayed close by his hiding with her friend, then with her grandmother. Dr. Flint became desperate to find her, and took many trips to New York in search of her. He also put her children in jail to persuade her to return, but their birth father bought them and gave them to Linda's grandmother. Linda remained in hiding for seven years. In the end of the book Linda Brent took a mark-brand slug to receive.

LINDA BRENT
New Introduction & Notes by Walter Teller

3

In the following pages you will read about the lives of four heroic people, who played a significant role in uncovering a world of discrimination. These young adults we read about had one main thing in common; they were different. They grew up in a cruel world, which forced its hate upon them.

Ruthie Bolton, a seven year old black girl, was beaten frequently because she reminded her grandfather of her grandmother. Linda Brent was born and raised a slave. When she reached her teens she was frequently sexually harassed. Tony Johnson was abused sexually, mentally and physically. He also had to cope with HIV. Helen Keller was blind and deaf. She became difficult to handle as she got older and more frustrated with her disabilities. Many people were afraid of her because she was so different.

All of these young adults were abused for different reasons. Ruthie Bolton was abused because she was a memory of her late grandmother. Linda Brent was abused because of her sex and race. Tony Johnson was abused because he was the result on an unplanned pregnancy. Helen Keller was abused because she was different.

People discriminate against others because they are different. They don't realize that we are all the same on the inside, we all have feelings and can hurt just as much.