Social Studies That Sticks

How to Bring Content and Concepts to Life

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To my students at SMASH,

and always

Durnford King

Contents

Exploration

Discovering More About First-Person Documents

Once you succeed in stimulating your students' curiosity about how people lived in other times and places, it would be excellent to give them some hands-on time with first-person primary sources. The goal in this Exploration section is to acquaint your students with a variety of documents and the people who took the time to record some aspect of their lives.

Firsthand accounts of any period in history are so plentiful that the hardest part will be choosing. Like other primary source documents, they're widely available on the Internet. Simply Google using keywords such as *diary, journal, letters, historic,* and you'll have hundreds of choices. Digital History (www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/) is a huge website with a major section that includes journals and diaries. For one-stop convenience, you can go to Repository of Primary Sources (www.uidaho.edu/special-collections/Other.Repositories.html) for a listing of more than five thousand websites describing holdings of manuscripts, archives, rare books, historical photographs, and other primary sources for the research scholar. There may also be some useful excerpts in your textbook.

While you yourself may spend hours looking at primary sources on line, the most practical approach for your classroom may be to print out copies of interesting documents that your kids can examine, compare and contrast, even annotate as part of their exploration. Try to find selections that will appeal to different student interests—diaries from children caught up in wars, journals from botanists combing American's unspoiled forests for plant samples, letters from prison, travel journals from the Westward movement, letters from the Court of Spain, speeches by presidents, union leaders and student activists. Then guide your students through their interrogations so that they learn to extract every morsel of information using curiosity and critical thinking skills.

First-Person Primary Source Documents: A Sampler

Here's a list of first-person documents you can locate simply by clicking your mouse.

Diaries: Diaries are day-to-day records of events. They're frequently terse and practical, containing little more than lists of expenditures, miles traveled, chores completed, weather conditions, animal sightings, and meals. For example, this 1847 wagon-train diary of James Coon contains many entries like this: *Thu Apr 22nd, 6 miles to Clinton. Cold rane. Fri Apr 23rd. 6 miles to Parris. Pleasant.* Diaries may also function as a listener for the writer who pours out intimate, stream-of-consciousness conversations that may never be read by another living soul. Some

writers think of their diaries as a special friend—Anne Frank called her diary Kitty.

Journals: A journal is usually written less regularly than a diary to record events that strike the writer as significant or interesting. They have a certain quality of storytelling in them that is often missing in diaries, but lack the big-picture hindsight of memoirs or autobiographies. Journals have a direct, in-the-moment perspective. Blogs are the electronic version of paper journals with the advantage of being instantly published.

Travel Journals: For thousands of years, curiosity seekers, outcasts, merchants, and pilgrims have been leaving home and returning with colorful stories for envious homebodies. The most serious brand of traveler—explorers—brought back artifacts, maps and navigational information, diseases, and treasure. Many of these footsore wanderers took notes in diaries or journals that were subsequently shared or published. As a result we can read about Ewart Grogan, the first person to walk the length of Africa from the Cape to Cairo in 1898. You can read the reverse journey, from Cairo to Cape Town, written by Paul Theroux in 2003. Like all travel journals, they give details about the climate, geography, local inhabitants, flora and fauna, cities, and cultures.

Letters: Human beings have been sending each other letters for a long time—in China, the same service has been delivering mail continuously for over two thousand years. And while the invention of the telephone threatened to relegate letter writing to a dying art, emails and blogs seem to have revived the urge to correspond in writing. Letters are unique in that they have an interpersonal intention not found in diaries or journals. Many famous letters chronicle turning points in history, and thousands are available on the Internet, including Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous Letter from a Birmingham Jail.

Interviews: Recorded interviews are an excellent way to bring living history into your classroom, as they allow students to hear the actual voice of the person. They're a livelier form of primary source document that provide tone of voice, accents, and emotions, not just words printed on paper. Many interviews are now available on the Web. For sound bites from the civil rights movement, visit *Voices of the Civil Rights Era* (www.voicesofcivilrights.org).

Autobiography and Memoir: The word *autobiography* means self-life-writing. This type of writing differs from a journal or diary because the writer has been through his or her life, or a good portion of it, and is looking back over the whole. It's the story of a life, told from the inside out. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* is a classic piece of Americana originally written for Franklin's son William. The work portrays life in Philadelphia, as well as shrewd observations on the literature, philosophy, and religion of the time.

Oral Histories: Oral histories are the oldest method of capturing the history of a group, originating when tribes designated people to pass their stories down from one generation to the next. This is also one of the most modern techniques, adopted in the 1940s with the advent of tape recorders. Oral history is not folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor. It is a systematic collection of living people's testimony about their experiences as participants in past events and ways of life. There is an excellent collection of slave narratives recorded after the Civil War that captures daily life before emancipation. See *American Slave Narratives: An Online Anthology* @ http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/wpa/wpahome.html.

Wills: Wills may be the last documents people create before passing on, yet the writing is typically impersonal, more like a shopping list than a good-bye. But wills can provide students with valuable information about material culture, class, family size, personal relationships, and what people valued enough to bequeath to the next generation.

Speeches: Reading speeches can give your students a front row seat at some of the pivotal moments in the life of a leader—be it a queen, union organizer, or tribal chief. Speeches tend to synthesize in a very compact and compelling way something that's very importance to the speaker, whether it is a call to arms, the redirection of a nation, or an anguished farewell, as in the last speech of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, when he declared: "Hear me, my Chiefs. I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever" (Beal 1963).

First-Person Documents as Informants

Once you have gathered an intriguing selection of first-person documents, you'll need to give your students plenty of getting-to-know-you time. If the document is antique or from another culture, their first encounter can be akin to listening to someone speaking a foreign language that you have studied but never road-tested, so they may need to do a bit of deciphering before they can concentrate on the content. The following activities provide examples of strategies that allow students to practice decoding first person documents.

Letters as Informants

Letters are a unique form of personal narrative because they represent one side of a written conversation. Readers glean details about daily life and the current situation of the writer, but they also gain insights about the person to whom the letter is addressed. The tone of the letter, the questions, and the requests hint at the relationship between the correspondents and the condition of the world in

which they live. You may have students in your class who've never written an authentic letter to a real correspondent, so it will be interesting for them to read the following letter to the then First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, in 1936, from a child who describes the reality of her life during the Depression.

> Nov. 6, 1936
>
> Dear Mrs. Roosevelt
>
> I am writing to you for some of your old soiled dresses if you have any. As I am a poor girl who has to stay out of school. On account of dresses & slips and a coat. I am in the seventh grade but I have to stay out of school because I have no books or clothes to ware. I am in need of dresses & slips and a coat very bad. If you have any soiled clothes that you don't want to ware I would be very glad to get them. But please do not let the news paper reporters get hold of this in any way and I will keep it from geting out here so there will be no one else to get hold of it. But do not let my name get out in the paper. I am thirteen years old.
>
> Yours Truly,
> Miss L. H.
> Gravette, Ark.
> R #3
> c/o A. H.

Read the letter and ask:

- What does this letter tell you about living in Arkansas in 1936?
- What does it tell you about this child's life?
- Why was the child concerned about her name being revealed?
- How do you think this child felt about the First Lady?
- How do you think Mrs. Roosevelt felt when she got a letter like this?
- What were economic conditions like in the United States during the 1930s?
- If you lived during the Depression, how would your life have been different from the way you live now?

Activity

Your students may not need clothes to wear to school, but they probably have some concerns that they could share with the current First Lady—about the environment, war, peace, their neighborhood, family, unemployment, or education. If they decide to send letters to the First Lady, they'll probably receive a reply from her staff. It's quite exciting for kids to open an envelope with a return address from the White House. Send their letters to the First Lady at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, DC.

Diaries as Informants

Some diaries are written in a staccato style, almost like shorthand, but they're packed with details of events and daily life. So, while they reveal little about the writer, there is much to learn about the context in which they were written. The following passage describes the reality of trekking across the United States to pursue a dream of wealth in California's gold fields.

> Tuesday April 30, 1850
> Started the morning about ½ past 5a.m. Captain's thigh is better. Went about 10 miles and camped on account of high winds. At 9a.m. saw a dead horse. Very cold. Very large prairies. Don't like the country. Come to a log house where there is 3 men. They have 2 barrels of liquor to accommodate the emigrants. Killed a rattlesnake near one of our tents. Passed a dead horse. 12 p.m. Struct tent. Went 13 miles. Land rolling prairie. Pitched tent at 5p.m. Saw elk horns along the road and some deer. Wind high.
>
> *The Gold Rush Diary of George Bonniwell*

War Diaries of Two Children

Many people write diaries when confined to a small space, sometimes by circumstances beyond their control. Their diaries are the place where they can safely reveal their thoughts and emotions about their plight. The following excerpts were written by children caught in two different conflicts, fifty years and a continent apart. Yet they have many similarities. These entries remind your students that children are eyewitnesses and often victims of historic conflicts and calamities, in this case the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

> **The War in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992–1995**
> That's my life! The life of an innocent eleven-year-old schoolgirl!! A schoolgirl without a school, without the fun and excitement of school. A child without games, without friends, without the sun, without the birds, without nature, without fruit, without chocolate or sweets, with just a little powdered milk. In short, a child without a childhood. A wartime child.
>
> *—Zlata Filipovic, Sarajevo, Bosnia (1994)*

> **Japanese Internment Camp**
> We now have oil stoves in our homes and school. But it does little good because you have to be near the stove in order to receive any heat. By keeping all the windows closed the room may become warm, but we were warned against it. Several people have been sent to the hospital because they did not leave any windows open—they inhaled the fume which comes out of the stove. In school the stove is in one corner and I am in the opposite corner so the warmth does not come near me. It certainly

> took a long time to get the stoves because of too much red tape involved. We still have no books to study out of. We are taught the progressive way. It is like a lecture form. The teacher talks and we take notes. When test time comes we have to study our notes. I hope by next semester we will be able to study from books.
>
> —*Louise Ogawa, from Poston, Colorado, Internment Camp, January 6, 1942*

Read these passages and ask:

- What is similar about the experiences of these two children?
- What is different?
- What did these children miss in their lives? Why?
- How do you think they feel about their situations?
- What would you ask these children if you could meet them?
- What do you wonder about children involved in wars?
- Have you read about any other children caught in wars?
- How could you find out more?

Activity

Through the Library of Congress, you can view "Suffering Under a Great Injustice: Ansel Adams' Photographs of Japanese-American Internment at Manzanar" (http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/anseladams/). This collection features 209 photographs taken by Adams in 1943. They portray the Japanese Americans who were relocated from their homes during World War II and interned in the Manzanar War Relocation Center in California.

Wills as Informants

Students rarely get a chance to see contemporary wills and adults may be reluctant to discuss them, but there are many historic wills on the Internet, including those of Adolph Hitler and Elvis Presley. The following excerpt is from Will's will. Shakespeare had money and some interesting items that he bequeathed to his family members and the poor.

> In the name of god Amen I William Shackspeare, of Stratford upon Avon in the countrie of Warr., gent., in perfect health and memorie, God be praysed, doe make and ordayne this my last will and testament in manner and forme followeing, **Item**, I gyve and bequeath unto the poore of Stratford aforesaied tenn poundes **Item**, I gyve and bequeath unto my saied sister Jone xx.li. and all my wearing apparrell, to be paied and delivered within one yeare after my deceas; and I doe will and devise unto her *the house* with thappurtenaunces in Stratford, wherein she dwelleth, for her naturall lief, under the yearlie rent of xij.d. **Item**, *I gyve unto my wief my second best bed with the furniture*, **Item**, I gyve and bequeath to my saied daughter Judith my broad silver gilt bole. All the rest of my goodes, chattel, leases, plate, jewels, and

> household stuffe whatsoever, after my dettes and legasies paied, and my funerall expenses dischardged, I give, devise, and bequeath to my sonne in lawe, John Hall gent., and my daughter Susanna, his wief, whom I ordaine and make executours of this my last will and testament.

Read the will and ask:

- What did you learn about William Shakespeare from this document?
- What did you learn about his family?
- Why do you think he said he was in perfect health and memory?
- What did you learn about the kinds of things that people valued in 1616, when this will was written?
- Was there anything that seemed unusual to you about the will?
- How do you think wills are different now?
- What else did you notice that is different from documents written today?

Interviews as Informants

Recorded interviews are like having a guest speaker without all the time-consuming arrangements. Plus, the recorded voice can be replayed over and over until students extract every bit of useable information. Many interviews are now available on the Internet, including conversations with presidents, war veterans, musicians, artists, protesters, inventors, and everyday people talking about life in their hometowns. For sound bites from the civil rights movement, visit *Voices of the Civil Rights Era* at www.voicesofcivilrights.org. After listening to an interview, ask:

- What did you learn about this person?
- What did you learn about his or her family?
- What did you learn about his or her job?
- What were some important or tragic events in his or her life?
- Was there anything unusual about the way this person lived or died?

Activity

If you were a journalist chosen to interview this person, what questions would you ask? Stage a mock interview in which students take turns being interviewed, using information gleaned from historic documents to answer the questions.

Autobiographies as Informants

Autobiographies can play a key role in your social studies program, either as class sets, independent reading for individuals, or as read-aloud books that you share

with your students. Consider books that have been produced as books-on-tape to bring in another voice, particularly if the book is read by the author. An excellent example of this genre is *Stride Toward Freedom* (1958), written by Martin Luther King Jr. It is his story of the Montgomery bus boycott, 381 days of peaceful resistance that became the turning point in the civil rights movement.

Read the autobiography and ask:

- What did you learn about civil rights laws from this autobiography?
- What did you learn about how people can challenge injustice?
- What would you have done if you were in Martin Luther King Jr.'s position?
- What would you have done if you were living in Montgomery at the time of the boycott?
- What skills did Martin Luther King Jr. have that helped him succeed?
- Who helped Martin Luther King Jr. succeed?
- If Martin Luther King Jr. was living today, what do you think he would be doing?
- How could we be more like Martin Luther King Jr.?

Keeping Track of Who's Who

When I was studying the Renaissance with my students, we kept bumping into new names—friends of Michelangelo, another Medici, an obscure mathematician. So I designated one bulletin board as *Who's Who in the Renaissance*. Whenever we came across a new name, we'd add it to the list, along with pictures, etchings, letters, paintings, and documents. This device creates something like a class picture or yearbook of the era you're studying.

Once you cue your students to hunt for people who have valuable things to say about your social studies theme, you can use a similar idea to keep track. Let your students know that as they identify the names and faces of the important players, or locate diaries, journals, or letters that provide information, they need to add their research to the *Who's Who* board. They can post pictures, photographs, or downloads from the Internet. Challenge them to decide how to organize the material, perhaps using categories such as writers, leaders, explorers, rulers, artists, thinkers, and rogues.

Writing Prompts

First-person narratives are excellent starting points for writing prompts because of the human-to-human connection. Students can relate to people who are lonely, frustrated, trying to solve a problem, or celebrating a triumph. Even a few sentences lifted from a longer document can stimulate rich, thoughtful writing about social studies. When you're constructing writing prompts to help your students

think about social studies, it's important to use verbs that explicitly convey the purpose of the writing task. The following prompts can be modified to elicit students' thoughts and assess their comprehension of first person documents.

- *Explain* how wagon trains crossed the mountains, using information from this travel journal.
- *Tell* about the last days of Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce tribe.
- *Defend* Harriet Tubman against the charge that she was breaking the law when she helped slaves escape to freedom.
- Write a statement to *persuade* a judge that Rosa Parks should not be arrested for sitting in the front of the bus.
- Use the information from this diary to *describe* the dangers pioneers faced when crossing the plains.
- *Summarize* the most important ideas Hammurabi included in his laws.
- *Define slavery* and give examples of how and where it is practiced in the twenty-first century.
- *Express* your feelings about the plight of children in internment camps based on their diaries and letters.
- *Evaluate* the success of the bus boycott lead by civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. based on his autobiography, *Stride Toward Freedom*.
- *Analyze* the skills needed to organize the bus boycott in Montgomery.

Show Me: Checking Comprehension

When you're reading first-person documents, it's vitally important to incorporate comprehension checks to make sure your kids are pulling the critical information from these sources. The standard approach is to ask questions, such as *What was it like to be a soldier with George Washington during their winter at Valley Forge?* The problem with this approach is that it's slow—only one reply at a time. The other students are in suspended animation—unraveling a sweater cuff or prospecting for lint to pass the time.

Show Me is an alternative approach to checking comprehension that lets your kids move, gesture, and make faces to show what they understand about a text or story. You tap directly into kinesthetic and spatial intelligence, and all your students can respond at once. That includes your second language learners, who can demonstrate their receptive language levels without ever saying a word. It's simple. Just say something like, "Show me what the soldiers were doing during their winter at Valley Forge." Appropriate responses would be huddling together, shivering, building fires, cupping their hands around a warm drink, lying on the ground moaning and dying. Kids move, mime, gesture and mug—all dramatic skills—with the single purpose of showing what they know. It's so much fun

that they return to the text with increased focus, waiting for the next round of Show Me. Repeat these pauses at irregular intervals during the reading. Here are some other examples of prompts:

- Show me how the main character felt when . . .
- Show me what the boy did when he saw Queen Elizabeth for the first time.
- Show me what happened to Marco Polo during the wind storm in the desert.
- Show me the shape of the Coliseum.
- Show me how you think the judge looked during Ethel Rosenberg's testimony. What about the jury?

Reading history is good for all of us. If you know history, you know that there is no such thing as a self-made man or self-made woman. We are shaped by people we have never met.
—David McCullough

This brand of drama is spontaneous and takes a matter of seconds. All of your students can be active and creative, but they're focused on your learning goals, not on performance for its own sake. At the end of the lesson, you can work together to develop a list of verbs that describe their actions, and post it as part of your word bank.

Inquiry

Digging Deeper into First-Person Documents

While studying the Renaissance with my students, I decided it was the perfect time to take a biographical approach to social studies, since that period is loaded with high profile, heavily documented superstars. First, we concentrated on the setting—architecture, city life, clothing, diet. We tried to imagine the atmosphere of the times—the foment of new ideas, the urge to explore, and the scramble for power. Finally, it was time for them to fan out into the crowd and get to know one Renaissance figure. In effect, to go from a casual handshake to a serious conversation.

Any time you're studying an issue or an era full of personalities, your students have a chance to get to know one person in depth. Certain periods spring to mind as likely candidates—the Revolutionary period and the civil rights movement both have a rich trove of dynamic characters. There are also many outstanding leaders your students should meet among contemporary Native Americans and social justice activists. Your students can wring a huge amount of crisp, detailed information out of first-person narratives simply by asking thoughtful questions. Think of this process as a blind date with a document.

How to Make First-Person Documents Talk: Blind Dating

We all know that the goal of a blind date is not to have fun. It's all about information. In a few short hours, maybe a cocktail or two, you need to size up the person you've just met to decide if there's a relationship in your future or it's back to solitary meals in front of the television. In this section, you're going to teach your students to take a primary source document on a blind date.

First, they'll just give the document a close look. This is usually the stark terror moment of an actual blind date, but first-person documents rarely generate that level of anxiety. The getting-to-know-you phase follows as they consider, *What am I seeing? Hearing? What's being said? What does it mean? What are the interests and issues motivating this person? What else is going on that may be an influence?* And finally, *what do I think about this person? Do I want to know more? How would I find out?* Or in the case of a spectacularly bad blind date, *how soon can I feign a migraine or induce projectile vomiting so I can get the hell out of here?*

Extracting all that information on a real blind date can be as easy as lending an ear if the object of your curiosity is nervous or narcissistic, babbling on without drawing a breath. But you can't count on that level of conversation from a shy person, and certainly not one who's dead. So as good blind-daters, your students need to be armed with an abundant supply of penetrating questions. Here's a four-step questioning process to make first-person documents talk.

What Is It?

- What type of document is this? Letter, diary, journal?
- When and where was it written? What are the clues?
- Is it handwritten or machine printed? What does that suggest?
- What do you notice about the typeface or design?
- Can you identify the author?
- What do you know or can you guess about the author? Age, profession, interests, education?
- What type of person do you think the writer is? What words tell that?
- Do you think the author is writing for himself or herself or to others?
- Can you identify the audience?
- How could you find out more?

What Does It Say?

- Who or what is the story or information about?
- What do the words say?
- What do they mean?
- What's unusual about the language?

- List any important facts you learned from the document.
- Does the author have first- or secondhand knowledge about what he or she has written?

What's the Point?

- Why was this document written?
- Was it written for a public audience or a specific group?
- Is it personal or for a few people?
- How do you know who it is for?
- What does the author hope to do with this document? (Inform? Argue? Persuade?)
- What phrases or words indicate the author's intent?
- What biases might the writer have?
- Why might the writer have that bias?
- What ideas, words, or phrases suggest bias?

What Else Do I Want to Know?

- What do I wonder about this document?
- What else do I want to know about the author?
- What guesses (inferences) can I make from this about the author?
- What other primary or secondary sources might help answer my questions?
- How can I find information on the internet?
- Who still knows about this event?
- Who else could give me more information?

Meet Annie Burton: A Conversation with an Autobiography

The first time you model this blind-date inquiry process, it's a good idea to start with something short, captivating, and easily accessible to all students. I've chosen a very brief but moving paragraph from an autobiography, *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days* (1909) by Annie L. Burton. The entire book can be read on the Internet, but with four sentences, you can introduce your students to Annie as a child, and stimulate their imagine about what it was like to live under the institution of slavery. But first, a bit of background.

Annie Burton was born into slavery in 1858 on a plantation outside of Clayton, Alabama, and raised by her mistress after her mother ran away. She grew up during the Civil War and remembers fondly her early days on the plantation. After Emancipation, Burton's mother returned for her children. Annie was hired as a nanny by Mrs. E. M. Williams, who taught her how to read and write. After her mother died, Annie took responsibility for her three younger siblings and moved to Boston. In 1888, she married, and together she and her hus-

band ran a boarding house. She began taking evening classes at the Franklin Evening School, and the headmaster, Frank Guild, suggested that each of the students write their life story. Burton embraced his idea and produced her autobiography.

The following excerpt is taken from Section One, called "Recollections of a Happy Life," in which she describes life on the plantation:

> We children had no supper, and only a little piece of bread or something of the kind in the morning. Our dishes consisted of one wooden bowl, and oyster shells were our spoons. This bowl served about fifteen children, and often the dogs and the ducks and the peafowl had a dip in it. Sometimes we had buttermilk and bread in our bowl, sometimes greens or bones.

In preparation for this activity, you may want to download a picture of Annie Burton from the Internet as well as some images of plantation life. Give your students copies of the paragraph from *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days* and have them read and discuss it in pairs or small groups. Then let the questions begin.

What Is It?

- What type of document is this?
- What can you guess about the author?
- What type of person do you think the writer is? What words tell that?
- Do you think the author is writing for herself or to others?
- Can you identify the audience?
- How could you find out more?

What Does It Say?

- Who or what is the story or information about?
- What do the words tell about this childhood in the south?
- Why do you think this section of the book is called "Recollections of a Happy Life"?
- How does it sound to you? Why might she think it was happy?
- List any important facts you learned from the document.
- Does the author have first- or secondhand knowledge that she has written?

What's the Point?

- What do you think the author hoped to do with this autobiography (Inform? Argue? Persuade?)?
- What do you think the effect was when people from the North read this?
- Why do you think it was important that Annie Burton wrote her autobiography?

What Else Do I Want to Know?

- What do I wonder about this document?
- What else do I want to know about Annie Burton?
- What guesses (inferences) can I make from this about the author?
- How can I find information on the Internet?
- Who else could give me more information?

On Their Own

You'll need to model this inquiry process numerous times with a variety of documents until students have acquired an appetite for inquiry. Gradually, they'll gain the skills and confidence to tackle documents on their own. Each time you lead students through this comprehensive thinking activity, you're reinforcing strategies they can use across the curriculum—in literature, economics, ethics, for substantive essays and standardized tests. Paramount among these are the abilities to extract information and interpret its meaning, draw conclusions or inferences from evidence, and compile, organize, and evaluate information.

One way to encourage investigative independence in your students is to introduce the element of choice into your curriculum. As you teach your way through any era, you teach and discuss general information with the whole class, but let your students choose one personality from the period that they want to investigate on their own. For example, if you're studying the Renaissance, your students may be interested in the writings of Laura Cereta, a fifteenth-century feminist. There is a summary of her letters on the Internet, in which she writes about the life and roles of women in her time and culture (www.pinn.net/~sunshine/book-sum/cereta.html). Other persons of interest include: the architects Brunelleschi and Inigo Jones; the artists Sofonisban Anguisola, Lavinia Fontana, Artemesia Gentileschi, Botticelli, Ghirlandiao, da Vinci; the writers Dante, Petrarch, Francis Bacon; the leaders Isabella d'Este, Elizabeth I, Lorenzo de Medici and William the Silent; the scientists Copernicus, Galileo, Paracelsus, and Pedro Nunes.

They'll need to scour text documents for information, but they can also extract valuable information from images, objects, and biographies. And remember, this isn't about becoming a Thomas Tallis expert, just for the sake of being an expert. Esoteric knowledge is interesting, but it's not the goal. The point is to hone in on a research target, gather relevant information, and synthesize it so they can bring that person to life for a listener. Then they've mastered what it takes to learn anything they want, from motorcycle repair to gourmet cooking—and that's the goal. Eventually you'll set aside time for them to present their expert findings to the class, and everyone gets smarter.

Guiding Questions for Biographical Research

Students can use the following questions to guide their research and shape their presentations:

- What attracted you to this person?
- Name three of this person's major accomplishments.
- What advantages and disadvantages did your person have over other people who lived at the time?
- What point of view, attitudes, and values does your person have? Be able to explain them.
- What's one quotable quote from (or about) this person that will help your classmates know him or her better?
- What do you admire most about this person?
- What mistakes did this person make? What was the result?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of this person?
- Do you think this person would have been a success if he or she lived in the twenty-first century?

Annotated Visual Biography Time Line

Students with strong visual skills may want to create a time line of the person they've researched, using sketches, collage, drawings, or images from the Internet. They should include personal accomplishments and important events taking place in the surrounding world that influenced their subject. They can annotate the time line with keywords and phrases to capture the important information about their person.

Annotated Life Story Map

Students interested in the visual arts and narrative can show the main events and locations in their person's life using a map format. Drawings, collage images, text, dates, and geographical details indicate the highlights. Students annotate the map with keywords and phrases to capture the important information about their subject.

Using Biographies to Inquire About Social Studies

In addition to first-person primary documents, reading biographies either as a class text or a read-aloud selection, builds content knowledge while exposing students to the art of good storytelling. Biographies are often superior to primary source documents because they provide in-depth information about many aspects of a person's life not found in primary sources. Most biographers go well beyond

simply retelling the high points of a life, letting readers eavesdrop on thoughts and conversations that reveal a character's motives, fears, disappointments, and triumphs. Although most biographies are about famous people, living or dead, the life of an ordinary person can also provide essential information about a specific time and place. Biographies let readers see:

- The human side of history. The setting and characters provide a context for understanding important events.
- How real people handle challenges and how their actions influence other people and history.
- That characters demonstrate virtues such as courage, persistence, honesty, and respect for human rights, providing role models for readers.
- Effective strategies for handling peer pressure and opposition by reading about situations that the character handled successfully.
- How people use their beliefs as a foundation to improve their world.

The following are the three approaches that authors take to telling a person's life story, and each delivers important factual information embedded in prose pictures that increase comprehension and retention.

1. *Authentic biographies* are the purest form of history stories. The author documents all the facts using eyewitness accounts, written documents, letters, diaries, and more recently, audio and videotape recordings.
2. *Fictionalized biographies* are also based on careful research, but the author turns primary source documents into drama by imagining conversations that the main character might have had related to the action.
3. *Biographical fiction* is a variation where the author begins with the known accomplishments of the subject of the biography, then works more in the style of a novelist to fill in the blanks of the story using invented dialogue and fictional secondary characters. These books tell what the characters might have been doing when they weren't performing memorable feats.

There are countless biographies that can take your students to any period in history without a passport. Just ask a good children's librarian and soon your arms will be stuffed with great titles. But here's one book you simply mustn't miss—*We Were There, Too: Young People in U.S. History* by Phillip Hoose (2001). This unique book describes the roles that young people played in history, from stories about the boys who sailed with Columbus to today's young activists. Based largely on primary sources—first-person accounts, journals, and interviews—it contains more than seventy young people from diverse cultures. Your students will be entertained and enlightened, but mainly they'll be thrilled to discover true-life tales about kids that never appear in the history books. The author, Phil Hoose, is a

warm and gentle man who truly loves kids and history. The book is crammed with anecdotes, and it is written in a style that will have your students fighting over who gets it next. Invest in several copies and tell parents that it makes a dandy gift.

If you have second-language learners, capitalize on their visual intelligence by choosing picture books that convey important content through illustrations and simple condensed text. Preview the content by showing the pictures, summarizing action, and identifying the major characters. After reading, have students draw pictures, make lists of relevant words, or retell a part of the story that they like.

Dialogues During and After Reading Biographies

The following questions can be used as the starting point for class discussions or as journal prompts.

- In what ways was this person's life different from most other people?
- What adjectives would you use to describe this person?
- If you lived at the same time as this person, do you think you would have been friends?
- What characteristic did this person have that helped him or her survive and overcome obstacles?
- Do you agree with most of this person's decisions? What would you have done differently?
- What lessons did you learn from this person's life?
- List the skills this person had that helped him or her succeed. Put a check in front of any skills that you possess. Now make a second list of additional skills that you have.