

BOOKNOTES

EDUCATORS GUIDE

picture book biographies

Grades preK–4

a note to teachers

There is no better way to connect students with history than by reading the life stories of intriguing people. A well-written biography has the same elements as any great story: characters that face challenges and difficulties, situations that excite and inspire, and narratives that urge the reader to keep turning the pages until the story's conclusion.

Picture book biographies illustrated with colorful, engaging pictures can be read to children as easily as a favorite fiction story. More advanced readers will marvel at the images that accompany the moving stories of legendary heroes, such as Joan of Arc or Christopher Columbus. They will delight in discovering how ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary things, such as how a young boy from Philadelphia named Ted Geisel grew up to become a writer named Dr. Seuss.

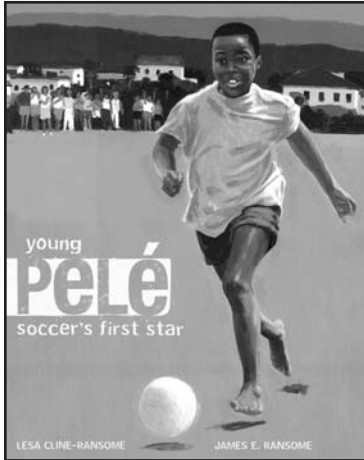
in the classroom

Below are some ideas for incorporating picture book biographies into the curriculum:

- Share with students that the word *biography* literally means “life writing” and comes from the roots *bio* and *graphia*. Have them try their hand at writing a picture book biography by choosing a person of interest to research and write about. Students can work independently to write and illustrate a biography, or work with a partner. Have plenty of picture book biographies in your classroom to use as models when the children begin their writing and illustrations.
- Create a separate space in your classroom library devoted to picture book biographies. Keep it stocked with a wide range of texts that will appeal to your class, and be sure to include books written at varying reading levels so that all students may enjoy this genre.
- Schedule time to read aloud a new picture book biography each week (even older students will look forward to this weekly foray into the past). Use this time as an opportunity to tie in to specific themes of study, or to celebrate months that are devoted to specific groups, such as Black History Month or Women’s History Month.



Young Pelé: Soccer's First Star



Schwartz & Wade
HC: 978-0-375-83599-5 (0-375-83599-7)
GLB: 978-0-375-93599-2 (0-375-93599-1)

about the book

Some of today's most popular celebrities are sports stars. As wealth, fame, and acclaim has come to define what it means to be a professional athlete, it is easy to overlook the humble beginnings from which many of the world's most successful sports figures hailed, and the obstacles they had to overcome to rise to the pinnacle of their professions. In *Young Pelé: Soccer's First Star*, readers will meet Edson do Nascimento, a young Brazilian boy who dreams about his one true passion: soccer. Through hard work, drive, perseverance, and practice, Edson grows up to become an international sports superstar known the world over by a single name: Pelé. Pelé became an inspiration to children all over the globe, and this story of his beginnings will inspire readers as well.

vocabulary use of language

Ask students to write down unfamiliar words and define them by taking clues from the context of the book.

Such words may include:
imaginary, snickers, huddled, independence, potholed, clutching, legendary, sponsoring, unofficial, lush, harmony.

questions for discussion

- In school Edson often daydreams about becoming a star soccer player. How does Edson's daydreaming help him to fulfill his dream? Do you think Edson's teachers were right in the ways they chose to discipline him for ignoring his studies? Explain. Why is imagining yourself in a position of success or accomplishment an important step in reaching a goal or fulfilling a dream?
- Even though Edson's family is poor, his father is able to support his dream of playing professional soccer. How does he do this? Is it important to have fancy equipment and uniforms to excel at a sport? Explain. What character traits did Edson possess that enabled him to become the best soccer player in his village, and eventually in the world?

curriculum connections

Language Arts—A proverb is a saying that carries an important meaning or imparts a basic truth, such as, "The foot of the poor man doesn't have a size." What does this proverb, spoken by Pelé's coach, mean in the context of the story?

Social Studies—Brazil is the largest country in South America. Work with students to explore this fascinating country, home to the Amazon rain forest, Rio de Janeiro, and of course, Pelé.

internet resources

Answers.com

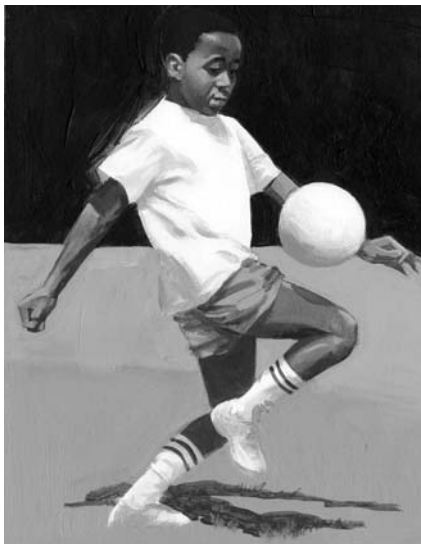
www.answers.com/topic/pel

A comprehensive page from Answers.com with information about the life and career of Pelé. Also includes links to additional sites devoted to Pelé.

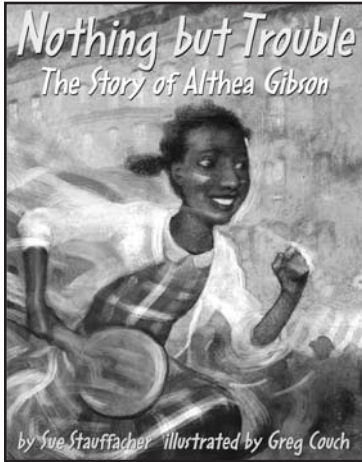
Time for Kids

www.timeforkids.com/TFK/specials/goplaces/0,12405,104221,00.html

This page features information on Brazil.



Nothing but Trouble: The Story of Althea Gibson



Alfred A. Knopf
HC: 978-0-375-83408-0 (0-375-83408-7)
GLB: 978-0-375-93408-7 (0-375-93408-1)

about the book

How did a wild tomboy from Harlem, a girl many people saw as “nothing but trouble,” become the first African American tennis player to compete and win the prestigious Wimbledon lawn tennis title? In this inspirational biography, readers meet one of the 20th-century’s true sports superstars: Althea Gibson. Born with natural athletic ability, boundless drive, and indomitable spirit, Gibson learned to harness and channel her gifts to reach the top of a sport that excluded people of color from competing for its top honors. With the help of a mentor who saw in her “pure possibility,” readers will root for Althea as she breaks the color barrier of professional tennis and forever changes the world of professional sports.

vocabulary use of language

Ask students to write down unfamiliar words and define them by taking clues from the context of the book.

Such words may include:
tomboy, nickin’, possibility, scrounged, ritziest, convinced, society, opponent, seasoned, coveted, honor, satisfying.

questions for discussion

- What traits and qualities did Althea Gibson possess that made people consider her “nothing but trouble”? How did those same traits propel her to tennis greatness?
- What is a mentor? If Althea Gibson did not have a mentor like Buddy Walker, do you think she would have been able to become a world champion at Wimbledon? Why are mentors so important in the lives of children?
- What does Buddy Walker mean when he says the following to Althea: “Are you going to play your game or are you going to let your game play you?”

curriculum connections

Physical Education—After reading *Nothing but Trouble*, try to show footage of Althea Gibson playing tennis. Work with students on the basic strokes and rules of the game. Invite a local tennis pro from a health club to come and demonstrate how the game is played. Give students time to work on their newly acquired skills and, if possible, partner with your local parks and recreation department to start an after-school tennis clinic.

Social Studies—Work with students to start a school mentorship program in which older students mentor younger students. Mentors can read to their mentoring “buddy,” help with homework, share lunch time once or twice per week, or spend time with them after school.

internet resources

The Official Althea Gibson Web Site
www.altheagibson.com

This Web site contains a biography, images of Gibson, and information on the Althea Gibson Foundation.

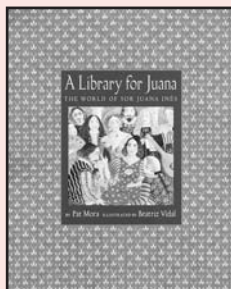
Optimist International
www.optimist.org/default.cfm?content=jooi/read2.htm

This Web site explains a special program called Kids Mentoring Kids and offer suggestions on how the program can be replicated in your school.



classroom connections

FOR MORE FASCINATING PICTURE BOOK BIOGRAPHIES



A Library for Juana: The World of Sor Juan Inés

How did Juana's early sense of curiosity lead her to crave books? Why is the word *why* such an important word? Discuss Juana's words: "Why decorate the outside of my head if the inside is empty?"

Work with students to organize a school-wide book drive to collect used children's books for needy schools, children's hospitals, day-care centers, and families in need. Work with a local literacy organization for help in finding recipients for the books that students collect.

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-80643-8 (0-375-80643-1) Spanish edition PB: 978-0-440-41765-1 (0-440-41765-1)
Spanish edition GLB: 978-0-385-90863-4 (0-385-90863-6)



Anne Frank

During her brief life, how did Anne Frank exhibit an internal strength of character? What part of her story most resonates with you and why?

Anne's diary has become one of the most widely read pieces of literature ever written. Read *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank aloud to your students. After each reading, have students write a journal entry reflecting on the words of this remarkable young person.

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-83242-0 (0-375-83242-4) GLB: 978-0-375-93242-7 (0-375-93242-9)



The Boy on Fairfield Street: How Ted Geisel Grew Up to Become Dr. Seuss

How did Ted's family influence who he would become? What elements of his neighborhood and upbringing would influence him in his career as a writer and illustrator?

On page 20, the author writes that while in art class, Ted's "biggest 'crime' was exaggerating things." Show students many examples of illustrations by Dr. Seuss, pointing out elements that feature exaggeration: creatures, plants, people, etc. Give students time to draw a person or animal, exaggerating features for humorous effect.

Random House HC: 978-0-375-82298-8 (0-375-82298-4) GLB: 978-0-375-92298-5 (0-375-92298-9)

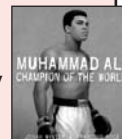


The Champ: The Story of Muhammad Ali

Do you agree with Ali's refusal to fight in the Vietnam War? Why is it important to stand by your beliefs?

Muhammad Ali had a way with words. Review some of his sayings and poems, such as his motto "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee," pointing out literary devices such as simile and metaphor. Have students write original mottos to describe this great champion.

Dragonfly PB: 978-0-440-41782-8 (0-440-41782-1)
Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-82401-2 (0-375-82401-4) GLB: 978-0-375-92401-9 (0-375-92401-9)



Coming
Spring 2008!

**Muhammad Ali:
Champion
of the World**
Schwartz & Wade
HC: 978-0-375-83622-0
(0-375-83622-5)
GLB: 978-0-375-93787-3
(0-375-93787-0)



The Daring Nellie Bly: America's Star Reporter

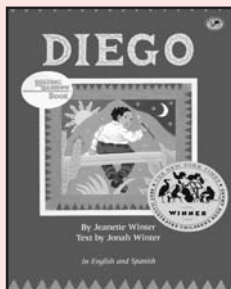
Discuss the meaning of Nellie's motto: "Energy rightly applied and directed will accomplish anything."

After Nellie finished her cross-country race, the mayor of Jersey City, New Jersey, declared that, "She will be recognized as pushing and determined, independent, able to take care of herself wherever she may go." Challenge students to write additional lines of this speech, further describing the character of Nellie Bly.

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-81568-3 (0-375-81568-6) GLB: 978-0-375-91568-0 (0-375-91568-0)

classroom connections

FOR MORE FASCINATING PICTURE BOOK BIOGRAPHIES

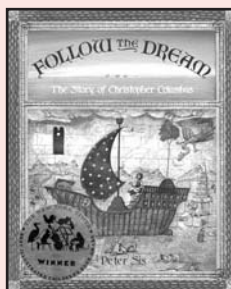


Diego

Discuss some of the experiences that Diego had as a child and how those experiences contributed to his life as an artist.

Diego Rivera is best known as a muralist. Describe to students what a mural is, and bring in examples of murals by Rivera and other well-known muralists. Work with the school art teacher to design and paint a mural in the style of Diego Rivera.

Dragonfly PB: 978-0-679-85617-7 (0-679-85617-X)
Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-679-81987-5 (0-679-81987-8)
GLB: 978-0-679-91987-2 (0-679-91987-2)

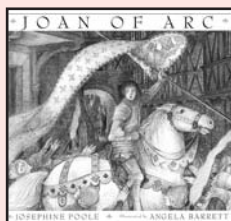


Follow the Dream: The Story of Christopher Columbus

Peter Sís illustrates his story of Christopher Columbus using many interesting compositional styles. Some pictures appear to be seen as if through a window, some appear to be pasted into a book, some appear as maps, some as stage sets, and others appear as storyboards. Have students work in groups to create an “extra” illustration for this book, using one of the above devices.

Have students choose one illustration from the book. Working alone or in groups, have students write dialogue to accompany their chosen picture.

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-679-80628-8 (0-679-80628-8)
GLB: 978-0-679-90628-5 (0-679-90628-2)

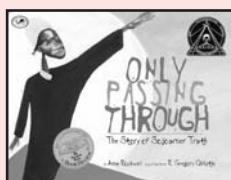


Joan of Arc

Although Joan was determined to defeat the British, she did not forsake her compassion for her opponents. How does this heroine display her goodness even when her life is being threatened?

Many artists have depicted Joan of Arc in their work. Go on a Web quest with students to find images of the Maid of Orleans.

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-679-89041-6 (0-679-89041-6)



Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth

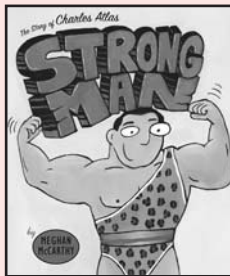
When Isabella went to court to get back her son, Peter, she said she felt “the power of a nation.” Discuss what this might mean? How did this experience encourage Isabella to her true calling? Why did Isabella choose the name Sojourner Truth?

Have students choose an illustration from the story that includes Isabella/Sojourner. Instruct them to write a thought bubble describing what she might be thinking (or saying) in the picture.

Dragonfly PB: 978-0-440-41766-8 (0-440-41766-X)
Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-679-89186-4 (0-679-89186-2)
GLB: 978-0-679-99186-1 (0-679-99186-7)

classroom connections

FOR MORE FASCINATING PICTURE BOOK BIOGRAPHIES



Strong Man: The Story of Charles Atlas

Discuss some of the qualities young Angelo possessed that allowed him to reach his goal of getting strong and fit. Why do you think he didn't give up when his first attempts at building muscles failed to work?

After reading the book, have students do online research on Charles Atlas and his fitness program. Compare Atlas's original plan with what fitness professionals recommend today. Work with the school physical education teacher on a school-wide fitness plan for all students, inspired by the life of Charles Atlas.

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-82940-6 (0-375-82940-7)
GLB: 978-0-375-92940-3 (0-375-92940-1)

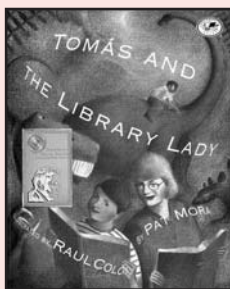


They Called Her Molly Pitcher

Although Molly was not a pretty woman, she had other qualities that would benefit her on the battlefield. Discuss those qualities and why outer beauty is less important than inner strength.

Place students in pairs. One student will be Molly after she returned back to her life as a wife and mother, and the other will be a newspaper reporter sent to interview her. Have students write the interview questions and Molly's responses. Allow time for pairs to conduct their interviews in front of the class.

Dragonfly PB: 978-0-553-11253-5 (0-553-11253-8)
Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-679-89187-1 (0-679-89187-0)

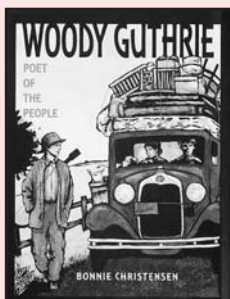


Tomás and the Library Lady

Why do you think Tomás's mouth "felt full of cotton" as he approached the library for the first time. Share an experience that you have had when you felt apprehensive or nervous about experiencing something new.

Why do you think books are so important to Tomás? What is so special about books and reading? Why are books an important part of your life?

Dragonfly PB: 978-0-375-80349-9 (0-375-80349-1)
Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-679-80401-7 (0-679-80401-3)
Spanish edition PB: 978-0-679-84173-9 (0-679-84173-3)



Woody Guthrie: Poet of the People

Discuss what the author means by, "Woody Guthrie became their voice, and songs were his way of speaking." Why do you think Guthrie's songs were so powerful and still have meaning to this day?

The subtitle of this book is called "Poet of the People." Bring in examples of lyrics by Woody Guthrie and have students read them aloud. Then, if possible, play examples of the songs. Have students illustrate a particular line or lines of lyrics from a Guthrie song of their choice.

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-81113-5 (0-375-81113-3)

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