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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2010 Volume III: Creating Lives: An Introduction to Biography

Biography through the Use of Document-Based Questions

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For the past two years, my AP English Literature and Composition class has reviewed a variety of literary approaches, including formalist, gender, psychological, and mythological, among others. While I have presented the concept of "authorship," I have not developed a unit focused on solely on using biography as an approach to critical thinking. I feel it is an appropriate subject for my class, as a strategy for reading fiction, poetry, and drama. Biography is uniquely sensitive to a variety of literary devices: irony, point of view, symbol, tone. In addition, delving into one critical approach will help students understand that each individual's critique of a text is influenced by his/her personal limitations, exceptions, and expectations. Their application of this will be a four to seven paragraph synthesis essay based on a variety of documents that have been provided for them.

(Developed for AP English Literature and World Literature, grade 12; recommended for AP English Literature and World Literature, grades 11-12)

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