



## **Taking a Role in History: Reading Biography with Empathy**

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### **Introduction**

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The classroom was alive with laughter and an anticipation that was nearly tangible. The children sat on the reading rug, legs crossed, leaning forward to capture every detail from the illustrations in the book. As I read each page aloud I adopted the characters' voices, incorporated physical movement into my reading, made dramatic pauses, deliberately obscured the pictures to allow the children to visualize until all the text on each page was read, then I slowly rotated the book so each child could see the colorful illustrations, and as the children were practically leaping out of their seats in the anticipation of an ending that promised to be spectacular, I finally revealed the last page. It was October and twenty-four laughing and gasping six year old children erupted into a wild round of applause upon the conclusion of my very dramatic reading of David Shannon's *Duck on a Bike*, which I had explained was, in my opinion, the greatest book ever written.

Once the applause quieted I asked my students to describe the character Duck to their discussion partners. I anticipated that the children would describe Duck as clever, fearless, friendly, creative, courageous, or unique. After all, for two weeks, using two different books, I had modeled for the children how to identify the main character, the character's traits, and briefly analyze that character. After the children engaged in a brief but enthusiastic discussion I eagerly asked them to share their thinking. As I walked from group to group leaning into the circle to hear their thinking, the responses they shared were: "I like him - he's nice." Or, "He's funny."

I sat down in my reading chair; my shoulders sagged a little but I soldiered on. "Why do you think he is funny?" I asked.

"Cause he's a *duck* riding a *bike*." One child answered holding her hands out while raising her shoulders indicating that I was clearly missing a very obvious gag.

I waited a beat. Then another. I pointed out the character traits listed on the graphic organizer chart for another of David Shannon's characters, David, whom we had read about earlier in the week in the book *No, David!*, as the class and I worked together identifying David's character traits and analyzing him. Then I asked a couple of additional questions to try to foster discussion leading to a deeper look into the very rich picture book character: Duck.

"What does the funny thing he is doing tell us about his character?" I asked.

"That he's funny," was the reply.

At this point I *may* have sunk a little in my chair and made a silent plea for the wisdom to empower my children to think deeply. I *do* remember wishing that I could find a way to help my children swim out of this shallow view to see the depth in the characters who made up the multifaceted stories we were reading.

## Background and Objectives

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The children for whom this unit has been constructed are first-grade students in my self-contained classroom at Henry M. Brader Elementary School in the Christina School District. Christina School District is located in New Castle County, Delaware and serves both the urban and suburban populations of Wilmington and the surrounding areas. There are approximately 17,000 pre-kindergarten through high school students in Christina's thirty-one schools. Brader is one of twenty-two elementary schools and serves its surrounding community in the city of Newark. Brader has approximately 700 preschool through fifth-grade students. Forty-two percent of Brader's student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch. I am part of a team of five talented first-grade teachers in my school who work closely together, sharing ideas and strategies generously.

This unit is designed to be implemented in the spring of first grade to allow the children first to develop the phonics and word attack skills necessary to decode and comprehend text at various, and sometimes challenging, reading levels. However, accommodations will be discussed to make the text accessible for all students. In this three-week unit each student will choose one historical figure from a preselected group of four individuals and read a biography based on that individual's life. The children will view other selected materials related to that biographical figure to expand their exposure to that individual. The children will create character analyses that they will demonstrate through role taking performances as the biographical figures in a "living wax museum" performance. Additionally, while the children are reading their biographies of choice they will be participating in activities to foster their development of empathy to better understand each biographical figure and each other.

In Delaware units of instruction are designed around an enduring understanding for the children to reach through their learning experiences. Through participation in this unit the enduring understanding that students should reach is that biographies can provide insights in which the inner and outer lives of human beings are revealed. Their lives are revealed through their struggles, dilemmas, and the events of that time period. In order to gain this understanding the children will explore these essential questions: how do texts about human beings of other ages, genders, races, religions, and disabilities affect me? How do they shape my decisions? How do these texts tell experiences similar to my own?

This unit also addresses Common Core and Delaware State Standards in English Language Arts through its design and activities. The students will read biographies, use reading strategies to comprehend these texts, synthesize and organize information from various media sources, write a character analysis, and share their character analyses through oral presentations.

## Rationale

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Common Core Standards require the children to analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text as a part of demonstrating reading comprehension. As I designed this unit I thought about ways that I could have the children move beyond identifying characters as good or bad, nice or mean, sad or funny and into a deeper analysis. I knew I wanted my children to delve below the surface of the text and illustrations and try to experience a look through the eyes of the characters to figure out motivations. I wondered if what we needed to do was empathize to understand a character deeply. It seemed to me that what I should be aspiring to do is develop the children's empathy. Can six and seven year old children empathize? Will empathy lead to better comprehension of a character in text? Was empathizing with a duck too broad a reach for children in the concrete-operational stage? *When* do children learn to empathize? *How* do children learn to empathize? Is empathy the missing piece that will complete the textual puzzle that reveals a character? Surely empathy is a necessary life skill; is it also a necessary reading skill?

As I reflected on the character analysis lesson described above I thought about my book choice and wondered if I made the right choice for the children to exercise their character analysis capabilities. *Duck on a Bike* is a fictional picture book. The main character is a duck that uses words to communicate with other farm animals and handles a bike without training wheels. This is not your typical duck! Perhaps the children were caught up in the fantasy or the humor of the story and therefore were discounting Duck's words and actions as meaningful because real ducks do not speak to us and convey their feelings with words. If fictional stories with animal characters such as Duck presented a challenge for my children to understand I would have to look to a different kind of literary genre for help.

The questions that guided my thinking were: Who are you? Who am I? I looked for an answer to the questions I had raised to ensure that I could prepare a unit of instruction that would enable my students to analyze a character with depth while keeping their engagement level high. Through my participation in the Yale National Initiative seminars I was afforded the opportunity to advance my mission. In the seminar "The Art of Reading People: Character, Expression, Interpretation," we have explored the ways in which we perceive characters in literature and the connection to the ways we see ourselves and others. Our readings and discussions led us to compile a "toolbox" of the tools we use to make inferences about characters in narrative fiction. I wanted to devise a way to apply those tools to reading about real people who were significant forces of positive social behavior in our world. These people would then be the role models and mentors for empathizing to understand each other in the classroom.

First I looked toward finding a particular genre of literature in which to anchor a unit of study. Even though we marinate our small children in fairy tales and fantasy in the early grades, concrete examples often work best with first-grade students. My students gobble up the informational books in our library, eager to learn more about the animals and activities that interest them. Since informational books are high interest for many first-grade children and the genre of biography conveys information about people who are or were real living beings, I decided to use biography to help my children identify character traits, analyze, and empathize with a person.

Why use the genre of biography for character analysis? Biography:

- is focused on a person;
- tells the story of a real person who has helped change the world;

- is informational to read;
- includes opportunities for making inferences;
- has a definite historical setting or time period that has helped to shape the biographical figure;
- describes events that have shaped the biographical figure;
- describes a biographical figure's change over time.

Other resources can be brought into the unit of instruction through photographs, film clips, and various audio/visual materials that will help to connect the student to the biographical figure. Hearing a voice or seeing the physical actions of a person can add a dimension to the children's understandings that text alone cannot. Using biography, the children can learn about a person in an historical context and find a wealth of information beyond the text to identify the character traits and construct an analysis of character beyond the realm of "good" or "bad."

In seminar we discussed ways we make inferences about characters in fictional texts and added them to the character "toolbox." The inference tools from the toolbox that the children will explore as a means to analyze a historical figure in my unit are:

- setting and environment - how the time period and physical place affect the individual
- names - the significance of a nickname as a clue to how an individual is perceived
- behavior - the manner in which an individual reacts in different situations
- physical actions - how an action can express an individual's thinking or feeling
- physical features - how the physical traits of an individual such as gender affect our perception of an individual
- facial expressions - the perceived emotions conveyed by the facial muscles
- point of view - the possibility that the perspective of the narrator shapes our perception of the subject of a biography

Many of these tools are the same as those we use to see ourselves and each other. Through the lens of our own experiences we also observe body language, postures, gestures, and vocal inflections to make judgments about ourselves and others in the context of our environment. These are tools that can be used to build empathy.

In our seminars we discussed empathy and its connection to understanding characters in novels. The narrative in a novel is told from a certain perspective having a narrative voice. This voice or perspective becomes a type of lens we use to understand a character. Biography is written from a perspective or told through the lens of the biographer. Will the lens help or hinder our ability to empathize with the subject of the biography? Is empathy simply perspective-taking?

## **Empathy**

What is empathy and when does it develop? There are many different definitions of empathy used in various contexts. For the purpose of developing this unit I have chosen a definition that separates empathy into two components. One of the two components is role taking: understanding another's feelings and thoughts,

thereby perceiving the world through their eyes. The second component of empathy is the sharing of emotions: being able to feel the emotion another is experiencing. <sup>1</sup> Therefore to become empathic a child must first be able to recognize and identify an emotion that he or she is seeing through the visual and verbal cues of an individual. Visual cues might include facial expressions, gestures, and physical actions. Then the child must interpret these cues in an attempt to understand the thinking behind the development of the emotion, and be able to experience that emotion. Empathy development begins in infancy as infants see empathic behavior modeled by their caregivers and is most effectively developed during childhood rather than later in adulthood. <sup>2</sup> Therefore first grade is an optimal time period for children to learn how to empathize.

### **Link Between Empathy and Readership**

Can developing a child's empathy help him or her to become a better reader? Studies link empathy to academic achievement. Empathy has been shown to increase reading and spelling performance for girls in the primary grades and to improve grade point averages with high school students. Whole schools that focus on creating caring-communities have outperformed schools without a caring-communities focus in the area of reading comprehension. <sup>3</sup> By placing an emphasis on developing empathy as an important reading strategy we link reading instruction with the development of necessary social skills not included in our state standards.

Empathy is a conduit to connecting to text. Connecting oneself to text is part of one of seven reading comprehension strategies used by proficient readers. <sup>4</sup> Empathy can play an important part in reading comprehension because it allows a child to experience a character on an emotional level as well as an intellectual level. <sup>5</sup> When a child reads about a character set in a time of great turmoil, the child can reach into her emotional experiences to a time of turmoil within her own life and apply her thoughts and feelings to the character. This leads to a deeper understanding of the character's emotions. A reader can place him or herself into the context of the story through that emotional link. Reading about a historical figure gives the child an opportunity to learn information about a person and the events of the period of time in which that individual was living. Through reading biography the children are exposed to history and are making connections to themselves and the world.

### **Four Historical Figures**

People throughout history have demonstrated instances of being empathic through their actions and affiliations. I have chosen to focus the unit on four historical figures who have demonstrated empathic behavior and made significant contributions to the world. An analysis of the characters of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Amelia Earhart, John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed), and Pocahontas will reveal several common traits. Each person in his or her own way advocated for peace, worked to help others, and was courageous. Each of the four people lived in a time period of historical significance to our nation. These four historical figures represent a variety of gender and race. I also chose these four people for their accessibility. There are many resources available to learn about their lives. Each person has a number of biographies written about him or her in various readabilities for children. There are visual representations available to supplement the texts in the forms of film, audio, drawings, photographs, statues, and other artifacts. After reading selections of the biographies and viewing the materials listed in the student resources appendix, the children will be able to gather the following information to make inferences about the character of the people listed below.

#### **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Martin Luther King, Jr., was born in 1929 and died in 1968. The time period of his life is historically significant

because of the changes brought about by the civil rights movement. It was a time of great turmoil and violence in which Martin Luther King Jr. was a model for peace. He advocated for peaceful demonstrations to change the injustices in society. Dr. King organized the successful bus boycott in Alabama after Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on the bus for a white man. He led the March on Washington in 1963 where he delivered his famous "I have a dream" speech in which he stated that people should be judged by the "content of their character." He was a man who demonstrated peace through his actions and was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 1964. <sup>6</sup>

Through his affiliations and actions Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., demonstrated his empathy for others. He was a pastor at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Alabama, ministering to the needs of his congregation. <sup>7</sup> He was a leader in the civil rights movement who gave generously of his time to bring about a change in society to end segregation. He recognized the need for peace and equality and devoted much of his life to working to bring them to fruition.

Courageousness was demonstrated through Dr. King's organization and leadership of boycotts, marches, and demonstrations. When threatened with physical violence he showed his courageousness by not responding with violence and not giving up his quest for change. He courageously and skillfully delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech to a large crowd of people when he led the March on Washington in 1963. <sup>8</sup> The effects of Dr. King's words and actions have played an integral part in shaping our country.

### **Amelia Earhart**

Amelia Earhart was born in 1897 and disappeared in 1937. This time period is historically significant because of some of the changes that mark this time. World War I was ending when Amelia was young. Women gained the right to vote during her lifetime with the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution. Amelia Earhart personifies this idea of change because of the role she played in changing the limits of plane travel and the perception of a woman's abilities.

As the children read biographies about Amelia Earhart they will read about Amelia's young life caring for wounded soldiers as a nurse's aide and how she worked as a social worker in Boston. She spoke out against war publicly. Amelia was an advocate for peace and women's rights.

Amelia demonstrated courage throughout her life. She flew planes on long journeys when plane travel was rare and considered unsafe. Amelia Earhart was the first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean alone in 1932. She was the first person to fly from Hawaii to California three years later. Through her courageous actions Amelia Earhart made a valuable contribution to the way society views the role of women.

### **John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed)**

John Chapman was born in 1774 and died in the 1840s. This time period is significant because the nation was forming and expanding. John Chapman embodies this idea of expansion because of his movement west. He was born in Massachusetts and later traveled west to Indiana, spending much of his life traveling back and forth through this route.

John Chapman lived a peaceful life. He traveled by foot planting seeds, reading the bible, and telling stories to the settlers he would encounter. He cared little about money and was described as friendly to both people and animals. He ate only vegetables because he did not want to harm any living thing. He shared his stories of his travels and his good nature willingly with strangers. <sup>9</sup>

When settlers' animals became ill John Chapman would help tend them. He was considered a medicine man. John knew how to make medicines from plants and shared them with the settlers. He also helped the settlers by planting apple trees so that they would have food. He taught the settlers how to care for their plants so that they would bear fruit and provide nourishment.

John Chapman was courageous. He traveled long distances alone, on foot through wooded areas. He slept outside on the ground as he traveled without fearing animal attacks. John wore old clothes, a pot on his head as a hat, and carried around a bag of apple seeds, unconcerned with what others thought about his appearance. He changed the world and the effects of that change can still be seen because the apple trees he planted have propagated and still exist.

## **Pocahontas**

Pocahontas was born in 1595 and died in 1617. Her lifetime is historically significant because during this time the British successfully established a settlement in our country. Pocahontas embodies this time period through her acceptance of the unfamiliar. The natives of America were unfamiliar with the British colonists, the colonists were unfamiliar with the ways of the natives, and Pocahontas brought them together.

Pocahontas promoted peace between her people and the British. She warned the colonists when her father's tribe planned to attack them. She made a plea to spare the life of Captain John Smith when it was thought that the Powhatans would harm him. When she was taken to England at age eighteen, she lived peacefully among the British, adopting their customs. <sup>10</sup>

Pocahontas demonstrated her courage through her choices. She befriended the British when they appeared near her home despite their different appearances and customs. She traveled to England and participated in English society. She married an Englishman and adopted his way of life. She took risks and demonstrated how to accept the differences in others.

## **Teaching Strategies**

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How does one teach empathy? First we must teach students to recognize their emotions and the emotions of others. <sup>11</sup> We can train children to recognize the emotions they are experiencing, starting with naming the feeling they are having. In order to recognize that emotion in others the children must see the visual cues so they can put a picture with the feeling name. Essentially there must be a picture and word vocabulary of feeling. Then once the vocabulary is developed the children can move into activities that will heighten their sensitivity toward the perspective of others.

These activities include:

1. Perspective taking

The child is given a situation and looks at it through the point of view of another.

2. Observing misfortune

The child views an instance of hardship in another person's life.

### 3. Writing and drawing

The children are presented with a situation of conflict and write and/or draw a solution to the problem.

Once the vocabulary of feelings and sensitivity toward others is established, the next step in fostering empathy is modeling behaviors. Modeling behaviors includes the teacher modeling empathetic reactions in situations as well as the students. The teacher must be cognizant of her reactions, words, and facial expressions when interacting with others. Children will emulate the behaviors of their teachers.<sup>12</sup> Role play or role taking is one vehicle for modeling behaviors. The child assumes the role of another person and act or reacts as he or she perceives the other person would in a given situation.

### **Vocabulary Development**

In this unit the children will compile a word bank of emotion before we begin reading the biographies. We will begin by using our read aloud time to discover the emotional reactions we have to our stories. Using the same books I previously used, *No, David!* and *Duck on a Bike*, I will read aloud the text and stop during pivotal moments to have the children share their emotional reactions. When Duck first rides the bike he is wobbly, a little unsure of himself. The children may be scared for him. Once the feeling is identified we will document it by writing the word scared on a sentence strip and posting it on the wall in our word bank. Then I will ask the children to show me what scared looks like on their faces. I will document the visual cue for scared by taking a photograph of a child and posting it under the picture. The children could also draw a simple stick drawing of a circle with facial features to graphically represent the feeling "scared" if no camera is available. We will continue this process during read-aloud time throughout the year until we have a wide range of emotions in our word bank.

Each biography will have vocabulary to develop specific to its setting and subject matter. As the children read the biography they have chosen they will use the graphic organizer in appendix B to list the words they encounter that they do not know. The organizer is separated into columns labeled: people, places, actions, and things. After the first reading the children will work cooperatively in their reading interest groups to sort the words into those columns. As I meet with each reading interest group, before their second reading of the text, we will review their organizers and compile their words on a large chart of the organizer.

### **Grouping for Reading Interest**

Before we begin the unit I will display copies of all the biographies in groups sorted by historical figure and ask the children to preview them in a museum tour format. I will design a viewing route around the room and demonstrate how I want the children to move through the tour route. Then I will arrange the children in groups of four and use a timer to signal their movement. At each group of biographies the children will have three minutes to look through the books to get a sense of the historical figure. Once the timer rings the groups will move through the tour route to the next set of books. This process will continue until all the children have previewed all the sets of books. Then the children will write their names and the names of the historical figure that they most want to learn about on an index card. I will collect the index cards and sort them into reading groups by interest. I will be able to fit each child to a text that he or she can read either instructionally or independently as I have collected a variety of texts at different readabilities for each historical figure. Children who need the most support reading will be placed into the group reading the Rookie Biography series. Partner reading or recording an oral reading of the biography to be set in a listening center are accommodations that



can be put into place for students needing extra support.

During the 45-minute reading block I will model one reading strategy in a whole group setting using the biography *Who Was Louis Armstrong?* The children will gather on the reading rug and I will explicitly explain the reading comprehension strategy and its importance to understanding text. Then I will read a small section of the biography and demonstrate how to use the strategy. Of the seven proficient reader strategies I will focus on making connections, text to self, text to text, and text to world, predicting, determining important information, and making mental images during these lessons.<sup>13</sup> These reading strategies fit nicely with the strategies for developing empathy as they require children to make inferences about actions/reactions and connect themselves to the lives they are reading about in the text.

After meeting together for the model lesson the interest groups will meet together to read and discuss their texts. The members of each group will have the choice to partner read (whisper-read aloud together) or read independently while implementing the reading strategy modeled during the lesson. I will meet briefly with each group and "listen in" on their reading and discussion. At the designated stopping time (after 15 minutes of reading) the children will bookmark their books and discuss their connections, predictions, important information, or mental images with their partners and their groups. The whole group will come back together on the reading rug to debrief. Each day one group will share what they have learned. We will continue this process, focusing on one reading strategy each week until the biographies have been read and reread. This will take place over two weeks during the reading block.

### **Writing and Drawing in Response to Reading**

In our National Initiative seminar we responded to our reading by listing our thoughts in a two column format with one column titled "observe" and the other titled "infer". We had rich discussions linking what we observed when reading different forms of narrative text with the inferences we made about the characters and how we perceived them. I adapted this format to make the reading response become a perspective-taking exercise. The students will answer the reading response questions from the perspective of the biographical figure they are reading about in their interest groups. I have included the reading response questions in appendix C.

Using a writing workshop format of mini-lesson, writing/conferencing, and sharing I will pose questions to the children, teach a structure for the response, and model how to respond to the question.<sup>14</sup> The children will write their responses as they relate to their biography reading. I will conference with different groups of children as they are writing. Then the group of children with whom I conferred that day will share their reading responses. The children will share their reading responses aloud in front of the class, taking the role of the biographical figure through a dramatic reading. The audience will praise their work and ask clarifying questions to help guide any needed revisions.

Through writing and drawing we will develop a graphic representation of the time period of the people we are reading about in the form of a timeline. The timeline will show the years 1590 to present. The children will draw and label the significant events they are reading about and place them on the timeline. The timeline will help the children see any spaces between or overlaps in the years the figures were living.

### **Character Analysis**

Using the writing workshop format I will guide students in the writing of a character analysis and text summary.<sup>15</sup> Using the character toolbox we built in our Yale National Initiative seminar sessions, the children

will make inferences about the subject of their biography when they reread. They will use the graphic organizer in appendix D to compile and organize textual information to write and illustrate a character analysis. Once the character analysis is completed each child will write a summary of the biography they read using the format in appendix E. One week of the daily forty-minute writing block will be devoted to learning how to write a reading response, a second week will be devoted to writing a character analysis, and the third week we will write summaries.

### **Visualization through Drama**

We will use drama in the form of role play and role taking both to demonstrate reading comprehension and to foster empathy building. The children will dress, speak, act, and try to react as the biographical figure they have studied. Role taking will allow my students to implement what they have learned and inferred about a biographical figure in a way that will fully engage all of their senses. Upon completion of the unit the children will perform in a "living wax museum" format for parents and peers. The children will be encouraged to dress in the style of the subject of their study. Each child will be stationed around the classroom in a still pose. At their feet we will station a sentence strip with a drawing of a switch. Next to the switch we will write: Please step here to learn more about (*name of the figure*). An audience of parents and peers will move about the classroom and turn on the switch that animates the figure. The child will come to life and share their summary in character. Imagine the excitement of "becoming" a famous person for a short time and sharing their learning about the two components of empathy with others in this way!

### **Independent Reading**

Through the writing workshop sharing process of reading aloud, celebrating the writing, and providing peer feedback each child will be exposed to information about all four historical figures. <sup>16</sup> This will build their background knowledge and make challenging text more accessible. After the children have read one biography the books will be grouped together by subject and added to the independent reading choices baskets. The children can then choose to read a biography about any or all of the historical figures during their independent reading times.

## **Classroom Activities**

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These lessons will occur after the children have created a feeling vocabulary word bank with picture documentation, have chosen a historical figure to read about, and have been placed in a interest group reading a biography at their independent or instructional reading level.

### **Lesson One: Predictions**

Objectives: The students will identify the setting and environment of the biography. The students will identify a character trait of the subject of the biography. The students will make prediction about the actions of the subject of the biography. The students will write a reading response.

Materials: biographies, vocabulary organizer, reading response organizers, chart paper, marker, pencils, and notebooks.

Procedures: During the reading block, in a whole class format, gather the children on the reading rug for a model reading lesson. Explain the reading strategy prediction as using what you know, along with what the author tells or shows you through words and pictures, to determine what you think will happen next. Model this while reading aloud a few pages from a model text. Demonstrate for the students how to identify the setting of the biography. Assign the students to read the first few pages of their biographies. Have students meet in their reading interest groups to read, discuss their predictions, and complete the setting section of their organizers. Meet briefly with each group to help direct the discussion.

Gather students together and demonstrate writing a reading response. Model the format using information from the reading model lesson biography. Direct students to answer reading response question number one in their notebooks. Have students from one interest group share their reading responses aloud with the class.

### **Lesson Two: Connections**

Objectives: The students will identify behaviors of the subject of the biography. The students will identify a character trait of the historical figure in the biography. The students will make text-to-self connections between themselves and the figure in the biography. The students will write a reading response.

Materials: biographies, vocabulary organizer, reading response organizers, chart paper, marker, pencils, and notebooks.

Procedures: During the reading block, in a whole class format, gather the children on the reading rug for a model reading lesson. Explain the reading strategy making connections as using what you know, along with what the author tells or shows you through words and pictures, to better understand what is happening in the text and how the character feels. Model this while reading aloud a few pages from a model text. Demonstrate for the students how to identify the behavior of the subject of the biography. Assign the students to read the next few pages of their biographies. Have students meet in their reading interest groups to read, discuss their connections, and complete the behavior section of their organizers. Meet briefly with each group to help direct the discussion.

Gather students together and demonstrate writing a reading response. Model the format using information from the reading model lesson biography. Direct students to answer reading response question number two in their notebooks. Have students from one interest group share their reading responses aloud with the class.

### **Lesson Three: More Connections**

Objectives: The students will identify actions of the subject of the biography. The students will identify a character trait of the subject of the biography. The students will make text-to-self connections between themselves and the subject of the biography. The students will write a reading response.

Materials: biographies, vocabulary organizer, reading response organizers, chart paper, marker, pencils, and notebooks.

Procedures: During the reading block, in a whole class format, gather the children on the reading rug for a model reading lesson. Reiterate that the reading strategy making connections is using what you know, along with what the author tells or shows you through words and pictures, to better understand what is happening in the text and how the character feels. Model this while reading aloud a few pages from a model text. Demonstrate for the students how to identify the actions of the subject of the biography. Assign the students

to read the next few pages of their biographies. Have students meet in their reading interest groups to read, discuss their connections, and complete the actions section of their organizers. Meet briefly with each group to help direct the discussion.

Gather students together and demonstrate writing a reading response. Model the format using information from the reading model lesson biography. Direct students to answer reading response question number three in their notebooks. Have students from one interest group share their reading responses aloud with the class.

#### **Lesson Four: Important Information**

**Objectives:** The students will identify actions and facial expressions of the subject of the biography. The students will identify a character trait of the subject of the biography. The students will determine the important information being communicated in the biography. The students will write a reading response.

**Materials:** biographies, vocabulary organizer, reading response organizers, chart paper, marker, pencils, and notebooks.

**Procedures:** During the reading block, in a whole class format, gather the children on the reading rug for a model reading lesson. Explain the reading strategy determining important information as deciding what are the important ideas and themes that are being communicated by the author. Model this while reading aloud a few pages from a model text. Demonstrate for the students how to identify the facial expressions in the pictures and illustrations of the biography and determine what the expressions tell about the character. Assign the students to read the next few pages of their biographies. Have students meet in their reading interest groups to read, discuss the important information, and complete the facial expressions section of their organizers. Meet briefly with each group to help direct the discussion.

Gather students together and demonstrate writing a reading response. Model the format using information from the reading model lesson biography. Direct students to answer reading response question number four in their notebooks. Have students from one interest group share their reading responses aloud with the class.

#### **Lesson Five: Visualization**

**Objectives:** The students will identify the physical features and possible nicknames of the subject of the biography. The students will identify a character trait of the subject of the biography. The students will create mental images of the subject of the biography. The students will write a reading response.

**Materials:** biographies, vocabulary organizer, reading response organizers, chart paper, marker, pencils, and notebooks.

**Procedures:** During the reading block, in a whole class format, gather the children on the reading rug for a model reading lesson. Explain the reading strategy visualization as making mental pictures of the actions and emotions of the subject of the biography. Model this while reading aloud a few pages from a model text. Demonstrate for the students how to identify the physical features shown in the pictures and illustrations of the subject of the biography. Explain that a person's physical features are what we can see. Assign the students to read the last few pages of their biographies. Have students meet in their reading interest groups to read, discuss their mental images, and complete the physical characteristics and nickname sections of their organizers. Meet briefly with each group to help direct the discussion.

Gather students together and demonstrate writing a reading response. Model the format using information

from the reading model lesson biography. Direct students to answer reading response question number five in their notebooks. Have students from one interest group share their reading responses aloud with the class.

### **Lesson Six: Summarize**

Objectives: The students will write a summary of a biography.

Materials: chart paper, marker, character analysis organizer, summary organizer, biographies.

Procedures: Gather students and demonstrate completing the summary organizer in appendix E to organize the information gathered from the biography used as a model. Have students complete organizers, working with partners in their interest groups. Gather students and demonstrate how to write a brief summary using the information recorded on the organizer of the model biography. Have students work either in groups or independently, to write summaries of the biographies they read. Ask students to share their responses reading "in character" as the historical figures.

### **Lesson Seven: Character Analysis**

Objectives: The students will write a character analysis of a historical figure.

Materials: chart paper, marker, character analysis organizer, biographies, pencil, notebooks.

Procedures: Gather students and demonstrate how to write a brief character summary using the information recorded on the organizer of the model biography. Have students work either in groups or independently, to write character analyses of the biographies they read using information from their completed organizer (appendix D). Ask students to share their responses reading "in character" as the historical figures.

### **Lesson Eight: Role Play**

Objectives: The students will role play the actions of a historical figure.

Materials: summaries, biographies, character analyses.

Procedures: Have students role play some of the significant events described in the biographies. Ask students to identify the emotions that they imagine the person was feeling at the time. Discuss how identifying these emotions help us understand the feelings of others.

Culminating Activity: Have students create a living wax museum by dressing and acting as the character while relating their summaries for an audience of parents and peers.

Evaluation of student learning: Through reading responses, completed graphic organizers, summaries, character analyses, discussions, and anecdotal notes of reading group interaction determine if the children have: identified important information in the reading, made plausible predictions, identified relevant character traits, summarized important information, and made relevant connections to the texts.

## Teacher Resources

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"American Rhetoric: Martin Luther King, Jr. - I Have a Dream." American Rhetoric: The Power of Oratory in the United States. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm> (accessed August 15, 2011). This website has audio recordings of the speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

A & E Television Network. "Martin Luther King Jr. - "I Have A Dream" Speech - History.com Photo Galleries." History.com -History Made Every Day - American & World History. <http://www.history.com/photos/martin-luther-king-jr/photo2> (accessed August 14, 2011). There are photographs of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., commentary, and video clips on this website.

"BrainPOP - Animated Educational Site for Kids - Science, Social Studies, English, Math, Arts ." BrainPOP - Animated Educational Site for Kids - Science, Social Studies, English, Math, Arts. <http://www.brainpop.com> (accessed August 18, 2011). On this website there are short informational cartoons telling about the lives of Louis Armstrong, Amelia Earhart, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Pocohontas.

Calkins, Lucy. *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.

Feshbach, Norma . "Empathy in Children: Some Theoretical and Empirical Considerations." *The Counseling Psychologist* 5, no. 2 (1975): 25-30.

Gladstein, Gerald A. "Understanding Empathy: Integrating Counseling, Developmental, and Social Psychology Perspectives." *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1983: 467-482.

Jean Decety, William Ickes. *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011.

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Pearson, P. David, L.R. Roehler, J.A. Dole, and G.G. Duffy. "Developing expertise in reading comprehension." In *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*, by S. Jay Samuels and Alan E. Farstrup (Eds), 145-199. Newark, DE: International Reading, 1992.

"Video - Amelia Earhart - Biography.com." Biography.com. <http://www.biography.com/video.do?name=ameliaearhart> (accessed August 18, 2011). This website has a video A & E Television Biography of Amelia Earhart. The program includes film footage of Amelia and interviews with her relatives.

## Student Resources

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Adler, David A., and Robert Casilla. *A picture book of Martin Luther King, Jr.* . New York: Holiday House, 1989.

Adler, David A., and Jeff Fisher. *A picture book of Amelia Earhart* . New York: Holiday House, 1998.

Burleigh, Robert, and Wendell Minor. *Night flight: Amelia Earhart crosses the Atlantic*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2011.

Ditchfield, Christin. *Johnny Appleseed* . New York: Children's Press, 2003.

Farris, Christine King, and Chris K. Soentpiet. *My brother Martin: a sister remembers growing up with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 2006.

"appleappetite." Index. <http://www.appleappetite.com> (accessed July 15, 2011).

Jerome, Kate Boehm, and David Cain. *Who was Amelia Earhart?*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 2002. This is a very comprehensive biography series and is written at a higher readability. I recommend these books for first grade readers reading above grade level.

Levine, Ellen, and Beth Peck. *If you lived at the time of Martin Luther King*. New York, NY: Scholastic, 1990.

Mara, Wil. *Amelia Earhart*. New York: Children's Press, 2002. This biography includes photographs, geographics, and is very accessible for first grade readers.

Mara, Wil. *Martin Luther King Jr.* New York: Children's Press, 2002.

"Martin Luther King - Biography." Nobelprize.org. [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-bio.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-bio.html) (accessed July 15, 2011).

McDonough, Yona Zeldis, and John Brien. *Who was Louis Armstrong?* New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 2004.

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"Virtual Jamestown." Virtual Jamestown. <http://www.virtualjamestown.org/> (accessed July 15, 2011).

Yolen, Jane, and Jim Burke. *Johnny Appleseed: the legend and the truth*. New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2008.

## Appendix A

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DE ELA #1 Use written and oral English appropriate for various purposes and audiences.

DE ELA #2 Construct, examine, and extend the meaning of literary, informative, and technical texts through listening, reading, and viewing.

DE ELA #3 Access, organize, and evaluate information gained through listening, reading, and viewing.

DE ELA #4 Use literary knowledge accessed through print and visual media to connect self to society and culture. This unit addresses each of the Delaware English Language Arts standards. Students will be reading informative texts for understanding (#2) and organizing the information read in the biographies with the use of a graphic organizer (#3). They will make connections to themselves (#4) and write a summary and character analysis of a historical figure (#1).

# Appendix B

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Vocabulary Organizer

<b>People</b>	<b>Places</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Things</b>



## Appendix C

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### Reading Response Questions

1. Now that you have read the first pages of the biography, predict what you think the historical figure will do next. (Prediction)
2. Describe how you and the historical figure are alike. (Text-to-self connection)
3. Would you have acted or reacted the same as the historical figure? Explain.
4. Which event do you think was the most important in the life of the historical figure? Explain. (Determining important information)
5. Using your senses describe your mental image of the historical figure and the time he or she lived. (Mental Images)

## Appendix D

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### Character Analysis Organizer

	<b>Draw or Write to Describe</b>	<b>Character Trait</b>
<b>Setting and Environment</b>		
<b>Behavior</b>		
<b>Actions</b>		
<b>Facial Expressions</b>		
<b>Physical Features</b>		
<b>Name or Nickname</b>		

## Appendix E

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Summary Organizer

Historical Figure

	Write	Draw
Birth place, date		
Events growing up		
Adult life		
Obstacles		
Character traits		
How he or she effected the world		

## Endnotes

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1. Gladstein, Gerald A. "Understanding Empathy: Integrating Counseling, Developmental, and Social Psychology Perspectives," 469.
2. Karen E. Gerdes, Elizabeth A. Segal, Kelly F. Jackson, Jennier L. Mullins. "Teaching Empathy: A Framework Rooted In Social Cognitive Neuroscience and Social Justice," 110.
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4. Pearson, P. David, L.R. Roehler, J.A. Dole, and G.G. Duffy. "Developing expertise in reading comprehension." In *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*, 145-151.
5. Jean Decety, 89-91
6. "Martin Luther King - Biography." Nobelprize.org.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. "appleappetite." Index. <http://www.appleappetite.com>
10. Polette, Nancy. *Pocahontas*.
11. Ibid, 90.
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13. Pearson, 147.
14. Calkins, Lucy. *The Art of Teaching Writing*, 183-190.
15. Ibid, 338-340.
16. Ibid, 340.

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