

What you need to know about:		Biographies	Big Picture
Key Concept	Related Concepts	Global Context	Through studying biographies, we explore how lives are shaped by time, place, and relationships, and how telling those stories helps us understand identity.
Perspective	Genre, Context	Identities and relationships	

Strategies to show character in nonfiction writing		
Strategy	Guiding Question	Example
Selective Quotes	What has the person said that reveals personality or belief?	“I would rather fail doing something bold.”
Complexity & Contradictions	How is the person inconsistent, surprising, or human?	A peace activist who sometimes lost his temper
Character Arc	How has the person grown or changed?	From quiet protester to global spokesperson
Relationships	Who shaped this person’s values or decisions?	Her mentor taught her to use her voice for justice
Actions	What does the person <i>do</i> that shows who they are?	Stayed in the lab until dawn, perfecting the vaccine
Reputation & Legacy	How is the person remembered or judged?	“The poet who spoke for the voiceless”

How to Analyze a Biography
Identify the subject → Identify the writer’s focus → Examine how language and structure shape our view → Connect to context → Explain the message about identity or human experience. <i>Remember: Don’t just ask what happened — ask how the writer wants you to see the person and why.</i>

Forms of Biography
Books, magazine features, newspaper profiles, documentaries, podcasts, biopics (films), graphic novels, social-media mini-biographies, obituaries, photo essays, and museum exhibits

Features of Good Biographical Writing	
Details	Consider what details are most important in the subject’s life, and what details are most intriguing or entertaining for the reader.
Figurative Language	Using similes, metaphors, symbolism, and other figurative language makes writing more interesting, even in non-fiction.
Sentence Variety	Don’t only use short sentences, but also, don’t only use long, complex sentences. Using a variety of sentences keeps the reader focused
Structure	Will you write about the subject’s whole life, or just one period of their life? Will you just include only facts? Will you include what they might have felt?
Theme	What makes the person special, or what they represent. A famous artist might represent the human need to create. A leader might represent a hunger for power.
Tone	A biography can be dry and factual, creative and poetic, or funny, or tragic. Does your choice of words match the subject of the biography?
Register	The word choice and tone of voice that make writing casual, formal, etc.

Type of Framing	Description	Example
Heroic frame	Emphasizes greatness, perseverance, and moral strength	Biographies of scientists, leaders, or reformers
Tragic frame	Focuses on failure, loss, or injustice	Artists who suffered/ died young
Victim frame	Portrays subject as harmed by society or circumstances	Figures oppressed due to gender, race, or politics
Transformational frame	Shows how subject changes or grows	Stories of redemption or discovery
Critical frame	Questions or revises public reputation	Modern biographies that “rethink” historical figures