

Book Links

UNPACKING A STANDARD:
WITH BIOGRAPHIES
BY JULIE GREEN

This article originally appeared in the June 1, 2013 issue of *Booklist* magazine.



Great biographies are not only introductions to fascinating subjects, they also provide wonderful opportunities to really think about the authors' choices: what details did they choose to include, what connections did they choose to make, and what concepts did they choose to explore? By sharing the following noteworthy biographies and classroom suggestions, teachers can address these questions while implementing CCSS.ELA-Literacy RI.1.3–RI.6.3. Visit www.booklistonline.com/commoncore for an extended version of this article.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.3. Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.

The Fantastic Jungles of Henri Rousseau. By Michelle Markel. Illus. by Amanda Hall. 2012. 34p. Eerdmans, \$17 (9780802853646). 759.4. K–Gr. 3.

As you read Markel's biography aloud, ask students to think about the one word they would use to describe Rousseau, and afterward, have students share the word that they chose. Next, have students work in pairs to go back into the text and pick out the exact phrases they heard that helped them choose their descriptor. Finally, ask students to present their proof and then vote on the adjective that they think best depicts the artist, based on the textual evidence.

Life in the Ocean: The Story of Oceanographer Sylvia Earle. By Claire A. Nivola. Illus. by the author. 2012. 32p. Farrar/Frances Foster, \$17.99 (9780374380687). 551.46092. K–Gr. 3.

On the first page of this beautiful book, which features an image of the earth dominated by water, the author discusses the importance of the ocean. As you read the story, have students record each time oceanographer Earle makes a connection with, or a step toward, working with or learning about the ocean, such as swimming to the bottom of a river or walking on the bottom of the ocean. After creating this list, have students break into groups and discuss the many ways in which Earle remained connected to the ocean throughout her life.

Who Says Women Can't Be Doctors? The Story of Elizabeth Blackwell. By Tanya Lee Stone. Illus. by Marjorie Priceman. 2013. 40p. Holt/Christy Ottaviano, \$16.99 (9780805090482). 610.92. K–Gr. 3.

After reading this picture-book biography aloud, have students reread the first few pages of information that describe Elizabeth Blackwell when she was young, before she became a doctor. Discuss how each of these events might have contributed to her becoming a doctor. Why would sleeping on a hardwood floor to toughen herself up help her to become a doctor? Finally, have students reflect on their own characteristics, using what they learned about Blackwell as a starting point for discussion.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.3. Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

Look Up! Henrietta Leavitt, Pioneering Woman Astronomer. By Robert Burleigh. Illus. by Raúl Colón. 2013. 32p. Simon & Schuster/Paula Wiseman, \$16.99 (9781416958192). 520.92. Gr. 2–4.

After reading *Look Up!* together, have students answer the question "What did Henrietta Leavitt discover?" Let them explore the text, picking out specific phrases that help them to understand her contribution to astronomy. Chart those phrases and add the chart to a larger, ongoing biography unit that records the contributions of all notable figures that the class studies throughout the year.

Monsieur Marceau. By Leda Schubert. Illus. by Gerard DuBois. 2012. 40p. Roaring Brook/Neal Porter, \$17.99 (9781596435292). 792.3092. Gr. 2–4.

Bip is the mime character that Marcel Marceau, née Mangel, created. After a close reading of the book, have students create an argument about why they think Bip acted and looked the way he did, based on what the text says about Marceau's life. Next, have students write a short autobiography and then create a mime character, based on the words and descriptions they used, to tell their own stories.

A Splash of Red: The Life and Art of Horace Pippin. By Jen Bryant. Illus. by Melissa Sweet. 2013. 40p. Knopf, \$17.99 (9780375867125); lib. ed., \$20.99 (9780375967122). 759.13. Gr. 1–4.

Horace Pippin was a self-taught artist who had to overcome a WWI injury in order to paint. Have students read *A Splash of Red* and determine which phases or events led Horace to become an artist. Some of these steps might be exact phrases from the text, while others might be inferences made from quotes the author and illustrator include. Finally, have

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students create a picture time line of Horace's life, attempting to recreate his unique folk art style.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.3. Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).

Barnum's Bones: How Barnum Brown Discovered the Most Famous Dinosaur in the World. By Tracey Fern. Illus. by Boris Kulikov. 2012. 40p. Farrar/Margaret Ferguson, \$17.99 (9780374305161). 560.92. Gr. 1–4.

While at first glance this book might appear to be written for an early elementary audience, it makes a great choice for older students as well. Have the class read the author's note first, which includes quite a bit of information that is not included in the body of the text. Next, have students study the central story and then write a letter to the publisher, pretending that they are the author, that justifies the reasoning behind what they will include in the main body of the text and what they will not. As part of this exercise, students can also research the information that was not included.

Little White Duck: A Childhood in China. By Na Liu. Illus. by Andrés Vera Martínez. 2012. 108p. Lerner/Graphic Universe, paper, \$9.95 (9780761381150); lib. ed., \$29.27 (9780761365877); e-book, \$21.95 (9780761379638). 741.5. Gr. 4–7.

In this autobiographical graphic novel, Liu offers a view of China's history along with her own story of childhood. Have students note where Liu alternates between telling the story predominantly through words and through illustrations, and discuss how the story is told differently in words and in pictures. How do those particular stories help tell China's story as well? Students could then create their own graphic story of an important episode in their own lives.

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