



7. WRITING A BIOGRAPHY

Learning Objectives

- How to undertake research;
- How to write a report;
- How to express your ideas;
- How to structure factual information.

Resources

- <http://www.hmdt.org.uk/hmdtmusic/stemsisters/the-stem-sisters-2/>
- Google or any search engine
- Books/articles/resources at home or in the classroom

MAIN TASKS

1. Discuss what a biography is and what purpose does it have. What are some of the key pieces of information that need to be included in a biography?

Facts

- When and where were they born – this immediately sets a context
- When, where and how did they die?
- What do we know about their childhood?
- Where did they study?
- Fun facts – other information which is perhaps a little unusual – see the STEM Sisters gallery.

Why are they famous?

- What did they do?
- What's important about their scientific work?
- How and when did they do what they are famous for?

Challenges - What struggles did they face? e.g.

- Prejudice from others e.g. for being a woman?
- Lack of education and opportunity
- Racism
- Disability
- Lack of money

Impact

- What is their impact on you/on other people/on the world?
- How have they influenced events during and if relevant, after their life?
- Have they taught us anything?

- Have they left a legacy and if so what?
 - Will they always be remembered – why or why not?
 - Have their inspired you?
2. Discuss what writing styles and features should be used in a biography.
 - a. It needs to be factual and accurate as it is an informational text.
 - b. Should it be written in the present or past tense?
 - c. Does everything have to be written in chronological order?
 - d. Do you want to bring them to life with anecdotal information e.g. a short entertaining story about something that happened?
 - e. Think about using a quote by them or about them.
 3. Choose a STEM woman to write a biography about ensuring you write in prose and not a series of bullet points. Decide if you want to use one of the women featured in the project or find someone different – it could also be someone who is still alive. Interesting historical suggestions include:
 - Katherine Johnson – one of the Hidden Figures; a NASA space scientist
 - Florence Nightingale
 - Margaret Ann Bulkley – first female surgeon who dressed as a man: Dr James Barry
 - Beatrice Shilling – aeronautical engineer
 - Jane Goodall - primatologist who studied chimpanzees
 - Mary Sommerville – wrote some of the first text books on studying science
 4. Plan your biography carefully. You might want to use a Spider diagram or a mind map to set out and categorise the type of information you're looking for. How can you make your biography more interesting and inspiring? Factual information doesn't have to be dry and boring, it can be very exciting!

Extension Activity

Read the biographies aloud to each other. Think about tone of voice to ensure they are inspire and not dull. Use them for short comprehension and/or memory quizzes.