

## Creating Biography Webs

*“Creating biography webs involves the completion of five related projects designed to help students understand an individual’s historical context. Historical **context** refers to the system of laws, economic structures, political institutions, and material conditions that existed at the time in history when an individual lived and were instrumental in shaping his or her beliefs, values, and actions.”* Gary Fertig, Professor, University of North Colorado

### I. Reading Biographies & Designing New Book Covers (Pair/Group)

- Each person reads a biography about the same person
- Each individual designs a new book cover
  - Draw a picture on the front cover representative of the person’s historical significance.
  - Write a description of the book cover on the left-end flap explaining how the cover represents the significance of the individual
  - Compose an I Am Poem on the right-end flap (Levstik & Barton, 2005)

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I wonder \_\_\_\_\_

I hear \_\_\_\_\_

I see \_\_\_\_\_

I want \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I pretend \_\_\_\_\_

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

I touch \_\_\_\_\_

I worry \_\_\_\_\_

I cry \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I understand \_\_\_\_\_

I dream \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

- Group members share and discuss book covers. Discuss similarities and differences. Generate new questions.

### II. Developing Timelines

- Create Initial Timeline
  - Record significant events discussed by the author of the biography (may distinguish events that had personal significance from those that had public significance)
  - Initial timelines may include events that took place in two people’s lives that were closely related

- Timelines may include quotes, illustrations of events, places, people, etc.
- Timelines do not have to be in a straight line (spiral, shape of an object that was historically important)

- Create Parallel Timeline-Situate the person’s life in the broader context of other historical events at that time.

### III. Storytelling Biography Using Artifacts

- Partners reach a consensus about which events in the individual’s life and select five historically significant or important events that occurred in the life of the biographical character.
- Create a graphic organizer

Significant Events	Artifact Representing the Significant Event	How the Artifact Represents the Significant Event?	Significance of the Event Today

- Partners find or create the artifacts to tell others of the individual’s biography.
- Partners can create or find a container that historically represents the individual’s life.

### IV. Using and Interpreting Historical Photographs: Allows students to “picture the past in their minds.”

- Create a visual display of individuals interacting with others in various groups and situations (photos, drawings, portraits, cartoons, etc.)
- Create captions for visual artifacts.
- Check out EIU’s Teaching with Primary Sources web page

<http://www.eiu.edu/~eiuam/index.php>

### V. Creating Historical Maps

- Students create one or more maps of the places to which the individual traveled. (Can color code, include dates, represent the system used to travel, etc.)

Fertig, G. & Silverman, R. (2009). Creating biography webs to investigate individuals’ historical contexts. *Social Education*, 73(5), 244-246.

Fertig, G. (2008). Using biography to help young learners understand the causes of historical change and continuity. *The Social Studies*, 99(4), 147-154.