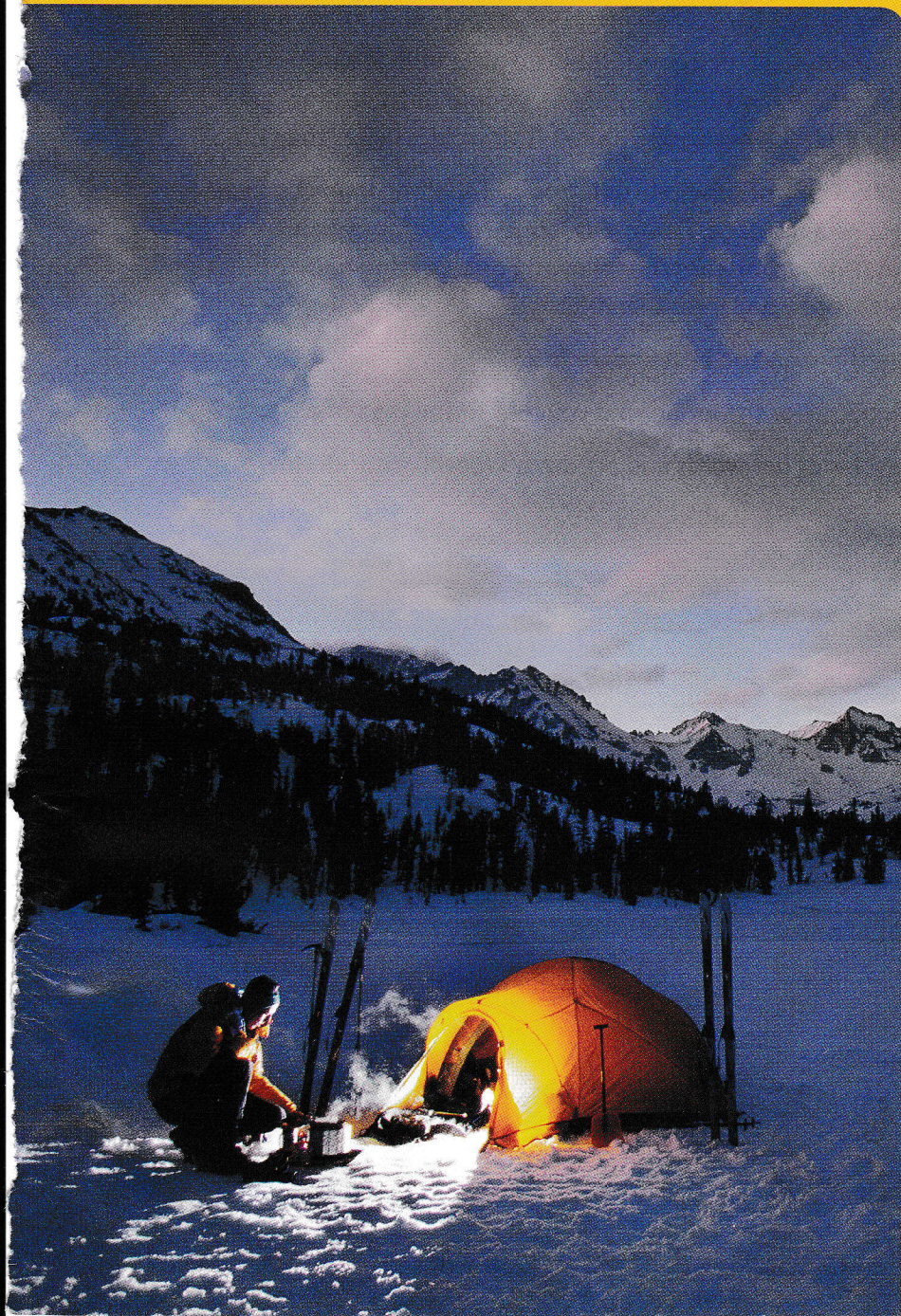


UNIT

7

Life Stories



BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

- In Nonfiction
- In Poetry
- In Media

What makes a person larger than LIFE?

Martin Luther King Jr., Anne Frank, George Washington—why are these people remembered? Each person comes from a very different time and place. Yet they are alike in that their words and actions shaped the lives of the people of their time, and continue to influence people today. Each one is larger than **life**.

ACTIVITY Think of someone who has had a strong impact on you. It might be a historical figure, a celebrity, or someone you know. In a small group, discuss the following questions to decide what makes this person larger than life:

- What is the person best known for?
- How has he or she influenced your life, or the lives of others?
- Might his or her words and actions affect the future? How?





ILLINOIS
OBJECTIVES

Preview Unit Goals

LITERARY ANALYSIS

- Identify the form and characteristics of a biography and autobiography
- Analyze a biography and autobiography
- Identify and analyze imagery

READING

- Identify main ideas and supporting details
- Trace chronological order using signal words
- Synthesize information from multiple sources
- Identify author's purpose

WRITING AND GRAMMAR

- Write a personal narrative
- Use colons correctly to introduce a list
- Capitalize proper nouns correctly

SPEAKING, LISTENING, AND VIEWING

- Create a video documentary
- Identify and analyze elements of a documentary
- Compare print and film versions

VOCABULARY

- Recognize the origins and meanings of frequently used foreign words in English
- Use context clues to understand the meanings of idioms and analogies

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|------------|
| • biography | • supporting details | • imagery |
| • autobiography | • chronological order | • author's |
| • main idea | • synthesize | • purpose |

ILLINOIS
OBJECTIVES

READING STANDARDS

2.6.06 Recognize points of view

2.6.14 Identify subcategories of genres

Biography and Autobiography

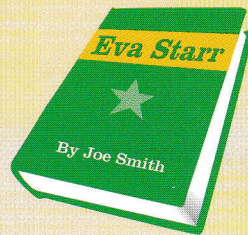
The magician Harry Houdini thrilled audiences with his escapes from deadly traps. How did he develop his tricks? Young Helen Keller overcame tremendous odds to discover the mystery of language. How did she feel when she could suddenly communicate with others? Most people are curious about the lives of others, from Houdini and Helen Keller to today's athletes and stars. Biographies and autobiographies can let you in on the lives of many fascinating people.

Part 1: Life Stories

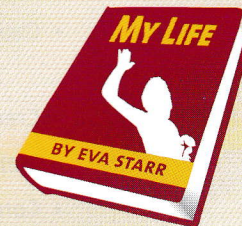
Both biographies and autobiographies tell the stories of people's lives. So, what makes them different from each other? The most important difference has to do with *who* does the writing.

A **biography** is written by someone other than the subject. The writer, or **biographer**, reports on the events, achievements, and struggles in a subject's life. An **autobiography**, however, is written by the subject. In many ways, an autobiography gives you an inside look. You get to hear all about the subject's life directly from the source.

Here are some other differences between biographies and autobiographies.

BIOGRAPHY*Writer IS NOT the Subject***Characteristics**

- is written from the third-person point of view, using pronouns such as *she*, *he*, *his*, *her*, *they*, and *them* to refer to the subject
- is often based on information from many sources, including books about the subject, the subject's journals or letters, and interviews
- sometimes includes details provided by the subject himself or herself


AUTOBIOGRAPHY*Writer IS the Subject***Characteristics**

- is written from the first-person point of view, using pronouns such as *I*, *me*, *my*, *we*, and *us* to refer to the subject
- describes the subject's thoughts, feelings, and opinions about his or her life
- is based primarily on details that come from the subject's own memories
- may include information from other sources, such as the subject's family and friends

MODEL 1: BIOGRAPHY

Years ago, readers worldwide first fell in love with the wizard Harry Potter. Soon after, J. K. Rowling became a household name. This excerpt is from a biography of Rowling, the author of the *Harry Potter* series.

from *J. K. Rowling*



Biography by **Bradley Steffens**

J. K. Rowling, as she was becoming known to the world, was pretty well prepared to handle life's ups and downs. She had equipped herself with a good education, traveled and lived abroad, been married and divorced, given birth to a child, and lost a parent. She had struggled
5 through grim poverty and realized a lifelong dream of publishing a book. Yet nothing could have prepared her for what was about to happen. Within five years she would become one of the richest and most recognizable women in the world. The media would report on her every move. . . . Most important, hundreds of millions of people—children
10 and adults alike—would read and reread her books.

Close Read

1. How can you tell that this excerpt is from a biography rather than an autobiography?
2. What was Rowling's life like before she became famous? Name two specific things you learn about her from this excerpt.

MODEL 2: AUTOBIOGRAPHY

As a Jew growing up in Poland, Anita Lobel was only five when World War II began. At that time, Nazi Germany had invaded Poland with the intent of imprisoning and killing Jewish people. Lobel and her brother spent days in hiding from German soldiers before they were captured.

from *No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War*

Autobiography by **Anita Lobel**

Walking as we did down the middle of the bridge, I hoped that we were hidden from view. Under our feet this short, solid stone walkway felt like a tightrope. I held my brother's hand. We will get across, I thought. We will. We had squeaked by in other situations. This was just
5 another adventure. Already, with every step, the distance to the safe side was shrinking. The guards were not looking in our direction. Not yet.

Close Read

1. What pronouns in the first sentence let you know that this is an autobiography?
2. In the boxed text, Lobel describes what she was thinking when she was crossing the bridge. Where else does she share her thoughts or feelings?

Part 2: Reading Life Stories

Picture this situation: You're in the library or on the Web, trying to find out more about a person who interests you. Perhaps that person is a former president, a professional athlete, or the genius who invented the cell phone. How can you learn as much as possible about that person's life, personality, and accomplishments?

The best way to get to know any person—whether he or she is a historical figure or a rising star—is to consult both autobiographies and biographies. Here are some important questions to keep in mind as you read.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Who wrote the work?

In an autobiography, the writer is the subject. You get to hear about the subject's life from his or her own point of view. In a biography, you learn about the subject from someone who has consulted many sources. Sometimes, a biography can give you a more complete picture of a subject's life.



When was the work written?

Was the work written early on in the subject's life or 100 years after his or her death? *When* an autobiography or biography is written affects the kind of information it includes.



What does the work focus on?

Some works focus on a single period in a subject's life—a wacky childhood or a championship season in an athletic career, for instance. Other works give a broader overview of the major moments in a subject's life.



How is the subject described?

The writer of any life story makes choices about how to describe the subject and what details to include. These details can affect how you feel about the subject. Ask yourself: Am I getting a positive, negative, or neutral impression?



MODEL 1: READING A BIOGRAPHY

Tony Hawk is a professional skateboarder. By the time he was 16, Hawk was taking the skateboarding world by storm and winning all kinds of competitions. This article was published in 1986, when Hawk was 18.

from

Chairman of the Board



Sports Illustrated magazine article by **Armen Keteyian**

When Hawk swoops down from the top of a U-shaped bowl and starts digging into his bag of tricks—720s, 360 varial inverters, finger flips—he's a sight to see, an aerialist who is equal parts gymnast, acrobat and ballet dancer. He often concludes his show with an electrifying 720 aerial; Hawk is the only skater in the world who can complete two midair somersaults and somehow still land on a 31- by 10-inch hunk of hardwood.

Close Read

1. If you knew nothing about Tony Hawk except for what you've just read, how would you describe him?
2. Examine the boxed details. Do they give you a positive or negative impression of Hawk?

MODEL 2: READING AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

In 1999 Hawk retired from competitive skateboarding. However, he has managed to stay involved in the sport that brought him fame. Hawk has developed his own line of skateboards and even has video games named after him. In this autobiography, Hawk looks back on his childhood and his career.

from

TONY HAWK: PROFESSIONAL SKATEBOARDER

Autobiography by **Tony Hawk** with Sean Mortimer

I got picked on. I was less than five feet tall when I entered eighth grade, and weighed less than eighty pounds. I was so skinny that I resembled a set of toothpicks walking awkwardly down the hallway. Only my legs had a hint of muscle on them. If I flexed my bicep nothing would pop up—muscle or fat. And, I was short. If I had to be skinny, at least someone could have given me height. I was a seriously late bloomer and in school nothing is more noticeable than that.

Close Read

1. In what way does this excerpt change your impression of the champion skater described in the magazine article?
2. How would you describe Hawk's personality?

Part 3: Analyze the Literature

Marian Anderson, an African-American singer, rose to fame in the 1930s. She performed for audiences across the country. However, she was banned from singing at Constitution Hall because she was black. Outraged, some people arranged for Anderson to give a free concert at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. On April 9, 1939, Anderson performed for 75,000 people.

Author Russell Freedman writes about Anderson's life in *The Voice That Challenged a Nation*, published 11 years after her death.

from

The Voice **That Challenged a Nation**

Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights

Biography by **Russell Freedman**

Marian Anderson never expected to become an activist in the struggle for equal rights. Away from the concert stage she valued her privacy and preferred a quiet family life. She disliked confrontations. And she never felt comfortable as the center of a public controversy.

5 “I would be fooling myself to think that I was meant to be a fearless fighter,” she said in her autobiography. “I was not, just as I was not meant to be a soprano instead of a contralto.”¹

10 Actually, Anderson had to fight hard to win her place in American music history. As she pursued her career, she was forced to challenge racial barriers simply to succeed as a singer. . . .

15 It was only after she toured Europe to great acclaim in the early 1930s that her artistry was recognized in her own homeland. And even then, Anderson's fame could not easily overcome the racial prejudice that she confronted as a black singer touring America. Well into her career, she was turned away from restaurants and hotels.

20 Anderson's **exceptional musical gifts** and her uncompromising artistic standards made it possible for her to break through racial barriers. She became a role model, inspiring generations of African American performers who followed her. But it was the strength of her character, her **undaunted**² spirit and unshakable dignity, that transformed her from a singer to an international symbol of progress in the advancement of human rights.

1. **soprano . . . contralto**: terms used to describe a singer's vocal range.

2. **undaunted**: courageously determined, especially during difficult times.

Close Read

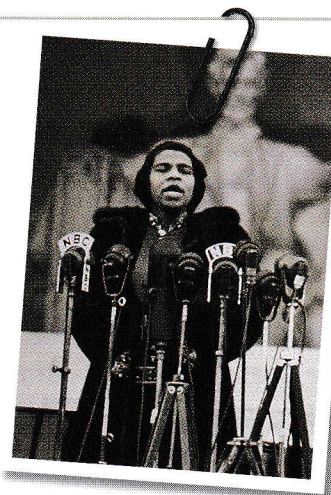
1. How can you tell that this excerpt is from a biography?
2. What do you learn about Anderson's personality in lines 1–4?
3. What source of information does the biographer cite in this excerpt?
4. What details does the writer include to give you a positive impression of Anderson? One detail is **boxed**.

Now read this excerpt from Anderson's autobiography, which was published in 1956. In the excerpt, Anderson remembers that April day in 1939 when she sang at the Lincoln Memorial.

from

My Lord, What a Morning

Autobiography by **Marian Anderson**



There seemed to be people as far as the eye could see. The crowd stretched in a great semicircle from the Lincoln Memorial around the reflecting pool on to the shaft of the Washington Monument. I had
5 a feeling that a great wave of good will poured out from these people, almost engulfing me. And when I stood up to sing our National Anthem I felt for a moment as though I were choking. For a desperate second I thought that the words, well
10 as I know them, would not come.

I sang, I don't know how. There must have been the help of professionalism I had accumulated over the years. Without it I could not have gone through the program. I sang—and again I know because I consulted a newspaper clipping—“America,” the aria “O mio Fernando,”
15 Schubert’s “Ave Maria,” and three spirituals—“Gospel Train,” “Trampin’,” and “My Soul Is Anchored in the Lord.”

I regret that a fixed rule was broken, another thing about which I found out later. Photographs were taken from within the Memorial, where the great statue of Lincoln stands, although there was a tradition
20 that no pictures could be taken from within the sanctum.¹

It seems also that at the end, when the tumult² of the crowd's shouting would not die down, I spoke a few words. I read the clipping now and cannot believe that I could have uttered another sound after I had finished singing. “I am overwhelmed,” I said. “I just can't talk.
25 I can't tell you what you have done for me today. I thank you from the bottom of my heart again and again.”

It was the simple truth. But did I really say it?

1. **sanctum**: a sacred place.

2. **tumult**: commotion.

Close Read

1. What thoughts and feelings does Anderson recall having before she started to sing?
2. In lines 13–14 and 22–24, Anderson admits that she consulted a newspaper for help with remembering details about the day. Why might she have had trouble recalling a day she experienced firsthand?
3. What picture of Anderson do you have after reading both excerpts? Explain how this picture would be different if you had not read her autobiography.

Matthew Henson at the Top of the World

Biography by Jim Haskins

Why attempt the IMPOSSIBLE?



ILLINOIS OBJECTIVES

READING STANDARDS

2.6.09 Compare or contrast two characters

2.6.14 Identify subcategories of genres

KEY IDEA Sailing across the ocean. Taking a walk on the moon. Once, these things were thought to be **impossible**. Then someone had the courage to try what had never been done. In the following selection, you will see how a young explorer's determination helped him go where nobody had gone before.

WEB IT What do you want to accomplish in your lifetime? Write down one of your biggest ambitions in the center of a word web like the one shown. Then brainstorm different things you could do to make that achievement possible.

