

American Idols

Using Inspiration to Organize a Biographical Web

OBJECTIVES

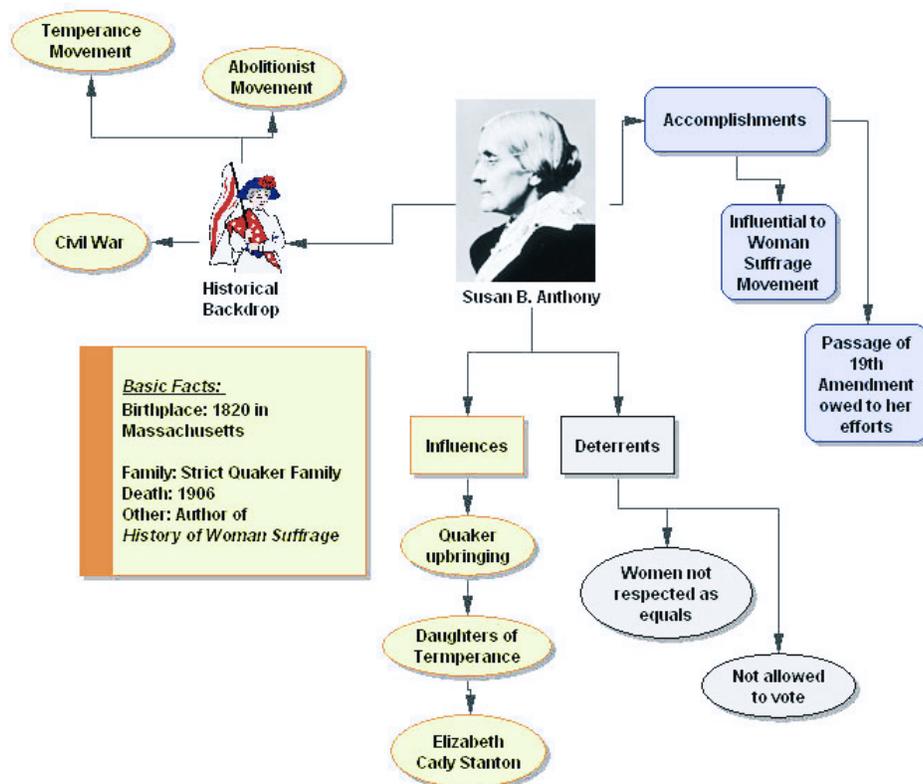
- Design a biographical web for a famous American figure
- Identify key research questions
- Organize information as a prewriting strategy

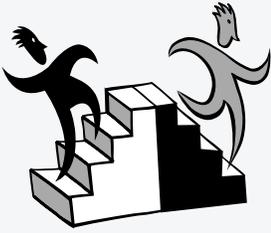
MATERIALS

- Inspiration software
- American Idols Planning Sheet
- American Idols Template
- American Idols Sample Activity

Note: Before the lesson, review the American Idols Template and Sample Activity. Make changes to meet the needs of your students. Browse the Internet Connection section for more ideas and references for developing historical biographies.

An effective biography goes beyond listing events in a person's life and moves toward explaining the significance of accomplishments, influence, or life activities. In other words, a good biography brings a person to life! Some biographies focus on famous or infamous historical personalities while others hail the accomplishments of local heroes or heroines. Whatever the subject, the key to writing interesting biographies is in asking the right questions and organizing the answers even before students begin to compose their essays.





Customizing to Meet Your Needs

- Younger students might enjoy reading about famous Americans aloud and then creating a class web on the subject using Inspiration.
- Older students might want to create a corresponding Inspiration web highlighting the historical backdrop and the various aspects of the world situation that may have influenced this historical figure.

Before the Computer

1. In a whole group setting, have students brainstorm a list of American personalities or idols. Encourage students to generate as many famous, infamous, or not-so-famous American historical figures as possible.
2. Next, work with students to develop a list of questions about these American personalities that will help them define the research process. At first they may volunteer such questions as “Where was this person born?” or “When did this person die?” Encourage students to go beyond the standard list of facts and to dig into the person behind the idol. Some effective questions might include:
 - In what ways was this life remarkable?
 - How has this person made an impact on others’ lives?
 - What human qualities were most influential in shaping the way this person lived and influenced his or her times?
 - Would you consider this person a hero? Why or why not?
3. Use the American Idol Planning Sheet to provide more questions and to help students create their own investigative inquiries. Take this opportunity to explain how this is an effective research and prewriting strategy.
4. Finally, take students to the library or browse the Internet for more resources on famous Americans. Encourage students to select a subject of interest and to use a variety of sources to locate answers to the Planning Sheet questions.

At the Computer

1. Direct students to the American Idols Template and remind them how to rename and save their template in the appropriate location.
2. Tell students to use the American Idols Planning Sheet as a guide in designing their biography webs. Encourage students to modify the templates to fit their needs. Monitor their progress and remind them to save periodically.
3. Instruct students to enter the name of the person into the symbol labeled “historical figure.”
4. Show students how to add notes to their symbols and tell them to add appropriate notes to further explain key topics on the diagram.

5. Take the time to show students how to use the **Outline** view when completing their biography webs.
5. Instruct students to print their completed biography webs and explain how to use these graphic organizers as a starting point for writing a biographical essay.

Other Great Activities

- Use this same format to create a graphic organizer for an autobiography or personal interview.
- Pair students and have each student interview the other partner in order to create a biography web based on their interview.
- Work in student teams to develop biography webs of the school faculty members that can later be shared with the school community.
- Create an American Heroes biography web that illustrates living American heroes and the qualities that make them special.

Internet Connection

<http://www.biography.com/>

Browse more than 15,000 famous figures or take a biography quiz at this site dedicated to biography resources.

<http://www.achievement.org/mainmenu.html>

Achievement.org has biographies of and interviews with people who have shaped the twentieth century by their accomplishments.

<http://www.wic.org/misc/llaward.htm>

Read biographies and view photos of those honored with the Living Legacy Award since 1984. Maya Angelou, Mother Teresa, and Linus Pauling are just a few of the notable recipients.



Tips & Timesavers

- Import scanned images or download pictures from the Web in order for students to customize their biographical webs.
- Use the **Note** button on the **Diagram** toolbar to open the **Notes Text** window for the selected symbol.