

Genre Focus Lesson

I. Objectives

- To read to understand a work of nonfiction
- To activate prior knowledge of a nonfiction topic
- To identify the main types of nonfiction
- To identify and understand the techniques used in nonfiction writing
- To respond and connect to a work of nonfiction
- To write a letter to a nonfiction author

II. Motivating Options

Activating Prior Knowledge Students reading nonfiction will often discover that they know something about the topic. If they are reading about a person, they may have heard about him or her before. If they are reading about a place or thing, they may have come across a description of it on television or in a book. Encourage them to jot down notes on what they already know. They can use the **K** column of Blackline Master 1 to list their prior knowledge about the topic. Referring and adding to their notes can help them increase their understanding of the topic.

III. Teaching Strategies

Nonfiction deals with real people and actual events. It includes the following types and techniques of prose writing.

A. Analyzing

1. **Types of Nonfiction** While nonfiction writing can include speeches, letters, and articles, these are the main types of nonfiction texts.

Genre Focus Lesson, *cont.*

- a. **Autobiography** Explain that an autobiography usually includes story elements, such as setting, characters, plot, and theme. Autobiographies often reveal a lot about the subject's thoughts and emotions, because the author is the subject. Encourage students to write a brief autobiographical anecdote. Urge them to use the anecdote to reveal something important about themselves.
- b. **Biography** While an autobiography is usually a first-person narrative, a biography is written in the third person and focuses on the life of someone well-known. Authors will usually select a series of anecdotes about the subject and use them to illustrate the development and impact of the person's life. Ask students to take the autobiographical incident they wrote and rewrite it as a biography. Discuss with them how the anecdote changes with the new point of view.
- c. **Essay** Explain that in an essay, a writer explores a topic or idea by telling a true story or providing facts, examples, and reasons. Essays may be serious or humorous and may treat any subject the author chooses. Sometimes the author states the central idea, or theme, in a thesis statement. Remind students that the purpose of an essay can be to inform, to entertain, to persuade, or to tell about real people, places, and events. Ask students to find an editorial in a local newspaper and identify its purpose. Does it inform, entertain, persuade, or tell about real people, places, and events? Does it have more than one purpose?

2. *Nonfiction Techniques*

- a. **Imagery** In autobiography, biography and narrative essays, authors will often use sensory details to bring their subjects alive.

Genre Focus Lesson, *cont.*

Ask students to describe an item in the classroom using sensory details, without directly identifying it. Other students can try to guess what the item is.

- b. Comparisons** Point out that by comparing something in a simile, metaphor, or analogy, a writer can help readers see it in a new way.

Have students turn clichéd similes around. Instead of comparing a character trait to an animal, as in *sly as a fox* or *brave as a lion*, have students make up similes that compare animals to humans, as in *The grizzly was as tall as Michael Jordan*.

- c. Examples** Tell students that examples are usually very specific. They are used to support a main idea.

Ask students to express an opinion about the school lunchroom and to use a specific example to support it.

- d. Statistics** Statistics are facts that are expressed in numbers. They can be proven. Authors use them to help support a main idea.

Ask students to look through a local newspaper to find an interesting statistic. Have them state an idea that the statistic supports.

- e. Propaganda** Remind students that propaganda techniques such as transfer, bandwagon, and glittering generalities, are attempts at manipulation. Encourage them to look for an author's purpose for using propaganda.

Have students find examples in magazines of ads using one of the propaganda techniques. Discuss what the technique attempts to do and whether or not it is successful.

- 3. Vocabulary** Remind students that essays often contain specialized vocabulary, or jargon, that is associated with a particular activity or career. Have them keep a list of specialized terms in a log, and encourage them to use a dictionary to define any unfamiliar terms.

Genre Focus Lesson, *cont.*

4. **Author's Craft** Point out that authors write nonfiction for a purpose. Clues to this purpose, or central idea, can be found in a number of places: the title, the events the author describes, and the details the author includes about people or places. The audience for a work of nonfiction is the readers for whom the piece is intended. Encourage students to identify the purpose and audience as they read. This will help them understand the work more fully.

B. Responding

1. **Literature Groups** After reading the piece of nonfiction, have students work in groups to discuss their reactions to and opinions of it. Encourage them to support their statements with examples from the work. (For more suggestions on using Literature Groups, see *Literature Groups Sourcebook: Strategies and Activities*.)
2. **Writing a Letter to the Author** Invite students to write a letter to the author of a nonfiction work they have read, detailing their reaction to the work. Their letters should address the following questions:
 - Do I agree with the author's opinion?
 - What do I want to more know about?
 - What does the author reveal about himself or herself in the work?
 - Did the work affect the way I think or feel? If so, how?

IV. For Blackline Masters, click [HERE](#)