

Biographical Poems Celebrating Amazing Montana Women

Enduring Understandings: There is no single “woman’s experience”; women’s lives are diverse. People can make a difference in their communities.

Grade Level: 4th–6th

Activity Description: This lesson combines the subjects of history and poetry into a single lesson. Students will read short biographies about specific Montana women and use them to create short biographical poems.

Objectives: Students will

- Read and gather information on actual people important to Montana’s history, identifying significant data and inferring meaning from text.
- Review parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositional phrases)
- Use a poem template to write a poem using the biographical information they collected.

Time: Two 50-minute sessions, plus a homework assignment if more time is needed to complete the assignment

Content Standards:

ELA.L.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

ELA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

ELA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

ELA.R.10 Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

ELA.W.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Materials

Lesson Plan Materials:

- Reference list of Montana Women Biographies (below)
- Biography Poem Template (below)
- Biography Reading Guide Worksheet (below)
- Completed Biography Reading Guide sample for Belle Fligelman Winestine (below)

Classroom/School Library Materials:

- Shirley, Gayle Corbett. *More than Petticoats*. Helena, MT: Falcon, 1995. (book, optional)
- Alter, Judy. *Extraordinary Women of the American West*. New York: Children’s, 1999. (book, optional)
- Cajune, Julie, Gary R. Stroutsos, Gary Lanz, Jennifer K. Greene, David Lanz, Joanne Bigcrane, Bev Swaney, Vi Trahan, Clara Charlo, and Swil Kanim. *Heart of the Bitterroot: Voices of Salish & Pend D’Oreille Women*. Npustin, 2007. (CD, optional)
- Judy, Beth. *Bold Women in Montana History*. Missoula, MT: Mountain Press, 2017. (book)
- Women’s History Matters, montanawomenshistory.org (website)
- Computer(s) with Internet access (optional)
- Notepaper
- Pencils

Pre-Lesson Preparation

- If your students will not have access to the Internet to read the biographies, print the biographies.
- Print copies of the Biography Reading Guide (worksheet) and Biography Poem Template (one per student).
- Print one copy of the completed Biography Reading Guide Sample.

Assessment/evaluation: Successful completion of the lesson components: biography notes and

biography poem. Students should be evaluated on the thoroughness of their work. Encourage creativity, and strength and precision of word choice. This lesson should elicit creativity in expression as well as attentiveness to factual details.

Procedure

Day One:

- Introduce the activity to students.
- Have each student select a woman from the biographies list to study.
- Provide students with printed biographies or allow them to access information online.
- Have students research their woman and complete the biography worksheet.

Day Two:

- Hand out the poem template.
- Review the template as a class, including parts of speech.
- Share the completed biographical worksheet for Belle Fligelman Winestine. Read the model poem as a class.
- Have students create their own poems and share them with the class (either by reading or posting them on a bulletin board).

Extension Activity: Have students create a portrait of the woman they studied and/or illustrate a scene from her life. Display the portraits and poems in a classroom exhibit. Invite other classes or parents to attend your “gallery opening” and/or poetry reading.

Biography Reading Guide

This reading guide will help you take notes on the woman you are studying while you read her biography. **You will use these notes later to complete a poem about the woman you are studying.**

- 1 What is your woman's name? _____

- 2 Where and when was she born? _____

- 3 Where did she live? _____

- 4 Who were her family members? _____

- 5 What are some historical events that affected her? _____

- 6 What did she look like? _____

- 7 Describe her personality and character. _____

- 8 What did she care about? _____

- 9 What were her hopes and dreams? _____

- 10 What challenges or obstacles did she face? _____

- 11 What were some of her accomplishments? _____

- 12 What did you find most interesting about this woman? _____

- 13 If you could ask her one question, what would it be? _____

Biography Poem Template

First line: woman's full name

Second line: born in (year)

Third line: noun, noun (specific nouns are better)

Fourth line: verb followed by prepositional phrase (it is ok to include other words, too)

Fifth line: verb followed by prepositional phrase

Sixth line: verb followed by prepositional phrase

Seventh line: adjective, adjective, adjective

Eighth line: I think she is (adjective).

Model

Belle Fligelman Winestine

Born in 1891

Writer, suffragist

Believed in equal rights

Spoke to people on the streets

Lived in Helena, Montana

Small, generous, courageous

I think she is amazing.

Parts of Speech

Noun—a person, place, object, emotion or quality. Examples: the girl (person), a mountain (place), the car (object), sadness (emotion), beauty (quality). Nouns can be general or specific. For example: a person (general) may also be a jazz musician (specific).

Proper Noun—a noun that is also a name of a specific person, place, or object. Examples: Jeannette Rankin (person); Helena, Montana (place); *Girls' Guide to Camping* (book title).

Adjective—a word that describes or tells more about a noun, such as the noun's color, shape, texture, age, feelings, and so on. Examples (adjectives in *italics*): the *brown* horse, the *selfish* giant, the *tired* grandmother, the *ancient* city, the *worried* teacher.

Verb—a word that expresses the action taken by a noun. Verbs change form according to when the action took place or will take place. For example: She *walks*. She *walked*.

Prepositional Phrases—Prepositions are words that help locate a noun or relate one noun to another. Examples: on, in, under, from, across, beside, between, behind, over, next to, from, about, with, without, by, to, and away. **Prepositional phrases** are a grouping of words that starts with a preposition and ends with a noun, such as *under* the couch, *beside* the waterfall, *from* a lost city, *without* her friends. They come after nouns or verbs.

Use this information as you follow the model to write your own poem.

Biography Reading Guide Sample: Belle Fligelman Winestine

This reading guide is to help you take notes on the woman you are studying while you read her biography. **You will use these notes later to complete a poem about the woman you are studying.**

- 1 What is your woman's name? **Belle Fligelman Winestine**
- 2 Where and when was she born? **Born 1891 in Helena, Montana**
- 3 Where did she live? **Helena, Montana; went to school in Madison, Wisconsin**
- 4 Who were her family members? **Herman and Minnie Fligelman (father and mother),
Getty Vogelman (stepmother), Frieda (sister), Norman Winestine (husband), Mina, Judy,
and Henry (children)**
- 5 What are some historical events that affected her? **Women's suffrage (1914), Jeannette Rankin being
elected to Congress (1916)**
- 6 What did she look like? **Small (5 feet tall), dark hair, feminine features**
- 7 Describe her personality and character. **Generous, determined, had a sense of humor, strong,
outspoken, caring**
- 8 What did she care about? **Encouraging women to seek public employment and to pursue
professional lives. She believed in pay equity for women and civil service reform.**
- 9 What were her hopes and dreams? **Women's rights, journalism, labor law, politics**
- 10 What challenges or obstacles did she face? **Discrimination of women's roles, balancing the duties of
family life with her activism and journalism career**
- 11 What were some of her accomplishments? **State president of the League of Women Voters (1920),
lobbied for Child Labor Amendment and Equal Rights Amendment, creation of a state Children's
Bureau, worked for Jeannette Rankin**
- 12 What did you find most interesting about this woman? **Her courage to stand up for what she believed
in and continue working for causes that were truly important to her and future generations**
- 13 If you could ask her one question, what would it be? **Was there ever a point where you felt or thought
that women's suffrage was not going to happen? If so, when and why?**

Montana Women Biographies

Note: A good starting point for research are books in your library (see materials list) and the Montana Historical Society’s Women’s History Matters website (montanawomenshistory.org). Students may also need to search for information online. As of 2019, credible information on all of these women was available on the Internet. This is an opportunity to work with students to evaluate the credibility of websites and teach them how search for information (for example, students may need to add the word “biography” or “Montana” after an individual’s name to find good sites.) There are also links to more information on several of these women on the Montana’s Biography web page, <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/MontanaBiographies>.

Alice Greenough Orr (1902–1995)—rodeo star

Alma Jacobs (1916–1997)—librarian and civil rights activist

Belle Fligelman Winestine (1891–1985)—suffragist, women’s rights advocate

B. M. Bower (1871–1940)—author of Western novels

Caroline McGill (1879–1959)—doctor, conservationist, and museum benefactor

Dolly Smith Cusker Akers (Eagle Day Woman) (1901–1986)—legislator and tribal council member

Dorothy Johnson (1905–1984)—author

Ella Knowles Haskell (1860–1911)—first female lawyer in Montana

Elouise Cobell (1946–2012)—accountant, tribal treasurer, and advocate

Esther Vance (1903–1983)—pilot

Evelyn Cameron (1868–1928)—photographer

Fanny Cory Cooney (1877–1972)—cartoonist and illustrator

Fanny Sperry Steele (1887–1983)—champion bronc rider

Idora Guthrie (1871–1937)—homesteader and teacher

Janine Pease (1949–present)—educator and tribal college president

Jean Wrobel (1920–2004)—jazz pianist

Jeannette Rankin (1880–1973)—suffragist, congresswoman, and peace activist

Maggie Smith Hathaway (1867–1965)—suffragist and legislator

Mary Fields* (1836?–1914)—gardener, postal carrier, and former slave

**Please note:* There are some very inaccurate accounts of Mary Fields on the Internet. Please do not direct your students to them, especially those accounts on blackcowboys.com and cowboysofcolor.org. These accounts contain inaccuracies as well as overtly racist content.

Mattie Bell Castner (1848–1920)—former slave and hotel owner

Minerva Allen (1932–present)—Assiniboine & A’Aninin poet and historian

Minnie Spotted Wolf (1923–1988)—first Native American woman to join the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve (Blackfeet)

Myrna Loy (1905–1993)—actress/movie star

Nancy Cooper Russell (1878–1940)—promoter and agent for husband-artist Charlie Russell

Pretty Shield (1856–1954)—Apsáalooke healer

Running Eagle (Pi’tamaka) (c. 1820–1850)—Blackfeet woman warrior

Sarah Bickford (1855–1931)—businesswoman and former slave

Susie Walking Bear Yellowtail (1903–1981)—Indian healthcare advocate