Answer Key

LEARNING GENRES BIOGRAPHY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Biographies and autobiographies are types of nonfiction literature. A biography is the true story of someone's whole life, written by another person. Most biographies are written about a person after that person has passed away. An autobiography is the true story of your own life that you write yourself. A biography can be as short as one paragraph, or it can be as long as 1,000 pages! Can you think of any famous biographies or autobiographies?





Mark Twain: Twain was one of America's first great writers. His style was unusual and unique to his own country. His autobiography was done in a unique and humurous way too. He demanded that it not be published until 100 years after his death.

"Her talk is my circus, my menagerie, my fireworks, my spiritual refreshment. When she is at it I would rather be there than at a fire. She talks but little to me, for I understand only about half that she says, and I have had the sagacity not to betray that I understand that half..."

-Autobiography of Mark Twain (2010)



Most of Mark Twain's Autobiography is spent talking about other people. What about it makes it still an autobiography, rather than journalism or a biography?

This is an autobiography because Mark Twain		
wrote it himself about his life and the people		
he knew. It shows his own perspective.		

BIOGRAPHY/AUTOBIOGRAPHY



Thomas Jefferson: Jefferson was one of the most important figures in the early history of the U.S. His autobiography is a great resource for learning what America was like when it was young.

"At the age of 77, I begin to make some memoranda and state some recollections of dates and facts concerning myself, for my own ready reference and for the information of my family.

The tradition in my father's family was that their ancestor came to this country from Wales, and from near the mountain of Snowdon, the highest in Great Britain."

-Autobiography (1821)



How can we tell from this introductory paragraph that we are reading an autobiography?

I can tell this is an autobiography because
the author writes the word "1" and mentions
his age. He also talks about his own experiences

Alexander von Humboldt: Humboldt was a German scientist and adventurer in the 1800s. Even though few people talk about him today, he made many great discoveries and his life story is a fascinating tale that takes place all over the globe.

"A biography of Alexander Von Humboldt, which shall contain a full and conscientious account of his life and labors, written in a style sufficiently clear and untechnical to meet popular tastes, has long been a necessity in our literature. Those biographies which are already in existence do not posess this character: they are rather chronicles of his achievements in the various departments of Natural Science, than stories of a life almost unexampled for its wealth of experiences, its labors, and successes."

- The Life Travels and Books of Alexander von Humboldt (1859) by R.H. Stoddard



What elements of this quote suggest it is a biography? How is this different from an autobiography?

This quote mentions a person and states that the author will write about another person's achievements and his character. This is different from an autobiography because this biography is a true story of someone's whole life, written by another person.

BIOGRAPHY/AUTOBIOGRAPHY



Let's practice writing a biography about someone! Most biographies talk about a person's whole life. Find a partner or friend to interview about his or her life! Use a scratch piece of paper to write the answers. Where were you born? What is your family like? How was childhood? What about the future? Ask as many questions as you want! Then write a brief bio for your friend.

Student answers will vary, but the biography should		
be about true events and facts about another person.		