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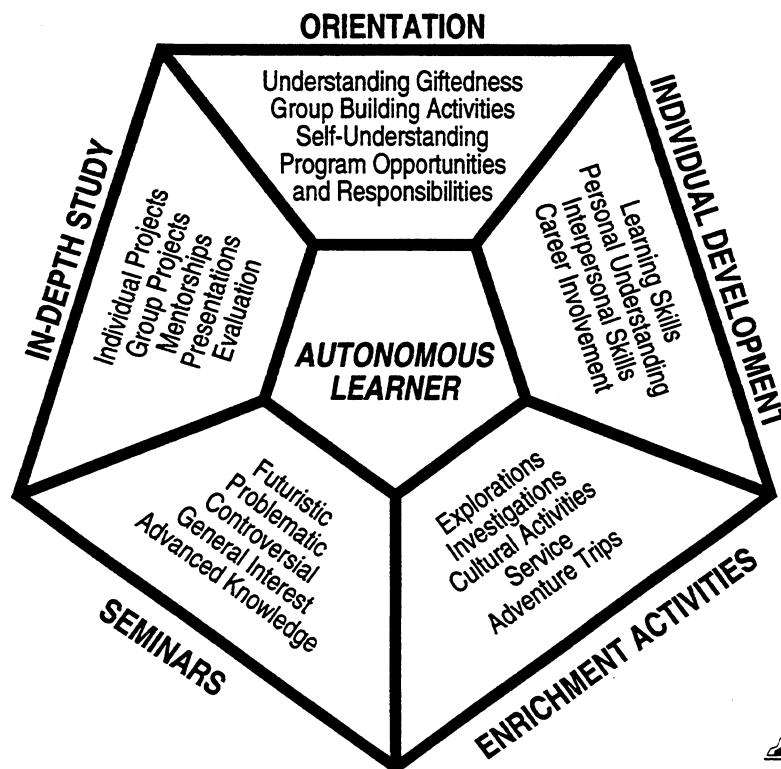
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# WRITING FEATURE STORIES ABOUT COMMUNITY ROLE MODELS



## Overview

*Discovering Who's Who in Our Community* is an investigative unit designed to help students in grades six through twelve practice the dynamics of group process, perfect written and oral communication, and gain interviewing and discussion skills while learning about an interesting role model from the community. The unit complements the first three dimensions of the Autonomous Learner Model: Orientation, Individual Development, and Enrichment Activities (see figure below). The time allotment is approximately forty minutes per day for twelve to fifteen days to accomplish the whole class steps. An additional out-of-class time of two to three weeks is allotted for the student to use the skills learned through the class process to complete a feature story about a community person of the individual's own choosing. This unit may be used in a variety of classroom settings by modifying the objectives and the activities: gifted language arts class, heterogeneous language arts class, pull-out gifted class, or in-depth study opportunities.



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*“School teachers are those who use themselves as bridges over which they invite their students to cross, then having facilitated their crossing, joyfully collapse, encouraging them to create bridges of their own.”*

—Nikos Kazantzakis

Learning activities include: pretesting, investigating feature stories in the news, reading and sharing them, brainstorming community people who would be good material for feature stories; and as a class, selecting, contacting, writing questions, interviewing, and writing a feature story on one of them. Using application skills, students then choose, contact, write interview questions, and interview a community person on their own. After taking notes during the interview, the students organize their material, write first drafts, revise, proofread, revise, prepare displays, present and publish individual work, and take post-tests.

All whole class activities prepare students for the primary activity of applying skills to write their own feature stories about a community person. Displays of finished stories may be published and celebrated in a variety of suggested ways. The evaluation and post-test complete the unit.

***“Always grab the reader by the throat in the first paragraph, sink your thumbs into his windpipe in the second, and hold him against the wall until the tag line.”***  
—LIFE magazine writer Paul O’Neil



## Student Objectives

The Students will:

- Acquire knowledge of feature story characteristics by collecting, analyzing, and writing them.
- Gain respect and knowledge for community people who personify life long learning.
- Learn how other people have used their gifts and talents.
- Gain confidence in contacting strangers for information.
- Become proficient at writing interview questions.
- Acquire and apply interviewing skills.
- Successfully complete the long term project of writing a feature profile on a community person after the students have learned the procedure from a class process.

***“Writing is easy. All you do is sit in front of a typewriter keyboard until little drops of blood appear on your forehead.”***  
—Red Smith

# TEACHER'S STEP-BY-STEP PLANS



## Whole-Class Activities

1. **Pretest.** (Test included.)
2. **Several** weeks before beginning the unit of study, make and display a chart "Feature Story Characteristics." (See chart) At this same time encourage students to begin looking for well-written and interesting feature stories about people, although it should be noted there are other types of feature stories. You should also collect some personality features to use as models in the introduction of the unit. Find a few stories that are not only about your students' heroes and favorite sport stars, but people who are change agents, risk takers, and life-long learners. Sunday newspaper editions and their magazine supplements often contain good feature stories. Don't forget state and local newspapers.
3. **Introduce** the unit by sharing a few good feature stories. Introduce the characteristics of a feature story and emphasize them in your models. Have students share and identify characteristics in the models they have collected, too. Use transparency "Feature Story Leads" (page 13) to examine the sample story leads. Take this opportunity to share a feature story you have written.
4. **Conduct** a brainstorming session. Brainstorm the names of local people who make an impact on your community. People who create strong public reaction make good feature stories. An unusual career, hobby, or lifestyle can make a person interesting too. Identify community persons who have done or are doing extraordinary community service, show evidence of being risk takers, and/or are life-long learners. Students will generate a large list, but also encourage them to gather ideas from parents, other teachers, and students to add to the list. Tip: Have the brainstorming session on a Friday, and as homework, have students collect more names from family members, church members, or other encounters over the weekend. These people may be able to suggest others who have some of the same interests, passions, or occupations in which the student may have an interest.
5. **From** this list, have the class decide on one person to contact for a class interview and feature story. Choose a few alternates in case the students' first choice is unavailable. Discuss and role play how to telephone a stranger and ask him/her to come to class to be interviewed. The class could prepare a script for telephoning. Have student representatives telephone the person and arrange a class interview date for the following week. It is a good learning experience for the whole class to witness this phone call.
6. **Send** home a parent/guardian letter to explain the unit. Parents are important allies and help lend support in assisting youngsters with both encouragement and taking a risk. (Sample letter included.)
7. **Invite** a reporter who writes feature stories for the local newspaper to come and speak to your class about his/her experiences. Students need to be prepared to ask questions.