

Trailblazers Through Time: Researching Influential Figures

Grade Level: 9-12 (Adaptable for 6-8)

Time Required: 2-3 class periods (plus time for presentations or final product completion)

Introduction

Every field — whether science, technology, the arts or sports — has been shaped by individuals whose stories offer insight into perseverance, innovation and impact. In this lesson, students will explore the life of an influential figure using **Biography Reference Ultimate**, EBSCO's comprehensive biographical database available via the library. Through guided topic browsing and database research, they will select a person of interest and present their findings in a visually engaging format that highlights the individual's background, contributions and legacy.

Standards Alignment (Common Core)

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7**
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8**
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1**
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4**

Middle School Adaptation: Use same standards at the 6-8 level (W.6.7, RI.6.1, etc.), with simplified research expectations.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Navigate and use Biography Reference Ultimate to browse topics and locate biographical information.
- Identify and summarize key achievements, challenges, and contributions of an influential figure.
- Create a compelling visual or multimedia presentation of their research.
- Reflect on how individual stories shape historical and cultural understanding.

Materials

- Access to Biography Reference Ultimate
- Computers or tablets with internet access
- Research organizer (included)
- Project instructions and rubric (included)

Procedure

Day 1: Introduction & Research Launch

1. Hook Activity: Who inspires you?

- Display images or quotes from several influential people across disciplines, such as:
 - Amelia Earhart – Aviation pioneer and first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic
 - Elvis Presley – Iconic rock and roll performer
 - John Lewis – U.S. Congressman and civil rights leader
 - Malala Yousafzai – Pakistani education activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner
 - Simone Biles – U.S. gymnast recognized for athletic excellence and resilience

You can use a Google Slides or Jamboard to present their images or quotes and let students respond in a quick warm-up journal or class discussion.

- Journal prompt / class discussion: *What makes someone influential? What kind of person would you call a trailblazer?*

2. Mini-Lesson: Using Biography Reference Ultimate

- Demonstrate how to access and search the database.
- Introduce the Topic Explorer (browse) feature. Show students how to explore broad categories such as Artists, Athletes, Literary Figures, Musicians, Scientists and more.
- Model how to drill down from a topic to a sub-topic to an individual profile.

3. Student Topic Selection

- Give students time to browse the topic categories and subcategories to select a person who interests them.
- Encourage students to take brief notes on why they chose this individual.
- Distribute a research organizer (included) to guide their data collection (key facts, contributions, challenges, legacy, quotes, etc.).

Middle School Tip: Offer a structured **scavenger hunt** to explore topics or provide a pre-curated list to help with decision-making.

Day 2: Research & Product Development

4. Continue Research:

- Students complete research using their selected biography.
- Encourage students to use the citation tools in the database and collect meaningful quotes or story details.

5. Begin Final Product (Students Choose One):

- One-page visual/illustrated research summary or infographic

- Slide presentation (Google Slides or PowerPoint)
- Mini-Poster (paper-based or digital)

Note: Canva is a great tool for creating digital posters and infographics. A free version is available.

6. Review Expectations:

- Go over research organizer, project guidelines and rubric.
- Remind students to include a reflection on why their chosen person is influential.

Day 3 (Optional): Presentations or Gallery Walk

7. Share Out:

- Students present their work to the class or participate in a gallery walk.
- Peers leave feedback using sticky notes or reflection slips.

Assessment

Use the included rubric to assess students' research, product quality, and understanding of their subject's influence.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class/Period: _____

Step 1: Choose a Trailblazer

1. Explore Topics in Biography Reference Ultimate

- Browse categories such as Activists, Artists, Athletes, Explorers, Inventors, Musicians, Scientists, etc.
- Choose a sub-category (e.g., baseball, jazz musicians, Nobel Prize winners).
- Select a person to research:

Chosen Person: _____

Field/Category: _____

2. Why did you choose this person? *(Write 2-3 sentences about what interests you about them.)*

Step 2: Gather Key Information

Use **Biography Reference Ultimate** to answer the following questions.

1. Early Life & Background

- When and where was this person born?
- What was their upbringing like?
- Any important childhood events or influences?

2. Major Accomplishments & Contributions

- What are they most famous for?
- What challenges or obstacles did they overcome?
- What lasting impact have they had on their field or society?

3. Challenges & Adversities

- Did they face discrimination, setbacks, or failures?
- How did they respond to difficulties?
- What does this reveal about their character?

4. Quotes & Legacy

- Find one meaningful quote from this person. Write it in the space below.

- Explain why you chose this quote.
- How does this quote reflect their life or beliefs?
- How are they remembered today?

Step 3: Organize for Your Final Product

Choose Your Format (Check One):

- One-Pager / Infographic (Visual summary with key facts, quotes, and images)
- Google Slides / PowerPoint Presentation
- Mini-Poster (Paper or Digital)

Outline Key Elements for Your Project:

- Title/Headline: _____
- Main Message (What do you want your audience to take away?):

- Three Key Facts to Include:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

Step 4: Cite Your Source(s)

- Which Biography article from Biography Reference Ultimate did you use? Cite using MLA format.

- Other Sources Used (if applicable):

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class Period: _____

Trailblazers Through Time Project Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Beginning (1)
Research Depth	Thorough, accurate research; includes nuanced details and analysis	Accurate, sufficient research with clear facts	Basic facts included; lacks depth or some inaccuracies	Limited or inaccurate information
Clarity & Organization	Well-organized, visually clear, easy to follow	Mostly organized and understandable	Some organizational issues; slightly confusing	Disorganized or hard to follow
Creativity & Presentation	Highly engaging, creative design or presentation	Clear and visually appealing	Some effort in design or delivery	Minimal design effort or very basic presentation
Use of Sources & Citation	Correctly cites <i>Biography Reference Ultimate</i> and any other source(s)	Cites <i>Biography Reference Ultimate</i> with minor errors	Attempts citation but has multiple errors	No citations or unclear source(s)
Reflection on Influence	Strong explanation of why this person is influential and their legacy	Clear explanation with some insight	Basic explanation with limited reflection	Minimal or unclear explanation of influence

Total Points: _____ / 20

Grading Scale:

18-20 = A

15-17 = B

12-14 = C

10-11 = D

9 or below = F