



## **Exploring Character and Culture in the Lives of Three Remarkable Women of Latin America**

Curriculum Unit 00.01.02  
by Christine A. Elmore

### **Introduction**

---

In her formative study, *Women of Smoke* (1989), Marjorie Agosin tells of the legacy of Latin American women writers who courageously defy their government's censorship and refuse to be silent. Relentlessly they speak on behalf of those people in their society who suffer deplorable conditions caused by repressive dictatorial regimes. Some writers disappear and others are exiled but the words they write serve as keys or secret codes that "seek to open the doors of silenced cities and countries" (p. 12). All of this could be said of the evocative paintings of Mexico's Frida Kahlo, the articulate activism of Guatemala's Rigoberta Menchú and the poetry of Chile's Gabriela Mistral.

In my curriculum unit I plan to have my third-grade students read about the lives of three important Latin American women from very different walks of life. Biography is the ideal genre by which they can learn about the courage of these women in meeting the challenges of their times and the creative contributions they were able to render to their societies. The great appeal of biographies as a pedagogical tool is in their ability to make history come alive for young readers. Written like fiction, often with dramatic action and excitement, these stories feature factual accounts of real events and real people whom we can admire and emulate, or abhor, and about whom we can seek further information in other sources. Biography is also an ideal introduction to the study and appreciation of 'foreign' cultures. Let us now take a brief look at the etymology of the word biography and at the history of its development.

The word, biography, is derived from Greek. *Bios* means life and *graphia* means writing. A biography, then, is a written account of an actual life. Early biographers were largely uncritical in their approach and tended to completely idealize their subjects whether they were saints or military leaders. Biography was commemorative, that is, written primarily to edify and inspire its readers. During the 17th and 18th centuries biographers began to employ sound research techniques and based their accounts on more factual information. In addition, literary standards rose and biographies became a distinct genre of high literature. With the 20th century came the powerful influence of Sigmund Freud whose revolutionary new concept of psychoanalysis irresistibly compelled biographers to focus more on the inner, 'mental life' of the subjects.

In regard to children's biographies, it wasn't until the late 1960s and 70s that biographers began to more realistically portray their subjects and they strove to develop "many sides of a subject's character, including

their negative qualities” (Jerome-Cohen, p. 7). Also, during this time period an increasing number of biographies were being written about such previously ignored groups as women, Native Americans, African Americans and other minorities.

Now let’s take a brief look at these three remarkable figures of achievement from Latin America, our cultural neighbors to the south. These brief biography sketches as well as the longer texts that I have composed (found later in this unit) are based on the reading I have done of a number of biographies about these three women cited in the bibliography section.

Frida Kahlo was a self-taught artist who went on to become one of the greatest Mexican painters of the twentieth century. Born during the Mexican Revolution, Kahlo’s life and her art were deeply influenced by this seminal event. She strongly believed in equal rights for all Mexicans and her politics and art reflected this conviction. In point of fact, Kahlo was of mixed heritage, Mexican and European, and she often felt herself torn between both worlds. Many of her paintings explored images from both native and European traditions, depicting her sense of struggle and conflict in belonging to two often contradictory worlds. Frida’s paintings also depict the almost unbelievable pain she suffered throughout her life. At the age of five, she contracted polio which left her right leg thin and weak. Then, in her teens, she was involved in a horrible bus accident from which she never fully recovered. Kahlo’s paintings may be appreciated as both personal and universal at times, evincing her feelings of ethnic pride, happiness, disappointment and pain.

Rigoberta Menchú, a Quiché Indian from Guatemala, began working as a laborer on large coffee and cotton plantations at the age of eight. Native Indians in Guatemala have few rights as citizens and are forced to work in extremely harsh conditions under the thumb of an oppressive military-led government and wealthy plantation-owners. Her parents were tortured and killed by Guatemalan soldiers when she was only a teenager. Menchú went on to become a courageous activist for the rights of the indigenous people of her country. She fearlessly led a campaign for social justice that brought international attention to this conflict between the Indians and the military government of Guatemala. Indeed, she became a powerful voice for the rights of all indigenous people throughout the Americas. In 1992, Rigoberta Menchú received the Nobel Peace Prize for her valiant efforts in the service of her people.

Gabriela Mistral (a pseudonym for Lucila Godoy y Alcayaga) was born in the village of Vicuña in northern Chile and was raised by her mother, a schoolteacher. She began writing poetry while working as a village schoolteacher. As an educational consultant, Mistral went on to improve schools in both Chile and Mexico for which she received honorable recognition. But her most outstanding achievement was to be the first South American writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize of Literature. Gabriela Mistral’s poetry combines themes of love, maternity and childhood. Through her verse she speaks with a voice that all people can understand. Mistral is celebrated both as a distinguished South American writer and as a symbol of the nationalistic aspirations of her country.

I have gathered numerous reference sources on the lives of Kahlo, Menchú and Mistral. Using these sources, I have written simple but interesting biographies appropriate for the age-group I teach and geared to their reading levels. Using a “think-along” format (used by the Steck-Vaughn Company, which creates excellent educational materials for students and teachers), I have inserted key-questions at regular intervals in the texts that I have composed. This will encourage my young readers as Dr. Roger Farr, program author of Steck-Vaughn Think-Alongs writes to take “think breaks” as they read. Thus, while reading these biographies in small-group settings, students will be called upon regularly to pause, think, and discuss the text they are reading. In this way, active reading-strategies of thinking along while reading are reinforced. Research has

shown that students who actively reason and interact with the text while reading, comprehend more of what they are reading.

There are three valuable resources that I have used to develop activities that will help my students respond meaningfully to their reading in both oral and written ways. They are: Exploring Biographies by Deborah Jerome-Cohen, Biography and Autobiography by Patricia S. Morris and Margaret A. Berry and Genres of Literature by Janice J. Withington. In addition to providing suggestions for thought-provoking questions that ask the reader to compare and analyze what they have read, they also offer many useful graphic organizers that my students can use in their examination of the subject's traits, challenges, achievements and important life events. A second source of graphic organizers that I plan to use is The Big Book of Reproducible Graphic Organizers by Jennifer Jacobsen and Dottie Raymer.

I teach third-grade in a self-contained classroom at Lincoln-Bassett Community School. My students are primarily of African-American descent, a heterogeneous group with varying abilities in the 8-10 age range. Although I have designed this unit with them in mind, I am confident that it could easily be adapted by teachers to suit the K-3 grades, if not older.

This unit will be divided into four sections:

- I. Frida Kahlo - The Power of the Brush
- II. Rigoberta Menchú - The Power of the Spoken Word
- III. Gabriela Mistral - The Power of the Pen
- IV. Comparison and Contrast of All Three Biographies

The lessons in this unit will be introduced on a daily basis for a period of 45-60 minutes. I anticipate the unit covering a four- to six-month span of time.

## Objectives

---

The unit objectives include:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| --to help students identify the particular essence of biography including the | backgrounds, conflicts and motivation that determine life. |
| --to introduce students to the structure of biography and its elements of     | the path of the person's                                   |
| --to encourage students to construct meaning as they read.                    | characters, plot, time setting and place setting.          |

- to encourage students to connect what they know to what is being read.
- to discuss each story and help students internalize unfamiliar vocabulary.
- to have students write while reading, thereby encouraging them to think about the text.
- to compare and contrast aspects in the lives of all three of the women being studied.
- to help students use a series of graphic organizers to organize ideas and strengthen comprehension of the text they have read.
- to use a time-line to help students appreciate the sequence of important events in the person's life.
- to reflect on the subject's life and expressing the ideas in writing in a response journal.

## Strategies

---

In all cases I plan to use the following biographies in small groups (4-5 students) in order to be more effective.

### *Before-Reading:*

--To spark interest in the subject whose life we are about to study, I will use various 'visual aids'. With Kahlo it will be a sampling of her paintings, with Mistral a sampling of her poems and with Menchú I will use a picture book about a Mexican-American boy in whose neighborhood she is commemorated on a mural.

--I have created a glossary of vocabulary items for each biography using dictionaries and the children's biography books cited in the bibliography as my main sources for these definitions. We will discuss these items together as they are necessary for an appreciation and understanding of each text.

--The time-line as it is presented in this unit is primarily for the teacher's reference but we will return to this highly-useful diagram in the after-reading section below.

### *During-Reading*

--As we read each biography we will pause to reflect on and discuss key questions inserted throughout the story. These questions will call upon students to predict, summarize, rely on their own past experiences, form conclusions and make inferences while they are reading.

### *After-Reading*

--I plan to familiarize my students with two of the very important terms of this genre: turning point and cause and effect by looking more closely at significant events we read about in the biographies.

--Students will construct a time-line on which to record in order five to six important events in the subject's life included in the biography text. I will define turning point for them and ask if they can point out events on their time-line that really changed the direction of her life. Lesson Plan I explains in greater detail how time-lines can be introduced to young students.

--I will ask my students to consider that very often in a person's life one event may cause something to happen which in turn causes something else to happen. Using a simple cause-and-effect graphic organizer in which pairs of boxes connected with an arrow and labeled cause and effect, students will be asked to find and record moments in the subject's life where one event caused something else to happen. This will reinforce comprehension and provides a springboard for further discussion of what has been read.

--I will have my students keep a response journal in which they will write about the biographies they have read. I will include writing prompts like:

What do you think is the person's greatest accomplishment?

Would you like the person as a friend? Why or why not?

Does this person remind you of someone you know? Explain.

Write a letter to this person expressing how you feel about him/ her and ask questions that you've been wondering about.

Did the person have a dream? Was it easy or hard for them to make the dream come true?

Were there other people who helped this person reach his/her goals?

## I. Frida Kahlo - The Power of the Brush

---

To introduce Frida Kahlo I plan to show my students a number of her paintings, focusing primarily on her striking self-portraits. To offer a glimpse of her family we will look at the painting, My Grandparents, My Parents and I (Family Tree). We will then look at Kahlo's painting of herself and her husband, Diego Rivera, entitled Frida and Diego Rivera. His influence on her early paintings was significant as can be seen in her painting called The Bus. Their relationship was a stormy one and we will gain some sense of this by examining the painting, The Two Fridas. In order to gain an appreciation of her feelings of conflict in belonging to two worlds, European and Mexican, we will look at three paintings, Roots, Self-Portrait on the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States, and My Dress Hangs Here. Her great pride in being Mexican is exemplified in The Frame and Self-Portrait As a Tehuana. A painting that expresses the physical pain she suffered but her hope in recovery is powerfully depicted in Tree of Hope. To show that Kahlo also painted beautiful still-life paintings we will look at Fruits of the Earth, Cuando te tengo a tí and Viva la Vida. By examining and discussing her paintings, we will get a better idea of all that Frida was, felt and valued.

### *Glossary*

Mesoamerican - Having to do with the people and the lands of Central America.

amateur - one who is interested in a particular field but who is not an expert in it.

mural - a wall painting.

symbolic - serving as a symbol of something.

unconventional - out of the ordinary and unlike most of its kind.

surrealism - a style of painting that was popular among European artists that depicted a super-real world of dreams.

self-portrait - a drawing or painting an artist does of himself/ herself.

image - a picture of a person or a thing.

easel - a framework made for holding a painting-in-progress.

Tehuana - a native tribe in Mexico about whom there is much folklore, or a woman from this tribe.

polio - a disease that can paralyze or cripple.

pre-Columbian - the time period before the Spanish came to the New World and before Christopher Columbus landed.

folklore - study of a people's beliefs, customs and traditions passed down through the ages.

## *Time-line*

- 1907 Born Magdalena Carmen Frieda Kahlo y Calderón on July 6 in Coyoacán, Mexico.
- 1913 Was stricken with polio at the age of six.
- 1925 Seriously injured in a bus accident on Sept. 17.
- 1926 Painted portraits of herself, her family and her friends during her recovery.
- 1928 Falls in love with the artist, Diego Rivera.
- 1929 Marries Rivera on August 21.
- 1932-33 Lives in Detroit and New York but longs to return to Mexico.
- 1938-40 Her paintings are exhibited in Mexico, New York and France.
- 1944-49 Her health declines but she continues to paint.
- 1950 Hospitalized for a year in Mexico City after a spinal operation.
- 1953 Attends her first solo art show in Mexico.
- 1954 Dies on July 13 at the age of 47.
- 1958 Her Blue House is opened to the public and renamed The Frida Kahlo Museum.

## *Biography Text*

“Now, Frida, you must exercise that right leg if it is to get better. I know people think that boxing is just for men but they are wrong. Your mother and I want you to try it.”

“Papa, already I am playing soccer, going swimming and bicycling every day. If I do all these activities, will the kids stop calling me, ‘Frida Peg Leg’?”

“Yes, they will, Frida. I promise.”

Why all this exercise for six-year-old Frida Kahlo? It is because she had gotten a serious crippling disease called polio and now her right leg was thin and weak and she needed to strengthen it. Unfortunately, nothing

ever helped very much so Frida began to wear long dresses and pants to hide her leg. She didn't want anyone to feel sorry for her.

### **WHAT ARE YOU PICTURING IN YOUR MIND?**

Frida Kahlo was born on July 6, 1907 in Coyoacán, Mexico. Her father, Guillermo Kahlo, who was Jewish, was born in Germany but when he was nineteen he moved to Mexico. Matilda, her mother, was Mexican and she met Guillermo while working in the same jewelry shop. The Kahlos had four children but Frida was her father's favorite. During the nine months when she was home recovering from polio, Frida became very close to her father. They shared an interest in nature and often took long walks together in nearby parks. Because Guillermo was very good at his job as a professional photographer and amateur artist, he was hired by the government of Mexico to take pictures of the country's important buildings. He took Frida with him on his travels. Not only did she learn how to use a camera, develop and touch up photographs but she also learned about ancient Mexican art and architecture.

### **WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT USING A CAMERA?**

The earliest Mesoamerican culture was made up of the Olmecs who lived some 3000 years ago. They built magnificent stone pyramids and carved huge heads of stone. Following the Olmecs in history were the Mayans, who built marvelous temples and palaces in jungle areas. They also made up a system of mathematics and an alphabet. Some 700 years ago, the Aztecs lived and they created beautiful sculptures from stone. They loved nature and worshipped the sun as a god. Frida was especially inspired by the Aztecs but in a general sense it was the pre-Columbian art and traditions that she grew to love and which were later to inspire her work.

### **IN WHAT WAYS WOULD IT BE HARD TO CARVE SCULPTURES OUT OF STONE?**

Interestingly, Frida was never much interested in art until she was in a terrible bus accident at the age of 18. She was sitting on the bus with her friend, Alejandro, riding home from school, when a trolley hit the bus. Some people were killed. Frida was horribly injured. Her spine was broken in three places and many of her bones were broken. Her friend was also injured but not as badly as she was. Because of this accident, Frida was to suffer a lot of pain and was to have more than 30 operations during her life.

### **WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT NOW?**

During the months of her recovery, when she was forced to sit still in bed, Frida started to paint. Her mother had a special easel made so that she could paint while lying on her back. First, she painted portraits of her friends, family and later of herself. She studied her father's art books and imitated the paintings of great European artists. Later, she became interested in the ancient folk art of her country and included many such images in her paintings. Painting helped Frida recover from her injuries and soon she was up and around. Frida promised herself she would never let the pain from her injuries stop her from doing what she wanted to do.

### **HOW DID PAINTING HELP FRIDA GET BETTER?**

One day at a party, she met the great mural artist, Diego Rivera, a man who was later to become her husband. Rivera, like other Mexican mural artists, painted large scenes of important events in Mexico's history on public buildings to inspire people to feel pride in their country. She showed him some of her art work and he was very impressed. Rivera, although not a very good husband, was a good teacher and encouraged Frida in her work. As a result, she became a more confident artist. Eventually Frida was to develop her own unique



style. Everything in her paintings is symbolic. Every detail has a special meaning. For example, if she painted a blackbird (which Diego said reminded him of her eyebrows), it represented her while a doll stood for the baby that Frida wished she could have. Frida expressed her feelings of happiness, disappointment and yes, of pain in her art work. If she painted stormy skies, they symbolized her deep feelings of sadness. Many of her more than 200 paintings speak of the physical pain she experienced. In some of her numerous self-portraits she added thorn necklaces and nails to represent her pain.

### **WHY DO YOU THINK IT WAS SO IMPORTANT FOR FRIDA TO MAKE PAINTINGS OF HER PAIN?**

By using Mexican colors and images she showed her love of her country. Some called Kahlo's style surrealistic, a strange style that was popular among European artists. Their paintings often appeared to show the super-real world of dreams but Frida, being very unconventional, did not accept that label and told people that she painted her own reality and not dreams.

### **WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT PAINTING?**

Although Frida traveled with Rivera while he painted murals in places like Detroit and New York, she was most happy in her own homeland. Frida continued to have to have operations and to spend long periods in the hospital as her health worsened. She died at the young age of 47 in 1954.

### **WHY DO YOU THINK FRIDA WAS MOST HAPPY AT HOME IN MEXICO?**

As is true of so many artists and composers, Kahlo's art work was appreciated more after her death, about 30 years later to be exact. Today she is considered to be one of Mexico's greatest artists. Her unique and imaginative style speaks to all people who view her art. In some small but significant way they are able to share their same feelings of pride in their country, happiness, disappointment or pain with Kahlo when they view her very striking art work.

### **WHAT IS IT ABOUT FRIDA'S PAINTINGS THAT SO MANY PEOPLE LIKE?**

Many travel to Mexico to Kahlo's Blue House, the place where she lived, which is now a special museum housing many of her original paintings. What an experience it would be to go there and see, up close, some of her very memorable art work!

### **WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO FRIDA IF YOU COULD TALK WITH HER ABOUT HER ART?**

## **II. Rigoberta Menchú - The Power of the Spoken Word**

---

The teacher who uses this unit should know that there is a very serious debate about the worthiness of Rigoberta Menchú in receiving the Nobel Peace Prize because of possibly credible accusations of fraud and misrepresentation. I have no decided view on this matter. Third-graders need not be concerned with this serious, ongoing debate. That we will leave to scholars. I have presented Rigoberta Menchú as she herself and her supporters would.

A perfect way to introduce Rigoberta Menchú to my students is through the book, *Barrio, Jose's Neighborhood*, by George Ancona. This book depicts the life of an eight-year-old Mexican-American boy in a barrio in San Francisco. As Jose walks past public buildings covered with murals "that sing out the stories of the neighborhood" he comes to one drawn of Rigoberta who "spoke out against the killing of her people, the Maya

of Guatemala” (p. 8). After sharing this book with the class, I would ask them, “Just who is this Rigoberta Menchú and what did she do to help her people?”

### *Glossary*

finca - a plantation or large farm controlled by the landowners.

ladino - Guatemalans whose parents are both Mayan and Spanish or Mayas who reject Mayan customs and ways.

strike - a situation when workers stop their work in order to get better wages and working conditions.

altiplano - the highlands of Guatemala.

campesinos - the farmers and farm workers that live in the countryside of Guatemala.

indigenous - a group of people who are native to the particular country.

Popol Vuh - the sacred book of the Mayas.

exiled - forced to leave one’s country.

fiesta - a celebration or festival.

### *Time-line*

1959 Born Rigoberta Menchú Tum on January 9 in Chimal, Guatemala.

1967 Picks coffee on finca. Sees a lot of children suffering from malnutrition.

1969 Initiated into adulthood by family and village.

1971 Became maid in Guatemala City. Her father goes to prison for the first time. Chimal residents are expelled from their homes by the rich landowners.

1973 Her best friend dies on a finca from pesticide exposure. Decides to devote her life to improving conditions for her people.

1980 Her father is killed in an army attack on the Spanish Embassy. Her mother is later killed by the army.

1981 Flees to Mexico and goes into hiding.

1982 Invited to Europe as representative of Guatemalan indigenous people. Dictates her autobiography, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman In Guatemala*.

1988 Returns to Guatemala, where she is arrested and then released.

1992 Receives the Nobel Peace Prize for her valiant effort to improve the lives of indigenous peoples.

1996 Assists in the negotiation of a peace treaty ending Guatemalan civil conflict that had begun 42 years earlier.

### *Biography Text*

Oh no! The soldiers recognized her and would quickly arrest her if she didn't get away! Rigoberta, along with a friend, slipped into a nearby church and knelt down at the railing next to two other people who were praying. She quickly untied her scarf, letting her hair down, hoping this would disguise her. She was lucky. Walking right behind her, the soldiers searched the church and to her great relief they soon gave up and left to hunt for her in the marketplace.

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN NEXT?**

Rigoberta realized that her homeland, Guatemala, was no longer a safe place for her to stay. She had to leave or eventually they would find her and kill her just as they had her parents and brother. She escaped to Mexico with a heavy heart. Exiled from her country, Rigoberta promised herself that she would return some day.

### **HOW DO YOU THINK RIGOBERTA FELT THEN?**

As dear as Guatemala was to Rigoberta, life there had never been easy for her and her family. Born on January 5, 1959 in the small village of Chimel, she remembers the mountainous region where she worked and played as being like a paradise with colorful birds and rivers that flowed down mountain slopes. But her family, like so many other Mayan Indians in Guatemala, were poor and struggled to make enough money just to eat. In her family there were nine little mouths to feed so for eight months out of the year her family had to leave their village home in the altiplano to go work on the fincas which were coffee, cotton and sugarcane plantations owned by rich landowners. At the age of 8 Rigoberta began working on these large farms picking coffee beans. The work was hard and the hours were long. For all their work the Indians earned very little money, many times not even enough to buy medicine when they were ill. Very sadly, because of this, many Indians, especially children died.

### **WHAT ARE YOU PICTURING IN YOUR MIND?**

The living conditions on the fincas were horrible. As many as 400 campesinos and their families were forced to live in a building with only one room. People couldn't understand each other because they spoke different languages. Flies flew all around, babies cried and people argued. Working on the fincas also was

unsafe. One year, very sadly, Rigoberta's best friend, Maria, died because of poisonous pesticides. How did it happen? One morning without any warning, while Maria was picking cotton, an airplane came and sprayed the field with pesticides. The spray fell on Maria too and she died soon after. From that day on, Rigoberta promised herself that her life would be different. She planned to work hard to improve the working conditions of her fellow workers in the fields.

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT LIVING ON A FINCA?**

Being descendants of the ancient people called the Maya, Rigoberta's family continued to speak a Mayan language called Quiché and to follow Mayan practices as described in their holy book, the Popol Vuh. True to their Mayan heritage, they believed that each person, when of age, needed to share in the responsibilities of the community in which they lived. Therefore, on her tenth birthday, Rigoberta's family and community held a special ceremony to welcome her into adulthood. Family and friends talked with her about their experiences in growing up, hoping they would help her as she grew into an adult. A second fiesta was held on her twelfth birthday and Rigoberta was given a special responsibility of caring for two chickens, a pig and a lamb. This was a job she took very seriously. Her days became a lot busier. Now, after working all day in the fields, she would come home to do her chores and then weave pieces of cloth that she could sell in order to buy food for her animals. She felt very proud of being able to handle her new responsibilities.

### **TELL ABOUT A NEW RESPONSIBILITY YOU HAVE NOW THAT YOU ARE OLDER.**

But Rigoberta wanted to do more to help her family earn money so at the age of 13 she decided to work as a maid for a rich ladino family in Guatemala City. For four months she worked very hard, cleaning the house and washing clothes. She was not treated well by the family and was given only a mat without a blanket to sleep on and beans and stale tortillas to eat. One advantage she did have was that of learning to speak and understand Spanish better as this was the language that the family spoke. This is also the official language of the country and the one spoken by the wealthy landowners and government people and military men. Rigoberta knew that if she was going to defend her people against the Spanish-speaking ruling class she would have to learn the language of those in power. In addition, knowing Spanish would help her to tell those around the world of the unfair ways in which the poor in Guatemala were treated. As time went on, she began to realize more and more the power of the spoken word. Words would become her weapons as she sought to pressure the government into stopping its cruel treatment of the Indians.

### **WHY DO YOU THINK RIGOBERTA STAYED SO LONG WORKING FOR THAT FAMILY?**

Upon returning to the altiplano, Rigoberta found that serious trouble was brewing. The wealthy landowners were forcing people of her village to leave their homes and were taking the land that they had worked so hard to cultivate. Her father, Vincente, a leader in the village, tried to help them hold onto their land. Because of this, he was arrested and put in prison. Her father was to be arrested again and again for his actions in organizing the people of his village to fight for their land and for their rights. Eventually, he was murdered when soldiers set fire to the embassy building that he and other protesters were in. Later that same year Rigoberta's mother, Juana, was also killed by the army. Rigoberta was determined to carry on the work of her parents in helping the Indians to fight for their rights in a nonviolent but nevertheless determined way. For one thing she helped organize strikes against the landowners.

### **HOW IS RIGOBERTA LIKE DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.?**

The Guatemalan government was on the landowners' side and used the army to murder and scare people who, like Rigoberta, disagreed with them. After her parents' deaths and because of her continued activism, Rigoberta knew that her life was in danger so, with the help of friends she escaped to Mexico.

Rigoberta became a powerful speaker on behalf of indigenous people not only in her country but in others as well. She told her story to a writer who took her words, wrote them down and turned them into a book that was to be read by millions of people entitled, *I, Rigoberta Menchú, An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. More and more people around the world began to learn of Rigoberta and her story of poor Guatemalans. In 1992 she was given a very important award for her efforts in trying to improve the lives of indigenous peoples. It is called the Nobel Peace Prize. With the large sum of money she received with this prize, Rigoberta set up an organization to help promote education and basic rights for indigenous people in Guatemala and elsewhere.

### **TELL ABOUT SOMEONE YOU KNOW WHO HELPS OTHER PEOPLE?**

Years have passed and some improvements have been made for the Mayan in Guatemala but there are still many problems that prolong their suffering and so the struggle continues. Rigoberta has not given up. She strongly believes that the world can be changed through courage, love, imagination and responsibility. And she is determined to continue her fight for the rights of her people. She said in her book... "I know that I can only hold my parents' banner high if I dedicate myself to the struggle that they left half finished" (p. 242).

### **HOW DID RIGOBERTA'S PARENTS HELP HER TO BECOME STRONG AND BRAVE?**

## **III. Gabriela Mistral - The Power of the Pen**

---

What better way is there to lead into the life of Gabriela Mistral than by looking at some of her poetry especially written for children. My selection of poems is by no means reflective of the numerous themes Mistral used in her writing. Rather, I have focused on poems that are lullabies for children, express some of her childhood memories, and that describe her religious fervor.

We will begin with a reading of the poem, *The House*, in which she recalls the childhood memory of her mother baking bread. We will then examine two poems in which she expresses her love and desire to nurture children, perhaps recalling the poor children in the rural villages she worked with in Mexico for two years, entitled, *Mexican Child* and *Little Feet*. Next we will look at a series of poems meant to be lullabies for children entitled, *Close To Me*, *Rocking* and *Night*. What child does not at some point ponder over the prospect of having a guardian angel to watch over him or her? In this last poem, *The Guardian Angel*, we will read about this divine protector of children.

### *Glossary*

poetry - a form of writing where words are arranged in a rhythmical or metrical way.

theme - the idea behind a story.

tragedy - a very sad or disastrous event.

pen name - an invented name used by a writer in place of his/ her own name.

Gabriel - the archangel who delivered the good news to Mary that she was to be the mother of God.

mistral - strong, hot winds that blow over the south of France.

reform - a movement to improve conditions.

rural - having to do with life in the countryside.

inspire - to influence or cause one to make some creative or effective effort.

advocate - a person who defends and pleads another's cause.

permeates - to spread through.

consul - a person appointed by the government to live in a foreign country and serve his/ her country's citizens there.

### *Time-line*

1889 Born Lucila Godoy Alcayaga on April 7 in Vicuña, Chile.

1901 Started writing poetry. Her family moved to La Serena, Chile.

1905 First became a teacher in La Compañía, Chile.

1908 First used the pen name, Gabriela Mistral. Published her first poem under this pen name.

1910 Began teaching in secondary schools.

1914 Won a major poetry contest. Wrote "Sonnets of Death" dedicated to her first love, Romelio Ureta who died tragically.

1918-1920 Served as a principal at a girls school.

1922 Traveled to Mexico to assist in education reform. Her book, *Desolación*, was published.

1924 Her book, *Ternura*, was published.

1925 Became a diplomat and was named a delegate to the United Nations.

1932 Became a consul in Chile.

1933 Moved to Madrid, Spain.

1938 Her book, *Tala*, was published.

1943 Her beloved nephew, Juan Miguel Godoy (Yin Yin) tragically dies.

1945 Received the Nobel Peace Prize for Literature.

1954 Her book, *Lagar*, was published.

1957 Died on January 10 on Long Island in the U. S.

## *Biography Text*

Lucila Godoy Alcayaga was born on April 7, 1889 in the small town of Vincu-a located in the beautiful Elqui Valley of Chile. When she was only three, her father, Jeronimo Godoy Villanueva, a teacher but also a 'pallador' who wrote and sang songs at festivals, picked up his guitar and left, never to return. Her mother, Petronila, also a teacher, and her half-sister, Emelina Molina, raised her and saw to her schooling. Even though her father was gone, his influence on Lucila remained in the form of his writings. It happened like this. When Lucila was 12, she found some of her father's verses and was inspired to try writing poetry herself. Her love of writing grew as strong as her love of teaching.

### **WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT POETRY?**

At the age of 15 Lucila first became a teacher in an elementary school in a tiny village in Chile called La Compa-ía. She went on to teach in both elementary and secondary schools in Chile. All the while she continued to write poetry, frequently entering her writings in different contests. In 1908 she published her first poem using a pseudonym or pen name, Gabriela Mistral. She chose this pen name because of its meaning. Gabriela stood for the archangel, Gabriel, who was the divine messenger of good news in the Bible. Mistral was the name given to strong hot winds that blow over the south of France. As a matter of fact, she had used other pen names for a while but after winning a very important poetry contest in 1914 under the name Gabriela Mistral, she made the decision to use only this one for the rest of her life.

### **IF YOU WERE A WRITER, WHAT PEN NAME WOULD YOU CHOOSE?**

Whenever she traveled Gabriela wrote poetry and prose for literary magazines and newspapers at the same time that she took on a variety of jobs as school principal, consul and delegate to the United Nations. Where did her travels take her? In 1922 she traveled to Mexico because the president there asked her to help in the reform of the school system. During this time Gabriela worked with many Indian children from rural villages. They were always to hold special place in her heart and she wrote some of her poetry about them.

### **WHY WOULD GABRIELA WANT TO WRITE ABOUT THOSE VILLAGE CHILDREN?**

Always an advocate for children, Gabriela helped found UNICEF, an organization to help the poor children of the world. After two years in Mexico, she traveled to Europe and the U.S. and later on to Central America and the Caribbean.

Wherever Gabriela went she gave lectures on her love of the American lands and her wish that the countries of North and South America could unite and live in harmony. Her poetry was filled not only with her love and praise of American lands but also of her memories of growing up in the Elqui Valley and of the beautiful nature found on tropical islands. She would never forget the fragrance of the almond trees.

### **HAVE YOU EVER WRITTEN ABOUT A PLACE YOU LOVED?**

There was also a sadness in some of her poetry as she wrote about some of her own personal tragedies, like the loss of a man she had loved when she was young, and of the death of her nephew, Yin Yin, whom she had raised like a mother would. People who read her poetry felt she spoke to them and that her feelings of sadness or tenderness or of being alone were like theirs.

### **WHY DO YOU THINK SO MANY PEOPLE LIKE READING HER POETRY?**

Always a devoted teacher, she specifically wrote poems for children in a book entitled, Ternura. To this day,

children in Chilean schools read and recite these poems. To honor this patroness of children and education, many schools and libraries throughout Latin America today bear her name.

### **CAN YOU THINK OF A TEACHER WHO IS SPECIAL TO YOU?**

A great honor was bestowed on Gabriela Mistral in 1945. She received the Nobel Prize for Literature. What made it an even greater honor was that she was the first Latin American writer to receive this special award.

They say that during her life Gabriela never tried to follow the fashions of the times and typically dressed in a loose black and gray dress. In the same way, she wrote in a style that was all her own that didn't depend on what was popular at the time. In 1952, Gabriela Mistral died of cancer but her spirit truly lives on in her writings which continue to inspire people.

### **DOES GABRIELA REMIND YOU OF SOMEONE YOU KNOW?**

## **IV. Comparison and Contrast of these 3 Biographies**

---

After spending adequate time reading and discussing each biography so that the students come away with a real understanding and appreciation of each subject, it is time to begin activities where they can compare and contrast these three women.

An initial activity that will serve to help them effectively gather information from the three biographies will be through the use of a multi-columned graphic organizer with such headings as life span, family, country of origin, occupation, obstacles, and accomplishments. By skimming the texts they will be able to 'plug in' the particular pieces of information required in each column. This becomes a good starting point for more in-depth study.

As students will realize as they read more biographies, this genre, in order to be appealing to both young and old, depends on providing the reader with a good and interesting beginning that will grab them and motivate them to want to read on. I have deliberately started each of my three biographies in different ways. One starts with a dialog between the subject and her parents when she was little. Another starts with a very decisive event that was to become a pivotal point in the subject's life. And the third biography begins with the birth of the subject and goes on to tell her story in a very chronological order from birth to death. I will ask my students to reread the beginnings of each biography and describe how they differ and then decide which beginning they found most appealing. Later, when they go on to read other biographies, we will return to the subject of how they begin and properly analyze this aspect.

In a good biography one can easily find incidents in the subject's life that really serve to illustrate the type of character the person is and the beliefs he/ she has. I will ask my students to explore this device and describe the subject's character and what their beliefs were, supporting their answers with incidents selected in the text. These activities can easily take both oral and written form and may prove to be a great way to debate about and defend one's view. One activity that could serve as a way to organize one's thoughts would be to have a multi-circled web in which the student would write various adjectives to describe the subject's character ( such as stubborn, fearless, unconventional, etc.). Lesson Plan II offers more detail in how to set up this lesson.



We often read how certain people or historical events have played an influential role in the subject's life. This is certainly true in the three biographies presented here. My students could begin by identifying and exploring the ways in which, each subject was influenced by people and events. For example, Frida Kahlo was influenced by the Mexican Revolution, Riboberta Menchú by the activism of her parents and Gabriela Mistral by the children she worked with in Mexico. I plan to use another graphic organizer designed with pairs of boxes labeled cause and effect to help my students organize information. I would ask them to locate and list important events or people in one set of boxes and after considering their impact on the subject, describe the effect in the corresponding boxes. This completed graphic organizer could then be used as a springboard for discussion and for future writing activities. After this in-depth examination I would call upon my students to reflect on the people or events that have played a significant role in their lives. Such an activity could lead to the beginnings of writing an autobiography!

Because these truly fascinating female figures were authentic heroines of their time, I have no doubt that they will inspire boys and girls alike. I expect, however, that our study of Latin American figures will expand in later months and cover important male heroes as well, thus providing further appreciation of Latin American cultures and the women and men it has produced.

When we are inspired by the lives of others and are able to witness their bravery and the creativity they use in meeting the challenges set before them, we can begin to try harder to overcome the often very formidable obstacles that we face in our own lives. Children need heroes and heroines that they can imitate. Such figures possess many admirable qualities to which they may choose to aspire. Equally important, learning about the lives of people who used their unique talents to make significant contributions to the world may provide the necessary impetus by which a child acquires a renewed belief in his/ her own ability to reach their full potential. If they can do it, so can I! Frida Kahlo, Rigoberta Menchú, and Gabriela Mistral, three remarkable Latin American women, can set us on our path toward self-realization.

## Lesson Plan I

---

Objectives: To distinguish between decade and century.  
To read simple time-lines including ones with B.C. and A.D. dates.  
To make a time-line of your own life using two-year intervals.

Materials: Large chart paper, large graph paper, rulers, fine-line markers, pencils, posterboard, post-it notes.

Procedure: 1. Begin by defining a time-line and its purpose (A time-line is a diagram that shows

when and in what order important dates happened). Display a time-line on chart paper. An example might be:

1400 1500 1600 1700 1800

---

\* \* \* \* \*

1492 1507 1607 1620 1775-83

1492 -- Columbus crossed the Atlantic and reached the Caribbean Islands.

1507 -- The New World was named America.

1607 -- The colony of Jamestown was founded.

1620 -- The Mayflower set sail..

1775-83 -- The American Revolution took place.

1776 -- The signing of the American Declaration of Independence.

Explain that time-lines are divided into equal parts and that this one is divided into 100-year segments called centuries. Century comes from the Latin word, centum, meaning 100. Time-lines can also be divided into 10-year periods called decades. Decade comes from the Greek word, deka, meaning 10.

2. Examine the time-line together and ask such questions as:

Toward which end of the time-line are the earliest events shown?

Where are the later events shown?

Did the Mayflower begin its voyage before the beginning of the American Revolution?

In what year did Christopher Columbus cross the Atlantic Ocean?

3. Now instruct the students that they will be creating a time-line of their lives using 2-year segments. Have them use rulers to draw a line on large graph paper positioned horizontally. Direct them to put the year they were born at the left end of the time-line and the year 200 and the right end. It might look something like this:

1990 1994 1996 1998 2000

---

\* \* \* \* \*

Ask them to think about some important events that have happened in their lives like the time when:

- you said your first word
- you learned to walk
- you first went to school
- you lost your first tooth
- you learned to tie your shoes
- you learned to ride your bike

Encourage students to insert at least five events on their time-lines. Have them share their time-line with a partner.

4. Tell the students that you will now show them a time-line that is a little more complicated. Explain that most people today use a system of dividing time into B.C. and A.D. Here is a sample:

5000 B.C. 2000-1000 A.D. 1 A.D. 1000 A.D. 1300

---

\* \* \* \* \*

- 5000 B.C. -- First Americans began farming.
- 2000-1000 B.C. -- Beginnings of the Mayan Culture in Central America.
- A. D. 1 -- The birth of Christ.
- A. D. 1000 -- The Vikings landed in North America.
- A. D. 1300 -- The rise of the Aztecs in Mexico.

Display this time-line on large chart paper and explain: Let's look at the earliest date given on this time-line.

Where would that be? (5000 B.C. when the first Americans began to farm.) The abbreviation B.C. stands for before Christ so this event happened before Christ was born. Now look at the date when Christ was born. Keep moving to the right on this line. Notice that the Vikings landed in North America in 1000 A.D., that is 1000 years after the birth of Christ. A.D. means anno Domini which is Latin for the year of the Lord. In order to read B.C. dates on a time-line you count backward from the year 1. The earlier the date is, the larger the number is. To read A.D. dates you have to count on or forward from the year 1. The largest number on the right end of the time-line is the most recent date.

5. Follow-up activities would involve the students using large posterboard to create time-lines of the lives of our three remarkable women in this unit. Instruct them to draw a long line horizontally on the posterboard and at the left end write the birth-date of the subject and at the other end, if appropriate, write the death-date. After selecting 5-6 important dates in the person's life, students would follow the correct chronological order and insert them using post-it notes on the time-line. A discussion of the person's life, the turning points and other significant events would then ensue.

--Adapted from Bank's (et al.) time-line lesson on pp. 122-123.

## Lesson Plan II

---

Objectives: To pull out important events from the biography that has been read and illustrate each one.

To write a 1-2 sentence description of the event.

To arrange each 'snapshot' event in a circle in chronological order.

Materials: posterboard, glue sticks, colored pencils, crayons, markers, scissors, pencils, white drawing paper, storyboard graphic organizer, the biography text.

Procedure: 1. Ask the students to go back and reread the text in order to pull out 6-8 important events in the subject's life. To help students keep their list in order, provide them with a storyboard graphic organizer with consecutively-numbered squares on which they can briefly write each event.

2. For each event students are to close their eyes and imagine how the event might have looked. Then they are to draw a sketch of the event on cut squares of drawing paper adding lots of detail.

3. Next they are to write a 1-2 sentence description that tells what is happening in each event (to be written under the sketch). Encourage the students to color their sketches.

4. Then they are to arrange and glue the 'snapshot' drawings in a circle in chronological order on the large posterboard going in a clockwise direction.

5. These snapshot biographies can then be orally presented by each student to the larger group.

--Adapted from Jerome-Cohen's 'Snapshot Biography Activity' on p. 41

@1H:Lesson Plan III

Objectives: To use adjectives to describe the qualities of a person's character.

To organize your ideas on a web.

To support your ideas with specific incidents from the biography text.

To compare yourself to the subject you have read about, reflecting on which qualities you might share or admire in that person.

Materials: A web graphic organizer, the biography text, pencils, highlight markers.

Procedure: 1. For young students like mine it would be best to begin by brainstorming a list of possible character qualities that we might later choose from and discuss like:

confident    enthusiastic    involved    understanding

curious	foolish	loving	open-minded
determined	brave	troubled	intelligent
honest		fair	hopeful
clever		selfish	decisive
			ambitious
			mischievous

2. After reading the biography, students are to think of words that best describe the subject. As they choose a word, they are to write it in one of the circles on the web and then find an incident in the biography text in which he/she demonstrated that quality. When they have located the incident in the text, they can highlight or underline it for future reference.

3. The graphic organizer can be simple and have only 4 circles (connected to a fifth one in the center with the subject's name on it) so when the students have filled in each circle and found evidence of it in the text, it is time to begin the discussion. A lively discussion may well take place as students find they disagree with others' findings or have interpreted events in different ways.

4. Two questions to continue the discussion that will call on students to more deeply reflect on how they would compare themselves with the subject they have read about are:  
 Do you share any qualities with this person? Explain.  
 Would you like to be like this person? Why or why not?

--Adapted from Jerome-Cohen's 'Responding to the Story Activity' on p. 15

## Student Bibliography

---

Ancona, George. Barrio: José's Neighborhood. San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998. This children's story presents life in a barrio in San Francisco describing the school, recreation, holidays and family life on an eight-year-old Mexican-American boy who lives there. Menchú is mentioned in this story. : Pablo Remembers: The Fiesta of the Day of the Dead. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1993. In this children's story a young Mexican boy and his family make elaborate preparations to honor the spirits of the dead during the three-day celebration of the Day of the Dead. : The Pi-ata Maker. San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994. This children's story describes how Don Ricardo, a craftsman from Ejutla de Crespo in southern Mexico, makes pi-atas for all the village birthday parties and other fiestas. Arnold, Caroline. City of the Gods: Mexico's Ancient City of Teotihuacán. New York: Clarion Books, 1994. In this book the ruins of the Aztec capitol, Teotihuacán and what life was like back then is explored. Bachelis, Faren Maree. The Central Americans. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990. This book offers a discussion of the religion, history and culture of the people who live in the countries of Central America. Brill, Marlene Targ. Journey for Peace: The Story of Rigoberta Menchú. New York: Lodestar Books, 1996. This children's biography that follows a

chapter-book format begins with Menchú's celebrated return to Guatemala after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. The author then goes on to describe her difficult journey for peace. A glossary and a list of further readings follow the story. Brill, Marlene Targ and Harry R. Targ. *Guatemala*. Chicago, Illinois: Children's Press, 1993. This book describes and great detail the land, culture, people, history, resources and daily life in Guatemala. Dorros, Arthur. *Tonight is Carnival*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1991. In this children's story a family in South America eagerly prepares for the excitement of Carnival. It tells what life is like for many people in the high Andes Mountains. Illustrations use photographs of arpilleras (wall hangings put together from cut and sewn pieces of cloth) first made in Chile to tell stories of important events in day-to-day life. Frazier, Nancy. *Frida Kahlo: Mysterious Painter*. Woodbridge, Conn.: Blackbirch Press, Inc., 1992. This beautifully-written children's biography is a lively, authentic portrayal of the life and art of Frida Kahlo. Garcia, Gud. *Spirit of the Maya: A Boy Explores his People's Mysterious Past*. New York: Walker and Co., 1995. This book tells the story of a twelve-year-old Lacando Indian boy who wants to learn about his ancient ancestry. Garza, Hedda. *Frida Kahlo*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1994. A very candid and unbiased biography of Kahlo from the Hispanics of Achievement series. A chronology and list of further readings follows the text. Hazell, Rebecca. *Heroines: Great Women Through the Ages*. New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1996. An anthology of women from many different countries and periods of history who gave something remarkable to the society in which they lived. The illustrations are drawn in the artistic style of the period and place in which each heroine lived. Krull, Kathleen. *Lives of the Artists: Masterpieces, Messes (and What the Neighbors Thought)*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995. Consists of a series of highly appealing biographies of artists written for young people. It includes a biography of Kahlo and her husband, Diego Rivera. Lazo, Caroline. *Rigoberta Menchú*. New York: Dillon Press, 1994. One of a series of Peacemakers biographies, this is beautifully-written children's biography of Menchú's life and trials. Many photographs are included. Silverstone, Michael. *Rigoberta Menchú: Defending Human Rights in Guatemala*. New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1999. A very comprehensive treatment of Menchú's life, her cultural background and her country, Guatemala. A glossary and a chronology can be found at the end of the biography. Stein, R. Conrad. *Mexico*. New York: Children's Press, 1998. In this book the history, people, culture and geography of Mexico are described. Venezia, Mike. *Frida Kahlo*. Danbury, Conn.: Children's Press, 1999. This appealing, simplified children's biography describes in both pictures and words the life of Kahlo including her childhood, her art and her marriage to Diego Rivera. Wood, Tim. *The Aztecs*. New York: Viking Press, 1992. This book describes the customs and daily lives of the Aztecs. @SH:Teacher Bibliography Agosin, Marjorie. *Women of Smoke*. (Janice Molloy, tr.). Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1989. This book offers a collection of very moving essays about the lives of women from different countries in Latin America. Alegría, Ciro. *Gabriela Mistral Intima*. Santiago, Chile: Editorial Antártica, S.A., 1989. I cannot read Spanish so I am unable to comment on the text but I do plan to use the photographs found throughout this book that so beautifully tell about Mistral's life and loved ones. Banks, James A. et al. *Latin America and Canada: Adventures in Time and Place*. New York: Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, 1998. A social studies textbook that is a rich resource for the geography, history and culture of many countries in Latin America. "Biography." *The Encyclopedia Americana*. Danbury, CT: Grolier Incorporated, 1982. pp. 766-768. A very comprehensive examination of biography that traces its history from ancient times to the present. Numerous examples of biographies reflective of each time period are offered. "Biography." *Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Inc., 1986. pp. 81-82. A clearly written informative article that traces the history of biography from ancient times to the present and discusses the many changes in form and style it has undergone. Burgos-Debray, Elisabeth, ed. (Ann Wright, tr.). *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. In this autobiography the editor, Elisabeth Burgos-Debray wrote down the words that Menchú spoke in a series of interviews she conducted. It recounts her life in vivid detail, describing her cultural background and the many obstacles she overcame in journey to try to bring peace and justice to all Guatemalans. Carlson, Lori M. and Cynthia L. Ventura, eds. *Where Angels Glide at Dawn: New Stories from Latin America*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990. This anthology of tales reflects the culture and traditions of a number of countries in Latin America. Coe, Michael D. *The Maya*. New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1984. An excellent up-to-date survey of the ancient Mayan civilization. Comins, Jeremy. *Latin American Crafts and Their Cultural Backgrounds*. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Co., 1974. The reader learns how to make articles using materials in the style of both ancient and modern Latin American artists. Projects include wax carving, embroidery, painting and jewelry-making.

Dana, Doris, tr. and ed. *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral*. Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins Press, 1961. A bilingual volume, this beautiful collection of Mistral's poems is divided into four sections: *Desolación*, *Ternura*, *Tala* and *Lagar*. Each section is preceded by the editor's commentary.

de Vazquez, Margot Arce. *Gabriela Mistral: The Poet and Her Work*. Trans. Helene Masslo Anderson. New York: New York University Press, 1964. A large portion of this well-written biography is devoted to description and analysis of Mistral's poetry which serves to help the reader appreciate her poetry even more.

Drucker, Malka. *Frida Kahlo*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991. An excellent biography of Kahlo that reads like a novel and offers a dual survey of her life and her works.

Farr, Roger. *Think-Alongs: Comprehending As You Read*. Austin, Texas: Steck-Vaughn Company, 2000. This text provides young readers with a variety of appealing selections to read and calls upon them to practice specific comprehension strategies.

Finney, Susan. *Keep the Rest of the Class Reading & Writing...While You Teach Small Groups*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2000. This resource book offers the teacher a wealth of engaging literacy-focused activities for use at centers in the classroom. It includes a small but valuable section on biography.

Grolier Library of International Biographies, The: *Writers*. Danbury, Conn: Grolier Educational Corporation, 1996. This reference work includes a brief but informative biography of Gabriela Mistral.

Hahner, June E. ed. *Women in Latin American History: Their Lives and Views*. Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1976. This book offers very interesting accounts of Latin American women from different countries, walks of life and time periods. They tell about their lives, their views and their experiences.

Jacobsen, Jennifer and Dottie Raymer. *The Big Book of Reproducible Graphic Organizers*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 1999. This book offers different forms of webs, maps and diagrams that will help young readers and writers to organize, interpret and better understand the material they have read.

Jehenson, Myriam Yvonne. *Latin-American Women Writers: Class, Race and Gender*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995. The Latin American women introduced in this book come from varied cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic conditions and they use various literary strategies to tell their stories.

Jerome-Cohen, Deborah, ed. *Exploring Biographies: Teacher's Sourcebook*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1994. Although designed for use with three particular biographies, this book is also an invaluable resource for teachers, offering a wealth of reading and writing activities that can be used with any children's biography.

King, David C. *First Facts About American Heroes*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1996. An excellent reference for use in introducing the genre of biography to young students. It spans the time period starting with colonial America and going up to the present. Time-lines, large color paintings or photos and interesting anecdotes accompany each biography.

Krauss, Clifford. *Inside Central America: Its People, Politics, and History*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991. This book provides a thorough survey of the important issues germane to Central America and a profile of its leaders.

Marrin, Albert. *Aztecs and Spaniards: Cortés and the Conquest of Mexico*. New York: Atheneum, 1986. This fascinating account traces the March of Cortés to Tenochtitlán to the fall of the Aztec Empire.

Marzolla, Jean. *My First Book of Biographies*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1994. This book offers very simply-written biographies of men and women from different cultures and walks of life. A beautiful illustration of each subject accompanies each selection. A biography of Gabriela Mistral is included in this collection.

Meyer, Doris and Margarite Fernández Olmos, eds. *Contemporary Women Authors of Latin America: Introductory Essays*. Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1983. This first volume provides a useful introduction to Latin American Women's Literature and is divided into two sections: introductory and testimonial essays.

*Contemporary Women Authors of Latin America: New Translations*. Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1983. This second volume of previously unpublished translations contains essays, drama, short stories, and poetry by women from all areas of Latin America. Brief biographical sketches tell about each author.

Morris, Patricia S. and Margaret A. Berry. *Biography and Autobiography: Activities and Booklists for Grades 6-12*. West Nyack, New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, 1993. This valuable resource book offers teachers extensive book lists as well as reproducible materials and reading, writing and critical thinking activities relevant to this particular genre.

Morrison, Marion. *Mexico and Central America*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1995. This reference work provides a good overview of the history, geography, people, religion and resources found in Central America.

Moyers, Suzanne. "Focus on Biography." *Instructor*. March 2000: 61-64. This article offers the teacher some very useful resources and strategies for introducing the class to the genre of biography.

O'Halloran, Kate. *Hands-On Culture of Mexico and Central America*. Portland, Maine: J. Weston Walch Publisher, 1998. This book offers projects that introduce students to the economy, music, literature and visual arts of Mexico and Central America. These projects can be done individually or in small groups.

Preminger, Alex & T.V.F. Brogan eds. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. New York: MJF Books, 1993.



This comprehensive reference work prepared by recognized authorities includes a section on biographical criticism. In it are traced the changes this genre has undergone as well as the influences various movements and trains of thought have had on it. Rolka, Gail Meyer. *100 Women Who Shaped World History*. San Mateo, Calif.: Bluewood Books, 1994. One hundred concise biographies of women who have helped change the course of world history are arranged chronologically. Biographies of both Mistral and Menchú are included in this collection. Tapscott, Stephen, ed. *Twentieth-Century Latin American Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1996. For each Latin American poet in this anthology, the editor has included a number of his/her major or representative poems. Brief biographical notes precede each selection of poems. Mistral is included in the outstanding anthology. Tardiff, Joseph C. and L. Mpho Mabunda, eds. *Dictionary of Hispanic Biography*. Detroit: Gale Research, 1996. An informative biography of Gabriela Mistral is included in this reference work. Winter, Jane Kohen. *Chile*. New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1991. Part of Cultures of the World series, this book vividly describes the country and people of Chile. Withington, Janice J. *Genres of Literature: Thematic Study Guides & Bibliographies*. Torrance, Calif.: Good Apple, 1996. Each of the eleven genres (including biography) are introduced in this wonderful resource book for teachers. Bibliographies, reproducibles and hands-on activities accompany each genre.

---

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>