Typical Personalities in Biographies

1. Scientists and Inventors: According to your text Thomas Edison is probably the most popular inventor in juvenile biographies. Other popular inventors and scientists include the Wright Brothers and Alexander Graham Bell.

2. Political Leaders: The category of political leaders includes presidents and senators as well as kings, queens, and other monarchs. Influences for writing these types of biographies can come from elections, coups, and other swings or changes in power.

3. Artists, musicians, actors, authors and other people from the arts: The category of people in the arts also has a trendy facet. Often times people from the arts are soon forgotten. Prior to the 1980’s few biographies of authors were written for young readers.

4. Sports personalities: Another trendy element to writing biographies. The athlete or person in the public eye is the next biography that is written. The biography usually includes several photographs and is typically written after a major event the athlete has participated in.

5. Explorers and Adventurers: Men and women who live dangerously to push back the frontiers of science and geography make for interesting reading. Often, these types of biographies are used to support curriculum in schools. Teachers have to be careful not to fall into a trap of only discussing one perspective of a particular individual.

6. Humanitarians: Some interesting subjects are interesting because of their self-less deed or acts of kindness. Some examples include Mother Theresa and Florence Nightingale.

7. People who overcome tremendous odds: Biographies of people who overcome tremendous odds focus on a different sort of heroism. A good example is Helen Keller.

8. Villains: Villains are interesting and can add to a biography. We may not think of Adolf Hitler as having admirable qualities but the information about his life can provide interesting contrasts to other people with different qualities and in a sense warn us of things that can occur if we mimic their ideas or behavior.

9. Other interesting people: According to the text, a trend in juvenile biography is to write about today’s ordinary people who have interesting lifestyles, occupations, or experiences. Books like these give children the sense that everyone, not just the big names form history, has a story and can make a contribution.

Types of Biographies

1. According to your text, fictionalized biographies are less common today. Instead, fictional treatments of a person’s life are often classified as historical fiction. Personal narratives may be considered in this category. A personal narrative is an individual’s biographical story written in narrative or story form rather than in pure expository or nonfiction form.
2. The **authentic biography**, written as true nonfiction, is today’s trend in biographies for young readers.

3. **Fictionalized biographies** are almost always individual biographies, which deal with the life of a single subject and authentic biographies are either individual or collective biographies.

4. **Collective biographies** contain a number of short biographical pieces about subjects who have a common trait. Some collective biographies feature popular current personalities, such as professional athletes, actors, or rock stars. Teachers must be aware of various viewpoints that can come across in some biographies.

5. When people write about their own lives, the problem with objectivity is even more acute. **Autobiographies** provide a unique viewpoint of self-revelation. No one has as complete view of a life than the one who lives it.

6. **Picture Book Biographies**: Picture book biographies, usually intended for very young readers, are brief and heavily illustrated. Generally 32 pages, the standard length for picture books, such biographies provide an overview, focusing on the highlights of a subject’s life.

7. **Simplified biographies** are aimed at newly independent readers and appear as picture books or as chapter books, typically with frequent illustrations.

8. **Complete biographies**: Although complete biographies may be in simplified, picture book, or length chapter books format, their purpose is to span the entire life of a subject.

9. **Partial biographies** have a more focused purpose than do complete biographies. They cover only a segment of the subject’s life.

**Judging Biographies for Young Readers**

Because biography is a brand of nonfiction, good biographies exhibit certain characteristics that vary from those in fiction. First, and most basic, the facts in a biography must be accurate. A biographer ought to avoid making blatant personal judgments and should allow the actions and words of the subject speak for themselves.

One of the short comings of some juvenile biographies is that they glorify their subjects, turning them into idols or making them larger than life. To present a balanced view means looking at the blemishes as well as the strong points.

Biographies must engage young readers with fresh prose and riveting perspective, bringing the subjects to life.