

# The Who Behind World War II



## A Lesson in Biographies

By Jeannie Johnson-Young

Welcome!

Thank you for downloading "The Who Behind World War II History," a biography study to go with the book "Virginia Was a Spy" by Catherine Urdahl. This picture book biography provides a great mentor text when teaching a unit focused on bravery, heroism, World War II history, or the important role women played in history. You also can use it to commemorate Veteran's Day. The focus of this lesson is to create biographical posters of World War II leaders from both the Allied and Axis sides, as well as resistance leaders from German occupied countries.

This lesson includes a slide show, a detailed lesson plan, and student handouts. It is an interactive lesson with opportunities for your class to work whole group, in small groups, and independently. Teaching the lesson over a week or two is particularly beneficial if your school uses Daily 5 or another format that provides opportunities to alternate whole group instruction with small group interventions. I have broken up the lessons into manageable chunks and delineated the break points with different colors.

This lesson covers a number of Common Core ELA skills, as well as some social studies standards. The ELA standards are listed on the next page, and the Social Studies Standards are included in learning about primary and secondary sources. It requires students to work in collaborative groups; do deep research using primary and secondary sources; write biographical text on their assigned leader; and increase their computer skills by searching for pictures, graphics, and maps.

Teachers instructing virtually can adapt this lesson by downloading the Google form of the student packet from the author's website ([www.catherineurdahl.com](http://www.catherineurdahl.com)) and sharing it with your students. They can work in groups by sharing their project via Google docs. You can present the slide show during a Google Meet or Zoom meeting.

I hope you and your students enjoy reading "Virginia Was a Spy" and this lesson on writing biographies.

Jeannie

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**Objective:** Students will be able to identify what a biography is, as well as essential elements of a biography, and then create a biographical poster on a World War II leader.

Standards		
3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade
<p><b>RI.3.3</b> Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.</p> <p><b>RI.3.5</b> Use text features and search tools (e.g., key words, sidebars, hyperlinks) to locate information relevant to a given topic efficiently.</p> <p><b>RI.3.7</b> Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).</p> <p><b>RI.3.8</b> Describe the logical connection between particular sentences and paragraphs in a text (e.g., comparison, cause/effect, first/second/third in a sequence).</p> <p><b>W.3.2</b> Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.</p> <p><b>W.3.5</b> With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.</p> <p><b>W.3.7</b> Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.</p>	<p><b>RI.4.3</b> Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.</p> <p><b>RI.4.5</b> Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.</p> <p><b>RI.4.7</b> Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.</p> <p><b>W.4.2</b> Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.</p> <p><b>W.4.5</b> With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.</p> <p><b>W.4.6</b> With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others</p> <p><b>W.4.7</b> Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.</p>	<p><b>RI.5.3</b> Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.</p> <p><b>RI.5.5</b> Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.</p> <p><b>RI.5.7</b> Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.</p> <p><b>W.5.2</b> Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.</p> <p><b>W.5.5</b> With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.</p> <p><b>W.5.6</b> With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others</p> <p><b>W.5.7</b> Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.</p>

Understandings:	Essential Questions
Students will understand that....	Students will be able to answer...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biographies are books about an individual written by another person</li> <li>• Biographies usually are told in sequential order</li> <li>• Biographies often cover a person's early life, education, career, and personal life.</li> <li>• Biographies require extensive research using multiple sources including books, internet websites, magazines, photographs, documentaries, journals, letters, and other sources.</li> <li>• Biographies, and other nonfiction texts, use informational elements such as sidebars, info boxes, timelines, maps, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is a biography and how is it different from an autobiography?</li> <li>• What literary device does the author use in writing a biography? (sequence of events)</li> <li>• What areas of a person's life are covered in a biography?</li> <li>• What are primary and secondary sources?</li> <li>• What kind of informational elements are found in biographies?</li> </ul>

## Supplies

### Research:

- I have found it helpful check out books from school or community libraries and place them in bins for the students to use in their research. This saves time and helps keep students moving forward.
- I have included some computer research websites in the student packets. They can use these in addition to Google searches.
- There are documentaries and YouTube clips about most of these leaders and several YouTube clips. I recommend students watch any documentaries at home with their parents in the event something inappropriate shows up.

### Whole Group Activities:

- A prepared list of 9 student groupings. You can assign the World War II leaders amongst the students yourself or allow the groups to choose themselves. I suggest students draw leader names from a container.
- Three pieces of butcher paper and yellow, pink, and blue post-it notes for large KWL charts

### Poster Creation:

- 9 pieces of poster board
- Glue and scissors
- Markers, pencils, crayons
- Printer paper

Slide Show	You can find the slide show on <a href="http://www.catherineurdahl.com">www.catherineurdahl.com</a> . Click on the For Teachers button to find the slide show.
Slide 1	Explain that World War II had strong leaders for both sides of the conflict and that they will be studying these leaders through biographical sources.
Slide 2	I like to read the objective and then have my students read it so they are clear on what they are going to learn.
Slide 3	Give the students 2-3 minutes to talk about what they think a biography is, and then choose someone to share their definition.
Slide 4	This slide will define a biography and autobiography.
Slide 5	Ask the students if they have ever read a biography and who it was about. Ask them why biographies are important and why they can be very interesting.
Slide 6	Ask the students if they know who these people are and why they are important. Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman to be appointed to the Supreme Court, might trip them up.
Slide 7	Ask the students if they know who these people are and why they are important. They might not know Marie Curie won the Nobel prize for Physics for her work in radiation and discovery of the elements polonium and radium, or that Katherine Johnson was a mathematician who plotted flight paths for spacecraft at NASA. You can recommend they read the picture book " <i>Hidden Figures</i> " or the chapter book of the same title for young readers both by Margot Shetterly.
Slide 8	Ask the students if they know who these people are and why they are important. They most likely won't know that Elizabeth Blackwell was the first female physician in the United States earning her degree in 1849, or that Annie Easley was a computer scientist who was instrumental in developing software coding that related to the energy industry.
Slide 9	Ask the students if they know who these people are and why they are important. Some will know Susan B. Anthony was an activist who fought for women's right to vote, but might not know that Chief Joseph led his Wallowa band of Nez Perce Indians across the Rockies to escape the U.S. government who was trying to force them to give up their land. They might not recognize Dolores Huerta as a leader who fought for the rights of Hispanic field workers back in the 1960s and 1970s.

Slide 10	Ask the students if they know who these people are and why they are important. They may know who Harriet Tubman was, but they might not know John McCain was a Navy pilot shot down over Vietnam and held as a POW for 5 1/2 years. He also was a US Senator from Arizona and a presidential candidate. They also may struggle with Virginia Hall who was a spy during World War II. Malala Yousafzai has made a name for herself recently by being a Nobel Peace Prize winner who stands up for the rights of Afghani girls to an education. She was shot in the head by the Taliban but refused to stop fighting.
Slide 11	Give the students 2-3 minutes to discuss who they would like to read about in a biography. Have 4-5 students share who they chose.
Slide 12	Story time! Today is the day you read the story to the students. The text has been broken down to allow the kids to discuss with partners and share out their thoughts.
Pages 1-8	What was Virginia like as a child? What were some of her experiences that support your opinion.
Pages 9-13	What did you learn about Virginia's early career? What happened that changed her life?
Pages 14-27	What were some of the things Virginia did as a spy? What fake identities did she use?
Pages 27-32	What award did Virginia get and what was it for?
Slide 13	Introduce the students to the biography writing project.
Slide 14	Start creating your KWL charts. Pass out 5 yellow and 5 pink post-it notes to each student. On the yellow post-it, have them write what they know about WWII. On the pink notes, have them write about what they would like to learn about WWII. You can share out what some of the students wrote, or you can have them come look at the poster later in the day.
Slide 15	An explanation of the two sides of the war, and the resistance fighters as well.
Slides 16-18	I've included a few facts about each leader to spark students' interest. This might be particularly helpful if you are going to let the students choose which leader to study.

Slide 16  
Axis Leaders

**Japanese Emperor Hirohito:** He was just 25 years old when he became emperor of Japan in 1926. He was the longest ruling emperor in the history of Japan. Unlike many of his comrades in Japan and other Axis countries, Hirohito was never tried for war crimes for the atrocities committed by the Japanese including the attack on Pearl Harbor.

**Italian Dictator Benito Mussolini:** He was considered the creator of fascism, which is defined as a governmental system with a dictator who controls every aspect of the country, forcibly suppresses any criticism or opposition, and promotes extreme nationalism and often racism. Mussolini overthrew the Italian government and became prime minister in 1922. He signed an alliance with Hitler in 1939.

**German Führer Adolf Hitler:** While known as the leader of Germany, Hitler actually was born in Austria. He fought as a lowly corporal in the German Army during World War I. He was convinced Germany had lost the war because of Jews and politicians. He later formed the Nazi party and became Chancellor of Germany in 1933. World War II started when he invaded Poland. He was responsible for the deaths of about 6 million Jewish people.

Slide 17  
Allied Leaders

**Soviet Premiere Joseph Stalin:** He was a brutal dictator and ruled a large communist country call the Soviet Union. At the time of World War II, Russia, Estonia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, and nine other countries were part of the Soviet Union. In 1939, Stalin and Hitler signed a non-aggression pact, but Hitler broke that pact by invading the Soviet Union in 1941. Stalin aligned his country with the Allies, and eventually his troops drove Germany out of the Soviet Union.

**U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt:** He was the 32nd President of the United States and was voted into office in 1932. He was working to bring the United States out of the Great Depression when Hitler rose to power. Roosevelt was hesitant to enter the war until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. He, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin worked to create what is now the United Nations.

**British Prime Minister Winston Churchill:** He was the leader of the Allied Forces after France fell to the Nazis and before America joined the fight. He helped develop many military plans including D-Day on June 6, 1944. He served as the Prime Minister of Great Britain first in 1940-1945, and then from 1951 to 1955. He helped form the United Nations. We also remember him an a journalist, author, and great orator.



<p>Slide 18 Resistance Leaders</p>	<p><b>Polish Resistance Leader Witold Pilecki:</b> Pilecki (pronounced peh-LET-skee) served in the Polish Army as a member of the Calvary. He fought in the Polish-Soviet War, and then he retired. When Hitler invaded Poland, he started a resistance movement. He volunteered to go to Auschwitz, the famous concentration camp, to start a resistance movement there and get word to the outside world about what was happening.</p> <p><b>British SOE Leader Vera Atkins:</b> A native of Romania, Atkins moved to Great Britain in the 1930s. She worked for the French section of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), England's spy unit during World War II. Her job was to recruit and deploy spies to France. She was in charge of 37 female spies in France.</p> <p><b>French Resistance Leader Charles de Gaulle:</b> He is among the most famous leaders of the French Resistance. De Gaulle was easily recognizable because he was so tall. This made him ineffective in the field, so he led and coordinated the resistance movement from England. His role included organizing attacks and broadcasting encouragement to the French resistance fighters via the British Broadcasting Company (BBC).</p>
<p>Slide 19</p>	<p>Table talk to give the kids about 5 minutes to talk about who piqued their interests.</p>
<p>Slide 20</p>	<p>This slide is a reminder of what they will be doing, and an opportunity for you to introduce Gen. George Patton, one of America's greatest military leaders and thinkers. He was responsible for many major victories in WWII.</p>
<p>Slide 21</p>	<p>After you present slide 21, divide the students up into 9 equal groups. Let them know that they need to establish some group norms before they get started. There are a couple of ideas already in this slide.</p>
<p>Slide 22</p>	<p>This slide gives them a sentence stem to use while discussing their norms.</p>
<p>Slide 23</p>	<p>Students will get their biography subject now. You can assign them a leader, have them draw names out of a hat, or have them choose—whatever works best for your class. This slide introduces them to the idea of divvying up work and responsibilities for writing the text blocks.</p>

Slide 24	Each person in the team will be responsible for one or two of the text blocks. This slide lets them know the areas that need to be covered.
Slide 25	Allow the teams 5-8 minutes to figure out what life area each person will cover.
Slides 26-27	Remind your students about the variety of sources they can use and that multiple sources are critical for a great project.
Slide 28-29	Social Studies standards include students knowing what primary and secondary resources are and the importance of using both when doing historical research. These slides introduce the students to both types of resources.
Slide 30	Remind your students that taking good notes helps ensure success. Have them look at the outlines in their packets so they know what questions they need to answer for their assigned life area. At this point, set them free to do their research and fill out their outlines. Be sure to give them a deadline so that you can continue the whole group lesson on the actual writing of the text block. It may take them a day or two to do the research and fill out the outlines.
Slide 31	Once everyone has completed their research and filled out their outlines, tell them to start writing their text blocks. They will find two lined pages in their packets on which they can write their rough draft (Pages 11-12). Remind them to skip the lines with the X's on them. Also remind them that even professional writers have their work edited many times over. No one writes a perfect draft the first time around so don't take it personally if someone suggests a change or points out a spelling or grammatical error.
Slides 32-34	These three slides point out the do's and don'ts when producing a text block. They need to be cognizant of length; spelling; using complete, grammatically correct sentences; and avoiding using fancy fonts.
Slide 35	This slide provides suggestions for type size and fonts to produce copy that is easy to read.
Slide 36	I included short writing samples to provide a bit of scaffolding for all students, but primarily for your IEP and ELL students. Now you can release the students to work on their text blocks. Once again, I find a deadline helps. This might take a day or two for them to complete. If you use a Daily 5 type schedule, you might want to consider doing this step over three days—one for rough drafts, one for editing and one for typing it into a document.
Slide 37	Many ELA anthologies include nonfiction stories for students. Most have information graphics along with the story. You might want to have them look at a non-fiction story and the different graphic elements. This slide introduces them.

<p>Slides 38-39</p>	<p>Fun Facts boxes are great for including quirky, interesting facts about a person's life. Remind students they need to work together and figure out which facts to include in the Fun Facts box.</p>
<p>Slides 41-46</p>	<p>If you have 1:1 or 2:1 computer usage in your classroom, the students could do the steps along with you as you go through the slides. I also have included the step-by-step instructions in the student packets.</p>
<p>Slides 47-48</p>	<p>Timelines can be tricky because students have to decide what is and what isn't a major event in a person's life. They also are challenging to make on the computer, but they are welcome to give it a shot. Remind them that some of the events they think are vital, may not feel that way to others. This is going to be a lesson in compromise.</p>
<p>Slide 49</p>	<p>Remind the students that when using Google to find a map, they need to add the words "during World War II" into the search field. Explain that maps have changed significantly—especially in the former Soviet Union.</p>
<p>Slide 50</p>	<p>This slide will help introduce students to other graphic elements such as flags, insignias, quotes, graphs, and tables. Remind them of how they use graphs and tables in math and how much easier it is to compare information when it is in graphic form.</p>
<p>Slides 51-54</p>	<p>Sometimes students need to see examples so they know what they are looking for when doing a Google search. These slides show a few examples of what they might be looking for to add to their poster.</p>
<p>Slide 55-56</p>	<p>It's time for the teams to meet and once again divvy up responsibilities. They need to finish filling out the task responsibility worksheet on page 3 of the packet. Once they have chosen tasks, they need to find all the graphic elements to go on the poster. Remind them that they need to copy and paste elements onto a Google, Word, or Publisher doc so they can print it, cut it out, and glue it onto their posters.</p>
<p>Slide 57-58</p>	<p>This is where working together might test the patience of the team members, and possibly you! Students need to come up with a design for the poster. Agreeing to one design might involve willingness to compromise. Your approach to this part of the project will depend on how well your students work together.</p>
<p>Slide 59-60</p>	<p>Now you can release students to work on their poster designs. The sample from the slide 58 is on page 15 of the packet, and grid paper is on page 16. If they use each unit on the grid paper as 1 square inch on the poster, it will help them determine sizes of the different elements. They will need team time to vote.</p>

<p>Slides 61</p>	<p>This is an example of a finished poster (smaller version and missing some graphic elements) based on the layout of the design on the grid paper. Remind students to lay out the pieces on the poster board <b>without</b> glue first, so they can rearrange them or print out a larger or smaller version of a photo or graphic element.</p>
<p>Slides 62-64</p>	<p>Having students present their work is a great way to meet some of the speaking and listening standards. Remind them to face their audience and speak loudly as they present. Also, remind them that they will be graded on what kind of audience member they are.</p>
<p>Slide 65</p>	<p>As the final wrap-up, pass out five blue sticky notes to each student. On 3 of them, have them write something they learned about biographies. On 2 of them, have them write something they learned about WWII. Have them place them on the What I Learned chart, and share out some insights the students provided.</p>