

# Teaching

## for high potential

and 2006 Final Program

### Demystifying the Grant Writing Process

Kristen R. Stephens, Ph.D., Duke University Talent Identification Program

So, how much money—out of your own pocket—are you spending on supplies and materials for your classroom? Are you easily claiming the entire \$250 deductible the IRS allows teachers on your federal income tax return? Teachers spend over \$500 a year of their own money on classroom materials, while new teachers pay out an average of \$700 a year. As schools scramble to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, it is likely that school systems will divert funds away from unmandated programs and toward initiatives that focus on raising the achievement levels of low-performing students. In those states without mandates for gifted programming, teachers of the gifted could see a dramatic reduction in some, if not all, of their classroom funds. As a result, teachers of the gifted need to

be proactive in seeking external funds that will help sustain the quality of gifted programming in their schools. One such source of funds is grants.

Many organizations—public and private, state and local—make awards to teachers for noteworthy projects through grants. While some grants available through federal and state sources require lengthy, detailed proposals, other organizations merely require a brief description of the proposed project in order to make their funding decisions. The notion of obtaining funds through grant writing has eluded many teachers, because it is often perceived as a tedious task involving the compilation of pages of research findings and meticulous laboring over a detailed budget. However, for projects requiring a relatively small amount of funding (i.e.,

under \$2,000), the process can be rather simple. More teachers should consider grant writing as a viable means for securing money for the classroom.

#### Need from Want

Being able to effectively articulate your needs and communicate your proposed solution to these needs is key in writing an effective grant proposal. In cultivating a noteworthy project consider the following: What are your classroom needs? What resources, if available, would have the greatest impact on student learning and achievement? It is vital that you distinguish a need from a want. Potential funding sources want to be certain the money they provide will address a critical issue and will have a substantial impact on the population the project seeks to serve.

#### Determine Your School's Policy

Before you begin researching potential sources of funds, determine your school district's policies regarding fund solicitation. Some potential funding sources may be considered "off limits" by the school district's administration. Sometimes the school system is cultivating rela-

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## Helpful Resources

- ◆ ***Grant Writing for Educators: Practical Strategies for Teachers, Administrators, and Staff*** (2004) by B. A. Browning
- ◆ ***How to Get Money for Your Classroom and School*** (2005) by F. A. Karnes & K. R. Stephens
- ◆ ***School Grants*** - [www.schoolgrants.org](http://www.schoolgrants.org)
- ◆ ***The Foundation Center*** - [www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org)

tionships with certain organizations, and doesn't want multiple proposals to be competing at the same agency. Additionally, a grantmaking organization may have recently made a substantial award to the school system, so requesting funds from this source again may not be fruitful.

### Finding a Funding Source

Many types of funding agencies exist: public (government), private (foundations), and corporate (businesses). Research the institutions in your own community and state first, as private and corporate foundations often limit their awards to projects within their own communities. The Foundation Center (<http://fdncenter.org>) has a searchable online database that can help you locate potential funding agencies in your area.

Once you determine which companies or foundations are headquartered in your state, visit their Web sites and read about them. Matching your need to the interest areas of a grantmaking organization is crucial. For example, if you have a need for instructional materials to teach elementary students advanced, algebraic concepts, approach an agency

interested in elementary education or math education rather than one that is only interested in adult literacy. Furthermore, be sure to determine if the amount you are requesting is within the agency's parameters. Most funding sources will specify the maximum amount typically awarded. Others may cite limitations on how funds can be used. For example, some prospective grantmaking organizations may not cover general operating expenses (i.e., utility and phone services). Your geographic location (urban or rural), population served (i.e., low-income, minority, girls) can all be potential elements that will either attract or put off a potential funding source. Be sure to research each organization fully. Read their annual reports to determine the types of projects they have supported in the past. Only submit proposals to organizations whose missions closely match your project goals.



### Writing the Proposal

Most grantmaking organizations have guidelines for how they want proposals to be formatted and submitted. Some require paper submissions while others may have forms to be completed online. Read over the agency's guidelines and deadlines carefully, and be sure to consider all elements as you prepare your proposal.

It may be necessary to consult with other school system personnel as you begin gathering information for your proposal. For example, your school or district's finance director may be helpful to you as you prepare your project's budget. If your proposal is going to directly benefit other classrooms or schools within your district, enlist the assistance of other teachers, or even parents, in the

actual compilation and writing of the proposal. Lengthy federal and state proposals can be written in teams rather than by just one individual.

Information requested may vary from agency to agency. In order to avoid delays in the processing of your proposal, be sure to provide the funding agency with all the information requested.

### What Are You Waiting For?

There is money out there—waiting to be awarded to a noteworthy project. Cultivate an idea, explore your options, fire up your word processing program, and get going! The dollars that will enhance the learning experiences of your students await you.



*The information contained in this article aligns with the following Gifted Program Standards: Program Administration and Management (4) & Program Design (2). For a complete copy of the Standards, visit [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org).*

### Questions that typically need to be answered in a grant proposal include:

- Why is this project being proposed?
- Who will benefit from this project?
- What are the goals and objectives of the proposed project?
- Why is your school, district, or community the best place to implement this proposed project?
- How is the proposed project related to the funding agency's priorities?
- How will the project be evaluated?
- How will the results of this project be shared with others?
- What personnel will be involved with the project, what will their roles be, and what are their qualifications to play those roles?
- What is the amount requested to carry out the proposed project?
- How will the proposed project be sustained once funding ends?

## Reading After School: Exploring Interests, Emphasizing Strengths, and Expanding Horizons

Catherine A. Little, Ph.D. and Ashley H. Hines, M.A., University of Connecticut

*Every student is reading, but all the desk chairs are empty. Students are scattered throughout the room – on the carpet, under desks, in the “comfy chair.” One student listens to an audiobook through headphones; three others are quietly discussing their books with college student volunteers. The room is quiet, except for a few soft voices and muted classical music.*

*The teacher claps his hands twice, and the students clap in response. The teacher tells students they may continue reading independently or with a friend, take a laptop to visit selected websites, or return to some work on an inventions project. Before moving energetically to their next activity, the students record their reading time in a log. The clock says 5:10 p.m.*

*Just the knowledge that a good book is awaiting one at the end of a long day makes that day happier. –*

Kathleen Norris, *Hands Full of Living*, 1931

The school above is one of eight schools implementing Project Expanding Horizons, an after-school reading enrichment program funded by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation and coordinated by the University of Connecticut’s Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development. At each school, children in third through sixth grade and adults come together as a community of readers to share in explorations of books and interests. Classes include 17–25 students, guided by a classroom teacher and volunteers. Teachers work with colleagues to invite children who have demonstrated strong reading skills and interests, as well as students who struggle yet demonstrate high motivation for reading.

The foundation of Expanding Horizons is the Schoolwide Enrichment Reading Model (SEM-R; Reis et al., 2003), which incorporates three phases of reading instruction into each session. Although the program varies from school to school, the focus in each context is on increasing students’ enjoyment of reading and encouraging them to pursue independent reading at levels challenging enough to support continued growth.

Effective out-of-school time (OST) programs and successful enrichment opportunities for advanced learners share several features. Studies of out-of-school time programs and the cognitive and affective needs of gifted students consistently demonstrate the importance of challenge, flexibility, and caring relationships (Beckett, Hawken, & Jackowitz, 2001; Hall, Yohalem, Tolman, & Wilson, 2003; VanTassel-Baska, 2003). Expanding Horizons promotes critical reading skills within a context that responds to

these recommendations.

### Challenge

*Derek is a third grader whose reading fluency scores far exceed the 90th percentile for his grade level. He is fascinated by paleontology and biology, easily pronouncing words like “Paleozoic” and “Equidae.” When handed a complex book on microorganisms, rejected by older students as too difficult, Derek’s wide-eyed response was, “Awesome!”*

One of the principles of differentiation is the importance of assessing where students are and planning experiences that will help them grow. In a typical

### A Sample Day in a Project Expanding Horizons Classroom

**4:00-4:10** *Students arrive in classroom, eat a snack, and visit with each other, their teacher, and volunteers.*

**4:10-4:30** *Phase 1, Exposure & Conversations About Literature*

The teacher reads aloud the opening paragraphs of *The Bad Beginning* by Lemony Snicket. She asks the students to discuss what makes a good beginning for a book; then the teacher shares the first few paragraphs of *Tut Tut* by Jon Scieszka. The group talks about how reading the first few pages of a book is a good way to get a “flavor” of the book and to determine whether it seems too hard, too easy, or just right. As they ready for Phase 2, several students raise their hands to ask if they can take the books that were read aloud.

**4:30-5:10** *Phase 2, Supported Independent Reading*

Students move to different areas of the room to find comfortable reading spots. The teacher and three volunteers each sit with a child for a conference. In one conference, a child who is just beginning to read *Tut Tut* shares the first few pages aloud with a volunteer, reading quickly and with minimal errors. They discuss what interested the child about the book. The volunteer then suggests that although the book certainly sounds interesting, it might not be challenging enough for reading during program time, and suggests that the student take the book home to read. Together, they visit the book collection to seek out a similar book that presents more challenge. In another conference, the teacher listens to a student read about the Fibonacci sequence and the “golden ratio” from *Go Figure* by Johnny Ball. They discuss a question the book presents about whether the Parthenon in Athens is based on golden rectangles. After about 5 minutes, the adults move to different students and continue conferencing.

**5:10-5:30** *Phase 3, Interest & Choice*

Several options are presented: Students may continue reading alone or with a friend, listen to a book on CD, work with a volunteer on a puppet show a group is writing about favorite characters from literature, or go online for research projects. At the end of Phase 3, students pack up and head home, looking forward to their next visit!

reading program, Derek might receive limited reading challenge. Moreover, many after-school programs emphasize remediation through homework help and tutoring, which also limits the challenge provided for more advanced students. Within SEM-R, the focus for all students is on promoting strengths and reading at individual challenge levels.

Reading material that is advanced for one student may not be challenging for another, so student assessment and availability of a wide range of books are critical program components. The framework incorporates opportunities for formal and informal assessment to support differentiation. Students take oral reading fluency tests at the beginning and at the end of the program, and throughout program sessions they read aloud and discuss their reading in individualized conferences. In these conferences, teachers assess the students' book selections and the reading strategies students are practicing. Teachers also promote higher-level thinking and model critical reading behaviors. Furthermore, the dual focus on challenge and enjoyment helps ground the program in a talent development emphasis, allowing students to engage extensively in something they enjoy and to develop their strengths.

### Flexibility

*Mark is a fifth grader who develops new interests related to each book he reads. Inspired by classmates' development of a puppet show about their novels, Mark decided to make a movie about his non-fiction book on bugs. Miranda and Jamie are fourth graders who would much rather continue to read at the end of Phase 2 than participate in a project. When their teacher announces Phase 3, Miranda and Jamie usually choose to stay where they are, with their books.*

Choice, flexibility, and a focus on individual interests are critical components of Expanding Horizons. The books selected for Phase 1 are intended to appeal to existing interests and expose students to new literary territory. During Phase 2, everyone reads, yet flexibility is evident in such features as opportunities to listen to audiobooks, the length of time spent reading, and most importantly, individual book choice. Phase 3 offers the greatest variety and flexibility, with a range of activities grounded in the students' interests. For some students, the main attraction is the extensive time allotted to quiet reading. For other students, although they enjoy reading, they also look forward to additional independent opportunities to explore interests and develop other strengths.

### Caring Relationships

*Ms. Cooper is an Expanding Horizons teacher who has known some of the program students since they were in kindergarten. Often when these students see her in the hall during the day, they tell her how excited they are about the program. Part of their excitement stems from the reading*

### For more information:

#### SEM-R

- [www.gifted.uconn.edu/semr](http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/semr)
- *Making the Match: The Right book for the right reader at the right time, grades 4-12* (2003) by T. S. Lesesne.

#### OST Programs

- [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/about.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/about.html)
- [www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/afterschool/index.html](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/afterschool/index.html)
- [www.afterschoolalliance.org/](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/)
- *Moving Towards Success: Framework for After-School Programs* (2005) by the C. S. Mott Foundation Committee on After-School Research and Practice

*opportunities; another large part stems from the chance to work closely with teachers and volunteers.*

The teachers and volunteers are as diverse as the students, reflecting a variety of ages, interests, and experiences. Although reading is in many respects a solitary activity, the individual conferences and conversations about literature in Expanding Horizons provide a context for relationships with reading at their core. Combining personal attention with the informality of the after-school setting, the program immerses children in a highly positive environment; in Ms. Cooper's words, "They really like that personal relationship; it makes a huge difference, for them to see that someone is really interested in what they're doing."

During the school day, logistical and academic requirements often take precedence in decision-making about how students spend their time. However, after-school time can be more relaxed and flexible, broadening the boundaries of what school represents. Students themselves express some of the benefits: "I like that you get to read really peacefully, and when you're here, you can get conferencing about your book. I really like that you actually get to pick the book instead of having the book assigned." Extending the boundaries of the school day and broadening the definition of reading instruction, educators and students in this after-school program focus on challenge and growth, reaching toward ever-expanding horizons of possibility.

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The information contained in the article aligns with the following Gifted Program Standards: Curriculum and Instruction (2, 3, & 5) and Program

Administration and Management (4). For a complete copy of the Standards, visit [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org).

**Catherine Little and Ashley Hines will present on this topic at the 53rd Annual Convention in a session entitled "Among Readers: Creating a Culture of Literacy After School," Saturday, November 4, 2006, 7:45 a.m. - 8:45 a.m.**

## How We Identified and Served ESOL Gifted

Catherine F. Reed, Ph.D., California State University East Bay

One thing is certain. No single descriptor explains the multiplicity of talents gifted students bring to school. The hardest part, from my perspective, is identifying gifted students, followed by providing appropriate services.

Let me explain. Because giftedness manifests

itself over all domains, no single test or set of behaviors reveals giftedness to the world. Taken alone, this multiplicity of possible presentations makes determining giftedness among students difficult. Then, add another layer of complexity—students who do not speak English as their primary language. As a result, well-meaning educators may overlook emigrant students when we seek to identify students who need the higher-level challenges found in gifted programs. Yet there is no reason to think that there are no gifted students within an English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) population.

Happily, I functioned as a GATE Resource Teacher in a middle school where the faculty, administration, and community were willing to work with me to identify and serve potentially gifted ESOL students. Our year resulted in unexpected benefits at several levels.

### The New GATE Resource Teacher

"Where are they? Where are our ESOL GATE students?" I wanted to cry as each GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) class walked through my door. I had been thrilled to be offered the position as the GATE resource teacher at a public middle school. The demographics mirrored the heterogeneity of my upbringing and were similar to the "melting pot" of many modern urban areas. In addition to a rich ethnic mix, over 62% of the students were ESOL, speaking 37 languages.

I arrived excited by the possibility of using my background,

language abilities, and advanced training in gifted education programs--so you can imagine my dismay as the GATE classes arrived. Each class was homogeneously Caucasian with, at most, one African American or Asian student. Hispanics were totally absent.

Worst of all, not one of the GATE students was an ESOL student.

Instead of challenging a diverse group of learners, we were warehousing ESOL students in English Language Development classes with teachers who had no experience with gifted education strategies. For the most part, these youngsters and their families did not complain. No one communicated with ESOL families about school programs and educational opportunities during registration or when schools requested help with conferences, meetings, or the creation of publications and newsletters. ESOL youngsters simply moved through their three years with us, went on to the high school, and often dropped out before receiving their diplomas.

In the face of these realities, I wanted to see if we could turn attitudes around, engage families and the community in our school programs, identify our ESOL gifted population, and then serve them in a meaningful manner.

### Seeking ESOL GATE

My principal was easy to convince. After all, he was an immigrant who had experienced many of the same challenges as his students. He encouraged my idea to seek out high-potential ESOL students, and together we outlined the steps necessary to bring capable ESOL students to screening. Convincing the faculty that we had gifted ESOL students,

that we could identify them, and that we could provide both gifted courses and necessary support for the students was a hard sell. Surprisingly, the other hard sell was to parents of ESOL students.

The ESOL faculty was initially intrigued but suspicious about my proposal to screen their students for placement in the GATE program. Being included in discussions about GATE eligibility and program planning was foreign to them. Together we discussed the implications of screening for this target population and came to several understandings regarding screening procedures, GATE course placements, and ESOL student support; all of which were key to the subsequent success of our collaborations.

### Screening

We intended to be inclusive rather than exclusive of emerging talent. To our knowledge, no ESOL students had ever been screened for GATE eligibility in the district. To inform parents and students about GATE programming and screening, we used small-group meetings attended by translators already known and trusted by district families--a tedious process spanning three months due to the need for scheduling trained translators in 37 languages. The meetings, held with the support of the ESOL faculty, resulted in 16 ESOL students being permitted to take the standardized test required to initiate screening.

The district screening employed the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT). Traditionally, students scoring more than one standard deviation above the national norm

moved forward in the holistic process by which GATE students were identified. In addition to the test results, GATE Resource

***We all learned that we could think creatively to find and serve an overlooked population.***



Teachers developed profiles of ability and “spark” using a checklist of generally accepted gifted behaviors.

This type of screening promised nothing for ESOL students because reading ability was essential to test well on the OLSAT. We believed that ESOL students who tested within one standard deviation of the mean demonstrated high potential and deserved to move forward for screening in our proposed, more inclusive GATE process. Rather than employ a checklist of behaviors, we had the ESOL teachers present a portrait of how well each student was progressing in acquiring English, of how committed each student was to school tasks, and of any “spark” for learning that the student exhibited. We agreed to err in favor of the student if a student profile was unclear because we planned to continue to support students’ development of English and to offer them a place in the extended academic after school program as well.

Prior to the administration of the OLSAT, the ESOL faculty arranged three practice test sessions to familiarize the 16 participating students with the test’s directions and multiple-choice format. At each session, the students were encouraged to seek clarification about any part of the testing process that concerned them. The ESOL faculty also taught the students about eliminating unlikely answers or distracters. The school district’s Office of Testing scored the answer sheets, eliminating any suggestion of impropriety. We wanted to be confident that the results were a fair estimate of students’ abilities.

From our initial pool of 16 students, nine were offered GATE placements for some portion of their academic program for the following year. Two of these students left our attendance

area and another highly recommended ESOL student moved into our attendance area during the summer. We programmed eight into GATE courses with careful attention to supporting continued development of their English skills. We also provided after-

school assistance through a pre-existing program thereby avoiding additional requirements for classroom teachers.

### Unexpected Outcomes

This initiative to identify and support GATE ESOL students was a success on multiple levels. We were gratified by the achievements of this initial group of identified students. All registered in GATE courses for the following year or enrolled in the International Baccalaureate Program course sequence at the high school.

Other tangible results occurred within the school and the community. Throughout the year, we received many favorable comments about the inclusion of ESOL students in the GATE program. Even more exciting, there was no lack of interest from the ESOL families when OLSAT screening occurred the following year. Having learned that the school could effectively provide targeted placements with accompanying academic supports, the families expressed an eagerness for their children to be included in the GATE program. Additionally, the GATE teachers became enthusiastic supporters of including high-potential ESOL students in their programs. This enthusiasm had a ripple effect within the faculty. Several of the faculty inquired about special GATE training, and two applied to add gifted endorsements to their teaching credentials.

Throughout the year, students, faculty, and community members developed new understandings and expectations. Prior to this program, ESOL students participated fully in the non-academic

activities of the school but were nearly invisible in the academic activities. During this first year of ESOL GATE placements, many ESOL students received encouragement from their teachers to join the student newspaper, to become peer mediators, or compete on the mathematics team. At the awards assembly in June, over 40 ESOL students received recognition for their contributions to and achievements in school-sponsored activities.

### The Word Spreads

Schools in the surrounding area began inquiring about our “ESOL GATE program.” We happily explained the process and clarified that our “program” was an extension of the district’s existing GATE programs. Eventually, neighboring school districts began similar discussions with their faculties and families about expanding their GATE screening to identify and serve high-potential ESOL students.

I knew that reaching out to identify and serve gifted ESOL students that first year had been a risky experiment for a new teacher. I had to convince my administration and faculty that we needed to make changes. I had to overcome resistance within the school and community culture. And after students had been identified, I had to put mechanisms in place to support the work of the faculty and the students to ensure fairness and a favorable outcome. The results were worth every discussion – even the heated ones. We all learned that we could think creatively to find and serve an overlooked population. No longer were ESOL students excluded from the most academically rigorous courses. We learned that we could identify and serve ESOL GATE students. Is it time for you to do so, too?



*The information contained in this article aligns with the following Gifted Program Standards: Program Administration and Management (2, 3) & Student Identification (1, 2, 3, 4). For a complete copy of the Standards, visit [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org).*



## Blueprints for Biography: Differentiating the Curriculum for Talented Readers

Ann Robinson, Ph.D., University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Biography combines “the solid satisfaction of facts with the shaping pleasures of the imagination” (Parke, 1996, p. xiii). It is the writing of a life, as its Greek roots reveal—*bio* for life and *graph* for writing. Because biography combines imaginative literary elements with historical methods, life writing is emotionally rich, intellectually challenging, and multidisciplinary. Examining a life, students learn about a real person in a historical time and place, and about themselves. Because biographies often focus on challenges faced and overcome by individuals, this genre can help students recognize and solve problems of their own. Biography can teach “life lessons,” and well-written biographies teach these lessons in exciting and compelling ways. Biographies are a favorite choice of adult readers; biographies written for children can ignite interests in younger readers, too.

### Incorporating Biography in the Curriculum

There are several ways to include reading and analysis of biography in the curriculum. Some avenues are tailor-made for this kind of nonfiction reading; social studies and history lessons and units often involve the study of famous figures. Numerous biographies of public figures and political leaders are available at different reading levels from primary grades to the middle school. For example, teachers will find multiple biographies of familiar figures such as Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, Sitting Bull, and Eleanor Roosevelt. Children’s biographies of artists, musicians, and scientists are also widely available for use in the classroom. In other words, biographies related to thematic or topical units across all content areas of the curriculum and at all levels of challenge are available as resource materials to differentiate the curriculum (Robinson & Schatz, 2002).

In the case of talented learners, biographies of lesser-known but fascinating people hold promise as supplementary reading choices for individual students or as shared

trade book readings with small groups of advanced readers who have the time and inclination to read beyond the standard fare. For example, in a unit on exploration, students generally encounter Christopher Columbus or Vasco de Gama on whom several biographies exist, but there are also children’s biographies of the intrepid travelers and explorers, Mary Kingsley and Alexandra David-Neel. Neither Kingsley nor David-Neel are household names, but their life stories provide rich opportunities for talented readers to explore how to cultivate passionate interests from early childhood and how to take big risks and be happy with the consequences.

### What is a Blueprint for Biography?

A Blueprint for Biography is a guide for teachers and students engaged in the study of a specific biography. Blueprints include three types or clusters of questions that may be used for teacher-led discussion or provided as a reading guide to individual students. They also include extension activities focused on student writing, higher-order thinking, and primary source analysis. A series of Blueprints for Biography are being developed at the Center for Gifted Education at the University of Arkansas at

Little Rock, but educators can also create a Blueprint themselves for any biography they wish.

### Developing Your Own Blueprint for Biography

Creating a Blueprint is a three-step process that includes the selection of a compelling biography, the development of discussion questions, and the development of extension activities.

First, the selection of the biography is crucial. Robinson and Cotabish (2005) recommend five criteria for selecting biographies to differentiate the curriculum for talented learners. The biography should: tell an engaging story, provide factually accurate information, incorporate insights about talent develop-

#### Blueprint Questions for *Walt Whitman: Words for America* (Author: Barbara Kerley, Publisher: Scholastic Press)

##### **Before the Book**

1. What is a poem? Do you have a favorite poem? What do you like about it?
2. During the history of the United States, this country had a civil war. What do you think a civil war means?
3. Do you think a poet can write a poem about something as sad as a war? Why? Or why not?

##### **By the Book**

1. As a boy, Walt Whitman worked as a printer’s apprentice. What is an apprentice?
2. On the page of Walt’s biography that begins, “Walt Whitman loved words,” the biographer tells us that Walt is a compositor’s stick. Look at the picture of Walt in the print shop. What is the purpose of a compositor’s stick? How do you think a compositor’s stick works? What evidence from the biography supports your explanation?
3. What inferences can you make about Walt’s reasons for writing “Leaves of Grass”? What reasons does the biographer suggest for Walt? What are some other reasons you can think of?
4. Walt Whitman lived at the same time as President Abraham Lincoln. What were the important events Walt experienced and remembered about President Lincoln? How did Walt feel about the President? What does the biographer tell you about Walt’s feelings? What does Walt’s poem, “Oh Captain, My Captain” tell you about Walt’s feelings about President Lincoln?

##### **Beyond the Book**

Walt was very young when he became interested in words, books, printing, and poems. He had a talent for writing. What interests do you have? How long have you had some of your interests? What will you do next to develop your interests into your talents?

ment, be sensitive to multicultural concerns, and be easily identified as biography rather than historical fiction. While there is no substitute for browsing the shelves of libraries and bookstores, websites of book vendors are also helpful. For example, [www.powells.com](http://www.powells.com) includes a specific section on children's biography, provides reviews, and sometimes includes example pages from the biography. Biographies are often among the medal winners and honorable mentions for nonfiction literary awards. These include the Orbis Pictus Award presented by The National Council of Teachers of English and the Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal from the American Library Association. Finally, the Center for Gifted Education at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock posts a list of biographies for primary, elementary, and middle school talented readers on its website at <http://giftedctr.ualr.edu>.

Second, develop questions which focus on prediction and higher order thinking, require textual analysis from the reader, and focus on the development of talent. Specifically, Blueprints include three general categories of questions: **Before the Book**, **By the Book**, and **Beyond the Book**. **Before the Book** questions focus student attention on the biography to be read, build student interest, and check for prior student knowledge of vocabulary and key concepts. **By the Book** questions focus on analysis of the text, inferences a reader can make from the text, and the readers' affective or aesthetic responses to the text. **Beyond the Book** questions focus on talent development or on extending student inquiry beyond the pages of the biography. Example questions for a children's biography of American poet Walt Whitman are found on the previous page.

Third, to complete a Blueprint develop at least one extension activity for each biography. At our Center, Blueprints extension activities focus on four different kinds of tasks: writing, point of view analysis, primary source analysis, and portrait study. The activities focus on developing skills important to understanding and appreciating nonfiction texts such as biography. Blueprint writing prompts generally focus on persuasive or explanatory writing because both encourage students to synthesize new information from nonfiction

reading in a unique or imaginative way. Because the plot of an engaging biography often involves controversy, conflict, and complex situations, point-of-view analysis also broadens students' understanding. Through these activities, talented readers examine multiple perspectives, think critically about facts and opinions, and develop greater empathy for individuals different from themselves. An analysis of primary sources, documents or other kinds of evidence written or created at the time of an event, develops students' historical thinking and habits of mind while also helping them accurately visualize the book as they read. Finally, some biographies lend themselves to portrait study as an extension. Whether the portrait is painted, engraved, or photographic, rich comparisons can be made between a biography and a portrait of the same individual. Fortunately, there is a wealth of primary source material and portraits available free online through library and museum websites.

### Laying a Cornerstone

The subjects of biographies can inspire curiosity and empathy while at the same time providing role models for young readers. When teachers use a blueprint to explore the life lessons and historical insights within the pages of a biography, they are also helping talented readers lay a cornerstone for future learning and exploration. Indeed Mark Twain was right:

"There was never yet an uninteresting life. Such a thing is an impossibility. Inside of the dullest exterior there is a drama, a comedy, and a tragedy."

### References

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**Ann Robinson will be presenting on this topic during the 53rd Annual Convention at a Preconvention workshop on Thursday afternoon and on Friday, November 3, 2006, from 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.**



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