

***Getting More Out of Biographies***  
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The Problem: How can I get my students to get more out of a biography other than the usual book report?

The Idea: Have a student relate personally to the obstacles, goals, and accomplishments of another person by organizing information from the biography into categories that allow the student to present an informal biographical retelling.

- Have students label index cards with the following headings, and teachers should also label these headings on large, various colored papers that are placed on the chalkboard:
  1. “Goals” (plans to accomplish something)
  2. “Obstacles” (things that stand in the way)
  3. “Challenges” (occurrences that lead to greater accomplishment)
  4. “Motivators” (people who encourage, assist, or challenge a greater accomplishment)
  - “Solutions” (answers to problems or ways in which problems were solved)
  5. “Accomplishments” (what a person has done that is noteworthy)
  6. “Lessons for Me” (what you have learned or what is worth remembering about a person for your own benefit)
- After students have read the chosen biography, have them look through the book again, choosing details that could be written on index cards. With every important detail, there should be a new index card.
- Teachers can evaluate the quality of the biography research by having students orally share their person by telling his/her story. Students should not start the biographical story with, “I was born...” Students should instead focus on elements of the biography.
- As students retell the important aspects of the biography, they place the index cards under the 7 main headings on the chalkboard. There should be item index cards under each heading, but some heading may have more cards than others. That’s okay!
- An example using renowned pediatric neurosurgeon Ben Carson is shown below.

<b>Obstacles</b>	<b>Goals</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Accomplishments</b>	<b>Solutions</b>	<b>Motivators</b>	<b>Lessons For Me</b>
Parents divorced	Wanted to be the best	To spell better than other kids	ROTC program	Wearing glasses	Teachers	Hard work is for my own good
Poverty	Missionary doctor	To pass chemistry	Won full scholarship	Would read 2 books per week	God	Read, read, read
Worst student in 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	Help people	To take charge of own life	3 <sup>rd</sup> highest graduating senior	Live by Proverbs	Chemistry set	Everything is worth knowing
Peer pressure			Went to Yale			
Bad temper			Graduated from Michigan Medical School			
Encountered prejudice						