

# BIOGRAPHY SHORTS

PCI2209

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## INTRODUCTION

The best way for students to become better readers is to read. However, it is often difficult to get reluctant readers to pick up a book. When many of today's students do not relate to the texts being studied in the classroom, something that piques the students' attention is needed.

This unique, reproducible binder is designed to offer high-interest reading material to reluctant readers, with the intent of turning them into avid readers. While students are reading about their favorite sports heroes, movie stars, or pop icons, they will also be practicing the basic skills of reading that will allow them to become stronger readers.

*Biography Shorts* offers 30 one-page biographies, followed by activity sheets that reinforce the information. These shorts focus on sports heroes, movie stars, pop singers, and successful business people from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The shorts may be used in two ways. You can use each one-page short as an introductory lesson to a reading skill and then use the other activities to teach that reading skill in greater depth. The short can also serve as a research source for any projects, reports, or essays the students must do about a famous, influential person. The activities following the short may be used to check for understanding prior to moving on with the students' projects.

Following each short are four activity pages. These activities allow students to practice reading-comprehension skills such as using context clues while learning new vocabulary; determining cause/effect, main idea/detail, and compare/contrast relationships; sequencing and using time lines; and expressing opinions through writing. Each lesson includes multiple-choice comprehension questions, a multiple-choice vocabulary section, a reading skill section, and extension activities.

A quiz follows the four activity pages. Each one-page quiz tests student comprehension and knowledge of the most important information in the short and includes questions that are written in a standardized test format.

Each one-page short is written at a 3.0–4.5 reading level in order to help struggling readers. Since the people featured in these biographies are popular across many cultures and interests, this binder is also recommended for at-risk and ESL students.



## OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to:

- sequence the events in a person's life.
- visualize the events in a person's life and then illustrate those events in proper sequence.
- define vocabulary words based on the surrounding context clues in each biography.
- compare and contrast events, professions, etc., in a person's life by using a Venn diagram.
- identify and explain the difference between a main idea and a detail.
- create a time line based on the events that occurred in a person's life.
- determine a true statement from a false statement based on the information given in the biography.
- compose a response to a question in a complete sentence.
- research additional information about a person's life by using the Internet or library.
- summarize the important events in a person's life.



## RESEARCH and STANDARDS

Research on teaching content to students with special needs and reading difficulties has shown that modified instructional strategies are critical to improving comprehension. Sousa noted that teachers should “consider modifying instructional strategies to meet the various learning styles and abilities of students with learning problems.” Among the strategies he suggested are to “break the assignment into smaller tasks, adjust the reading level of the classroom material, relate the new learning to students’ experiences, reduce the number of concepts presented at one time ... and provide practice test questions for study” (2001). Waldron stated “students with learning differences often have short attention spans and are so easily distracted that concentration is eroded. They simply cannot handle the same amount of information as students with longer attention spans. For these students, briefer assignments with frequent breaks work best to sustain their on-task behaviors” (1992).

Each of these research-based strategies has been integrated into *Biography Shorts*. Students will find the short passages easy to understand due to the controlled 3.0–4.5 reading level. The high-interest topics attract students with special needs. Extension questions for each short include personal connection questions. Each set of worksheets breaks the content into small chunks, so it is more easily understood by students with learning differences.

*Biography Shorts* meets both state standards and national English Language Arts standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association. As students read the short passages and complete the worksheets and quizzes, they will meet many of the requirements of the twelve English Language Arts standards identified by NCTE and IRA, particularly the following:

- Standard III: Students read a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate different texts.
- Standard VII: Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems.
- Standard VIII: Students use a variety of technological and information resources to gather and synthesize information.



## RESEARCH and STANDARDS

- Standard IX: Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
- Standard XI: Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- Standard XII: Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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Sousa, D.A. (2001). *How the special needs brain learns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Waldron, K.A. (1992). *Teaching students with learning disabilities*. San Diego, CA: Singular Publishing Group, Inc.

**Aaliyah One in a Million**

**On January 16, 1979, in Brooklyn, New York, Aaliyah Dana Haughton was born. Her parents named her Aaliyah, which means “the highest, most exalted one.” Aaliyah spent most of her childhood enjoying music while living in Detroit, Michigan. When she reached nine years old, Aaliyah entered the youth competition on *Star Search*. The young performer did not win but continued to sing. At age 11, the legendary Gladys Knight selected Aaliyah to perform with her in Las Vegas, Nevada.**

Aaliyah released her first album, *Age Ain't Nothing but a Number*, in 1994 at age 14. The album featured the hit single, “Back and Forth.” The debut song ranked number one on R&B charts and number five on the Billboard Hot 100.

The young artist released her second record in 1996, *One in a Million*. “If Your Girl Only Knew,” the first **single** off of this album, went double platinum. While Aaliyah’s career took off, she always remained true to her education. In 1997 Aaliyah graduated from the Detroit Performing Arts High School with a 4.0 GPA.

As Aaliyah continued to **pursue** her music career, the entertainment world began to notice her. In 1998 Aaliyah recorded songs for the *Dr. Doolittle* and *Anastasia* soundtracks. “Journey to the Past” received an Academy Award nomination for Best Song. During 2000, Aaliyah made her movie debut when she costarred with Jet Li in *Romeo Must Die*. The soundtrack to this film included Aaliyah’s mega-hit “Try Again.” This song became Aaliyah’s first single ever to reach number one on the Billboard Hot 100.

In 2001 Aaliyah began filming her next movie, *The Queen of the Damned*, which was to be released in 2002. The year 2001 also saw Aaliyah’s third album, *Aaliyah*, debut at number two on Billboard charts. Aaliyah was hotter than ever; however, tragedy soon hit.

In August of 2001, Aaliyah traveled to the Bahamas to shoot the “Rock the Boat” video. Once she finished filming the video, Aaliyah and her staff boarded a small airplane. Aaliyah never arrived at her **destination** of Miami, Florida. Instead, right after the plane took off from Marsh Harbour, it crashed and exploded upon impact. On August 25, 2001, Aaliyah died at only 22 years old. An **autopsy** showed both alcohol and drugs in the pilot’s blood. In addition, the plane appeared to be overloaded by several hundred pounds. Aaliyah was buried in Hartsdale, New York, on August 31, 2001.

While Aaliyah may have died before her time, her music and legacy live on. Aaliyah once said, “...I want to be remembered...as a full on entertainer.” To honor her wish, Aaliyah’s family released two more albums containing songs she had performed throughout her career.



**MULTIPLE CHOICE** Circle the best answer, and write the letter in the box.

- 1. The name "Aaliyah" means \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. the perfect
  - B. the highest
  - C. the singer
  - D. the star
  
- 2. Aaliyah released her first album when she was \_\_\_\_\_ years old.
  - A. 11
  - B. 12
  - C. 14
  - D. 22
  
- 3. Aaliyah costarred in her first movie with \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. Anastasia
  - B. Gladys Knight
  - C. Dr. Doolittle
  - D. Jet Li
  
- 4. When Aaliyah's plane crashed, she was only \_\_\_\_\_ years old.
  - A. 22
  - B. 25
  - C. 31
  - D. 40
  
- 5. Aaliyah said she always wanted to be remembered as \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. a loving daughter
  - B. an entertainer
  - C. a talented actress
  - D. a legend



**VOCABULARY** Find the bold words in the article. Use the words around them to help you figure out the meanings. Circle the best answer, and write the letter in the box.

1. In paragraph one, the word “exalted” means \_\_\_\_\_.  
**A.** lovely  
**B.** honored  
**C.** tall  
**D.** disliked

2. In paragraph three, the word “single” means \_\_\_\_\_.  
**A.** couple  
**B.** one person  
**C.** compact disc  
**D.** song

3. In paragraph four, the word “pursue” means \_\_\_\_\_.  
**A.** follow  
**B.** bag  
**C.** play  
**D.** dance

4. In paragraph six, the word “destination” means \_\_\_\_\_.  
**A.** parked car  
**B.** planned ending place  
**C.** mother’s home  
**D.** music career

5. In paragraph six, the word “autopsy” means \_\_\_\_\_.  
**A.** inspection of an automobile  
**B.** private airplane  
**C.** examination of a dead body  
**D.** a drawer inside the plane

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ | Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**SEQUENCING** In each square below, draw a picture of what is happening in the paragraph. Add captions (words that describe the picture) to make it look like a comic strip.

<b>Paragraph 1</b>	<b>Paragraph 2</b>
<b>Paragraph 3</b>	<b>Paragraph 4</b>
<b>Paragraph 5</b>	<b>Paragraph 6</b>
<b>Paragraph 7</b>	



**Aaliyah One in a Million QUIZ**

**SEQUENCING** Put the events of Aaliyah’s life in the correct order. Write the numbers 1–5 in the blanks.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Aaliyah’s plane crashed after filming the “Rock the Boat” video.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. At age 14, Aaliyah released her first album.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Aaliyah’s parents name her Aaliyah, which means “the highest, most exalted one.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Aaliyah’s family released two more albums containing songs she had performed throughout her career.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. On August 31, 2001, Aaliyah was buried in Hartsdale, New York.

**MULTIPLE CHOICE** Circle the best answer, and write the letter in the box.

- 6. Aaliyah died when she was only \_\_\_\_\_ years old.  
A. 12                      B. 14                      C. 22                      D. 31
- 7. In this passage, the word “exalted” means \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. lovely                      B. tall                      C. brave                      D. honored

**SHORT ANSWER** Answer the following question in complete sentences.

8. What did Aaliyah want to be remembered as?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_