



**Unit Nineteen**

**Writing  
Your  
Autobiography**

# UNIT NINETEEN:

## Writing Your Autobiography *Suggestions for the Instructor*

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### **Pg. 19-6 – 19-7 – Describing Yourself and Others**

Distribute the handout, **Describing Yourself and Others**. Review it with the students. Do a few activities to help students become acquainted with new words on the list. For example, you might:

- ask volunteers to take turns reading sections or columns from the list aloud
- ask students to circle all the words they know and use in their daily speech and highlight all the words they'd like to know
- assign small groups to a column of words (or a short set of words) and ask them to find the definitions by using dictionaries and thesauruses and then share their definitions with the class
- ask students to write short stories using a selected set of words

Tell students they will be drawing on these lists to help them write Biography Poems and Autobiography Poems.

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### **Pg. 19-8 – Frederick Douglass Biography Poem**

Write the following quote on the board:

*“When students become aware of the power of their past, they will have a far greater understanding and appreciation for the power within themselves to accomplish whatever they set their sights on.” -- Baruti K. Kafele*

Ask students to read the quote and think about what the speaker means. Is it important to understand our collective history? Is it valuable to know about the past – the past of a group of people and the past of an individual? How is it useful?

Distribute “Learning to Read and Write” by Frederick Douglass (Unit Nine, Pg. 9-20 – 9-23.) “Learning to Read and Write” from **Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass** describes the famous abolitionist’s experience learning to read and the power he associated with literacy. (The complete autobiography is available on-line at [www.gutenberg.org/files/23/23-h/23-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23/23-h/23-h.htm).) **(continued)**

Remind the students that Frederick Douglass had a powerful impact on our history because he worked so hard to create change, to interrupt the status quo, the way the people in power thought it was always going to be, by writing, by fighting, by living a courageous life.

Distribute **Frederick Douglass Biography Poem**. Have student volunteers read it aloud twice. Ask students if they recognize any of the words about Frederick Douglass's life based on the excerpt from his Narrative. As if they feel the poem describes him accurately.

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### **Pg. 19-9 - Biography Poem**

Distribute **Biography Poem**. Tell students this poem follows the model of the poem about Frederick Douglass.

Place a stack of African-American history cards or one page biographies of famous African-Americans at each table. (This exercise can be done with biographies of any influential Americans about whom you have read as a class, or about whom you have one page informational handouts.)

A number of free, printable resources are available on line. For example:

<https://www.education.com/worksheets/black-history-month/>

Ask students to work in pairs to read the card or handout aloud to each other, then to use the **Describing Yourself and Others** handout (and any other resources or word lists) to find words to include in the poem.

Tell them they need to use all of the bulleted lines on top and bottom of the page and to complete as many of the prompts as they can, but to skip prompts that don't apply to the person they have researched.

Ask them to share their poems with the class. Tell students that it is important to know and reflect on their own personal histories as well as the history of their people, their race, their culture, their gender, etc.

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### **Pg. 19-10 – Autobiography Poem**

Distribute **Autobiography Poem** and ask students to take time completing it, using **Describing Yourself and Others** handout (and any other resources or word lists) to find words to include in the poem.

Tell them they need to use all of the bulleted lines on top and bottom of the page and to complete as many of the prompts as they can, but to skip prompts that don't apply to them.

Ask them to share their poems with the class.

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### **Pg. 19-11 – 19-36 – Autobiography Packet**

Distribute the Autobiography Packet and use it to guide students in the writing of an autobiography. You may choose to set aside time during every class period for students to write reflectively about their lives, using the prompts as a guide; you may also ask students to write chapters of their autobiographies on their own time.

Encourage students to use the Autobiography Packet to develop their writing skills. Have them use the “Describing Yourself and Others” handout to enhance their vocabulary. Have them share their reflections with others and ask for feedback. Have them edit, revise and type their autobiographies for publication.

Throughout the process, ask students to reflect on the following questions:

1. Why is it important to understanding our personal history?
2. Can knowing -- and writing about -- our personal history help us feel empowered? How? Why?
3. How can knowing -- and writing about -- our personal history help us see the future in a new way?
4. Why is it sometimes difficult to probe the past?
5. Are there some memories that are easy and some that are difficult to uncover?
6. What surprises you about reflecting on your past and writing about your memories?
7. What do you think it will be like to read your autobiography five years from now? Twenty years from now?
8. Would it be useful to share your autobiography with others in your family? With your children? Why?

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**Unit Nineteen**

**Writing  
Your  
Autobiography**

**Student Activities**

# DESCRIBING YOURSELF & OTHERS

What adjectives can you use to describe yourself or someone else? Be creative, be unique, be unusual!

Use descriptive words you do not usually use.

- agile
- agreeable
- alert
- amiable
- amazing
- ambitious
- amiable
- amusing
- analytical
- artistic
- assertive
- attentive
- attractive
- authentic
- awful
- balanced
- beautiful
- beneficent
- blue
- blunt
- boisterous
- brave
- bright
- brilliant
- buff
- callous
- candid
- capable
- careful
- careless
- caustic
- cautious
- charming
- childlike
- cheerful
- civil
- clean
- clever
- clumsy
- coherent
- competent
- composed
- conceited
- confident
- confused
- content
- cool
- cordial
- cowardly
- crabby
- crafty
- cranky
- critical
- cruel
- cute
- curious
- cynical
- dainty
- decisive
- delicate
- dependent
- delightful
- depressed
- devoted
- diligent
- direct
- discerning
- disruptive
- distant
- distraught
- distrustful
- dramatic
- dreary
- drowsy
- dutiful
- eager
- earnest
- easy-going
- efficient
- egotistical
- elegant
- emotional
- energetic
- excellent
- excitable
- fabulous
- fastidious
- ferocious
- fervent
- fiery
- flabby
- flashy
- frank
- friendly
- funny
- fussy
- generous
- gentle
- gloomy
- graceful
- grateful
- groggy
- grouchy
- guarded
- hearty
- helpful
- hesitant
- hysterical
- idle
- illogical
- immature
- immodest
- impatient
- impetuous
- impressive
- impulsive
- inactive
- incisive
- insensitive
- inspiring
- intelligent
- interesting
- intolerant
- inventive
- irritable
- irritating
- jocular
- jovial
- joyous
- keen
- kind
- lame
- lazy
- lean
- leery
- lethargic
- likable
- listless
- literate
- lithe

- lively
- logical
- lovable
- lovelorn
- lovely
- maternal
- mature
- mean
- mercurial
- meticulous
- mild
- miserable
- modest
- morose
- motivated
- musical
- naive
- natural
- naughty
- negative
- nervous
- noisy
- normal
- nosy
- numb
- obliging
- obnoxious
- one-sided
- orderly
- ordinary
- organized
- outgoing
- outspoken
- particular
- passionate
- passive
- paternal
- patient
- peaceful
- pensive
- picky
- playful
- pleasant
- plucky
- polite
- popular
- positive
- powerful
- practical
- prejudiced
- pretty
- proficient
- proud
- prudent
- punctual
- quick
- quiet
- ready
- realistic
- reassuring
- reclusive
- rejoicing
- relaxed
- reliable
- reluctant
- renewed
- resentful
- reserved
- resigned
- respected
- respectful
- rested
- restless
- revered
- ridiculous
- sad
- sassy
- saucy
- sedate
- sensible
- sensitive
- serene
- serious
- sharp
- shrewd
- shy
- silly
- sincere
- sleepy
- sloppy
- slothful
- slovenly
- slow
- smart
- snazzy
- somber
- sober
- soulful
- spirited
- spiteful
- stable
- staid
- steady
- stern
- striking
- strong
- stupid
- sturdy
- subtle
- sullen
- sulky
- superficial
- supportive
- surly
- suspicious
- sweet
- tactful
- tactless
- tasteful
- talented
- tender
- terrific
- terrified
- testy
- thinking
- thoughtful
- timid
- tired
- tolerant
- touchy
- tranquil
- tricky
- unafraid
- uncertain
- unfriendly
- unhelpful
- unique
- unpleasant
- unreliable
- unstable
- unsure
- unusual
- venerable
- versatile
- vigilant
- wacky
- wandering
- warm
- wary
- watchful
- weak
- weird
- wild
- willing
- wonderful
- wondering
- worried
- valuable
- versatile
- vulnerable
- yearning
- zealous

# Frederick Douglass Biography Poem

Frederick Douglass

Writer, speaker, abolitionist

Brilliant, brave, forceful

Activist, orator, statesman

Who dreamed of liberty for all people

Who was determined to abolish slavery

Who refused to stop working for justice

Who taught us to stay strong and not give up

in the face of adversity

Who made a difference by telling his story

so that others would understand the horrors of slavery

Who said, "It is not light that we need, but fire;

it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.

We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake."

Who wrote Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

Writer, speaker, abolitionist

Inspiring, wise, courageous

Frederick Douglass



# Biography Poem

*Fill in the blanks to write a poem about a person whose life you have researched. Skip prompts that don't apply to the person you have chosen. Then retype the poem and share it with the class.*

**(Name)** \_\_\_\_\_

**(What he or she is known for)** \_\_\_\_\_

**(Three adjectives that describe him or her)** \_\_\_\_\_

**(A synonym for what he or she is known for)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who dreamed of** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who was determined to** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who refused to** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who invented** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who discovered** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who wrote** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who taught us** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who made a difference by** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who believed in** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who is remembered for** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who said, “** \_\_\_\_\_ **”**

**Who learned** \_\_\_\_\_

**(What he or she is known for)** \_\_\_\_\_

**(Three different adjectives that describe him or her)** \_\_\_\_\_

(Name) \_\_\_\_\_

# Autobiography Poem

*Fill in the blanks to write a poem about yourself. Skip prompts that don't apply to you.  
Then retype the poem and share it with the class.*

(Your name) \_\_\_\_\_

(Three adjectives that describe you) \_\_\_\_\_

Son / daughter of \_\_\_\_\_

Mother / father of \_\_\_\_\_

Sister / brother \_\_\_\_\_

Maker of \_\_\_\_\_

Lover of \_\_\_\_\_

Fan of \_\_\_\_\_

I dream of \_\_\_\_\_

I'm determined to \_\_\_\_\_

I refuse to \_\_\_\_\_

I can make a difference by \_\_\_\_\_

I believe \_\_\_\_\_

I want to be remembered for \_\_\_\_\_

I am learning \_\_\_\_\_

(Three different adjectives that describe you) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# My Story

*The Autobiography of*

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*Date*

## *Part One: What Makes You Unique?*

*Write about yourself! You are a unique individual! Answer any of the following questions you feel you need to answer in order to describe yourself and tell what makes you YOU -- and add any other information you'd like.*

- What do you look like?
- What talents or abilities do you have?
- What skills do you have?
- What three words describe parts of your personality you like the best? Why?
- What three words describe parts of your personality you'd like to change? Why?
- What activities do you like to do in your free time?
- What do you like to read?
- Do you like to watch sports? Which ones? Which teams?
- Do you like to play sports? Which ones?
- What is your favorite color?
- What is your favorite food?
- What is your favorite movie?
- What is your favorite musician?
- What is your favorite song?
- Who is your favorite actor?

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## PART TWO: WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

Answer any of the following questions you feel you need to answer in order to describe the ideas, feelings, thoughts and beliefs that make you special. Add any other information you'd like.

- What is something you believe in very strongly? Why do you hold this belief?
- What do you think are the values a person must hold in order to live a good life?
- What qualities should a life partner have?
- What qualities should a friend have?
- What qualities should a parent have?
- If you were given \$100,000 tomorrow what would you do with it, if you had to spend some, save some, and give some away?
- What person do you most admire? Why?
- When you were a child, what did you want to do when you grew up?
- What is your dream job?
- What do you think you'll be doing for work in five years?

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# **Part Three – the History of Your Name**

*Write about your full name and your parents' names. Answer any of the following questions and add any other information you'd like.*

- Do you know the history of your family's name?
- Do you know why your family picked your name?
- Do you know what your name means?
- Do you like your name?
- Do you have any nicknames?

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## Part Five: Your Family

*Tell about your family. Write about the people you grew up with and the people who are in your family today and how they influenced you and affected the person you've become. Write about memories of growing up with your family. Answer any of the following questions and add any other information you'd like.*

- Who took care of you?
- Do you have brothers and sisters and cousins?
- What important memories do you have of growing up with them?
- Who are your grandparents?
- Where were they born and what do you know about their childhood?
- What do you know about your parents and their lives before you were born?
- What memories do you have of your caretakers?
- What values did they teach you?
- What was easy and what was challenging about the people you grew up with?

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# Part Six: School

Write about when and where you went to school. Describe some of your early memories of elementary school, as well as your memories of middle and high school. Answer any of the following questions and add any other information you'd like.

- What are some of your memories of friends and teachers in school?
  - How do you think school affected the kind of person you are today?
  - What was fun?
  - What was scary?
  - What was hard?
  - What was easy?
  - What factors influenced your decision to leave school?
  - What are your opinions about the schools you attended: what did they do well?
  - What did they do poorly?
  - How were your experiences in school good?
  - In what ways could your school experiences have been better?
- What advice would you give on how your schools could be improved?

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# Part Ten: Holidays

*Write about holidays you celebrate now or have celebrated in the past. Answer any of the following questions and add any other information you'd like.*

- What holidays does your family celebrate?
- What foods do you eat on these holidays?
- What traditions do you follow?
- What has been fun and easy about the holidays?
- What has been difficult or challenging about the holidays?
- Which are your favorite holidays? Why?
- Do you have a special holiday memory?

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# Part Twelve: Work

Write about work you have done in the past or are doing now, paid or unpaid. Answer any of the following questions and add any other information you'd like.

- What jobs have you had?
- What have done that you have enjoyed?
- What have you done that have not enjoyed?
- What work have you done that you are good at?
- Who are some of the bosses and co-workers you have had, and what memories do you have of working with others?
- What kind of work would you like to do in the future?
- What kind of environment would you like to work in?
- Do you prefer to work indoors or outdoors?
- Do you prefer to work alone or with others?
- Do you like working with computers?
- Have you did a career inventory, what did you find out about yourself?
- What kind of education and training will you need to do that kind of work?

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# Part Thirteen: Your Goals, Your Future

*Write about your goals and how they will impact your future. Answer any of the following questions and add any other information you'd like.*

- What are your short-term goals (things you'd like to achieve in the next year)?
- What specific steps will you need to take to achieve these short-term goals?
- What are your long-term goals (things you'd like to achieve in five or ten years)?
- What specific steps will you need to take to achieve these short-term goals?
- Why do you have these particular goals?
- What do you think you need to do to keep yourself on track so you can accomplish what's important to you?
- What support do you need from others?
- Who can assist you to achieve your goals?
- How will you feel if you achieve these goals?
- What will you do if your situation changes and you need to revise your goals?

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