

Launching Nonfiction Author Studies:
A focus for teaching the Common Core State Standards with books by

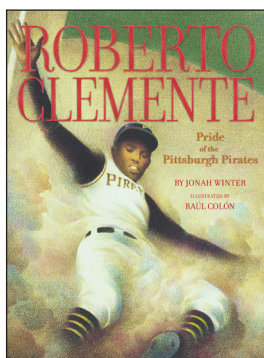
JONAH WINTER



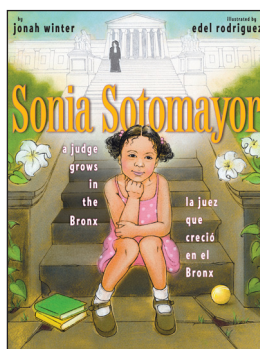
Books



*Gertrude is
Gertrude is
Gertrude is
Gertrude*



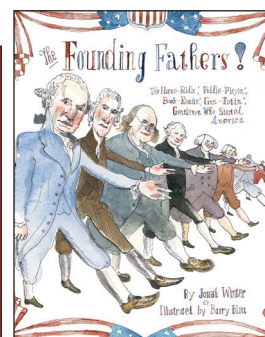
*Roberto Clemente:
Pride of the
Pittsburgh Pirates*



*Sonia Sotomayor:
A Judge Grows in
the Bronx*



*Jazz Age Josephine:
Dancer, singer—
who's that, who? Why
that's Miss Josephine
Baker to you!*



*The Founding Fathers:
Those Horse Ridin',
Fiddle-Playin',
Book-Reading,
Gun-Totin' Gentlemen
Who Started America*

Background Information

Jonah Winter's poetic style and varied use of language make his picture book biographies distinctive. You can see this in his free verse writing in *Roberto Clemente*, in his use of rhyming couplets in *Jazz Age Josephine*, and in his writing that closely parallels Gertrude Stein's style of writing in *Gertrude Is Gertrude Is Gertrude Is Gertrude*. In each biography, the language captures the essence of the person being written about. Readers also learn how a strong-willed, determined young person triumphed over obstacles to achieve a cherished goal. Sonia Sotomayor realized her childhood goal of becoming a judge. Josephine Baker left the US to find the recognition she wanted as a singer and dancer in Paris. Roberto Clemente pushed himself to become the greatest all-around baseball player of his time. Their stories are inspirational.

Activities for Launching Your Author Study

CCSS Connection: The activity below shows how phrases with alliteration provide meaning and suggest feelings (RL.1–2.4).

1. **Goals, Obstacles, and Successes.** Josephine Baker, Roberto Clemente, and Sonia Sotomayor all achieved success by pursuing their goals with determination. Have students complete the chart on the corresponding page to identify each person's goal, the obstacles each had to overcome, and how each person did it.

PERSON	GOAL	OBSTACLES	HOW THE OBSTACLE WAS OVERCOME
Josephine Baker			
Roberto Clemente			
Sonia Sotomayor			

After completing the chart, discuss how these three people were alike. What characteristics do they share? Then ask students to write about their own goals for the future and the obstacles they will need to overcome in order to reach them.

2. **Newspaper Article.** Josephine Baker, Robert Clemente, and most recently Sonia Sotomayor have all been written about in newspapers. Have students write an article that could have appeared in the newspaper when one of them achieved a major goal. Articles should have a short, descriptive headline, an opening paragraph that covers the five Ws, and details that add interest to the article. Students can find photographs on the Internet to illustrate their articles. Have students use the newspaper template on the next page to create their newspaper outline.

CCSS Connection: The activities below deal with nonfiction craft and structure—learning about nonfiction text features (RI.1–3.5).

3. **Text Features.** As you read and discuss each book, examine the following text features:

- **Cover:**

What information is provided on the front and back covers?

How do the illustrations reflect important information in the book?

- **Flaps:**

What can you learn about the content of the book by reading the flaps?

What can you learn about the author and illustrator?

- **Author's Note:**

What additional information is provided?

- **Lettering:**

What do you notice about the size of the letters?

What do you notice about the placement of the words?

4. **How the Author Supports His Ideas.** Below is a quote from *Sonia Sotomayor: A Judge Grows in the Bronx*. In writing, explain what the quote means. Then identify the reasons Jonah Winter gives to support this idea.

“You never know what can happen. Sometimes the most beautiful moonflower blossoms in an unexpected place—on a chain-link fence, near broken glass, next to an abandoned building—watered by someone whose name you might not even know. And sometimes the most amazing person blossoms in just such a place as well.”



Name of Newspaper	Name of Publicity Company & Logo
Date	Newspaper Logo

Photo	Article One Headline by Text
Caption	

Article Two Headline by Text

Why Author Studies?

Beyond seeing the author as a person—a writer with information and a point of view to share—author study (studying several books by one author) provides us with a rich yet manageable way of looking at the decisions an author makes when creating a work of nonfiction. These decisions are about content, word choice, illustration, and original thoughts and interpretations.

Thinking about how an author creates nonfiction raises many questions for young readers and writers to think about: After researching a topic, what information goes into the book? What doesn't? Why? How should the book begin in order to grab the reader's attention? How should it end in order to keep the reader thinking about the topic? What information is best introduced through pictures, photographs, graphs, or tables? What features like sidebars and primary sources would add interest to the page? In what ways are the author's books similar? How are they different? As students engage in author study they think about how an author answered these questions.

Not surprisingly, these same questions are highlighted in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The Standards emphasize reading informational text to determine key ideas and details, an author's point of view, how the author structures and crafts information, how new vocabulary is introduced, and how visual material works together with written text. It's a match! That is, by engaging in author studies students are also meeting many Common Core Standards for reading and understanding informational text.

This guide features books and suggested activities that can be used to jumpstart a nonfiction author study. This will open the door to critical inquiry and focused discussion of informational text. By aligning activities to Common Core State Standards, students learn content while becoming critical consumers of that content. That's powerful instruction.

—Myra Zarnowski, Queens College, CUNY

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