

Grade
Level:
**Adaptable,
grades K-3**

Guiding Lights

Social Studies, English/Language Arts, Media Studies, Black History, Women's History, US History

This is a four-part lesson plan that can be divided into several days, depending on grade level and instruction time available.

Learning Objectives:

- To introduce biography as a sub-genre of nonfiction
- To guide students in the creation of core learning materials featured in the biographic sub-genre of nonfiction
- To engage the range of media and formats (songs, books, oral presentations, and films) through which people tell their stories/ share biographical information with audiences
- To cultivate an appreciation for the study of figures drawn from Black Women's History by demonstrating the lessons their lives can teach us in our present context
- To cultivate an appreciation of the people in students' communities who can provide inspiration

Necessary Materials:

- Fannie Lou Hamer BrainPOP episode, available for free on the Find Your Voice website
- [Songs My Mother Taught Me](#), Smithsonian Folkways Album, select tracks available on YouTube
- [To Praise Our Bridges](#), Fannie Lou Hamer's autobiography
- Grade-Level appropriate biography, options include:
 - A. (K-3) Planting Seeds: The Life and Legacy of Fannie Lou Hamer by Maegan Parker Brooks
 - B. (4-8) Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer, Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement by Carole Boston Weatherford, available for purchase [here](#)
- Guiding Lights Brainstorm Worksheet
- [Kid President Martin Luther King, Jr. Episode](#)
- [Super Speech Worksheet](#)
- [Fannie Lou Hamer's America](#) documentary trailer
- [Short Video](#) about documentary filmmaking from Fannie Lou Hamer's America filmmaker
- Design Your Own Documentary worksheet

Background Knowledge:

You may wish to enhance/refresh your own knowledge by consulting this [Biographical Sketch of Fannie Lou Hamer](#) before introducing the "Guiding Lights" unit.

Part One: Identifying Guiding Lights

Instruction Steps:

Anticipatory Set

Step One: Step One: This lesson plan can build upon the ["Shining Lights"](#) lesson or stand alone.

If building upon, you should start by recapping the previous lesson. Invite students who did not have the chance to respond orally to the prompt from the previous session to share "How can I stand up for what I believe is right?" and "How can I let my light shine?"

If featuring the "Guiding Lights" as a stand alone lesson, you might wish to pique students interest by playing the Fannie Lou Hamer BrainPOP episode, available for free through the Find Your Voice website and/or a song Fannie Lou Hamer sang from the Songs My Mother Taught Me album. You should also explain the difference between autobiographies and biographies. While autobiographies are stories we tell about our own lives, biographies are stories we tell about other people whose light guides our way in this world.

Guided Practice

Step Two: To further exemplify the distinctions between biographies and autobiographies, you can read an excerpt from Fannie Lou Hamer's autobiography, [To Praise Our Bridges](#) and contrast how she tells her own story from how her life story is related by others (see recommended biographies broken down by grade level above).

You might even wish to push this analysis a step further by comparing biographies written about Hamer, noting that two people writing about the same person might choose to do so in very different ways.

Independent Practice

Step Three: After reading the selected biography and comparing/contrasting it with an excerpt or excerpts from Hamer’s autobiography, students can return to their desks and brainstorm (either in drawing or words) specific people from their community (coaches, teachers, clergy-people, family members, neighbors, etc.) who inspire them. A Guiding Lights Brainstorm Worksheet can be found below.

Closure

Step Four: Invite students to informally share information about the Guiding Light they brainstormed.

Part Two: Interviewing Guiding Lights

Guided Practice

Step Five: Encourage students to interview the person from their community whom they identified as a Guiding Light. It is helpful to practice interviewing an adult from school as a class. This can be done by inviting another teacher, an aid, or a member of the administration to your class for a fifteen-minute interview. See below for sample interview questions.

It is helpful to identify which students will ask which questions beforehand and to encourage all students to take notes on the responses. Immediately after the interview, work through the questions with the class, encouraging all students to share what they learned and to compile a collective record of the interview. It might be interesting to note how different researchers recall different things about the same interview.

Part Three: Sharing Lessons Learned from the Guiding Lights Research Through Speech

Direct Instruction

Step Six: Once all students conduct their interview and complete their own record of the conversation, you can help them transform their interview notes into a Super Speech about their Guiding Light. Show students the Kid President Martin Luther King, Jr. Episode as a model

speech. Ask students to pay attention both to what Kid President says about King, as well as how he says it. After watching the speech, reflect on what aspects of Kid President’s content were effective--guiding students

to recognize that super speeches convey a clear purpose and have a beginning, middle, and an end.

Also encourage students to recognize what aspects of Kid President’s delivery were effective, e.g. eye contact, rate of speech, and volume. You can compile their reactions into a customized Super Speech guide and/or you can adapt this Super Speech [worksheet](#) example.

Find Your Voice Highlights

The Guiding Lights Unit encourages students to find their voices by introducing them to an inspirational figure from history, inviting them to recognize inspirational figures from their communities, and encouraging them to share what is inspirational about these figures through a variety of media.

Independent Practice

Step Seven: Students can then plan out their Super Speech, using their notes from the Guiding Lights Interview and their observation of the Kid President model.

Peer Review and Presentation

Step Eight: Set aside enough time for each student to practice their presentation with a peer and to give their speech to the class.

Part Four: Sharing Lessons Learned from the Guiding Lights Research through Film

Direct Instruction

Step Nine: Share with your class this short trailer for the [Fannie Lou Hamer’s America](#) documentary. After viewing it, you can also show them a [short video](#) created by the Fannie Lou Hamer’s America filmmaker. In this video, Davenport explains how the genre of film is similar to and different than other forms of storytelling such as books.

Independent Practice

Step Ten: After watching Davenport’s short video and the film trailer, you can encourage students to sketch out their own documentary about their Guiding Light. See below for an adaptable Design Your Own Documentary worksheet.

Closure

Step Eleven: To conclude this unit, you can invite students to share their documentary designs before encouraging them to reflect upon the multiple ways we share information about a person's life--through songs, through cartoons, through autobiographical stories and books, through speeches, and through film too.

You can pose reflection questions like: how does each medium affect the message? Which mode of storytelling do you prefer? Why?

Assessment of Student Learning: The Guiding Lights unit contains multiple assessment opportunities, including: a Guiding Lights Brainstorm worksheet, an interview for students to complete, a speaking outline, and a documentary design activity.

Lesson Plan Author: Maegan Parker Brooks, PhD

Brooks is a professor at Willamette University. She earned her PhD at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she wrote a dissertation about Fannie Lou Hamer. Her dissertation became a rhetorical biography of Hamer, [A Voice that Could Stir an Army: Fannie Lou Hamer and the Rhetoric of the Black Freedom Movement](#). Brooks also co-edited the first collection of Hamer's speeches, [The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell it Like It Is](#) (with Davis W. Houck). Her third book, *Fannie Lou Hamer: America's Freedom Fighting Woman*, will join Rowman & Littlefield's Library of African American Biography in February 2021. Brooks is a board member of the Fannie Lou Hamer Statue and Education Fund Committee, a lead researcher for the film *Fannie Lou Hamer's America*, editor of the Find Your Voice K-12 curriculum, and the director of the Find Your Voice: Online Resource for Fannie Lou Hamer Studies website. Brooks has two elementary-aged children and loves volunteering in their classrooms.





Guiding Lights Brainstorm

Directions:

Think of people you know who have done the following things and fill their names in the blank space. See the example below for additional ideas.

Example:

I believe that all people have something special to contribute to our world.

_____ encourages me to do my best

_____ does a job I might like to do someday

_____ always gives me great advice and ideas

Which one of these people would you like to learn more about the most? Why?

Examples:

My dad, my basketball coach, and my teacher encourage me to do my best

The school principal, my pastor, and my neighbor do jobs I might like to do someday

Mrs. Jones at church, my uncle Jackson, and my friend's mom always give me great advice and ideas

Which one of these people would you like to learn more about the most? Why?

Example:

I would like to learn more about my basketball coach because she is friendly and good at coaching



Design Your Own Documentary Worksheet

1. My documentary would be titled:

2. My documentary would be about:

3. My documentary would have _____ type of music

4. My documentary would include images like these (draw them in the space below)



Sample Interview Questions

Instructions:

Invite an adult into your classroom for a fifteen-minute practice interview. This could be another teacher, an aid, a member of the administration, or a parent volunteer. Consider the following questions as a frame for the interview or to ask your interviewee other questions that the class is curious about. You can distribute the questions to students, who can use the space below to record important aspects of the interviewee's responses.

1. What is your name?

2. When were you born?

3. What did you like best about school?

4. Who inspires you?



Guiding Lights

5. Are there any sayings or famous quotations that motivate you?

6. What words do people use to describe you?

7. What are some of your life goals?

8. What would you like to teach others about?