



Writing obituaries involves communicating in a specific style, whether for a website or a quality newspaper. The activity incorporates aspects of Citizenship education because it asks students to consider the contribution made to society by a range of individuals and to evaluate their significance.

Students are free to select an individual, who might be a national figure or someone who has made a contribution to the local community.

Lesson 1 Analysing an obituary

Starter

Scan and project two or three current obituaries from newspapers and/or select some from the BBC website. A search on 'obituaries' and the year will produce some recent ones. Select people who have made a contribution to society.

The whole class offers ideas about the purpose of an obituary and these are recorded.

Development

Select one obituary for analysis, preferably of someone known to the students.

The class works in groups on one of the following aspects of the obituary.

- the contributions to society of the deceased
- the writer's objective
- the tone of the article

If BBC obituaries used, comment on differences between these and newspaper versions.

Share phrases and ask class to comment on them. If an interactive whiteboard is used, students could highlight the obituary on the board and on tablets.

Examine the structure of an obituary, such as how the person died and the highlights of his/her life.

His /her life in detail – each aspect should be in a separate paragraph.

A final paragraph outlines the main dates in subject's life – usually in bold – with details of whom he or she has pre-deceased.

Plenary

Class discuss then feedback on what they most want to learn about a person from an obituary.

Lesson 2 Writing an obituary

Starter

Recap on phrases used in obituaries. Discuss suitability and language style – colloquial or standard/formal English.

Discuss what we mean by people who have made a contribution to society. Suggestions might be contemporary or historical. How have they contributed? Discuss what we as a society most value in people, why things are valued, how that value should be celebrated and rewarded, and how the legacy of that value can be maintained.

Discuss how the lives of controversial persons or those who have died in controversial circumstances may be described: Adolf Hitler, the London bombers of 2005, The Yorkshire Ripper Peter Sutcliffe, Slobodan Milosivec, Jean Charles de Menezes, or Alexander Litvinenko. Should news media be forced to ensure that such obituaries are limited and merely descriptive?

Students select a living person who they believe has made a significant contribution to society. The choice might be drawn from topical events. Cheryl Cole, Nelson Mandela, Boris Johnson, Wayne Rooney, Tony Blair, the prime minister, Bob Geldof, Jamie Oliver. It could also be someone who has contributed to the local community. They research the life of the individual and prepare to write an obituary.

Development

Students write an obituary for a newspaper or website and have a fixed deadline of 30 or 45 minutes, depending on the ability of the students. They also produce a bulleted list of the contribution the individual has made to society.

Plenary

Class discussion and feedback on a list of features of people who contribute to society, which they merit most, and why.