

History 9 - Ancient World Biography Project

For the final component of this course (20% of final grade), you will research and write a biography of a significant figure in Ancient World history. As you have probably noticed by the content of my course, I find people - especially leaders - as vital characters in the narrative of history. This project will allow you to not only conduct historical research, but actually become an *expert* on your assigned individual, providing you with an insight into the complexity and importance of the role of the individual in history.

You will be randomly assigned a historically significant person from the Ancient World from pre-history up to 1500. They are individuals that we have either come across already in lectures or readings, or persons that we will encounter as the semester continues. Others will be notable individuals whose actions to world history was notable. However, most of the assigned persons may not be immediately obvious to you all. I have purposely avoided assigning the "Julius Caesars," the "Alexander the Greats" and the "Homers" as there is such a mass of information and literature out there about them already, it would be overwhelming for you to begin to address them. Additionally, part of this assignment is conducting thorough historical research of your own.

Don't worry if you do not immediately recognize your person. The list of individuals I have developed are **all** important people in world history, and you will be able to find plenty of information on them - including primary sources. A little bit of initial research online should give you a sense of the person you have been assigned. From there, you should be able to locate important primary and secondary sources to write your project. If you have any trouble at all, contact me and I will be able to steer you in the direction of important sources.

The project will be broken down into three parts:

Part 1 - Biographical Narrative

This will be a descriptive "story" of the person you have researched. This section will explain and address the important achievements in their life, and their contributions to world history. Consider the following questions:

- **Who were they?** Locate the individual in time and space. Discuss family background and identify early life influences (father, mother, tutor, brother).
- **What did they achieve in their life?** Describe their path to success, including the struggles and hardships experienced in this journey.
- **What made them historically significant?** How did their life experiences shape their perspective/actions? Describe their most significant historical achievement.
- **Historical Memory:** why were they important to world history - i.e. what was their significance both in that specific historical moment and later on in history?

When writing a biography, it is certainly appropriate, even necessary, to draw out their humanity. The reader should gain a sense of your subject as an individual, as well as an important historical figure. This means that you have the liberty to discuss their personal lives, love interests, personal shortcomings – their triumphs as well as their failures. Biography, perhaps more than any other historical genre, enables the reader and writer to tell stories about the past that are inherently human. It is still important to locate them within the broad sweep of history, but you also need to provide fine-grained detail. You should get to know your subject as a person so that your reader feels they know them personally, even intimately.

This section of the paper should be about 6-7 pages long. You will be primarily assessed on clarity of writing, organization of information, and quality (not quantity) of your sources. Refer to all the handouts and experience you have gained writing a historical paper throughout the year.

Part 2 - Creative Historical P

As you did with Alexander the Great, I would like you to write a short piece of historical fiction (two pages) about your historical figure. You can write it in any way you like - you could actually be the person reflecting on life, imagine yourself meeting the person or write an account of a significant moment in their life. How you present your information is also up to you - a diary entry, a story, a piece of Homer-styled poetry, or a newspaper article.

Part 3 - Annotated Bibliography

This section will be an extended bibliography of the sources you used in writing the biography. While you will provide all the correct citing information, as you would in a normal bibliography, however, you will also write a short paragraph about the source itself. In this paragraph, describe the source, explain how useful it was to write the paper, and whether you would like to find another source similar that would provide you with good information (just as you did in the Ancient Greece projects).

Part 4 - Presentation

Towards the end of the semester, you will present a short oral presentation of your findings. You are allowed to use powerpoint, posters, performance/play, video or any other means of presentation. You will have approximately 10-15 minutes each for your presentation. You will also get to choose your audience - we have spoke at length this semester about the importance of your audience in how you present historical information, and you will now experience this first hand. You will get to choose from:

- 1) Your peers
- 2) A 4th grade audience
- 3) A group of faculty

You can get assistance with your presentations, especially in helping you shape the presentation based on your audience. You will be assessed on organization of presentation based on the audience you choose, clarity of information, explaining the

significance of your individual, as well as staying within the allocated time. Your performance will contribute to your participation grade.

Approaching Historical Research

As historical research can be daunting if you have never done it before, I have prepared you for this project by introducing to you, during each quarter, the skills necessary to successfully conduct research for a biography paper! You will conduct research both online as well as in the library, find primary and secondary sources, take notes and organize them, write both creatively and critically, prepare an annotated bibliography, and develop an oral presentation. All these skills you have practiced throughout the semester in the assignments and projects.

As with the Greece project, you are expected to use a variety of sources: books, journals, primary documents (e.g. documents written by the person or about the person at that time), as well as **selected and reliable** online materials (i.e. not Wikipedia nor a non-reliable online source). During class discussion on the biography project, I can help you with locating the materials needed to write this paper. I do not expect you to acquire materials that are not available in the library or online.

While Wikipedia is not a good source to use **in** the paper, it might be a good place to **start** if you don't know who this person is. That way you have a quick sense of who your individual is and their main contributions. But I strongly advise you NOT to use it as a source for your paper. In fact, a good place to start is looking at the bottom of a Wikipedia entry for the "sources" section, which will provide you with a bibliography of the sources used in the article and how to find them. Also, many of these individuals already have biographies written, and they are usually a good place to start and are available in the library. Any concern with sources will be addressed in class or you can contact me directly if you are having a hard time locating anything.

Over the course of the semester, you will be writing outlines, drafts and I strongly recommend that in organizing your narrative, you start with an outline. I would also recommend submitting a draft to me as you write. I can provide a lot of feedback, and those students who have handed me drafts of papers have traditionally done better than if they would have if they handed in without a draft. I will talk about drafts and draft deadlines in the class discussion.

Paper Style

The biography paper should be approximately 6-8 pages long, using 12pt Times New Roman font and double-spaced. You will use footnotes to cite your paper (I will address footnotes in a couple of weeks) and you will use the Chicago Citation Style as found in the Chicago Manual of Style available online at: www.lib.washington.edu/help/guides/45chicago.pdf. We can talk more about footnoting and plagiarism during our class discussion.