

Tip Sheet #10

READING ABOUT REAL PEOPLE

Many of the books that we read to our children are fiction – stories that are made up by the author to entertain us. Another group of stories are biographies – stories about the lives of real people. Some of these stories give us an idea of what life was like a long time ago. Other biographies tell us about people that are still living today. In the library, biographies are either grouped together under the number 921, or in the relevant section for which the real person is known (sports section for athletes, art section for artists).

Libraries that have a children's section will have their own shelves containing easy-to-read biographies. Help your child look at the numbers on the shelves, or on the spines of the books until you find 921 – Biography.

Children in the early grades are beginning to understand the difference between “made-up” stories and stories that are “real”, or based on fact. They begin to ask, “Is this a real story or pretend?” Biographies are one way to learn about real people’s lives, and feed a child’s interest in learning about the real world.

Is your child interested in a particular sport? Choose a biography about a famous athlete. Is your child interested in the ocean? Look for a biography of Jacques Cousteau or Sylvia Earl, both famous underwater explorers. Perhaps they would like to read about astronauts, or inventors, or an artist whose work they have seen.

Some children will choose to read many books about the same person, or all the books on hockey players, for instance. Other children will enjoy reading about many different types of people.

Let your child teach you some new facts! After they have selected a biography, let them read it themselves or have you read it to them. Then ask them to tell you what you should remember about the person in the book. Tell them to quiz you on that fact later on, to see if you remember it!

Biographies also let children explore many kinds of work that people do. After you have both read the book, you might talk together about how the person decided what they wanted to do in their life. Did anything stand in their way? How did they overcome those obstacles? Would either of you like to do the same kind of work? Why or why not?



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