

## American Lives

In the next few “Tips for Tutors,” I will spend some time introducing materials that have become our core components. All of our materials are designed for use with English as a Second Language students as well as students from the United States. Each program has been tried for at least two years and proven itself to work.

Many adult students have set a goal of passing the GED test in order to get a better job. The GED Test has five parts: Literature, Writing, Social Studies, Science, and Math. The series called “American Lives” is a great program to use to prepare a student for enrollment in a GED class. It will raise their reading level to an appropriate level as well as improve writing skills.

There are three levels to the program: American Lives 1 (Reading Levels 3—4.5), American Lives 2 (Reading Levels 5—6.5), and American Lives 3 (Reading Levels 6.5—8). Each book contains a series of well written biographies on people from many walks of life: Benjamin Franklin, Sacajawea, Harriet Tubman, Mark Twain, Emma Lazarus, Sandra Cisneros, Thomas Jefferson, Dorothea Lange, Rachel Carson, etc. The biographies are followed by meaningful exercises that check comprehension, sequence, vocabulary, maps, time lines, charts, true and false, fact or opinion, and other skills. The format is consistent and one biography is enough for a sixty minute lesson.

The vocabulary is challenging. New words need to be introduced before the reading. You should tell your student about each person and see what they already know before reading. If your student knows a bit about the person, it will make the reading easier. I recently used the biography of Jackie Robinson with a student who had never watched a baseball game. I drew some bases to help explain players’ positions, stealing bases, pitching, etc. Even though my student knew little about baseball, she clearly understood the discrimination in the story and how Jackie Robinson turned his back on those who threatened and tried to harm him. That part of the story was something that she could relate to.

The articles are several pages long and a mix of both silent and oral reading seems to work best. Encourage your student to highlight or underline anything that needs to be clarified. Give some direction to the silent reading by giving your student a purpose to read. For example, I might say, “Read the next three paragraphs to find out where Woody Guthrie traveled during the Dust Bowl.” I find that a purpose also makes the reading easier for the student.

To begin the “American Lives” series, your student must have first reached a third grade reading level. I find students are fascinated and always want to know more. Was she ever married? I think I know why his hair turned gray? Is there a movie about Helen Keller? Your student might send you to the internet or library looking for more and isn’t that the best that we can hope for: the desire to know more. This is a series that I strongly endorse in preparation for a GED class.

Glenn G. Coats