

good night, and good luck.



Library of Congress

Lesson Plan 5

“Snapshot of a life: The Obituary”

Overview: Obituaries attract readers. They represent a short summary of an entire life, highlighting accomplishments or activities. Although they are routine—writing obits is often the first job journalists have when they go to work for a newspaper—they also offer an opportunity to go beyond the ordinary and find an interesting angle. The famous often have obituaries written and on file at such newspapers as The New York Times for years before their actual death. Two of those portrayed in “Good Night, and Good Luck.” have accessible obituaries that reveal a lot ... or a little ... about them.

Suggested time allotment: After watching the 90-minute movie, one class period to read the material that follows and discuss the characters whose obituaries are included here. Two to three additional days if students will be writing obituaries.

Objectives

Students will:

1. Watch the movie and read the article below about obituaries.
2. Then read and discuss the obituaries for Don Hollenbeck and Jack O’Brian. Did they give you a

Anyone who isn’t confused really...

glimpse of the men you saw or heard about in the movie? For Hollenbeck, how do the “facts” about his life seem different in the newspaper than they do when his character talks to Murrow? Why do you think that might be?

3. Read sample obituaries of movie stars, political figures and the like who have died in recent years.
 - a. Discuss the information included and how the reporter probably got it.
 - b. Discuss the way the article is organized: Chronological? Summary news lead and inverted pyramid? Other?
 - c. Note if negative or embarrassing information is included and discuss what they think this is so.
4. Choose a celebrity living now and research his or her life.
5. Write an obituary that could run in a national publication or be aired on national television for this person.

Standards: National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association Standards:

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their

discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

8. Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
12. Students use spoken, written and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion and the exchange of information).

Resources and materials:

Websites with information:

- Get some background about how newspapers are ahead of the game when it comes to obituaries of the famous. “Newspapers get a Jump on Death with Pre-Written Obits,” by Joe Strupp, Editor & Publisher, Jan. 25, 2006.
http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1001918280
- The Lincoln Star, Lincoln, Neb., Wednesday, June 23, 1954: News Commentator Hollenbeck Ends Life (AP).
<http://members.aol.com/rdkfour/DonHollenbeck.html>
- Deaths. “O’BRIAN, JACK
Published: Nov. 7, 2000. A long-time newspaper columnist, and radio talk show host in New York, died Nov. 5, 2000 in Manhattan. (The New York Times obituary).
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F0DE4DB1039F934A35752C1A9669C8B63>
- A slightly different version of O’Brian’s obituary comes from Radio Ink, “Radio’s Premier Management & Marketing Magazine: “Legendary Broadcaster and Columnist Jack O’Brian dies (Nov. 6, 2000).
<http://www.radioink.com/HeadlineEntry.asp?hid=28562&pt=archive>