



**LESSON PLANS ON AGING ISSUES:**  
*Creative Ways to Meet Social Studies Standards*

**U.S. History**

**FAMOUS PERSON INTERVIEW**

Ithaca College Gerontology Institute  
[www.ithaca.edu/aging/schools](http://www.ithaca.edu/aging/schools)

*(Permission is granted to make copies of this lesson plan for non-commercial, educational purposes.)*

# **Table of Contents**

## **Famous Person Interview**

Overview .....	1
Handout: Famous Americans to Research .....	4
Handout: Timeline Worksheet .....	5
Handout: Relationship Worksheet .....	6

## Famous Person Interview

### Introduction

Students research the life of a famous older person, looking at various stages in her/his life and the events, character traits and values contributing to their achievements. Students then share their research information in groups. Commonalities are identified and discussed. The culminating activity is a personal essay on how each student will achieve success.

This unit takes about 5 or 6 class periods to complete.

### Objectives

Students will:

- List achievements of many older persons.
- Recognize that people have goals throughout their lives.
- Discuss the importance of values and character traits in overcoming obstacles.
- Write personal essays applying information gained from the unit to themselves.

### Materials

Handout: Famous Americans to Research

Handout: Timeline Worksheet

Handout: Relationships Worksheet

Arrangements to use the library on days 1, 2, and 3

### Lesson Steps

- Day 1
1. Distribute “famous people” handout. Explain to students that they will have approximately thirty minutes to look up and note the major field for which each person is famous. They should work in small groups of two or three.
  2. Each student should also note three famous persons s/he may wish to research.
  3. Have students identify their research subject. Each student should research a different person.
  4. If time allows, students can begin checking the library catalog and/or *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature* for sources on their research subject.

- Day 2/3
5. Distribute “timeline” handout and “relationships” handout. These sheets will be used for taking notes on their research subject. Answer any questions on completion of the handouts. Two class days plus homework time should be allotted to complete the assignment. If available, several sources should be pursued, including biographies, magazine articles and encyclopedias. Be available during these classes to assist students with research problems.
  6. As homework on day 3, students should prepare a silhouette symbol that represents the field of achievement of the person researched (for example, a palette could represent a painter, masks an actor/actress... etc.) The symbol can be cut from colored paper. On the symbol, students should print neatly the name of the person in bold letters. Beneath the name, list her/his significant achievements in later life. These silhouettes will then be used in group presentations and later on a bulletin board.
- Day 4
7. Ask students to sit in groups of four or five. They should share the results of their research, using the information they have collected on the handouts.
  8. Each group should appoint a recorder. Give each recorder a blank “relationships” handout on which to list commonalities in these areas: character traits, values, obstacles faced, goals, amount of achievement in later years. The recorder should list ALL famous persons studied by the group members. The group members should seek a consensus on the question, “is there one single factor you find that helped all of your famous people”? Direct the group to use the list to formulate a short report, three to five minutes in length. A spokesperson should be chosen to give it to the class. The groups should use their list of commonalities to prepare the report on their findings as a group. Reports should begin with each group member introducing the person s/he studied, displaying the silhouette with a brief explanation. Then one person from the group should present the report on commonalities observed and the consensus on a single factor that helped all their people.
  9. Spokespersons deliver the reports. As the reports are given, the teacher may wish to take notes on the commonalities, using one column for each area. If time allows, the teacher may use the notes to sum up results at the end of class. If there is not enough time, summation can start on day 5.
- Day 5
10. Explain that having studied accomplishments of famous persons, it is helpful to apply insights to personal goals.
  11. After reviewing goals and values of persons researched, assign each student to write an essay in which s/he discusses what kind of a famous, or not so

famous, person s/he would like to become. Think about various stages in life. What measures will it take to achieve this? The assignment can be done in class or as homework.

- Day 6
12. When you have had time to review their responses, give students generalized feedback on:
    - types of “fame” they aspire to; how many chose NOT to be famous
    - clarity of their descriptions of values and steps to “fame”
    - their positive feelings about themselves as older successful people
  13. Read the following quotation from Dr. Jack Rowe Chief of Gerontology, Beth Israel Hospital (*Boston Globe*, March 26, 1982, p. 21):

“We have in our mind a view of what it’s like to be old, and it’s not a pretty picture. There are myths that old is dying, that old is sick, that old is poor, that old is senile, that old is sexless and hopeless, and helpless and what we’re learning about the elderly in the last couple of decades debunks some of those myths.”
  14. To close the activity, challenge students to “debunk myths” based on their experiences with older people, or summarize specific student findings.

---

Adapted from *Teaching and Learning about Aging*, a publication of the Constant School, Acton, MA.

**Handout****Famous Americans to Research****Artists/Performers**

Marian Anderson  
George Burns  
Mary Cassatt  
Bette Davis  
Duke Ellington  
Martha Graham  
Helen Hayes  
Katheryn Hepburn  
Bob Hope  
Grandma Moses  
Arthur Rubenstein  
John Wayne  
Frank Lloyd Wright

**Writers/Scientists**

George Washington Carver  
Thomas A. Edison  
Helen Keller  
Albert Schweitzer  
Booker T. Washington

**Politicians/  
Business People**

Justice William O. Douglass  
Frederick Douglass  
Benjamin Franklin  
Thomas Jefferson  
Margaret Chase Smith  
Harry S. Truman

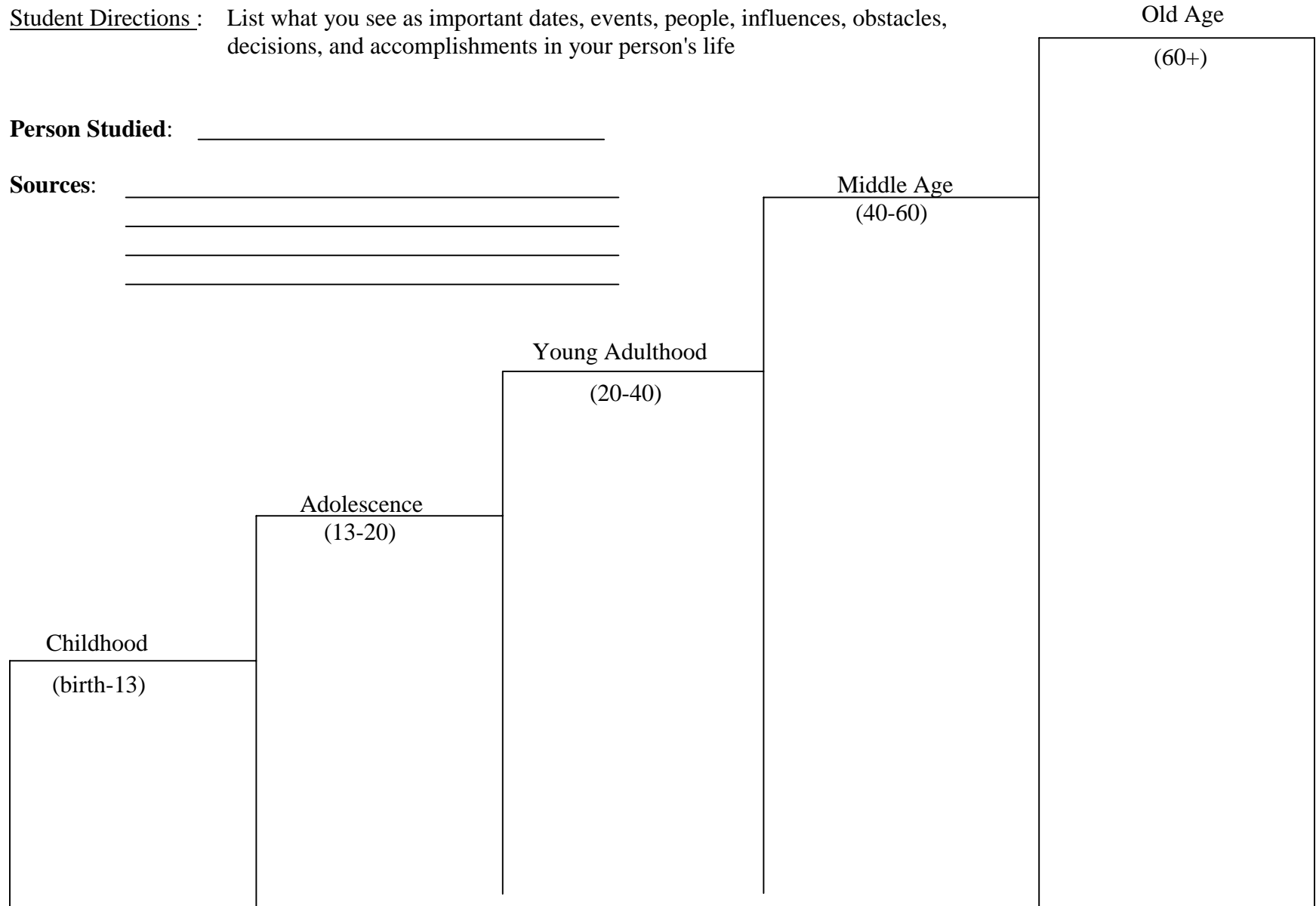
**Handout**

**Timeline Worksheet**

Student Directions : List what you see as important dates, events, people, influences, obstacles, decisions, and accomplishments in your person's life

**Person Studied:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Handout**

**Relationships Worksheet**

Person Studied: \_\_\_\_\_

