

Biography – Making History Come Alive
Spring 2010: Parry Norling with lectures by Pete Wellington, Jim Parks, and Carl Schnee
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Lectures at: <http://parrynorling.magix.net/website>

Biographies can bring history to life; we will study the biographies of the famous and infamous in the arts, politics, religion, the military, the sciences, and other fields of human endeavor.

We can learn much from studying the life stories of famous or interesting people. We can examine personality traits, outside influences, events in their lives, the historic forces acting upon them, and their successes and failures. We can learn from these biographies and gain a better understanding of history. Possibly we can apply the lessons to our own situations. At least we can gain a greater appreciation of the lives of some very interesting individuals.

Week 1 : Justice Louis Brandeis and Justice Thurgood Marshall

Pete Wellington will compare the first Jew and the first African American on the court. Louis Brandeis was a lawyer who dedicated his life to public service, earning the nickname the "people's attorney." As an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, he tried to balance the developing powers of modern government and society with the defending of individual freedoms. Thurgood Marshall (July 2, 1908 – January 24, 1993) was an American jurist and the first African American to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States. Before becoming a judge, he was a lawyer who was best remembered for his high success rate in arguing before the Supreme Court and for the victory in *Brown v. Board of Education*. He was nominated to the court by President Lyndon Johnson in 1967.

Week 2 : Secretary of State George Marshall

Jim Parks will discuss the life and accomplishments of General and then Secretary of State George Marshall. **George Catlett Marshall** (December 31, 1880-October 16, 1959), America's foremost soldier during World War II, served as chief of staff from 1939 to 1945, building and directing the largest army in history. A diplomat, he acted as secretary of state from 1947 to 1949, formulating the «Marshall Plan», an unprecedented program of economic and military aid to foreign nations. After leaving office, in a television interview, Harry Truman was asked who he thought was the American that made the greatest contribution of the last thirty years. Without hesitation, Truman picked

Marshall, adding "I don't think in this age in which I have lived, that there has been a man has been a greater administrator; a man with a knowledge of military affairs equal to General Marshall."

Week 3: **Churchill: one Perspective**

Carl Schnee will give us a slice of life of Winston Churchill. **The Right Honorable Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill** (1874-1965), the son of Lord Randolph Churchill and an American mother, was educated at Harrow and Sandhurst. After a brief but eventful career in the army, he became a Conservative Member of Parliament in 1900. He held many high posts in Liberal and Conservative governments during the first three decades of the century. At the outbreak of the Second World War, he was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty - a post which he had earlier held from 1911 to 1915. In May, 1940, he became Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and remained in office until 1945. He took over the premiership again in the Conservative victory of 1951 and resigned in 1955. However, he remained a Member of Parliament until the general election of 1964, when he did not seek re-election. Queen Elizabeth II conferred on Churchill the dignity of Knighthood and invested him with the insignia of the Order of the Garter in 1953. Among the other countless honors and decorations he received, special mention should be made of the honorary citizenship of the United States which President Kennedy conferred on him in 1963.

Week 4: **Ella Fitzgerald sings Cole Porter and many others**

With a vocal range spanning three octaves, she was noted for her purity of tone, phrasing and intonation, and a "horn-like" improvisational ability, particularly in her scat singing. She is widely considered one of the supreme interpreters of the Great American Songbook. Over a recording career that lasted 59 years, she was the winner of 13 Grammy Awards, and was awarded the National Medal of Arts by Ronald Reagan and the Presidential Medal of Freedom by George H. W. Bush.

Week 5: **Harry Truman: Political success against all odds**

We explore the surprising political success of an against-all-odds public figure. AOs an unknown politician from Missouri, Harry S. Truman suddenly found himself in office as the most powerful man in America. Yet despite his inexperience, he would go on to lead the country through the end of WWII, the rise of the atom bomb, the expansion of the Soviet Union, and the start of the Korean War.

Week 6: **Edgar Allan Poe: Psychological thrilling tales**

Poe's psychologically thrilling tales examining the depths of the human psyche earned him much fame during his lifetime and after his death. His own life was marred by tragedy at an early age (his parents died before he was three years old) and in his oft-

quoted works we can see his darkly passionate sensibilities—a tormented and sometimes neurotic obsession with death and violence and overall appreciation for the beautiful yet tragic mysteries of life.

Week 7: Emily Dickinson: poet with great power

Emily Dickinson, regarded as one of America's greatest poets, is also well known for her unusual life of self imposed social seclusion. Living a life of simplicity and seclusion, she yet wrote poetry of great power; questioning the nature of immortality and death, with at times an almost mantric quality. Her different lifestyle created an aura; often romanticized, and frequently a source of interest and speculation. But ultimately Emily Dickinson is remembered for her unique poetry. Within short, compact phrases she expressed far-reaching ideas; amidst paradox and uncertainty her poetry has an undeniable capacity to move and provoke.

Week 8: Caravaggio; a turbulent life with chiaroscuro

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Italian painter with great influence both in Italy and abroad. Caravaggio is particularly renowned for his use of chiaroscuro, a technique that uses light and dark to achieve a 3-D effect. Caravaggio breaks away from the tradition of symmetrical figures and detailed backgrounds. His figures do retain a traditional monumentality. His later work is less plastic. Caravaggio's life is as turbulent as his personality. He has many run-ins with the law and is arrested on several occasions. In 1606 a bet over a game of tennis leads to an argument, at which point Caravaggio draws his sword and kills his opponent. He flees to Naples, intending to take the long way home to Rome - where friends are lobbying for his rehabilitation - via Malta and Sicily. On his wanderings he produces several masterpieces, such as *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*, which he creates in Malta. He dies before reaching Rome, probably of pneumonia, in Porto Ercole. Several days after his death word arrives of papal absolution.

Week 9: Queen Victoria: Most commemorated British Monarch

Her reign as the Queen lasted 63 years and 7 months, longer than that of any other British monarch before or since, and her reign is the longest of any female monarch in history. The time of her reign is known as the Victorian period, a time of industrial, political, scientific and military progress within the United Kingdom. Though Victoria ascended the throne at a time when the United Kingdom was already an established constitutional monarchy in which the king or queen held few political powers and exercised influence by the prime minister's advice, she still served as a very important symbolic figure of her time. Victoria's reign was marked by a great expansion of the British Empire; during this period it reached its zenith, becoming the foremost global power of the time. Queen Victoria remains the most commemorated British monarch in history, with statues to her erected throughout the former territories of the British Empire.

Week 10: **Mary Cassatt: An American Impressionist Abroad**

Mary Cassatt was the only American to exhibit her work in an exhibit of the original group of Impressionist Artists, including such masters as Degas, Renoir and Monet. Cassatt said that she "hated conventional art" and when invited by Edgar Degas to exhibit with this group of independent artists in an exhibit of non-academic art she was overjoyed. Female Impressionists were rare, as were American Impressionists.

Week 11: **Woodrow Wilson: Reluctant Warrior**

Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Ph.D. (December 28, 1856–February 3, 1924) was the 28th President of the United States. A leading intellectual of the Progressive Era, he served as President of Princeton University from 1902 to 1910, and then as the Governor of New Jersey from 1911 to 1913. With Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft dividing the Republican Party vote, Wilson was elected President as a Democrat in 1912. To date he is the only President to hold a doctorate of philosophy (Ph.D.) degree and the only President to serve in a political office in New Jersey before election to the Presidency. In the opinion of historian John Cooper, Wilson was a remarkably effective writer and thinker. He composed speeches and other writings with two fingers on a little Hammond typewriter; his diplomatic policies had a profound influence on shaping the world; and as a white supremacist and an apologist for slavery, he claimed, that "[domestic] slaves were almost uniformly dealt with indulgently and even affectionately by their masters." He also maintained that black political participation during Reconstruction constituted "an extraordinary carnival of public crime," and called the violent extinction of black voting and office holding in the South "the natural, inevitable ascendancy of the whites."

Week 12: **Willa Cather: Chronicler of the Pioneer West**

Cather is most often thought of as a chronicler of the pioneer American West. Critics note that the themes of her work are intertwined with the universal story of the rise of civilizations in history, the drama of the immigrant in a new world, and views of personal involvements with art. Cather's fiction is characterized by a strong sense of place, the subtle presentation of human relationships, an often unconventional narrative structure, and a style of clarity and beauty.

Week 13: **Mark Twain: Eyewitness to History**

As his literature provides insight into the past, the events of his personal life further demonstrate his role as an eyewitness to history. During his lifetime, Samuel Clemens watched a young United States evolve from a nation torn apart by internal conflicts to one of international power. He experienced the country's vast growth and change - from westward expansion to industrialization, the end of slavery, advancements in technology, big government and foreign wars. And along the way, he often had something to say about the changes happening in America.

Week 14: **Theodore Roosevelt: Living Embodiment of the Nation**

Roosevelt was an historian, a biographer, a statesman, a hunter, a naturalist, an orator. His prodigious literary output includes twenty-six books, over a thousand magazine articles, thousands of speeches and letters. Theodore Roosevelt, not quite 43, became the youngest President in the Nation's history. He brought new excitement and power to the Presidency, as he vigorously led Congress and the American public toward progressive reforms and a strong foreign policy. He took the view that the President as a "steward of the people" should take whatever action necessary for the public good unless expressly forbidden by law or the Constitution." I did not usurp power," he wrote, "but I did greatly broaden the use of executive power."

