

# WISCONSIN BIOGRAPHIES

## Story Summaries and Guiding Questions

### *Wisconsin Biographies* Summary

Wisconsin's history is filled with rich and vibrant characters whose contributions to society extend beyond the borders of the state and continue to resonate today. The *Wisconsin Biographies* resources help tell these people's stories, focusing on their impact and awakening students' appetites to learn more. This content was designed around 4<sup>th</sup> grade standards, but is appropriate for use with younger and older students.

### *Wisconsin Biographies* Guiding Questions

Who are these people?

What did they do?

Why are they considered important?

How did they change the lives of people past and present?

What impact will their actions have on future generations?

## *Stephen Babcock: Agriculture's MVP*

### Summary

Not driven by fame or fortune, Stephen Babcock worked to help make other people's lives better. This agricultural chemist at the University of Wisconsin–Madison invented the Babcock Test, which enabled people to accurately and efficiently find the amount of butterfat in milk. His invention revolutionized the dairy industry around the world and helped Wisconsin gain the nickname–“America's Dairyland.”

### Guiding Questions

1. What motivated Stephen Babcock to do his work?
2. Compare and contrast your personality to Babcock's.
3. Describe the importance of the Babcock test.
4. How did Babcock's work affect those living in Wisconsin? How did it affect people around the world?
5. What do you admire most about Babcock? Why?
6. If you could create something that would solve a problem, what problem would you want to solve? Why?

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## *Elizabeth Baird: Life in Territorial Wisconsin*

### **Summary**

Elizabeth Baird was a strong woman with fierce determination living on the Wisconsin frontier. Born a native French speaker, Baird taught herself English and worked as an interpreter in her husband's law firm, all while operating her family's farm and recording her memoirs. Her rich descriptions about the fur trade, 1800s Green Bay, and the Peshtigo Fire provide a window into life in early Wisconsin.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. Describe the changes Elizabeth Baird saw in Wisconsin during her life.
2. How did Baird's life change over time?
3. What makes Baird a significant person in Wisconsin's history?
4. Describe an important person in Baird's life and tell how they affected her life.
5. Why is recording history important?

## *Walter Bresette: Treaty Rights and Sovereignty*

### **Summary**

Walter Bresette passionately worked to educate others on issues such as tribal sovereignty, American Indian treaty rights, and environmentalism. This member of the Red Cliff Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa (Ojibwe) was an eloquent speaker, organizing rallies and emerging as a leader during the Northern Wisconsin spearfishing controversies of the 1980s. He embodied an intelligent and inclusive model of activism that serves as an example for human rights activists today.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. Name two of Bresette's beliefs. How did he act on those beliefs?
2. Tell about the Walleye Wars and Bresette's role during the events.
3. Describe tribal sovereignty and what it means in Wisconsin.
4. Describe what you think the most important thing Bresette did during his life. Support your answer with three or more facts.
5. Are the things Bresette fought for still important today? Why or why not?

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## *Charles Clark: From Rags to Riches*

### Summary

To Charles Clark, success meant finding ways to serve his family, community, and country. Clark is best remembered as a founder of the consumer products corporation, Kimberly-Clark, but his work in Neenah, Wisconsin, dates back to the 1850s when he worked in a furniture factory to help support his family while he simultaneously attended school. His values, hard work, and perseverance formed a life of contributions that inspired others to continue his work even after his death.

### Guiding Questions

1. Name one thing that was important to Charles Clark. Why was it important to him?
2. Create a timeline with at least one event for each of the following:
  - a. How Clark served his family
  - b. How Clark served his community
  - c. How Clark served his country
3. How did Clark's children continue his legacy?
4. What did success mean to Clark?
5. What does success mean to you?
6. What do you want to do in your life to be successful?

## *Mildred Fish-Harnack: Germany's Secret Hero*

### Summary

While facing one of the most horrifying armies the world had ever seen, Mildred Fish-Harnack chose to serve as a spy for the Allied forces and fight the Nazi regime in Germany. This Milwaukee native was such a threat to the Nazis that she became the only American woman to be executed by direct order from Adolf Hitler. She gave her life to save the lives of others and the Germany she loved.

### Guiding Questions

1. How did Mildred Fish-Harnack's actions influence the course of history?
2. How did events in Harnack's childhood influence her actions as an adult?
3. What motivated Harnack to join the resistance movement in Germany?

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4. Describe how Harnack might have felt when she stood up to the Nazis. How do you know?
5. When is it okay to break the rules? Explain your reasoning using examples from Mildred Fish-Harnack's story.

## *Carrie Frost: Fly Fishing Boss*

### Summary

Carrie Frost was a fly fishing entrepreneur who paved the way for other female business owners in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Despite the fact that women could not vote and in many cases could not own property, Carrie Frost created a successful manufacturing company, and she gave over 150 Stevens Point women a chance to earn their own wages in a time when they were not often able to do so.

### Guiding Questions

1. What were the expectations of women during the time Carrie was growing up, and how did those expectations affect her?
2. How did Carrie's business change Stevens Point? How did it change opportunities for women in Wisconsin?
3. Carrie fought against the stereotype that women shouldn't own and run a business. What stereotypes do you see in the world around you today?

## *Joshua Glover: And the End of Slavery*

### Summary

Joshua Glover escaped slavery in St. Louis, Missouri, only to be recaptured in Wisconsin. Defying the Fugitive Slave Act, abolitionists including Sherman Booth aided Joshua's escape via the Underground Railroad. These actions were part of a chain of events that led to the formation of the Republican Party and the Emancipation Proclamation.

### Guiding Questions

1. Describe Joshua Glover's life as a slave.
2. Why did Glover choose to live in Wisconsin in 1852?
3. What was the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850? What impact did this law have on Glover?

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4. How did Glover escape to Canada? Tell about his life there.
5. What effect did the freeing of Glover have on Wisconsin and the United States, politically and historically?

## *Bill Harley & Arthur Davidson: Innovation on Two Wheels*

### Summary

Resources, ideas, and opportunities combined at the turn of the century to enable Bill Harley and Arthur Davidson to realize their dream of building a better motorcycle. The company they founded as young men became one of the largest companies in Wisconsin.

### Guiding Questions

1. What motivated Bill Harley and Arthur Davidson to build a motorcycle?
2. What resources were available to them in Milwaukee that made it a good setting for their ideas?
3. What challenges did Harley and Davidson face, and how did they overcome them?
4. What contributions to society did their innovation allow?
5. How does their work from 1901 impact the present and beyond?

## *Belle Case La Follette: Ballots & Bloomers*

### Summary

At a time when women were expected to stay at home, Belle Case La Follette went out and made her voice heard in national politics. She was a staunch supporter of women's rights, racial justice, physical education for women and other progressive causes.

### Guiding Questions

1. What was life like for women in America pre-1900?
2. Describe Belle Case La Follette's education. Was this typical for children then? What motivated her?
3. How did La Follette put her personal beliefs into action?
4. What role did La Follette play in her husband's professional career?

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5. What effect has Belle Case La Follette's work had on the world today?

## *Gaylord Nelson: A Vision for the Earth*

### Summary

Gaylord Nelson had an idea for a day focused on the environment. That idea would become the internationally recognized annual event, Earth Day. Born and raised in Clear Lake, Wisconsin, Nelson went on to become a State Senator, Governor of Wisconsin, and a United States Senator. All along the way, he made the environment a priority by protecting natural resources through advocacy, policies, and inspiring greater awareness of the need to care for the earth.

### Guiding Questions

1. What was Gaylord Nelson's childhood like? How did it affect what he did as an adult?
2. Why did Gaylord Nelson want to have a day focused on the environment?
3. Describe a change that took place after the first Earth Day to help the environment.
4. What do you predict would happen if we did not take steps to care for the planet?
5. What was Gaylord Nelson's vision for the earth? What is yours?

## *Chief Oshkosh – Leader in Troubled Times*

### Summary

During a time when the United States government was pushing many American Indian nations off their lands, Chief Oshkosh worked to negotiate treaties that would allow the Menominee to stay in their homeland. He also promoted his people's traditional forest management practices, known today as sustainable forestry.

### Guiding Questions

1. What historic events did Chief Oshkosh take part in during his life?
2. How did Oshkosh become chief of the Menominee?
3. Describe the Menominee's and the United States government's relationship.

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4. What societal pressures on the Menominee existed at the time of the treaty signings?
5. What is Chief Oshkosh's legacy?

## *Les Paul: The Search for the New Sound*

### **Summary**

He heard the sound in his mind—a unique sound that no one had ever heard before—and he wanted to share it with the world. Les Paul's natural curiosity and relentless enthusiasm for music, guitar, and electronics propelled this “Wizard from Waukesha” into music history. His groundbreaking music techniques are still used today in the music recording industry.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. What inspired Les Paul to invent?
2. How have Paul's actions influenced the world today?
3. What obstacles did Paul face? How did he overcome them?
4. How did Paul's personality lead him to become an inventor?
5. How did others' reactions to Paul's inventions influence his work?

## *Kate Pelham Newcomb: Doctor of the North Woods*

### **Summary**

As a woman in the early 1900s, Kate Pelham Newcomb had to fight to achieve her dream of becoming a doctor. As a physician in the north woods of Wisconsin, she sometimes had to fight to reach her patients, traveling by snowshoes and canoe. She is known for her contributions to public health in rural Wisconsin, including delivering over 4,000 babies and building a hospital.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. What motivated Kate Pelham Newcomb to become a doctor?
2. What challenges did Newcomb face while pursuing her dream career?
3. How did meeting Bill change Kate's life?

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4. In addition to being a family doctor, what other lasting achievements did Newcomb accomplish?
5. What effect has Kate Pelham Newcomb's work had on the world today?

## *Vel Phillips and James Groppi: The Fight for Fair Housing*

### Summary

Facing Milwaukee's institutional racism, Vel Phillips and Father James Groppi did not back down. They organized and worked with African Americans both in the streets and through the City Council to obtain equal rights under the law.

### Guiding Questions

1. What motivated Vel Phillips and Father Groppi to help in the fight for fair housing?
2. Describe the two different methods Phillips and Groppi used to combat racism.
3. What rights were people marching for? Who opposed them?
4. Why was it important to get an ordinance passed?
5. What effect has Vel Phillips and Father Groppi's work had on Milwaukee? In the future?

## *Joe Bee Xiong: War to Peace*

### Summary

After fighting as a child soldier in Laos during the Vietnam War era, Joe Bee Xiong moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, as a refugee in the 1980s. He dedicated his life to serving the community including on the community's city council, making him the first Hmong American in Wisconsin elected to public office. He also taught others about Hmong culture and Hmong Americans about US customs.

### Guiding Questions

1. Summarize Joe Bee Xiong's life using at least three facts from the text.
2. Tell about the challenges Xiong faced during his life and how he overcame them.



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3. Choose an adjective you would use to describe Xiong, and tell why you chose that adjective.
4. How was Xiong a role model?
5. Describe how you can be a role model.

## *Milly Zantow: Recycling Revolutionary*

### **Summary**

When Milly Zantow learned about a problem in her Sauk County community - a landfill closing much earlier than it should - she took action. Seeing for herself that there was too much plastic waste, she thought it should be recycled. At that time, no one was recycling plastics, but Milly figured it out. She went on to come up with the idea for the numbering system to identify plastics for recycling, now used worldwide, and she helped with the writing of Wisconsin's recycling law.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. How did growing up on a farm during the Great Depression affect Milly?
2. Describe some of the challenges Milly came up against for recycling plastics.
3. What did Milly need to make recycling plastics possible?
4. Where did Milly find inspiration for what she did? How does her story inspire you?
5. Which qualities do you think Milly had? Why?
6. How did Milly's efforts change Wisconsin and the world?