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How are scientists portrayed in children's science biographies?

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Summary: The goal of this study is to analyze the images of science and scientists in science biographies written for children. We examined 12 biographies of historic and contemporary scientists written for primary/middle school children in relation to three dimensions: characteristics of scientists, nature and process of scientific knowledge, and social processes of science. Biographies of historic scientists were characterized by a relative absence of description of how scientists arrived at their knowledge especially in books addressing younger readers. Biographies of contemporary scientists showed richer descriptions of experimental science with limited attention to connections between evidence and theory. Findings reinforce the need for teachers to guide students in their critical reading of biographies and provide additional resources to help them construct a richer understanding of the nature of science.

Classification: M50 M60 A30 U90 A90

Keywords: science biographies; children's literature; primary education; lower secondary; book reviews; textbook analyses

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