

# DESCRIBE A HISTORICAL FIGURE

This is the fourth lesson in the '[Vocabulary for Describing People](#)' series.

You are going to learn how to describe a historical figure using different language tools.

This will be done in **6 Steps**. It is recommended that you do **1 Step** at a time for stellar results.

If you are stuck on a new word, look for help in a unilingual or bilingual dictionary. Apart from the meaning, don't forget to check how the word is pronounced too.

Write down necessary information. You never know when it will come in handy!

Are you ready? Let's start!

## a) Describe a Historical Figure (Step 1): Names of Historical Figures

### NAMES OF HISTORICAL FIGURES



NAPOLEON BONAPARTE ABRAHAM LINCOLN CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

KWAME NKRUMAH JULIUS CAESAR CLEOPATRA ALBERT EINSTEIN

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE DAVID LIVINGSTONE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT



SHAKA ZULU KARL MARX THOMAS EDISON DIDO



History is laden with interesting and noteworthy people. We can spend hours talking about them and we will still find more characters to fill our conversations with.

Take William Shakespeare, for example. As you may already know, this 17th century man greatly shaped the English language that we use today. He was a great poet, dramatist and playwright and his delectable works are devoured with greed all over the world.

Do you recognise some of the people in the picture? What can you say about them?

### Examples

- *Napoleon Bonaparte*, also known as Napoléon I, was a French general and emperor who greatly revolutionised military organisation and training in early nineteenth century.
- Around the same time, *Shaka Zulu*, King of the Zulu Kingdom and revered warrior in South Africa, was also making great strides in military warfare.
- *Thomas Edison* invented the light bulb and we are really grateful for his contribution to humanity.
- *Eleanor Roosevelt*, a notable activist and diplomat, was the longest-serving First Lady of the United States for America. She is equally best known for her [quotes](#) such as: *'No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.'*
- *David Livingstone* was a famous Scottish explorer who mainly travelled in central and southern Africa.

**Your turn:** Choose **5** historical figures from the picture and write something about them. Additionally, you can do a Google search to help you with the facts.

## b) Describe a Historical Figure (Step 2): Different Types of Historical Figures

### DIFFERENT TYPES OF HISTORICAL FIGURES



POLITICIAN   SCIENTIST   ECONOMIST   REFORMER   LEADER

FEMINIST   PHILOSOPHER   MATHEMATICIAN   REVEREND   PRIEST

WARRIOR   AGRICULTURIST   HISTORIAN   SOLDIER   BIOLOGIST



EXPLORER   ENGINEER   PLAYWRIGHT   COMPOSER



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Historical figures usually owe their prominence to what they used to do during their lifetime.

For example, Albert Einstein was an award-winning scientist and physicist.

Hence, what can we say about the other historical figures? Do you know anything about them?

#### Examples:


- Martin Luther King was a respected *reverend* and *leader* during the [Civil Rights Movement](#) in the USA.
- Karl Marx was an influential German *philosopher*, *economist* and *historian*, among other things.
- Ludwig van Beethoven was also from Germany and he was a celebrated *composer* and pianist.
- Isaac Newton was a great *mathematician* who lived in England from 1643 to 1727. He was also a physicist like Albert Einstein and made significant contributions to science.

- Kwame Nkrumah, a prominent African *politician*, became Ghana's first president after independence from British rule in 1957. Moreover, he is also the founder of the Pan-African movement.



**Your turn:** What do you know about other historical figures? What did they do exactly when they were alive? Why are they very well known today? Write 5 sentences to talk about that.

**c) Describe a Historical Figure (Step 3): Fields for Historical Figures**

## FIELDS FOR HISTORICAL FIGURES



POLITICS	SCIENCE	ECONOMICS	REFORM	RELIGION
FEMINISM	PHILOSOPHY	MATHEMATICS	GOVERNANCE	
MEDICINE	AGRICULTURE	HISTORY	WARFARE	BIOLOGY
EXPLORATION		ENGINEERING	ARTS AND CULTURE	

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You can also talk about the fields in which these illustrious figures excelled or dabbled in.

Was it biology or engineering? What about arts and culture?

Let's see what we have.

**Examples:**

- Female participation in *politics* was very low before the twentieth century. However, some women like British *suffragette* Emmeline Pankhurst fought bravely for their rights.
- We know Pope John Paul II for his Catholic beliefs and *religion*.

- *Medicine* is a field that relates to health and health care and Marie Curie helped to radically transform it with her discovery of radioactivity.
- *Philosophy* is another intellectual field which has seen many a historical figure such as [Aristotle](#) contribute it.
- Adam Smith and John Maynard Keynes were outstanding in *economics*.

**Your Turn:** What other fields can you think of? Consequently, can you think of 5 sentences to talk about them? What special fields helped to turn ordinary figures into historical ones?


You can use transitional words such as **MOREOVER**, **ADDITIONALLY** and **HOWEVER**.

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Well done! Let's tackle the next step then. Ready? Here we go!

#### d) Describe a Historical Figure (Step 4): Qualities of Historical Figures


## QUALITIES OF FAMOUS HISTORICAL FIGURES




DETERMINATION INTELLIGENCE BRAVERY GRIT PERSEVERANCE

COURAGE VISION FEARLESSNESS HUMILITY HUMOUR CREATIVITY

RELATABILITY RELIABILITY SELF-AWARENESS TRUSTWORTHINESS



OPTIMISM WISDOM BENEVOLENCE AUTHENTICITY


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One cannot become a famous historical figure without certain qualities.

Most of the times, the people whom we have been discussing demonstrate high doses of courage, intelligence and perseverance.

Do you agree with me? What other qualities can we attribute to these people?

**Examples:**

- *Authenticity* is necessary for politicians like Franklin D. Roosevelt to thrive because people want to believe in their leaders in times of crisis.
- Before becoming a historical figure and, therefore, get the keys to virtual immortality, you have to contribute greatly to mankind through *determination*.
- We often overlook *grit* as a necessary quality in one's quest for greatness. Actually, historical figures knew how to push their agendas persistently and consistently like Nicolaus Copernicus in the fifteenth century.
- Nevertheless, other qualities such as *optimism* and *humour* also play a key role in one's pursuits and Albert Einstein demonstrated them perfectly.
- *Creativity* is a quality that is often found in arts and culture. Artists such as Leonardo da Vinci were very creative, so much that they produced a considerable amount of work that is still highly regarded even today. Remember the Mona Lisa painting which hangs in the Louvre?
- Many African cultures consider *wisdom* as wealth. Thus, chiefs or kings are often wise people who resolve disputes and find solutions to people's problems.

**Your turn:** What are the qualities that you admire the most in historical figures? Next, make 5 sentences that illustrate your point of view.

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Great job! Let's move on to **Step 5**. It is about how you can describe historical characters using Adjectives instead of Nouns.

## e) Describe a Historical Figure (Step 5): Adjectives for Some Historical Figures (Part 1)

### ADJECTIVES FOR SOME HISTORICAL FIGURES (1)

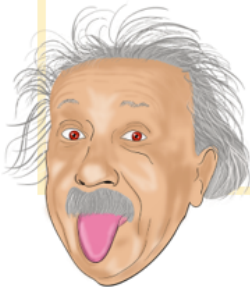


DETERMINED INTELLIGENT BRAVE WISE PERSEVERING

COURAGEOUS FEARLESS HUMBLE METICULOUS CREATIVE

ECCENTRIC FUNNY RELATABLE SELF-AWARE TRUSTWORTHY

OPTIMISTIC RELIABLE BENEVOLENT AUTHENTIC



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Some historical figures are easy to characterise because they lived a high profile life. For instance, Michael Jackson was a talented musician who revolutionised pop music.

Yet, it is not that easy to describe some historical characters because we know more about their works than who they were as human beings.

How can we go about describing them then?

#### Examples:

- Shaka Zulu was a *fearless* warrior who conquered many tribes.
- Cleopatra must have been very *intelligent* and *powerful* to have such influence on Julius Caesar.
- Abraham Lincoln was a very *reliable* and *trustworthy* man to such an extent that many Americans call him '*Honest Abe*'.
- Nelson Mandela was a *brave* lawyer, political activist and South Africa's first black president. He spent 27 years in prison because of his political beliefs.


- Mahatma Gandhi was a *humble* and *optimistic* Indian lawyer who led his country to independence and full self-governance through nonviolence.

**Your turn:** Can you choose 5 historical characters and describe them? You can do an online search to help you. You can even watch interviews on YouTube to see [the person](#) so that you can come up with an authentic description.

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This was interesting, wasn't it? Let's go to the last step of our lesson and discover the dark side of some historical figures. Are you ready?

## f) Describe a Historical Figure (Step 6): Adjectives for Some Historical Figures (Part 2)


ADJECTIVES FOR SOME HISTORICAL FIGURES(2)



CONTROVERSIAL    BELLIGERENT    WARMONGERING    ADVENTUROUS

CRUEL    INCONSIDERATE    THOUGHTLESS    TWO-FACED    AMBIGUOUS

TYRANNICAL    POPULAR    INFLUENTIAL    DARK    STUBBBORN

DESTRUCTIVE    BRUTAL    BLOODTHIRSTY    VIOLENT




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Human beings are not perfect individuals. Hence, our historical figures are often ambiguous and controversial characters.

However, some of them have really done awful things despite their popularity. Consequently, history remembers them that way.



Can you think of someone who was prominent in the past but who is certainly not an example to follow today?

**Examples:**

- Adolf Hitler was a *cruel* leader who brought a lot of chaos and destruction in the world.
- Napoleon Bonaparte was a *belligerent* emperor who wanted to conquer a lot of lands in Europe.
- Idi Amini was a *bloodthirsty* Ugandan president who unleashed terror on his own people.
- Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Julius Caesar and Shaka Zulu are considered as great military tacticians, yet they brought a lot of misery in the world with their warmongering. It is therefore safe to say that they were *thoughtless* and *inconsiderate* in their quest for greatness.
- Historical figures who fought to have power and wealth were often *two-faced* and untrustworthy.

**Your turn:** Do you know any historical figures who can fit the descriptions above? Make 5 sentences in which you describe them.

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Congratulations for coming so far!

This was the last step in our '**Describe a Historical Figure Lesson.**' Good job for having a persevering spirit!

What was your favourite step?

Before you start another lesson, remember to go back to the lessons you have previously done to reactivate old words.

Besides, make sure that you always have a unilingual or bilingual dictionary in order to check the meaning and pronunciation of new words.

*'Practice makes perfect!'*

As usual, it was fantastic to have you around!

Have a great day wherever you are!

Until next time!



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