

**16** **MORE**  
**^** **Extraordinary**  
Hispanic  
Americans

**Nancy  
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# Contents

<i>To the Teacher</i> .....	v
<i>To the Student</i> .....	vii
Franklin Chang-Díaz: Astronaut .....	1
Joseph Unanue: Business Leader .....	10
Guy Gabaldon: U.S. Marine .....	18
Nicholasa Mohr: Artist/Writer .....	27
Isabel Allende: Author .....	36
Mario Molina: Scientist .....	45
Bill Richardson: Politician .....	54
Carlos Santana: Musician .....	63
Antonia Hernandez: Civil-Rights Lawyer .....	72
Gloria Estefan: Singer .....	80
Edgar Prado: Jockey .....	89
Salma Hayek: Actress/Producer .....	98
Christy Turlington: Supermodel .....	106
Rebecca Lobo: Basketball Player .....	115
Alex Rodriguez: Baseball Player .....	124
Scott Gomez: Hockey Player .....	133
<i>Vocabulary</i> .....	143
<i>Answer Key</i> .....	147
<i>Additional Activities</i> .....	157
<i>References</i> .....	163

# To the Teacher

According to *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy*, a report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York (2004, second edition), “High-interest, low-difficulty texts play a significant role in an adolescent literacy program and are critical for fostering the reading skills of struggling readers and the engagement of all students. In addition to using appropriate grade-level textbooks that may already be available in the classroom, it is crucial to have a range of texts in the classroom that link to multiple ability levels and connect to students’ background experiences.”

Biographies about extraordinary people are examples of one such kind of text. The 16 Americans described in this collection should both inspire and reassure students. As students read, your instruction can include approaches that will support not only comprehension, but also learning from passages.

Reading and language arts skills not only enrich students’ academic lives but also their personal lives. The *Extraordinary Americans* series was written to help students gain confidence as readers. The biographies were written to pique students’ interest while engaging their understanding of vocabulary, recalling facts, identifying the main idea, drawing conclusions, and applying knowledge. The added value of reading these biographies is that students will learn about other people and, perhaps, about themselves.

Students will read stories demonstrating that great things are accomplished by everyday people who may have grown up just like them—or maybe even with greater obstacles to overcome. Students will discover that being open to new ideas, working hard, and believing in one’s self make them extraordinary people, too!

## Structure of the Book

### The Biographies

This collection of stories can be used in many different ways. You may assign passages for independent reading or engage students in choral reading. No matter which strategies you use, each passage contains pages to guide your instruction.

At the end of each passage, you will find a series of questions. The questions are categorized, and you can assign as many as you wish. The purposes of the questions vary:

- **Remembering the Facts:** Questions in this section engage students in a direct comprehension strategy, and require them to recall and find information while keeping track of their own understanding.
- **Understanding the Story:** Questions posed in this section require a higher level of thinking. Students are asked to draw conclusions and make inferences.
- **Getting the Main Idea:** Once again, students are able to stretch their thinking. Questions in this section are fodder for dialog and discussion around the extraordinary individuals and important points in their lives.
- **Applying What You've Learned:** Proficient readers internalize and use the knowledge that they gain after reading. The question or activity posed allows students to connect what they have read to their own lives.

In the latter part of the book, there are additional resources to support your instruction.

### **Vocabulary**

A list of key words is included for each biography. The lists can be used in many ways. Assign words for students to define, use them for spelling lessons, and so forth.

### **Answer Key**

An answer key is provided. Responses will likely vary for Getting the Main Idea and Applying What You've Learned questions.

### **Additional Activities**

Extend and enhance students' learning! These suggestions include conducting research, creating visual art, exploring cross-curricular activities, and more.

### **References**

Learn more about each extraordinary person, or assign students to discover more on their own. Start with the sources provided.

## To the Student

The lives of many Hispanic Americans have made a difference in the story of America. Writers, artists, scientists, teachers, politicians, ministers, lawyers, doctors, businesspeople, athletes, and so many more have helped to make the United States what it is today. Hispanic Americans can be proud of their heritage. It is a pride all Americans should share.

In *16 Extraordinary Hispanic Americans*, you read the stories of sixteen of these people. In *16 MORE Extraordinary Hispanic Americans*, you will read the stories of sixteen more outstanding Hispanic Americans. They are:

- Franklin Chang-Diaz, a rocket scientist who was the first Hispanic-American astronaut
- Joseph Unanue, a business leader who built Goya Foods into the largest Hispanic-owned company in the United States
- Guy Gabaldon, a U.S. Marine who captured 1,500 Japanese soldiers by himself during the Battle of Saipan in World War II
- Nicholasa Mohr, an artist and author of novels and short stories for young adults
- Isabel Allende, one of the first successful Hispanic-American female novelists
- Mario Molina, winner of the Nobel Prize in chemistry for discovering that CFCs were destroying the ozone layer
- Bill Richardson, a U.S. politician who has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize five times
- Carlos Santana, a famous guitarist who is known for his humanitarian work
- Antonia Hernandez, a lawyer who has worked hard for Hispanic civil rights

- Gloria Estefan, a singer who is known as the Queen of Latin Pop
- Edgar Prado, a jockey best known for his work with the beloved racehorse Barbaro
- Salma Hayek, an actress and producer who has worked hard for charities
- Christy Turlington, an American supermodel who has used her fame to help others
- Rebecca Lobo, a women's basketball player and Olympic gold-medalist whose successes helped lead to the creation of the WNBA
- Alex Rodriguez, a baseball player who was the youngest player ever to hit 500 home runs
- Scott Gomez, the first Hispanic-American National Hockey League player

The motto on the Great Seal of the United States reads “E PLURIBUS UNUM.” That is Latin for “Out of many, one.” The United States is made up of many peoples of many ethnic backgrounds. These peoples have come together to form one nation. Each group has been an important part of American history. I hope you will enjoy reading about sixteen Hispanic Americans who have made a difference.

—Nancy Lobb

# Alex Rodriguez

## Baseball Player

Alex Rodriguez (nicknamed A-Rod) is one of the best players in baseball. He has been the third baseman for the New York Yankees since 2004. Before that, he played shortstop for the Seattle Mariners and the Texas Rangers. Rodriguez uses his wealth and fame to help others.

Rodriguez is the youngest player ever to hit 500 home runs. He is the highest-paid player in baseball. In 2007, he signed a \$275 million contract with the New York Yankees.

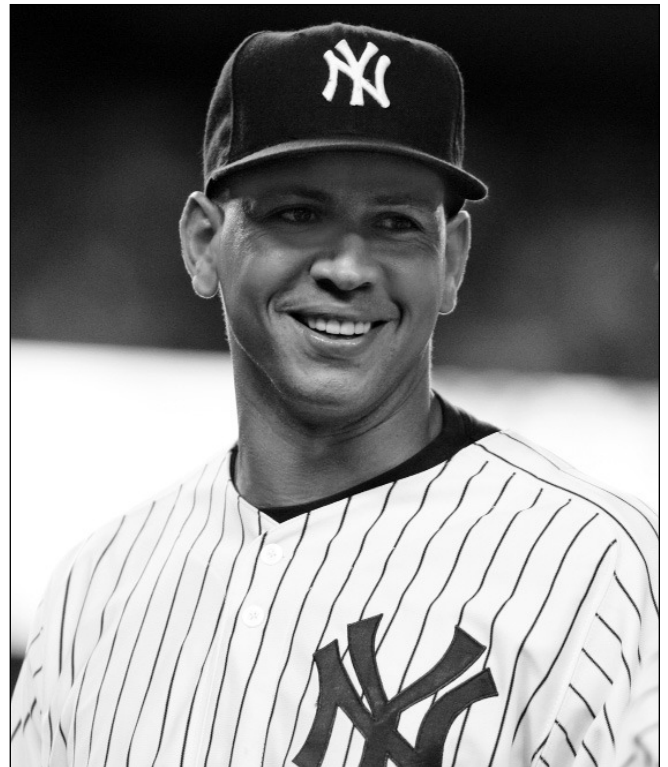
Alex Rodriguez was born on July 27, 1975, in New York City. He has an older brother and sister named Joe and Susy.

Alex's parents are Victor and Lourdes Rodriguez. They are both from the Dominican Republic. This is a country on an island in the Caribbean Sea. The couple loved it there. But it was very hard to make a living. The average wage was less than \$1,000 a year.

They moved to New York City soon after their marriage. Victor opened a shoe store. He worked long hours. As a toddler, Alex ran up and down the store's aisles swinging a huge red plastic bat.

The store did well. By the time Alex was four years old, Victor had made enough money for the family to return to the Dominican Republic.

Baseball is the major sport in the Dominican Republic. Because of the warm climate, the game is played year-round. Alex played baseball every minute he wasn't in school. Victor had once been a catcher in the Dominican professional baseball league. He practiced with young Alex.



When Alex was eight, Victor needed to go back to work. He moved his family to Miami. He opened a new shoe store.

When Alex was nine, his father left home. He never came back. Alex's mother had to support the family. She worked in an office during the day. At night, she waitressed. Susy and Joe took care of Alex.

When Alex was 11, he joined a baseball team at the Boys & Girls Club of Miami. The club offered after-school programs and sports. Alex's baseball coach was Eddie Rodriguez. (He had no relation to Alex.)

Eddie spent a lot of time with Alex. He told him of the great players he had coached at the Boys & Girls Club. These included Jose Canseco, Alex Fernandez, and Rafael Palmeiro. All of them were now major-league players. Eddie told Alex he could be a major-league player, too, if he worked hard.

Alex had a second adult male role model. He was Juan Arteaga, the father of Alex's friend J. D. Arteaga. Juan Arteaga treated Alex as his own son. He bought the boys gloves and drove them to their games.

Alex and J.D. went to high school at Westminster Christian High School. It was a small private school. The school demanded the best from students. Westminster also had a great sports program. Its baseball team was one of the best in the United States.

Alex and J.D. played baseball, football, and basketball together. Juan Arteaga was always there to watch. But he had a heart attack and died at one of their games. Alex later said, "Everything he gave to his son, he gave to me. I still play in his honor."

At the beginning of his tenth-grade season, Alex was tall and skinny. He did not make the starting lineup on the baseball team. His friend J.D. was the star pitcher. Alex worked hard to improve.

Alex was a well-rounded student and athlete. He was quarterback for the school football team. He played point guard on the basketball team. He studied hard. He was an honor-roll student.



When baseball practice began in Alex's junior year, Alex was 6'2" and 185 pounds. He had gained 2 inches in height and 30 pounds of muscle. He was faster and stronger than the year before. This time, Alex was one of the top players on the team.

That year, *USA Today* named Westminster the number-one high-school baseball team in the country. Alex and eight teammates were named to the Florida all-state team. Alex and one teammate were high-school All-Americans.

At the age of 16, Alex was already what baseball scouts call a five-tool player. He excelled at all the skills a good player should have. These are throwing, hitting for a high average, fielding, running, and hitting with power. Not many players in baseball are five-tool players.

When Alex began his senior baseball season, *Baseball America* named him the top high-school prospect in the country. At his first game, 62 scouts were in the stands. Alex was under a lot of pressure. But he didn't let it affect how he played. He ended the year with a .505 batting average. He had 9 home runs, 36 RBIs, and 35 stolen bases.

The major-league draft was held on June 3, 1993. Alex, his friends and family, and many reporters waited for the results at a party at J.D.'s house. At 1:14 P.M., 17-year-old Alex learned that he was the number-one draft pick in the country! He had been chosen by the Seattle Mariners. (J.D. was picked by the New York Mets in the fifth round.)

Alex didn't sign with the Mariners right away. He had a choice to make. He had also received a baseball scholarship to the University of Miami. If the Mariners didn't offer him enough money, he planned to play college baseball. He would be eligible for the draft again after his junior year.

Alex and the Mariners negotiated all summer. Alex wanted a million-dollar contract. The Mariners didn't want to pay that much. But time was running out. Once Alex started attending classes, the Mariners could no longer sign him. Just two hours before Alex was to attend his first class, the two sides came to an agreement. Alex's contract would be \$1.3 million. It was the most ever paid to a player right out of high school.

Alex didn't let the money go to his head. He bought a new car. He kept \$1,000 a month to live on. Then he paid off the mortgage on his mother's house. He bought her a new car. He saved the rest of the money. He was thankful for all the years his mom had worked so hard to support him.

Most new players spend their first years with a minor-league team. Alex Rodriguez went to the Mariner's Single-A team, the Appleton Foxes, in Wisconsin.

But it soon became clear that Single-A ball was too easy for Rodriguez. So the Mariners sent him up to their Double-A team in Jacksonville, Florida. For most players, this is a big leap. Rodriguez played just as well in Double-A baseball.

In 1994, the Mariners had a chance to win their division. But they needed a spark to get them going. Manager Lou Piniella had seen Rodriguez play. He thought Rodriguez could be the spark the team needed. So, on July 8, 1994, Rodriguez was called up to the majors. He was 18 years old and just a year out of high school.

Rodriguez flew to Boston. The Mariners were going to play the Red Sox in Fenway Park. He was in the starting lineup as shortstop. In his second game against Boston, Alex Rodriguez got his first hit in the major leagues!

After the end of the season, Rodriguez was ready to play more baseball. The Mariners asked him to play winter-league baseball. Winter league is played in the warm countries of the Caribbean.

Rodriguez played for a team in the Dominican Republic. He enjoyed being there. He had forgotten much about the country. He had lived in the States so long that his Spanish was rusty, too.

In 1995, the Mariners decided Rodriguez should start the season with their Triple-A team in Tacoma, Washington. Over the season, he was sent back and forth between the Triple-A team and the majors. He was frustrated. He kept working hard trying to improve his skills.

At the end of the season, Rodriguez returned to Miami for a break. He didn't rest. He began working out with a trainer six days a week. He also worked on his diet. He was determined to be in the best shape he could when the 1996 season began.

It worked. Alex Rodriguez was named starting shortstop for the Mariners for the 1996 season. Lou Piniella put him at number two in the batting order, right in front of Ken Griffey Jr.

Rodriguez was the youngest player in the American League. He was given the nickname A-Rod. Two days before his 21st birthday, the Mariners gave him a \$10 million, four-year contract.

Rodriguez did not let his fame go to his head. He said, "My mother taught me to be respectful of others, save my money, and stay humble." He is easy-going and well-mannered. Because of this, he is well-liked.

In the 1996 season, Rodriguez led the American League in hitting. He had a .358 batting average. He led the league in runs scored, total bases, and doubles. He had 36 home runs and 123 runs batted in (RBIs). He won the Silver Slugger award as the best-hitting shortstop in the league. (He would win this honor nearly every year after this.)

When the season ended, Rodriguez was named to a major-league all-star team. They played exhibition games in Japan. Cal Ripken was on the same team. He had been Rodriguez's boyhood hero. The two became friends. Rodriguez said, "I learned from Cal to respect the game, respect the fans. Nothing fancy out there. Just do your job."

Rodriguez's second year (1997) was not as productive. Still, he had 23 home runs and 84 RBIs. He did something most players never do. He hit what is called "the cycle." That means he hit a single, double, triple, and home run all in the same game!

In 1998, Rodriguez had a great season. He joined the "40-40 Club." That meant he had at least 40 home runs and 40 stolen bases in the same year. Only two other players had ever done this in the history of baseball! He was named the American League Player of the Year.

In 1999, Rodriguez missed more than 30 games due to a knee injury. Still, he hit 42 home runs that season.

In 2000, his contract with the Mariners expired. Rodriguez became a free agent. The question was, who would sign him next? There was no question that his contract would be huge. In the end, the Texas Rangers signed him to a ten-year contract worth \$252 million. It was the biggest contract in sports history.

Rodriguez's 2001 and 2002 seasons broke many records. He hit 52 home runs in 2001 and had 135 RBIs. In 2002, he had 57 home runs. He won a Gold Glove award for outstanding defense. At the age of 27, he was called the best player in baseball.

In 2002, Rodriguez married Cynthia Scurtis. They later divorced in 2008. The couple had two daughters together.

In 2003, Rodriguez led the American League in home runs and runs scored. He won his second Gold Glove award. He became the youngest player to hit 300 home runs. He also won his first American League MVP (Most Valuable Player) award.

In 2004, Rodriguez was traded to the New York Yankees. Derek Jeter was already the shortstop. A-Rod became the third baseman.

In 2005, he won his second American League MVP award. He hit 48 home runs that year. In 2006, he pounded out his 450th home run and his 2,000th hit on the same swing!

On August 4, 2007, Rodriguez hit his 500th career home run. At the age of 32, he was the youngest player ever to do this. That same year, he won the Players Choice Award for Player of the Year. He also was named MVP for the American League for the third time in his career.

Rodriguez has said that he'd like to remain a Yankee for the rest of his career. On November 15, 2007, he signed a ten-year contract for \$275 million. If he breaks the all-time home-run record during this time, he will get millions more.

Rodriguez has used his fame and fortune to help others. He remembers what the Boys & Girls Club of Miami did for him as a child. He says, “The streets were there, but, for my sake, so was the Boys & Girls Club.” For years, Rodriguez has supported his childhood club with his time and money. Since 2002, he has been one of three national spokespersons for the Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA). He pledged \$500,000 to build an educational center at the BGCA in Miami.

Rodriguez also supports the University of Miami. In 2002, he donated \$3.9 million to the school to remodel the baseball stadium. It will be renamed Alex Rodriguez Park. He funded a four-year scholarship to the university. Every year, a graduate of the Boys & Girls Club of Miami will be chosen as the winner.

In 2005, Rodriguez donated money to fully fund five day-care centers in the Dominican Republic. He supplied all their needs for a year.

In 2006, Rodriguez and his family set up the AROD Family Foundation. Its purpose is to help troubled families. It will do this by supporting programs “focusing on improving quality of life, education, and mental health.”

Rodriguez has also written two children’s books. *Hit a Grand Slam* (1998) is the story of his life. It encourages children to follow their dreams, even if the going gets rough. *Out of the Ballpark* (2007) is the story of a young boy who achieves his dreams through hard work.

Rodriguez is one of the finest baseball players in the game. He is also a fine person. Texas Rangers manager Jerry Narron once said of him, “He is without a doubt the best player in baseball, but that’s not what impresses me most. I only hope that someday he might be as good a player as he is a person.”

## Remembering the Facts

1. How did the Boys & Girls Club of Miami help Alex when he was young?
2. How did Juan Arteaga help Alex?
3. Why was Westminster a good place for Alex to play baseball in high school?
4. At what point in his life was Alex Rodriguez first called up to the major leagues?
5. Why is baseball so popular in the Dominican Republic?
6. In what three years did Rodriguez win the American League Most Valuable Player award?
7. How has Rodriguez supported the Boys & Girls Club of Miami?
8. What two things has Rodriguez done to support the University of Miami?

## Understanding the Story

9. Which people do you think were good examples to Rodriguez when he was growing up?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What do you think might be some reasons a young player might choose to play professional sports rather than go to college?

## Getting the Main Idea

In what ways do you think Alex Rodriguez is a good role model for young Americans?

## Applying What You've Learned

Make a list of words that you think best describe Alex Rodriguez.