

16 **Extraordinary** Multiracial Americans

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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 sixteen 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 students develop skills such as understanding 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 can make them extraordinary people, too!

Structure of the Book

The Biographies

The collection of stories can be used in many different ways. You may assign passages for independent reading or engage students in choral reading.

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 purpose of each type of question varies.

- **Remembering the Facts:** Questions in this section engage students in direct comprehension, and require them to recall and find information while keeping track of their own understanding.

- **Understanding the Story:** Higher-level thinking questions require students 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 about 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 for 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.

Introduction

The term “multiracial” is important as a celebration of identity and heritage. Multiracial Americans have become the fastest-growing demographic group. The U.S. Census Bureau has recognized that many Americans come from blended families. In 2000, the Bureau changed its forms so that citizens could check off multiple boxes to identify their race. The multiracial population in the United States is expected to reach at least 20 percent by 2050.

The lives of many multiracial Americans have made a difference in the story of America. These people include writers, artists, scientists, teachers, politicians, ministers, lawyers, doctors, businesspeople, athletes, and a president of the United States. They have all helped to make America what it is today.

In *16 Extraordinary Multiracial Americans*, you will read the story of sixteen of these people. They are:

- Sam Choy, a celebrity chef and restaurateur who revolutionized Hawaiian cooking
- Ann Curry, an Emmy-Award-winning journalist and news anchor
- Dorothy Dandridge, an actress and singer who fought racism and became the first black woman nominated for a Best Actress Academy Award
- Kip Fulbeck, who uses his roles as artist, activist, and educator to help people explore issues of ethnic identity
- Lani Guinier, a highly respected civil rights lawyer and legal scholar
- Dwayne Johnson, a champion professional wrestler and movie star who has given back to help children around the world
- Lori “Lolo” Jones, who overcame many hurdles in her personal life to become a champion track-and-field hurdler
- Norah Jones, a Grammy-Award-winning musician with a style all her own

- Edmonia Lewis, the first nationally acclaimed African-American sculptor
- Maya Lilly, performance artist and playwright whose work enlightens people about mixed ethnic identities
- James McBride, who has used his talents to create successful careers as both an author and a musician
- Naomi Shihab Nye, an author whose work inspires cross-cultural understanding
- Barack Obama, who used his roles as a lawyer and a politician to promote social fairness—and who was elected 44th president of the United States
- Apolo Anton Ohno, a teen rebel who buckled down to become an Olympic medal-winning speed skater
- Mark Polansky, who made his childhood dream of becoming an astronaut a reality
- Earl Woods, who used his life lessons to make his son Tiger a champion golfer

Dwayne Johnson

Actor and Professional Wrestler

Dwayne Johnson was born on May 2, 1972, in California. Many people know him by his former wrestling name, The Rock.

Dwayne's father was Rocky Johnson. Rocky was originally from Nova Scotia, Canada. He was the first black champion in professional wrestling. Dwayne's mother's father was High Chief Peter Maivia. He was a Samoan wrestler.

As a boy, Dwayne often traveled with his family. His father appeared in wrestling rings across the country. Dwayne even lived in Auckland, New Zealand, with his mother's family for a short time.



Dwayne settled in Pennsylvania once he was in high school. He was a major track star at the school. He also played football. He quickly became one of the top ten defensive tackles in the nation.

Dwayne attended the University of Miami. He received a full scholarship and played football for the school's team, the Miami Hurricanes. The team won a national championship in 1991. Dwayne had his eye on a professional football career. But this was not to be. An injury kept him from playing during his senior year.

Dwayne Johnson did not give up on school. He graduated from college. His degree in criminology gave him a number of possibilities. He still wanted to play football.

He was not offered a position on a National Football League (NFL) team. But he did accept an offer from a team in the Canadian Football League (CFL). He still had problems from his injury. He did not go far in the league.

Johnson had very little money. He lived with roommates in a small apartment. He tried to continue his football career. But there was no future in the CFL for Johnson. The team cut him. He was 23 years old. And he had only seven dollars. How would he live?

Johnson needed a job. He wanted a future. He went to his dad. He pleaded with him to help him learn to be a wrestler. His dad agreed.

Johnson worked hard. He wrestled in matches wherever he could find them. He often earned less than forty dollars for an entire night of fighting.

But Johnson would not give up. He finally was able to join the World Wrestling Federation (WWF). This later became World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). His stage name was Flex Kavana.

It did not take long for Johnson to rise through the ranks in the ring. He began winning awards within six months. He soon became part of The Nation of Domination. He gave himself a new moniker: The Rock.

Johnson soon wrote his autobiography. Published in 2000, it was titled *The Rock Says*. The book sold well.

Some say Johnson changed the sport of wrestling. He gave the sport a new popularity. But wrestling would not be his only career path. Film cameras and sets awaited him. He began acting. It was clear that he had star quality. Johnson combined his athletic talent with his acting talent. The response was fantastic. Johnson's first leading role was in 2002, in *The Scorpion King*. For this movie, he earned \$5.5 million, the highest salary for an actor in his first starring role. He has since been in movies such as *The Rundown*, *The Game Plan*, *Get Smart*, and *Tooth Fairy*.

Johnson's most important role, however, is that of a father. He married his college sweetheart, Dany Garcia, in 1997. Their daughter, Simone Alexandra, was born in 2001. Unfortunately, the Johnsons ended their marriage in 2007. The couple said that they would remain friends.

Johnson has become known as a person who cares for and gives back to others. He and Dany Garcia donated \$2 million to the University of Miami. Their care and kindness were not limited to a college, though.

Johnson started The Rock Foundation in 2006. Its mission is “to educate, empower and motivate children worldwide through health education and physical fitness.”

The Rock Foundation sponsors three major programs. These are the National Children’s Fitness Challenge, Project Knapsack, and The Rock’s Global Toy Initiative. All of the programs are set up to help build kids’ self-esteem and inspire them to achieve goals.

The Rock’s Global Toy Initiative sends clothing, shoes, blankets, school supplies, toys, and other things to children in developing nations. This program helps give hope to children who otherwise might feel no hope at all.

Project Knapsack’s goal is to guide students in the United States to recognize the problems faced by children in developing nations and feel compassion toward these children. Students in a U.S. classroom “adopt” a class of students in a developing nation. The “adopted” students are usually around the same age as the American class. The U.S. students send backpacks filled with things the “adopted” students need. Students in both countries write to one another.

What happens in the National Children’s Fitness Challenge? Students compete in races across the nation. Then there is a final National Challenge series. Johnson has worked to make these programs strong.

Johnson traveled to Washington, D.C., in 2008 to receive the Horizon Award. This award goes to people who have worked to create opportunities for all Americans. These are also people who have set outstanding examples for young people through their own success.

Johnson went from being a professional football player to having seven dollars in his pocket. Then he rose to become a star in wrestling and movies. Achieving greatness for himself has never been enough for Dwayne Johnson, though. He has shown that success means more than personal gain.

Remembering the Facts

1. What sport did Dwayne Johnson, his father, and his grandfather have in common?
2. What sport did Dwayne play in college? What happened while he was playing?
3. What do CFL and WWE stand for? Why were they important to Johnson?
4. Just after Johnson stopped playing football, what did he do? Was he successful at this? Explain.
5. What is a moniker? What were Johnson's two monikers mentioned in the passage?
6. Name three movies Johnson starred in. Has Johnson been successful as an actor? Explain.
7. What is the title of Johnson's autobiography?
8. What are three major programs that get help from The Rock Foundation?

Understanding the Story

9. What do all of the programs that Johnson helps with have in common?

10. Which of the programs mentioned in this passage would you most like to help with now and in the future? Why? Support your answer with information from the passage.

Getting the Main Idea

How do you think Johnson is an inspiration for young adults?

Applying What You've Learned

Johnson wrote an autobiography. If you could write your autobiography, what would the titles of the chapters be? How would your autobiography be like Johnson's? How would it be different?