

“They Refused to Complain-Research Paper”

Lesson Plan

Submitted by: Melissa Johnson, Sioux Falls, SD

Grade Level(s): 6-12

Subject(s): Positive School/Reading

Overview: Have you ever felt like giving up? In this lesson, students will be introduced to a wide ranging group of people who have overcome hardships of many different kinds. They may have had complaints and desperation along the way, but in the end these people refused to let that stop them; they refused to let their problem define them. They pressed on and pursued their dreams.

Activities and Procedures:

Students are given a list of people who overcame hardship. (See list, attached.) Through library, internet, or any other available resources, students research the person of their choice and write a paper about that person. Through their research, they are instructed to focus not only on that person’s accomplishments, but also on the adversity that person faced on their way to achievement.

Questions to consider when conducting research:

- What obstacle/obstacles did this person face on their journey to following their dreams?
- Did they have moments of doubt?
- What did they do to move beyond their doubts and fears and move onto being successful?
- How was/is the world impacted because of their perseverance?

Evaluation/What we did:

Created a research paper on a person who has done their best to remain positive and overcome, even through adversity. Provided real-life examples of people who refused to give up, and then moved beyond their problems to impact the world in a positive manner.

People to research:

Source: <http://sachem.suffolk.lib.ny.us/advisor/bioadversity.htm>

- **Abraham Lincoln**
- **Oprah Winfrey**
- **Nick Vujicic** www.lifewithoutlimbs.org
- **Lance Armstrong**

It's Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life by Lance Armstrong, with Sally Jenkins. Putnam, 2000.

In 1996, Armstrong was diagnosed with testicular cancer and informed that his career as a world class cyclist was over. Less than three years later, after successfully battling the disease, the determined athlete proved the medical experts wrong by winning the grueling Tour de France. He went on to win the race five more times. For further reading: *Every Second Counts* by Lance Armstrong and Sally Jenkins (Broadway, 2003).

- **Ludwig van Beethoven**

Beethoven by Maynard Solomon, 1998.

This book is a major reinterpretation of the life, personality, and works of the enigmatic musical genius who began to lose his hearing at the age of 31. Rigorously meticulous and objective, it is also renowned for its highly original interpretations of Beethoven's personality, his inner conflicts, patronage affiliations, intellectual and religious tenets, and the dynamics of his family constellation. Through these, we meet an infinitely more complex, and human, Beethoven than has been known from earlier biographies. Also, an extended chapter presents the evidence for Solomon's compelling solution to the riddle of Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved."

- **Andrea Bocelli**

Andrea Bocelli: A Celebration by Antonia Felix. St. Martin's, 2000.

This detailed biography chronicles the singer's childhood in the Tuscan countryside, his early ambitions and passion for singing, the disease and accident that caused his blindness at age 12, the uncompromising philosophy of his strong and loving family, the Italian musical legacy that has shaped him, and the spiritual beliefs that sustain him.

- **Kathy Buckley**

If You Could Hear What I See: Lessons About Life, Luck, & the Choices We Make by Kathy Buckley, with Lynette Padwa. Dutton, 2000.

Labelled mentally retarded by an uncaring school system, comedian Buckley shares the pain of growing up hearing impaired as well as surviving childhood molestation and cervical cancer.

- **Chris Burke**

A Special Kind of Hero: Chris Burke's Own Story by Chris Burke and Jo Beth McDaniel, 1991.

The tale of how one family raised a Down's Syndrome child to achieve far beyond expectations. Chris became one of America's favorite personalities, starring as "Corky" on the hit television series *Life Goes On*. Not since Helen Keller has one person so thoroughly changed the way the world views people with disabilities.

- **Ray Charles**

Brother Ray: Ray Charles' Own Story by Ray Charles and David Ritz, 1978.

This is a drama of survival and success against staggering odds. Born black and poor in the deep south, blinded as a small boy, orphaned as a teenager, by age thirty-two Ray Charles was acclaimed the world over as a musical genius. This is the story of one man's triumph over tragedy and pain to ultimate success.

- **Brooke Ellison**

Miracles Happen: One Mother, One Daughter, One Journey by Brooke and Jean Ellison, 2001.

At age 11, Brooke Ellison was left paralyzed from the neck down after being struck by an automobile. In this book, Brooke and her mother, Jean, document the exhausting efforts and dedication that it took for Brooke to beat overwhelming odds and finally graduate from Harvard University, with honors!

- **Betty Ford**

Betty, A Glad Awakening by Betty Ford with Chris Chase, 1987.

This is the deeply personal story of one of the most celebrated women of our time. It is a moving memoir in which Betty Ford shares her experience, understanding, and hope so that other men and women can discover that alcoholism and drug addiction need not rob them of their lives.

- **Jami Goldman**

Up and Running: The Jami Goldman Story by Jami Goldman and Andrea Cagan, 2001.

Meet tall, beautiful Jami Goldman: world-class athlete, Adidas spokesperson, motivational speaker -- and double amputee. More than a decade ago, a wrong turn on a back road during a blizzard resulted in a terrifying fight for her life. Now, for the first time, Jami recounts her gripping story of being trapped in the snow for eleven days, the grievous loss of her legs from severe frostbite, and the fortitude it has taken not only to walk again, but run like the wind!

- **Stephen Hawking**

Steven Hawking: A Life in Science by Michael White and John Gribbon, 1992.

Physicist Stephen Hawking cannot walk, stand, feed himself, speak, or write. Stricken with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, as a young man he has, nonetheless, contributed more toward the theory of the origin and evolution of the universe than any other person in the latter part of the twentieth century.

- **John Hockenberry**

Moving Violations: War Zones, Wheelchairs, and Declarations of Independence by John Hockenberry, 1995.

By no means was it a dark and stormy night. It was, in fact, a beautiful, sunny February day when journalist John Hockenberry's life was forever changed due to an automobile accident. He now continues to conduct his life all over the world, and quite well actually, from his wheelchair. This is an unforgettable account of John's struggle to be free within the confines of paralysis.

- **Ed Hommer**

The Hill: A True Story of Tragedy, Recovery, and Redemption on North America's Highest Peak, by Ed Hommer, with Daniel Paisner. Rodale, 2001.

After losing both feet to frostbite following a plane crash in Alaska, bushpilot Hommer overcame both depression & alcoholism to make it as a pilot for American Airlines and fulfill his dream of climbing to the summit of Mt. McKinley.

- **Helen Keller**

The Story of My Life by Helen Keller, 1954.

Helen Keller met life head on in spite of mind-boggling handicaps. After losing both her sight and hearing through illness as a young child, she managed to respond fully to her surroundings and to lead as "normal" a life, as possible. Her autobiography simply inspires!

- **Jill Kinmont**

The Other Side of the Mountain: The Story of Jill Kinmont by E. G. Valens, 1988.

Jill Kinmont had been a leading candidate for the U. S. Olympic ski team, when a skiing accident left her paralyzed from the shoulders down. How she came to terms with her experience and went on the lead a meaningful life makes fascinating reading.

- **Emmanuelle Laborit**

The Cry of the Gull by Emmanuelle Laborit. Gallaudet University Press, 1998, 1994.

At the age of nine months, Laborit was diagnosed as deaf. Not until the age of 7 did she discover sign language (banned as "obscene" in France until 1976) and a new world opened for her. After a period of typical teenage rebellion, she reassessed her life, devoted herself to acting, and in 1993 became the first French actor to win the prestigious Moliere Award for "best new talent."

- **David L. Lander**

Fall Down, Laughing: How Squiggy Caught Multiple Sclerosis and Didn't Tell Nobody by David L. Lander with Lee Montgomery, 2000.

In the summer of 1999, David Lander revealed publicly that he suffers from multiple sclerosis (MS) - a secret he'd kept for fifteen years, even while living and working in Hollywood's celebrity fish bowl. Diagnosed with the illness after filming the last episode of *Laverne and Shirley*, Lander continued to develop his film and television career while hiding his illness. His success is an astonishing testament to his physical and emotional strength, and his determination to prove that those with MS can still enjoy fulfilling and challenging lives.

- **Heather Mills McCartney**

A Single Step by Heather Mills McCartney, with Pamela Cockerill. Warner, 2002, 1995.

After an accident left her with a partially amputated leg that all but ended her career as a fashion model, Mills, a successful businesswoman and land-mine activist, took the set-back as yet another of life's challenges to be met and overcome. In 2000, she married former Beatle Paul McCartney and continues to lobby on behalf of the physically handicapped, especially those touched by war.

- **Mary Tyler Moore**

After All by Mary Tyler Moore, 1995.

Mary spares nothing as she recounts her traumatic childhood, two failed marriages, her own alcoholism, the tragic death of her son, her battle with diabetes, and her third, happy marriage to a cardiologist eighteen years her junior. Moving, Inspiring, and brutally frank, this story will touch a reader's heart and soul.

- **John Forbes Nash, Jr.**

A Beautiful Mind: A Biography of John Forbes Nash, Jr., Winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, 1994 by Sylvia Nasar, 1998.

The true story of John Nash, the mathematical genius who was a legend by age thirty when he slipped into schizophrenic madness, and who -- thanks to the selflessness of a woman, and the loyalty of the mathematics community -- emerged after decades of ghost-like existence, to win a Nobel Prize and world acclaim. The inspiration for a major motion picture of the same name, this award-winning biography is a drama about the mystery of the human mind, triumph over incredible adversity, and the healing power of love.

- **Jerri Nielsen**

Icebound: A Doctor's Incredible Battle for Survival at the South Pole by Jerri Nielsen with Maryanne Vollers, 2001.

In 1999, at the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station in Antarctica, Dr. Jerri Nielsen discovered a lump in her breast. With help from U. S. doctors via e-mail, she performed her own biopsy, began chemotherapy, and waited for rescue. Both her experience and her philosophy make truly amazing reading.

- **Hirotsada Ototake**

No One's Perfect by Hirotsada Ototake, 2000.

Born without arms or legs into a Japanese society that has traditionally shielded the disabled from public view, Hirotsada Ototake tackles life with courage, energy, and a firm belief that there are some things only a disabled person can do!

- **Christopher Reeve**

Still Me by Christopher Reeve, 1998.

In 1995, Christopher Reeve was thrown from a horse, landing on his head and breaking his neck. His consequential paralysis has led Reeve to become a public figure of the first rank. Since his accident, he has directed his first film, started the Christopher Reeve Foundation to fund spinal-cord-repair research, lobbied Congress, and crisscrossed the country on speaking engagements. This book also explains the tantalizing, but quite real, possibility that Reeve (and a quarter-million other paralyzed people, plus 49 million disabled Americans) may get back on their feet! Read also: *Nothing is Impossible: Reflections on a New Life*, by Christopher Reeve (RH, 2002).

- **Franklin Delano Roosevelt**

FDR: An Intimate History by David Miller, 1983.

In the summer of 1921, at the age of 39, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was stricken with poliomyelitis. Courageously, he fought to regain the use of his legs, particularly through swimming. He went on to become the only U.S. president elected to four terms, certainly proving that his disability was not only not a hindrance, but never an issue at all!

- **Marla Runyan**

No Finish Line: My Life As I See It by Marla Runyan, with Sally Jenkins. GPPS, 2001.

In 2000, runner Marla Runyan placed 8th in the 1,500m race at the Sydney Olympics—the highest placement ever by an American woman. What made her feat so remarkable was that she had been legally blind since childhood.

- **Harold Russell**

The Best Years of My Life by Harold Russell with Dan Ferullo, 1981.

Having lost both of his hands in World War II, Harold Russell nevertheless went on to win two Oscars for his performance in the film *The Best Years of Our Lives*, was the national commander of AMVETS, was co-founder and president of the World Veterans Federation, played the piano and told jokes on stage and in nightclubs with Jackie Gleason and Vic Damone, and toured for B'nai B'rith with Bess Myerson. His disabilities never hindered his successes.

- **Adam Taliaferro**

Miracle in the Making: The Adam Taliaferro Story by Scott Brown and Sam Carchidi, 2001.

On September 23, 2000, Penn State freshman football player Adam Taliferro's athletic career came to a screeching halt when he tackled an opponent headfirst. Told he would never walk again, Adam set out to prove them all wrong. The devotion of Adam's family, the ongoing commitment of the coaches, the dedication of the numerous doctors, physical therapists, trainers and rehabilitative nurses, and Adam's drive and hard work, made his miracle possible. On September 1, 2001, Adam led the Penn State Nittany Lions onto the field to begin their new season.

- **Mel Tillis**

Stutterin' Boy by Mel Tillis with Walter Wager, 1984.

The life story of the beloved and celebrated performer and songwriter who has endured (and just about overcome) a speech impediment, a broken marriage, and a long and challenging climb up the ladder of public recognition.

- **Henri Toulouse-Lautrec**

Toulouse-Lautrec: The Soul of Montmartre by Reinhold Heller, 1997.

Deprived of a "normal" life as a result of stunted growth, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec was a French aristocrat who observed life in the cabarets and cafes of Paris, producing art that endures today as the essence of 19th-century Paris.

- **Ronan Tynan**

Halfway Home: My Life 'Til Now by Ronan Tynan, 2002.

Born in Ireland in 1960, Ronan Tynan is a world-renowned Irish tenor. Able to walk only with the aid of prosthetic limbs, he is a horseman, an athlete, a doctor, a singer, and now a writer!

- **Patricia Van Tighem**

The Bear's Embrace: A Story of Survival by Patricia Van Tighem, 2001.

In a society that values perfection, Patricia Van Tighem has had to conjure up extraordinary bravery. In 1983, while hiking, she and her husband were attacked by a grizzly. Her recounting of the attack, her injuries, her recovery and her outlook today, stand as an example of what perseverance is all about.

- **Geerat Vermeij**

Privileged Hands: A Scientific Life by Geerat Vermeij. W. H. Freeman, 1997.

A memoir by the great blind marine biologist & paleontologist who learned to use his extrasensory abilities to overcome both his handicap and prejudice.

- **Erik Weihenmayer**

Touch the Top of the World: A Blind Man's Journey to Climb Farther than the Eye Can See by Erik Weihenmayer, 2000.

Erik Weihenmayer is a world-class athlete, skydiver, long distance biker, marathon runner, skier, mountaineer, and ice and rock climber. He is also, incidentally, blind. His life story of never "looking back" is a lesson in courage.

- **Heather Whitestone-McCallum**

Listening with My Heart by Heather Whitestone-McCallum with Angela Elwell Hunt, 1997.

Miss America 1995 recounts the story of her inspiring life, beginning with a childhood fever that left her profoundly deaf. However, she built on her strengths and accepted her limitations in school, in community service, and in beauty pageants to become the first Miss America with a physical handicap.

- **Montel Williams**

Climbing Higher by Montel Williams, with Lawrence Grobel. NAL, 2004.

After almost 20 years of ignoring the symptoms, the Emmy-winning talk-show host and former Naval Intelligence Officer, was told he had multiple sclerosis, the devastating, often disabling, sometimes fatal disease, which attacks the central nervous system. Determined not to be defeated by the condition, he overcame his feelings of denial and anger and determined to lead a vital and productive life.