

Stories of Courage

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Summary

Stories of Courage is a collection of eight true stories about exceptionally brave people from different parts of the world. Each courageous individual demonstrates remarkable determination; every story is inspirational.

Story 1: In *Running for her Life*, Ana Quirot, a Cuban world-class sprinter, suffers burns in a terrible accident at home one day. Yet, over the course of several months Ana re-learns to walk and run until she is once again winning medals for her country.

Story 2: The true identity of the brave man in *The River to Freedom* cannot be disclosed. "Matthew" is just one of the world's brave refugees in Sudan who has escaped persecution in his own country and set up a successful life abroad. He suffered in prison, but managed to run away. He traveled thousands of kilometers, eventually finding peace and freedom in a land far from his own.

Story 3: In *The Housewife Spy*, Odette Sansom worked as a British spy against Nazi Germany and was part of the French Resistance. She was imprisoned, tortured and sentenced to death. Despite these dreadful circumstances she remained loyal to her country and her principles. Her brave actions saved thousands of people's lives.

Story 4: *Fighting for the Forest* tells the story of Chico Mendez, a Brazilian who devoted his life to the protection of the Amazon rainforest. He fought hard to educate the world about the importance of the forest's natural resources and the lasting damage that its destruction would have. His campaigns against corrupt businesses and governments regularly meant putting his own life in danger. Although he was killed under very suspicious circumstances in 1988, work to save areas of the forest continues successfully in his name.

Stories 5–6: *Prisoner for Peace* tells the story of Burmese Aung San Suu Kyi, the unofficial leader of Burma. Her government was removed from power by the Burmese army in 1988, and she was placed under house arrest shortly afterward. Since that time she has fought tirelessly for democracy. She was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1991 and continues to fight for her people's freedom.

A Mountain Accident is about Aron Ralston, a US-born hiker whose arm became trapped under a huge rock in the wild, remote Utah countryside. After several days in the open mountains, Aron saved his own life by cutting off his arm and walking to safety.

Stories 7–8: *The True Courage of Erin Brockovich* is about an ordinary mother living in the United States with not much money and not much luck.

One day she discovered that a large, rich company was acting dishonestly and possibly putting people's lives at risk. Against almost impossible odds she helped to win one of America's biggest court cases against one of the most powerful companies in the world.

A Doctor, a Father, and his Son tells the story of Japanese Dr. Fumio Shigeto, Kenzaburo Oe, and Hikari Oe. This is a remarkable example of how one person's bravery can inspire bravery in others. When journalist Kenzaburo Oe is writing about the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, he meets a Dr. Shigeto, who changes his life forever. Oe is inspired by the doctor's integrity and is thus able to come to terms with his own problems. As a result, Oe's disabled son, Hikari, is able to reach a degree of success and fulfillment that would not otherwise have been possible.

Background and themes

Determination and life-changing decisions: Each story in the book is separate from the others. The stories take place at different times, and in different places around the world. Courage against extreme difficulties links the main characters throughout the book. Each one shows bravery, determination, and fearlessness in facing harsh circumstances. Each makes an important decision that changes his or her life forever.

Common well-being over personal interest: In many cases, these people's decisions mean choosing difficulty and danger over an easy, comfortable life. Just as Aung San Suu Kyi chooses to leave her happy life in England for the sake of her country, so Erin Brockovich decides to help the people of Hinkley, even though this means working harder for no extra money, and less time with

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her family. "Matthew" and Aron Ralston choose to risk death to escape their dreadful circumstances; Chico Mendez and Odette Sansom selflessly choose to do difficult jobs in order to create a better world for future generations.

The individual versus powerful institutions: Many of the stories feature individuals who fight against organizations more powerful than themselves. Chico Mendez is only one man, and still he fights against some of the biggest, richest international businesses in the world. Similarly, although Erin Brockovich is not a lawyer, she uses her intelligence and ingenuity to win one of the biggest court cases in US history.

Extreme physical pain and the power of the mind over physical realities: Ana Quirot's doctors do not believe she will walk again. Yet, Ana is not prepared to accept this so she pushes her body to the limit. Hikari Oe is severely disabled, but his family encourages him to develop his strengths as well as recognizing his limitations. Aron Ralston manages to cut off his own arm with a pocket knife, using the power of his mind over the pain in his body to save his own life.

Causes worth fighting for: The stories show at least some success against the problems that each person faces. Although Aung San Suu Kyi is still in prison, her work means that there is worldwide pressure on the Myanmar government to reinstate the rightful government. Although Chico Mendez was murdered as a result of his struggle, large areas of the rainforest were saved, and ork continues in his name today.

Stories of Courage inspires determination and a sense of justice in our own lives. When these stories are true, they can encourage us to face our own problems more confidently, too.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- 1 **Discuss:** Talk about stories of courage.
 - a Ask students to look at the cover. Write "courage" on the board and draw arrows from it. Ask students which other words they can relate to it (bravery, strength, fearlessness, power, etc.).
 - b Put them in groups. Tell them: *Think of what we discussed about courage and make a list of different examples of bravery, such as bravely fighting a terrible illness, fighting in a war, rescuing someone in danger.*
 - c Groups read their list to the class. Write the most representative examples on the board.

- 2 **Discuss:** Ask students to read the back cover blurb. *Close your eyes. Think of any inspirational stories of bravery that you have heard. Which examples of people from history have you thought of? Which contemporary examples? Discuss this with your group.*
- 3 **Guess:** What are the stories about?
 - a Divide the class into groups. Tell students to look at the titles of the stories on the Contents page. *In groups imagine what you think each chapter could be about. Write one or two sentences for each story.*
 - b Have each group add eight (one per story) of the following words to the sentences written in a. medal courage power strength army freedom trust peace politics poison lawsuit disabled
Choose seven words and decide where to use them. You can find them in footnotes throughout the book.
- 4 **Discuss:** Ask students about Erin Brockovich.
 - a *Do you know the name Erin Brockovich? Where have you heard it? Who has seen the movie? What did you think of it? Who is the main actress? Why would you recommend it?*
 - b Divide the class into two, those who have seen the movie (Group A) and those who haven't (Group B). Have students in Group A write a very short summary of the movie. Have students in Group B write some questions about the movie.
 - c Group A reads the summary out loud. Then Group B takes turns to ask Group A questions.
- 5 **Discuss:** Ask students if they have seen any movies similar to *Erin Brockovich*, which show stories of courage. List them on the board.

Story 1

After reading

- 6 **Write:** Have students write about Ana. *Imagine you work for a Cuban newspaper at the time. Write a short newspaper article about Ana's accident. How did it happen? What do the people of Cuba think and feel about it? What hope is there for Ana's future?*
- 7 **Role play:** Ana and Fidel Castro meet. *Imagine that you are Ana Quirot and Fidel Castro. Student A: You are Cuba's leader. Tell Ana why you are visiting her. Why she is so important for Cuba. Student B: You are Ana. You are surprised that the leader of your country is visiting you. Tell him what you will do for Cuba.*
- 8 **Research:** Ask students what they know about Fidel Castro. Encourage them to do research on Cuba.
 - a *In groups, discuss how much you know about Cuba, its government and leader, Fidel Castro.*
 - b *Decide which facts or aspects of Cuba and Fidel Castro you would like to learn more about. Go to the library or use the Internet to find more information. Use Cuban, US and international sites, if possible.*

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Story 2

After reading

- 9 Discuss:** Have students talk about Bulgaria and the Sudan. Bring a world map and ask students to work in groups and find Bulgaria and the Sudan.
What do you know about these countries? Think about their locations and culture. What are the differences between the two countries? What problems do you think Matthew faces in a new country? Write a list.
- 10 Write:** Ask students to bring bottles (glass or plastic) for an activity.
Imagine you are Matthew. You find the bottle at the army prison. Nobody is watching. Write a message, put it inside the bottle and throw it into the gray water.
- 11 Group work:** Put the bottles in the center of the classroom. Have students walk around them. When you clap your hands, they should pick a message and read it. Choose students to read their messages out loud. Repeat this as many times as you want.

Story 3

After reading

- 12 Research:** Ask students about Winston Churchill.
- Who was Winston Churchill? How important was he? Why do you think that his name saved Odette?*
 - What do you know about Germany in the 1940s? Have you seen any movies about it?*
 - Divide into two groups. Group A will research Germany in the 1940s. Group B will research Churchill. Use the library or the Internet. Students present their findings to the class.

Story 4

After reading

- 13 Discuss:** Have students talk about Chico Mendez. Tell students to form groups and discuss:
- Who do you think killed Chico Mendez? Why? Who thought he was dangerous?*
 - Give reasons for your answers. Have all groups exchange their ideas.*
- 14 Role play:** In pairs, ask students to write and act out the interview between a reporter and Chico Mendez.
Student A: *You are interested in Chico Mendez's fight. Ask him about his ideas and his enemies.*
Student B: *Answer A's questions and tell A what you would like the rest of the world to know.*
Choose three to five pairs to act out their interviews.

Stories 5–6

After reading

- 15 Write and role play:** Tell your students to imagine they are Suu.
You have just been freed. The media go to your house and you prepare a few words to say to the Burmese people. What would you say?
Then in groups, hold a press conference with reporters asking Suu questions.

- 16 Artwork:** Tell students to re-read Aron's story and underline the places he goes.

In groups draw the mountains and all the places that he goes to from the moment when he has the accident until the moment when he is rescued.

Stories 7–8 After reading

- 17 Movie:** Watch the scenes from the movie *Erin Brockovich* from the point Erin starts working on the case against PG&E until they win it and discuss the following with the class: *Did you expect Erin and Ed to win the case? Why (not)? What made her win the case? What do we learn from Erin?*
- 18 Write:** Students work in pairs or groups. Write on the board: *You are Kenzaburo Oe. Write about Hiroshima for your magazine. What is Hiroshima's story? Why was the bomb important for the world? What happened to the people of Hiroshima? Why is Dr. Shigeto an important man in the city? What can we learn from the story of Hiroshima and its people?*

After reading

- 19 Guess:** Put students in groups. Each student has to be one of the people in the stories in the book (Ana, Matthew, Odette, Chico, Suu, Aron, Erin and Ken). They take it in turns to describe themselves, what courageous thing they do or did, and how they feel.
- 20 Role play:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to plan a TV show on "Courageous People" with the following guests: Ana, Odette, Suu, Erin and Ken. *Where will the show take place? What will its name be? Who will be the host? How will guests be seated? Why? Think of their personalities and decide: What will they wear? What will they talk about?*
- 21 Write:** Tell students to write a short script and prepare to act out the show for the rest of the class.
- 22 Project: Presentations about courage**
Make three groups. Allocate one story to each group.
- Each group prepares a presentation about their story. The presentation should feature: a short summary of the story, a description of the main person, and some background information about the problem that each person was fighting against.
 - Each group should say why their person's work changed the world for the better. They should try to prove that their person's work made more difference than either of the other two.
 - Judges (fellow students) decide which group gives the most convincing argument.
 - The class prepares a display with their work. Invite other classes. Your students can present their work to a real audience in a meaningful situation.