

16 **MORE**
^ **Extraordinary**
African
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 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 an important point 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

When the history books are written in future generations, the historians will have to pause and say, “There lived a great people—a black people—who injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization.”

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The lives of many African 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 America what it is today. African Americans can be proud of their heritage. It is a pride all Americans should share.

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

- Langston Hughes, a poet whose poems tell the story of Black America
- Jesse Owens, an athlete who won fame at the 1936 Olympic Games
- Benjamin O. Davis Jr., a pilot who led the Tuskegee airmen in World War II
- Fanny Lou Hamer, a sharecropper who became a symbol of the voter registration drives of the 1960s
- Coretta Scott King, wife of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who became a civil rights hero in her own right
- Alex Haley, whose book *Roots* gave African Americans pride in their heritage
- Muhammad Ali, three-time heavyweight boxing champion of the world

- Faith Ringgold, an artist who is best known for her story quilts
- Alice Walker, a writer who won the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Color Purple*
- Gladys Knight, a singer who has had #1 hits in pop, gospel, and rhythm & blues
- Bernice Johnson Reagon, founder of the gospel group Sweet Honey in the Rock
- Colin Powell, a four-star general who was the first black Secretary of State
- Benjamin Carson, a pediatric neurosurgeon who has saved the lives of many very ill children
- Morgan Freeman, an actor who has played many outstanding roles
- Geoffrey Canada, CEO of the Harlem's Children Zone
- Ruth Simmons, a teacher who became the first black president of an Ivy League university

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 races. 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 African Americans who have made a difference.

—Nancy Lobb

Colin Powell

Statesman/Soldier

Colin Powell was a soldier for 35 years. He was a four-star general. He was the first African-American chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was also the first African-American U.S. Secretary of State.

Powell is a respected problem-solver. His ideas are both fair and insightful. Presidents Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush have all looked to him for advice. Powell has served his country for most of his adult life.

Colin Luther Powell was born on April 5, 1937, in New York City. His parents were from Jamaica. They had moved to New York City in the 1920s. They settled in the Harlem neighborhood. Neither had finished high school. His father was a shipping clerk. His mother was a seamstress. Colin had one older sister, Marilyn.

When Colin was three years old, the family left Harlem for the Bronx. The Bronx was a working-class New York City neighborhood. Many ethnic groups lived there. Irish, Italians, Puerto Ricans, blacks, and Polish all lived side by side. Colin learned to get along with different people.

Colin's parents taught their children to work hard. They told them, "Strive for a good education. Make something of your life."

Colin did not listen to this advice. He made little effort in school. His grades were low. He was placed in a special needs class in fifth grade. Colin's interests were playing stickball and riding his bicycle.



Colin graduated from high school in 1954. He had a C average. Still, his parents made it clear that they wanted him to go to college. So Colin went to City College of New York. Anyone who had graduated from a New York City high school could go there for a \$10 fee.

City College had an Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program. Students in ROTC received military training. They wore uniforms on campus. When they graduated, they could become U.S. Army officers.

Colin Powell signed up for ROTC in the fall of 1954. He joined the Pershing Rifles drill team. He did not plan to make the army his career. He thought he might serve just two years after college. As it turned out, Powell had found his life's work.

Powell liked ROTC. He enjoyed the physical activity. He liked the discipline and the teamwork. He worked hard in ROTC. He found that he was very good at it. Powell gained the rank of cadet colonel. This was the highest rank a cadet could earn.

In 1958, Powell graduated from college. He was at the top of his ROTC class. He became a second lieutenant in the army. He earned \$60 a week.

Powell was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, for basic training. Here he got a taste of the segregation laws of the South. Black soldiers and white soldiers had the same rights on the base. But black soldiers had to be careful when they went to town.

One day, Powell went to a restaurant in town. He ordered a hamburger. The waitress said that she couldn't serve him because he was black. She sent him to the back door of the restaurant. She could hand the hamburger out the door to him. Powell told her he wasn't that hungry.

After the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, no one could refuse service to a person based on his or her race. So, one day Powell went back to that same restaurant to get his hamburger.

In the meantime, Powell was sent to West Germany in 1959. First he was a platoon leader. Then he commanded a rifle company. By the time he returned to the United States in 1960, he was a first lieutenant.

Next, Powell was sent to Fort Devens in Massachusetts. There he met a girl named Alma Johnson. In 1962, the couple got married. They later had three children.

A few months after his marriage, Colin Powell was sent to fight in the Vietnam War. In this war, communist North Vietnam was trying to take over South Vietnam. The United States wanted to help the South Vietnamese. Powell was wounded in action twice. He received two Purple Hearts.

Powell served in Vietnam from 1962 to 1963. He then returned to the United States. He enrolled in the army's Command and General Staff College. This was at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He graduated second in a class of 1,244. Then the army sent him back to Vietnam in 1968.

By this time, there were 500,000 American troops in Vietnam. Things were going very badly in the war. The United States sent more and more high-tech weapons and equipment. More and more Americans were being killed or wounded. The war still did not end. Many Americans were angry about the war. They wanted the troops to come home. They felt as if the war was not for the Americans to fight.

In 1969, Powell's second tour in Vietnam ended. He returned to the States. The army sent him to graduate school. Colin Powell went to work on an MBA (Master of Business Administration) at George Washington University. This was in Washington, D.C. Powell said, "Good business managers are needed in the Department of Defense!"

In 1972, Powell's career got a big boost. He was one of seven people (out of 1,500 applicants) to be chosen as a White House Fellow. White House Fellows work for one year as assistants in a high level of the government. Fellows often later go on to work in high-level jobs in the government.

Powell worked as a special assistant to the deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The OMB helps the U.S. President put together the country's budget each year. It also controls how the budget is carried out.

Powell did an outstanding job at the OMB. Two important men noticed his competence. Frank Carlucci and Caspar Weinberger became his strongest supporters. They would later recommend him for higher-level jobs.

Over time, Powell rose higher in rank. In 1979, he became a brigadier general. He did many important jobs for the army. In 1989, he was promoted to four-star general. That same year he became chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).

The chairman of the JCS is the main military advisor to the President. He assists the President and the Secretary of Defense. Together they decide on military actions and strategies. He is also the leader of all active-duty and reserve members of the U.S. armed forces (3–4 million troops).

Powell has worked to solve the international conflicts involving the United States since the Vietnam War. Some of these are Panama, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Kosovo, the Middle East, and the war on terrorism.

Powell always preferred to use diplomacy rather than force. As a soldier, he knew that sometimes military force must be used. If military action was necessary, he preferred to strike with great force to resolve the situation quickly.

On August 2, 1990, the army of Iraq invaded Kuwait. The President of Iraq was Saddam Hussein. He wanted to control Kuwait's oil fields. Powell advised President George H. W. Bush to act quickly. Powell made plans for Operation Desert Storm. He organized a buildup of troops, planes, tanks, and ships in the Middle East. Eighteen countries joined in the effort. Powell said, "My job is to make sure that if it is necessary to go to war, we go to war to win." At the same time, he tried to resolve the problem peacefully.

The United Nations Security Council gave Hussein a deadline of January 15, 1991, to remove his troops from Kuwait. Hussein did not withdraw his troops. An air attack on Iraq began 24 hours later. By February 23, Iraq had suffered major losses. Then the U.S.-led ground troops went in and continued the fight. Hussein agreed to withdraw from Kuwait.

The victory in Desert Storm was quick and decisive. Few American lives were lost. Colin Powell and the U.S. military were national heroes. Many people began to talk about Colin Powell as the next U.S. President. Powell said he had no interest in running for office.

In 1993, Powell retired as chairman of the JCS. He took two years to write his autobiography, *My American Journey*. He toured the country signing his book. Powell became more popular than ever. Again, he was mentioned as a presidential candidate.

Whenever he could, Powell made room in his schedule to visit schools. He told black students, “Don’t let being black be an excuse. . . . If you work hard . . . success will come your way. I remember the feeling that you can’t make it. But you can.” He used himself as an example. He called himself “a black kid of no early promise and limited means.”

Powell became the chairman of America’s Promise—The Alliance for Youth. The group works to get adults involved in the lives of America’s young people. It is based on five supports that Powell feels young people need to succeed in life. They need caring adults and safe places. They need a healthy start and a good education. They need chances to help others. Powell’s wife, Alma, is also involved in America’s Promise. She wrote a children’s book called *America’s Promise* that was published in 2003.

On December 16, 2000, President George W. Bush chose Colin Powell as his Secretary of State. Powell was sworn into office in on January 20, 2001. In this job, Powell was the President’s chief foreign-affairs advisor. The first test Powell faced was the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Powell organized leaders from around the world. They joined together to fight terrorism. This international battle still continues.

In February 2003, President George W. Bush asked Colin Powell to address the United Nations. He hoped to win the support of other countries to deal with difficulties rising in Iraq. It was a historic presentation.

In 2004, Powell retired. He said, “In one generation we have moved from denying a black man service at a lunch counter to elevating one to the highest military office in the nation and to being a serious contender for the presidency. This is a magnificent country, and I am proud to be one of its sons.”

Remembering the Facts

1. Name two jobs that Colin Powell was the first black to hold.
2. Why did Colin Powell like ROTC?
3. What is a White House Fellow?
4. What is the job of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?
5. What was Operation Desert Storm?
6. What is America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth?
7. What is the job of the U.S. Secretary of State?
8. What problem did Powell encounter during basic training when he tried to buy a hamburger off base?

Understanding the Story

9. Why do you think the army sent Colin Powell to graduate school?

10. Why do you think Powell preferred to use diplomacy rather than force?

Getting the Main Idea

In what ways do you think Colin Powell is a good role model for young Americans?

Applying What You've Learned

Do you think a military leader would make a good U.S. president? Write a paragraph explaining your opinion.