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16 **Extraordinary** American Entrepreneurs

Second Edition

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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

The 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 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.

To the Student

The lives of many American entrepreneurs have made a difference in the story of America. These are men and women of vision. They have seen opportunity where others saw none. They have kept going when others gave up. They have created new products and new ways of doing things. They have made the American dream come true.

In this book, you will read the stories of 16 of these people:

- Frederic Tudor, the man who harvested ice from the frozen ponds in the North and shipped it around the world
- Biddy Mason, a former slave who became a wealthy landowner and philanthropist in Los Angeles
- Andrew Carnegie, who built one of the world's greatest steel companies and then spent the rest of his life giving his fortune away
- Montgomery Ward, who created the first large-scale mail order business
- Henry Ford, champion of assembly line production, who drove his Model T into the hearts of Americans
- Madam C.J. Walker, America's first female African-American millionaire, who helped to bring pride and self-determination to black women
- Mary Kay Ash, who created a huge cosmetics empire with a part-time female sales force
- John H. Johnson, owner of a vast media empire, including *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines and Black Entertainment Television
- Doris Christopher, who started The Pampered Chef as a way to bring families closer together

- Fred Smith, who created Federal Express, a firm that guarantees the delivery of packages overnight
- Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, ice-cream makers who use their business as a tool for social change
- Oprah Winfrey, a TV talk-show host who is among the world's richest entertainers.
- Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft and one of the richest men in the world
- Debbi Fields, who started Mrs. Fields Cookies and turned it into an empire
- Jerry Yang, co-founder of Yahoo!, one of the most popular search engines used on the Internet
- Julie Aigner-Clark, a mother and former teacher who created The Baby Einstein Company

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 people from many races. These people have come together to form one nation. Each group has been an important part of American history. I hope you will enjoy reading about 16 American entrepreneurs who have made a difference.

—Nancy Lobb

Doris Christopher

Founder of The Pampered Chef

It was a rainy October afternoon in 1980 in River Forest, Illinois. Doris Christopher was driving to a friend's house. The car was crammed with six large boxes of kitchenware. Doris was planning to demonstrate, and hopefully sell, these products.

Doris was nervous. But she had to go through with it. Her friend had invited a group of people to her house to see what Doris had to offer. Doris had no choice but to show up!

Doris unloaded her boxes in the rain. A group of 15 women was waiting there. Doris arranged her products as best she could. Then she began her presentation. She talked about the items and showed the women how to prepare some foods using them. Everyone paid close attention. They asked questions. And they wanted Doris to pass the items around so they could see them.

By the end of the evening, Doris had sold \$175 worth of products. Better yet, four of the women had asked her to present her products in their homes. From that day forward, her business took off.

Today, Doris Christopher's company is known as The Pampered Chef®. She has a sales force of 60,000 Kitchen Consultants (salespersons). More than 1,000,000 Cooking Shows are held each year.

Doris Kelley was born in 1945 in Oak Lawn, Illinois. Her father, Ted Kelley, owned and operated a service station. Ted Kelley pumped gas and repaired cars. He was proud that he was his own boss! Doris's mother worked as a typist in the claims department of an insurance company.



In the Kelley family, the highlight of the week was Sunday dinner. Mrs. Kelley was a great cook. She spent hours making dinner. The family gathered around the table. They enjoyed the food and good conversation. This was one of Doris's most pleasant memories from her childhood.

Doris took her first home economics classes in high school. In college, she majored in home economics at the University of Illinois.

She married her high-school sweetheart, Jay Christopher, after they graduated from college. Doris got a job teaching home economics to high-school students. The next year, the family moved. Doris found a new job. She taught nutrition, cooking, and home decorating to adults. She did this for six years. When her first child was born in 1972, she became a full-time mom. A second child was born three years later.

When her two girls were old enough for school, Doris wanted a part-time job. But Doris wanted her job to be flexible. If the girls were home from school or had activities, she wanted to be there.

Doris decided that the best way to have flexibility was to start her own business. She thought about selling practical, high-quality kitchen tools. She would not do this in a store. She would go to women's homes. She would teach them how to use the tools properly. Her idea would use her love of cooking, her home-economics training, and her love of teaching.

The "Cooking Show" would form the center of Doris's business. It would be an evening of entertainment, refreshments, and friends. Doris would demonstrate her high-quality, affordable kitchen tools. Those attending the show would learn recipes and cooking tips. They would learn ways to make preparing a family meal easier.

Doris wanted to do more than sell kitchen tools. She felt it was important for families to share meals. She hoped to bring families closer by encouraging them to eat together. In this way, she could make a difference in people's lives.

Before Doris could begin doing Cooking Shows, she needed something to sell! The Christophers borrowed \$3,000 on Jay's life

insurance policy. Doris headed to the Merchandise Mart in downtown Chicago to shop.

The Merchandise Mart was a huge wholesale center. It was 25 stories high. It filled two city blocks. It was the world's largest trade center. In August 1980, Doris arrived at the Mart. She spent all day browsing. She found dish towels on the 15th floor. She found cutting boards on the 10th floor.

Finally, Doris decided on a small selection of items. She and her husband built shelves in their basement. They organized her inventory neatly.

On October 15, 1980, Doris did her first Cooking Show. By the end of that year, Doris had done 18 shows. She sold \$6,689 worth of kitchen tools, averaging \$372 per show. It was a great start!

Doris took only the tools she was showing to each event. The rest of her items were stored in her basement. On Saturday mornings, the family delivered the items that had been sold in that week's shows. As the business grew, this became too time consuming. Later, when they could afford it, Doris began shipping the products.

Operating a home-based business took a lot more time than Doris thought. She had to keep her priorities in order. This meant family first, work second. She gave up her leisure activities. She gave up sleep. She cut out her volunteer work. But she never gave up activities that involved her family.

In May 1981, Doris added a second Kitchen Consultant. This worked out well. In the next six months, her sales force grew to ten. By the next year, she had 25 Kitchen Consultants and revenues of \$100,000. By the end of 1984, the company had revenues of \$499,000.

Things were getting tight at the Christopher home. Their basement held the inventory, three desks, and filing cabinets. The living room was stacked to the ceiling with boxes. The garage was full, too.

In 1984, Doris discovered a vacant 2,500-foot building only two miles from their home. The two-story building had an apartment upstairs. Renting out the apartment brought in money. They used the money to pay the mortgage. The building seemed huge. There was room for all the inventory as well as office space. Doris thought the business would never have to move again. But she was wrong. In 1989, she had to buy the building next door to house all her inventory.

Doris continued to improve her product line. She was always on the lookout for new products. Each product had to meet her strict criteria. It had to be high quality and easy to use. And it had to sell well. By the end of 1985, the product line had 162 items.

In 1980, The Pampered Chef listed its entire product line on one sheet of paper. Today, there is a whole catalog of products. This way, the Kitchen Consultant can demonstrate just a few of the products. The customer can see what else is available by looking in the catalog.

Today, The Pampered Chef operates in all 50 states. It is also represented in Canada, Great Britain, and Germany. Over 60,000 Kitchen Consultants meet with about 12 million customers a year.

Doris came up with a system for paying her consultants. A new Kitchen Consultant buys a starter kit for \$155. It contains more than \$500 worth of products. It includes everything needed for a successful Cooking Show. At first, Kitchen Consultants get to keep 20% on their own sales. Those who recruit other Consultants get a higher percentage. Some Kitchen Consultants make over \$100,000 a year!

In 1985, The Pampered Chef held its first national conference. Thirty-two people attended the one-day workshop. Today, there are so many Kitchen Consultants that three conferences are held. About 4,000 people attend each of these conferences.

Doris has strong feelings about giving back to the community. The Pampered Chef supports three major causes. All three are related to women and family.

To help all families put food on the table, The Pampered Chef supports America's Second Harvest[®]. This is a huge network of food banks. The Pampered Chef sponsors a program at the University of Illinois called the Family Resiliency Program. It works to help families become stronger and more resilient in the face of challenges. The Pampered Chef also created a program called Help Whip Cancer[®]. This program provides money for education about breast cancer.

Another program is called Round Up from the Heart[®]. Consultants ask their customers to round up their purchase to the next dollar. For example, if the purchase were \$15.49, the customer would pay \$16. The extra \$.51 would go to America's Second Harvest.

In 2002, Doris began thinking about retirement. She wanted to make sure that the business would continue. In October of that year, she sold the company to Warren Buffett of Berkshire Hathaway.

Buffett said, "At Berkshire Hathaway, we like companies that are easy to understand. Doris Christopher's 'keep it simple' approach has a lot to teach anyone who is reaching for the American Dream. I would challenge anyone on Wall Street to take \$3,000 and do what Doris Christopher has done: build a business from scratch into a world-class organization."

Remembering the Facts

1. What did Doris major in at the University of Illinois?
2. After she became a mother, why did Doris decide that starting her own business was the best way for her to earn extra money?
3. What would people who attended a Cooking Show get out of the experience?
4. How did Doris hope that her business would help bring families together?
5. Where did Doris buy her kitchen tools?
6. How is a Kitchen Consultant paid?
7. Name a charity supported by The Pampered Chef.
8. Why did Doris sell her business to Berkshire Hathaway in 2002?

Understanding the Story

9. Why do you think that being a Kitchen Consultant could work well for a mother with small children?

10. Why do you think Doris was so successful with her business?

Getting the Main Idea

Why do you think Doris Christopher is a good role model for someone who wants to start a business?

Applying What You've Learned

Make a list of the ten tools in your kitchen, which you use the most often. (Do not include silverware.) Compare your list with those of your classmates.