

# AMERICAN HEROES

Biography Writing

3<sup>RD</sup>  
Grade



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# What Makes A Hero?

**Compassion** – Understanding what others are going through.

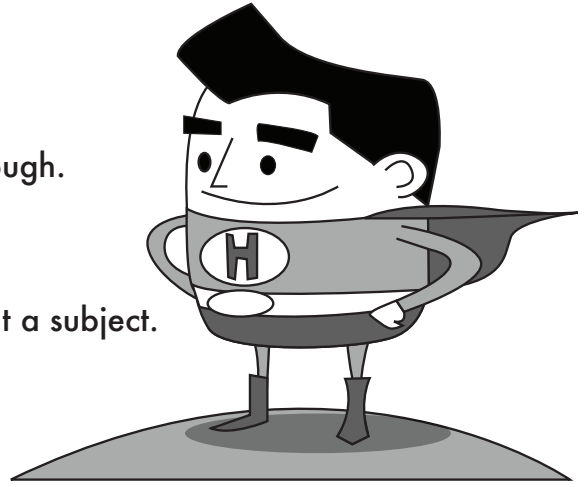
**Bravery** – Being brave.

**Determination** – Working hard to meet a goal.

**Talent** – Being really good at something.

**Intelligence** – Being able to think clearly and learn about a subject.

**Leadership** – Being good at helping groups of people.



**Name the qualities that each hero below showed.**

Clara Barton cared for sick and injured soldiers on the Civil War battlefield.

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Jackie Robinson was the first African-American baseball star. He became a player at a time when African-Americans were not allowed to play in the major leagues.

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Jane Addams opened a home for immigrants. At her home, they could learn English and learn skills to help them find jobs.

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George Washington was our first president. People wanted him to be president. He had been a great leader in the American Revolution.

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**Can you think of any other words that would describe a hero?**

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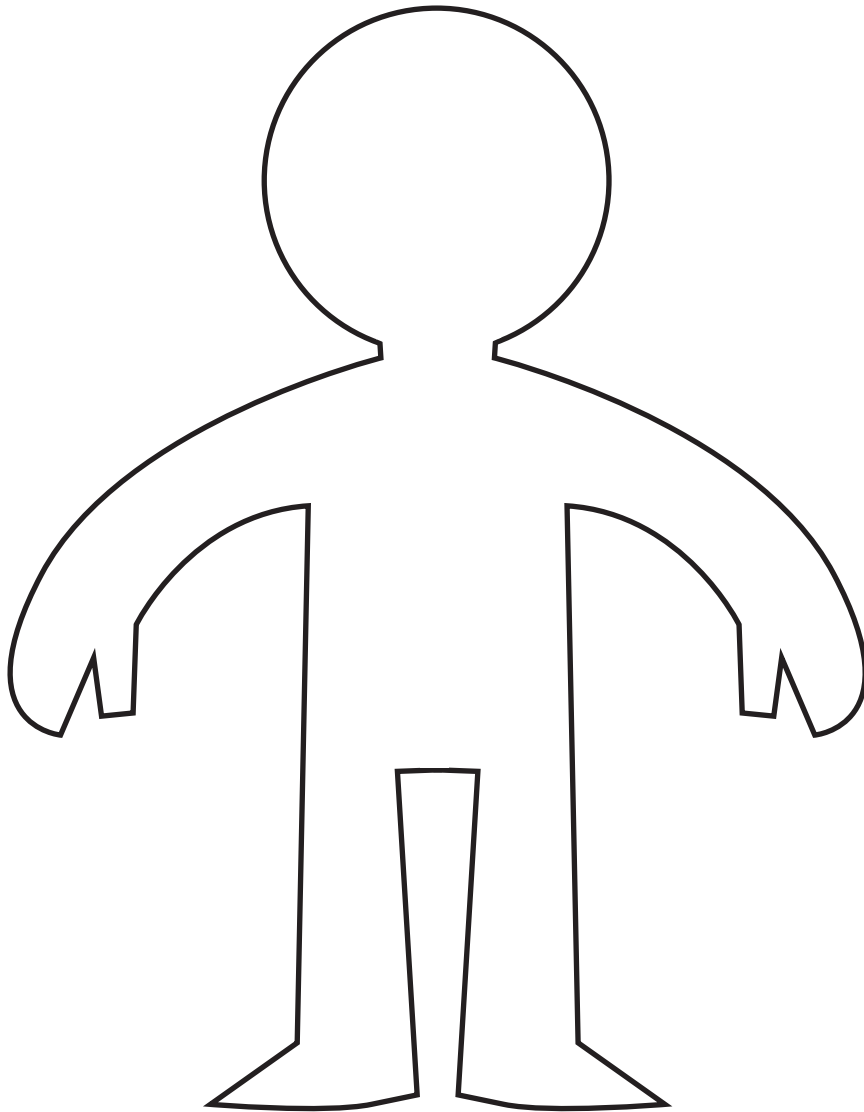
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# Superhero Powers

Instead of the ability to fly and leap over tall buildings, real-life heroes use their brains and bravery to make a difference. Fill in this outline with the qualities you think make up an American hero.

Use this outline to draw what you think a hero looks like before circling the adjectives in the box you believe best describes a hero.



## Pick the Heroic Adjectives

**Brave**  
**Bored**  
**Selfless**  
**Caring**  
**Scared**  
**Rich**  
**Courageous**  
**Reliable**  
**Proud**  
**Happy**  
**Determined**  
**Fearless**

Write a few sentences using your new hero vocabulary to describe the hero you know.

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# Sally Ride

Sally Ride was born on May 26th, 1951. Her parents were named Dale and Carol. Their middle names were Burdell and Joyce. Her mother's maiden name was Anderson. She had a sister named Karen, who some people called "Bear." Her family was **Presbyterian**. She was born in Encino, California.

She went to Portola Junior high and then Westlake School for Girls in Los Angeles. In High school, she was interested in science and also a great tennis player! After High school, she went to college at Swarthmore College and took science classes at UCLA. Some time later, she went to Stanford University and got her degree in both English and **Physics**.

In 1977, Sally saw an ad in a newspaper. It said that **NASA** was looking for people to work for them. She applied and was chosen over 1,000 other people! She was the **capsule communicator** for the 2nd and 3rd flights of the Space Shuttle and built parts of the shuttle. On June 18th, 1983, Sally flew into space on the Challenger. She was not the first woman to fly into space, but the first American woman.

However, many Americans had never heard of a female astronaut before. Some people thought she might not be a good astronaut because she was a woman. People sometimes asked her questions that she thought were silly – if she cried on the job, or if she might give up on her dream of flying into space and become a mother instead. Instead of getting mad, she always answered these questions with a smile – and sometimes a joke.

She completed two **missions** into space. After leaving NASA, she became a science teacher at UC San Diego, the director of the California Space Institute, and started a company that holds science classes and camps for girls. She also wrote science books for kids.

## VOCABULARY:

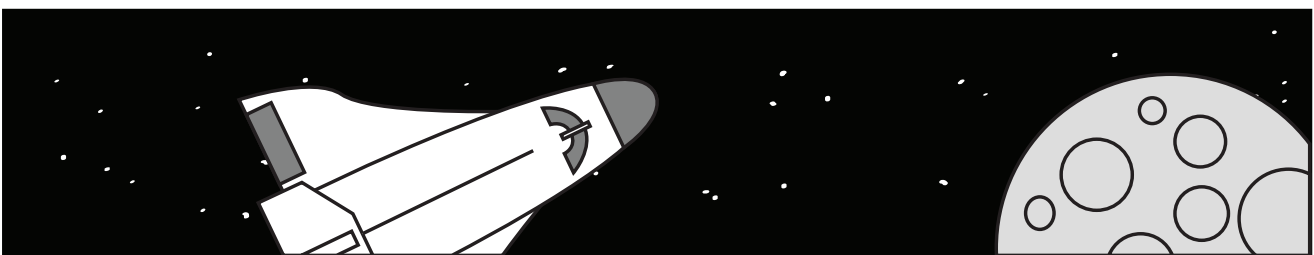
**Presbyterian** (prez-bit-tear-ee-an): A kind of religion or a person who is part of the Presbyterian church.

**Physics**(fizz-icks): A kind of science that deals with energy, motion and force.

**NASA** (nas-suh): The part of the government that explores space and planetary science.

**Capsule Communicator** (cap-sool com-mew-nick-Kate-or): The person on Earth who speaks to astronauts in space.

**Mission** (mish-shun): A task. At NASA, every flight to space is called a "mission."



**Read the story on the previous page. What part did you like the best?**

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**What part did you like the least?**

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**Is there any information you think should be left out of the story?**

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**Fill in what happened in Sally Ride's life between each of the events listed.**

Sally Ride was born on May 26th, 1951.

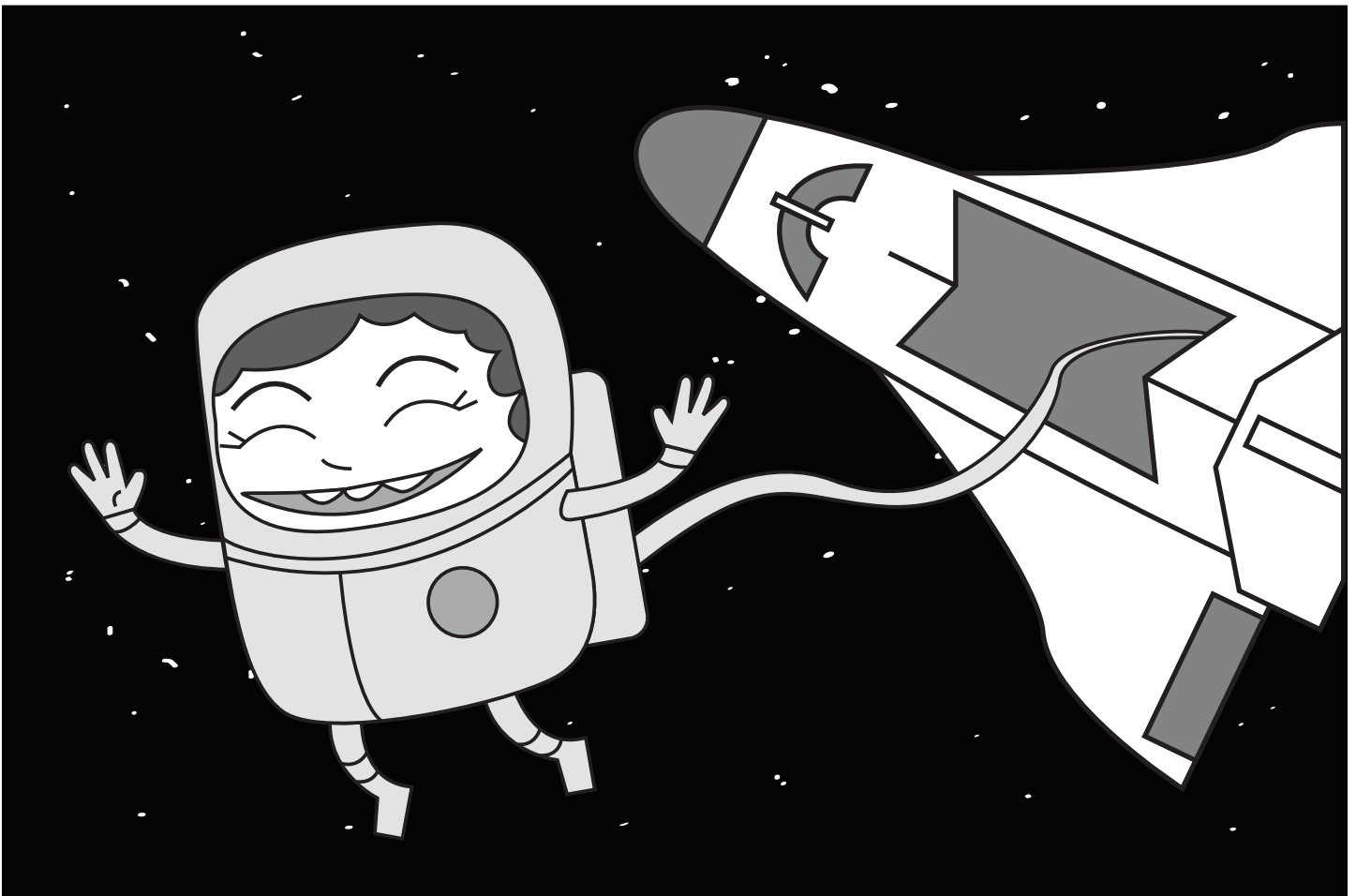
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She saw a newspaper ad seeking workers for NASA.

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She became a science teacher and started a company that helps girls take an interest in science.

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# Standing on the Shoulder of Giants

Would you like to stand on the shoulders of a giant? The expression is a popular phrase used to describe the way some people owe some of their success to heroes who came before them. When you "stand on a giant" you are building upon the work of others.

Study these fast facts about Amelia Earhart and Sally Ride.

**Name:** Amelia Earhart

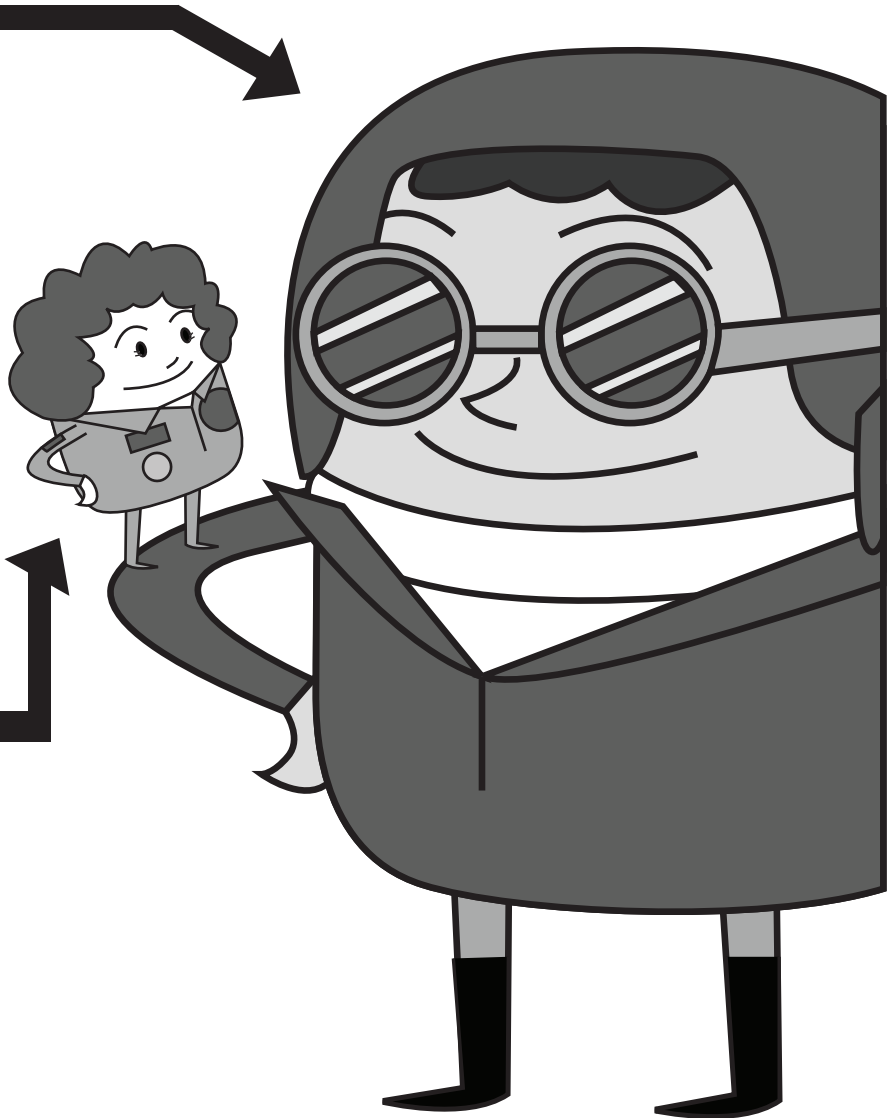
**Claim to Fame:** First woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean

**Brief Bio:** In 1928, Amelia Earhart agreed to fly across the Atlantic Ocean with pilot Wilmer Stultz. However, Earhart wasn't satisfied with playing co-pilot. Defying the society's long-held belief that only men should be at the controls, Earhart made history by flying solo across the Atlantic in 1932. Throughout her career, she showed the importance of women working alongside men.

**Name:** Sally Ride

**Claim to Fame:** First woman in space

**Brief Bio:** Sally Ride joined the NASA space program in 1978 and quickly found her calling. Despite finding acceptance within NASA, she was often questioned for being a woman trying to do a man's job. She silenced her critics in 1983 by becoming the first woman to enter space.



What did Amelia Earhart do that made her a "giant"?

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How did Sally Ride benefit from Amelia Earhart's accomplishments?

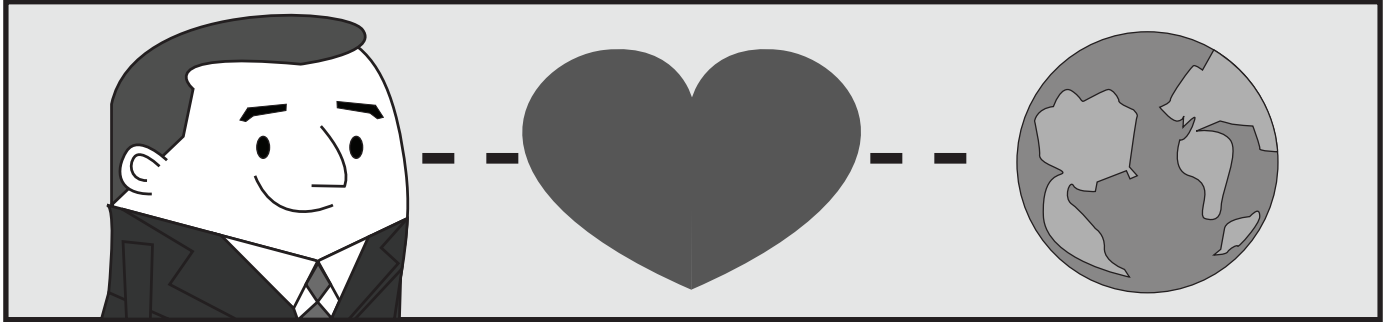
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Think about what great things you want to do in your life. Can you name some famous giants whom you might want to follow?

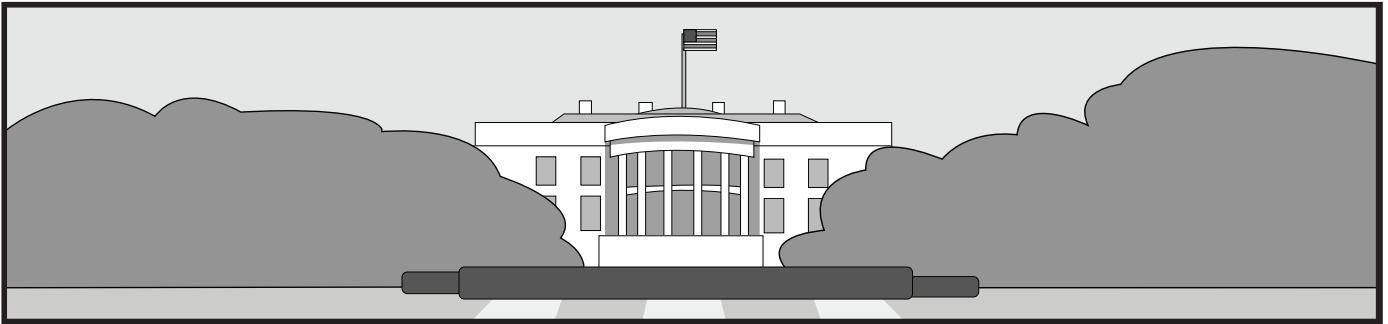
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# Past and Present Heroes: Al Gore

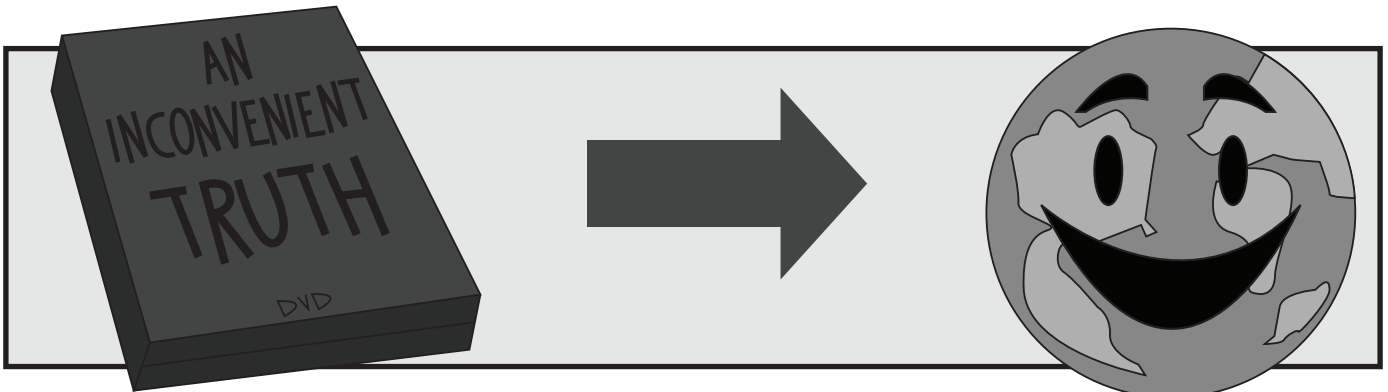
Al Gore was born on March 31, 1948 in Washington, D.C. Since he had a senator for a father and a lawyer as a mother, it wasn't surprising when he became a politician. He attended Harvard College and studied government. Along the way, however, he became interested the environment after taking a class on ocean science.



At age 28, he became the U.S. Representative for his home state of Tennessee. Then in 1992, he was Vice President under Bill Clinton. Throughout his time in Congress and the White House, he continued his work on conserving the environment and stopping global warming.

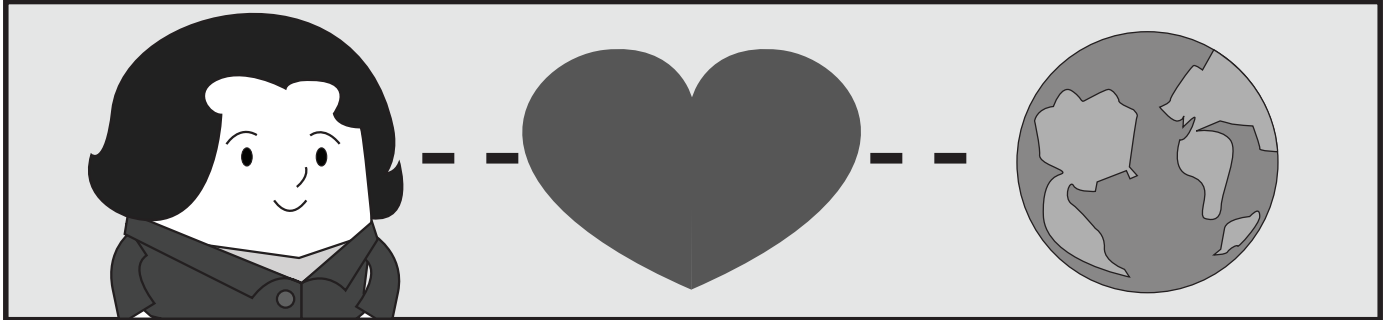


Gore's passion for the environment showed when he wrote and starred in the 2006 documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. The film showed Gore's fight to tell the world about global warming and humans' negative effect on our planet. While there were many people who didn't like the film and denied Gore's claims, the documentary was a huge success. On top of making money and receiving an Academy Award nomination, *An Inconvenient Truth* brought global warming to the attention of the American people. In 2007, Gore was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to raise awareness about man-made climate change. Today, he continues to speak about environmental activism and is the founder of the Alliance for Climate Protection.

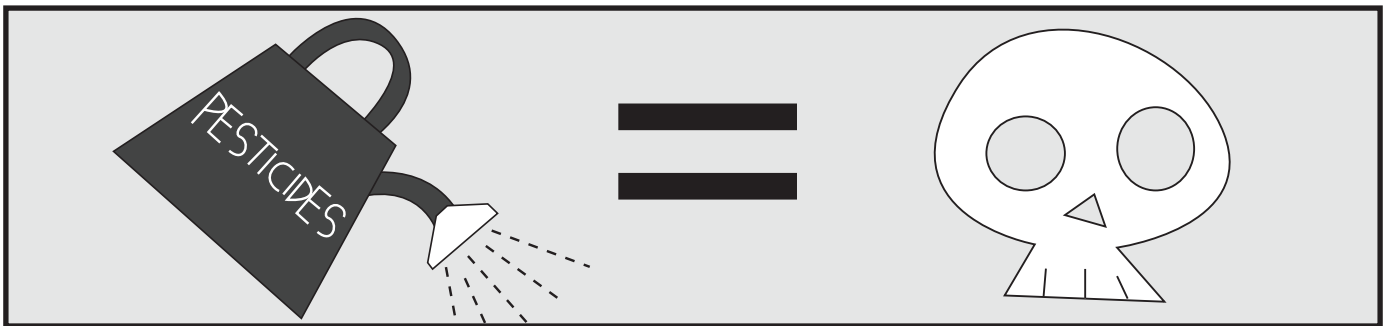


# Past and Present Heroes: Rachel Carson

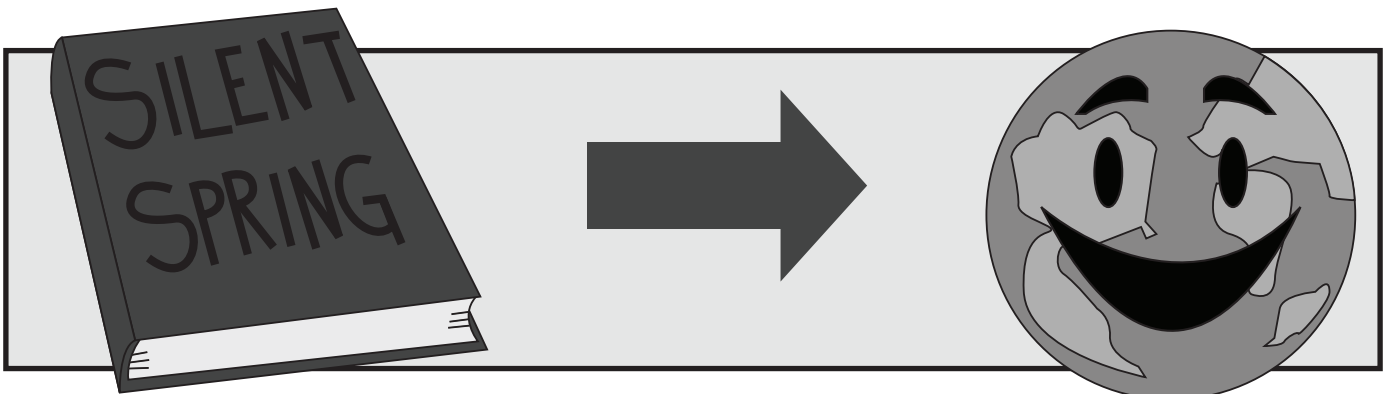
Rachel Carson was born on May 27, 1907 in the very small town of Springdale, Pennsylvania. She developed her love of nature on her family's farm. When she wasn't reading stories, she spent her childhood summers exploring fields and playing with animals. As she grew older, her love for the great outdoors turned into a love for science. She graduated from Pennsylvania College for Women with a degree in biology in 1929.



While working as an ocean biologist, Carson quickly discovered something scary about the natural world she loved so much: Earth's environment was in trouble. Due to human acts, like pesticide spraying that was used to get rid of bugs on plants, our environment was suffering negative consequences. To let people know about the danger, she wrote *Silent Spring*, a book that detailed the negative side effects of pesticides and the sickness it caused in humans and animals. Carson knew her book would make her a lot of enemies – people did not want to hear that they needed to change – but she believed in her cause and published the book anyway.



Before *Silent Spring*, the environmental movement did not really exist. The public did not know about the effects our own products could have on plants, animals and ourselves. Carson is credited as kick-starting the movement, showing how important it is to take care of our planet.

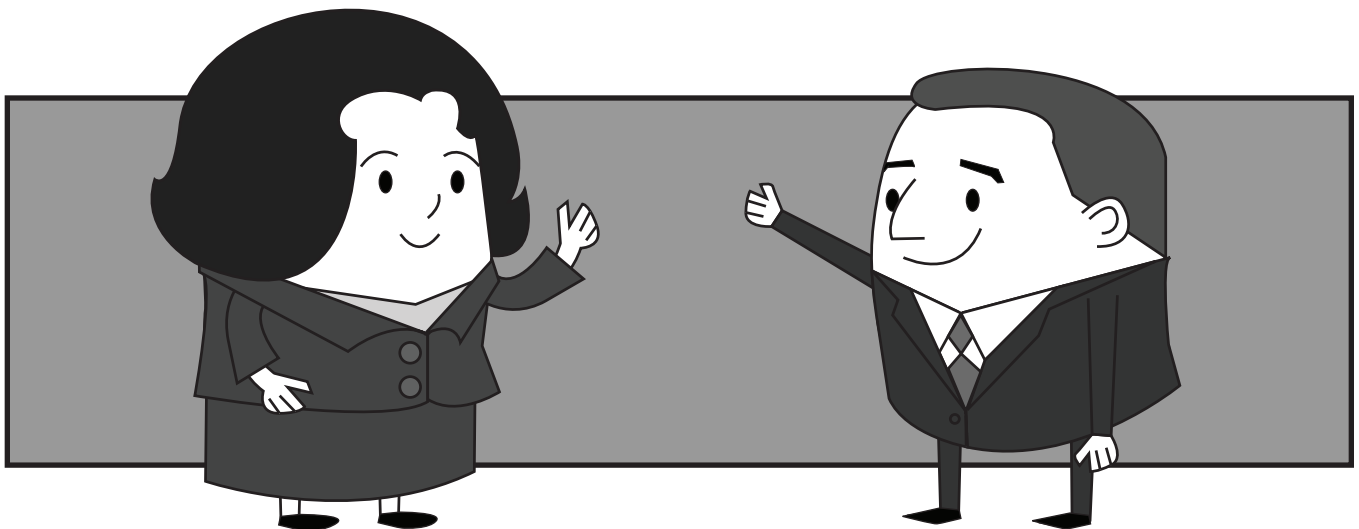
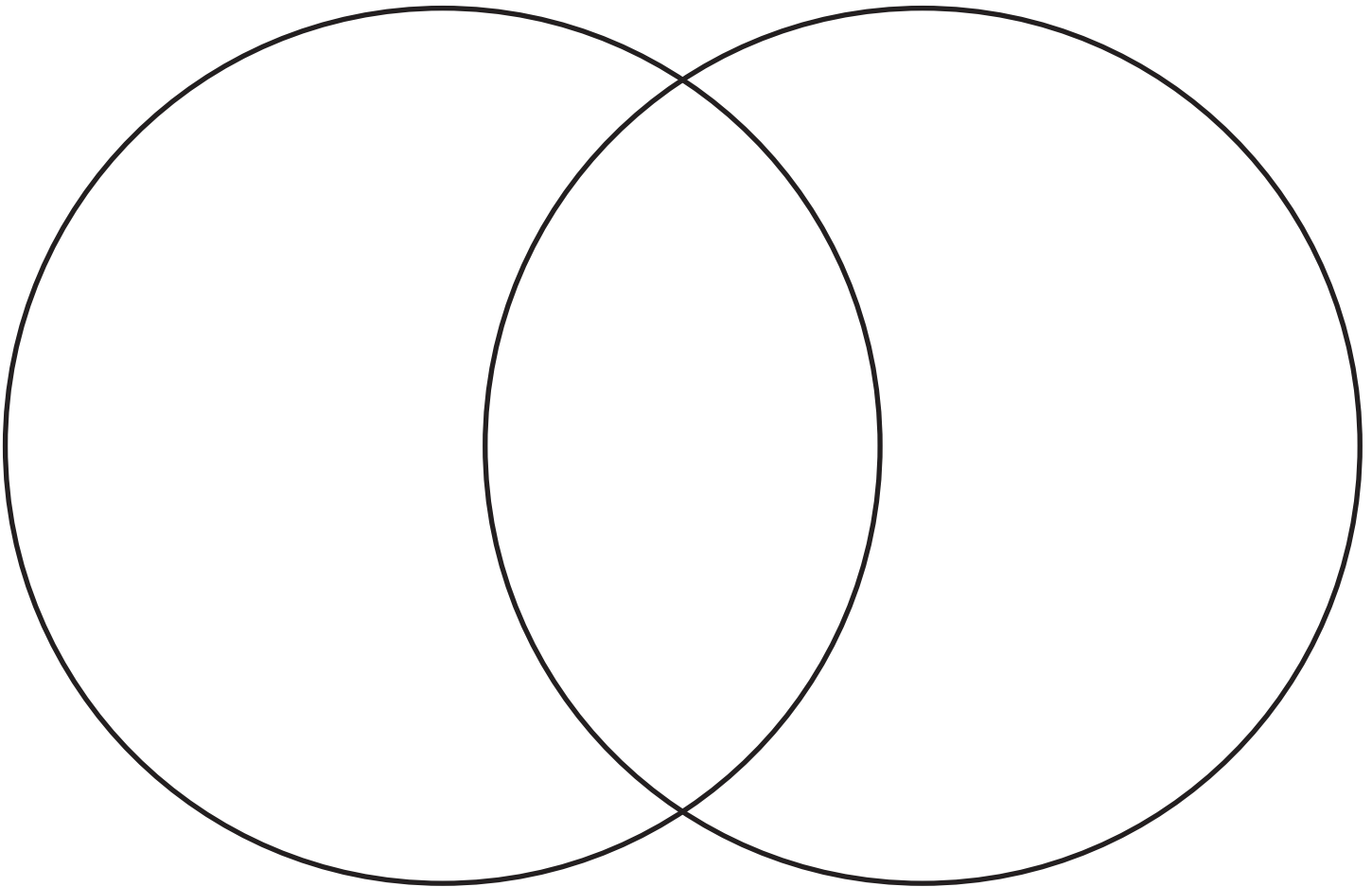


# Past and Present Heroes: Venn Diagram

Even though Rachel Carson was making a name for herself while Al Gore was still a toddler, these two American heroes have a lot in common. Use this Venn diagram to take a closer look their similarities – as well as their differences.

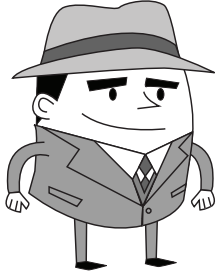
**Rachel Carson**

**Al Gore**



# Unsung Heroes

**Not every hero gets a story or movie made about his life. Some of them live their brave lives under the radar. Read the following stories and see if you can figure out what makes these unknown men and women so heroic.**



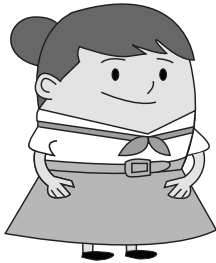
I was terrified, okay? No sudden burst of courage or anything like that. I could hear this woman, a mom, crying out. Her kids were still inside. I just felt like I didn't have a choice. It had nothing to do with me being brave. I just saved the kids because ... well, because it was the right thing to do.

Do you think this man considers himself a hero?

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Does being afraid make a person any less of a hero?

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I was a little mad, I'll admit. I was born in this country and I've been to school - how could someone say that because I'm a woman I don't get to vote? So I stood up. It was just a small town meeting, but I had say what was on my mind. I told them, the whole town, that not letting women vote was wrong and that I didn't like it.

Do you think this woman considers herself a hero?

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When is standing up to others okay? When is it heroic?

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**Create your own unsung hero. What could he or she have done that was heroic? Draw a picture of your hero.**

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# Harriet Tubman

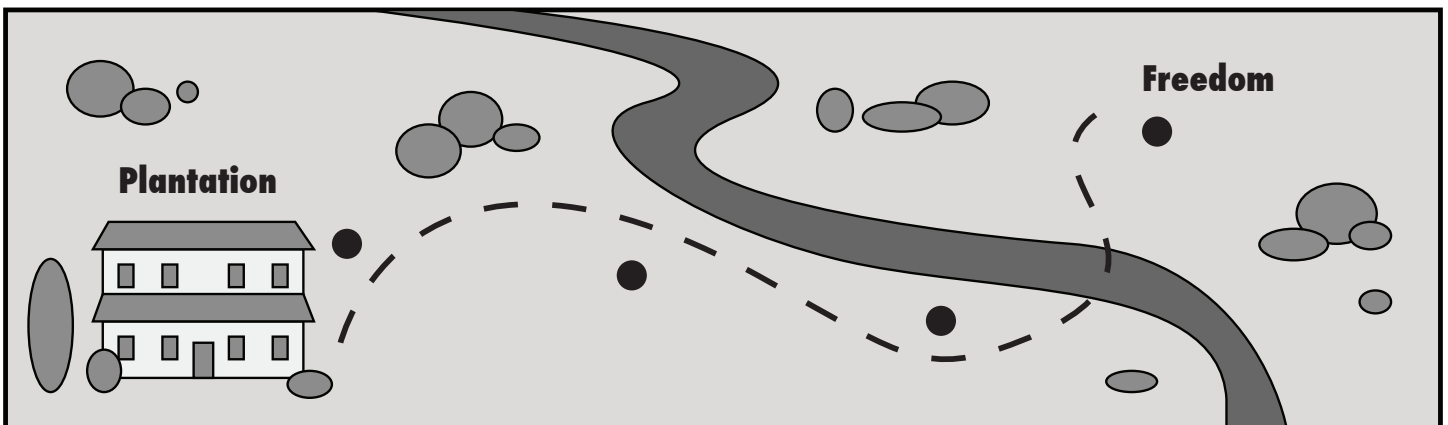
Harriet Tubman was born as a slave on a plantation in Maryland around 1820. No one, not even Harriet, knew what day she was born – slave families often weren't allowed to celebrate birthdays. She worked in her owner's house and in their fields for her entire childhood.

When she was older, she married a man named John Tubman. A few years later, she heard news that the slaves on the plantation she lived on were going to be sold. She did not want to go to another owner, so she decided to run away. Running away was dangerous for slaves in the 1800s. If found, their owners would often hurt them and punish them.

Once she escaped, she met a friendly woman who helped her hide. At night, she went North, toward states where slaves could be free. She made it all the way to Philadelphia, where she was able to find work. Once she had saved up some money, she went back to Maryland to help her family and friends escape, too. Pretty soon, she was taking slaves of all kinds through the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was a network of houses owned by people who did not agree with slavery and had promised to hide slaves and keep them safe as they tried to escape north. Slaves traveling on the railroad hid during the day and traveled to the next house at night, until they reached a free state.



By 1860, she had made 19 trips from the South to the North and had helped over 70 slaves and their families escape slavery. Soon afterward, she worked for the Union army as a cook, a nurse and even a spy. When the war was over, she spoke about injustice toward African-Americans and opened a home for elderly people. She cared for others her entire life.



# Following a Hero's Trail

Not every hero has an easy beginning. Harriet Tubman started out her life as a slave. When she finally got the chance to escape, however, she decided mere freedom was not enough. She chose to repeatedly return to the land where she was enslaved to guide her relatives, friends and eventually even strangers to safety. This decision was a dangerous one: she knew that if slave owners ever caught her, she would likely be killed.

After reading Harriet Tubman's biography, fill in the spaces below as if you are a passenger on her Underground Railroad. Pretend each box is a house you have stopped at. How do you feel as the journey goes on? Are you excited or scared?

**Journal Page 1**

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**Journal Page 2**

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**Journal Page 3**

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**Journal Page 4**

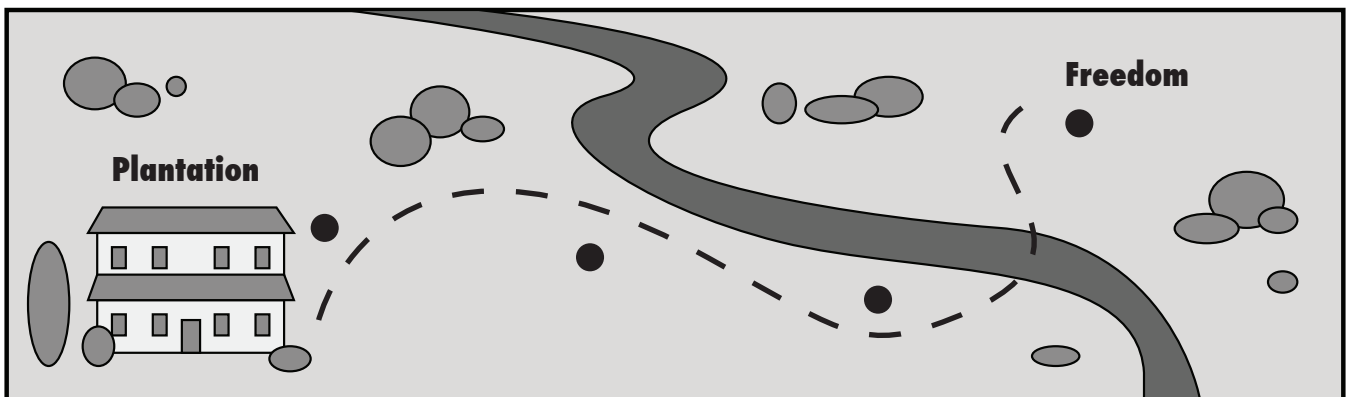
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# Stars – They're Just Like Us!

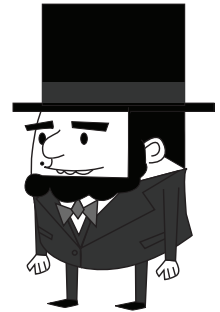
It's easy to think that heroes are better – or at least different – from the rest of us. After all, we admire these men and women for having super-human courage, bravery and determination. Think about it: when a hero goes home, does he make himself a sandwich in a way that is more heroic than anyone else? Can he brush his teeth more heroically? Of course not! When you get down to it, heroes are just like us.

Not everybody knows this. Help out this starstruck reporter as he interviews some familiar faces.



Abraham Lincoln, is it true you were born to billionaires and lived in a gigantic mansion as a kid?

Well, actually, I was born in a one-room log cabin. My family was pretty poor.



Why would people think Lincoln is rich? Does being rich or poor decide whether you can be a hero or not?

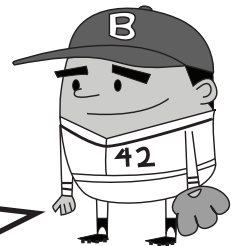
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Jackie Robinson, do you possess superpowers that allow you to play baseball so well?

No, I wouldn't say that at all. I practiced a lot. In college, I tried to stay active by playing other sports – not just baseball. I liked track, basketball and football too.



Why would people assume Jackie Robinson had superpowers? Can you be a hero without having extraordinary talent?

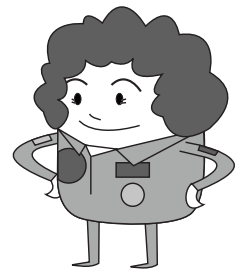
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Sally Ride, do you look up to anybody? As the first American woman to go into space, maybe you're just your own hero.

Not at all. As a kid, I loved Superman. I looked up to him and wanted to be just like him. I think it's important for people to have heroes.



Why do you think it's important to have heroes? Who is your hero?

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# Jackie Robinson

**Biographies don't have to be boring! Adding details can spice up a life story.**

This biography of Jackie Robinson is missing some sentences. Read it all the way through, then cut out the missing details on the next page and place them into the part of the story where you think they fit best.

Jackie Robinson was born on January 31st, 1919 in Cairo, Georgia, then moved with his family to California.

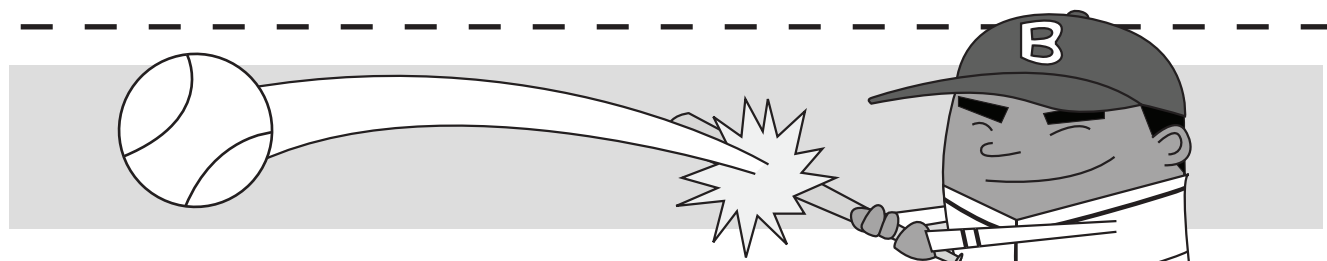
In high school, he joined his school sports teams.

He went to college, then joined the military in 1942.

After leaving the military, he went back to college. While he was there, the Kansas City Monarchs asked him to play for them. The Monarchs were a team in the Negro Leagues, a league that was set aside just for African-Americans.

He played one season with them when Brooklyn Dodgers manager Branch Rickey asked him to join his team.

Jackie's first day as a Dodger was April 15th, 1947.



As time went on, fans could see Jackie wasn't your ordinary ball player.

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The 1947 Dodgers became league champions.

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Soon, more and more African-American players began joining major league teams. Many of them went on to become stars. Jackie began to use his celebrity for good: he started speaking out against injustice and racism. He wrote a book about his life so that people could understand how hard it was to be judged by the color of your skin.

Jackie's baseball career lasted ten years. In the time he played, the Dodgers were unstoppable: they won six pennants and a World Series. In 1956, the Dodgers moved to California, and they planned to send Jackie to the New York Giants.

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He retired from the sport.

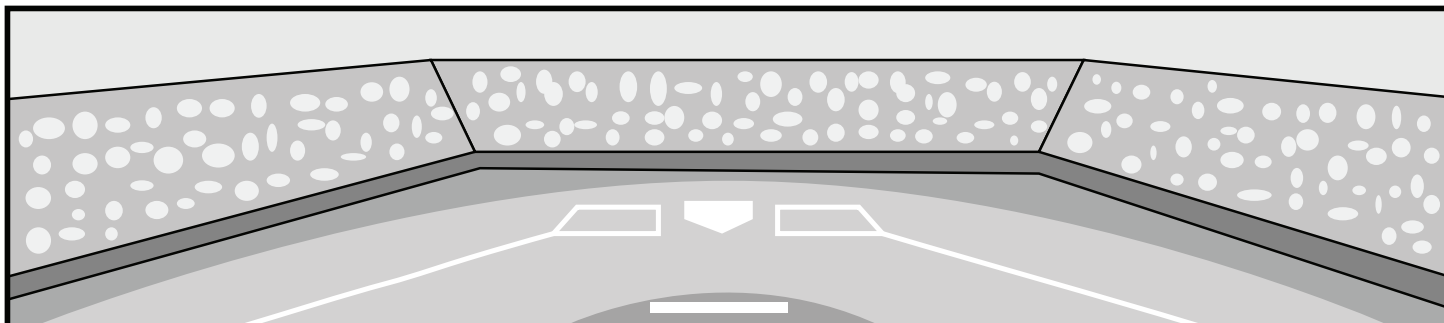
After leaving baseball, he worked in business, wrote a newspaper column, and started a bank. In 1962 he joined the Baseball Hall of Fame. By then, the civil rights movement was in full swing. Many African-Americans were speaking out about unfair laws that existed in many parts of the country. Jackie joined the fight. He and his family went to the March on Washington, and were there in the crowd to hear Martin Luther King give his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

Jackie Robinson died in 1972.

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The End



There had not been an African-American player on a major league team since 1889. Branch wanted to change that. He wanted to find a player that was not only a great athlete, but had a strong and courageous character. He knew that, in the face of racism, Jackie would stay calm and focused. Jackie agreed to join the team.

Growing up, Jackie felt like he didn't fit in. He and his friends were often looked down upon because of the color of their skin.

Jackie played football, basketball, and baseball, and also ran track. In almost every sport he played, he won awards for his talent.

He was a respected officer, but he experienced discrimination because of his race.

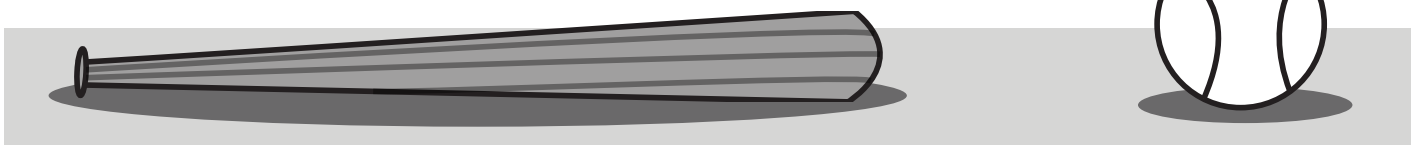
Thousands of people watched his funeral. Jackie Robinson was not only a hero to baseball fans, but a hero to everyone who felt mistreated. His courage, his talent and his determination to make the world a better place still inspires people to this day.

He loved playing baseball, but life as an African-American ball player was hard - many cities would not let him sleep in hotels or eat at restaurants.

He was nervous! He was worried that baseball fans would be angry at him or even try to hurt him. Fans and other players called him names, and some of his other teammates asked him to leave the team simply because he was African-American. Sometimes he wanted to quit, but he knew wasn't just playing that day for himself or even for the Dodgers - he was playing for freedom. When he needed courage, he thought of his grandmother, who had been a slave. He thought of the awful things she had been through and how strong she had been.

Though he still loved the game, he decided that ten great years was enough for him.

They loved the way Jackie stole bases and kept the other team guessing!





# Who Said That?



You can guess a lot about a person based on what they have to say. Take a look at these quotes from some of America's great heroes. Can you match each quote with the hero who said it?

"The way I figured it, I was even with baseball and baseball with me. The game had done much for me, and I had done much for it."

"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

"All I was doing was trying to get home from work."

"I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country."

"That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts."

## Hints

Franklin Delano Roosevelt: President of the United States of America during World War II

Neil Armstrong: The first man to walk on the moon

Rosa Parks: An African American civil rights activist who refused to give up her seat on a bus

Rachel Carson: A writer and early supporter of the environmental movement

Nathan Hale: A soldier during the American Revolution

Jackie Robinson: The first African American Major League baseball player

# Sharing Birthdays

What American heroes share your birthday month? Pick your "birthday month twin" and write down the ways you two are alike and different.

**JANUARY:** Elvis Presley, Jackie Robinson, Michelle Obama

**FEBRUARY:** Susan B. Anthony, George Washington

**MARCH:** Dr. Seuss, Harriet Tubman

**APRIL:** Beverly Cleary, Coretta Scott King, Duke Ellington

**MAY:** Willie Mays, George Lucas, L. Frank Baum

**JUNE:** Lou Gehrig, Mel Brooks

**JULY:** Thurgood Marshall, Oscar Hammerstein, Kristi Yamaguchi

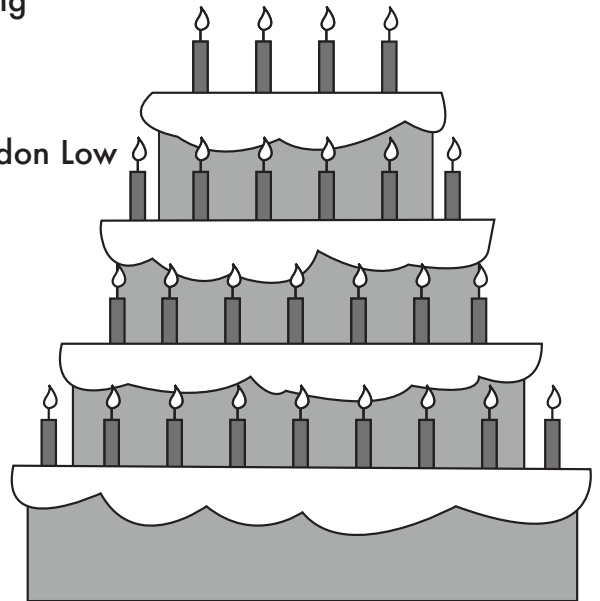
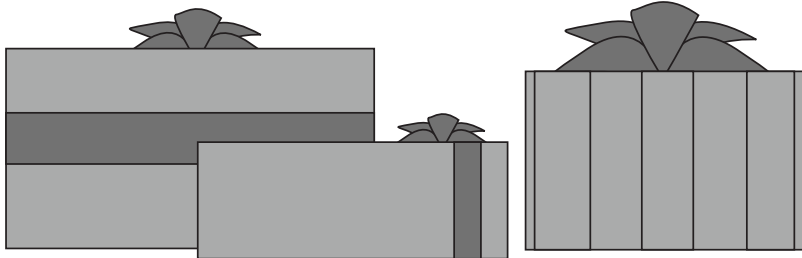
**AUGUST:** Louis Armstrong, Barack Obama, Neil Armstrong

**SEPTEMBER:** Jim Henson, O. Henry, Jesse Owens

**OCTOBER:** Eleanor Roosevelt, Hilary Clinton, Juliette Gordon Low

**NOVEMBER:** Carl Sagan, Joe DiMaggio, Mark Twain

**DECEMBER:** Walt Disney, Emily Dickinson



How are you the same as \_\_\_\_\_ ?

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How are you different?

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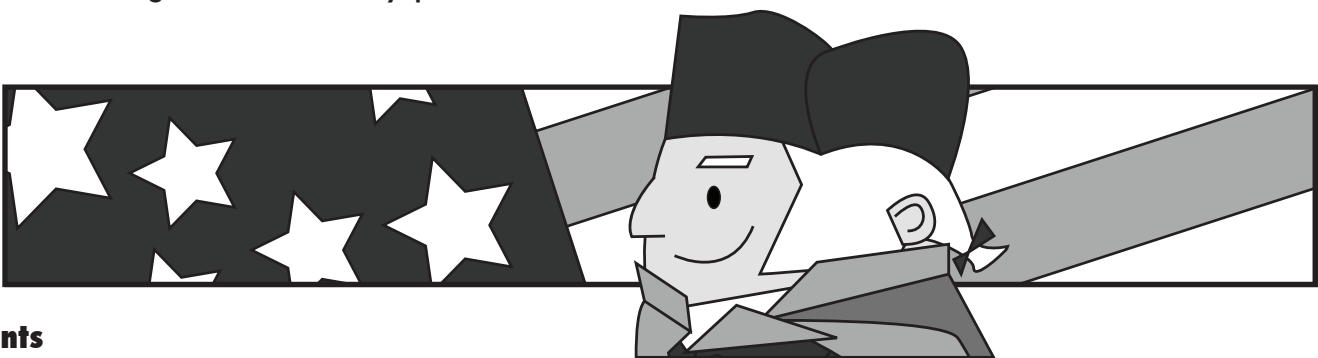
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# Fact Finding

Have you ever heard something about yourself that wasn't true? Rumors and gossip can be unpleasant, especially when they're not even correct! Sometimes, when a person is admired, stories about the things they did get exaggerated, or made to sound larger-than-life, to match their heroic deeds.

Read the following statements about George Washington, our first president. Can you tell what's true and what isn't? If you're stuck, you can go on the Internet or go to a library to find a book about his life.

1. George Washington towered over most men. He was six feet two inches tall! **TRUE or FALSE**
2. When he was a child, he demonstrated his incredible strength by throwing a coin all the way across the mile-wide Potomac River. **TRUE or FALSE**
3. He was brave even in his teens, responsible for surveying and exploring large parts of the western Virginia wilderness. **TRUE or FALSE**
4. Our first president didn't have a very good dental plan: by the time he was an adult, he had lost all his teeth. His fake teeth were made of wood. **TRUE or FALSE**
5. Washington bred mules because he thought the animals were stronger than horses or donkeys. **TRUE or FALSE**
6. He was a big fan of composting! **TRUE or FALSE**
7. Since it was fashionable at the time, Washington wore a powdered wig whenever he went out in public. **TRUE or FALSE**
8. Before he was elected president, he was a very rich and wealthy businessman. **TRUE or FALSE**
9. He visited every single state during his first term in office. **TRUE or FALSE**
10. Washington was the only president that did not live in the White House. **TRUE or FALSE**



## Hints

2. Throwing anything this far is not really possible – even for American heroes.
4. He did have fake teeth, but they were made of wax, Plaster of Paris and metal.
7. Washington wasn't the sort of guy who followed fashion trends. He just wore (and powdered) his own hair.
8. He was actually a humble farmer before he became our president.

# Everyday Heroes

**You don't have to lead a civil rights' movement or end a war to be considered a hero. Heroes are really just ordinary people who show compassion or bravery. Think of someone in your own life who demonstrates the qualities of a hero. Maybe you admire your teacher, parent or even older sibling. Ask that person if you can interview them and write a mini-biography of their heroic life.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Where did you grow up? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did you go to school? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you like your job? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your favorite thing about your job? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your definition of a hero? \_\_\_\_\_

Who were some of your childhood heroes? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the most heroic thing you think you have done in your life? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any advice on how kids can be heroic? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Biography:

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# Museum Display

**Imagine you're helping create a brand new museum that will celebrate our country's greatest heroes. The museum is almost ready to open, but there is still one display stand that needs to be filled. What would you choose to display? Pick one of your favorite American heroes and select an artifact, or object, that you think will represent that hero well - the object can be anything from a hero's old t-shirt to his personal journal.**

**Draw the artifact below and don't forget to fill out the display card at the bottom. The display card will let museum visitors know what the artifact is and why it is important.**

The form is a template for a museum display stand. It features a large central rectangular area for drawing an artifact. Below this is a smaller rectangular area, likely for a title or description, which is shaded gray. At the bottom, there is a larger rectangular area with four horizontal lines for writing, also shaded gray. The entire form is outlined in black.

Great job!

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