

# 16 **Extraordinary** American Women **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

“... Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. . . . If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies, we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.”

—Abigail Adams, 1776

Many women have made a great difference in American history. The ways in which they lived their lives have brought positive changes for all Americans. This book contains the stories of 16 women from diverse economic, ethnic, racial, social, and geographic backgrounds. They are judges, writers, artists, astronauts, musicians, scientists, sportswomen, politicians, and businesswomen. Some of their voices you may know; others you may have never heard. Each has made an extraordinary contribution to America’s heritage and to our lives today.

The 16 American women included in this book are:

- Elizabeth Cochrane Seaman (Nellie Bly), a journalist who uncovered social injustices
- Mary Jane Colter, an architect who designed buildings in the Southwest
- Ka’iulani, a Hawaiian princess who fought to keep Hawaii as an independent nation
- Eleanor Roosevelt, a humanitarian and distinguished First Lady
- Georgia O’Keeffe, an artist who painted beautiful flowers, bones, mountains, and clouds
- Dorothea Lange, a photojournalist who took portraits of people in real life

- Rachel Carson, a conservationist who fought to control the use of pesticides
- Ella Fitzgerald, a Grammy-winning singer who became America’s “First Lady of Jazz”
- Rosalyn Sussman Yalow, a Nobel Prize-winning doctor who developed a test to help detect disease
- Nikki Giovanni, a poet who gave back to her community
- Donna Karan, a fashion designer who made clothing to help women feel better about themselves
- Bonnie Blair, an Olympic speed skater who has set several records
- Eileen Collins, an astronaut who became the first woman to command a space shuttle
- Ruth Bader Ginsberg, only the second woman to become a Supreme Court Justice
- Susan Butcher, a dogsled racer who won the Iditarod four times
- Nancy Pelosi, who became the first woman Speaker of the House

I hope you will enjoy reading the stories of these amazing women. As you read about each woman’s experience, you may be able to imagine ways in which you, too, can make a difference.

—Emma Hahn

# Susan Butcher

## Iditarod Champion

A sense of adventure. Dogsledding expertise. The courage to journey through uncharted terrain. Grit and determination. All of these qualities made Susan Butcher a champion. She was only the second woman to win the famed Alaskan Iditarod dogsled race.

Susan was born and raised in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Home to the Harvard University, Cambridge was known for producing scholars—not mushers.

When she was a child, Susan got her first dog, a Siberian husky. Susan learned that her new puppy's mother was an Alaskan sled dog and the leader of a team. The dog's owner said, "Maybe you could teach this puppy how to pull a sled."

Susan became curious about sled dogs. She read a story about the Iditarod. She told herself, "I'm going to go up there and run that race."

Susan graduated from high school in 1972. She went to Colorado State University. There she studied veterinary medicine. She took all the classes she needed to be a veterinary technician. But Susan did not have the patience to carry on with her studies to become a doctor.

Susan left college in 1975 when she was 20 years old. She moved to Alaska. She wanted to follow her dream of dogsled racing and raising huskies. Susan instantly felt at home in Alaska.

She had a pilot with a small ski plane fly her in to a remote point. Her closest neighbor was 40 miles away! She settled in a cabin with no



water and no electricity. Her first years were dedicated to learning how to survive in the wilderness. And she also raised and trained dogs. She had little money, so she had to build her own dogsleds.

In 1978, Susan ran her first race. She and her team finished in 19th place. She raced again in 1980 and moved up to the top five. In 1985, she was in the lead when she and her team collided with a moose. The moose killed two of her dogs and injured 13 others. But that didn't stop Susan.

The Iditarod is an annual dogsled race in Alaska. About 50 mushers and 1,000 dogs participate. Mushers and their dog teams cross about 1,150 miles in 8 to 20 days. The race takes place in March. It is grueling. They race in 100 mph winds and blinding snow. It is often as cold as 70 degrees below zero! The terrain is wild. The trail is not groomed. In fact, the lead team often has to blaze a new trail. They race from point to point through deep forests and mountain passes, across frozen tundra, rivers, and streams, and along the shore of the Bering Sea.

Though the conditions were brutal, Susan always saw the beauty in the race. She loved the sight of 16 huskies racing across the landscape under the glare of the sun or the glow of the northern lights.

Teams can run during the day or at night. There are 25 checkpoints along the trail where mushers must sign in. Rules require three absolute rest stops: one 24-hour layover, one 8-hour layover, and one 8-hour stop. Susan knew that the pace of the team was very important.

Alaskan huskies love to race. They are always eager to pass the teams ahead. But they, like the mushers, need to rest in order to complete the long race. Mushers have to be constantly aware of the dogs' needs. Susan was known for the care and training of her dogs. She would make sure they were all fed and lying down to sleep before she rested. Many said that she cared too much about her dogs to ever win the race.

Mushers need to be strong. The dogs are harnessed to the sled and each other. But there are no reins for the musher to control the dogs and steer the sled. A typical sled weighs from 150 to 200 pounds. Mushers

must use verbal commands to direct the dogs: “gee” for right, “haw” for left, and “whoa” to stop.

In 1985, Susan married fellow dogsled racer, David Monson. When they weren't racing, they were raising huskies. They opened Trailbreaker Kennels in Eureka, Alaska. They later had two daughters, Tekla and Crisana.

Susan had her first Iditarod win in 1986. She also won the next two years. In 1989, she finished second. But Susan did not give up. She came back to win first place yet again in 1990. She had four first place finishes in five years! It was an astounding Iditarod record for any musher, male or female.

In 2005, Susan was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia. She was taken to a hospital in Seattle, Washington, for chemotherapy. But she needed a bone marrow transplant.

The state of Alaska pulled together for their beloved champion. More than 1,100 Alaskans signed up to be donors. The Blood Bank of Alaska said there hadn't been this many donors since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Susan was honored. But she was also glad to know that so many of those donors would be able to help other sick people, too.

Susan remained hopeful that she would survive. She was surrounded with support from her loved ones. She worried about leaving her daughters without a mother at such a young age. But she knew they were strong and would be okay. She kept a journal for them to read if she died. She wanted them to remember her and know how she felt about them. She hoped that they would never have to read it.

Susan never quit fighting the cancer, but it was a fight she could not win. She died in August, 2006 at the age of 51.

In her memory, Susan's family created the Susan Butcher Family Center at the Providence Alaska Medical Center in Anchorage, Alaska. It is a special place where children can go while a parent is being treated for cancer.

Susan Butcher may be gone, but the mushing legend lives on in her family. Her daughter Tekla competes in some smaller dogsled races. Many say she has the spirit of her mother. And she's the spitting image of her, too!

Susan was at the 2007 Iditarod. Her husband spread her ashes over one of her favorite spots on the trail. Now she will be part of the Iditarod forever.

## Remembering the Facts

1. When did Susan become interested in dogsled racing?
2. What did Susan first do when she moved to Alaska?
3. How did Susan lose her lead in the 1985 Iditarod?
4. Why was Susan criticized about the care of her dogs?
5. How many Iditarod races did Susan win?
6. What devastating news did Susan get in 2005?
7. Why was Susan happy to have so many people sign up to donate bone marrow?
8. What did Susan do for her daughters before she died?

## Understanding the Story

9. What was Susan drawn to the Alaskan wilderness?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Why did so many Alaskans volunteer to donate their bone marrow to save Susan's life?

## Getting the Main Idea

Why do you think Susan Butcher is a good role model for young people today?

## Applying What You've Learned

Do you think you could survive in the Alaskan wilderness? How would you prepare yourself and a team of dogs to compete in the Iditarod?