

# 16 **Extraordinary** Young Americans

**Second Edition**

**Nancy  
Lobb**

# Contents

<i>To the Teacher</i> .....	v
<i>To the Student</i> .....	vii
Benjamin West: Artist .....	1
Phillis Wheatley: Poet .....	8
Maria Mitchell: Astronomer .....	15
Allen Jay: Underground Railroad “Conductor” .....	21
Mary Jane Dilworth: Teacher .....	27
Orion Howe: Civil War Drummer Boy .....	34
Wilma Rudolph: Olympic Athlete .....	41
Melba Pattillo: Civil Rights Activist .....	48
S.E. Hinton: Author .....	55
Midori: Violinist .....	61
Ryan White: AIDS Spokesperson .....	68
Trevor Ferrell: Activist for the Homeless .....	75
Samantha Smith: Peace Ambassador .....	82
Tiger Woods: Golfer .....	89
Jason Gaes: Cancer Survivor .....	95
Gregory R. Smith: Children’s Rights Advocate .....	101
<i>Vocabulary</i> .....	107
<i>Answer Key</i> .....	111
<i>Additional Activities</i> .....	119
<i>References</i> .....	123

# 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

Throughout our history, we have profited by the daring of our young people, by their bold adventurousness, by their hunger for new horizons, by their willingness to make sacrifices and to seek something without knowing what they sought.

—John Gardner, President of the Carnegie Corporation, 1957

Throughout U.S. history, many young Americans have shown courage, dedication, and intelligence far beyond their years. The 16 young Americans profiled in this book are outstanding examples. The lives of these young people have made a difference in the story of the United States.

In this book, you will read the stories of 16 young Americans who made extraordinary contributions to our nation while in their teens (or even younger). These stories include:

- Benjamin West, the first artist in Colonial America
- Phillis Wheatley, the first African-American poet
- Maria Mitchell, an astronomer who discovered a comet
- Allen Jay, a “conductor” on the Underground Railroad
- Mary Jane Dilworth, the first school teacher in Utah
- Orion Howe, a heroic Civil War drummer boy
- Wilma Rudolph, an Olympic athlete
- Melba Pattillo, a member of the Little Rock Nine
- S.E. Hinton, author of *The Outsiders*
- Midori, a professional violinist

- Ryan White, a spokesperson for people living with AIDS
- Trevor Ferrell, an activist for the homeless
- Samantha Smith, a goodwill ambassador to the Soviet Union
- Tiger Woods, a professional golfer
- Jason Gaes, a cancer survivor and author
- Gregory R. Smith, a children's rights advocate

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 people of different races, genders—and ages. Throughout history, America’s youngest citizens have shown great creativity, courage, and compassion. We must not forget the important contributions of American youth, both in the past and the present. I hope you will enjoy reading about these 16 American young people who have made a difference.

—Nancy Lobb

# Mary Jane Dilworth

## Teacher

The story of the Utah Territory begins in the state of New York. It was in New York in 1830, that Joseph Smith founded a new church called The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Members of the church were called Latter-Day Saints (LOS) or Mormons.

The Mormons had beliefs that were very different from those of other Christian churches. They believed their church to be the true church of Jesus, restored to Earth after years of spiritual darkness. In addition to the Bible, they had three other holy books. They also believed that men could have more than one wife at a time (polygamy).



Many people did not like the Mormons' beliefs. The Mormons left New York and moved west to Illinois. There, they founded the town of Nauvoo. By the early 1840s, Nauvoo was the largest city in Illinois.

But some people in Illinois didn't like the Mormons, either. They burned Mormon farms and crops. They burned much of the town of Nauvoo. On June 27, 1844, a mob murdered Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum.

A new leader took over. Brigham Young was determined to follow the dream of Joseph Smith. He wanted to establish a new home for the Mormons in Utah.

One of the many families who made the journey was the Dilworth family. They were Quakers living in Pennsylvania when they heard of

the new religion. Soon they decided to join the new church. Like many other Mormons, they were forced from their home by those who feared and misunderstood them. The Dilworths had eight children—seven girls and one boy. Mary Jane Dilworth, born in 1832, was one of the younger children. She went on to play an important role in the settling of Utah. She would become Utah's first teacher.

Mary Jane was 14 when her family arrived in Nauvoo. Her family had hoped to settle there. They had not yet heard about the burning of the town. The Dilworth family did not remain long in Nauvoo. They got started on the trip west before the weather got cold.

In April 1846, thousands of Mormons set out on the journey to Utah. For the first few weeks, the trip was exciting. The weather was fine. The children ran alongside the wagons. It all seemed like a great adventure.

Then came the rain. Day after day, the children huddled inside the wagons. They quickly became bored. Mary Jane took charge. Reaching into her bag, she brought out a small blue speller. She convinced the children to play school. Every day, she taught them from her speller. If they listened well, she rewarded them with a story. Mary Jane continued the lessons until the group reached Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Council Bluffs was the site the Mormons had chosen to camp for the winter. "School" was over for the older children who had chores to do in camp. The boys took care of the cattle, cut hay, and chopped wood. The girls washed, ironed, cooked, and took care of the babies.

Since Mary Jane was good with children, she got the job of taking care of a dozen young children. She made up rhymes and songs to teach them their ABCs. She told them stories. She taught them songs and games.

She began teaching the children to read. One day, as she was giving lessons, Brigham Young came by to watch. He was so impressed, he sent his son for lessons with Mary Jane's group.



It was a terrible winter for the Mormons. Their shelters had been built quickly and did not keep out the cold and rain. Hundreds of people got sick. Many died.

It got so cold that the children were forced to stay inside. They became restless. So 15-year-old Mary Jane decided to begin school for the older children again. Day after day, she kept them at their lessons.

Finally, on June 17, 1847, the Mormons left their winter quarters. Once again, they were on the way to their new home. The miles of prairie seemed endless. For three months of burning summer, the group moved west. Mary Jane kept her students happy and busy.

In July, Brigham Young left the main body of travelers behind. He led an advance party of about 170 Mormons into the Great Salt Lake valley. They arrived on July 24, 1846. "This is the place," he said as he looked down over the wide valley.

By early September, the rest of the Mormons were climbing the slope toward the top of the Continental Divide. One night, they camped on the Sweetwater River in Wyoming. Suddenly, excitement ran through the camp. Brigham Young had returned from the Salt Lake valley. He began to speak to the group.

Mary Jane stood on the edge of the crowd. Many children stood close to her. When Brigham Young finished speaking, he walked over to Mary Jane.

"Sister Dilworth," he began, "I have a special mission for you. As soon as we reach our new home, I want you to start a school for the younger children. Any children who wish to may attend, and I encourage all to do so. God bless you."

A mission was a high calling for a Mormon. Mary Jane would do everything in her power to build a wonderful school in the new land.

In October, Mary Jane's group finally emerged from the canyons east of the Salt Lake valley. They stopped and stared at the valley before

them. It was full of tall grasses and shrubs. In the distance lay the Great Salt Lake. Surrounding the huge valley were tall blue mountains. It looked like a safe home at last for the Mormons.

Already a new city was springing up. Streets were laid out. They were broad and straight. A few cabins had already been built. The newcomers would live in the fort until they could build their own cabins. The fort was an enclosed area surrounded by cabins. In the center of the fort was a large open square area.

Mary Jane wasted no time getting a site ready for her new school. She got some men to set up a large tent in one corner of the square. She had others make benches from logs that were too short to use for building cabins. Her desk was a seat that had been taken out of a wagon.

Mary Jane went through town collecting books for the school. She found very few. But she did collect one speller, two readers, and one arithmetic book.

Just two weeks after she arrived in the Salt Lake valley, Mary Jane opened her school. It was the first school in what would later become the state of Utah.

The main subjects taught in the new school were reading, writing, and arithmetic. Mary Jane had her students read and memorize Bible verses. The students learned their times tables and had spelling bees. Mary Jane believed in using many drills to go over and over the material being taught. She knew that what the children learned well, they would not forget.

On November 11, 1848, at the age of 17, Mary Jane married Francis Hammond. Three years later, Francis was sent to the Hawaiian Islands as a missionary. Mary Jane and the couple's baby went, too. They hoped to teach others there about their faith.

The young couple stayed for six years. Mary Jane continued her teaching career, working at a school for young children. She cooked and sewed for the unmarried Mormon missionaries serving on the Islands.

Later, Mary Jane and her husband settled in Huntsville, Utah. There, Mary Jane again taught school. She died in Huntsville on June 6, 1877, at the age of 45.

Mary Jane's grave was the first in the Huntsville cemetery. Its marker reads as follows:

IN HONOR  
OF  
The First School Teacher of Utah  
Mrs. Mary Jane Dilworth Hammond

Mary Jane's legacy as a teacher lives on in Salt Lake City. The Mary Jane Dilworth Elementary School was named to honor the first teacher of Utah.

## Remembering the Facts

1. Why weren't the Mormons popular with their neighbors?
2. What town did the Mormons found in Illinois?
3. Who led the Mormons from Nauvoo to Utah?
4. Why did Mary Jane Dilworth begin teaching the children on the journey west?
5. What mission did Brigham Young give Mary Jane?
6. Where did Mary Jane set up her first school?
7. Where did Mary Jane and her husband serve as missionaries?
8. What building in Salt Lake City is named after Mary Jane?

## Understanding the Story

9. Do you think the subjects taught in Mary Jane's school would be the same or different from those taught in an elementary school today?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What qualities do you think are most important for a successful teacher? In what ways do you think Mary Jane Dilworth exhibited these qualities?

## Getting the Main Idea

One Mormon motto is "The glory of God is intelligence." How do you think Mary Jane Dilworth was true to this teaching?

## Applying What You've Learned

Imagine that you've been asked to start a school for young children of different ages. You have four textbooks: a speller, two readers, and one arithmetic book. How would you schedule the day using only these materials (no paper or pencils) and your own imagination?