

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The stories in *Amazing Stories from History* are unlike others on the market. These are **high-interest** stories—stories that live up to the title of the book; stories that students will find dramatic, vivid, and compelling; stories that students will want to read, want to finish, and want to understand—not only to satisfy a teacher or complete an assignment but because the stories are truly **amazing**. Teachers and students will find these stories interesting and unique. Although the stories take place in the past, no expertise in history is required to teach these units.

Drawn from the panorama of history, these stories span continents and centuries. As much as possible, no particular people or geographic region has been favored. The stories are arranged in chronological order, but the units need not be taught in chronological order. Although occasionally a word used in one story will have been explained in a previous story, this should not present a serious difficulty to using the units in any order.

In the attempt to present a context for students, some historical references are provided, but it is not expected that teachers know these terms and events. Teachers may choose to expand the teaching of the unit by discussing these items, or they may not. It is important, however, to explain to students that these terms and events are not all common knowledge.

Each unit is organized as follows:

Understanding the Context and Before You Read

- Scene-setting map and a historical timeline
- Definitions of non-target vocabulary words used in the story (useful to understanding a particular story but not considered high-frequency vocabulary for students in an academic setting)
- Questions that help a student to become familiar with the time, place, and characters involved

Reading

A 600- to 700-word reading passage with targeted vocabulary appearing in bold. The readings aim to stimulate interest in the person and in history. They have been written in a style to promote suspense and fascination. Toward this end, a few liberties have been taken in terms of “reported” speech. In order for students to do well on the activities, teachers should encourage students to read the story a few times. Present-day place names are also used even though at the time the story occurred, some places did not have official names or the names we use today.

Vocabulary

This section follows the same pattern from unit to unit. The vocabulary words that appear in bold in the reading and that are the focus of the activities are not ever defined, but students should be able to discover their meanings through the reading and exercises.

- **Understanding new words and phrases.** Students are asked to circle the answer that has the same basic meaning as the word or words in bold. Some of the boldfaced vocabulary items are collocations, so it makes sense to teach the phrase, rather than a single word. The object is to teach the meaning of the targeted vocabulary as used in the text. It is important to note that the students are to identify **synonymous meaning, not synonyms**. The correct answer may be a single word, a phrase, or an entire sentence.
- **Practicing new word forms.** To enhance the usefulness of this section, a chart lists related forms of many of the targeted vocabulary items. The present, past, and past participle forms of verbs are given with noun, adjective, and adverb forms. The chart is followed by activities that, in most cases, require using a common form of the related forms. In a few cases, the same form as that used in text is practiced to reinforce acquisition or to give an example of a different usage. While many textbooks include word form charts, the majority do not show different verb forms, which are important for expanding vocabulary and helping students see all the forms available. In a few cases, different forms are used to help students see the full range of possible words from one word that is spelled the same way (e.g., *object* as a noun and as a verb).

- **Using your new vocabulary.** To practice the new vocabulary, questions containing several of the targeted vocabulary items are provided for students to ask of each other. Teachers may want to ask the students to report their answers to the class or, alternatively, to pose the questions to the students themselves.
- **Focus on vocabulary.** These sections vary, but in each case, a word or phrase within the text is used as a springboard for an in-depth vocabulary building discussion and practice.

Comprehension

The selection of exercises in this section varies from unit to unit (with the exception of the last exercise, which is present in each unit), but each unit contains four of the following types of exercises.

- **Getting the main idea.** Each unit contains an exercise titled *Getting the Main Idea*, which appears in two ways.

In one format, students are asked to choose the best answer from among three choices. The answers are not within the text but can be deduced by the use of logic. The teacher may want to ask questions such as, *Which is the most logical or likely answer? How did _____ probably feel? What did _____ probably do? How would you feel in this situation? What would you do in this situation?*

The other exercise format calls on students to recall information that is specifically given in the text. In most cases, distracters may contain information that is logical to assume or that is almost certainly true, given the events of the story, but nevertheless is not specifically stated.

- **Understanding details—correcting errors.** Students are asked to correct factual errors. Students can refer back to the text to find the correct information, but the teacher should encourage students to try to identify the errors and answer from memory first. This exercise will promote closer reading and understanding of details.
- **Understanding details—answering questions.** Students are asked questions relating to the text. The emphasis is on **information**, not grammar, so it is not necessary that the questions be answered in complete sentences. Again, students often will be quick to refer back to the text to find the correct information, but the teacher should encourage students to try to identify the errors and answer from memory first.

- **Understanding details—true, false, or not given.** This is an expansion of the traditional true/false exercise. In many cases, the statements may be logical to assume, but if the answer is not explicitly stated, Not Given is the correct answer.
- **Understanding the order of events.** Students can become so focused on new vocabulary or specific segments of a text that they fail to see the big picture. The object of this exercise is to encourage students to put it all together, to recall the broad outline of the story rather than focus on discrete details.
- **Reading between the lines.** Students are asked to **infer** the answer. The object is to help students learn not to depend on texts to simply hand them information but to learn to extrapolate from the known to the unknown and make educated guesses.
- **Completing the sentences.** This exercise is intended to focus on grammar. Although the sentences are taken directly from the text, students should be strongly encouraged to attempt the answer without referring back to the text. In each case, the correct answer is the only grammatical answer, and the two distracters represent typical mistakes made by English language learners. We have attempted to make them as realistic as possible. Teachers may want to ask students to defend and explain their choices.

A final note: The attempt to create a textbook that is politically correct is always a worthy goal. For a text whose content is driven by history, this can become difficult. Much of history has been influenced or even driven by outdated notions of race, religion, and gender—there is no way to avoid it completely. We should not hide from the past, but learn from it. These stories present an opportunity to consider how far human society has (or has not) come since the events of these stories in terms of transcending these beliefs. But whatever we may have learned on our trip through history, one thing is certain—it's been an amazing ride.