



Classroom Guide for
JIM THORPE'S BRIGHT PATH
 by Joseph Bruchac
 Illustrated by S. D. Nelson

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grades 3-4

Interest Level: Grades 1-6

Guided Reading Level: S

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 5.5/.5

Lexile™ Measure:870

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Family, Sports (Football, Track and Field), Education, Cultural Heritage, Survival, Native American History

This biography portrays the childhood and school years of the immensely talented Native American athlete, Jim Thorpe (1887–1953). Born in Oklahoma, Thorpe spent his first years exploring the outdoors with his father and twin brother, Charlie. At age six, the boys were sent to an Indian boarding school, which Jim hated. He struggled academically, and his only outlet was sports. In the years that followed, Jim lost his brother to pneumonia, his mother to a sudden illness, and his father to a snakebite. During this time he moved from school to school until a recruiter heard about his athletic ability and brought him to the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. There, Jim finally found himself gaining confidence among the students and excelling at both track and football.

Background

In 1830, the Indian Removal Act forced the migration of eastern Indians to land west of the Mississippi River. This Indian Territory included what is now the state of Oklahoma. Subsequent federal policy and government programs focused on assimilating Indians into the ways of white people. Indian children were sent to boarding schools where they could not practice their customs or speak their native languages.

Teacher Tip

Be sure to feature this book in your reading center as part of your celebration of National American Indian Heritage Month in November.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing the book, share the background information with students. Then you may wish to set the stage for reading with questions such as the following.

1. What are some problems you have faced? How did you resolve them?
2. What is excellence? What things do you excel at?
3. Have you ever been away from your family for more than a few hours? How did you feel? What do you think it would be like to go to a boarding school away from home at age six?
4. Why is education important? How can it make a difference in your life?
5. Why is cultural heritage important? How do you celebrate yours? How do customs and traditions get passed on in your family?
6. What is a biography? Why are biographies of interest to readers? What biographies have you read?

Exploring the Book

Display the book and read aloud the title. Ask students what the title suggests to them.

If students do not already know about Jim Thorpe, tell them that he was a real person. Then discuss the characteristics of a biography.

Review the different parts of this book including the title page, dedication, biography, and timeline.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out who Jim Thorpe was and what some of the key events in his early life were.

Teaching Tip

If possible, display a copy of the 1998 U.S. Postal Service commemorative stamp honoring Jim Thorpe.

VOCABULARY

Write the following words from the story on the chalkboard

wrestle	endurance	squad	recruiter
athleticism	gauntlet	varsity	hurdles
dashes	tackling	challenge	confidence

Students might find some of the following words unfamiliar. Have them write what they think a word means, then look it up and write its dictionary meaning.

interrupting	prairie	reservation	clan
warrior	survive	knuckle	dormitory
military	snickered	sanitation	epidemic
influenza	whooping cough	pneumonia	inconsolable

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation. Encourage students to refer back to the book to support their responses.

1. What does the author mean when he writes "The sun was in Hiram Thorpe's heart..."?
2. How did Jim get his second name?
3. How did Jim feel about his twin brother Charlie? How did Jim show his feelings?
4. What were some of the skills that Pa taught the boys? Why were these important to the Sac and Fox people?
5. Why did Pa think it was so important to get an education?
6. How did Jim feel about his first school? Why? What caused him to run away from this school?
7. Why were the Indian boarding schools unhealthy?
8. How did Jim get recruited for the Carlisle School?
9. Why did Jim stay on at Carlisle even after his father died?
10. How did Jim get on the Carlisle track team? How did he get on the football team?
11. How would you describe Jim Thorpe? What were his strongest characteristics?

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for passages that reveal the character of Jim Thorpe.

- The **Illustrator** might draw pictures of what Jim is thinking at various points in the story.
- The **Connector** might find books about later periods in Jim Thorpe's life.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might research life at an Indian boarding school.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *Literature Circles: Voice And Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to what they have read. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, oral discussion, or drawings.

1. Jim Thorpe is given a second name by his mother. How can names make people feel special? Does anyone call you by a special name? What is it? How does it make you feel?
2. Jim gains confidence while participating in Carlisle's work program. What kinds of experiences have helped you gain confidence?
3. How do the illustrations add to this story? Which ones are realistic? Which ones are more fanciful?
4. Why is this a sad story? Why is it uplifting?
5. How does this book affect your thinking about prejudice and the way people are sometimes treated by others?

Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for students to share and discuss their work.

1. Jim's favorite sport was football. What is your favorite sport? Write a story about it.
2. Long after his death, people honored Jim Thorpe in different ways. Write a paragraph to describe what you would do to honor him.
3. Make a timeline of events in Jim Thorpe's early life. Then write what his feelings were during each event.
4. Study the football uniforms in the book illustrations. Then write compare and contrast paragraphs about those uniforms and the ones players wear today.
5. Pretend you are a reporter for the sports page of a newspaper. Write a story about an imaginary track meet or football game at the Carlisle School in which Jim Thorpe played.

ELL/ESL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners or who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Break large chunks of the text into small chunks for easier comprehension.
2. Have volunteers act out parts of the story. For example, they might dramatize Jim playing football at Haskell with the other boys who weren't big enough to make the team.
3. Pair strong English speakers with ELL partners to help explain meaning.
4. Read aloud a sentence and have students repeat the sentence after you, pointing to each word as they speak.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas, you might try some of the following activities.

Social Studies

1. Provide a detailed map of the United States and have students locate the places mentioned in the book. These include Garden Grove, Oklahoma; the North Canadian River; Lawrence, Kansas; Carlisle, Pennsylvania; and New Jersey. Students may also want to locate the town of Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, where Thorpe is buried.
2. Interested students might do research to learn more about the Sac and Fox nations and Chief Black Hawk. Have students report on their findings to the class.

Math

1. Teach or explain how a professional football game is scored, or have a knowledgeable student explain the scoring. Work with students to compare this to scoring in baseball, another sport at which Jim Thorpe excelled.
2. Have students use the library or the Internet to research records of Jim Thorpe in track events, baseball, and football. (You might want to explain to students that when Thorpe was competing, the rules, uniforms, and fields were different than they are today.) Use the statistics to make graphs or charts. Students can then make up questions based on this material.
3. Have students find out the measurements for a college football field. Then have them draw to scale a diagram of a field.

Language Arts

1. Students can expand their vocabularies with football terms such as *blitz*, *sack*, and *sweep*. After discussing the meaning of such words in football, have students identify other meanings of the words as well. Suggest that students compile special dictionaries for some of the sports that Jim Thorpe played.
2. Draw attention to the use of similes in the book. For example:
Jim took to it all like a catfish takes to a creek.
It made him (Jim) feel like a fox caught in an iron trap.

Epidemics of influenza swept through like prairie fires.

Have students try to write their own similes for other events or actions in the story.

Sports

Students might log onto the Web sites for the National Track & Field Hall of Fame (www.usatf.org) or the Pro Football Hall of Fame (www.profootballhof.com) and plan an imaginary trip there or enjoy a visual visit on the Web

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph Bruchac is a storyteller, author, and poet. Although he is of Slovak as well as Abenaki descent, Bruchac has spent much of his career exploring his Native American roots. Today he is one of the most respected and widely published Native Americans writing for children and young adults. He is the author of several award-winning books including *Bowman's Store: A Journey to Myself*, *Crazy Horse's Vision*, and *Buffalo Song*, all published by Lee & Low Books. Bruchac earned his B.A. from Cornell University, an M.A. from Syracuse University, and a Ph.D from Union Institute of Ohio. He is a Rockefeller Fellow, the recipient of the Native Writer's circle of the Americas Lifetime Achievement Award, and an NEA Poetry Writing Fellow. He lives with his wife in Greenfield Center, New York, in his childhood home. They have two adult sons.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

S. D. Nelson is an illustrator and author who lives in Flagstaff, Arizona. He is of Norwegian and Lakota descent and is a member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe. Nelson attended Moorhead State University in Minnesota. In addition to *Jim Thorpe's Bright Path*, he has illustrated *Crazy Horse's Vision* and is the author/illustrator of *Quiet Hero: The Ira Hayes Story* and several stories inspired by the traditions of his Lakota heritage.

JIM THORPE'S BRIGHT PATH has received numerous awards and honors. These include:

- "Choices," Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC)
- Carter G. Woodson Award, National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)
- Teachers' Choices, International Reading Association (IRA)
- Storytelling World Award, *Storytelling World* magazine
- Best of the Best Books, Chicago Public Library
- Spur Award: Best Western Storytelling Finalist, Western Writers of America

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *Jim Thorpe's Bright Path*,
visit http://www.leeandlow.com/books/69/hc/jim_thorpe_s_bright_path

Other Books by Joseph Bruchac and S. D. Nelson**Crazy Horse's Vision:**

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/38/hc/crazy_horse_s_vision

Other Books by Joseph Bruchac**Bowman's Store: A Journey to Myself**

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/24/pb/bowman_s_store_a_journey_to_myself

Buffalo Song:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/171/hc/buffalo_song

BookTalk with Joseph Bruchac on *Bowman's Store*:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/bruchac.mhtml>

BookTalk with Joseph Bruchac on *Buffalo Song*:

http://www.leeandlow.com/p/buffalo_song_talk.mhtml

Other Books by S. D. Nelson:***Quiet Hero: The Ira Hayes Story*:**

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/93/hc/quiet_hero_the_ira_hayes_story

Booktalk with S. D. Nelson on *Quiet Hero*

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/nelson.mhtml>

Order Information**On the Web:**

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/ordering.mhtml> (general order information)

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/69/hc/jim_thorpe_s_bright_path (secure on-line ordering)

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