

# Educator Guide

## *Gwen Jorgensen: USA's First Olympic Gold Medal Triathlete*



### ABOUT THE BOOK

Gwen Jorgensen wants to win the Rio 2016 Olympic triathlon—an event no USA athlete, male or female, has ever won.

Although accessible to middle-grade and young adult readers, this book is appropriate for any age. The story, which alternates between Gwen's Olympic race and her journey to get there, emphasizes personal discovery, risk-taking, goal setting, and team building.

In the final chapters, readers take a front-row seat at the Rio 2016 Olympics where Gwen battles the ocean, careens down hills on her bike, and runs to victory.

*This may have been written for young adults, but anyone of any age will finish the book deeply inspired to pursue their goals—big or small—with passion and heart.*

—Liza Wiemer, award-winning author of *The Assignment*

*I would have enjoyed reading this book as a young aspiring athlete. Gwen's story is relatable to many in that she came from humble beginnings and slowly chipped away at her big goal. Her never give up attitude and dedication to reaching her goal to be an Olympian will be inspiring to all.*

—Flora Duffy, 2020 Olympic gold medalist, Triathlon

*...there is so much to be gleaned...*

—Taylor Knibb, 2020 Olympic medalist, Triathlon

*Gwen's story proves that any girl can have a gigantic dream. From everyday young athlete to aspiring Olympic champion, Gwen's story rings true and emanates inspiration.*

—Alexi Pappas, 2016 Olympian and author of *Bravey*

### WHO IS GWEN JORGENSEN?

Gwen Jorgensen (b.1986) is a Wisconsin native. She was a University of Wisconsin-Madison athlete (swimmer and runner) who earned a Master of Accountancy. In 2009, while working as an accountant at Ernst & Young, USA Triathlon recruited her. She competed in the London 2012 Olympics but suffered a flat tire and finished 38th. In Rio 2016, she won the Olympic gold medal in triathlon.

To assist teachers, Common Core Anchor Standards as of 2022 are included in footnotes.

## **BEFORE READING<sup>1</sup>**

Before reading the book, ask students to look at the first page of several chapters. Point out the two timelines:

- One narrative follows the Rio 2016 Olympic triathlon race.
- A second narrative follows Gwen’s journey from average Wisconsin student/athlete to Olympic champion.

As you read the book, create an outline of Gwen’s journey. Discuss favorite moments or milestones.

## **DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES DURING/AFTER READING**

P. 9 Stories told through letters are called epistolary stories. Throughout the book, Gwen writes letters. Who does she address in these letters? Why are letters effective in this book? Have you read other epistolary books? Who did the author address in their letters? Who else might an author address in an epistolary story? Why would an author use this device?

P. 10 Some of the chapters are set in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Find Rio de Janeiro on a map. What do you know about South America? The chapters set in Rio de Janeiro each begin with a quote. What do the quotes reveal about Gwen?<sup>2</sup> What do they show about Gwen and her quest for Olympic gold?<sup>3</sup> Is this an effective way to deliver information?

P. 11 Information, like Gwen’s packing tips, is sometimes organized into sidebars. Why did the authors create these sidebars?<sup>4</sup> Why do you think the information is not included in the narrative?

P. 12-16 Gwen realizes she performs better in relays than in individual events. Do you perform better on a team? Or when you work alone?<sup>5</sup> What can we learn by working in teams versus individually?

P. 20-22 Gwen’s teacher makes a mistake. Have you ever thought a teacher made a mistake? How did you react? What is a good approach when this happens? Do you think Gwen’s response was effective? Did she solve the problem? What else could she have done?

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<sup>1</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

<sup>2</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

<sup>3</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

<sup>4</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

<sup>5</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.11 Develop personal, cultural, textual, and thematic connections within and across genres as they respond to texts through written, digital, and oral presentations, employing a variety of media and genres.

P. 23-29 Gwen thinks she deserves a better grade. Do you agree? Or was the grade fair? What should a student do when they believe a grade is unfair? How important are grades? What do grades communicate? How much do they matter?

P. 23-29 What caused Gwen to break her arm? What might have prevented the accident? How important is it to win? Is it more valuable to learn a skill or to be the best? Describe a time when you didn't follow directions. What were the consequences?<sup>6</sup>

P. 29 Gwen writes letters to her younger self. It's a way to recognize her achievements and progress. Use the Dear Younger Self worksheet to reflect on your past. How have you changed? What lessons have you learned?

Activity #1 using Dear Younger Self worksheet

- Think of a time when you were younger. What did you worry about? What could you have done differently? Did some of your problems resolve themselves?
- Write your younger self a letter of encouragement, reassurance, or understanding.

Activity #2 using Dear Younger Self worksheet

- Where do you see yourself in five years? What would you like to accomplish?
- Write your older self a letter describing your dreams and plans for the future. Share with a trusted adult or teammate. Perhaps discuss ways to pursue these plans or the next steps to take.

P. 31 Gwen treats her teammates as both friends and competitors. Is this a good idea? Does it work to be friends with competitors? What are the advantages? Disadvantages?

P. 38-41 A track coach recognizes Gwen's talent for running. Has anyone noticed a talent you didn't think you had? How did you react? Did you pursue that talent?

Have you ever noticed someone else's talent? Did you say something? How did they react?

Do you have a talent for the things you enjoy? Is it important to be good at the activities you enjoy? Can you have fun with something without having a talent for it?

P. 38-41 A teammate shows resentment when Gwen takes a spot on the relay. How does it feel when someone takes a spot you thought you earned? How should coaches decide who participates (talent or hard work and hours invested)? Does a talented athlete help the team by winning, even if they don't attend every practice?

P. 48 The authors use several literary devices to tell the story in an interesting way. List examples of strong verbs, sensory references, introductory clauses, and useful punctuation. See attached worksheet, Scavenger Hunt.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

<sup>7</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

P. 52 Gwen listens to dieticians, coaches, and her own body as she tries to fuel her work. Research carbohydrates, proteins, fruits, vegetables, fats, and fluids. What is the benefit of each for the body? How do nutrition and hydration affect athletic performance?<sup>8</sup>

P. 54 Gwen writes an essay to convince the University of Wisconsin she should be admitted to the School of Business. What team or activity would you like to join? Write an essay that argues your case by telling a story about yourself.<sup>9</sup>

P. 57 Gwen writes an essay about her persistence. Think of a positive quality about yourself and write an essay that tells your own story.<sup>10</sup>

P. 67 When Gwen competed in Rio de Janeiro, Zika virus was present in the waters and discussed as a possible problem. Research water-borne viruses and the danger they can pose to swimmers.<sup>11</sup>

P. 68-74 At the end of Gwen's college career, she sustained a leg injury that caused her to pull out of her last race. Research<sup>12</sup> common running injuries and write about<sup>13</sup> how to prevent them.

P. 74 Several times, Gwen's story is told through letters to the reader or to herself. Write a true or fictional epistolary story (one told through letters).<sup>14</sup>

P. 80 Triathlon was invented in the 1970's, with rules and regulations that athletes must follow. Create your own activity, sport, or game. Write a set of rules and share with your classmates.

P. 83 Gwen surprised even herself by placing second in the 2011 London race and qualifying for the 2012 London Olympics. Have you ever done better than you expected? Have you ever done worse? What did you learn from these experiences?

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

<sup>8</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

<sup>9</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

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<sup>11</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

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P. 84 As a member of Team USA, Gwen represented her country and sometimes carried the United States flag. She had to learn the correct way to handle the flag. Research flag etiquette and write a set of rules for athletes who carry or wave the USA flag.<sup>15</sup>

P. 91 Salaries and winnings vary widely from sport to sport. Research various sports and create a chart showing the highest and lowest earnings for athletes. Are they the same for men and women?<sup>16</sup>

P. 99 Gwen relied on coaches to guide her in physical training and in attitude. Use the worksheet prompts to give yourself advice for school, work, a sport, or other interest. See attached worksheet, Be Your Own Coach.

P. 105-108 This book is told in third person from Gwen's perspective.<sup>17</sup> Look for clues on the page that prove the story uses Gwen's perspective. See attached worksheet, Perspective Detective.

P. 117 Gwen used her influence and winnings to give back through the Gwen Jorgensen Scholarship fund. Research how other sports figures give back to fans or beginner athletes. Have you performed acts of service or volunteer work? List ways you could donate your time or talents to a worthy cause.<sup>18</sup>

P. 124 Gwen kept a daily journal, recognizing her successes and listing things to improve. On race days, she read her journal to build confidence. Seeing her successes, she knew she was prepared. See attached worksheet, Build Confidence—Daily Journal.

#### Activity #1

- Each day, think about your work. What did you do well? What do you want to improve? Write down your conclusions.

#### Activity #2

- In a few months, go back and read your daily entries. Do your successes give you confidence? Have you done the work you wanted to do?

P. 134 The sidebar details how to mount a bike. The authors describe several steps, but the action only takes a few seconds. Think of an action you know well and describe it to a classmate, as though you are teaching them. Be precise and list steps in order.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

<sup>17</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

<sup>18</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.  
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<sup>19</sup> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

P. 138-139 Gwen and Nicola Spirig have an unusual conversation while they run. Do you believe Nicola was trying to distract Gwen? If so, should that be a legal tactic? Is it ethical? How would you advise Gwen to respond if that situation happens again? Would you advise her to use the strategy herself?

P. 158 Research a women-in-sport issue such as equal pay, equal opportunity, equal prize money, sponsorship opportunity, or maternity leave for athletes. What is the history of this issue? What gains have been made? What inequalities still exist?<sup>20</sup>

## END OF BOOK ACTIVITIES

### Activity #1

- Gwen attempted her first triathlon as a bucket list item. She and a high school friend borrowed bikes and registered for a super-sprint event. Gwen had no idea she would eventually compete as a professional triathlete. What activities are on your bucket list? Do you think any of them could become your profession? See attached worksheet, Bucket List.

### Activity # 2

- Gwen writes letters to her readers. Now, it's your turn. Write a letter to Gwen with your questions or comments. See attached worksheet, Dear\_\_\_\_\_.

#### Tips on writing to an author:

- Greet the author by name and use their honorific. Make sure you spell their name correctly.
- Offer a compliment or positive observation.
- Ask questions or comment on your reading experience.
- Sign off with your name. Include your contact information if you would like a reply.
- Find the author's contact information and send. Or, post your thoughts to one of the author's social media accounts.

### Activity #3

- Write a letter to another author with your questions or comments on their book.

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# Chapter 11

## Scavenger Hunt



Go on a hunt for literary devices and list what you find.

### Strong Verbs

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Sensory references

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Punctuation

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Introductory clauses

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

# Chapter 11

## Scavenger Hunt

**POSSIBLE ANSWERS**



Go on a hunt for literary devices and list what you find.

### Strong Verbs

- hefted  
\_\_\_\_\_
- offered  
\_\_\_\_\_
- strolled  
\_\_\_\_\_
- slipped  
\_\_\_\_\_
- journaled  
\_\_\_\_\_
- discovered  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Punctuation

- exclamation mark  
\_\_\_\_\_
- period  
\_\_\_\_\_
- comma  
\_\_\_\_\_
- question mark  
\_\_\_\_\_
- em dash  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Sensory references

- air smelled salty and warm  
\_\_\_\_\_
- temperature was 85  
\_\_\_\_\_
- breeze blew through  
\_\_\_\_\_
- wiping his hands  
\_\_\_\_\_
- away from the noise  
\_\_\_\_\_
- green was her favorite color  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Introductory clauses

- When they arrived,  
\_\_\_\_\_
- At their room,  
\_\_\_\_\_
- So, when traveling,  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Before he left,  
\_\_\_\_\_
- While he was gone,  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Be Your Own Coach

GIVE YOURSELF EXAMPLES

MY MEASURABLE GOALS

HOW TO FOCUS ON THE PROCESS

PEOPLE WHO MAKE ME BETTER

MY POSITIVE HABITS

WHAT I NEED TO IMPROVE

WHO I WILL SHOW GRATITUDE

# Perspective Detective



Find and jot down examples that prove the author is writing from Gwen's perspective.

An example of what Gwen thinks:

page number:



An example of what Gwen believes:

page number:



An example of Gwen's attitude:

page number:

# Build Confidence

Gwen keeps a daily journal, recognizing her successes and listing things to improve. On race days, she reads her journal to build confidence. Seeing her successes, she knows she is prepared.

## Activity

Each day, complete this form. What did you do well? What can you still work on? In the future, go back and read your daily journal entries. Do your successes give you confidence? Have you done the work you need to do?

## Daily Journal

Date	Successes
	1
	2
	3

  

Date	Things to Work On
	1
	2
	3

# BUCKET LIST



Gwen completed her first triathlon as a bucket list adventure. Create your own bucket list of things you would like to try.

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

