

Unbroken

A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption

by Laura Hillenbrand

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Reading Level: 9

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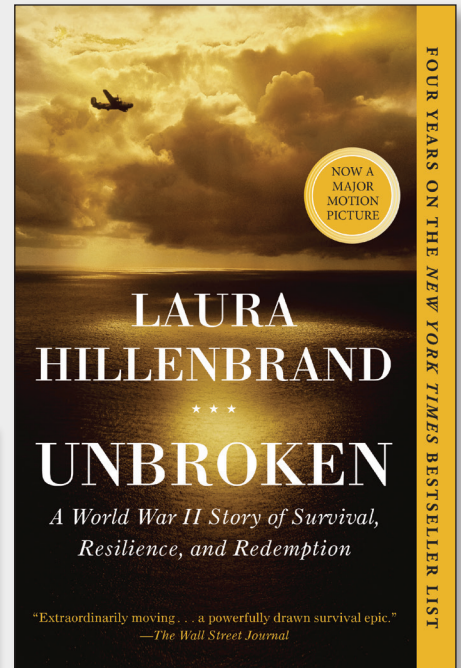
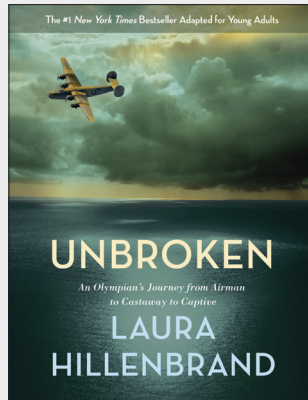
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ABOUT THIS BOOK

Unbroken is a true account of one man's prodigious journey from juvenile delinquency, to the 1936 Berlin Olympics as a world-class runner, to participating in World War II bombing missions on Japanese-held territory. While on a search-and-rescue mission, Louis (Louie) Zamperini's B-24 bomber crashes in the Pacific Ocean. Of eleven men aboard, only Louie and two other men survive, climbing into life rafts. One man eventually dies, and Louie and his pilot float on. On the forty-seventh day, they are captured by the Japanese. Sadistic guards at Japanese prison camps, attempting to erase all traces of dignity from their captives, physically torture, starve, enslave, and mentally abuse Louie and other fellow prisoners of war. After the war, Louie stumbles through addiction, failed business ventures, and a strained marriage before finding redemption.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LAURA HILLENBRAND, born on May 15, 1967, in Fairfax, Virginia, attended Kenyon College in Ohio. After college she began writing articles and essays for *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, *The New York Times* and other publications. Her article "A Sudden Illness," written for *The New Yorker*, won the National Magazine Award in 2004. *Unbroken* is her second work of nonfiction. The book was hailed by *Time* magazine as the number one nonfiction book of the year in 2010. It also won, among other awards, the *Los Angeles Times* Book of the Year Award. Both *Unbroken* and her first nonfiction work, *Seabiscuit*, spent weeks at number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Hillenbrand has received the Book Sense Book of the Year Award for Nonfiction and was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction for *Seabiscuit*. In addition, *Seabiscuit* inspired the 2003, Academy Award-nominated movie of the same name. In 2014, Universal Pictures released a film adaptation of *Unbroken*, directed by Angelina Jolie.

NOTE TO THE TEACHERS

Hillenbrand's account of one man's monumental highs and colossal lows provides a vivid portrait of life as a soldier and prisoner of war (POW) during World War II. The book focuses on the role of family, the bonds of friendship, and the power of hope as important coping mechanisms in dire situations. The author also explores the role of physical and mental conditioning in human resilience and in human depravity.

Beyond this, *Unbroken* is also a powerful informational text, as it tells Louie's story against the backdrop of major world events of the twentieth century. Louie, the younger son of a poor family, grows up during the Great Depression. Just before its onset, Louie scrambles outside predawn to witness the German *Graf Zeppelin* fly over their California home on its 1929 trip around the world. He participates on the US Olympic track team (with sprinter Jesse Owens) in Hitler's 1936 Berlin Olympics. Louie's military experience is determined by the fallout of December 7, 1941 (the attack on Pearl Harbor), horrific Japanese POW camps, and the atomic bombing of Japan. He and other former prisoners of war struggle through physical and mental postwar torments as the 1951 Treaty of Peace between Japan and the Allied nations, which absolves Japanese war criminals, is signed. Evangelist Billy Graham plays an integral role in Louie's redemption. Louie's return to the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan, as the torchbearer, brings his storied life full circle.

Supporting the national Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in reading informational text for high school curriculums, *Unbroken* is an appropriate selection for grades eleven and twelve in Language Arts or US History classes. At the college level, the book is appropriate for US History and Military History courses, and is also ideal for first-year/common reading programs.

In the following "Examining Content Using Common Core State Standards" section of this guide, the prompts provide for a critical analysis of *Unbroken* using the Common Core State Standards for Informational Text for grades eleven and twelve and are organized according to the standard they primarily support. In addition, at the end of each standard and the corresponding prompts, a classroom activity is provided that will enhance analysis of the text.

For a complete listing of the Standards, go to: www.corestandards.org/the-standards.

EXAMINING CONTENT USING COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

The author's Notes section, beginning on page 417, is an excellent resource for further examination of many of the following prompts.

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

■ **CCSS ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

1. How did the *Graf Zeppelin*'s passengers describe the shadow? What inferences can be drawn from the shadow's description and Louie Zamperini's life? How does this description foreshadow events leading up to the inception of World War II as well as events in Louie's life?
2. Compare and contrast Louie's view of running as "one more constraint" (Chapter Two, p. 15) with his self-encouragement, "let go" (Chapter Three, p. 35), while running in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. What had constrained Louie?
3. As the *Green Hornet* spiraled downward, Phil thought, "There's nothing more I can do," which left him "strangely devoid of fear." (Chapter Eleven, p. 124) Louie felt "intensely alive," even though he knew the plane was doomed. (Chapter Eleven, p. 125) Analyze these feelings. What is the author's purpose for including them? Compare Phil's and Louie's thoughts and actions with those of McNamara.
4. In Chapter Twenty-Three, the reader is introduced to Corporal Mutsuhiro Watanabe, who embraces the philosophy of nihilism. Research nihilism and examine the Corporal's application of its tenets. A website source can be found at tiny.cc/Nihilism.
5. John Falconer described bombed-out Hiroshima as a beautiful sight. (Chapter Thirty-Three, p. 327) Examine why Falconer, in the immediate aftermath of his hellish POW experience, would feel this way. Video of the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki can be viewed at tiny.cc/AtomBomb.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

After studying the positions of each soldier aboard the *Superman* and the *Green Hornet*, have students watch a video clip of a World War II air battle. As students experience the sights and sounds of World War II air combat, ask them to write stream-of-consciousness poems describing their feelings and actions as if aboard a combat plane that is spiraling out of control. What impromptu measures would they take to stay alive/prepare for death?

■ **CCSS ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2** Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis: provide an objective summary of the text.

1. The Preface to *Unbroken* recounts an encounter with a Japanese war plane strafing World War II Army Air Force Bombardier Louis Zamperini and his two crewmates, who are adrift in life rafts in the Pacific Ocean. As the Japanese Zero targets the drifters on yet another pass, machine guns blazing, Louie dives for

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY (CONTINUED)

cover under his raft only to notice the presence of sharks coiling upward from the depths. As you read *Unbroken*, examine how this crisis and its resolution symbolize most of Louie's life, especially in terms of the role of physical and mental conditioning in human resilience.

2. Compare/contrast the personalities of Louie and Pete. In addition, examine the role Louie's family plays in Louie's ability to maintain hope against seemingly insurmountable odds.
3. As Louie ran the 5,000-meter final in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, he recalled a comment Pete once made: "A lifetime of glory is worth a moment of pain." (Chapter Three, p. 35) Then, in Louie's words, he "let go." (p. 35) In many ways *Unbroken* is about the experience of letting go. For some, like Francis McNamara (Mac), letting go meant succumbing to death. (Chapter 16, p. 171) Develop a position paper, citing further examples from the book that addresses what human qualities and conditions are essential to remain resilient against the odds.
4. Consider the qualities of exceptional leaders. Did Louie demonstrate good leadership in *Unbroken*, especially while lost at sea? Support your position using examples from the book and other reputable resources.
5. Analyze the role the mothers of Louie Zamperini and Mutsuhiro Watanabe play in the lives of their sons. Cite examples from the text that support their dedication to their sons. In what ways were their actions similar and in what ways were they different?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Some say that survival is 80% mental (keeping a positive attitude), 10% skill (knowledge), and 10% equipment (specialized resources). (See the Montclair College website below.) While adrift in the Pacific, Louie takes stock of the rafts' survival provisions. (p. 133) He improvises the use of these items to save Phil, Mac, and himself. (p. 164) Conduct a problem-solving survival scenario using groups of four or five. Adapt the sea/wilderness survival experiential learning activities from the websites below to meet the developmental needs of students engaged in the reading of *Unbroken*:

Lost at Sea Lesson Plans (COSEE): www.cosee-central-gom.org/seascholars/lesson_plans/cruisin/lostatsea_lesson.html

(The above site provides for a time line for written analysis— a Common Core State Standards requirement.)

Survival Lesson Plan (Monclair State University): tiny.cc/SurvivalLessonPlan

Basic Survival Skills (Alderleaf Wilderness College): www.wildernesscollege.com/basic-survival-skills.html

Three Things Required for Survival in Any Situation (PreppingToSurvive.com): preppingtosurvive.com/2011/10/06/three-things-required-for-survival-in-any-situation/

■ **CCSS ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3** Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

1. While reading *Unbroken*, create a character chart on Louie and on Mutsuhiro Watanabe. Log their thoughts, plans, words, feelings, deeds, actions, strengths, and weaknesses. Then, analyze the relationships and events that cause them to change over time. In what ways do they remain unchanged? Janet Allen's

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY (CONTINUED)

Yellow Brick Roads (Portland, MA: Stenhouse Publishers, 2000) provides comprehensive character chart graphic organizers.

- In Chapter Nineteen, the author quotes from the 1941 Japanese Military Field Code that soldiers should die, rather than live with the shame of imprisonment. Read more excerpts from the Japanese Military Field Code at tiny.cc/FieldCode. Analyze the ideal Japanese soldier based on the contents of this code, including how he was to treat captives. Compare and contrast the ideal with the Japanese soldiers described in *Unbroken*.
- In Chapter Twenty-Four, the reader is introduced to Japanese Private Yukichi Kano. Kano aids as many POWs in Omori as he can, risking his own life. Medal of Honor recipient Pappy Boyington wrote, “[His] heart was being torn out most of the time, a combination of pity for the ignorance and brutality of some of his own countrymen and a complete understanding of the suffering of the prisoners.” (p. 251) In his own way, Kano resisted the regime. Develop a position as to why there was little organized resistance to the Japanese World War II regime as compared to the European regimes. For a brief overview of Japan’s reason for entering the war, go to tiny.cc/JapanWWII. Also, *Leaves from the Autumn of Emergencies: Selections from the Wartime Diaries of Ordinary Japanese*, by Samuel Yamashita, and *Hiroshima*, by John Hersey provide human perspectives on the daily lives of ordinary Japanese citizens during the war.
- Throughout *Unbroken*, the author describes the brutality of Japanese prison personnel toward their captives. Compare this treatment with the Nazi treatment of prisoners of war. Develop a position as to which Axis power was crueler. Support your conclusions using examples from the book and other reputable sources. Hillenbrand cites a number of references on page 448 of the Notes section of *Unbroken*. In addition, ask students to search online for World War II prisoners of war data.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Debate Option One: American POWs in Japanese prison camps were subjected to waterboarding as a means of obtaining classified enemy information. Research the technique of waterboarding, including its use by United States intelligence agencies. Conduct a classroom debate concerning whether or not waterboarding is an interrogation tool or a form of torture. This debate activity can be extended to introduce and discuss interrogation methods in other countries.

Debate Option Two: In the Epilogue, the author delineates the reasons the United States lifted the retribution of Japanese war criminals. Discuss those reasons, and then support or refute the lift using examples from the book and other reputable sources.

ccss: craft and structure

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings: analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10)

- According to Hillenbrand, “The same attributes that had made him the boy terror of Torrance were keeping him alive in the greatest struggle of his life.” (Chapter Fourteen, p. 155) Do you agree? Explain your position citing examples from *Unbroken*.

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE (CONTINUED)

2. As Hillenbrand describes Louie's prison life, she explores the concept of dignity as a basic need. (Chapter Eighteen, p. 188) Critique the role of dignity as an essential element to life.
3. Evaluate the phrase, ". . . They remained sovereign over their own souls." (Chapter Twenty-Two, p. 233) Support its relevance to the human condition using events from Louie's life as well as other people described in *Unbroken*.
4. At Naoetsu, Louie hauled charcoal in a basket strapped to his back while Tom Wade recited poetry and speeches. (Chapter Twenty-Eight, p. 287) Compare the recitations to the conversations Louie held with his raft mates, Phil and Mac. What purpose, if any, did the recitations serve?
5. Hillenbrand writes, ". . . the Japanese commander slogged back up the mountain . . . He walked into the barracks and approached the ranking American, Lieutenant Colonel Marion Unruh." The commander said, "The emperor has brought peace to the world." (Chapter Thirty-Two, p. 315) This is how Japanese citizens learn of the war's end. Ask students to research how the governments and citizens of Germany and Japan have regarded their nations' conduct during the war. Are their attitudes accepting? Are certain subjects taboo?
6. Evaluate Louie's statement, "This, this little home . . . was worth all of it." (Chapter Thirty-Four, p. 341)
7. Compare and contrast Louie's actions upon meeting his captors in Sugamo Prison (Chapter Thirty-Nine) with him being reunited with his mother after he jumped off the California-bound train. (Chapter One, p. 5)

■ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.**

1. *Unbroken* is composed of a short preface, five parts, and an epilogue. Each section foreshadows the one that follows. Discuss the structure of this book—how one section's cliff-hanger leads to the next's resolution or subsequent conflict. Discuss the author's purpose for sectioning the book as she does. What effect does it have on the reading experience?
2. The book opens with an excerpt from Walt Whitman's "The Wound-Dresser." Read the whole poem at tiny.cc/TheWoundDresser and draw parallels between the wound-dresser's changing attitude with Louie's transformations in *Unbroken*. Examine the author's reason for selecting the excerpt as her epigraph to *Unbroken*.
3. Hillenbrand makes ample use of figurative language in this book. For example: "In Torrance, a one-boy insurgency was born" (p. 6); "Stricken bombers began slipping behind, and the Zeros pounced" (p. 100); "The sky broke all at once. . . . The ocean began heaving and thrashing. The wind slapped the raft. . . ." (p. 177); "With the bombers sweeping overhead, the Bird stormed into the barracks and shouted for all Americans to get out. . . . The Bird and Kono picked up their kendo sticks . . . and began smashing them [the Americans] over their heads. . . . Woozy, Louie lay there as the Bird and the sirens screamed" (p. 302); and "Louie walked upstairs and lay down on his old bed. When he finally drifted off, the Bird followed him into his dreams." (p. 342) Discuss why the author might have chosen to use such figurative language in a biography. Does it help or hinder the understanding of the themes presented in this book? Explain.

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE (CONTINUED)

4. Both Louie and brutal prison guard Mutsuhiro Watanabe survive into old age. After describing the Japanese World War II POWs' liberation in *Unbroken*, Hillenbrand provides a detailed account of prison guard Watanabe's survival. As you critique the survival of both Zamperini and Watanabe, consider the author's purpose in including Watanabe's survival account.
 - **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.**
 1. Hillenbrand considers the Japanese ideal of the superior race. (Chapter Nineteen, p. 201) Compare her findings with research on Hitler's ideologies. Which doctrine led to more violent tendencies toward prisoners of war? Support your answer with valid research.
 2. Hillenbrand writes, "Perhaps some guards forced their prisoners to live in maximally dehumanizing conditions so that they could reassure themselves that they were merely giving loathsome beasts their due. . . . Some of the worst abuses . . . may have arisen from guards' discomfort with being abusive." (Chapter Nineteen, p. 202) Support or refute this observation using examples from *Unbroken* as well as examples from other valid research.
 3. Hillenbrand describes Louie's breakup with his beloved Cynthia in terms of Holocaust survivor Jean Améry's account, "All he had left was his alcohol and his resentment, the emotion that Jean Améry would write, 'nails every one of us onto the cross of his ruined past.'" (Chapter Thirty-Seven, p. 374) Read excerpts from Jean Améry's book, *At the Mind's Limits*, at nomoretorture.blogspot.com/2007/06/first-blow-changes-everything-jean.html. Does Hillenbrand ultimately support or refute Améry's conclusions? Explain using examples from *Unbroken*.
 4. Hillenbrand writes that Japanese POW accounts of abuses "pushed the bounds of believability." (Chapter Thirty-Four, p. 343) Analyze Louie's life story. Does it push those bounds too? What importance does Hillenbrand place on the role of providence in Louie's survival? Consider Louie's contemplations and experiences during days thirty-nine and forty on the raft (Chapter Sixteen, p. 174), and his recall of other past experiences under a Billy Graham rival tent. (Chapter Thirty-Eight, p. 382) Use additional examples from *Unbroken*.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Have students compose and share "Six Word Memoirs" (explanation below) based on Louie's experiences at each stage of his life. In addition, have students create and share "Six Word Memoirs" based on themes addressed in *Unbroken*. Culminate by having students expand their memoirs into formal essay format using textual support and other reliable resources. For a guide on implementing "Six Word Memoirs," consult www.smithmag.net/share/pdf/six-word-teachers-guide-teen-book.pdf.

INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.**

INTEGRATION OF
KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS
(CONTINUED)

- Chapter One begins with Louie watching, awestruck, as the *Graf Zeppelin* passes over his California home on the last leg of its around-the-world journey. Examine the author's purpose for juxtaposing the vessel's passage with the events that occurred in the countries it passed over. Further analyze the author's purpose for including this event at the outset of her account of Louie's life. In addition, access the materials Hillenbrand used to document the *Graf Zeppelin*—especially Douglas Botting's work, Dr. Eckener's *Dream Machine*. A map of the *Graf Zeppelin*'s 1929 journey can be found at tiny.cc/GrafZeppelin.
- Analyze how Louie's brush with eugenics affected him. Go to tiny.cc/EugenicsAndTheNazis and read an article by Edwin Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis—the California Connection," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 9, 2003. Develop a position on the embrace of eugenics in some parts of the United States. For further reference, a brief description of the inception of Nazi Germany's euthanasia program can be viewed in a clip of director Peter Cohen's documentary *Architecture of Doom Nazi Eugenics* at tiny.cc/NaziEugenics.
- Study a map of the World War II Pacific Theater and describe the extent of Japanese-controlled territory in 1942. What specific obstacles, if any, would military strategists face in gaining control of the occupied lands?
- On Friday, June 4, 1943, Phil's mother received a telegram announcing that Phil was missing in action. (Chapter Thirteen, p. 144) Research the Army's present-day policy procedures for notifying the next of kin for those missing in action or killed. How different is this new policy from the one used in 1943?
- Compare/contrast the Rickenbacker account of being lost at sea with the castaways of the *Green Hornet*. The Historynet.com article at tiny.cc/Rickenbacker recounts Rickenbacker's experience.
- Both Phil and Louie recognized the seriousness of their predicament at sea, yet neither man succumbed to hopelessness. Defend the power of the mind to hope in hopeless situations using examples from *Unbroken* and other sources. The following articles will help develop this theme:

"The Brain: The Power of Hope" by Scott Haig, MD: tiny.cc/PowerOfHope
 "Intense Emotions and Strong Feelings: A Language Everyone Should Understand" by Mary C. Lamia, PhD: tiny.cc/PowerOfHope2
- Read the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Compare and contrast the plight of the mariner with Louie's plight. Coleridge's poem can be found at tiny.cc/AncientMariner.
- Research the sex slave industry run by the Japanese during World War II. Research modern-day sex slave industries. Has an intolerance of such practices evolved today? Explain. You may choose to begin the research at tiny.cc/ComfortWoman (a comfort woman for the Japanese describes her ordeal). Also research the 1937 Nanking massacre at the hands of the Japanese.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

At the beginning of Chapter Thirty-One, "Naked Stampede," the war prisoners heard and read different accounts of what happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Since World War II, subsequent generations have understood the ramifications of the dropping of the atomic bomb. In order for students to understand how language and culture are in constant flux, make a list of terms and mindsets that may not be known to the students. In groups, have the students brainstorm, and then share their conclusions as to what the terms or mindsets mean. After revealing true meanings,

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY (CONTINUED)

have students make up their own lists of terms and mindsets that are a part of their vernacular and that may not be known to older generations. Ask them to share their results with older family members and poll the results. In addition, have the students create a list of terms and mindsets that older family members use/used that the students might not know or use. Students should be prepared to share their results.

OTHER WORKS OF INTEREST

At the Mind's Limits by Jean Améry

Empire of the Sun by J.G. Ballard

The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam by Ninh Bao

The Greatest Generation by Tom Brokaw

The Boys in the Boat by Daniel James Brown

The Rape of Nanking by Iris Chang

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass by Frederick Douglass

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet by Jamie Ford

The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank

Hiroshima by John Hersey

Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler

Strength in What Remains by Tracy Kidder

We Band of Angels by Elizabeth Norman

In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex by Nathaniel Philbrick

Leaves from the Autumn of Emergencies: Selections from the Wartime Diaries of Ordinary Japanese by Samuel Yamashita

Devil at My Heels by Louis Zamperini and David Rensin

ABOUT THIS GUIDE'S WRITER

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