

Biography

Rudy Garcia-Tolson

by Ann Weil

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PAIRED
READ

The Unsinkable Molly Brown

STRATEGIES & SKILLS

Comprehension

Strategy: Summarize

Skill: Sequence

Phonics

Variant vowel spellings
with digraphs /ü/ oo, u, u_e,
ew, ue, ui; /û/ oo, ou, u

Vocabulary Strategy

Synonyms

Vocabulary

agree, challenging,
discover, heroes, interest,
perform, study, succeed

Content Standards

Social Studies

History

Word count: 1220**

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**The total word count is based on words in the running text and headings only. Numerals and words in captions, labels, diagrams, charts, and sidebars are not included.



Education

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A



Essential Question

What do heroes do?

Rudy Garcia-Tolson

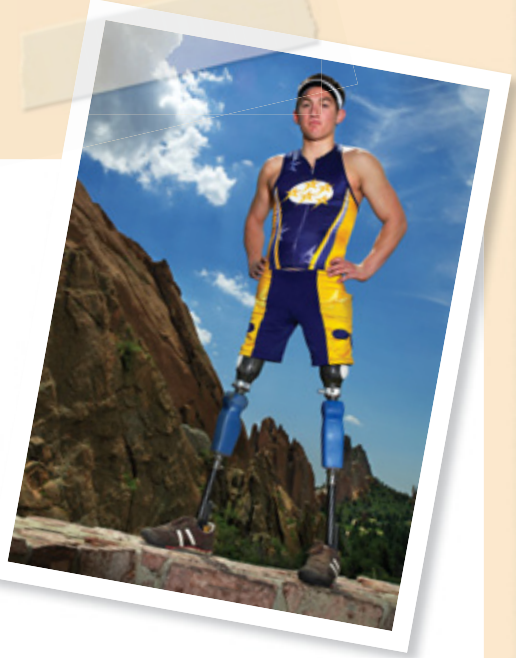
by Ann Weil

| | |
|--|--|
| Chapter 1 | |
| A Hero Who Has No Legs | 2 |
| Chapter 2 | |
| New Legs, New Start | 5 |
| Chapter 3 | |
| An Athlete's Life | 9 |
| Chapter 4 | |
| A True Hero | 11 |
| Respond to Reading | 15 |
| PAIRED READ | The Unsinkable Molly Brown . . 16 |
| Glossary/Index | 19 |
| Focus on Social Studies | 20 |

A Hero Who Has No Legs

Rudy Garcia-Tolson is an unlikely hero. He wasn't always a talented athlete. Before he became a star paralympic swimmer, he faced challenges.

Rudy was born with **birth defects** to his mouth, hands, and legs. These affected the way his physical body looked and functioned. The most serious problems were with his legs. Rudy was born with a club foot. This means his foot was turned in. He had trouble walking. Everyday tasks were challenging for Rudy, but he still went after his dreams.



Rudy showed great courage at a very young age. His birth defects did not affect his mind. Rudy stayed focused on what he wanted and what he could do.

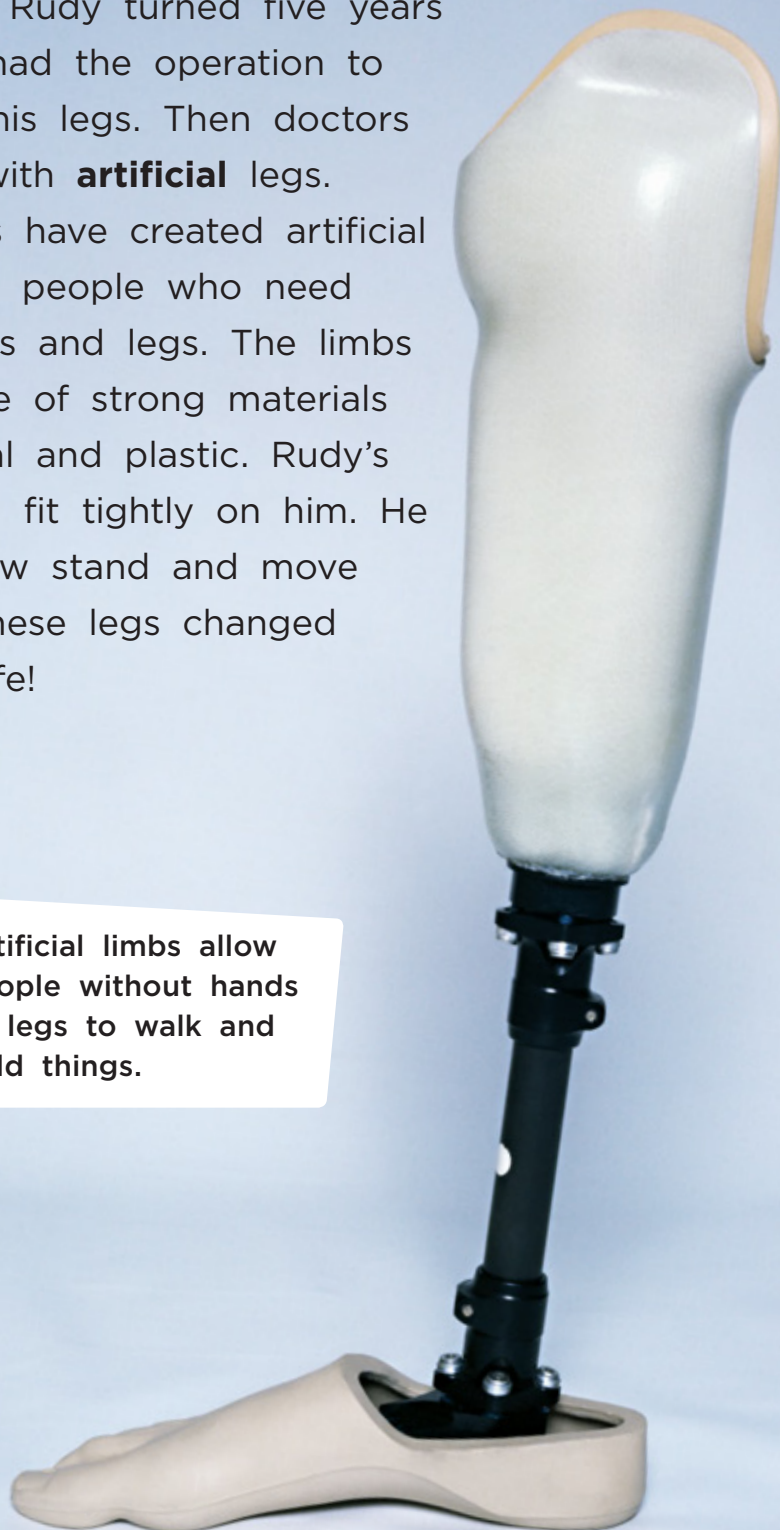
Rudy hoped to walk and play like other children. Doctors performed surgeries to try to fix some of the problems with his legs. But they were unable to fix everything. Rudy had many **operations**, but his legs still had problems. It looked like Rudy might spend his life in a wheelchair. Doctors told Rudy they could give him new legs. But first they would need to remove his old legs. Rudy and his family decided he would have the operation.

A surgeon is a doctor who performs surgery.



When Rudy turned five years old, he had the operation to remove his legs. Then doctors fit him with **artificial** legs. Scientists have created artificial limbs for people who need new arms and legs. The limbs are made of strong materials like metal and plastic. Rudy's new legs fit tightly on him. He could now stand and move easily. These legs changed Rudy's life!

Artificial limbs allow people without hands or legs to walk and hold things.



chapter

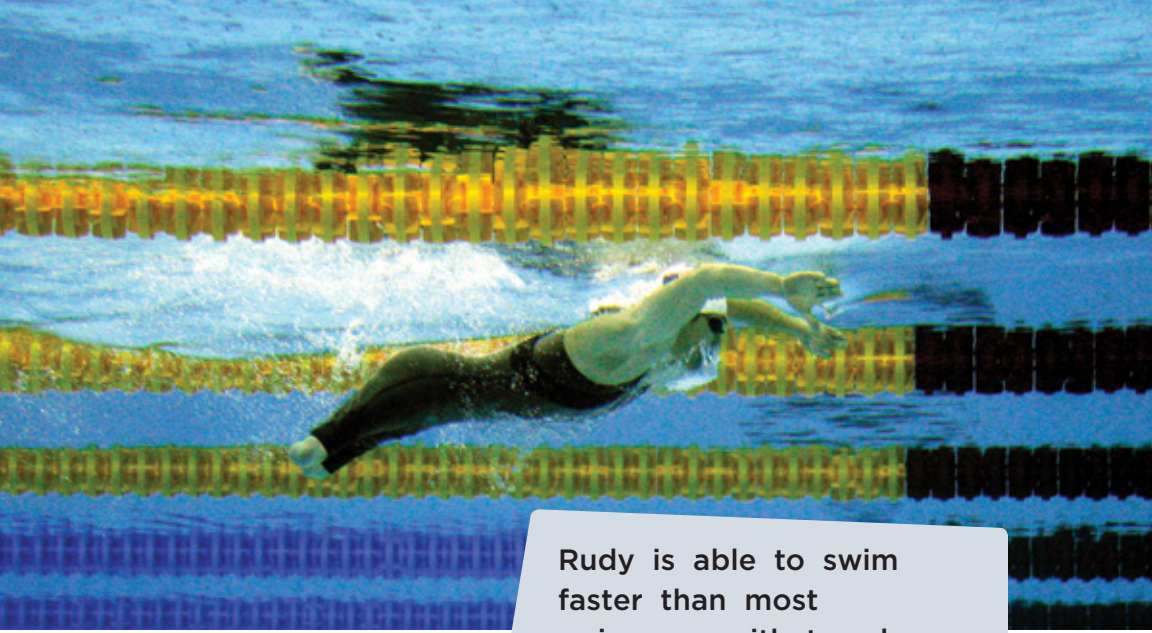
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New Legs, New Start

Rudy's new legs gave him freedom to try many sports.



Rudy's new legs opened up new possibilities for him. Now Rudy could walk and run. He could even ride a bike like other kids his age! Rudy's new legs gave him courage to try new things. He began playing sports and learned how to swim. This is when Rudy developed a new interest. He dreamed of becoming a great athlete. He wanted to show people that he could do many of the same things they could. Rudy would not let anything stop him from reaching his goal. This made Rudy a hero.



Rudy is able to swim faster than most swimmers with two legs.

Swimming became Rudy's favorite sport. He loved to swim and felt free in the water. Swimmers kick their legs to move faster, but Rudy did not need his new legs for swimming. He began to discover that he could use his strong arms and upper body instead. He was able to swim quickly without legs. Rudy began practicing in the pool each day. Soon he became a great swimmer.

Rudy began entering swimming races. He made a goal to swim faster than swimmers with legs. He traveled around the country and won first place in many races. It was hard for other swimmers to catch him in the pool!

Rudy also competed in **triathlons**. Triathlons are races that include swimming, biking, and running. Triathletes usually change their shoes for the running and biking parts of the race. Rudy changes his legs! Because he uses artificial legs, he can choose their height. He uses shorter legs for running. They help him balance better. When Rudy was 10 years old, he became the youngest person without legs to finish a triathlon on his own.



Rudy wears special legs for each sport he competes in.



Rudy set a world record and won a gold medal at the Paralympic Games in 2004.

Rudy competed as a swimmer in the Paralympic Games. He won many medals and set new world records. When he turned 14 years old, he won his first gold medal at the Paralympic Games in Athens, Greece. He won a second gold medal at age 16 at the Paralympic competition in Durban, South Africa.

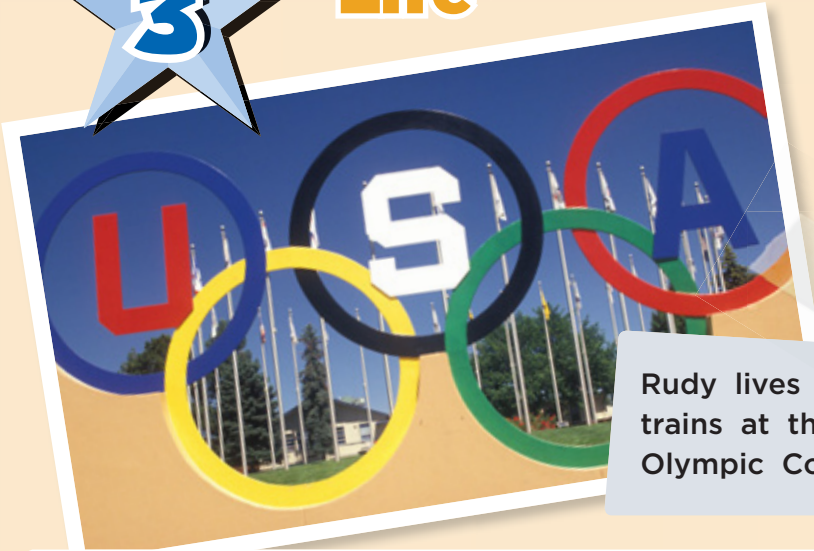
Since winning his first gold medals, Rudy has continued to set swimming records.

The Paralympic Games are like the Olympic Games. The world's best athletes compete for medals. The difference is that Paralympic athletes have disabilities. But the focus of the Paralympic Games is not the disabilities. The Games are about what these athletes can do. The Paralympic Games are held in the same year, and at the same place, as the Olympic Games.

chapter

3

An Athlete's Life



Rudy lives and trains at the U.S. Olympic Complex.

Rudy lives at a **training center** in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He spends most of his day working out. The training center has special equipment for Rudy to use. This allows him to train longer, harder, and safer. Rudy also works with doctors who study artificial legs and feet. They are looking for ways to improve artificial legs so Rudy can perform even better. Living at the training center helps Rudy improve his skills. He spends time with other athletes and eats healthy food. He takes care of himself so he can achieve his goals and succeed.

In 2009, Rudy attempted one of the hardest athletic events. It is called the Ironman and takes place in Hawaii every October. It is the longest triathlon race. Participants begin swimming in the ocean. Then they bike through the mountains. They finish the race by running a very long distance. The race was challenging, but Rudy finished it. He was one of the first people without both legs to compete in the Ironman. Rudy shows that people without legs can be great athletes.

Rudy puts on his legs for the biking part of the race.



During the Ironman race, athletes first swim 2.4 miles (3.86 km). Next, they bike 112 miles (180.25 km). Then they run a marathon, which is 26.2 miles (42.2 km). Everyone who finishes within the time allowed is called an “Ironman.”



Rudy is a hero to many kids.

A hero is someone who does something important to help others. Some heroes rescue people from danger. They save lives. People agree that Rudy is a different kind of hero. He lives his life in a way that inspires others. He is a **role model** who changed the way people think of amputees. He shows people they can achieve their dreams through hard work.

Rudy Garcia-Tolson

The Life of a Hero

1988 Rudy was born on September 14 in California.

1998 At age 10, Rudy became the youngest double above-the-knee amputee to compete in a triathlon on his own.

1985

1990

1995

2000

1993 Rudy had both of his legs removed.

2003 Rudy was in *Teen People* magazine's "20 Teens Who Will Change the World."

2004 At age 15, he won the gold medal and set the world record in swimming at the Paralympics in Greece.





2012 His 2012 goal was to be in his third Paralympic Games.

2005 • • • **2010** • • • **2015**

2007 Rudy moved to the Olympic Training Center.

2011 Rudy joined the Pan-Pacific Para-Swimming Championships U.S. team.

2008 Rudy won gold and bronze medals in swimming at the Paralympic Games in China.

Rudy did not set out to be a hero. He liked to be active. He loved sports and wanted to compete. His positive attitude and hard work made him a winner. Rudy travels around the country and shares his story with people. He speaks to crowds and shares what he has learned.

Rudy has inspired other people who have lost their arms and legs. He shows all people that a person without legs can still succeed. Rudy lives by the motto, “A brave heart is a powerful weapon.” This means that when you are not afraid, you can do anything. These are the words of a true hero.

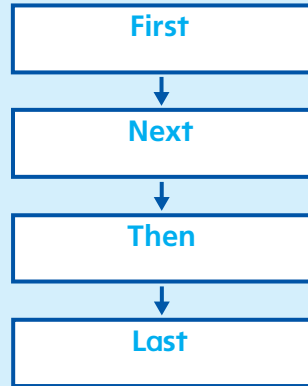
**Rudy's success
inspires others to
do their best.**



Respond to Reading

Summarize

Use the chart to help you summarize *Rudy Garcia-Tolson*.



Text Evidence

1. How do you know that *Rudy Garcia-Tolson* is nonfiction? **GENRE**
2. List the events in Rudy's childhood, in order, that led him to become an athlete. **SEQUENCE**
3. What is a synonym for *challenging*? **SYNONYMS**
4. Write about Rudy's life. Include at least three major events, in sequence. **WRITE ABOUT READING**

Compare Texts

Read about a hero who helped others.

The Unsinkable Molly Brown

“The Unsinkable Molly Brown” is the title of a movie and a musical. Both were based on the life of a real woman. Her name was Margaret Brown. The writers did not always stick to the facts about her life. They mixed truth with fiction.

Separating fact from fiction in legends is not always easy, but here are some facts that people agree on. In 1912, Margaret Brown was on the *Titanic*. The ship hit an iceberg in the North Atlantic Ocean and sank. As a result, 1,500 people died. Mrs. Brown was among the 700 who lived through the disaster.



Margaret Brown lived from 1867 to 1932.

Taking Charge

The ship's makers called the *Titanic* “unsinkable.” They figured that if the ship could not sink, then there was no need for lots of lifeboats. When the ship was sinking, people saw that there were not enough lifeboats.

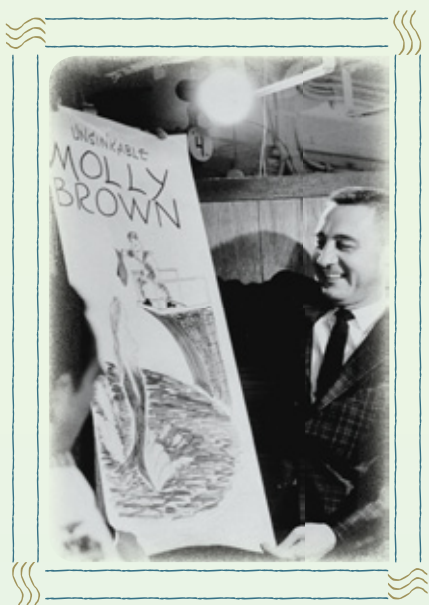
Margaret helped others onto lifeboats. Then she was pushed into one. It was dropped over the side of the ship. Margaret helped turn the lifeboat around. She was looking for people in the water that she could save. Another ship picked up Margaret's lifeboat. She was fine, but others were ill from getting so cold and wet. Margaret helped them. She also persuaded the wealthy passengers on the rescue ship to give money to the very poor people.

The “unsinkable” *Titanic* sank in 1912.



The Legend

Margaret Brown was known as Maggie before she married. No one called her Molly during her lifetime. But the writers who created the musical changed her name to Molly. They thought *Molly* was easier to sing than *Maggie*. The writers also changed other things about her life as well. And that's how the legend of Molly Brown was born.



Musicals and movies about real people are not always factual.

Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images



Make Connections

What qualities made Molly Brown a true hero?

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How are Rudy and Molly similar? **Text to Text**

Glossary

artificial (*ar-tuh-FISH-uhl*) not real, man-made (**page 4**)

birth defect (*BURTH DEE-fekt*) problem with a baby's body or mind when it is born (**page 2**)

operation (*op-uh-RAY-shuhn*) surgery performed on a person's body to help that person get better (**page 3**)

role model (*ROHL MOD-uhl*) a person whose good qualities are copied by others (**page 11**)

training center (*TRAY-ning SEN-tuhr*) a place where athletes live and work out (**page 9**)

triathlons (*trigh-ATH-lons*) three-part races (usually swimming, biking, running) (**page 7**)

Index

artificial legs, 4, 7, 9

athlete, 2, 5, 9–10

birth defects, 2

legend, 16–18

operations, 3, 4

Titanic, 16–17

triathlete, 9

Focus on Social Studies

Purpose: To identify a hero

What to Do

Step 1

Make a poster with the title "My Hero."
.....

Step 2

Write your hero's name. List three things the person did to make him or her your hero.
.....

Step 3

Draw a picture of each action. Write a sentence describing each action.
.....

Step 4

Share your poster with the class.

Thinkmark

Text Structure

How is the information in *Rudy Garcia-Tolson* organized?

Vocabulary

What new words did you learn? What helped you understand their meanings? What are the key words in this text that relate to the topic?

Conclusions

What is the most important thing you learned in *Rudy Garcia-Tolson*?

Make Connections

How is *Rudy Garcia-Tolson* similar to other biographies you have read? How is it different?

How can you apply Rudy's motto to your own life?