

Research Assignment: Learning More About Famous and Newsworthy People with Disabilities

Directions: Select a person from the list below or identify another person or people with disabilities whose life or career interests you. You can get other ideas from disability websites or even by doing an Internet search using phrases like “athletes with disabilities,” “writers with disabilities” or “famous people with disabilities.”

Identify and record some basic facts about the person:

- Is the person living today or famous for things done in the past?
- What do we know about the person’s background and childhood?
- What is/was the person’s career or main interests?
- What did you learn about the person’s character or personality?
- What has the person accomplished? What makes/made this person important in his or her chosen work or interests?
- How did the person’s experience with disability influence his or her life and work?

Don’t limit your explorations to the following list. Consider people who share your background, experiences and interests, and consider including local people in your class list. We hope this activity inspires you get to know more about individuals with disabilities who used their own abilities and skills to achieve either personal success or desired social change.

A Starting List

Activists & Reformers

Jane Addams — advocate for immigrant rights, peace activist

Clara Barton — founder of the American Red Cross

Mary Billingham — British suffragette

Louis Braille — invented print language for people who are blind

Judi Chamberlin — leader in the mental health self-help movement

Lurent Clerc — early Deaf teacher of sign language

Pat Deegan — leader in the mental health self-help movement

Thomas Gallaudet — early advocate for American Sign Language
Justin Dart — disability rights advocate
Judith Heumann — cofounder, independent living movement
Helen Keller — speaker, writer and reformer
Ed Roberts — cofounder, independent living movement
Thaddeus Stevens — abolitionist and politician
Harriet Tubman — abolitionist

Athletes

Jim Abbott — baseball player
Katie Dallam — boxer
William Ellsworth Hoy — baseball player
Greg Louganis — diver
Casey Martin — golfer
Wilma Rudolph — field and track

Artists and Architects

John Callahan — cartoonist
Dale Chihuly — glassmaker
Chuck Close — painter
Francisco Goya- — painter and printmaker
Michael Graves — architect
Frida Kahlo — painter
Dorothea Lange — photographer
Vincent van Gogh — painter
Donna Williams — painter and sculptor

Celebrities and Reporters

Chris Burke — actor
Michael J. Fox — actor
Daryl Hannah — actor
John Hockenberry — reporter
James Earl Jones — actor
Marlee Matlin— actor
Henry Winkler— actor and director

Musicians

Rachel Barton — violinist
Ludwig van Beethoven — composer
Ray Charles — singer
Evelyn Glennie — percussionist
Itzhak Perlman — violinist
Art Tatum — jazz pianist
Stevie Wonder — singer

Writers

Christie Brown — autobiographer
Jane Kenyon — poet
Patricia Polacco — picture book author and illustrator
Andy Potok — fiction and nonfiction writer
Daniel Stefanski — young writer of book on understanding autism
Rosemary Sutcliff — young adult fiction

Scientists

Temple Grandin — expert on humane treatment of cattle
Stephen Hawking — physicist
Monty Roberts — horse trainer

Final Comments

These are a few examples of individuals with disabilities who are famous or noteworthy. Who would you add?

We have listed each individual in just one category but they often are well-known for more than one skill or accomplishment. If you choose to research any of these individuals, consider his or her other accomplishments and the different ways that this person has influenced people and the world we live in.