In this essay, attention is given to three impressive people whose talent and determination have made them extraordinary athletes despite serious physical disabilities. Jean Driscoll is a wheelchair marathon runner. Oscar Pistorious is a champion runner despite having no legs and running on “blades.” Erik Weihenmayer is blind but has climbed all Seven Summits—the highest mountain on each of Earth’s continents.

**INTRODUCE THE TITLE AND AUTHOR**

Discuss the title and author of *Extraordinary Athletes*. Draw attention to the photograph and ask what might make the mountain climber extraordinary.

Help students decode the word *extraordinary* by pointing out the prefix *extra-*, which means “outside, beyond what is normal or expected.” Brainstorm with students to name other words with the prefix, such as extracurricular, extrasensory, extraterritorial, and extravehicular. Have students check a dictionary for the meanings.

**BUILD BACKGROUND**

Explain that many disabled people are able to do amazing things, including competing in sports. Point out that the Paralympics, in which disabled people compete, takes place with the regular Olympics.

**PREVIEW/USE TEXT FEATURES**

Have students preview the book. Invite them to discuss text features such as captions, headings, and highlighted words. Point out the Glossary on page 24 and the suggestion for a debate on pages 22–23.

**READ THE BOOK**

**SET PURPOSE**

Recall with students that this book is nonfiction. Ask volunteers to name their purpose for reading. Remind students that they may change their purpose as they read to suit what they find.

**STRATEGY SUPPORT: SUMMARIZE**

Recall with students that good readers often summarize the main ideas of what they are reading as they go along in order to check their understanding. Tell students that after they finish reading a section, they should take a few minutes to summarize what they have read.

**COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS**

**PAGE 3** Why does the author think all top athletes are amazing? (Those who reach the top have trained hard for many years.) What makes the three described in this book even more amazing? (All are disabled and had to overcome their own special difficulties.)

**PAGES 5–6** Jean Driscoll never dreamed she could participate in sports. What inspired her to get started playing wheelchair sports? (A friend encouraged her to try wheelchair soccer. She enjoyed it so much she began to play other sports.)

**PAGES 10–11** What are Oscar Pistorious’s “blades”? (They are the special j-shaped running prosthetics Oscar wears when he is racing.)

**PAGES 11–12** What problem did Oscar cause other Olympic runners? (Oscar could run so fast on his “blades” that normal runners argued he had a special advantage.)

**PAGE 18** Although Erik Weihenmayer is blind, he depends on other talents when he is climbing mountains. What helps him? (his strength, balance, and senses of touch and hearing)
REVISIT THE BOOK

READER RESPONSE

1. Responses will vary, but many students will generalize that physically challenged athletes must work harder than ordinary athletes and are often more motivated to succeed.

2. Main accomplishments—Jean Driscoll: led her college basketball team to two national championships, earned four medals at the 1988 Paralympics, won the women’s wheelchair division of the Boston Marathon, won more Boston Marathon records than anyone else. Oscar Pistorius: began breaking world records as soon as he began to run on his “blades,” won many medals at the 2004 Summer Paralympics, competed against non-disabled runners but was not allowed to do that in the Olympics; Erik Weihenmayer: climbed many mountains, beginning with Mount Everest and continuing to conquer all Seven Summits.

3. Sentences will vary. Not all vocabulary words need be used in each story.

4. Responses will vary, but have students explain their choices.

EXTEND UNDERSTANDING Special prosthetics like Oscar’s “blades” are often used to allow those with disabilities to participate in sports. There are also many wheelchair adaptions for various kinds of sports. Have students note the special racing wheelchair Jean uses in the photograph on page 9.

RESPONSE OPTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS/DEBATE Have students follow the directions on pages 22–23 to hold a debate about Oscar Pistorious’s use of his special “blades” in races. You may want to have students work in teams rather than in pairs to do the research and carry out the debate.

SPORTS CONNECTION

Invite interested students to do some research into the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games. How are the athletes who participate in both games chosen? What are some of the sports included in both games? Ask students to report the results of their research to the class, either orally or in a written paragraph or two.

Skill Work

TEACH/REVIEW VOCABULARY

Using the list of vocabulary words in the Glossary on page 24, have students brainstorm to include each word in a sentence about a topic not covered in the book.

TARGET SKILL AND STRATEGY

GENERALIZE Remind students that they may come across generalizations in their reading that are statements that cover many ideas. Sometimes generalizations are identified with clue words such as all, most, never, usually, generally, and so on. Generalizations should be supported by observable facts or statements.

SUMMARIZE Remind students that they can help themselves remember what they read by summarizing the main ideas of each section before proceeding to the next one.

ADDITIONAL SKILL INSTRUCTION

GRAPHIC SOURCES Have students discuss the help that they get from graphics such as captions, headings, illustrations, and glossaries.
Generalize

• A **generalization** is a broad statement that applies to many examples.
• Sometimes a generalization is signaled by a clue word such as *all, most, many, never, usually, or generally.*
• A generalization should be supported by facts and be reasonable.
• A generalization can include your own background knowledge.

**Directions**  Consider what you read in *Extraordinary Athletes.* Follow the directions below.

1. Write a generalization about disabled athletes.

2. List facts and statements from the book that support your generalization. Add something from your own background knowledge if you choose to.

3. Write a generalization about special opportunities for disabled athletes to compete.

4. List facts and statements from the book that support your generalization. Add something from your own background knowledge if you choose to.
Vocabulary

Directions Write the word from the box that best matches each clue.

Check the Words You Know

- __advantage
- __amputated
- __determination
- __disabilities
- __marathon
- __qualified
- __summit
- __ultimate

1. the very top ____________________________
2. cut off ____________________________
3. a long race ____________________________
4. limiting conditions ____________________________
5. makes it easier to do things ____________________________
6. will to succeed ____________________________

Directions Think about the words. Write one or more words that fit each description.

7. adjective, or word that describes things ____________________________
8. a word with a prefix ____________________________
9. past tense verb ____________________________
10. word with three syllables ____________________________