

Educator's Guide

BABE CONQUERS THE WORLD

The Legendary Life of Babe Didrikson Zaharias

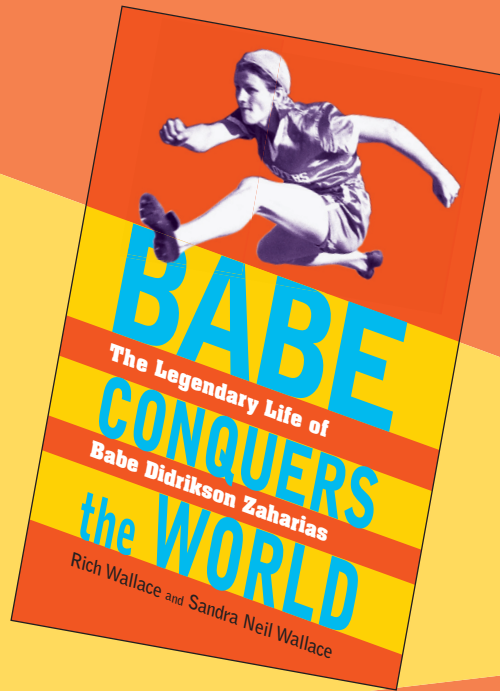
By Rich Wallace and Sandra Neil Wallace

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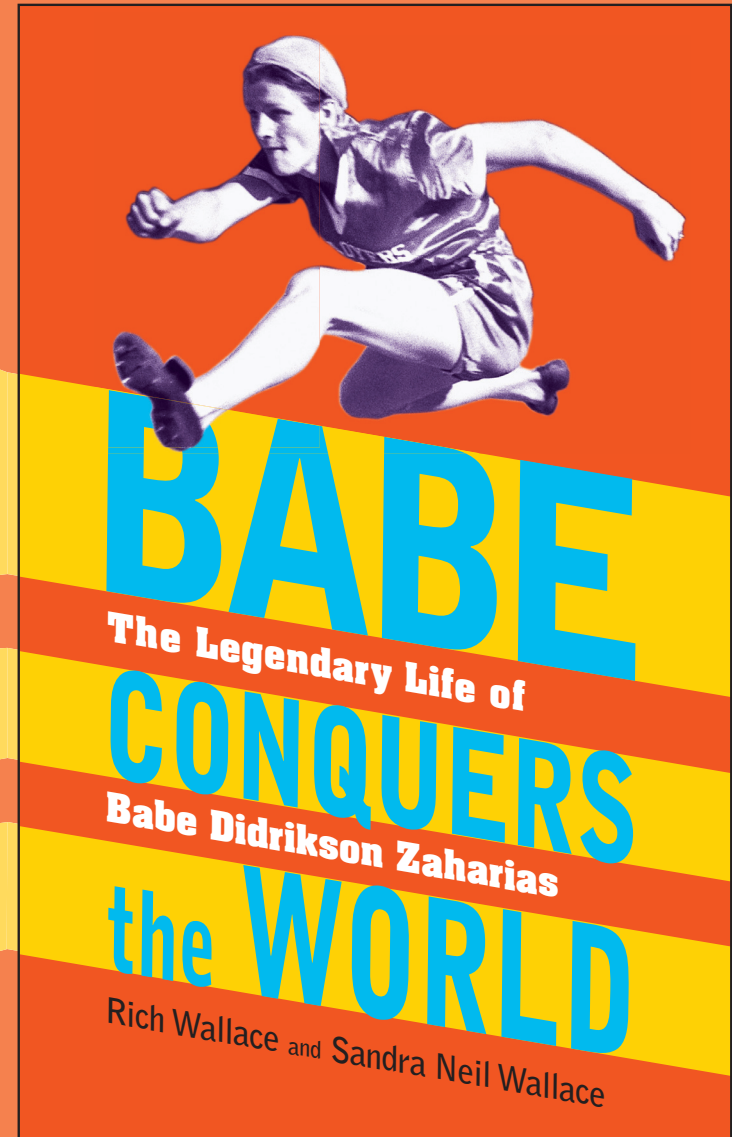
Highlights

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This guide was created by Jane Becker.



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Highlights

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In *BABE CONQUERS THE WORLD*, Rich Wallace and Sandra Neil Wallace reveal the story of a woman who defied convention to do what she loved best—compete.

Babe Didrikson Zaharias's indomitable will and unrelenting drive made her an All-American basketball player, an Olympic gold medalist, and a championship golfer. She also excelled in baseball, tennis, swimming—even bowling and billiards! In fact, she was named one of the greatest athletes of the twentieth century by ESPN.

Students will be inspired by the main character's determination in spite of societal pressures, discrimination, and an often disparaging press. This guide is designed to enhance students' reading of the book and to encourage them to learn more about Babe Didrikson Zaharias and the era in which she lived.

Discussion Questions and Research

Mildred Ella Didrikson was born in Port Arthur, Texas, on June 26, 1911, the sixth of seven children of Norwegian immigrants. Her mother called her "Babe" from an early age. What was Babe's early childhood like? How did her behavior as a child foretell her future?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.2)

Babe refused to accept society's definition of how a girl should behave. What did Babe do that differed from what other girls of her era were doing?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.1)

In Babe's time, most high school girls didn't play sports. Babe played on all the teams she could at Beaumont High School—including basketball, tennis, baseball, and diving. Who supported Babe in her endeavors?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.1)

Babe read about the 1928 Olympics in the sports pages and became inspired by the women who were allowed to compete in track and field events for the first time. What did Babe do to prepare herself for the Olympics?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.1)

Extra Credit

The Olympic Games began in ancient Greece. In the 1890s, a Frenchman named Baron Pierre de Coubertin worked to revive the ancient sporting event. Initially, only men were allowed to compete; then, women participated minimally beginning in the 1920s. Track and field was added for women in 1928 on a trial basis. How has this changed? In what Olympic events do both men and women participate today?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.7)

In their book, the authors share quotes from journalists writing about Babe and her athletic endeavors. Some of the sportswriters are clearly biased against Babe, while others are impressed by her accomplishments. Sometimes, the truth about Babe was distorted by writers who disliked her or the idea of women competitors.

In a *Running Times* article (<http://www.runnersworld.com/rt-columns/eleven-wretched-women?page=single>), an account of the women's 800-meter race at the 1928 Olympic Games is debunked. Think about why the journalist may have distorted the truth in 1928. How important are eyewitness accounts? What tools did the article's author use to uncover the truth?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.6)

Title IX was signed into law in 1972. What is Title IX? Why was it important?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.7)

Athletes, particularly amateurs, were subject to a complex set of rules that were different for each sport. Babe's career was often sidetracked by these rules, and she resented being told what she could or couldn't do by the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). Today, we consider college athletes "amateurs" and many receive money in the form of scholarships. Think about the rules governing collegiate athletes today. Do you think they are fair? Why or why not?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.7)

From the time she was a little girl, Babe loved to play the harmonica. For a brief time, she even headlined a vaudeville show. What is vaudeville?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.4)

Babe "barnstormed" across the country, playing different sports. What is "barnstorming?"

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.4)



Students can cover a school event and write an article about the event. What do their reports have in common? What makes them different? As a class, discuss how news articles can be affected by the person doing the reporting.
(CCSS Literacy W 5.2 and CCSS Literacy SL 5.1)

The Great Depression began in 1930 and had caused widespread devastation by the time of the 1932 Olympics. Workers across the country were inspired by Babe's humble upbringing and plain speaking. What was the Great Depression? Who was affected by it? The authors refer to white collar and blue collar workers. What do those terms mean? Why was the 1932 Olympics considered a welcome distraction for the people of the United States?
(CCSS Literacy RI 5.9)

Babe Didrikson's confidence was legendary. She was known to boast, "The Babe is here. Who's coming in second?" She was an amazing athlete whose success was bolstered by her self-confidence. Have students write a paragraph about three of their best qualities. How do these qualities help them to be successful?
(CCSS Literacy RI 5.2 and CCSS Literacy W 5.1)

Babe was dismayed to discover she would have to wait years to compete in the next Olympic Games; she loved competing and was less interested in schoolwork. In 1930, while playing in a high school basketball game, she led all scorers with 19 points. What happened next?
(CCSS Literacy RI 5.1)

Babe was hired by Employers Casualty as a typist, but the company really wanted her to play basketball on the company's team. At the time, the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation (NAAF) was trying to prevent high schools and colleges from having women compete in the "prolonged and intense strain" of competition. The NAAF had no authority over business and church teams, however. In a short time, Babe went from being a high school athlete to playing with the country's best female basketball players. How did Babe's new job help her family?
(CCSS Literacy RI 5.1)

Babe had a strong work ethic. In the summer of 1930, she convinced Employers Casualty to reinstate their track and field program. The team's two-hour practices were just the start of Babe's training. How else did she train?
(CCSS Literacy RI 5.1)

Employers Casualty sent Babe as a "one-girl track team" to the 1932 national track and field championships. What events did Babe compete in? What was the outcome of the meet? How did the other athletes at the meet feel about Babe?
(CCSS Literacy RI 5.3)

After her success in the track and field championships, Babe was officially headed to the Olympics. She was a master athlete, but her bravado got in the way of her making friends. She was not elected captain of the Olympic team even though she was the best athlete. Why?
(CCSS Literacy RI 5.8)



At the Olympics, Babe was a sensation. She set three world and Olympic records, won two gold medals and one silver medal, and became a national hero. A sportswriter at the time wrote, “She is beyond all belief until you see her perform.” After all her Olympic success, Babe wasn’t sure what she would do next. A sportswriter urged her to try her hand at what sport? How did she do?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.1)

In 1933, Babe’s father was ill and Babe needed to make money to pay for his care. She played baseball and basketball around the country to earn money. But Babe wasn’t happy. What did she decide to do next?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.1)

Employers Casualty welcomed her back in 1934, and Babe practiced golf before and after work. A prominent competitor snubbed Babe for not having a country club background, and Babe responded by working even harder. What was the outcome of the Texas State Tournament in 1935? How did Babe handle the opponent who had belittled her?

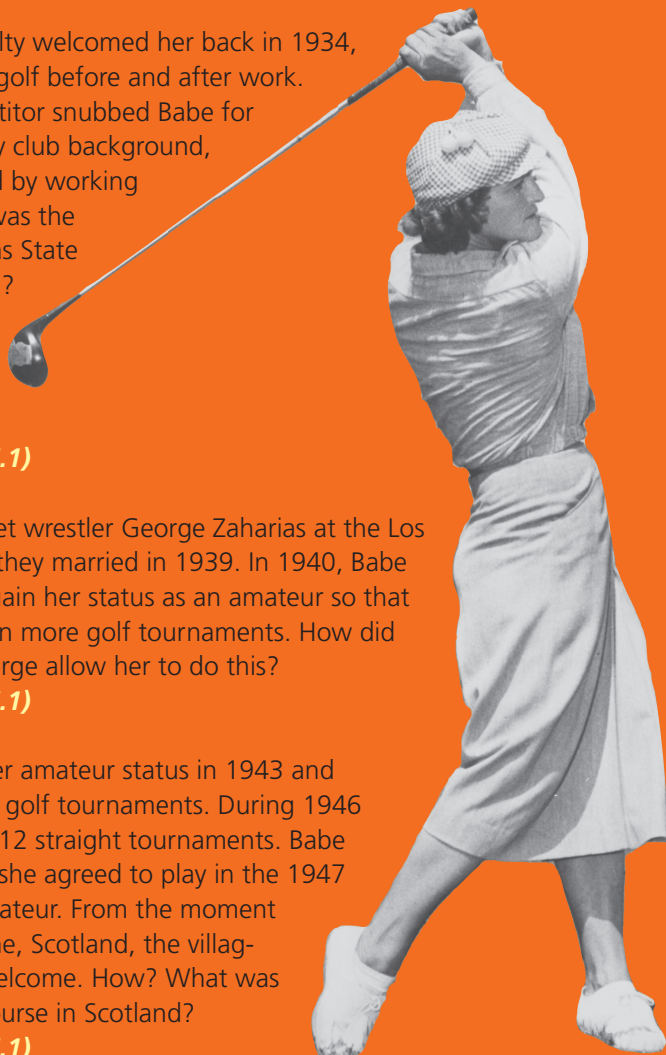
(CCSS Literacy RI 5.1)

In 1938, Babe met wrestler George Zaharias at the Los Angeles Open, and they married in 1939. In 1940, Babe decided to try to regain her status as an amateur so that she could compete in more golf tournaments. How did her marriage to George allow her to do this?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.1)

Babe regained her amateur status in 1943 and began competing in golf tournaments. During 1946 and 1947, she won 12 straight tournaments. Babe was exhausted, but she agreed to play in the 1947 British Women’s Amateur. From the moment she arrived in Gullane, Scotland, the villagers made her feel welcome. How? What was unique about the course in Scotland?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.1)



All of Babe’s experiences—from her vaudeville performances to her time barnstorming across the country—made her comfortable talking to spectators. How did the fans at the British Women’s Amateur feel about Babe?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.3)

In 1947, Babe turned professional again and even had corporate agreements with sponsors like Wilson Sporting Goods and Timex watches. In 1951, she won seven of the tour’s 12 tournaments and achieved considerable financial success. Her confidence riled the other players. What were some of the ways Babe would gain a “mental edge” over her opponents?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.3)

In 1953, Babe was diagnosed with cancer, and in 1956 she died from the disease. In the years between her diagnosis and her death, Babe won the U.S. Women’s Open and inspired people across the country by speaking about her fight against cancer. Her determination to regain her health after her cancer diagnosis and to win a major tournament is truly remarkable. What characteristics were at the heart of Babe’s success?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.8)

Babe was named the Associated Press (AP) Athlete of the Year in 1932, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1950, and 1954. In 1999, she was named the Woman Athlete of the Century. As the authors say, “Babe broke barriers and changed attitudes about what women could achieve.” What is Babe Didrikson’s legacy?

(CCSS Literacy RI 5.8)

Curriculum Connections

The sports editor of the *Beaumont Journal*, Bill Scurlock, was impressed by Babe’s athletic prowess. He collected clippings about Babe’s athletic achievements and corresponded with her over the years. Other journalists were less enthusiastic about women competing in athletic events. Throughout the book, the authors share quotes from journalists of the time. Sometimes, the sportswriters would report on the same event and have completely different things to say about Babe.

