

'My Life Hasn't Changed'

Paralympic athlete Ann Thompson bounces back after accident.

On a cold morning in Austria, 16-year-old skier Ann Thompson was about to make her last practice run before lunch.

At the time, Thompson was one of the United States' top junior skiers. She hoped to win an Olympic gold medal in skiing.

As she prepared for that practice run, she couldn't know that it would be the last one she'd ever take.

As she sped down the hill on her skis, Thompson had a terrible accident. She fell and severed her *spinal cord*.

The spinal cord is made of tissue that carries signals to and from the brain. They tell body parts when and how to move.

Thompson's fall took place 15 years ago. As a result of the accident, Thompson could no longer walk. Her skiing career was over. But her life as an athlete was not.

'I Never Missed a Beat'

"The accident didn't change anything," Thompson told *Extra*. "I never missed a beat. I'm the same person I was before."

After her accident, Thompson joined the Cruisers, a program for wheelchair athletes in Connecticut, Thompson's home state.

"We brought her down to see what was happening," said Don Chaffe, a Cruiser official. "At first, she said, 'I can't do that.' Then she realized, 'I can do that. I'm going to do that.' And we're so proud of her."

Paralympic Star

Just over a year after her accident, Thompson was a top wheelchair athlete. Her sport was track and field.

As a student at the University of Illinois, Thompson also played basketball. It wasn't easy for her. She had never played basketball before her accident. Now she was learning the sport in a wheelchair.

"I started practice in October of my freshman year," she said. "I made my first basket right before Christmas break."

Thompson also joined the U.S. Paralympic team. In 1988, 1992, and 1996, she competed in track-and-field events. She won two gold medals, a silver medal, and two bronze medals.

From Track to Hoops

Soon, though, Thompson knew she had to get a job. She knew that training for track and field took too much time to allow her to work. So she tried out for the U.S. Paralympic women's basketball team instead, and she made it.

Thompson played basketball at the Paralympic Games in Sydney, Australia, in October. Her husband, a U.S. team trainer, went to Australia with her.

Role Model

Thompson is a role model for millions of people with physical disabilities. Her message to kids is simple. "Try," she said. "Really try. If you want to do something, give it your best effort. If you really want to do something, you can find a way to do it."

The kids who watch her practice see her as proof that anything is possible.

"They see this lady in her wheelchair going around, getting married and loving life," said Chaffee. "And they say, 'Hey, I can make it, too.' "

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Which of the following sports did Thompson play as a wheelchair athlete?
 - A skiing
 - B basketball
 - C swimming
 - D soccer

2. What problem and solution are described in this text?
 - A The problem was the time Ann Thompson needed to train for track and field, and the solution was to join the basketball team instead.
 - B The problem was that Ann Thompson's spinal cord was severed, and the solution was to put it back together.
 - C The problem was the ski accident that left Ann Thompson unable to walk, and the solution was becoming a wheelchair athlete.
 - D The problem was that there were no opportunities for wheelchair athletes, and the solution was to create a program call the Cruisers.

3. It can be inferred from the passage that Ann Thompson
 - A is going to become a trainer some day
 - B wishes that she could still ski
 - C is a very strong person
 - D will probably quit playing basketball soon

4. Read the following sentence: "Paralympic athlete Ann Thompson bounces back after accident."
In this sentence the word **athlete** means
 - A an excellent skier
 - B someone who helps other people play sports
 - C someone who organizes sporting events
 - D someone who takes part in sports competitions

5. This passage deals primarily with
 - A what it is like to be a wheelchair athlete like Ann Thompson
 - B Ann Thompson and her hope to win an Olympic gold medal in skiing
 - C the life of athlete Ann Thompson after an accident left her unable to walk
 - D how Ann Thompson graduated from the University of Illinois and got married

6. What effect did the accident have on Ann Thompson?

7. What can you infer is the difference for Ann Thompson between training for track and field and being part of the U.S. Paralympic basketball team?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Ann Thompson's spinal cord was severed in an accident, _____ she could no longer walk.

- A but
- B so
- C because
- D although

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Ann Thompson joined the Cruisers after the accident so that she could become a wheelchair athlete.

Who? Ann Thompson

(did) What? _____

When? _____

Why? _____

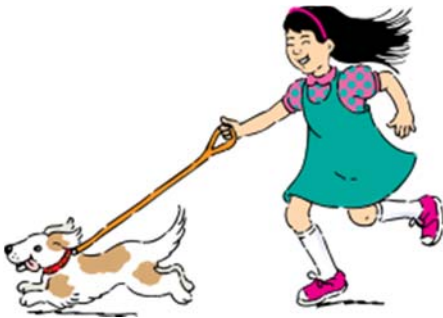
10. Read the vocabulary word and definition below and complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

Vocabulary Word: career (ca · reer): a job that someone does for a long time.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline the word **career**.

1. I would like to have a career in medicine, maybe as a doctor or nurse.
2. My mother has changed her career a few times, going from owning a store to being a teacher to running a small business.
3. When the principal retired, her career in education had lasted 40 years.
4. If you want a career as a plumber, you will have to complete a training program.
5. In college, there is usually a career center to help students find jobs after they graduate.

10b. Which image shows a person doing something that is most likely part of her career?



11. If you became a camp counselor for one summer, would that be your career? Why or why not?

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 610

Passage Text Structure: Problem/Solution – the writer poses a problem and suggests possible solutions

Passage Summary: This passage describes the life of Ann Thompson, a wheelchair athlete. At age 16, Thompson severed her spinal cord in a skiing accident but went on to win an Olympic gold medal as a Paralympics athlete in track-and-field. She then became a member of the U.S. Paralympics women's basketball team.

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 - D how Ann Thompson graduated from the University of Illinois and got married

6. What effect did the accident have on Ann Thompson?

Suggested answer: After the accident, Thompson was unable to walk and was in a wheelchair. [paragraphs 6 & 8]

7. What can you infer is the difference for Ann Thompson between training for track and field and being part of the U.S. Paralympic basketball team?

Suggested answer: It can be inferred that practicing for the Paralympic basketball team takes less time than training for track and field, since Thompson joined the basketball team to solve the problem of needing more time to get a job. [paragraph 14]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Ann Thompson's spinal cord was severed in an accident, _____ she could no longer walk.

- A but
- B so
- C because
- D although

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Ann Thompson joined the Cruisers after the accident so that she could become a wheelchair athlete.

Who? Ann Thompson

(did) What? **joined the Cruisers**

When? **after the accident**

Why? **so that she could become a wheelchair athlete**

10. ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.

Vocabulary Word: career

Step 1: Introduce the word

- a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (ca · reer)
- b. Teacher says: "This word is career. What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "career."]

Step 2: Provide a child-friendly definition

- a. Teacher says: "Career means a job that someone does for a long time."
- b. Teacher says: "In the text, Ann Thompson's skiing career was ended by the accident that severed her spinal cord. This means that her job as a skier was ended. She had been skiing for a long time, but she couldn't ski any longer. Now she needed a new career, or a new job that she could do for a long time."

- c. Teacher says: "What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "career."]

Step 3: Practice the word

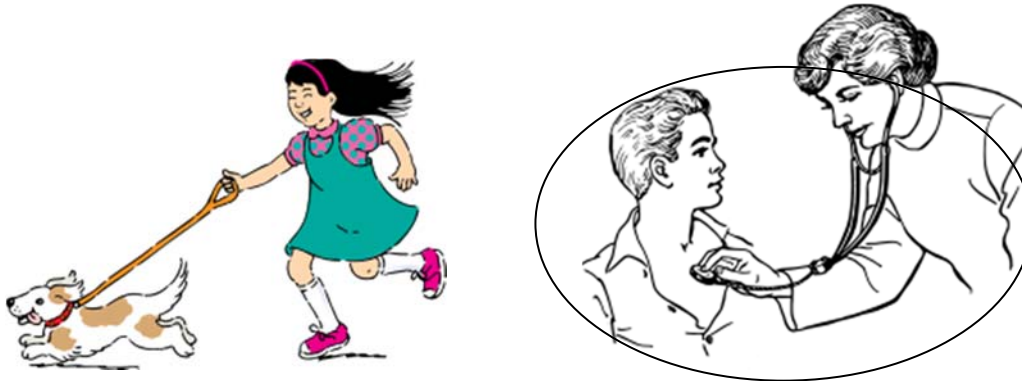
Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the first sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to your students.

- 10a.**
1. I would like to have a career in medicine, maybe as a doctor or nurse.
 2. My mother has changed her career a few times, going from owning a store to being a teacher to running a small business.
 3. When the principal retired, her career in education had lasted 40 years.
 4. If you want a career as a plumber, you will have to complete a training program.
 5. In college, there is usually a career center to help students find jobs after they graduate.

Step 4: Check for student understanding

This step can be completed as a whole class activity or as an independent practice.

- 10b.** Which image shows a person doing something that is most likely part of her career?



- 11.** If you became a camp counselor for one summer, would that be your career? Why or why not?

Suggested answer: No, because it would be a short-term commitment, whereas a career is a long-term focus that grows and evolves.

Suggested Additional Vocabulary: athlete, disabilities