

Being Heumann and Rolling Warrior

All-Community Read Guide

“Change never happens at the pace we think it should. It happens over years of people joining together, strategizing, sharing, and pulling all the levers they possibly can. Gradually, excruciatingly slowly, things start to happen, and then suddenly, seemingly out of the blue, something will tip.”

- Judith Heumann (*Being Heumann*, p. 183)

In our past All-Community Reads, Facing History and Ourselves has witnessed the power of literature to cultivate empathy, build shared understandings, and inspire civic agency. This year, we have selected two memoirs co-written by Judith Heumann and Kristen Joiner for our shared reading experience: *Being Heumann: An Unrepentant Memoir of a Disability Rights Activist*, and its young adult counterpart, *Rolling Warrior: The Incredible, Sometimes Awkward, True Story of a Rebel Girl on Wheels Who Helped Spark a Revolution*.

We invite you and your school community to join us in learning about one of the most influential disability rights activists in US history, who shares her personal story of fighting for her right—and the rights of all people with disabilities—to receive an education, secure employment, and be recognized as fully human. Judy Heumann’s story calls attention to the power of individuals and groups to create communities of inclusion and belonging, and to use their agency to make structural and institutional change. This story leads readers to think about how we can stand up in big and small ways when we see injustice and unfairness.

We’ve created this planning guide to support you on this journey. The activities and discussion questions are designed to spark critical thinking and conversations around issues of identity, belonging, choices, and justice as you read and discuss Judy Heumann’s life as a disability rights activist.

This guide supplements **Facing History’s Whole School-Read Planning Guide**, which supports educators to design and implement a whole-school read that centers students’ voices and experiences. We invite you to use these two guides to plan and engage in an All-Community Read of Judy Heumann’s memoirs.

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Getting Started

Establishing a Brave and Reflective Community

Before reading *Rolling Warrior* or *Being Heumann*, we suggest you review the following resources to deepen your understanding of the diversity of experiences within the disability community, and to prepare students to engage in conversations that use identity-affirming language when talking about disability.

- **Create a Classroom Contract:** Prepare students to engage, take risks, and support one another by creating a **classroom contract** with agreed-upon norms and behaviors that allow every student to feel seen, heard, and valued during your discussions of the memoirs. You can review the contract at the outset of each session to reestablish your group's norms.
- **Frame Your Discussions with Intention:** Introducing and modeling the use of respectful language when talking about disability and ability will help foster an inclusive learning environment that supports a sense of belonging for all students. As you prepare to engage in an All-Community Read of Heumann's memoirs, we recommend that you review the following resources:
 - NPR's article **Don't be scared to talk about disabilities. Here's what to know and what to say.** If appropriate for your context, you could have students read and discuss this piece as part of your All-Community Read.
 - The "Tips on Talking About Disability and Difference" section on pages 3–5 of the **Crip Camp Educator Discussion Guide** includes framing for addressing ableism and modeling accessibility in your classroom.

Preparing for Group Discussions

You will find discussion questions for each version of the memoir in Sections 2–4 of this guide. For each question, we recommend that you start by having students review the section of the text, perhaps by reading aloud as a group, in pairs, or to themselves. We also encourage you to invite students to bring their own questions to the discussions!

For additional student handouts and questions, see **Section 4 of Facing History's Whole School-Read Planning Guide** and our **Coming-of-Age Journal Prompts**.

Choosing Strategies and Activities to Engage Students

The following Facing History teaching strategies and activities can support the reading and discussion of *Rolling Warrior* and *Being Heumann*. They are designed to help educators foster meaningful discussions, center students' voices and experiences, and cultivate a sense of civic agency.

Before Reading

Introducing a New Book: Spark students' interest in the book and build schema before reading by having them explore the cover and any photographs, skim the chapter titles, make predictions, and ask questions about the contents.

During Reading: General

- **Starburst Identity Chart:** Follow the steps of the Identity Chart teaching strategy and use the **Starburst handout** (see "Variations") to help students consider the many factors that shape an individual's identity. Students can create Starburst Identity Charts for Judy Heumann (and themselves) after reading the first section, and then continue to add to them over the course of the All-Community Read.
- **Life Road Map:** Enrich students' understanding of Judy Heumann and her story by having them use examples and quotations from the text to visually represent her life journey. Similar to Identity Charts, this is a good strategy to begin using after reading Part 1 and revisit over the course of the All-Community Read.
- **Big Paper:** Building a Silent Conversation: Invite students to engage in a written conversation with peers about short passages from the text. The quotations in Sections 2–3 of this guide can support this strategy.
- **Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World:** Help students connect passages or scenes from the text to their own lives, another text, or the world around them with this teaching strategy. It works well as a culminating activity to a discussion session.

During Reading: Parts 1 and 2

- **Part 1:** Read and discuss James Berry's poem, ***What Do We Do with a Difference?***, after reading Part 1 of either memoir. This poem invites readers to question the ways that individuals and societies react to difference. After reading the poem 2–3 times, discuss the following questions:
 - What question in the poem resonates with you, perhaps because of an aspect of your identity, your experiences in the world, or the poet's craft?
 - Use the poem to discuss the following question: What are some of the ways that individuals and groups respond to Judy?
 - Work with a partner to craft a new question to insert into the poem that describes how you would like to see your community respond to differences today.

- **Part 2:** Use the **Analyzing Levers of Power** handout after reading Part 2 of either memoir to help students understand the decisions and actions Judy Heumann, other disability rights activists, and their allies took as they advocated for the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. To introduce the framework, you can adapt activities from the **Choosing to Participate** lesson plan.

After Reading

- **10 Questions Framework:** Use the **10 Questions Framework Graphic Organizer** to help students think about civic engagement in terms of their own passions and identities. To introduce the framework, you can adapt activities from the **Getting to Know the 10 Questions** lesson plan.

For additional teaching strategies and activities that support student-centered discussions, explore themes of identity and belonging, and examine consequences and choices, see **Section 2 of Facing History's Whole School-Read Planning Guide**.

Discussion Questions

Rolling Warrior: The Incredible, Sometimes Awkward, True Story of a Rebel Girl on Wheels Who Helped Spark a Revolution

Directions: Choose from the following questions to reflect on and discuss as you read Judy Heumann’s memoir. You can also bring your own questions to the discussion!

Note on Edition: Page numbers are based on the 2020 print book edition of *Being Heumann* published by Beacon Press.

Prologue

1. In the Prologue, Judy shares the story of her Jewish grandparents on both sides of her family sending their children away to escape Nazi Germany before World War II. How did her grandparents’ experiences and the choices they made shape her own parents’ decisions after they learned that Judy would never walk as a result of polio?

Part 1

What Do We Do with a Difference?

2. Review the first two pages of the memoir, stopping at this quotation: “One day, I was considered a ‘normal’ kid, because I could walk and the next, I was considered a ‘disabled’ kid because I couldn’t. People still talk about that day as if I became an entirely different person, even though I was still the same kid.” (page 4)
 - a. What factors do you think most impacted the assumptions people made about Judy after she was no longer able to walk?
 - b. What role do individuals play in determining what is and is not “normal”?
 - c. How might a community influence what is and isn’t considered “normal”?
3. In Chapter 4: “If You’re Not Busy, Can You Help Me Into Bed?” Judy notes a shift in how her generation views disability when compared to her parents’ generation, who saw it as something to beat or cure. She writes: “Our disabilities weren’t medical problems that we were going to ‘fix.’ Our problem was with society. From our perspective, disability was something that could happen to anyone at

any time, and frequently did, so it was the right thing for society to expect it and design for it.” (41)

- a. What is the difference between viewing disability as a societal problem rather than an individual problem?
- b. How would your school or local community look and feel different if it were designed with the needs of everyone in mind?

Part 2: Three Years Later

Power and Agency

- 4. Reporting on the Section 504 sit-In, a newspaper headline read, “An Occupation Army of Cripples Has Taken over the San Francisco Federal Building” (100), and a television news segment reported: “It all started this morning here at the old Federal Building at 50 Fulton Street when an incident took place outside. Immediately after that demonstration this morning, the handicapped started invading the building.” (101)
 - a. How are the headline and news report similar to or different from the scene that Judy describes in her memoir?
 - b. What message is the media trying to convey about the demonstration and the demonstrators?
 - c. What strategies do you see the media using to convey their message?
 - d. Whose perspective do you think the reports are written from? Whose perspectives may have been missing? What makes you say that?
- 5. Two weeks into the Section 504 sit-In, Congressmen Miller and Burton held a congressional hearing with the activists at the San Francisco Federal Building. Judy, the first speaker, made the following statement: “You have given us respectability. . . . We will not compromise any further. We will not be leaving this building until the regulations are signed as we want. This is a civil rights movement. . . . You are helping us start a civil rights movement.” (122)
 - a. What do you already know about the history of civil rights movements?
 - b. What new information are you learning about this movement for civil rights as you read *Rolling Warrior*?
 - c. What do you think it takes to be someone who challenges injustice?

Part 3: Four Years Later

Choosing to Participate

6. Review the first two pages of Chapter 19: “Thirty-Six Million of Us” (159–160) and then discuss the following questions:
 - a. What are some of the arguments that people made against complying with Section 504 regulations?
 - b. What strategies did Judy and others use to advocate for the changes that Section 504 guaranteed? In your opinion, which ones seem most effective?
7. In Chapter 19: “Thirty-Six Million of Us,” Judy recalls traveling to Germany and visiting her father’s childhood village with her brother: “[N]ot one word was said about what had happened to the Jews. . . . Have you ever noticed how people don’t like to talk about things that make them uncomfortable?” (161)
 - a. What are some reasons why someone might remain silent when they witness an injustice or when they hear something that makes them uncomfortable?
 - b. What are the consequences when we choose to remain silent?
 - c. What factors can make it hard to talk about things that make us feel uncomfortable?
 - d. What strategies can we use to help us listen actively and be more receptive to hearing things that make us feel uncomfortable?
8. Discuss the questions that Judy poses in the Epilogue to *Rolling Warrior*:
 - a. “How many movies or television series have you watched with a disabled person in it?”
 - b. “How many movies or television series have you watched with a disabled person in it, who wasn’t white? Or from the United States?” (186)

Next, apply these questions to the stories you’ve read and the history you’ve studied in school and consider the possible consequences for individuals and groups whose stories might not get included in school curricula, the media, or publications:

- a. How many stories have you read or historical lessons have you learned about people with disabilities?
- b. How might the stories we read, hear, and experience impact the way we understand ourselves and others in the world around us?

Discussion Questions

Being Heumann: An Unrepentant Memoir of a Disability Rights Activist

Directions: Choose from the following questions to reflect on and discuss as you read Judy Heumann’s memoir. You can also bring your own questions to the discussion!

Note on Edition: Page numbers are based on the 2021 print book edition of *Rolling Warrior* published by Beacon Press.

Prologue

1. What do you learn about Judy’s family history in the Prologue? How did her grandparents’ experiences and the choices they made shape her own parents’ decisions after they learned that Judy would never walk as a result of polio?

Part 1: Brooklyn, New York, 1953

What Do We Do with a Difference?

2. In Chapter 1: “The Butterfly,” we learn about Judy’s childhood—her family, early friendships, schooling, and experiences at summer camp. These questions ask you to consider the spoken and unspoken rules of each place. Here are some examples to help you understand spoken versus unspoken rules: a spoken rule might be that students must sit in assigned seats during assembly. An unspoken rule might be that seniors sit in a certain area of the cafeteria during lunch. There are consequences for not following spoken and unspoken rules of a place, and these rules, especially the unspoken ones, can impact someone’s sense of belonging.
 - a. What were the spoken and unspoken rules in Judy’s home, at her school, and at Camp Oakhurst? Who made and enforced the rules in each place?
 - b. Who determines and enforces a community’s spoken and unspoken rules about who belongs?
3. In Chapter 2: “Insubordinate,” Judy notes a shift in how her generation views disability when compared to her parents’ generation, who saw it as something to “beat or conquer.” She writes: “We were beginning to see our lack of access as a problem with society, rather than our individual problem. From our perspective, disability was something that could happen to anyone at any time, and frequently

did, so it was right for society to design its infrastructure and systems around this fact of life.” (page 42)

- a. What is the difference between viewing disability as a societal problem rather than an individual problem?
- b. How would your school or local community look and feel different if it were designed with the needs of everyone in mind?

Part 2: Berkeley, California, 1977

Power and Agency

- 4. In Chapter 5: “Detained,” Judy recalls her reaction to all the different individuals, groups, and organizations that came out in support of the Section 504 demonstration at the federal building: “I loved that our work supporting the causes of African Americans, feminists, unions, the gay community, and the other civil rights groups was paying off, and they were now supporting us in turn.” (90)
 - a. What do you think “civil rights” means to each of the groups Judy names? How do these groups offer support to the disability rights activists during the demonstration and federal building sit-in?
 - b. How have you experienced someone being an ally? How have you been an ally to other individuals or groups?
- 5. In Chapter 6: “Occupation Army,” Judy and a few others went on a hunger strike to protest actions taken against the disability rights activists and their allies in Washington, D.C. Judy explains, “We wanted to make the point that withholding food and supplies from a group of peaceful demonstrators goes against the spirit of democracy. A true democracy values the ability of citizens to hold the government accountable.” (106)
 - a. How would you define a democracy? What does it mean when democracy doesn’t represent all people equally?
 - b. What are the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy? Where do you see evidence in Being Heumann of citizens upholding these responsibilities? How do citizens uphold responsibilities in your community?
 - c. What is one way that Judy suggests individuals and small groups of citizens can create a just and democratic society?
- 6. In Chapter 6: “Occupation Army,” in response to the Section 504 sit-in, a newspaper headline read, “An Occupation Army of Cripples Has Taken over the San Francisco Federal Building.” A local television segment reported: “It all started this morning here at the Old Federal Building at 50 Fulton Street when an incident took place outside. Immediately after that demonstration this morning, the

handicapped started invading the building.” When recalling these accounts, Judy writes: “We were being talked about as if we were a foreign army. The public was stunned. People weren’t used to thinking of us as fighters—when they thought about us at all. And I don’t say that in a bitter way, but in more of an honest way. We were a people who were generally invisible in the daily life of society.” (103)

- a. How is the news headline and television segment similar to or different from the scene that Judy describes in her memoir?
 - b. What message is the media trying to convey about the demonstration and the demonstrators?
 - c. What strategies do you see the media using to convey their message?
 - d. Whose perspective do you think the reports are written from? Whose perspectives may have been missing? What makes you say that?
7. At different points in her memoir, Judy reflects on the challenge that women in leadership positions face in this country. For example, she notes: “As a woman, I knew I walked a fine line between being seen as ‘strong’ and being seen as ‘unlikeable.’” (128). Later, after being accused by protesters on the East Coast of being too confrontational, Judy asks, “Would we [the mostly all-female West Coast leadership team] have been considered too confrontational and unwilling to compromise if we were men?” (140)
 - a. How does Judy’s identity as a woman with disabilities shape her experience as a civil rights leader?
 - b. How do you respond to assumptions people make about your gender identity or other aspects of your identity? To what extent do you embrace or reflect them? To what extent do you challenge or reject them?

Part 3: Berkeley, California, 1981

Choosing to Participate

8. In Chapter 9: “The Reckoning,” Judy shares the challenges that the disability rights activists and allies faced to ensure that the structural changes guaranteed by Section 504 were implemented. When reflecting on these challenges, she observes: “Part of the problem is that we tend to think that equality is about treating everyone the same, when it’s not. It’s about fairness. It’s about equity of access.” (153)
 - a. What arguments were people making against structural changes, such as ramps, bus lifts, and captioning, that were guaranteed by Section 504?
 - b. What strategies did the activists and allies use to counter the opposition’s arguments?

- c. How is “equity of access” different from “treating everyone the same”?
 - d. What would it look like if equity of access were the goal? Think about school, public transportation, social media platforms, and places of business to help you get started.
- 9. In Chapter 9: “The Reckoning,” Judy reflects on the different messages she received from her parents during her childhood: “I’d been taught to do whatever it took to get my point across, to question authority, to stand up for myself.” (161)
 - a. Where do you see Judy doing “whatever it took” in her work as a disability rights activist?
 - b. How did she feel in the moments when she had to convey her point of view, question authority, or stand up for herself? What choices did she face? What did she stand to gain, risk, or lose in those moments?
- 10. In the final chapter of her memoir, Judy poses this question to readers: “We are all human. Why do we see disability differently from any other aspect of being human?” (202). What is your response to Judy’s question? Why might we see disability differently?

Discussion Questions

After Reading *Rolling Warrior* or *Being Heumann*

Directions: Choose from the following questions for a culminating discussion after you have finished reading either version of Judy Heumann’s memoir. You can also bring your own questions to the discussion!

1. Consider your key takeaways from Judy’s memoir:
 - a. In your opinion, what is the most valuable idea in the memoir? Why do you find it valuable?
 - b. What scene from the memoir most resonates with you, perhaps because of an aspect of your identity, your experiences in the world, or the way that Judy crafts the scene? What makes you say that?
 - c. What question does the memoir raise for you? Where might you go to seek answers to your question?
2. How has Judy’s upbringing shaped her choices and decision-making process over the course of her life? For example, what mindsets and skills did her family instill in her? What skills and mindsets have influential figures in your life—caregivers, teachers, mentors, friends, coaches, teammates, religious leaders—passed along to you?
3. How can Judy’s story help us to better understand ourselves, other people in our communities, and the world? How does her story challenge us to consider our choices and role in creating a more fair and just society?
4. What can we learn from Judy’s story about the different ways people tell their own stories? How can we make room for people to tell their own stories in our schools, communities, and world?
5. What is your vision for a fair, just, and equitable society? What is something that you feel needs to be changed to achieve this kind of society? For example, would you examine the court system? Would you try to change laws? Would you decide to change your behavior? Or would you choose a different strategy?