



# NO BARRIERS

A BLIND MAN'S JOURNEY TO  
KAYAK THE GRAND CANYON

Photo © James Q Martin

## CURRICULUM GUIDE THE YOUNG ADULT ADAPTATION

**ERIK WEIHENMAYER** has a long history of turning obstacles into adventures. Born with a rare condition that blinded him as a teenager, he never lets his diagnosis hold him back from a full life.

In 2001, Erik became the only blind climber in history to reach the summit of Mount Everest. In 2008, he completed his quest to climb the Seven Summits — the tallest peak on each of the seven continents. An article in Time Magazine stated, “There is no way to put what Erik has done in perspective because no one has ever done anything like it. It is a unique achievement, one that in the truest sense, pushes the limits of what man is capable of.”

In his new adventure-packed memoir, Erik shares his kayak journey down the entire 277-mile length of the Grand Canyon along with blinded Navy veteran, Lonnie Bedwell. Erik’s No Barriers mindset is sure to inspire young readers to overcome challenges in their own lives.

In this curriculum guide, teachers will find high-interest, standards-based activities that can be adapted to many classroom settings.

**ERIK**  
WEIHENMAYER



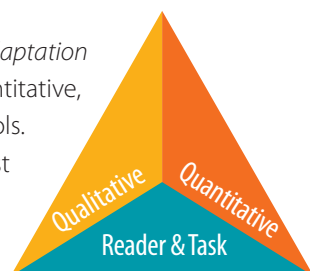


Photo © James Q Martin

**TOUCH THE TOP OF THE WORLD** As a blind adventurer who has climbed Mt. Everest and kayaked the Grand Canyon, Erik understands better than most that barriers are real, not merely perceived, and that that obstacles encountered can either stop us in our tracks, or we can figure out a way to harness them and propel ourselves to new places that we would never get to in any other way.

## ➤ Text Complexity

*No Barriers: The Young Adult Adaptation* has been analyzed using quantitative, qualitative and reader-task tools. Analysis shows the text is most appropriate for 7th and 8th grade students.



## ➤ Using This Guide

**STANDARDS:** All activities are linked to CCSS.ELA standards.

**STRUCTURE:** The curriculum guide is divided by chapters into three thematic units: (Grit, Communication, and Independence).

**ACTIVITIES:** A variety of research-based best practices are incorporated into unit plans. You need not use all activities, but should try to select a variety of different types of tasks in order to meet diverse learning styles of students.

**PACING:** A day-to-day pacing guide is not included, as requirements and schedules vary greatly from school to school. A single unit may take multiple days based on

how reading is assigned (grouping choices, homework assignments, etc.). Teachers should use their best judgment, based on district requirements and student needs, to select activities and appropriately pace learning.

**VOCABULARY:** Tier II vocabulary words have been identified for each unit. This is not an exhaustive list. Vocabulary relevant to your students should be added. Use research-based practices to teach vocabulary. Tier III (domain-specific words) can be found in the Glossary on pp. 193 -195 of *No Barriers*.

**ASSESSMENT:** Many of the activities are performance based and should be assessed using a rubric aligned to relevant standards. Formative assessments may also be used throughout the units.

**EXTENSIONS:** There are many YouTube videos available on the life and adventures of Erik Weihenmayer. *The Weight of Water*, a 2019 movie based on Erik's Grand Canyon trip, is available for streaming or downloading on Amazon Prime.

**ENRICHMENT:** Advanced students may be interested in reading the adult version of this book. The 460-page adult version is available from all major retailers.

# GETTING STARTED:

## > Preview

Play the video, *No Barriers Grand Canyon Expedition Recap* (1:48), available at <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7030732/video/108090492>. After viewing, distribute student copies of *No Barriers: The Young Adult Adaptation* and conduct a brief “book walk”, highlighting text features including foreword, prologue, photos, glossary and epilogue. If desired, have students create a Readers’ Notebook for use throughout the unit of study.

## > Engage: Discovering the Big Idea

Write the titles of the three units (**Grit, Technology, and Teamwork**) at the top of three different chart papers. Under each title, write the Essential Question (EQ) as shown throughout this guide. Leave room for additional activities to be added later. Explain to the students that they will read this book in sections, each with a slightly different focus as demonstrated by the EQ. Read aloud the EQ on the first chart, **Grit**, and ask students to respond in a one-minute provisional writing response to the EQ. It may be necessary to define *perseverance* and *resiliency* for some students. Remind students that an EQ extends beyond the specific book they are reading and therefore their responses need not be specific to this book or the video preview. Students will respond to the EQ again at the end of the section.

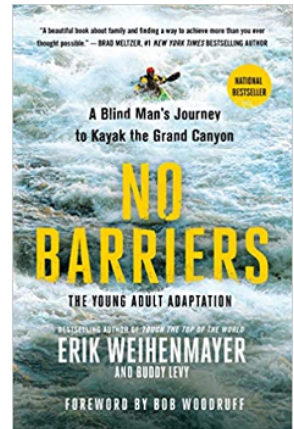
**Note:** Keep the other two EQ charts handy and use them in the same manner as you begin each of the units.

## > Setting Purpose: What Good Writers Do

Tell students that you are going to read a section of the prologue to them and they should listen for how the author, Erik Weihenmayer, uses strong **images** to relate to his audience. If desired, students can take notes of words or images that are particularly relevant to their lives.

Read aloud to students pages 1-2 of the Prologue of *No Barriers*, stopping at the end of the third complete paragraph after “tugging against the fear of sitting quietly and safely in a dark place.” Stop and ask students for the images that they now have after hearing Erik’s words. You may wish to re-read some of the text that evoked the specific images that they mention as a way of reinforcing the textual evidence and establishing text-to-self schema.

Assign remainder of Prologue to be read independently or in small groups.



**HE LOST HIS SIGHT,  
BUT HE DIDN'T  
LOSE HIS VISION.**

**On May 25, 2001, Erik Weihenmayer became the only blind person to reach the summit of Mt. Everest.**

**In 2008 he climbed Carstensz Pyramid on the island of Papua New Guinea, completing the Seven Summits, the highest point on every continent.**

**This accomplishment closed the circuit on a 13-year journey that had begun with his 1995 ascent of Mt. McKinley. He is joined by a select company of only 150 mountaineers to have accomplished the feat.**





# UNIT 1 GRIT | CHAPTERS 1-8

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION:** How can we develop perseverance and resiliency?

## STANDARDS ADDRESSED IN UNIT 1: GRIT

**RI.7.4** • Analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

**L.7.5** • Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

**W.8.10** • Write routinely over extended time frames and shorter time frames for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

## CHAPTERS 1-4 Read > Cite Evidence > Discuss

Review the Setting Purpose activity from the introductory section of this guide, explaining to students that as they read the first four chapters of the book, they will be looking for additional examples of how word choice impacts meaning and tone. Ask students to read to pg. 25, using either their Readers' Notebooks or sticky notes to record evidence of how the author has used words or images in a particularly effective way.

After students finish reading and taking notes, guide a discussion of author's word choice, encouraging students to cite specific textual evidence in their responses.

If not specifically cited in your discussion, have students turn to the birthday cake simile presented by Marieke on pg. 14. Discuss the impact that using this figure of speech has on the tone of the writing. Discuss why an author might use figures of speech.

## CHAPTERS 5-8 Read > Cite Evidence > Discuss > Write

Introduce the next chapters by looking at the Unit I chart: Grit. Explain to students that academic researchers Angela Duckworth and Erik's friend Dr. Paul Stoltz have concluded that there is a sort of "X factor" they call grit. It is this grit that allows some to be successful, while others fail in the face of a challenge. The words **perseverance** and **resiliency** in the EQ are two synonyms for grit. As a group, chart other synonyms for grit. Ask students for names of people that they believe exemplify grit. Add names to chart.

**Guided Practice:** Ask students to find examples from the first four chapters that demonstrate Erik's perseverance and resiliency (grit). Encourage use of the text to locate this evidence. Discuss the examples, supplementing with additional research on grit, as appropriate (see Resources below).

**Independent Practice:** Assign chapters 5-8, asking students to continue to look for text evidence that demonstrates Erik's grit. They can mark this with sticky notes for class discussion or use this evidence to write a short essay on how Erik exemplifies grit in his life.

**Writing Task:** Have students revisit their initial provisional writing response to the EQ. Ask them to think about how their understandings have changed after reading the first eight chapters and have them write another paragraph to reflect their new knowledge.

### GENERAL ACADEMIC VOCABULARY (TIER II WORDS)

- rehabilitation (p. 10)
- orientation (p. 24)
- tandem (p. 19)
- arsenal (p. 33)
- visualize (p. 23)
- vulnerable (p. 41)

### GRIT RESOURCES

- *The Adversity Advantage* by Paul Stoltz and Erik Weihenmayer (available from all major retailers)
- Peaklearning.com (Dr. Paul's website on Grit and AQ (Adversity Quotient))
- *TED Talks Education: Personal Grit as Key to Success* by Angela Lee Duckworth
- Teaching resources available from Characterlab.org





# UNIT 2 TECHNOLOGY | CHAPTERS 9-19

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION:** How has technology changed the way we live our lives? Is this good or bad?

## STANDARDS ADDRESSED IN UNIT 2: TECHNOLOGY

**RI.7.4** • Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and **technical meanings**.

**W.8.2.D** • Write informative/explanatory texts. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

## PREVIEWING THE UNIT

Use the previously prepared chart on Technology to introduce the EQ for the next section of the text. Ask students to brainstorm different technologies that change lives, adding them to the chart. Encourage students to suspend value judgements. Use the technologies listed on the chart as you preview the unit writing task explained below.

Introduce the next section by explaining that readers will meet two new characters: Kyle and Lonnie. Each of them uses technology in different ways. As they read about the various technologies or lack of technology, they may encounter words with very technical meanings (Tier III words). Some of these may be listed in the glossary, however students may need to use context clues or other sources for some words. Instruct students to keep a running list of technical words and their meanings in their Readers' Notebooks.

CHAPTERS 9-11 Read > Cite Evidence > Discuss > Write

Refer back to the EQ for this unit. Explain to students that they should keep this overarching question in mind as they read chapters 9-11 in whole group, pairs, or individually. Each of the chapters highlights a specific technology, though in very different ways. Provide the following focus questions to students as they read:

Questions for Discussion	Possible Textural Evidence	Page
1. Erik ends Chapter 9 by exclaiming, "I am done with those radios." What earlier text evidence can you find that Erik may need to abandon this communication system?	"...with technology came a higher chance of catastrophic failure"	46
	"...it began throwing off my rhythm and filling me with anxiety."	47
	"My ears heard the words, but my brain was shutting off."	48
2. The BrainPort relies on sensory substitution. Erik explains this concept through descriptive images of what he can "see" when using the device. Find an example in the text that best helps you visualize what Erik sees.	Student answers will vary greatly, but may include: Description of the "tongue display unit" Descriptions of household items Description of Arjun's face	53
		55-56
		56-57
3. Technology is defined as the practical application of knowledge to solve human problems. Does Kyle Maynard use technology?	Some students will look only at Kyle's use of the wheelchair as evidence of technology usage. Other students may cite Kyle's use of bath towels, grocery bags, and tape as evidence of technology  <i>Accept both responses as students continue to refine their understanding of technology.</i>	59
		59-60

CHAPTERS 12-19 Read > Cite Evidence > Discuss > Write

This section focuses on how Erik prepares for the Grand Canyon adventure. Chapters 12-15 describe local and international trips on big water, while Chapters 16-19 describe training at the U.S. National Whitewater Center. Introduce this overall organization and have students create a t-chart in their Readers' Notebook:

Chapters 12-15 Big Water	Chapters 16-19 Whitewater Center	Instruct students to use this t-chart as they read each section, noting specific techniques or technologies that assist Erik in preparing for the Grand Canyon trip.

After students have completed their charts, lead a discussion about the benefits of technology, asking them to use evidence as they discuss which method, Big Water or the Whitewater Center, better prepared Erik for his trip.

**Writing Task:** Students should select a specific technology that improves lives as the topic of an informative paper as defined in W.7-8.2. As you determine the guidelines for this paper (length, due dates, etc.), keep in mind the importance of using technical vocabulary. Though written in narrative form, Erik does an excellent job in No Barriers of explaining technical terms, especially in the description of the BrainPort in Chapter 10. It may be helpful to examine this chapter in depth with students.

GENERAL ACADEMIC VOCABULARY (TIER II WORDS)

- minuscule (p. 47) • mobility (p. 58)
- torrential (p. 69) • exhilarating (p. 74)
- excruciating (p. 77) • tumultuous (p. 105)





Photo © Tony DiZinno

# UNIT 3 TEAMWORK | CHAPTERS 1-8

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION:** What are the elements of a strong team?

## STANDARDS ADDRESSED IN UNIT 3: TEAMWORK

**RI.7.3** • Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).

**SL.8.5** • Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

## PREVIEWING THE UNIT

Use the final EQ chart, Teamwork, to introduce the final section of the text. Ask students to brainstorm teams that they have been a part of, encouraging a variety of contexts. Chart responses. Use responses to introduce the multi-media project presented at the end of this unit.

Introduce the final section of the book by explaining that readers will meet members of Erik's team and follow them on their journey down the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon.



CHAPTERS 20-22 Read > Cite Evidence > Discuss > Write

Instruct students to make a chart in their Readers' Notebook with three columns as follows:

Chapter 20 Lonnie	Chapter 21 Harlan & Rob	Chapter 22 Other Team Members

Read Chapter 20 together, modeling how to take notes about the main character, Lonnie Bedwell. Use the **think-aloud strategy** as you note key character traits and how they relate to being a member of a team. For example, on p. 107 when Lonnie tells what he says to his daughters each night, you might say, "Lonnie has such a positive mindset. I am going to write this on my chart as a character trait of a strong team member". Continue modeling the process of identifying key traits and recording on character chart.

Allow students to read Chapters 21 and 22 independently, filling in the charts for the main characters in each chapter. When complete, ask students to make predictions about the success of the team. Discuss predictions, encouraging students to use the text evidence to support their analysis of the team.

CHAPTERS 23-36 Read > Cite Evidence > Discuss > Write

This lengthy section describes the actual 277-mile journey. You may wish to assign a variety of reading scenarios (group read, partner read, assigned independent reading). As students read, they should take notes that will help support the presentations that they will make for the culminating project for this unit (see below).

Use independent reading time to conduct student conferences, assessing both oral reading fluency and comprehension of individual students.

Conclude this unit with a discussion of the EQ on Teamwork and have students present final projects.

FINAL PROJECTS

Students will work in teams to integrate multimedia and visuals into a group presentation on effective teamwork. Use the EQ, "What are the elements of a strong team?" as the focus of the presentation. They should include examples from Erik's team in No Barriers, but can also use other teams to support their presentation. Predetermine requirements such as length, number of sources, and due dates before assigning the project.

GENERAL ACADEMIC VOCABULARY (TIER II WORDS)

- menace (p. 121) • nocturnal (p. 135)
- provisions (p. 139) • turbulent (p. 152)
- execute (p. 173) • daunting (p. 185)

## MORE ABOUT ERIK WEIHENMAYER

Learn more about Erik by watching the movie, *Touch the Top of the World*. See interviews with Erik, including a 20/20 interview when Erik was in high school, at Erik's website **ErikWeihenmayer.com**.

**ERIK**  
WEIHENMAYER



Photo © Shannon Gagnon

### > ERIK'S OUTREACH

Check out the **No Barriers Youth Program**. Students ages 15-19 can apply to participate in an expedition providing transformative experiences in some of our planet's most inspiring settings.  
[www.nobarriersusa.org/youth](http://www.nobarriersusa.org/youth)



Photo © Michael Brown

### > CLIMBING EVEREST

Take a Journey to Everest on Erik's home page. Video, photos and narration show students the route Erik took up Everest during his historic ascent in 2001.



Photo © James Q Martin

### > COLORADO RIVER CHALLENGE

Watch Erik solo kayaking 277 miles down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon from Lee's Ferry to Pearce Ferry. Find this and other adventures at [www.ErikWeihenmayer.com/adventures](http://www.ErikWeihenmayer.com/adventures)

### > CHECK OUT ERIK'S BLOGS

- Training his guide dog
- Skiing with a guide
- Ice climbing
- Expedition Impossible!
- Rock Climbing

### > LEARN about the many people with whom Erik has adventured:



**Hugh Herr** • Rock climber missing both legs; engineer, and biophysicist

**Daniel Kish** • Expert in human echolocation

**Mandy Harvey** • Deaf jazz singer & songwriter

**John Bramblitt** • Blind painter

**Kyle Maynard** • First quadruple amputee to ascend Mount Kilimanjaro without the aid of prosthetics

**Mick Ebeling** • Humanitarian and technologist who developed 3-D printed prosthetics and computers controlled with eye movement