

***Running Against the Odds* by Desmond Dunham**  
*Teacher's Support Plan by Jesse Meyer*

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**Book Summary**

Life took Desmond “Coach Dez” Dunham down an unpaved path toward both manhood and coaching, testing his spirit, humility, and purpose. Now a nationally recognized high school coach, *Running Against the Odds* chronicles Dunham’s journey to finding his passion within youth sports, culminating at the 2007 Penn Relays - one of the most defining moments of his illustrious running career.

In this impassioned coming-of-age memoir, Dunham recounts his turbulent childhood, filled with challenges in economically-distressed Gary, Indiana. Despite constant rejection and disappointment from a distant, alcoholic father, Dunham persevered, attended Howard University, and found his passion on the track with key support along the way.

From humble beginnings with the odds stacked against him, Dunham’s story shows that underdogs prevail.

**Supplementary Texts**

- Jason Reynolds's Track Series Paperback Collection: *Ghost; Patina; Sunny; Lu*, Paperback – October 22, 2019
- *Inc. Magazine*, February 2016, “Kevin Plank: The Rise & Risk of Under Armour”, Single Issue Magazine – January 1, 2016
- *Girls Running: All You Need to Strive, Thrive, and Run Your Best*, Paperback – Illustrated, August 11, 2020
- *The Youth and Teen Running Encyclopedia: A Complete Guide for Middle and Long Distance Runners Ages 6 to 18*, Paperback – February 18, 2014
- “Invictus” by William Earnest Henley

## Priority Standards

This teacher's support plan serves as a direct companion for middle and high school grade teachers whose work is rooted in the Common Core State Standards. If your state assesses its own standards, it's okay! The culminating tasks, text-dependent questions, and vocabulary work are rooted in the text and can be matched to your own state's standards. The standards listed below are the anchor standards. Teachers of specific grade levels should look to the grade specific standard correlated to the anchor standard in order to ensure they are planning for, teaching to, and assessing at the full breadth of their grade-level standard.

### Reading Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5: Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

### Writing Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

### Culminating Tasks & Exemplar

Task	Standards	Criteria for Success Beyond the Standards
<p><b>Middle School Argumentative</b> Write an essay that argues which of Dunham’s accomplishments was his most significant. Be sure to include clear reasoning and relevant evidence from the text to support your selection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifies a clearly significant moment</li> <li>- Supports with at least 3 reasons or sub-claims</li> </ul>
<p><b>Middle School Explanatory</b> Write an essay explaining how Dunham and his team overcame the odds to win the 2007 Penn Relays. Be sure to include the people and events that were important in this process. Support your answer with evidence from each source.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Includes at least 3 people or events that helped Dunham and his team to succeed</li> <li>- Explains how each person or event supported or led to the team’s success</li> </ul>
<p><b>Middle School Narrative</b> You have read Chapter 8, in which Dunham loses at the Lafayette Jeff Invitational. Recount Dunham’s experience in a journal entry that both recollects the event and exposes Dunham’s emotions. Use what you know from the text to guide your new narrative.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Written as a journal entry</li> <li>- Written in the past tense</li> <li>- Includes an accurate timeline of the day’s major events</li> <li>- Includes Dunham’s reflection and emotions appropriate for the scene and what we know about Dunham as a character</li> </ul>
<p><b>High School Argumentative</b> Write an essay that argues who or what most impacted Desmond’s journey to become a nationally-recognized high school track coach. Be sure to respond to counterclaims and include clear reasoning and relevant evidence from the text to support your selection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifies a clearly impactful person or event</li> <li>- Supports with at least 2 sub-claims and at least 1 counterclaim with rebuttal</li> <li>- Draws clear connection between person/event and future success</li> </ul>

<p><b>High School Explanatory</b> Consider Dunham’s experiences in high school and at Howard University. Write an essay exploring Dunham’s view of the most challenging obstacles that he faced while at Howard University, and in what way his solutions were rooted in his previous experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifies at least 2 obstacles that Dunham faced while at Howard University</li> <li>- Identifies at least 2 solutions Dunham found to overcome his obstacles</li> <li>- Draws connections between Dunham’s solutions and his earlier years</li> </ul>
<p><b>High School Narrative</b> You have read Chapter 8, in which Dunham loses at the Lafayette Jeff Invitational. Rewrite the scene on pages 78-80 from Chief’s point of view. Use what you have learned about Chief up to this point in order to write your narrative.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1</li> <li>● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Correct scene is written from the 1st person point of view of Chief</li> <li>- Includes characteristics, behaviors, and dialogue appropriate for Chief and for the scene in the text</li> <li>- Portrays Dunham appropriately given evidence in the text</li> </ul>
<p><b>Creative Writing Options</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create a playlist (on Spotify or a streaming platform of your choice) that accompanies the reading of Dunham’s memoir. For each song chosen, write a brief paragraph explaining the song’s connection to the text and why it was chosen. Be sure to include at least eight songs.</li> <li>● Create a Reader’s Theatre script of a short scene from the text, and then film your performance. Be sure to include at least two characters, their dialogue, and necessary stage directions.</li> <li>● Pick a meaningful scene from the text and transform the narrative scene into a poem.</li> </ul>		

*Questions and expected answers (ideal student responses) will need to be tailored to the specific language of the grade level to which you are teaching in order for students to achieve the full breadth of the standard.*

**Literary Elements Found and Highlighted in *Running Against the Odds***

<b>Symbolism and Motifs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 75th Place Ribbon from Lafayette Jeff Invitational</li> <li>- Batons given to the “House of Champions” team</li> <li>- Running routes</li> <li>- Communities; teams as a form of community</li> </ul>
<b>Structural and Plot Elements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sectioning of the text into Childhood, College Years, and Coaching             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quotes at the start of each section</li> <li>- Setting changes in each</li> <li>- Introduction to a primary supporting character(s) in each (Chief, Phil / Alpha Phi Alpha, Jami)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Frame Structure: Introducing the Penn Relays in the Author’s Note and ending the text with his team’s success at Penn Relays</li> <li>- Juxtaposition             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gary, Indiana vs. Washington, DC (Howard University)</li> <li>- Dunham’s father vs. Chief</li> <li>- Dunham’s childhood vs. Dunham’s child-rearing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Possible Themes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One’s family can be both a support and an obstacle.</li> <li>- One doesn’t need to overcome obstacles alone; most obstacles are overcome with support from others.</li> <li>- The “underdog mentality” can be fuel to accomplish your goals.</li> <li>- _____ is necessary to achieve your goals.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hard work</li> <li>- Strategy</li> <li>- Teamwork</li> <li>- Failure</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Early failures are not a reflection of your future.</li> </ul>

*This plan includes at least 3-4 Tier Two (or SAT/ACT) vocabulary words per chapter to support teachers with planning instruction around solving for word meaning. Each chapter includes many more than 3-4 examples and teachers are encouraged to use the following list as a starting point for planning.*

Vocabulary Work					
Chapter	Tier Two Vocabulary Words	Chapter	Tier Two Vocabulary Words	Chapter	Tier Two Vocabulary Words
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contemplated (21)</li> <li>- Vacated (22)</li> <li>- Evasive (23)</li> </ul>	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Moniker (70)</li> <li>- Blistering (73)</li> <li>- Sheepishly (75)</li> </ul>	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Serenity (133)</li> <li>- Validation (134)</li> <li>- Unbowed (139)</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inconceivable (25)</li> <li>- Paradox (25)</li> <li>- Reprieve (27)</li> <li>- Tirades (32)</li> </ul>	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Serene (77)</li> <li>- Adversity (80)</li> <li>- Cultivated (81)</li> <li>- Precariously (84)</li> </ul>	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Choreographed (143)</li> <li>- Succumb (145)</li> <li>- Shanties (146)</li> <li>- Diaspora (149)</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incomprehensible (35)</li> <li>- Imploring (37)</li> <li>- Transpired (37)</li> <li>- Brunt (40)</li> </ul>	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adjacent (93)</li> <li>- Entrepreneur (97)</li> <li>- Interrogated (99)</li> </ul>	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hefty (157)</li> <li>- Jubilation (158)</li> <li>- Reciprocating (161)</li> <li>- Meticulous (166)</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Camaraderie (44)</li> <li>- Periphery (45)</li> <li>- Mitigate (45)</li> </ul>	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Barbaric (105)</li> <li>- Manifest (105)</li> <li>- Imperative (107)</li> <li>- Capitalized (112)</li> </ul>	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deferring (169)</li> <li>- Solemn (169)</li> <li>- Barrage (172)</li> <li>- Exhortation (174)</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Haven (51)</li> <li>- Disdain (54)</li> <li>- Autonomy (55)</li> <li>- Rampant (59)</li> </ul>	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Captivated (116)</li> <li>- Composure (120)</li> <li>- Wallow (121)</li> </ul>	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resent (186)</li> <li>- Plethora (187)</li> <li>- Juxtaposition (188)</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adamantly (61)</li> <li>- Muster (63)</li> <li>- Emulate (67)</li> </ul>	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dogged (124)</li> <li>- Ultimatum (126)</li> <li>- Diverted (129)</li> </ul>	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Designated (189)</li> <li>- Prematurely (190)</li> <li>- Demeanor (193)</li> </ul>

19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aloof (202)</li> <li>- Chagrin (204)</li> <li>- Poignant (205)</li> <li>- Loomed (207)</li> </ul>	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prestige (217)</li> <li>- Leverage (219)</li> <li>- Wane (219)</li> </ul>	22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preliminary (221)</li> <li>- Prognosticated (222)</li> <li>- Fatigued (229)</li> <li>- Indomitable (231)</li> </ul>
20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regimen (211)</li> <li>- Laborious (213)</li> <li>- Grueling (215)</li> </ul>				

*Vocabulary-focused questions and expected answers (ideal student responses) will need to be tailored to the specific language of the grade level to which you are teaching in order for students to achieve the full breadth of the standard. Additionally, the words above may not be appropriate for the grade level that you are teaching, but each chapter in the text is rife with Tier 2 vocabulary words.*

*Common Core assessments like SBAC and PARCC will often ask students for the meaning of a word in the context that it is being used. SAT and ACT questions may do the same, or may focus more on the form of the word, particularly in the context of the grammar section of both tests.*