

Penguin Readers Factsheets

Teacher's Notes

Cinderella Man

By Marc Cerasini



Level 4 – Intermediate Cinderella Man

Summary

Cinderella Man tells the true story of American boxing legend, James J. Braddock. A man of the people, Braddock fights against poverty and obscurity as hard as he does against his sporting opponents. This book is based on the 2005 movie, directed by Ron Howard and starring Russell Crowe and Renée Zellweger.

The story begins in 1928, when the American economy is thriving and Braddock is a popular and successful boxer. He has a promising boxing career ahead of him, plenty of money and a happy home life in New Jersey with his wife and three children. But by the early 1930s Jim Braddock's career has hit rock bottom. America is suffering from the Great Depression and, like many of his fellow Americans, Braddock finds himself unable to pay the bills or support his young family. After a crushing defeat in the boxing ring, Braddock loses his boxing license and is forced to work for a few dollars a day in the Newark, New Jersey, docks. Despite being so desperately poor that he has to beg his former manager for money, Braddock never loses his pride or his determination to keep his family together.

Just when the family are most desperate, Braddock is offered a second chance in the ring. He returns to fighting having sold his boxing shoes and with no recent training. But his work at the docks has strengthened Braddock's left hand punch ... and his resolve. He wins his fight and goes on to win more. He becomes the champion of the American common man – fighting against the odds and carrying the hopes and dreams of his countrymen with every punch. He works his way up the boxing ranks until, finally, he faces Max Baer – the notoriously violent world heavyweight champion. With his wife begging him not to fight on one side, and the demoralized, impoverished American population urging him to win on the other, Braddock enters the ring for the fight of his life. After a long and dramatic fight, the judges announce Braddock's victory. The fighter's triumph over great adversity both in and out of the ring is a truly inspirational tale.

About the authors

Cliff Hollingsworth and Akiva Goldsman worked together to write the story for the movie *Cinderella Man*. Before the movie, Jim Braddock's story was not well known in the United States. Hollingsworth wanted to tell modern Americans about this great man, so he contacted Jim Braddock's sons, Jay and Howard. They read Hollingsworth's first script and loved it! At last their father's heroic story would be told.

Hollingsworth wanted to keep as close to the true story as possible. When Jim Braddock pays money back to the relief office in Chapter 10, it may seem like a Hollywood fantasy, but it was really true. Jim Braddock's sons, too, agreed that their parents' characters and the movie story itself is very accurate. As Hollingsworth says, Jim Braddock "was a character who was too good to be true – but he was true!" *Cinderella Man* was Cliff Hollingsworth's first big movie.

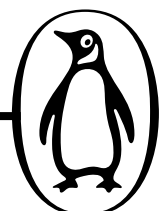
Akiva Goldsman is an experienced Hollywood scriptwriter. He worked with Hollingsworth on the *Cinderella Man* script once the main story was ready. Before *Cinderella Man*, he adapted two John Grisham movies, *The Client* and *A Time to Kill*, as well as working with the actor Russell Crowe on the Oscar-winning movie, *A Beautiful Mind*. (You can read all these stories in the Penguin Readers series, too.)

Marc Cerasini wrote the book *Cinderella Man* from the movie. He has worked as a magazine editor and writer for over twenty years. He often works on novelizations for some of the big movie companies in Hollywood.

Background and themes

Cinderella Man begins in New York in 1928, during the "Roaring Twenties." This was an exciting time of great economic prosperity and social change in the United States. After World War I, the American economy grew faster than ever before. Thousands of people were making money quickly on the stock market, the development of mass-produced goods meant that industry was thriving, and new music, movies, and literature were inspiring people's creativity and optimism everywhere. But this all came to a sudden end on Black Tuesday, 29th October 1929, when the US stock market collapsed.

The book highlights the sudden and dramatic change in the Braddocks' fortunes as the United States (and the industrialized world) was plunged into the Great Depression. Although President Herbert Hoover insisted that the only thing to fear was "fear itself," the American economy did not recover and millions of Americans lost their jobs and their homes. *Cinderella Man* shows the suffering of the average American citizen during the Depression. We see Mae forced to wait in line for soup to feed her family and to burn street signs to keep her children warm and Jim reduced to begging for a few dollars (Chapter 5) to keep his family together. We also see homeless New Yorkers living on the streets, in cars, on the subway and in Central Park. All over the United States, people began building shanty towns – also known as "Hoovervilles" – to live in.



Penguin Readers Factsheets

Teacher's Notes

With the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt as the new American president, the government began injecting money into the economy and handing out money to the country's poor. Jim and his fellow Americans are ashamed to receive money from the government – but they know it is their only chance of survival. When Jim eventually wins some prize money, he immediately goes to the relief office to pay back what he has received. Books and movies set during the Great Depression are popular in America today because the people are proud of their families' abilities to survive and remain proud during this difficult time.

Against the background of the Great Depression, *Cinderella Man* tells a story of a loving and courageous family man. He is determined to keep his family together and to bring his children up honorably, even in the most difficult circumstances. When Jay steals some meat to feed the family, Jim makes him take it back to the butcher. Even in the good times, at the beginning and end of the story, Jim Braddock is more interested in spending time with his wife and children than in a superstar lifestyle. They are "the reason why he was not only the heavyweight champion of the world, but the luckiest man in it."

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class Readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/group work questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access center.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- 1 Ask students what they know about the story of *Cinderella Man* before they start reading the book. Have any of the students seen the movie? If so, ask them to tell the rest of the class about it. Ask them to look at the front cover, too. Elicit ideas about the story from the students. Do they recognise the actors (Russell Crowe and Renée Zellweger)? Ask them to look closely at the crowd. Can they guess when and where the story takes place?
- 2 Ask students to write down their favorite sport on a piece of paper. They should spend a few minutes thinking about *why* they like that sport, and make notes if they need to. Walk around the class and help students with vocabulary. (If any students don't like any sport, ask them to write down the reasons why.) Then, choose some students to tell the rest of the class about their favorite sport. How many other students also chose that sport as their favorite? Do they like it for similar reasons? What are the most popular sports in the class?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapter 1

Ask students to write a character profile of Jim Braddock for a popular magazine. Students should include information about his sport, home life and other interests. Ask students to use their imaginations and add some details, such as favorite food, hobby etc.

Chapters 2–3

Students work in small groups. Give each group a large piece of paper and ask them to make a list of the problems that the Braddocks face at the end of Chapter 3. After a few minutes, the groups should swap their pieces of paper and try to think of a solution for each of the problems. As a class discussion, ask students how easy it will be for the Braddocks to find solutions to their problems. What other problems might they face in the next part of the book?

Chapters 4–5

When the Braddock's electricity and heat are turned off, Mae takes the boys to her father and Rosy to her sister. Ask students to write a page in Jay's diary about this day. How does he feel about being sent away? What did he see on the trip to his grandfather's house? How does he feel about his sick brother and sister? Does he like it at his grandfather's house? Jim promised not to send the children away. Does Jay feel differently about his father now that this promise has been broken?

Chapters 6–7

Students work in pairs. Ask them to prepare and then act out the following conversation:

- Student A: You are Jim Braddock. Joe Gould has just told you that you will fight Corn Griffin for \$250. You know it is dangerous but you want to fight because your family needs the money. Talk to Mae about it. Tell her it's only one fight. Explain that you only get a few dollars for a day's work at the docks. You need her support. Will she give it?
- Student B: You are Mae Braddock. Your husband, Jim, will tell you that he has a fight against Corn Griffin. You're not happy about it because you're scared for your husband's safety. What will happen to your family if he is injured and can't work. Or if he dies? Ask him how much money he will get. Will you support your husband, or not?

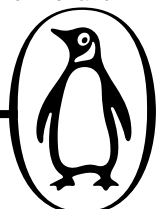
Chapters 8–9

Students work individually or in pairs. In Chapter 9, John Henry Lewis says that Jim is "not the same guy." Ask students to make two lists: one about the changes in Jim's fighting style and the other about any other changes in Jim's character and attitude since 1928. Ask some students to read their lists to the rest of the class and encourage classroom discussion. What has made Jim change so much in just a few years?

Chapters 10–11

Students work in small groups. Ask each group to choose one of these scenes and prepare it to be acted out in front of the class. Encourage students to expand the scene from the book to include more dialogue and action.

- Jim goes home and finds Sara Wilson there with Mae. She tells him that Mike is missing.
- Jim finds Mike, dying, under a wagon in Central Park.
- Mike's funeral.
- Jim, Mae and Joe answer reporters' questions about the fight with Max Baer.
- Jim, Mae and Joe go to the boxing club for dinner and Max Baer comes in.



Penguin Readers Factsheets

Teacher's Notes

Chapters 12–13

Students work in pairs. In each pair, one student is a radio or television interviewer and the other is Jim Braddock. Students should prepare and act out a short interview (about 6–8 questions) before the big fight. The interviewer should ask Jim about his preparation for the fight and his feelings about it, too. Some students can act out their interviews for the rest of the class.

Chapter 14

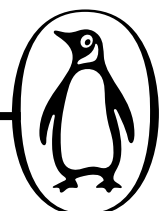
Students work individually or in pairs. After years of poverty, Jim Braddock wins a lot of money in his fight against Max Baer. What will he spend it on? Ask students to write a shopping list for the Braddock family three things for Jim, three for Mae, three for the whole family, and one each for the children (total 12 things). Then, as a whole class activity, compare the lists and choose the best or most popular ideas to make a master shopping list on the board. Ask students what *they* would buy if they suddenly received a lot of money.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- 1 Discussion: "*Cinderella Man* is a sports movie for boxing fans." Do students agree or disagree? What might someone who is uninterested in boxing enjoy about the movie?
- 2 Use a video or DVD of a sport that your students may be familiar with. Show the students the video/DVD with the sound turned off. Tell them that they will need to supply the sports commentary for the rest of the class. You will need to show the video several times and allow plenty of time for the students to make notes and practice. Alternatively, you could ask students to supply their own video/DVD and to prepare their commentary for homework.

Word list

It will be useful for your students to know the new words found on page 80 of the Reader. They are practiced in the "Before you read" sections at the back of the book. (The definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)



Penguin Readers Factsheets

Student's Activities

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Level 4 – Intermediate Cinderella Man Photocopiable

These activities can be done alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group only activities are marked*.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- Cinderella Man* was a successful movie in 2005. Read about it in the Introduction (pages v–vii). Then close the book and read these sentences. Are they true (T) or false (F)?
 - Cinderella Man* is a true story about a famous American boxer.
 - Film maker Ron Howard and actor Russell Crowe worked together for the first time in *Cinderella Man*.
 - Jim Braddock's wife, Mae, is played by Renée Zellweger in the movie.
 - Russell Crowe had to put on weight to play Jim Braddock in the movie.
 - Muhammad Ali, the famous boxing trainer, trained Russell Crowe for the movie.
 - Some of Braddock's opponents are played by real boxers in the movie.
- Look at the Contents (page iii) and read the chapter titles. Do you think the story has a happy ending? What happens, do you think?

ACTIVITIES WHILE READING THE BOOK

Chapter 1

- Who
 - had come to New York after winning fifty fights?
 - organized the fights at Madison Square Garden?
 - has no control over his mouth?
 - had moved from Ireland to the United States for a better life?
 - finds it difficult to watch Jim's fights?
- Joe Gould is Jim Braddock's manager. What work does he do and how does he earn money? Why does Mae ask him questions about Jim's prize money? From this chapter, do you think Joe Gould is a good manager? Give reasons for your answers.

Chapter 2 and 3

- Finish these sentences in your own words. Try not to look at the Reader.
 - Jim's wedding photograph reminds him of ____
 - Jim gives his meat to his daughter, Rosy, even though ____
 - When the United States economy failed, ____
 - It's harder and harder for Joe Gould to ____

- Ben points his gun at the foreman's heart because ____
 - Jay stole enough meat to ____
- Why does Jay steal the meat? What does Jim do about it? If you were Jim, what would you do?
 - Answer these questions.
 - What does Joe Gould say about Jim's opponent before the fight?
 - How has Joe Gould been affected by the Crash?
 - Joe Gould breaks the rules of boxing for Jim's fight in two ways. What are they?
 - Jim has broken his hand badly. What other damage has he suffered in the ring?
 - What reason does the referee give for ending the fight early?
 - Read chapter 3 carefully; then close the book. How much can you remember about Jim's fight with Abe Feldman? Why did Jimmy Johnston take away Jim's boxing license? Was he right, do you think? Give reasons for your answer.

Chapters 4 and 5

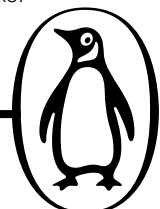
- Complete these sentences. Use these words.

ashamed beaten destroyed failed
useless worried worse

- Mae is ____ about Jim's hand because he cannot work.
 - Jim's hand is broken, but he will not be ____.
 - The doctor says that Jim's right hand will be ____ for months.
 - Without heat and electric power, Howard's cough became ____.
 - Jim feels ____ when he collects money from the Newark relief office.
 - Jim's fight with Tommy Loughran turned him into a boxer of " ____ promise."
 - When Mae takes the children away, Jim realises how easily their life can be ____.
- Joe Jeanette "had always been a hero to Jim." Do you have a hero? Who is it and why do you admire him or her? Are heroes still important in today's world? Why/why not?

Chapters 6 and 7

- Who says these things? What are they talking about?
 - "It was better when we had our own cake."
 - "You're always trying to fix the world."



Penguin Readers Factsheets

Student's Activities

- (c) "Maybe he just needed a little time."
- (d) "You have a better jab than I did!"
- (e) "You're meat, Jimmy."
- (f) "It's not for me... It's for my dad."
- (g) "Am I seeing a ghost?"
- (h) "I can't believe it!"

- 2 After Jim has won his fight against Corn Griffin, he watches Max Baer fight Primo Carnera. You will meet one of these boxers again in this story. Which one, do you think? Can you imagine what will happen?

Chapters 8 and 9

- 1 After Joe Gould visits Jim's apartment in Chapter 8, Jim says "At least in the ring you know who's hitting you." What does he mean? How are his words connected to his work partner, Mike?
- 2 When do these things happen? Put these sentences in order (1–8) starting with the thing that happened first (1).
- (a) Jimmy Johnston agrees to give Jim Braddock a fight with John Henry Lewis.
 - (b) Mike tells Jim he's put some money on him for the fight.
 - (c) Joe Gould visits Jim's apartment.
 - (d) Jim starts training with Joe Jeanette .
 - (e) Jim wins his fight against Art Lasky.
 - (f) Jim wins his fight against Lewis.
 - (g) Mae visits Joe's apartment.
 - (h) Jimmy Johnston announces that he will organize fights among the top heavyweight boxers.

Chapters 10 and 11

- 1 Choose the right answer.
- (a) Jim used some of his prize money to pay back
 - (1) Joe Gould. (2) the butcher. (3) the relief office.
 - (b) After the Crash, tens of thousands of New Yorkers lost their money and became
 - (1) homeless. (2) political. (3) useless.
 - (c) Jim found Mike in a pool of blood under a
 - (1) wagon. (2) trash can. (3) subway.
 - (d) Jim felt that Mike's death was a stupid, unnecessary
 - (1) funeral. (2) waste. (3) future.
- 2 What kind of future will Sara Wilson have with her baby daughter, do you think? Write a paragraph about Sara's life after her husband's death. How will she get money? Who will help her? Where will she live?

- 3 Choose one or more of these words for each person.

angry champion confident journalist
manager mean rich scared smart
successful thoughtful violent

- (a) Jim Braddock
- (b) Mae Braddock
- (c) Joe Gould
- (d) Jimmy Johnston
- (e) Sporty Lewis
- (f) Max Baer

- 4 Jimmy Johnston knew that the Braddocks would meet Max Baer at the club's restaurant. Why did he organize this, do you think?

Chapters 12 and 13

- 1 Jim's wife, Mae, asks Jim not to fight. She is scared for her husband's life and for her family's future. Is she right to ask him not to fight, do you think? Is Jim right to fight without his wife's support? What would you do? Give reasons for your answers.
- 2 Read this paragraph about the first seven rounds of the big fight. There are ten wrong words. Circle them and write the correct words.

Jim won the first round on punches, but Baer was not worried. He was confident he can end the game at any time with one punch. In the second round, Baer threw more punches at Jim's weak ribs. In the third round, too, Baer punched Jim's body and the manager warned the champion to keep his fists down. Baer kept punching Jim's ribs in the fourth and fifth rounds, but Jim's feet were quieter and he danced away easily. Baer got angry and hit Jim with an illegal handback punch. Then he threw Jim into the crowd. In the sixth round, Jim kept punched Baer hard. Baer wanted to finish the fight, but by the end of the seventh round either fighter was ahead.

Chapter 14

- 1 Read these sentences about Chapter 14. Are they true (T) or false (F)?
- (a) Jim hits Baer below the belt in the twelfth round
 - (b) Baer isn't hitting as hard as he usually does.
 - (c) Mae doesn't listen to any of the fight on the radio.
 - (d) Baer wanted to end the fight with a knockout, but he couldn't do it.
 - (e) After becoming heavyweight champion of the world, Jim Braddock never fought again.
- 2 At the end of the big fight, both boxers were still throwing punches. Why did the judges decide that Jim Braddock was the winner? Read about the fight again and make a list of possible reasons.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- 1 On the back of the book you will find a "blurb" — a short description of the story. A good blurb should make readers want to read the book and find out more. Write your own blurb for *Cinderella Man*. Don't look at the back cover!
- 2 What have you learned about the sport of boxing from this book? Has it changed the way you feel about the sport in any way?
- 3 Jim Braddock has two great loves in his life: boxing and his family. Which is most important to him, do you think? Give reasons for your answers.

