



AMERICA: THE LAST BEST HOPE

How to Help Students Struggling to Read and Comprehend *America: The Last Best Hope*

Team HOPE strongly believes that what sets *America: The Last Best Hope* apart from other textbooks is the fact that it is simply a compelling narrative. We think this is a book that will engage students and one they will actually read. That being said, we know many students do struggle with reading skills and others are just reluctant to read at all.

Despite these challenges, we encourage teachers to do all they can to encourage students to read this book. At the very heart of this program (*Last Best Hope* and the Roadmap) is the desire to provide for students the rare joy that comes from reading a dramatic retelling of a great story – in this case, our nation’s story. We all know this is a bold goal in that students in schools everywhere don’t actually read their history texts – they skim, scan, and search for answers to questions they have been assigned. And in doing so, they miss the enjoyment that comes from being hooked by the incredible story of our nation’s past.

So here are some suggestions for helping those students who do struggle to read *Last Best Hope*:

1. Some students will be challenged by the vocabulary in *Last Best Hope*. The “Teacher Toolkit” has a page giving suggestions on [How to Incorporate Vocabulary](#) found in the book into daily instruction. Another possibility is to have students open the vocabulary page on the student view of the Roadmap corresponding to the chapter they are reading. Here is an [example](#) from Volume II, chapter 7. Note that each word has a “pop up” definition, and students can look up difficult words as they read. Or, in most cases, students will be able to understand the definition of words from the context of the paragraph in which they appear.
2. From their own pre-reading of the text, teachers can break chapters into smaller, five to ten pages at a time. These assignments will be more manageable for students and will make it more likely that they will become interested in the “story” and want to read on.
3. The “Summary” for each chapter on the student view of the Roadmap can be read out loud and discussed by the class before students read the chapter. Having a foundation of pre-knowledge will help make the reading in the chapter more accessible. The same exercise can be used with the “Key Historical Points” provided for each chapter in the student view of the Roadmap.



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4. Students or the class as a whole can listen to Dr. Bennett's introduction to each chapter found on the student view under "Chapter Media." This will also give students foundational knowledge before beginning to read the material.
5. Under the "Web Tutorials for Teachers," teachers will find an excellent suggestion ([Web Tutorial #20](#)) for a pre-reading exercise incorporating the "Key People You Should Know" link provided to students in each chapter of the Roadmap. This can prepare students to read and comprehend the material in the chapter.
6. Have students write creative stories using episodes from the chapter as a backdrop.
7. Use the plays and debates provided on the Teacher View for each chapter of the Roadmap to reinforce the reading and deepen understanding of key issues.
8. Incorporate brief clips from films from the historical period the class is studying to help students imagine the historical setting in the chapter more clearly. A list of possible films to use can be found in the teacher view for each chapter under "Other Resources."
9. For those teachers and students who subscribe to the Premium Roadmap, students can take advantage of the audio version of *Last Best Hope* and listen to the book **as they read**. The audio is broken into short (2-6 minute) segments that are very manageable for a struggling reader.
10. More than any other factor, though, a key component for all students as they read this book is the role of the teacher. Teachers should read along with their students and continually challenge students to see the drama in the story. Bennett's narrative certainly provides this, but teachers have to ask students questions such as:
 - a. What would you have done in that situation? This can help students see characters from the past as real people like themselves.
 - b. Did he or she (historical figure) exhibit courage? Why didn't others?
 - c. How could the situation have turned out differently had he or she (historical figure) not acted?

Above all, we encourage teachers to show your own passion for the story related in *Last Best Hope* to create the same desire in students to read the story for themselves.