

The Fastest Woman in the World

How a champion racer changed sports in America forever

About the Story

Lexile: 910L

For qualitative complexity factors,
go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective: to write an essay
synthesizing information from two
articles

Key Skills: compare and contrast,
inference, figurative language,
supporting a claim, author's craft,
key ideas, text feature, synthesis

Essential Questions:

- What does it mean to be inclusive?
- How can people stand up for their rights?
- What does it take to change society?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these
Common Core anchor standards: R.1,
R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, R.7, R.9, W.2, SL.1,
SL.2, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—
including TEKS—go to Scope Online.

THE FASTEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD

How Tatyana McFadden became a champion racer—and changed sports in America forever. *By author Deborah*

Ad You Read This is about the importance of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Tatyana's life.

Tatyana McFadden was flying through the streets of New York City. She had been on her racing wheelchair for years, and she was racing as fast as she could. She was a champion, and she was a role model for many people.

Exciting News When Tatyana was 5, her life changed forever. A woman named Deborah McFadden came to visit the orphanage. She was looking for a girl to adopt, and she found Tatyana. Tatyana was a strong, healthy girl, but she had a physical challenge. She was born with a condition called spina bifida, which means she was born without a part of her spine. This made it difficult for her to walk, and she had to use a wheelchair.

A New Life Left: Tatyana with her mom Deborah McFadden in 1991. Below: Tatyana in a racing wheelchair, which is longer and wider than a regular wheelchair.

Nonfiction

Tatyana felt it was "that my mother," she announced after Deborah left.

Tatyana's caregivers thought her declaration was a nightmare—but Deborah kept coming to see Tatyana. On one visit, she noticed with racing arms. She was adopting Tatyana and bringing her to live with her and her partner, Bill, at their home in Maryland.

In the U.S., doctors warned that Tatyana might have only a couple of years to live. Years of inadequate medical care had left her dangerously weak. But Deborah had a feeling that Tatyana would shatter expectations.

How Tatyana

Tatyana's new life in America was full of wonder. Her first pair of shoes, a new pair of wheels, warm bubble baths, ice cream. (She had never eaten anything so cold and asked her mom to let her try it in the kitchen.)

To help Tatyana's strength, Deborah enrolled her at a sports club for kids living with physical disabilities—physical conditions that affected their movement, even the speed at which they perform certain activities. Tatyana enjoyed every sport she tried—basketball, ice hockey, swimming. But it was track and field that captured her heart.

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Audio:

- Author read-alouds
- Vocabulary
- Text-to-speech
- Podcast: Activist Chat: Meet Jennifer Keelan

Recommended pairings from the Scope archives:

- Infographic: "How to Be a Changemaker"
- Nonfiction: "Nothing Holds Me Back"
- Paired Texts: "My Limb Difference Doesn't Define Me" and "Advice From Jordan"

Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking
- Preparing to Write: Making the World a More Inclusive Place
- Core Skills Workout: Central Ideas and Details*
- Choice Board
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

10 minutes

Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project or screenshare the activity **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice**. Review the definitions as a class. (Optionally, have students complete the practice activity for homework.) Highlighted words: *accessible, curb cuts, designated, humanitarian, implement, inadequate, mandate, mobility, seasoned*

2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

“The Fastest Woman in the World”

- Have a volunteer read the **As You Read** box that appears on page 18 of the magazine and at the top of the digital story page.
- Read the article once through as a class. Optionally, have students listen to author Allison Friedman read her article aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Divide students into groups to read the article again and respond to the following close-reading questions. *Tip: If you're remote, you can have each group respond in a shared doc or discuss the questions in their own chat room; you can also use the questions as an asynchronous assignment.*

Close-Reading Questions

(10 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **How was Tatyana’s life in the U.S. different from her life in Russia?** (compare and contrast) *Tatyana’s life in Russia was extremely difficult. Because her mother couldn’t afford treatment for Tatyana’s spina bifida, her mother put Tatyana up for adoption. The orphanage was a grim place*

where Tatyana did not have a wheelchair and inadequate health care caused her to become “dangerously weak.” After moving to the U.S., Tatyana’s life changed drastically. She lived in a loving home, received quality health care and her first wheelchair, and built up her strength at a club for kids living with physical disabilities. She became strong and healthy and was able to pursue her passion for track and field.

2. Tatyana explains, “The moment I sat in that racing chair, I knew it was for me. It was something that I never felt before: freedom.” What does she mean? What does this help readers understand about wheelchairs? (inference) *Tatyana means that the racing chair made her feel more powerful than ever, like she could move without any barriers or restraints. Someone who doesn’t use a wheelchair might view it as limiting or confining; Tatyana shows us that her chair is liberating.*
3. Consider the saying Tatyana often thinks of: “Failure is not falling down, but refusing to get up.” What does this saying mean? How does it relate to Tatyana and the way she has lived her life? (figurative language, supporting a claim) *This saying expresses the idea that failure is not being unsuccessful in achieving a goal, but rather giving up on a goal when success doesn’t come easily. Tatyana’s “ya sama” attitude exemplifies this saying and has helped her find success in her athletic and activist endeavors. Just as she pushed herself back into her toppled racing chair to win a marathon, she has refused to give up in her fight for equal treatment of people living with disabilities. Because of Tatyana’s determined efforts, she was permitted to race at her school, other kids with disabilities are able to participate in school sports, and Paralympic athletes will receive payment equal to that of Olympic athletes.*

“Climbing Toward a Better World”

- Read the article as a class. Optionally, have students listen to co-author Jennifer Dignan read the article aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Discuss the following close-reading questions.

Close-Reading Questions

(5 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. The authors write that for Jennifer Keelan, “restaurants, stores, and museums were often off-limits.” What do they mean by “off-limits”? What does the use of this word help readers understand? (author’s craft, key ideas) *If a place or an area is “off-limits,” you are not allowed to go there. This word suggests that because places like restaurants, stores, and museums*

were designed without consideration for those with disabilities, not only was Jennifer physically unable to enter these places, she felt intentionally excluded from them.

2. **Analyze the article's title, "Climbing Toward a Better World." How does the title relate to the article?** (text feature) *By leaving their canes, wheelchairs, and crutches behind and climbing the Capitol steps, activists drew attention to the barriers that exist for people living with disabilities. This climb made the world better by building empathy and pressuring lawmakers to finally pass the ADA, a law that makes our country a more accessible and inclusive place. "Climbing" in the title also reflects the fact that, as the authors explain, the work for disability rights is not over; we are still climbing toward the goal of a world that is inclusive and free from discrimination toward people with disabilities.*

3. Meet Jennifer Keelan

10 minutes

- Have students listen to the **Activist Chat podcast** in which author Allison Friedman interviews Jennifer Keelan. (You may also want to share the transcript with students. Both the podcast and transcript are available in the Resources tab.)
- Discuss the following critical-thinking questions, which draw on the articles and the podcast.

Critical-Thinking Questions

(5 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **How did Jennifer have an impact on Tatyana's life, even though they didn't know each other? How did Tatyana in turn affect the lives of other children?** *Thanks to the work of advocates and activists like Jennifer who helped to pass the ADA, Tatyana grew up in an America that was more accessible and inclusive than it would have otherwise been. When the McFaddens took Tatyana's school district to court, they were able to argue that the way the school treated Tatyana was not just wrong, it was illegal, because it was in violation of the ADA. After winning their case, Tatyana and her family built upon the work of the ADA through the nationwide passage of Tatyana's Law, which mandates that kids with disabilities have the right to participate equally in school sports. Both Jennifer and Tatyana fought for their own rights, and they also helped protect the rights of other kids of their own generations and of those who would come after them.*

2. What are civil rights? How, if at all, did your understanding of civil rights change after reading these articles? Lastly, why is it important to have laws that protect people's civil rights? *Civil rights are the rights of citizens to freedom and equality. Some students may offer that while they were familiar with the civil rights movement—the struggle for justice and equality for African Americans that took place during the 1950s and 1960s—reading the articles helped them understand that people with disabilities have also been denied their civil rights and have also had to fight for those rights. Students may say that it is important to have civil rights laws because such laws represent a commitment to ending discrimination in our country, because they help deliver on this commitment by creating new programs and practices, and because they protect people whose rights are being violated and penalize those who violate them.*

4. Skill Building and Writing

20 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: Making the World a More Inclusive Place**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the prompt on page 23 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story article.
- Alternatively, have students choose a task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated culminating activities.

Recommended pairings from the *Scope* archives that feature young changemakers working to make the world a more inclusive place:

- Infographic: [“How to Be a Changemaker”](#) (November 2020)
- Nonfiction: [“Nothing Holds Me Back”](#) (December 2018/January 2019)
- Paired Texts: [“My Limb Difference Doesn’t Define Me”](#) and [“Advice From Jordan”](#) (November 2019)