

Doctors said that Wilma Rudolph would never walk again. Read the text to find out how she managed to become an Olympic athlete, and then answer the questions.

from *Wilma Rudolph: A True Winner*

by Terre Lintner

Wilma's Childhood

- 1 Wilma Rudolph was born on June 23, 1940, in Tennessee. As a child Wilma was often sick. She caught the measles and the chicken pox. Her parents didn't have money for a doctor. But Wilma was lucky. Her family took good care of her.
- 2 When Wilma was four, she got a disease called polio.¹ Polio made thousands of people sick. They suffered greatly. Some could no longer walk. Wilma couldn't use her left leg at all.
- 3 In the United States at that time, segregation was the law. Black people could not use the same hospitals as white people. The closest hospital for African Americans was far away from Wilma's house. Wilma and her mother took the long bus ride there every week for the treatment Wilma needed to get well.
- 4 One day the doctors said that Wilma would never walk again. Her mother flinched.² She said that Wilma would walk. Years later Wilma was asked about this. She said, "I decided to believe my mother."
- 5 Wilma worked hard doing exercises to make her leg strong. Finally she could walk with a brace on her leg. But she still couldn't run and play. So she worked even harder to make herself well.

1 *polio* - a serious disease that lasts forever and often makes the muscles unable to work

2 *flinched* - pulled away from something unpleasant

Skeeter

- 6 By the time Wilma was 12 years old, she no longer needed to wear the brace. Her leg was strong again. She wouldn't have to hear the muttering and snickering of children making fun of her brace. She could face any challenge that came along.
- 7 Now that she was able to run, Wilma ran all the time. She raced everyone. The other children gaped³ at her as she whizzed by. It almost felt like an insult. She was so fast!
- 8 Wilma joined the basketball team at school. The coach called her "Skeeter." He told her, "You're little, you're fast, and you always get in my way."
- 9 Finally Wilma got to play. She was almost six feet tall by this time. And she was fast. In her first game, she scored 32 points. This was no fluke.⁴ Wilma quickly became the star player and soon joined the track team. She easily won every race.
- 10 Then her team competed in a track meet at Tuskegee University. Wilma lost every race. She was shocked. But she did what she knew she had to do. She went back to training.

Tigerbelle

- 11 Ed Temple, the coach of the Tennessee State University girls track team, saw Wilma run. He invited her to train with his track team. The team was called the Tigerbelle. At first Wilma's mother was worried about Wilma leaving home. Then she realized that this was Wilma's chance to go to college. "If running is going to do that, then be the best you can be," she told Wilma.
- 12 Wilma did well on the Tigerbelle. At one meet Wilma entered nine races and won them all.
- 13 Wilma tried out for the 1956 Olympics team. She was 16 years old. She made the team. The games were in Melbourne, Australia. The people in Wilma's hometown collected money to help pay for her trip.
- 14 At the 1956 Olympics, Wilma competed in the 200-meter race. She lost that race, but her team won a bronze medal in a relay race. It was her first Olympic medal.

3 *gaped* - stared with an open mouth

4 *fluke* - an accident or act of luck

American Heroine

- 15 Four years later, Wilma was back. At the 1960 Olympics in Rome, Italy, Wilma’s speed was legendary. “Don’t blink or you’ll miss her!” people would say when Wilma took off.
- 16 During the 100-meter race, the crowd began screaming. Wilma looked behind her. She was way ahead of everyone. When the race ended Wilma had won her first gold medal.
- 17 Then, during the 200-meter race, she told herself, “Nobody can beat me!” And she won her second gold medal.
- 18 The relay race wasn’t so easy. Wilma almost dropped the baton⁵ as it was handed to her. She saw runners race ahead of her. With a great burst of speed, Wilma caught up to the other runners. Then she flew past them all. The crowd roared. Wilma had won her third gold medal!
- 19 Her hometown had a huge celebration for their Olympic heroine.⁶ They had a parade and a banquet. But this celebration was special for another reason. On this day blacks and whites celebrated together.

Wilma’s Legacy

- 20 After the Olympics, everybody wanted to see Wilma race. But Wilma had reached one dream. She turned to her next dream.
- 21 Wilma had learned many lessons in her life. Now she wanted to help others. She started the Wilma Rudolph Foundation in 1981. The foundation gave free coaching to boys and girls to help them work toward getting good grades.
- 22 Wilma also helped other women athletes. She gave speeches urging women to believe in themselves. She knew it wasn’t always easy. Wilma remembered when she had to rise above insult and prejudice.⁷
- 23 In 1994, Wilma Rudolph became ill. She died on November 12, 1994.
- 24 Wilma still inspires people today. Each year, the Women’s Sports Foundation gives the Wilma Rudolph Courage Award to a woman athlete who shows the kind of strength Wilma did.

Lintner, Terre. *Wilma Rudolph: A True Winner*. New York: Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009. 4-14. Print.

5 *baton* - hollow pipe passed between runners during a relay race

6 *heroine* - female hero

7 *prejudice* - unfriendly feelings toward a group of people because of their race or religion

15-16 Assessment Text Complexity Summary

Quantitative				
Passage Title	from <i>Wilma Rudolph: A True Winner</i>		Author	Terre Lintner
Genre	Informational-Historical		Grade	3
Lexile	530		Lexile Band	Grades 2-3: 420-820
Qualitative				
Overall Rationale	This text is appropriate for third grade because of its qualitative and quantitative text complexity. The text has a clear main idea about how Wilma overcame challenges and is a role model to others. The main idea is conveyed through the details about how Wilma overcame polio and trained to become an Olympic athlete. The historical events are organized in chronological order and allow the reader to make sequencing and cause and effect connections. The subheadings in the text allow the reader to locate particular details by providing the topic of each subsection. There are examples of academic words and figurative phrases. The reader can infer the meanings of these words and phrases from the context provided in the text.			
Meaning / Purpose	Mid-Low	The text has a single purpose that is mostly explicit and revealed through sentences at the beginning and end of the text. The main idea of the text is captured through a few sentences: “Wilma worked hard doing exercises to make her leg strong,” (1) “Wilma remembered when she had to rise above insult and prejudice,” (22) and “Wilma still inspires people today” (24). The main idea about Wilma’s inspirational life is captured through the events that describe how she overcame challenges, including polio, athletic defeat, and societal prejudices.		
Structure	Low	The overall structure of the text is chronological. The text is divided into five subsections that describe aspects of Wilma’s life. The first section describes her childhood and each subsequent section captures an event or stage in her life (for example, her college experience and her Olympic victories). Each subsection is introduced by a subheading that captures the main topic of the section. However, these subheadings are not essential to understanding because each subsection is also introduced by transitional sentences such as “Four years later, Wilma was back” (15). The text includes a conclusion that describes how Wilma worked to inspire and assist others later in her life. The conclusion also explains the impact that her life continues to have on others.		
Language	Mid-Low	The text has mostly explicit and literal language with a few examples of academic words and figurative phrases. Academic words include “snickering,” “gaped,” “fluke,” “heroine,” and “prejudice.” The definitions of these words can be inferred through context clues or are stated explicitly in footnotes. There are also a few examples of figurative phrases, including “She turned to her next dream,” (20) and “Wilma remembered when she had to rise above insult and prejudice” (22). These phrases, while infrequent, are central to the meaning of the text.		
Knowledge	Mid-Low	The subject matter of the text includes some discipline-specific knowledge, but most of these references are explained fully within the text. The text makes references to historical events, such as the outbreak of polio and the prevalence of laws that mandated segregation. Additional historical context is given in footnotes. There are also a few references to athletics that readers are likely familiar with, including the Olympics and relay races.		