

Maya Angelou

Poet & memoirist • 1928 - 2014



“ I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it.

— Maya Angelou

WHO WAS SHE?

Maya Angelou was an American poet and writer who barely spoke for years as a girl after something terrible happened to her. Books and poems slowly gave her voice back, and she grew up to write seven memoirs and read a poem at a presidential inauguration. Maya believed hard things can change you without making you smaller.

THINK ABOUT IT

When something goes wrong for you, what helps you feel like yourself again? Write down one thing you could say to yourself on a hard day.

J.K. Rowling

Author • b. 1965



“ Rock bottom became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life.

— J.K. Rowling

WHO WAS SHE?

J.K. Rowling is a British author who wrote the first Harry Potter book while she was broke, jobless, and raising a young daughter on her own. Twelve publishers turned the manuscript down before one said yes. She kept writing anyway, and her books have now been read by hundreds of millions of people.

THINK ABOUT IT

Think of a time you were told no, or something did not work. What did you learn from it that you still use today?

Margaret Thatcher

Prime Minister • 1925 - 2013



“ You may have to fight a battle more than once to win it.

— Margaret Thatcher

WHO WAS SHE?

Margaret Thatcher grew up in a flat above her family's grocery shop and studied chemistry at university before going into politics. She lost her first two elections. She kept running, and in 1979 she became the first woman ever to be Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

THINK ABOUT IT

What is something you have tried more than once? What would trying it one more time look like this week?

Eleanor Roosevelt

Diplomat & activist • 1884 - 1962



“ You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.

— Eleanor Roosevelt

WHO WAS SHE?

Eleanor Roosevelt was a painfully shy child who was scared of almost everything, including speaking in front of people. She made herself do the scary things anyway, one at a time. She later helped write the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a promise about how every person on earth deserves to be treated.

THINK ABOUT IT

Name one thing that makes you nervous. What is the smallest brave step you could take toward it?

Billie Jean King

Tennis champion • b. 1943



“ Champions keep playing until they get it right.

— Billie Jean King

WHO WAS SHE?

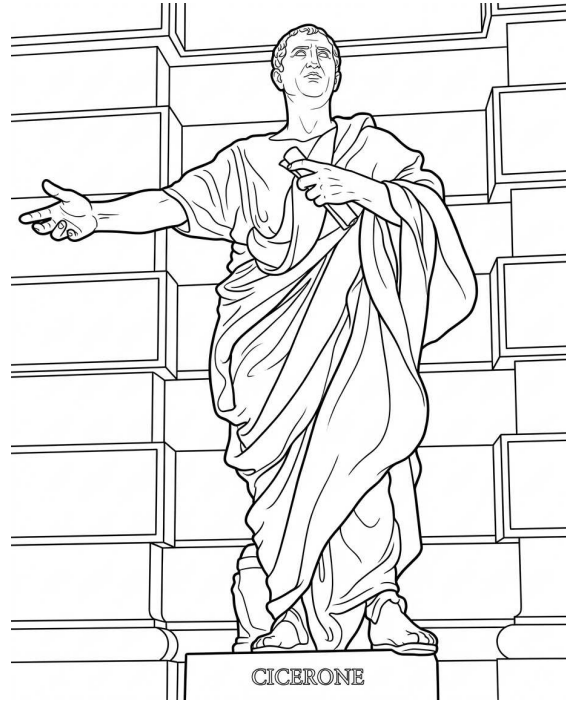
Billie Jean King learned tennis on free public courts and went on to win thirty-nine Grand Slam titles. Off the court she fought for women athletes to be paid the same as men, and won. She always said that champions are not the people who never miss, but the people who keep swinging.

THINK ABOUT IT

What is one skill you are still practising? What does getting it right look like for you?

Cicero

Roman statesman • 106 – 43 BC



“ Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues but the parent of all others.

— Cicero

WHO WAS HE?

Cicero was a Roman lawyer, speaker, and writer who lived more than two thousand years ago. He was famous for arguing so clearly that crowds gathered just to listen to him. He taught that being thankful is where all the other good habits begin, because grateful people notice what others do for them.

THINK ABOUT IT

Who has helped you recently without being asked? Write down what you would like to thank them for.

Carl Sagan

Astronomer • 1934 – 1996



“ Imagination will often carry us to worlds that never were. But without it, we go nowhere.

— Carl Sagan

WHO WAS HE?

Carl Sagan was an American astronomer who studied planets and helped send messages into space for anyone out there to find. He made television shows that taught millions of people to look up at the night sky and wonder. Carl believed asking good questions matters just as much as knowing answers.

THINK ABOUT IT

What is a question about the world you would love the answer to? How could you start finding out?

Henri Matisse

Painter • 1869 – 1954



“ Creativity takes courage.

— Henri Matisse

WHO WAS HE?

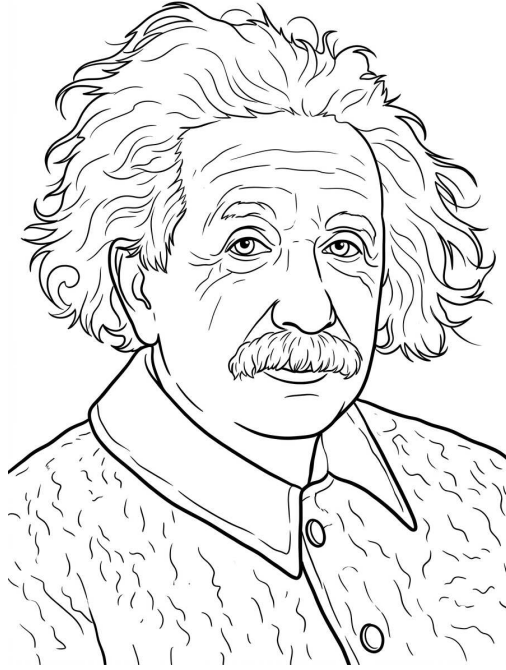
Henri Matisse was studying to be a lawyer when he got sick and his mother gave him a box of paints to pass the time. He never went back to law. Late in life, when he was too ill to stand at an easel, he cut shapes out of coloured paper instead and made some of his most famous work.

THINK ABOUT IT

What is something you would make if you knew nobody would laugh? What is stopping you from starting it?

Albert Einstein

Physicist • 1879 - 1955



“ Imagination is more important than knowledge.

— Albert Einstein

WHO WAS HE?

Albert Einstein was a curious boy who was fascinated by a compass his father gave him, and who was slow to speak as a small child. He worked in a patent office and did physics in his spare time, imagining what it would feel like to ride on a beam of light. Those daydreams became the theory that changed how we understand time and space.

THINK ABOUT IT

Where does your mind wander when you are bored? What could you build or discover from one of those daydreams?

Thomas Jefferson

U.S. President • 1743 - 1826



“ We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.

— Thomas Jefferson

WHO WAS HE?

Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence at age thirty-three and later became the third President of the United States. He loved books so much that his personal library became the start of the Library of Congress. He also enslaved people, which means the equality he wrote about was a promise the country is still working to keep.

THINK ABOUT IT

What does treating everyone equally look like in your class or your team? Name one thing you could do about it.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Essayist & poet • 1803 - 1882



“ The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

WHO WAS HE?

Ralph Waldo Emerson was an American essayist who lost his father at eight and worked his way through school. He travelled the country giving talks telling people to trust their own thinking instead of just copying the crowd. His idea was simple: who you become is mostly a series of choices you make.

THINK ABOUT IT

What kind of person do you want to be known as? What is one choice today that would match that?

Oprah Winfrey

Broadcaster & philanthropist • b. 1954



“ Turn your wounds into wisdom.

— Oprah Winfrey

WHO WAS SHE?

Oprah Winfrey was born to a teenage mother in rural Mississippi and grew up so poor she sometimes wore dresses made from potato sacks. She got her first radio job at sixteen and went on to host the most-watched talk show in the world. She has since given away hundreds of millions of dollars, much of it to schools.

THINK ABOUT IT

What is a hard thing you have been through that could help someone else? Who might need to hear about it?

John F. Kennedy

U.S. President • 1917 - 1963



“ Effort and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.

— John F. Kennedy

WHO WAS HE?

John F. Kennedy was the 35th President of the United States. As a young man he was often sick, and during World War II his boat was sunk, yet he swam for hours towing an injured crewmate to safety. As president he set the country the goal of landing on the moon, and taught that hard work matters most when you know where you are heading.

THINK ABOUT IT

What is one goal you are working toward right now? What is the very next step that would move you closer to it?

Marcus Aurelius

Roman emperor & Stoic philosopher • 121 - 180 AD



“ You have power over your mind - not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.

— Marcus Aurelius

WHO WAS HE?

Marcus Aurelius was the emperor of Rome, which made him the most powerful person alive - and he spent most of his life at war, dealing with plague, and trying to be a decent man anyway. At night he wrote short notes to himself about staying calm, being fair, and not wasting time on anger. Those private notes became a book called *Meditations* that people still read almost two thousand years later.

THINK ABOUT IT

Name one thing today that you cannot control, and one thing you can. What will you do with the part that is yours?

Epictetus

Greek Stoic philosopher • 50 - 135 AD



“ **It is not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters.**

— Epictetus

WHO WAS HE?

Epictetus was born a slave in the Roman Empire and walked with a limp for his whole life. Even while enslaved he was allowed to study philosophy, and after he was freed he opened his own school and taught for the rest of his days. His big idea was simple: you do not get to choose what happens to you, but you always get to choose what you do next.

THINK ABOUT IT

Think of something that went wrong this week. What is one better way you could react if it happens again?
