About the author
Mark Cerasini wrote the book *Cinderella Man* from the movie. He often works on novelizations for some of the big movie companies in Hollywood.

About the movie
Cliff Hollingsworth and Akiva Goldsman worked together to write the story for the movie *Cinderella Man*. Before the movie, the story of Jim Braddock was not well known in the United States. Hollingsworth wanted to tell modern Americans about this great man, so he contacted Braddock’s sons, Jay and Howard. They read Hollingsworth’s first script and loved it.

Hollingsworth wanted to keep as close to the true story as possible. When Jim pays money back to the relief office in Chapter 10, it may seem like a Hollywood fantasy, but it really happened. Jay and Howard Braddock agreed that the movie story and their parents’ characters were very accurate. According to Hollingsworth, Jim Braddock “was a character who was too good to be true—but he was true!” However, there have been criticisms over the movie’s unflattering portrayal of the boxer Max Baer.

Akiva Goldsman is an experienced Hollywood scriptwriter.

Summary
*Cinderella Man* tells the true story of an 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. The book is based on the 2005 movie, directed by Ron Howard and starring Russell Crowe and Renée Zellweger.

Chapter 1: The story begins in 1928. The American economy is strong and Jim Braddock has just won his twenty-seventh fight since becoming a professional boxer. The fans love him and his manager, Joe Gould, brags about the win to Jimmy Johnston, an important boxing promoter who supported Jim’s opponent.

Chapters 2–3: But by 1933 Jim’s luck has gone. America is suffering under the Great Depression. Like millions of other Americans, Jim has no steady job. He and his family move to a poor neighborhood. Jim finds himself unable to pay the bills or buy enough food for his children. He can’t get a job.

Jim breaks his right hand in a fight, but wants to box again soon afterwards because he needs money. Although it is against the rules, Joe lets him fight with an injured hand. Jim suffers an embarrassing defeat against a strong opponent. He loses his boxing license and his manager Joe leaves him.

Chapters 4–5: Jim finally gets work for a few dollars a day at the docks. He finds the work difficult because he is forced to use his left hand. Meanwhile, his wife Mae waits in line with the children to get free food.

Jim takes a second job and sees less of his family. During the cold winter, Mae hears that their gas and electricity will be cut off because they haven’t paid their bills. Jim and his friend from the docks, Mike, help a poor family who are about to be locked out of their home. Mike tells Jim the people need to organize and fight back. Mae takes the children to live at her relatives’ homes in New York City, which makes Jim angry. He swallows his pride and asks his old boxing friends for money to pay the bills so that the children can come home.

Chapters 6–7: Jim’s right hand finally heals. Joe visits him and offers him one more fight in the boxing ring. The fight is against a promising young boxer, and Mae is very worried. But although it is against her wishes, he decides to return to the boxing ring. Jim begins training again and Joe gets him another fight. He wins and goes on to win more fights.
Chapters 10–11: Jim becomes a popular boxer with working men, carrying their hopes and dreams with every punch. His friend Mike, angry and desperate, dies accidentally while fighting police during a protest. At Mike’s funeral, Mae wonders if she will lose Jim. Finally, Jim reaches the top. His opponent will be Max Baer, a famously violent heavyweight champion who has killed two men in the ring. His wife begs him not to fight but the newspapers call Jim the “Cinderella Man”. People say that his successful return to fighting has inspired poor Americans.

Chapters 12–13: Mae begs Jim to get out of the fight, but Jim continues his training. Mae goes to church to pray for Jim, but even there she meets people who are excited about the fight and hoping that Jim will win. She begins to understand how important Jim’s fight is to the poor working people. She goes to visit Jim just before the fight and gives him a new pair of boxing shoes to show that now she supports him. That night Jim enters the ring for the most important fight of his life.

Chapter 14: At home, Mae and the children listen to the fight on the radio. At the end of a long and difficult fight, the two men are still standing. The crowd cheers for Jim, and finally the judges make the announcement that everyone wants to hear: Jim Braddock is the new heavyweight champion. The fighter’s triumph, both in and out of the ring, has been a truly inspirational tale.

Background and themes

The Great Depression: 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. But it came to a sudden end on Black Tuesday, October 29th, 1929, when the stock market collapsed. The United States (along with the rest of the industrialized world) fell into the Great Depression. Cinderella Man gives us a picture of the suffering of ordinary Americans during the early years of the Depression. We see unemployed men who are desperate for work. We see people standing in lines for free food. We see homeless New Yorkers living on the streets, in cars, on the subway and in Central Park.

With the election of Franklin Roosevelt as the new president, the government began to give money to the country’s poor and build a new economy. Many Americans, like Jim, hoped that Roosevelt’s plans would work. Others, like Mike, were more radical, and believed that the only choice for poor people was to fight the rich.

Family: Cinderella Man tells the story of a loving and courageous family man. When the Depression comes, Jim is determined to keep his family together even in the most difficult circumstances. We see how Mae is torn between supporting her husband’s career as a boxer, and her fears for his safety and for her children, if anything happened to him. We see how the children, in their different ways, try to support their father and their family—Jay steals food, Rosy buys a steak to put on her father’s black eye. At the end of the story, Jim thinks his wife and children are “the reason why he was not only the heavyweight champion of the world, but the luckiest man in it.”

Honesty and honor: Another theme that runs through the story is the importance of living an honest and honorable life. Jim’s ten-year-old son Jay steals meat for the family, but Jim makes him return it to the butcher’s shop and apologize. “We don’t steal,” he tells his son. “It doesn’t matter what happens.” Although he becomes so desperately poor that he has to beg money from his old manager and boxing associates, he never loses his pride.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 Discuss: Tell students they are going to read a story about a sport. Ask students to write down their favorite sport. They should spend a few minutes thinking about how they can describe the sport, and about why they like that sport. Encourage them to make notes. Walk around the class and help students with vocabulary (if students don’t like any sport, ask them to think of reason why they don’t). Then choose some students to tell the rest of the class about their favorite sport. Find out from the class how many other students chose that sport as their favorite. Ask them if they like it for the same reasons. Find out what is the most popular sport in the class.

Introduction

After reading

2 Predict: Look at the Contents (page iii) and read the chapter titles. Do you think the story has a happy ending? Why or why not? What happens in the story, do you think?

Chapter 1

After reading

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

Chapters 2–3
After reading
4 Discuss: Ask students to work in small groups. Give each group a large piece of paper and ask them to make a list of the problems that the Braddock family faces at the end of Chapter 3. Then ask groups to think of a solution for each problem on their new list. When they have finished, put two groups together and have them compare their lists of problems and solutions. Ask them to think about how easy or difficult each solution would be, and what other problems the Braddocks might face in the next part of the book.

Chapters 4–5
After reading
5 Write: When the Braddocks’ gas and electricity are turned off, Mae takes the boys to her father’s and Rosy to her sister’s. 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
After reading
6 Role play: 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 get only a few dollars for a day’s work at the docks. You need her support to win the fight. Will she support you? Student B: You are Mae Braddock. Your husband, Jim, will tell you that he has a fight against Corn Griffin. Ask him how much money he will get. You’re not happy about it because you are scared that Jim will get hurt. What will happen to your family if Jim is injured and he can’t work? What if he dies? Is this really just one fight or will he want to fight more? Will you support him or not?

Chapters 8–9
After reading
7 Write and discuss: 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
After reading
8 Role play: Students work in small groups. Ask each group to choose one of these scenes and prepare to act it out in front of the class. Encourage students to expand the scene from the book by including more dialogue and action.
- Jim goes home and finds Sara Wilson there with Mae. She tells him Mike is missing.
- Jim finds Mike, dying, under a wagon in Central Park.
- Mike’s funeral.
- Jim, Mae and Joe answer the reporter’s questions about the fight with Max Baer.
- Jim, Mae and Joe go to the boxing club for dinner and Max Baer comes in.

Chapters 12–14
After reading
9 Write and discuss: Students work individually or in pairs. After years of poverty, Jim Braddock wins a lot of money after his fight with Max Baer. What will he spend it on? Ask students to write a shopping list for the Braddock family: three things for Jim, three things for Mae, three things for the whole family and one thing for each of the children (total: 12 things). Then, as a 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.

10 Research: Choose one of these topics. Decide what you would like to learn about it. Use the library or the Internet to find out. Then give a short presentation on it:
- life in America (or another country) during the Great Depression
- James Braddock’s fight with Joe Louis
- James Braddock’s life after he stopped fighting
- the life of Max Baer
- the movie Cinderella Man
- other movies or stories about boxing (e.g. Ali, Million Dollar Baby, Rocky, etc.)
- Madison Square Garden
Encourage students to use illustrations or diagrams in their presentations.

Vocabulary activities
For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.