

A Curriculum Guide to

Shoe Dog: Young Readers Edition

By Phil Knight

About the Book

In this young readers edition of *Shoe Dog*, Phil Knight takes us on a remarkable journey of his experience “getting lost to find his way.” Filled with stories, anecdotes, risks, and setbacks, we learn how a simple mission to import high-quality running shoes leads to one of the most successful brands ever. The journey is honest and filled with mistakes, struggles, and sacrifice. Following his own advice, “You must forget your limits,” and “Just keep going. Don’t stop,” Knight builds a reputation and brand with determination and heart that is exciting for young readers to learn about. His journey will also inspire young readers to believe in themselves, to hold on to hopes and dreams, and to strive to make their own dreams a reality.

Pre-reading Activities

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.5-8.2,9)

1. What do you think the title of the book means? Why is the title important, and what might this tell us about Phil Knight? Do you recognize the logo? The adult version of this book has a black cover: Why is the young readers edition red? Does the color make a difference?
2. What is a memoir? How is it different from a biography or autobiography? What’s the difference between a memoir and a story? Why do we tell stories? Do you feel that storytelling is important? How often can your story change? Who knows your story best?

Discussion Questions

Key Ideas and Details

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.5-8.1,2,3,7,9) (W.5-8.6,8,9)

3. There are several main themes in this story, including resilience, perseverance, determination, courage, and hope. Can you name others? As you’re reading, note the page number and paragraph and why these themes are evident in the text sample you’ve chosen. Keep a running chart or log of passages that demonstrate these themes.
4. Consider the qualities of a good leader; some leaders might be your principal, a teacher, a president, or a community member. What qualities does a good leader demonstrate? Does Knight show good leadership as he is trying to build his company? Why or why not? Cite examples from the book and other reputable sources.

5. Knight's memoir is a reflection on his life and discovering himself. In what ways does he tell his story so that it reflects who he is and what has shaped him? Make a chart of major events that shaped him throughout his journey.

6. Knight talks about the difference between wanting to win and not wanting to lose. Is there a difference? What do you think he means by this?

7. What does it mean "to get lost to find your way"? Cite examples from the story to support your answer.

8. In the chapter titled "1962," Knight decides to explore the world. Make a chart of the places he visits, what he does in each place, and the people he encounters. There are also several Zen and Buddhist sayings that helped him along the way; include those sayings on the chart as well. Compare and contrast what he has learned at each place. He specifically asks, "Why am I here? What is my purpose?" Explain how this journey helps him, pointing out some defining moments and why you think they are important to his life.

9. An eclectic mix of people helped Knight get started: a former track star now paralyzed, an overweight accountant, and a salesman who was excessive in his letter writing. What did they have in common, and what were their differences? Why might such a group of people make a company so successful? Using a graphic organizer*, create a character chart showing the qualities you notice about the people Knight surrounded himself with. Consider their thoughts, plans, words, feelings, deeds, actions, strengths, and weaknesses.

10. Knight paid an art student \$35 to design a logo for his new company. Little did he realize that the "swoosh" would become so widely recognized. Why do you think this logo was so successful? What is it that appeals to people? If you had to design a logo for Nike (or any other shoe brand), what would you choose and why?

11. At one point, Knight talks about the letter of the law versus the spirit of the law. What does this mean? How does this conflict with what you may have been taught? Can you find other examples in the book, in your own life, or in current news where rules have been broken for a good cause? Is this the right thing to do? Why, or why not?

Author's Craft and Structure

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.5-8.4)

12. What do you think motivated Knight to share his story? How did you respond to his voice? What is Knight trying to achieve in telling us his story? Find examples of techniques he used to help achieve his goal. For example, using flashback to increase tension or repeating a line to support a theme.

13. Discuss the book's structure; each chapter is a year up until 1972. What changed for Knight at this point? What is his purpose in formatting the book like this? How did the author's use of language and his writing style keep you engaged? Does the author tell his story with comedy, self-pity, or something else? Find examples in the book that support your answer.

14. Knight includes a letter to his grandchildren at the beginning of the book. Why is this important? What do we learn about Knight from these personal reflections? Would the book be the same without the letter? Why or why not? If you received a letter from your grandfather, what would you do with it? How might it become a part of your life?

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.5-8.6) (W.5-8.6,7,8,9)

15. Knight makes several statements in the first part of the book titled “Dawn.” He says his journey is messy, and that mistakes were made. He states that “you must forget your limits.” Take one or two moments from this chapter that resonate with you. How can you apply this to your life right now, and the journey you are on? Define success and what it looks like in this book. What do you think success will look like for you?

16. Compare and contrast Knight and the other members of his team using the graphic organizer information from question 9 under the Key Ideas section. What strengths do they have that complement one other? What weaknesses might they possess? What else do you notice?

17. In the epilogue, Knight shares a final letter with the reader. How does this letter give the reader a window into his state of mind? Why do you think he felt it was important to include this epilogue and the information he had learned?

18. Some say that survival is 80 percent mental (keeping a positive attitude), 10 percent skill (knowledge), and 10 percent equipment. Why is Knight’s survival important to this story? What has he taught us? How did he deal with his drive, the pressure, and conflict? What resources did he use? What can you take with you from reading about his mistakes and journey as you move on with your own journey?

19. LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, Michael Jordan—all of these star athletes are sponsored by Nike. What qualities do they have that reflect the Nike brand? Who else would you choose? Are there females who have Nike sponsorship? If so, who are they? Make a chart or graph of the traits and qualities that Nike looks for when they sponsor an athlete.

Extension Activities

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (SL.5-8.1,2,3,4,5,6) (RL.5-8.5) (W.5-8.6,8,9) (RI.5-8.3) (RST.6-8.7)

1. The word nike has its origins in Greek mythology. Read the story of the Battle of Marathon from *Classic Myths to Read Aloud* or any other resource you have at hand. Explain the origin of the following words: *nike* and *marathon*. What other words in this story are part of our everyday language? What is the origin of the word *eureka*, and who is given credit for its first usage? What other myths does Knight refer to in his memoir, and why are they important?

2. If you could design a new logo for Nike, what would it be and why? If you could design a new book cover for *Shoe Dog*, what would you choose and why? Draw your designs and explain what they mean, and how they relate to Knight’s story.

3. The four-minute mile barrier was first broken in 1954. What is the current record, and when was it set? What kind of training does it take to be able to run a four-minute mile or less? What is involved both physically and mentally? What science is involved in running at this pace? Try running a mile. Is it difficult or easy to do? Keep a running journal and note how long it takes for you to run a mile. What happens as you track your pace over time? Why do you think this is?

4. What is involved in shoe design? How have science and technology changed the way shoes are designed and made? Create a chart of all the different kinds of shoes (starting with Tiger) that Knight had to create to get to something he felt was truly new and different. Include things like the Waffle, spikes, materials, etc. Create a new shoe that might be of interest to Nike. What would it look like? How would you design, create, test, and present this shoe to someone like Knight? Present your new shoe to your class and explain why you think your shoe would be a good fit for Nike.

5. Write a persuasive essay for a current athlete who is not currently sponsored by Nike. Explain who they are, their sport, and why they should have a Nike sponsorship. Be sure to keep in mind the following as you build your argument:

- a. Align your interests with the person who you’re trying to persuade
- b. Know your demographics—collect data about your athlete that is relevant to your audience
- c. “Quid pro quo”—what will the athlete do for Nike, and what will Nike do for the athlete?

6. Have students each take one of the early chapters of the book (each chapter that is based on a year) and compose six-word memoirs based on the experiences over that year. Have the students expand their memoirs into a more formal essay using text support from the chapter and any other reliable sources they might need. In addition, have students create a six-word memoir for themselves based on the themes addressed in *Shoe Dog*. Use resources from [The Six Word Memoir Project](#).

Tier II Vocabulary

The vocabulary words below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RI.5-8.4) (L.5-8.4)

balky	diminished	pessimism	savored
aspire	exuberant	prodigious	improbable
eureka	existential	angst	derive
precocious	prescient	wan	spiel
entrepreneurship	merit	exotic	boondoggles

predecessor	ulterior	guffawed	mortified
itinerary	fruition	deftly	compendium
notorious	ferocity	<i>Carpe diem</i>	emphatic
introvert	implode	bedlam	depraved
conflagration	eloquence	barraged	misanthrope
misanthropy	languorous	epochal	bolstering
innate	frugality	inscrutable	diametrically
vaunted	venerable	reprisal	embroiled
deferential	autocratic	myopic	euphemism
avuncular	internecine	quandary	rhapsodic
demotic	inexorably	quotidian	cryptic
dismissive	parenthetical	mollifying	autonomy
ostensibly	quixotic	blithe	bewitchment
portentous	chimera	idiosyncrasies	lucrative
sedentary	unbridled	amanuensis	guileless
probity	countenance	frivolity	percolating

*Graphic organizers can be found online. Here are some suggested pages to explore:

<https://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/>

<https://www.teachervision.com/lesson-planning/graphic-organizer>

https://www.scholastic.com/content/dam/teachers/lesson-plans/migrated-files-in-body/graphic_organizers.pdf

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Curriculum Guide written in 2017 by Sharon Haupt, District Librarian, San Luis Coastal Unified School District