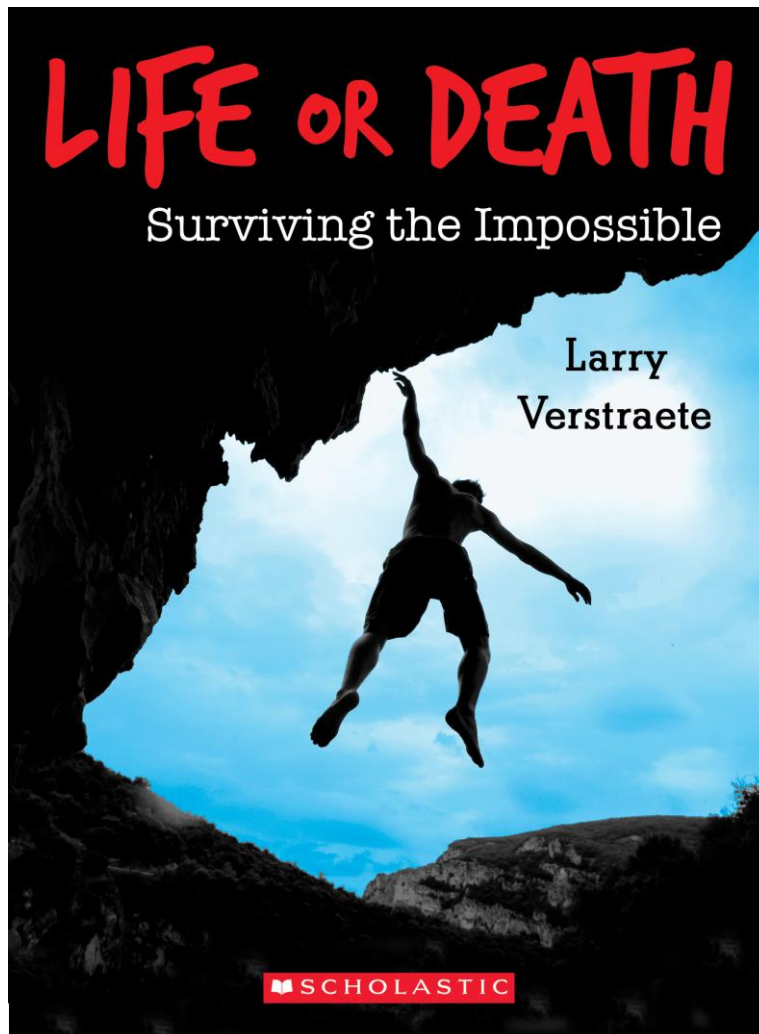


## TEACHER'S GUIDE

# LIFE OR DEATH: SURVIVING THE IMPOSSIBLE

by Larry Verstraete  
Scholastic Canada Ltd., 2014



In *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible*, people come head-to-head with impossible situations. Facing danger, risk and overwhelming obstacles, they beat the odds, emerging successful and often stronger. Organized into 4 chapters – Survive, Rescue, Liberate, and Escape – the 40 plus stories in this book explore what it takes to turn the tables around and triumph in the end.

The activities in this package are organized into two sections:

- 1) Teacher-Led Classroom Activities
- 2) Student Activities (reproducible handouts)

## **TEACHER-LED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

### **Character Study**

What personal traits does it take to succeed in impossible situations? Construct a classroom chart of characteristics such as determination, persistence, patience, optimism etc. As students read stories, decide on the characteristics displayed by the main characters. End with a forum such as debate or persuasive writing around the question: What does it take to beat the odds?

### **Thinking Outside the Box**

In many stories, clever thinking helped main characters resolve difficult problems. Keep track of the kinds of 'thinking outside the box' strategies that emerge as students read the book. Use words like adapt, modify, alter, adjust, innovate and invent to denote their subtle differences. Discuss: What does thinking outside the box mean? Can we learn how to think outside the box or is it an ability we have (or don't have) from birth? (see also the reproducible student activity page: Thinking Outside the Box)

### **Plain Luck**

Construct a classroom value line with one end labelled 'Pure Luck' and the other labelled 'No Luck At All'. After each story, use post-its to indicate the role that luck played in the situation. End with a discussion: Does success depend on luck? Is there a relationship between the two? Are flashes of insight like Henry Brown's just lucky strikes or signs of clever thinking?

### **Who Has the Advantage?**

Just what is the role of experience, skill or knowledge in overcoming the odds? As students read the book, note situations where these factors played a part in a person's success. How would this person have fared without this prior skill, knowledge or experience? To what degree does this impact a person's ability to think outside the box?

### **Timeline**

Create a classroom timeline. As the class reads the book, mark pertinent events on the timeline and have students add drawings and captions to illustrate them. To close, have students select an event from the timeline that they think made a critical difference to the outcome of a story and then write a brief explanation defending their choice.

STUDENT ACTIVITY - *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible*

### Plot Structure

A plot structure is the sequence of events within a story. Below are the definitions for each part of the plot structure. Select a story from *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible* and complete the plot structure chart.

**Exposition:** introduction of the main characters, setting and problem or conflict

**Rising Action:** events that complicate the problem; also attempts to solve the problem, often unsuccessfully

**Climax:** point of the highest emotion; also the turning point of the story

**Falling Action:** events that follow the climax, but not yet to the process of being solved or completed

**Resolution:** problem of the story is resolved or worked out

<b>Story title:</b>	
<b>Exposition</b>	
<b>Rising Action</b>	
<b>Climax</b>	
<b>Falling Action</b>	
<b>Resolution</b>	

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STUDENT ACTIVITY - *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible*

### Scrambled Solutions

Unscramble these letters to spell different kinds of devices, methods or solutions that people in this book used to pull themselves out of impossible situations. Beside each identify the story where these were used. (Answers on the last page)

Example: dhnsou irevr = Hudson River = *A Ribbon of Grey*

		<b><i>Unscrambled device, method or solution</i></b>	<b><i>Title</i></b>
1	odowne xbo		
2	yhtsu		
3	omlabxi		
4	rnufftao		
5	glurhatrit		
6	utvialgn rhseo		
7	cbirk lwla		
8	ncatisaro		
9	eipxheo		
10	dnwliilm		

STUDENT ACTIVITY - *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible*

### Thinking Outside The Box

When people use unique ways of solving a problem we often say they were “thinking outside the box”. In *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible*, many people overcame impossible odds by doing just that. The chart below lists different kinds of thinking outside the box. Complete the chart by giving a definition for each term and an example from the book where that kind of problem-solving helped a person conquer the impossible.

Thinking Outside the Box	Definition	Example
Adapt		
Modify		
Adjust		
Invent		
Innovate		
Flash of insight		

STUDENT ACTIVITY - *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible*

**Which One is Not Like the Others**

Three words in each group have something in common and were used in a story from *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible*. Figure out which word in each group does not belong and then identify the story where the other 3 words were used. (Answers on the last page)

- |     |                   |                 |                  |                      |       |
|-----|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|-------|
| 1)  | snowboard         | \$20 bill       | MP3<br>player    | Camp 14              | _____ |
| 2)  | Fontana           | sewer           | pink<br>T-shirt  | hypothermia          | _____ |
| 3)  | peephole          | secret<br>room  | Canada           | Saddam<br>Hussein    | _____ |
| 4)  | Youth<br>Movement | Google<br>Earth | Tahrir<br>Square | protest              | _____ |
| 5)  | electricity       | India           | windmill         | science<br>book      | _____ |
| 6)  | vaulting horse    | Gestapo         | room             | Beje                 | _____ |
| 7)  | SAR techs         | Arctic          | beacon           | Twin Otter           | _____ |
| 8)  | Hudson River      | Berlin Wall     | ultralight       | zip line             | _____ |
| 9)  | freedom           | earthquake      | North<br>Korea   | electrified<br>fence | _____ |
| 10) | influenza         | Teterboro       | engine           | geese                | _____ |

STUDENT ACTIVITY - *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible*

### Four Box Story

Select a story from *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible*. Use the four boxes below to illustrate its story elements.

Box #1 – one or more event(s) leading up to the crisis (rising action)

Box #2 – the crisis situation (conflict/problem/ predicament)

Box #3 – the peak of danger or darkest moment (climax)

Box #4 – solution /result (resolution)

#1	#2
#3	#4

STUDENT ACTIVITY - *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible*

### Cause-and-Effect

While reading *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible*, look for examples of cause-and-effect. Select 5 stories from the book where you have identified cause-and-effect relationships then fill in the chart below. In the last row, give an example of cause-and-effect from your life.

**Cause:** the reason something happens; source; root of the problem

**Effect:** the result; consequence of an action; outcome

Story title	Cause	Effect
Your own life		

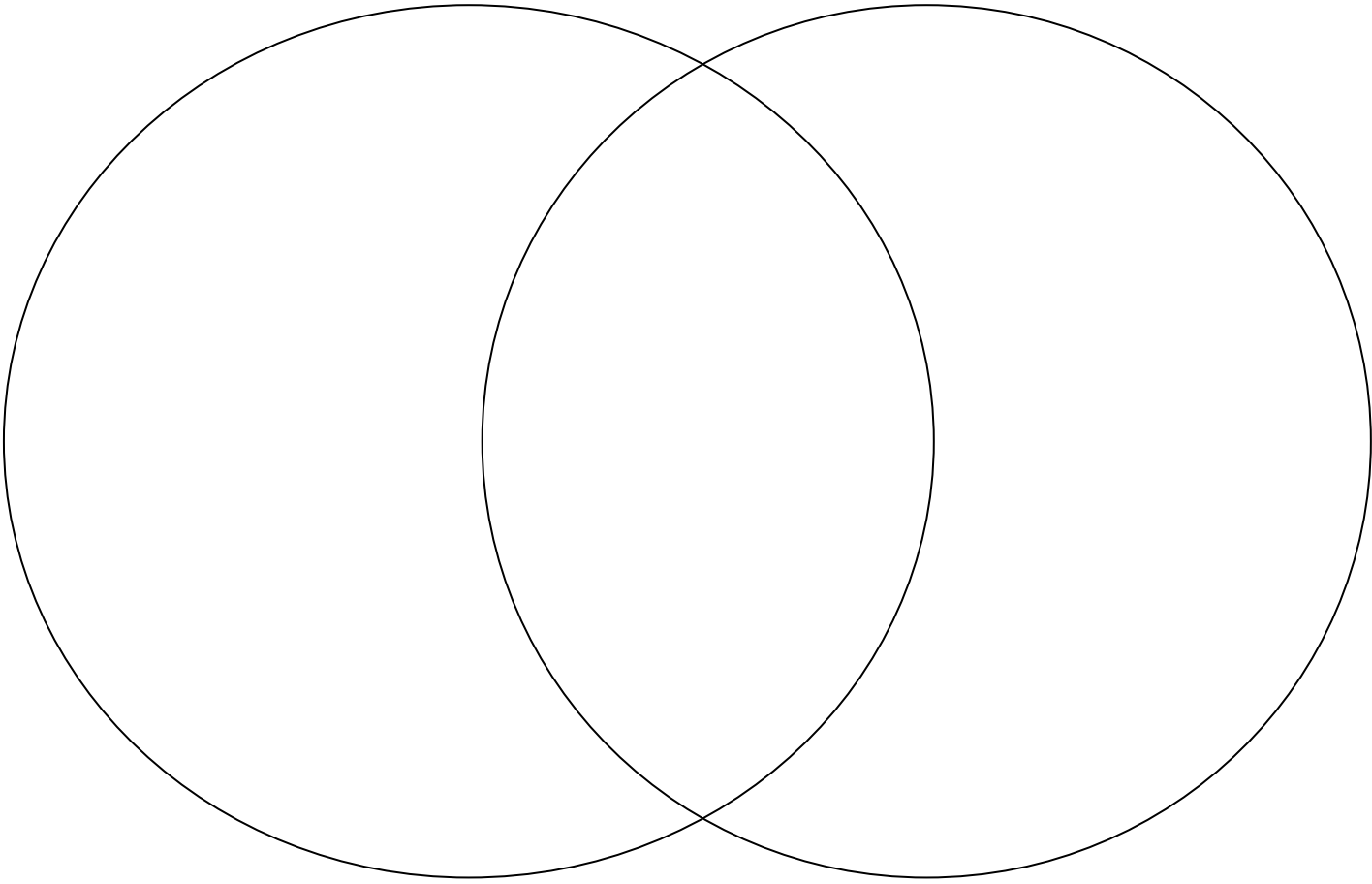


### Compare Yourself

Select a story from *Life or Death: Surviving the Impossible*. Use the Venn diagram below to compare yourself to the main character. Pay close attention to physical traits, personality traits, lifestyles, and time periods. Challenge yourself to come up with as many similarities and differences as possible:

Story Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Main Character: \_\_\_\_\_



**Main Character**

**You**

## **ANSWERS:**

### ***Which One is Not Like the Others***

1. Camp 14 – *Ordeal on Mammoth Mountain*
2. Pink T-shirt – *Swept into Oblivion*
3. Canada – *Twenty-two Years in a Tomb*
4. Google Earth – *People Have Some Shame*
5. India – *Reaching Every Village*
6. Vaulting horse – *Behind the Brick Wall*
7. Twin Otter – *Stranded*
8. Hudson River – *The Brothers Three*
9. Earthquake – *Now or Never*
10. Influenza – *A Ribbon of Grey*

### ***Scrambled Solutions:***

1. Wooden box – *This Side Up With Care*
2. Typhus – *An Epidemic of Fear*
3. Mailbox - *“Houston, we’ve had a problem.”*
4. Fortuna – *Swept into Oblivion*
5. Ultralight – *The Brothers Three*
6. Vaulting horse – *Vaulting to Freedom*
7. Brick wall – *Behind the Brick Wall*
8. Raincoats – *Chiseling Off ‘The Rock’*
9. Phoenix – *Thirty Three of Us*
10. Windmill – *Reaching Every Village*