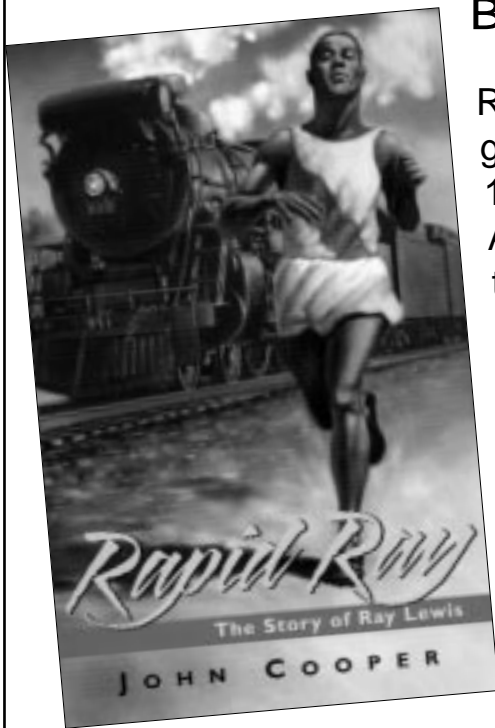




Rapid Ray: The Story of Ray Lewis

by John Cooper



BOOK SUMMARY:

Rapid Ray Lewis was arguably the fastest man of his generation. He won medals in the 1932 Olympics and the 1934 British Empire Games, and countless races in North America. Remarkable achievements for any man – but all the more remarkable because Lewis had to face poverty and prejudice. The great-grandson of slaves, he worked as a porter on the railway, and trained by running alongside the tracks when the train was stopped on the prairies.

Rapid Ray is far more than a sports biography; it is as much a history of one man's battle for equality as it is a history of Olympic-level track. Throughout his long life Ray Lewis has fought discrimination not only in sports, but in every walk of life.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY:

John Cooper is a corporate communications specialist for the Government of Ontario. He also teaches corporate communications at Centennial College in Toronto, and writes books. John has been interested in African-Canadian history since he was 12 years old when he read *Black Like Me*. He is a member of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations, and is editor of their newsletter.

Pre-Reading

Before starting the book, read the back cover aloud and examine the front cover together. Read the author biography. Review the difference between a biography and autobiography.

Rapid Ray is a biography. This means it is the story of Ray Lewis as told by the author John Cooper. The author has chosen to write the book in the voice of Ray Lewis so it sounds like Ray Lewis is telling the story. Read the author's note at the beginning of the book.

1. Why do you think the author might have chosen to write the story this way?
2. What famous Canadian runners can you name? Who are they, and how do you know about them?
3. Do you watch the Olympics on TV? What are your favourite events?

Suggestions for Tutors/Instructors

For level 1-2 learners, record answers for questions (such as those listed for chapter 1) on paper or on a flipchart or a board.

As a general approach for level 1-2 learners, ask learners to read the italics paragraph that begins each chapter and then the tutor/instructor can read the key sections aloud from each chapter or from key chapters. Using this approach, learners can gain the information they need to discuss the questions. Since this is a non-fiction book, it is not necessary to read the entire book to understand the story and discuss the larger issues. Key chapters are: 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16.

For groups of level 3-4 learners, try an alternative approach. Ask everyone to read chapters 1 through 5, but ask individual learners to read chapters 6 through 16. Learners could then summarize the chapter they read for the rest of the group, noting what they think are the really important passages, ideas, or events.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 1

1. In chapter 1, we hear about many ways that African-Canadian people faced discrimination. List the types of discrimination mentioned in this chapter. (For level 1-2, provide this question before beginning chapter 1 and ask students to think about it as you read the chapter aloud.)
2. How does Ray react to the discrimination he observes or experiences?
3. Ray Lewis was born in 1910. In the book, we hear what daily life was like when Ray was young. What are the biggest changes between then and now?
4. What important world events happened when Ray was young?

5. After reading this chapter, what impression do you have about Ray's character? Why? For example, we learn that Ray insisted on buying the 35-cent ticket at the movie theatre. What does that tell you about Ray?
6. A social stereotype or prejudice is sometimes based on race. What are examples of other stereotypes or ways that people discriminate against one another?

Chapter 2

1. Ray Lewis knows quite a lot about his family's history. What can you share about your family's history? For example, do you know when your family first came to Canada and what jobs they had?

Chapter 3

1. What do you think Ray Lewis means in the paragraph in italics at the beginning of the chapter? Why is there "no nice way to talk about racism"?
2. What do you think about Sir John Graves Simcoe and how he tried to stop slavery in Canada? Do you think his policy would have been successful had the British not outlawed slavery?
3. What was the Underground Railroad?
4. What was Ray's experience with the Ku Klux Klan? How do you think it might have affected him?
5. In chapter 1, we learned about the discrimination African-Canadian people faced. What other forms of discrimination are described in chapter 3?
6. How does this chapter add to your impression of Ray's character?

Chapter 4

1. Why do you think Ray was inspired to run and compete?
2. How does Ray describe the feeling of running?
3. What is your favourite sport? Why do you like it? How do you feel when you play the sport or watch it on TV?

Chapter 5

1. Ray has a different coach in high school. His high school coach also motivates Ray to run, but in a different way. How is the motivation he gets from Captain John Richard Cornelius different from that of Sergeant-Major McIntosh?
2. Why do you think Ray didn't quit running?
3. What do you think about Ray's response to the teacher who hit him? How does this add to your impression of Ray?

Chapter 6

1. Do you think Ray was right to quit the football team? What would you have done in his place?
2. In chapter 6, we learn about changes in sports training and equipment. Do you think people's attitudes have changed towards sports stars from when Ray was competing?

Chapter 7

1. Do you think Ray was right not to speak to the sports writer Ivan Miller? What else could he have done?
2. Are you surprised at how obvious racism was when Ray was growing up? Do you think people's attitudes have changed? If so, why have people's attitudes changed?

Chapter 8

1. Ray explains why he quit university. Can you think of other reasons why he might have quit that he doesn't mention? What do you think of Ray's decision to quit university?
2. Why do you think Ray doesn't mention any regret about quitting university?
3. After reading this chapter, has your impression of Ray's character changed? How would you describe Ray Lewis to someone who doesn't know him?

Chapter 9

1. Although Ray quit university, he never quit running. Why do you think he wouldn't give up running? Why do you think Ray was so driven to run?
2. What qualities are important for someone to have in order to reach their goals?

Chapter 10

1. What do you think of Ray Lewis's reaction to Nick Bawlf, his Olympic coach? Do you think he was right in speaking up? What might have happened if he hadn't complained?

Chapter 11

1. In this chapter, we hear about the 1932 Olympics. Have you watched the Olympics on TV? What are some of the differences between 1932 and now?

Chapter 12

1. After winning the 1932 Olympics, Ray went back to his job as a railway porter. How is Ray's experience different from the way Olympic athletes are treated today?
2. Even as an Olympic athlete, Ray faced prejudice and couldn't get a better job. What prejudice do you see in today's society?

Chapter 13

1. The 1934 British Empire Games (since 1974 known as the Commonwealth Games) were the first that featured women's events. How do you think women's struggles for recognition might have been similar to those experienced by Ray Lewis and other African-Canadian athletes?
2. Ray Lewis felt proud when he was introduced as, "Mr. Raymond Lewis of Canada." What are some of the reasons that you are proud of being a Canadian?

Chapter 14

1. On page 126, Ray Lewis says, ". . . race is an invention. It's a way of looking at people that is truly an illusion." What do you think of his statement?
2. Ray Lewis says that he does not condone or agree with violence, yet he approves of his son's fistfight at school. What do you think of Ray's reaction to his son's fight?

Chapter 15

1. On page 132, Ray says, "I hold to the notion that if people live, work, and learn together, they will overcome racial stereotypes. They will see each other as they really are, and will learn to appreciate not only their differences but their similarities." Do you agree with Ray's statement? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think Ray Lewis kept working so hard and so long?

Chapter 16

1. On page 138, Ray Lewis says, "Every time I recall receiving the Order of Canada, I think of what it took to get to that podium in Ottawa." He then lists what it took. What do you think of his list? What else is responsible for his successes?
2. On page 139 (at the end of the book), Ray Lewis says that to be able to deal effectively with people in any situation you need humour and strength of character. What do you think of this statement? What do you think he means by "strength of character"?
3. Do you think that Ray Lewis is ultimately happy with how his life turned out?
4. If you were to meet Ray Lewis, what would you want to ask him?

General Discussion Questions

1. How do you think Ray feels about the way he was treated? What is his tone in the book? Angry? Bitter? Proud? Determined? Do you think he was justified in his feelings?
2. Ray Lewis says he believed in being confrontational. In what ways do you think he was confrontational? Do you think this attitude helped him in his life or made it harder for him?
3. Do you think Ray's experience was similar or different from other African-Canadians of his time?
4. Have you ever experienced discrimination or prejudice? How did you feel?

Additional Activities

1. Ray Lewis recently died at age 94. His obituary, reprinted here, appeared in *The Globe and Mail* on November 18, 2003. Do you think it accurately reflects Ray Lewis's life and his achievements? What would you add or change?
2. Find out more about the Order of Canada by visiting the Governor General's website at http://www.gg.ca/honours/order_e.asp
3. Learn more about the underground railway by following Harriet Tubman on an interactive journey at <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/index.html>

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Black pride of Canadian track and field
First Canadian-born black athlete to win an Olympic medal
was member of relay team at 1932 Los Angeles Games but
could find work only as a railway porter

By JAMES CHRISTIE

Ray Lewis's event in Olympic track and field was officially
the 400-metre sprint, a flat race. His enduring place in
Canadian sport history, however, was earned for hurdling a
barrier.

Mr. Lewis, who died in his native Hamilton at age 94 on the
weekend, was the first Canadian born black athlete to stand
upon the Olympic medals podium. He won a bronze medal as
a member of the Canadian 4 x 400-metre relay at the Los
Angeles Games in 1932.

At a time where racial discrimination was the way of the
world, Mr. Lewis didn't get to live a hero's life. Viewed today
as a pathfinder for talented black athletes, in the 1930s Mr.
Lewis had to all but quit his athletics training because of the
demands of his job as a railway porter with the Canadian
Pacific Railways. He spent 22 years on the trains making 250
trips from Toronto to Vancouver. To try and stay fit, Mr.
Lewis would train by running alongside the rails when the
train stopped on the prairies.

"He deserved so much more than he ever received," said
Donovan Bailey, who won two gold medals at the 1996
Atlanta Olympics in the 100 metres and 4 x 100-metre relay.
"I benefited from his going before.

"I had the honour and good fortune of having lunch with Ray
Lewis and talking with him. I couldn't imagine what it was
like in his day. It was so different. Ultimately, he's one who
inspired me."

Raymond Gray Lewis was a Hamiltonian, cradle to grave.
James Worrall, honorary member of the International
Olympic Committee and Canada's Olympic flag bearer in
1936, recalled the family roots in the area went back to the
1840s when his great grandparents escaped slavery in the
United States and settled near Otterville, Ont.
The youngest child of Cornelius Lewis and Emma Green,

Ray Lewis was born Oct. 8, 1910, at 30 Clyde St. He began
running races for fun at age 9 when he entered a contest at a
local picnic. He began formal training in track and field at
Central Collegiate where the autocratic John Richard (Cap)
Cornelius was his coach. In 1929, he established a Canadian
high-school track-and-field record of four championships in
one day, taking the dashes at 100, 200, and 440 yards as they
were measured then, and anchoring the one-mile relay. In
1928 and 1929, Mr. Lewis was part of the Central relay team
that won the United States
national schoolboy title.

He briefly attended Marquette University in Milwaukee but
returned to Canada during the Depression and joined the
CPR.

Besides his Olympic medal performance with teammates Phil
Edwards, Alex Wilson and Jimmy Ball, Mr. Lewis was also a
Canadian champion several times and competed in the inau-
gural British Empire Games in 1930 in Hamilton and the
1934 Empire Games in London, where he won a silver medal
in the mile relay. Mr. Edwards was actually the first black
athlete to win an Olympic medal for Canada in 1932, getting
the 800-metre honour about a half-hour before the relay with
Mr. Lewis. Mr. Edwards, however, was native of British
Guyana, while Ray Lewis was a local.

Mr. Lewis, who in 2001 was awarded the Order of Canada,
had a life-long attachment to the Empire Games, later
renamed the Commonwealth Games. He was an adviser to
the bidders who recently sought the 2010 Games for
Hamilton and vowed that if the Games were coming back,
he'd be there to greet them at the official opening at age 100.
The Hamilton bid lost out last week to one from New Delhi,
India. He lit the torch during the opening ceremonies at the
International Children's Games in Hamilton July 1, 2000.

Mr. Lewis wrote an autobiography entitled *Shadow Running*
in which he detailed his life "as porter and Olympian." He
was featured in a 2002 TVOntario documentary series on
racism, *Journey to Justice*. "It [racism] felt worse here,
because it wasn't supposed to happen here," he recalled in the
video.

Whereas white athletes had an opportunity for coaching jobs
after their careers, Mr. Lewis did not. His position as a porter
was one of the few jobs open to men of his race.

"The first time I met him, the Canadian team was on its way
to Fort William, Ont., for the Canadian championships in
1933. They traveled by Pullman and Ray was the porter. He
couldn't get the time off to compete. But he did make the
1934 Empire Games team and was presented to the Prince of
Wales, something that was a point of honour for him. He felt
it was something to rub into all those people who had kept
him off teams and out of places because he was black," Mr.
Worrall said.

Mr. Lewis married Vivienne Jones in 1941, and they adopted
two children, sons Larry and Tony.