

Michael Tougias

The Finest Hours: The True Story of the Coast Guard's Most Daring Rescue

Educational Guide, Grades 3-12



About the Performance

On February 18, 1952, a vicious Nor'easter wrecked two gigantic oil tankers less than 20 miles off the coast of Cape Cod. To save the crewmen, the Coast Guard braved towering waves that reached 70 feet, blinding snow, and one of the most dangerous shoals in the world. This daring rescue is the subject of Tougias' award-winning book, now a major motion picture. With dramatic photography, Tougias transports students into the heart of the storm, confronting them with the challenges the young heroes of the Coast Guard faced and teaching the importance of resilience and making good decisions. In addition, Tougias discusses writing the book, working with a co-author and making the film, and gives tips for students to make their own writing come alive.



About the Artist

Michael Tougias, a *New York Times* Bestselling Author, is a lecturer and award-winning author/co-author of 24 books. His book *Fatal Forecast: An Incredible Tale of Disaster and Survival at Sea* was praised by the *Los Angeles Times* as "a breathtaking book – Tougias spins a marvelous and terrifying yarn." He also co-authored the bestseller, *The Finest Hours: The True Story of the Coast Guard's Most Daring Rescue*, now a major motion picture from Walt Disney Pictures. On a lighter note, Tougias chronicled his misadventures at his remote cabin in Vermont in his award-winning book, *There's A Porcupine In My Outhouse: Misadventures of a Mountain Man Wanna-be*. This book won the Independent Publishers Association Award for the "The Best Nature Book of the Year." Tougias uses humor, candor and edge-of-your-seat storytelling to inspire students to make sound decisions and to excel in their writing projects.

Program Learning Goals

1. To explore the heroes, challenges, and historical context of *The Finest Hours*.
2. To experience the art of storytelling.
3. To empower students to create and tell their stories.

Essential Questions

1. Why is it important to tell stories about the past and historical events?
2. What elements make up a story?
3. How can we use our distinct voices to tell stories?

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Vocabulary

- **Storytelling:** the art of telling a story about real or imagined events using gestures and words to bring the events and characters of the story to life in the minds of those listening
- **Storyteller:** a person who tells or writes stories
- **Author:** a person who writes a story, novel, poem, or other written work
- **Fiction:** a story that is created from the imagination
- **Non-fiction:** a piece of writing that consists of facts and information about actual events or topics

Key Facts and Context for Students

About *The Finest Hours*

This is the story of a small group of Coast Guardsmen in 1952 who ventured into an epic storm to rescue sailors from a ship that broke in half. The crew continued toward the stricken ship despite knowing they may not return. In 2016, Walt Disney Pictures released a full-length film based on the book. It stars Chris Pine, Casey Affleck, Ben Foster, Holliday Grainger, John Ortiz, and Eric Bana.



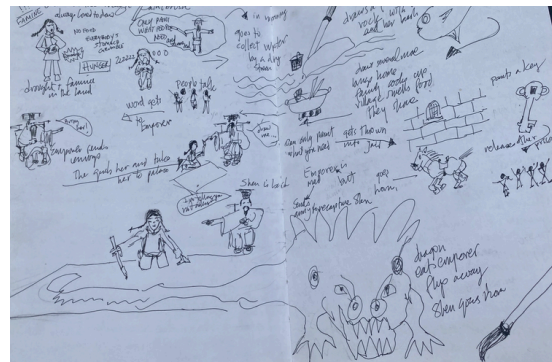
Questions for the Writing Process

Every author's writing process is unique, yet all storytellers seek to answer the same questions in their stories:

- Who are the characters?
- Where and when do they live?
- What do they do?
- Why?

Story Maps

Many authors use story maps to brainstorm their stories. Story maps can be a combination of pictures and text to layout the characters and plot before writing a first draft of the story. Students can make story maps as a learning tool, by breaking down a story into the most important events and putting them in order.



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Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- What do you know about creating and telling stories? What would you like to know? How could you find out more?
- What are some of your favorite stories? What happens in these stories? What do these stories teach you?
- Who tells stories in your family? What are those stories about? Do you use gestures or different voices to make a story funny or scary or sad?

Pre-Performance Activity: Mapping Stories

Learning Goal:

To understand the elements (characters, setting, problem, conclusion, and moral) of stories.

Materials:

A picture book (for younger grades) or short story (for older grades), "Story Map" worksheet (see page 4), coloring supplies

Directions:

1. Read a picture book or short story with the class.
2. Discuss the story. Who were the main characters? Where did the story take place? What was the conflict? How did the story end?
3. Have students complete the "Story Map" worksheet for this story. Include the characters, the setting, the activities that occur, etc. This can be done in words and/or pictures.
4. Share the story maps with the class. Discuss the similarities and differences between how students represented the story.

Extension:

Use the "Story Map" worksheet to outline the plot of an original story.



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Name: _____

Book Title: _____

STORY MAP

Directions: Draw and/or describe the elements of the story in each box.

Setting:

Main Characters:

Plot:

1

2

3

4

5

6

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Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What did you learn or notice about the crewmen in *The Finest Hours*? What did they teach you about resilience and making good decisions?
- In what ways did you think about history from a new perspective?
- How did Michael Tougias change the way you think about creative writing?

Post-Performance Activity: Historical Creative Writing

Learning Goal:

- To research a historical event and understand its historical significance.
- To expand creative writing skills.

Materials:

"Story Map" Worksheet (see page 4)



Directions:

1. Discuss *The Finest Hours* and Michael Tougias's approach to presenting a historical event. How did he make history come to life? What were his suggestions for creative writing?
2. Pick a historical event (or several events for students to choose from) for students to research and write about. It could be an event that was recently studied, and/or one that is of interest to students.
3. Research the historical event. Who were 2-4 notable people? What did they do? What was the conflict? What was the resolution or conclusion?
4. Fill out the "Story Map" Worksheet using the details from this research.
5. Write a short story about the historical event using the story map as an outline. Include original conversations that could have happened between the important people in the event. Encourage students to use their research and imaginations to create historically accurate details in their stories.
6. Share the stories with the class. Discuss how using a creative writing approach to write about a historical event is different than writing an entirely fictional story.

Extension:

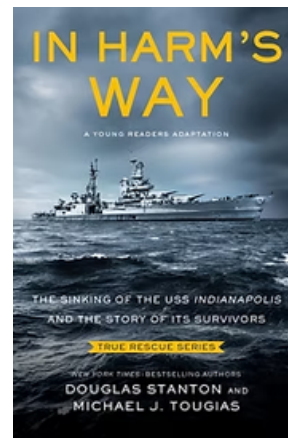
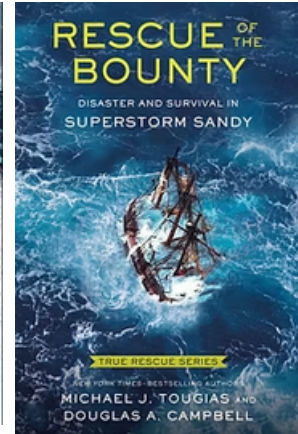
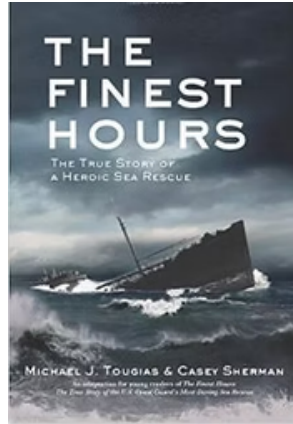
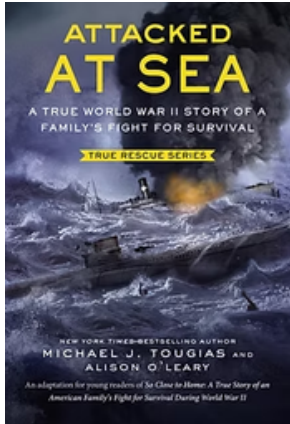
Create a presentation in the style of Michael Tougias's performance to enhance the storytelling. Incorporate photos, art, and/or music to bring the story to life. Share and discuss the presentations with the class.

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Michael Tougias Books for Students



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Further Resources

- [Michael Tougias Website](#)
- [Scholastic Publishing: "Websites Where Kids Can Create Books"](#)
- Bauer, Caroline Feller: *Read for the Fun of It: Active Programming with Books for Children*, H.H. Wilson Company (1992)
- Gregory, Cynde: *Childmade: Awakening Children to Creative Writing*, Station Hill Press (2010)
- Sanders, Joshunda: *I Can Write the World*, Six Foot Press (2019)
- Trelease, Jim: *Read-Aloud Handbook: Eighth Edition*, Penguin Books (2019)



Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Theatre

Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.01)
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.02)

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (T.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (T.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (T.R.09)

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (T.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (T.Co.11)

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Curricular Connections, continued

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Reading

- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. (R.PK-12.2)
- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. (R.PK-12.4)

Writing

- Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences. (W.PK-12.3)

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (L.PK-12.3)
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings. (L.PK-12.5)

