

TITLE: True Height

BOOK: Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul

PAGE: 289

TIME TO READ: 7 minutes

TOPICS: Overcoming obstacles  
Following your dream  
Physical handicap—blindness  
Sport—pole vaulting

AGE LEVEL: Grades 3 and up

SYNOPSIS: Michael Stone confronts the most challenging day of his pole vaulting career to set a National and International Junior Olympics record, and to achieve a “personal best,” breaking his former record by 9.5 inches. Michael is a *blind* person!

NOTES TO TEACHER:

It works well to stop reading the story *before* the ending to allow the students to finish the story without them knowing that Michael is blind.

For younger students, you may need to explain about the sport of *pole vaulting* (*With this track and field event, the athlete sprints down a runway and plants a long, fiberglass pole into a box. This throws the athlete high into the air, over a horizontal bar, and lands him or her onto a large, protective mat.*).

*Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*  
True Height

ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE SCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL:

PRE-QUESTIONS:

If you could set any “record” in the “*Guinness Book of Records*,” what would it be?

- Why did you choose that?

**Read Story**

POST-QUESTIONS:

What record did Michael break?

How do you think he did this?

What specific steps did Michael take to achieve his goal?

What role did his parents play in his success?

What responsibilities did Michael have at home and at school?

How do you think that Michael learned to vault as a blind person?

- Discuss “legal” blindness vs. “total” blindness. (*Legal blindness is when one’s vision is 20/200 on a reading chart. Objects can be seen, but are very blurry. With total blindness, nothing can be seen.*)
- Discuss how Michael might learn to vault with either type of blindness. (*counting steps, or having a coach give verbal placement cues, etc.*).

NOTE TO TEACHERS:

Stop reading the story *before the final paragraphs* to allow students to have their own ending.

Write your own ending to the story before hearing its completion.

Compare your ending with the true ending to the story.

- Partner with another student.
- One of you is blindfolded, while the other acts as a guide and protector.
- Do a series of simple tasks such as walking around the classroom or school, washing hands, doing a math problem, tying a shoe, etc.
- Discuss how this felt.

#### NOTE TO TEACHERS:

You should choose tasks wisely and/or limit the time for younger students. Older students should remain blindfolded for a long enough period of time so that they start to notice other senses increasing. Hearing, touch, and smell will become more acute as time goes on.

Discuss the body's ability to compensate for a loss by increasing other sensory abilities.

Having done some of these activities, go back to Michael to discuss how he may have felt doing the simple tasks that many of us take for granted.