



How They Choked: Failures, Flops, and Flaws of the Awfully Famous

Georgia Bragg , Kevin O'Malley (Illustrator)

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Over the course of history, famous people made mistakes that were so monumental they could never escape them, no matter how brilliant their successes! Ferdinand Magellan is credited as the first man to sail around the world . . . but he only actually made it halfway. His terrible treatment of everyone he met cut his life journey short. Queen Isabella of Spain is remembered for financing Columbus's expeditions—and for creating the Spanish Inquisition. J. Bruce Ismay commissioned the unsinkable marvel of the sea, the *Titanic*—and then jumped the line of women and children to escape death on a lifeboat. Readers will be fascinated well past the final curtain and will empathize with the flawed humanity of these achievers.

Famous successful “failures” include:

Marco Polo • Queen Isabella of Spain • King Montezuma II • Anne Boleyn • Ferdinand Magellan • Isaac Newton • Benedict Arnold • George Armstrong Custer • Vincent Van Gogh • Susan B. Anthony • Thomas Alva Edison • J. Bruce Ismay • Amelia M. Earhart • Joseph Jefferson Jackson (“Shoeless Joe”)

How They Choked: Failures, Flops, and Flaws of the Awfully Famous Details

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From Reader Review How They Choked: Failures, Flops, and Flaws of the Awfully Famous for online ebook

Dianne Landry says

I listened to this on audio and loved it. It is amazing how, depending on how you look at it, anyone can be a screwup. We think of Marco Polo as this great explorer until we find out he completely messed up in later life when he joined the navy. Amelia Earhart is an aviation pioneer and then you learn she could have made it if she had just followed safety procedures and hadn't hired an alcoholic navigator who didn't know Morse code and used the navigation techniques from the days of Christopher Columbus. These are only two of the fascinating characters in this book. It was hoot.

Diana says

I received this book through Goodreads Giveaways. I can't believe how long I've had this audio book sitting around. I popped it in for a listen while I was getting things ready for a garage sale, thinking it would be "OK" since it's considered a children's history book. I have to admit I really enjoyed it, partly because I love reading about/listening to historical disasters. The audio book is fairly short only 4 CD's, but it has some interesting basic information about things like the Titanic and Amelia Earhart's final flight. I feel adults as well as children could enjoy this book/audio book, I certainly did.

Jim says

There are thumbnail biographies of over a dozen famous people that Bragg uses to make moral points of, so she's quite judgmental & over simplifies very badly at times. There is no balance or attempt to put many of their actions into historical context. I really noticed this with Benedict Arnold since I just read a biography about him not long ago. Her summary makes one wonder why he achieved the rank & standing he did. No mention of his heroics or how much of a popularity contest rank was in the fledgling country or what many of his peers were doing. Still, it's not awful & does bring to light some historically unpopular truths & lessons. It's also a quick read or, in this case, listen. Well read, too.

The historic figures covered:

Marco Polo

Queen Isabella of Spain

King Montezuma II

Anne Boleyn

Ferdinand Magellan

Isaac Newton

Benedict Arnold

George Armstrong Custer

Vincent van Gogh

Susan B. Anthony

Thomas Alva Edison

J. Bruce Ismay

Amelia M. Earhart

Joseph Jefferson Jackson ("Shoeless Joe")

Not a bad way to spend a few hours while doing chores, but hardly a definitive history. Very much like a twisted version of what we were taught in school.

Evan says

The book was awfully jam-packed with information, along with many I, history buff, did not know. The book, in my opinion was very short and did not know that I was even close to being done with it until I got to the last page. In other words, a very descriptive book that I ate up in a week.

Rylan Anderson says

It doesn't tell you really how they died but you can make out what he is trying to say.

Robert Risher says

This is an immensely entertaining, if perhaps overly pessimistic, catalogue of historical failures perfectly suited for adolescents, yet still compelling enough for adults. I picked it up in a middle school classroom in a moment of boredom, and I just kept reading until it was done. The illustrations are as captivating as the writing, and both leave me curious for the creative team's initial venture. I would absolutely recommend this book to inspire historical research with the caveat that students not rest solely on the author's interpretation of the figures (even if she is pretty spot-on).

Kim says

Georgia Bragg does it again. This follow up to her fantastic "How They Croaked" is another set of biographies of famous people with an emphasis on their flaws, failures and flops. Some of greatest and most notorious people in history were not necessarily very nice people. George Armstrong Custer was horrible to pretty much everyone he knew. I wouldn't be surprised if his own troops cheered when they heard he'd been killed at the Battle of Little Big Horn. And Amelia Earhart was exceptionally brave but she wasn't a rule follower. Forms, check lists, safety rules... they all bored her so she didn't do them, with fatal results.

The writing is engaging and as humorous as it is possible to be when discussing psychopaths, narcissists, and manic-depressives. That's just my arm-chair psychology talking, not Bragg's words.

But because of the severe character flaws and violent tendencies that many of the highlighted famous people displayed, I would recommend this book for 5th grade and up. I do think adults would enjoy it maybe even more than students.

A fun and unusual look at historical people.

Vanessa says

I loved to get some history lessons with a fun way of telling the tales. Also liked the summary and listing of the highlights of their failures at the end of each person's story.

Kyky More says

How They Choked

How They Choked is an interesting book on the failures of the many people who are thought of as wise and famous. It knocks the people off their pedestals to reveal the true side of each story.

The book contains 14 cases including Montezuma II, Amelia Earhart, and the Captain of the Titanic.

After you read this, you'll realize that all the famous have flaws.

I recommend this book to 6th to 8th graders and adults. It has a rich vocabulary and "hard to pronounce" names. The pages are jam-packed with complex history but even so, the author does a good job of explaining it clearly.

I learned a lot from this book.

Jacob Venske says

The books creamy but it has famous people and about there failures in life.

Margaux says

This is a seriously funny read. Illustrations of spilled milk with feature highlights from the subject's life at the beginning of each chapter. This book is filled with great one-liners.

"Isabella created a society that systematically told some of it's people they were no good" (21)

"There's good news and bad news about Queen Isabella. She's admirable because she ran Spain when everybody told her a woman couldn't do it. And while she was running it she gave Christopher Columbus money to go exploring. She also believed in prayer. The bad news is she overdid everything. Isabella was the original get-out-of-my-way-and-don't-tell-me-what-to-do person. Those who didn't believe or want the ssame things she did had their limbs ripped apart, brinas rushed, or body fried in a slow-burning fire. Queen Isabella's reign of terror was called the Spanish Inquisition." (13)

Featuring Marco Polo, Anne Boleyn, Amelia M. Earhart, Susan B. Anthony, and many more, *How They Choked* is the perfect companion to *How They Croaked: The Awful Ends of the Awfully Famous*. I'd recommend this to any of your run-of-the-mill morbidly curious children and teens who want to learn how other people ended up famously messing up. The pictures are perfectly placed and poignant. The end of each

individual chapter has a facts section that not only includes more information on the subject but on the time period and other pertinent people from that area of thinking (Montezuma II has a table of "Eight Aztec Emperors and their Relationship to Montezuma II" featuring their title, reign and relationship to said emperor.)

The end of the book has sources, an index, and online resources for further reading on each person featured in the book. It's well-put together and actually an interesting read on a subject (biography) that I find very, very dry.

Alex B. says

A very interesting nonfiction piece of writing.

Samantha says

I really disliked the tone of this book. The writing style is quick to judgment and turns a very disapproving eye towards its subjects. I couldn't stand reading so many articles that just felt overly sarcastic and negative.

Source info, further reading, recommended websites, and an index round out the back matter.

Trey says

This was not quite as good as the first book, however I still enjoyed it, and I finished my genre graph, so win win!

Michelle Welch says

This is the kind of kids' book that I love to read: it gets right to the point, and it's irreverent without being too cute. I'm not sure that all the figures whose biographies appear here are quite on the same plane - Susan B. Anthony's failure is of a totally different nature than Benedict Arnold's, for example - and more squeamish parents might object to their kids reading about Aztec sacrifices and Anne Boleyn's sex appeal. Anyone who idolizes Custer and Edison will also be disappointed to see their character flaws so roundly criticized. But for those who hold with the author's premise - that no one's perfect, not even you - this is both a good overview of history and biography, and an entertaining read.
