

The Greatest Generation Study Guide

The Greatest Generation by Tom Brokaw

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Plot Summary

The greatest Generation by Tom Brokaw is a book about the experiences of different people during World War II and afterwards. The people who were involved in the war were born during the prosperity of the twenties and then watched the nation plunge into the Great Depression. Many grew up in extreme poverty. Others came from affluent families. Whatever their background, they were all patriotic and wanted to help in the war effort. They came from different backgrounds, had different experiences, and made different kinds of contributions but they all did it because they wanted to. All of these people served their country and contributed to the greatness of America.

In examining the experiences of the World War II generation, Brokaw divides people into different groups. Ordinary People are just that. They are people who made their contributions to the war effort and then returned to their ordinary lives without any fame, celebrity status or fortunes. The Home Front people are those who made their contribution in America by working in the production of war goods industries, government or providing moral support. The Heroes refers to those who won medals for their acts of valor. The section on Women in Uniform and Out looks at the role of women. Some paved the way for women in the military while others worked as nurses. The section entitled Shame looks at the issue of discrimination experienced by racial and cultural minority groups. Love, Marriage, and Commitment looks at the values of the time. Most people who married hastily had marriages that lasted because marriage was considered a lifetime commitment. The sections entitled Famous People and The Arena look at people who attained celebrity status after the war.

Brokaw calls this generation of people The Greatest Generation. They made many contributions to America both during and after the war contributing to the progress and greatness of the country whether it was in public service, politics, medicine, scientific research, journalism, or numerous other fields. They affected the lives of many people and made America what it is.

Brokaw became interested in the people of this era when he covered the fortieth and fiftieth anniversaries of the D-Day invasion in Normandy. It began as just another assignment for Brokaw until he arrived in Normandy and began talking to different people about their experiences. Many have bad memories from the war that they cannot forget and some do not want to talk about their war time experiences. However, Brokaw thinks their stories are worth listening to because of the effects they had in the country. After the war, they obtained educations on the GI Bill and went on to work in various fields.

Brokaw writes an interesting book that many people will find interesting reading. In the course of the book, he examines the issues of changing values and discrimination. The book is rather quick to read and the reader will find the book worth the time spent reading it.



Time, Ordinary People, pgs. 3-36

Time, Ordinary People, pgs. 3-36 Summary and Analysis

Tom Brokaw is born in 1940, a time when America was in between the Great Depression and World War II. America had been in a period of great prosperity in the years before the Depression but this quickly changed. A child born into the prosperity of the 1920s, he saw how quickly life changed during the Depression with the bank failures and massive unemployment.

Franklin Roosevelt becomes President and promises a program called the New Deal to revive the economy and end the Depression. In Germany, Adolf Hitler comes to power and starts invading numerous countries in Europe. Stalin is in power in Russia and Francisco Franco is the leader of Spain. The world is on the brink of war.

Pearl Harbor is attacked on December 7, 1941 and America entered World War II. The involvement in the war effort developed jobs and helped end the Depression. The young generation of the time is the one that would make great contributions by the end of the twentieth century. Many of these people were ordinary people like Thomas and Eileen Broderick.

In 1942, Thomas was a student at Xavier College in Cincinnati. Originally from Chicago, he enlisted in the Merchant Marine. After one mission to North Africa, he wanted to transfer to Airborne, which he did. He is sent to England and then into Holland. He is shot in the head and wakes up in an English hospital. He is then sent to Menlo Park, California where he is told he is permanently blind. After finding he can't attend school or hold a job, he decides to learn Braille. He eventually goes into the insurance business.

Eileen was a twenty-three year old nurse when Tom met her. They have five children. Tom and his friends form the Blinded Veterans Association.

Charles O. Van Gorder is a medical doctor and is in the United States Army Medical Corps in June 1944. He is thirty-one years of age at the time and was in the gliders that landed in Normandy on D-Day. They established a hospital in a chateau for the treatment of the D-Day wounded. The medical unit stays with the 101st Airborne for the next six months and he is taken prisoner by the Germans on December 19, 1944. He escapes near the Russian border and makes his way back to the American lines.

After the war, he and Army buddy John Radda open a practice in Andrews, North Carolina. His wife, Helen, is the clinic nurse.



Ordinary People, pgs. 37-60

Ordinary People, pgs. 37-60 Summary and Analysis

The generation of this time is characterized by personal responsibility and honesty. Wesley Ko is a member of this generation. He grew up in Philadelphia. His father was a pastor, educated at Princeton and Temple. Both of Wesley's parents were Chinese immigrants. Since his parents could not afford college for him, he went to work at a printing company. When the war begins, he becomes a second lieutenant in the 82nd Airborne and is assigned to the 325th glider Infantry Regiment. He saw combat duty in Italy, Ireland and England before the Normandy invasion.

Ko was in the one of the two hundred fifty gliders that landed in Normandy. His unit moves east through Germany and helps to liberate Wöbbelin concentration camp. He returns to the United States on September 23, 1945. A year later, he opened a printing business with his brother and a friend. He marries Ruth in 1950 and they have three children. In 1985, he guaranteed a \$1.3 million to move his business to Glen Falls, New York. The business fails after a year. Instead of filing bankruptcy and collecting his social security, the seventy year old KO finds a job and begins to repay the loan. He retires six years later.

James Dawking is from Smithtown, New York. When his mother dies, members of his church give a home to the children. James enters the U.S. Army Air Corps when he is nineteen. He is sent to England where he makes bombing runs in Germany. When his B24 crashes, he is captured by the Germans and spends eight months at the Stalag Luft One POW camp. He is liberated by the Russians in May 1945.

James marries Dorothy and he and his father-in-law open a seafood trucking business. In the afternoons, he organized baseball games for kids and formed the Little League. He is elected superintendent of highways in the early 1960s and begins to modernize the road system.

Reverend Harry Reginald "Reg" Hammond is the son of an Episcopal priest. He eventually becomes a priest himself in the Anglican Orthodox Church at the age of seventy-nine. All of his brothers are priests in the Episcopal Church. Reg marries Margery MacPherson in 1941 and then enters the Army. He was in Normandy right after D-Day and received five battle stars and a Bronze star for service.

After the war he attends the University of California at Santa Barbara and enters teaching. He eventually earns a PhD in education and retires in 1980. He then decides to go into the ministry where he can continue his service.



Ordinary People, Pgs. 61-88

Ordinary People, Pgs. 61-88 Summary and Analysis

Lloyd Kilmer's father was a dairy farmer until Lloyd was eight years old. Then his father lost the farm and the family moved to Stewartville, Minnesota. Lloyd is the first in his family to graduate from high school. When the war begins, he enlists in the Army Air Corps on July 22, 1942 and becomes a B24 pilot. Based in England, he takes part in the D-Day invasion. On one mission, Kilmer cracks in Beemster, Holland. He and his crew become prisoners of the Germans and spend ten months in confinement. Kilmer's only goal is to survive.

When Kilmer returns to the United States, he marries Marie and attends Creighton University in Omaha. He goes into real estate after graduation and is very active in community affairs. He is elected to the position of Douglas County clerk and controller. He and Marie retire to Arizona, where he spent ten years caring for an ailing Marie. After Marie's death, he marries Ruth.

Gordon Larsen is with the Army Corps of Engineers for thirty-five years. In 1941, he quit high school to join the Marines and served in the South Pacific. After the war, he finishes high school in night school. He marries Emelia and they have six children.

John 'Lefty' Caulfield founded the Romeo Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He had been born and raised in the Kerry Corner section of Cambridge. Many kids from the neighborhood became life-long friends and many of them served together in the war. After the war, Lefty completes his education at Harvard. After graduation, he enters the teaching profession. The Romeo Club members meet monthly.

Home Front, Heroes, pgs. 89-114

Home Front, Heroes, pgs. 89-114 Summary and Analysis

The war effort requires a large force of workers at home. After the Depression, many are happy to have work. Charles Briscoe is from the Midwest coming from a farming family in Kansas. After graduation from high school, he attends sheet metal school in California and then goes to work for Boeing in Wichita. His parents also go to work at the plant. They all work on the long range B29 that is needed for the war effort. They build the Enola Gay which drops the first atomic bomb at Hiroshima.

Charles enters the Navy in 1945. After the war he returns to Boeing where he works until he retires at the age of sixty-seven.

Many women found jobs in plants related to war production. One is Dorothy Haener. When she graduates from high school, she secures a job at the Ford Motor Company plant in Willow Run, Michigan. She felt proud that she could be independent on the money she earns but she loses her high paying job near the end of the war and has to take a lower paying job. Eventually, she becomes a union activist in the United Automobile Workers. She is instrumental in forming a woman's section. She also becomes a founding member of the National Organization for Women and was always a promoter of equal pay for women.

Bob Bush marries Wanda in 1945. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his battlefield service. He joins the Navy medical corps in 1943. He is injured in the South Pacific and released from service and returns home and marries Wanda Spooner. He finishes high school and opens a lumberyard with his friend Victor Druzianich. They use their military training to plan their time and run their business.



Heroes, Women in Uniform, pgs. 115-133

Heroes, Women in Uniform, pgs. 115-133 Summary and Analysis

Joe Foss grew up in South Dakota during the depression. His father dies when he is a teenager and he works to pay for flying lessons and college at the University of South Dakota. In 1940, he joins the Marines and after serving as a flight instructor for a year, he ships out to Guadalcanal in 1942. He and others fly their F4F-4 Wildcat fighters from an aircraft carrier to Henderson Field. He achieves many records and wins the Congressional Medal of Honor. After a year, he returns to the States and eventually is sent to the Pacific for another tour.

After the war, Foss opens a charter flying service and Packard dealership. He enters politics and becomes governor of South Dakota. He and Tom Brokaw appear on Two for the Money together in the 1950s.

Foss marries after the war but has a troubled marriage. Two of their children suffer from cerebral palsy and polio. He helps to establish a hospital for crippled children and becomes the national president of the Society of Crippled Children and Adults. He leaves politics after losing a Congressional race to George McGovern. Foss then becomes president of the American Football League.

Leonard 'Bud' Lowell is also a part of D-Day leading his men up the sheer cliffs at Pointe-du-Hoc. The sixty-four year old lawyer tells Brokaw his story during the fortieth anniversary filming of the documentary. As part of the U.S. Army Rangers, he spends more than a year training for the mission.

Bud attends Tennessee Wesleyan College and graduates in 1941. He enlists in the Army after working as a brakeman on a train. He is shot during the Normandy landing but goes on despite the wound to disable some of the big German guns aimed at Utah Beach. He served until 1945 and then is sent home. He re-enlists in the Army.

On June 6, 1946, he marries Charlotte Ewart and attends law school.



Women in Uniform, pgs. 139-151

Women in Uniform, pgs. 139-151 Summary and Analysis

Women also play a role in the war effort since there aren't enough men to fill all of the support positions. This led to the creation of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corp of which Mary Hallaren is a member. Mary, from Massachusetts, is a junior high school teacher when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurs. Jeanne Holm is from Oregon where she works as a radio technician.

Mary is determined to prove that women can have a productive military career. When the war ends, Mary is in charge of upgrading the Auxiliary Corps to the Women's Army Corps so women would have a permanent place in the Army and Navy.

Jeanne Holm, in the meantime, is in Oregon attending Lewis and Clark College. When she receives a letter from the Defense Department asking if she'd be interested in regular duty, she immediately goes to Fort Lee, Virginia.

Mary is the colonel in charge of the Woman's Army Corps. This is the highest rank a woman could hold. She paved the way for the integration of women into all branches of the military.

Jeanne serves in Germany during the Berlin airlift.

When Mary returns in 1960 she becomes involved with WICs, Women in Community Service. This is the recruitment part of the Jobs Corps. Mary works with WICs for thirty four years.

Jeanne stays with the Army, finishing her degree and works at NATO headquarters in Europe. She is appointed director of Air Force women and is a one-star general by 1971 and receives her second star two years later. In 1975, she works on women's issues for the White House and then works for the Defense Advisory Committee.



Woman, pgs. 151-174

Woman, pgs. 151-174 Summary and Analysis

Marion Rivers works at the General Plate Division of Metals and Controls Corporation in Attleboro, Massachusetts. Claudine 'Scottie' Scott is a freshman at the University of Kansas. The following fall, she enlists in the WAVEs, Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service and serves the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In California, Alison Ely leaves graduate school to work at a shipyard in Oakland, California. All three women are motivated by patriotism.

Many trains heading for Camp Myles Standish stop in Attleboro. The women from the plant distribute baskets containing fruit and other items to the soldiers. Later in the war, there is no cheering when the trains are heading in the opposite direction carrying the wounded and the dead.

In California, Alison asks to work on the assembly line. She has to learn to understand blueprints.

Scottie knows of the plans for D-Day and knows that her boyfriend, Dale Lingelbach, will be part of it. He is injured and sent home. They are married in September 1945.

The Attleboro community does their best to provide a home away from home for the service men with dances, dinners in homes, etc.

Alison marries John W. Campbell and leaves her job at the shipyards. Her husband is sent to the Pacific.

Scottie and Dale move to Carthage, Missouri, where Dale has a good job with Smith Brothers. He dies at the age of forty-five leaving Scottie with two children. She obtains a teaching certificate and begins to teach civics.

Marion marries Karl Nittel at the end of the war. In 1965, after her kids are grown, she works as a writer for a technical company. She has a painful experience when her daughter dies of cancer.

Alison and her husband divorce when Alison is fifty five. She has to re-enter the workforce and eventually becomes a technical writer for IBM.

The WASPs are the Woman's Air Force Service Pilots. Women have to meet stringent requirements to join this program. Margaret Ray is one of these women. The Indiana woman obtains her flying license after graduating high school. In the WASPs, she tests and transports planes. In 1944, the WASPs are told that their services are no longer needed. She becomes a flight instructor. When Japan surrenders, she drops leaflets over the town with the information.



Mary marries Morris Ringenberg and in the mid-1950s, begins to take part in the Powder Puff Derby which she participates in for the next twenty-years. In 1994, at the age of seventy two, she participates in a round the world race.

Mary Louise Roberts serves in the Army Nurse Corps and serves at the Anzio beachhead. Her father dies when she is a child leaving her mother with six children. At eighteen, Mary Louise enters nurses training so she could have a profession to help her family. After graduation she secures a good job and her mother and two siblings live with her. When the war begins, she volunteers and is sent to North Africa. She lands at Anzio five days after the invasion. Mary Louise is the first woman to win the Silver Star. She returns to Dallas in October 1945 and resumes her nursing career.

Shame, pgs. 183-214

Shame, pgs. 183-214 Summary and Analysis

Martha Settle Putney is one of eight children born in Norristown, Pennsylvania. The young black woman offers to help a Republican candidate. When he wins the election, he helps arrange a scholarship for her at Howard University where she earns a master's degree in history. She then works for the War Manpower Commission and then volunteers for the WACs. She becomes a lieutenant and is sent to Des Moines. As a black woman, she faces racial discrimination wherever she goes. She helps fight the color barrier and as a result, the black band is allowed on base and blacks can use the base swimming pool. She receives training as an executive officer or administrative commander and is assigned to the Woman's Army Corps Hospital in Chicago and has to deal with incidents of discrimination on route and on assignment. After the war, she returns to work at the Manpower commission and marries Bill Putney in 1947. She receives a PhD in history and begins teaching at Boise State College and then Howard University. When she returns, she works as a volunteer at the Smithsonian.

Johnnie Holmes is born in Ohio but moves to Chicago as a child. He enters the Army. He experiences discrimination during basic training. There are racial slurs and incidents wherever he goes, including in combat in Germany even though the unit made exemplary contributions to the war effort. After the war, he works as a machinist until 1951 and then works for the City of Chicago until he retires in 1985. He marries a white woman and they have a good marriage until her death in 1985.

Luis Vittorio Armijo grows up on a reservation ranch in southwestern New Mexico. His mother is Apache and his father is Spanish Basque. He is raised in the Apache traditions and enters the Army Air Force in 1942. Luis wants to be a pilot but the Army wants Indians as code talkers. He is eventually accepted for ground communications. At Chanute Field in Illinois, he is trained to guide B29s and then sent to Tinian Island, where his unit guided the Enola Gay. He sustains a back injury in a typhoon and returns home to New Mexico. After the war, he attends college and becomes a teacher. After obtaining a master's degree, he moves to California. After he returns from teaching, he finances his grandchildren's college education by selling Indian jewelry at swap meets.



Shame, Love, pgs. 215-240

Shame, Love, pgs. 215-240 Summary and Analysis

Nao Takasugi is born in Oxnard, California. His grandparents, immigrants from Japan, settle there in 1903. Nao is a Nisei, a second generation Japanese American. During the war, many Japanese are confined to internment camps. When Nao's area is confined to within five miles of his Home, he couldn't continue his studies at UCLA. The family is then ordered to report to the Ventura railroad station.

The Takasugi family is first housed at the Tulare county fairgrounds where they remain for three months. Then they are sent to the Gila River Indian Reservation in Arizona where they would remain for three and a half years. Some of Nao's cousins are at the same camp, all of whom volunteer for the Army. Nao receives financial support from the Quakers and attends Temple University in Philadelphia and then goes on to the Wharton School. He returns to Oxnard after the war to help his parents where a friend operated his parents' store.

Nao enters politics and sells the family store to be mayor of Oxnard for ten years. He is elected to the California Assembly when he is seventy years of age.

Norman Mineta is another Japanese whose family is sent to an internment camp. His family is sent to Heart Mountain, Wyoming and returns to San Jose after the war and then the family moves to Evanston, Illinois. He attends the University of California at Berkeley. He serves in the Army and then works in his father's insurance business. After being elected to the San Jose City Council, he is elected mayor. He then wins election to Congress. After leaving Congress after twenty years, he becomes a vice president for Lockheed Martin.

Takasugi and Mineta are instrumental in securing an apology and reparations for Japanese Americans.

John and Peggy Assenzio marry right after the attack on Pearl Harbor. They grew up in Brooklyn where Peggy teaches while John serves with the Combat Engineers. He is awarded the Bronze Star for his service.

They have an old-fashioned sense of values and are married for fifty-seven years at the time of the writing of the book.



Love, Marriage, pgs. 241-272

Love, Marriage, pgs. 241-272 Summary and Analysis

Many wives become friends during the war and their husbands become part of the group when they return home. Vivian Auld, Tom Brokaw's mother-in-law is a member of such a group. His wife saw her father once in her first five years but they are close by the time she is an adult.

Most of the news the families receive comes from radio but the postman always makes special trips to deliver letters he knows are from the military. Most of the people have little idea of exactly where their loved ones are.

When the war ends, the husbands return and the wives decide to continue the regular monthly dinners and meetings. They call themselves the Dumbos and the meetings continue for thirty five years.

Gaylord Nelson is from Wisconsin. He enters the Army after earning his law degree. His wife, Carrie Lee Dotson is from Wise County, Virginia. Her mother places her and her brothers in a foster home when her father dies. Carrie completes her officers training and qualifies for Officer Candidate School. She meets Gaylord on a blind date in spring of 1945. A mutual friend finds them both on Okinawa and they meet again. They marry in November 1947. Gaylord eventually becomes governor of Wisconsin and then a U.S. Senator. Carrie Lee believes their marriage is successful because they have confidence in each other.

Jeanette Gagne Norton is from a suburb of Minneapolis. She becomes engaged to Camille Gagne of Quebec and marries in June 1942. Jeanette is pregnant when Camille leaves for basic training in fall. He doesn't see his son before he ships overseas to North Africa and then to Italy. He also takes part in the D-Day invasion. Camille is killed in battle when his son Robert is seventeen months old. Jeanette eventually marries William Norton and has three daughters. The son, Robert, eventually visits his father's grave in Holland.

Daphne Cavin meets Raymond Kelly in August 1941. They marry in June and Raymond leaves for basic training in November 1942. He is sent to France while Daphne works as a beautician in Lebanon, Indiana. Raymond is killed in June 1944. Daphne buys a beauty shop and, after four years, marries Marvin Cavin and moves to a farm in central Indiana. When her four children are grown, she works again as a beautician. Marvin dies of cancer in the 1970s and Daphne works until she retires in 1987. Her sister finds the scrapbook and mementos from her marriage to Raymond.



Famous People, pgs. 273-302

Famous People, pgs. 273-302 Summary and Analysis

The rich and famous and many future rich and famous are also involved in the war effort. George Bush is in this category. His father was a U.S. Senator and Wall Street millionaire. On his eighteenth birthday, George enlists in the Navy Air Corps wanting to be a combat pilot. His plane is shot down and he floats in the sea for hours until being rescued. After the war, he marries Barbara and attends Yale. After graduation, they move to Texas. He becomes congressman, United Nations Ambassador, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, vice president and then president.

Ben Bradlee is from Connecticut. On August 8, 1942, he receives his degree from Harvard, is commissioned as a lieutenant in the Navy, and marries. They have two children. His Navy experience shows him that he has many options in life. He goes into journalism after the war and becomes editor of The Washington Post.

Art Buchwald enlists in the Marine Corps at the age of seventeen. After basic training at Parris Island, he is sent to the South Pacific to the island of Engebi. After the war, he attends the University of Southern California and the Alliance Française in Paris. He secures a job with the International Herald Tribune and writes the famous Paris After Dark column. He is famous when he returns to America after sixteen years as a writer and lecturer.

Andy Rooney comes from Albany, New York. During the war, he works as a reporter for Stars and Stripes. He covers the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day for CBS since he had covered the invasion for Stars and Stripes. As a graduate of Colgate, he is drafted into service. Not wanting to serve in the infantry, he applies to and is accepted by Stars and Stripes. He arrives in Normandy after the invasion and follows the troops to Paris for the liberation. He crosses the Rhine into Germany with the troop and was in various European battlefields, as well as India and China. After the war, he continues as a journalist with a newspaper column and a spot on 60 Minutes.

Julia Child, the writer of cookbooks and host of televised shows on cuisine, worked for the Office of Strategic Services during the war. From Pasadena, California, she attends Smith College then works in advertising. She wants to serve the war effort but is rejected by the WAVES. Julia worked as a typist before becoming a senior clerk for the OSS. After a year and a half, she is assigned to the Far East.



Famous People, pgs. 303-326

Famous People, pgs. 303-326 Summary and Analysis

Gertrude Bells 'Trudy' Elon is a chemist. She graduates from high school at fifteen and college at nineteen. She goes on to earn a master's degree and then finds the only jobs open to her are in teaching. After the outbreak of war, many laboratories call her offering her jobs. Her first is in quality control at A&P. She then goes to Johnson & Johnson and then to Burroughs Welcome. She wants to work in cancer research and spends the next forty years working with Dr. George Hitchings. They are pioneers in medical research and developed drugs useful in treating leukemia, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, kidney stones and herpes virus. Trudy eventually becomes a department head. She never marries but becomes a role model and mentor for women. She and Hitchings win the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1988.

Chesterfield Smith is the president of the American Bar Association during Watergate. He is from Florida where he has a lucrative law practice and serves as president of the Florida Bar Association and is president of the state commission on constitutional revision. He has worked his way through law school and is married to Vivian Parker for forty-three years. He enters the Florida National Guard and goes on active duty in November 1940. After Officer Candidate School, he marries Vivian and is sent to France six weeks after D-Day. He spends five years in Europe and is discharged in fall 1945. He attends law school and then goes into practice soon becoming a partner in a major law firm. The firm merges and the new entity becomes Holland and Knight. When the Watergate special prosecutor is fired by President Nixon, the ABA is the first to call for the president's impeachment. Smith returns to Holland and Knight after the end of his ABA terms. He retires from his position as chairman when he is sixty five but still works in the officers.

Al Neuharth is the founder and publisher of USA Today. The president and CEO of Gannett produced a national newspaper. He was born in Alpana, South Dakota. His father dies when he is three leaving his mother with two small children. All three of them work to pay the bills. He leaves college to enlist in the Army and is trained in intelligence and reconnaissance and then serves with Patton's 3rd Army in Europe. After the war, he returns to South Dakota, marries, and attends the University of South Dakota, deciding to major in journalism. He and a friend start a paper in the 1950s but it fails. He and his wife then move to Miami and he works for The Miami Herald where he rises to the position of managing editor. He then goes to the Detroit Free Press and is soon approached by Gannett. He made Gannett the largest and one of the most profitable chains in the country in his fifteen years there.

Hank Greenberg is born to a poor farming family in the Catskills. At the age of seventeen, he drops out of school and joins the Army. On D-Day, he is with the U.S. Army Rangers on Omaha Beach and fights in Europe until the end of the war. After the war, he finishes high school at Rhodes School in Manhattan. After law school, Hank, a

member of the reserves, is recalled to serve in Korea. After Korea, he works in the insurance industry and eventually becomes the chief executive of AIG, American Insurance Group and went on to become a billionaire.

The Arena, pgs. 328-356

The Arena, pgs. 328-356 Summary and Analysis

Many veterans enter the political arena. Mark Hatfield of Oregon is one of these men. He is a Navy ensign in the Pacific and after the war earns a master's degree at Stanford and then teaches at Wilamette University in Salem, Oregon. He enters politics and serves in the state legislature, state secretary of state, and governor and then becomes a U.S. Senator. In the war, Hatfield is in the invasions at Iwo Jima and Okinawa and then sent to the Philippines. He accompanies Douglas MacArthur into Japan and is in Hiroshima one month after the bomb is dropped. When he is in the Senate, Hatfield is an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War and nuclear weapons and war in general. He retires from the Senate in 1996 and returns to Oregon to teach.

Bob Dole is from Kansas and serves with the 10th Mountain Division in the Italian Alps. He is injured and spends over three years recovering from his wounds. Daniel Inouye of Hawaii and Philip Hart of Michigan are in the same hospital ward. All three would eventually serve in the U.S. Senate together. Dole attends the University of Arizona law school when he recovers. He enters politics and serves in the House of Representatives and then the U.S. Senate in 1969. He is instrumental in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 and serves as chairman of the Republican National Committee under President Nixon. In 1976, he is Gerald Ford's running mate. He also unsuccessfully runs for president on the Republican ticket.

Daniel Inouye is a Japanese American from Hawaii. When Pearl Harbor is attacked, the seventeen year old Daniel goes to the harbor to help with the wounded. When the Army allows Japanese Americans to enlist, Daniel is assigned to the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and sent to train at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. The unit is then sent to Italy. He is seriously wounded and sent back to the United States. After the war, Daniel attends law school at George Washington University, then returns to Hawaii. He works as a prosecutor and serves in the territorial legislature. When Hawaii attains statehood, Daniel is elected as the first congressman. He becomes a U.S. Senator in 1963 and is re-elected for numerous terms.



The Arena, pgs. 357-376

The Arena, pgs. 357-376 Summary and Analysis

Some of the World War II generation are successful in the private sector and accept assignments in the public sector. Caspar Weinberger is one of these people. Caspar is from San Francisco and the son of a Jewish father and Episcopalian mother. He enters Harvard in 1934 and majors in English literature and political science. He also works on the *Crimson*, the student newspaper. He receives a law degree and enters the Army. After Officer Candidate School., he is sent to Australia and assigned to MacArthur headquarters as an intelligence officer. After the war, he practices law in California and becomes active in politics. He becomes a Reagan advisor and Secretary of Defense where he pioneers the Strategic Defense Initiative. He vastly increases military spending. Weinberger eventually becomes the publisher of *Forbes* magazine.

Lloyd Cutler grew up in New York. The son of a lawyer, he graduates high school at sixteen, and attends New York University and Yale, where he earns a law degree. He is editor of the *Yale Law Journal* and takes a job at a prestigious New York law firm. When the war begins, he volunteers to work in Washington and is assigned to the Lend Lease Administration. In 1944, Cutler is with the Army Combat Engineers but the Army decides he could better serve in intelligence at the Pentagon. After the war, he and friends form the Washington law firm of Wilmer, Cutler, and Pickering. He also is a founder of the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights.

George Shultz and Arthur Schlesinger are also members of the World War II generation. Both grew up in the Northeast and had fathers with PhDs in history. Schlesinger's father is a professor; Shultz's is active on Wall Street. Both men earn PhDs and become professors at Ivy League schools. Shultz attends Princeton and Schlesinger attends Harvard.

During the war, Schlesinger works for the Office of War Information. He is sent to the South to investigate drinking at military camps. He is eventually assigned to the OSS in Paris. After the war, he becomes a professor at Harvard and his writing has earned him several Pulitzer Prizes.

Shultz joins the Marines. After the war, he returns to teaching. He serves as secretary of state holding cabinet level positions in two Republican administrations.

Both men move back and forth between the private and public sectors working with numerous presidents.



The Arena, Twilight, pgs. 377-390

The Arena, Twilight, pgs. 377-390 Summary and Analysis

Ed Guthman is from Seattle. He attends the University of Washington. He enters the Army in 1941 and serves in North Africa and Italy. After recovering from wounds, he is assigned to Stars and Stripes. After the war he works for The Seattle Times and investigates the case of a professor accused of communist sympathies by the state Un-American Activities Committee. Guthman's investigation reveals that the committee was in error and he wins a Pulitzer Prize. He serves as press secretary for Attorney General Robert Kennedy. He holds top positions at the Los Angeles Times and The Philadelphia Inquirer and then becomes a professor of journalism at the University of Southern California.

In the *Twilight of Their Lives*, Brokaw discusses Bill Mauldin's book *Up Front*, which is a collection of his drawings and thoughts on the war. Mauldin concludes that they want to forget their wartime experiences but can't and there is no way money can compensate them for what they have been through. Many refuse to talk about their wartime experiences unless they are asked. Brokaw thinks that it is important to learn about these stories.



Characters

Tom Brokaw

Tom Brokaw is born in 1940 to Jean and Anthony 'Red' Brokaw in South Dakota. His mother is a high school graduate who worked at the post office and his father is a construction equipment manager. At the age of three, he, his parents and newborn brother moved to an Army base in southwestern South Dakota called the Igloo. They lived there until Tom was five years of age and then moved to Yankton, South Dakota, where Tom grew up. His wife, Meredith Auld, is also from Yankton. They have three daughters. Brokaw attended the University of South Dakota and earned a degree in political science. He then went into journalism working first in Omaha and then in Atlanta. He joined NBC News in 1966 and was their White House correspondent during the Watergate era. Brokaw was the anchor of the Today Show on NBC from 1976 to 1981. From 1983 onwards, he was the anchor and managing editor of the NBC Nightly News and has won every major award in broadcasting journalism. These include the DuPonts, Peabodys, and Emmys. He became interested in the World War II generation and the effect these people had on his life and on the country. Brokaw went to Normandy in the spring of 1984 to prepare a documentary on the fortieth anniversary of D-Day. This kindled his childhood memories of life on the South Dakota army base. He was also in Normandy for the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day as host of the Today show. In each instance, he met veterans and talked with them. As a journalist, he is a good listener as well as a researcher and reporter. He wrote this book, *The Greatest Generation*, to show the contribution of some of these people.

Chesterfield Smith

Chesterfield Smith is from central Florida. His father had been a schoolteacher and then opened an electrical appliance shop near Arcadia, when electric power became available for the remote areas. The business failed during the twenties and the family traveled around wherever his father could find work. When they returned to Arcadia, Chesterfield finished high school graduating at the top of his class. He enrolls at the University of Florida where he would be a student for one semester and then take the next off to earn money. At the age of twenty, he enrolled in the Florida National Guard and when it was mobilized in November 1940, he did his basic training in Florida and then went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for Officer Candidate School. He marries Vivian Parker at Camp McCain, Mississippi and then goes to France six weeks after D-Day as a part of General Patton's army. He served in France, Belgium, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. After more than five years of service, he is discharged in 1945 as a major with a Purple Heart and Bronze Star. After the war, he attends law school. He and Vivian have their first child while he is in law school, which he graduates from with honors. After law school, he joined a small law firm in Arcadia and then two years later, joined a larger firm in Bartow. He was quickly made a partner. He became president of the Florida Bar Association and served as the chairman of the state constitution revision



commission. The American Bar Association appointed him to a committee on Availability of Legal Services which resulted in legal services available to the poor. He becomes President of the American Bar Association the month before Nixon fired the Watergate special prosecutor. When his terms expired, he returned to Holland and Knight. After retiring as the term chairman at the age of sixty-five, he still worked in the office.

Martha Settle Putney

Martha Settle Putney is one of eight children born in Norristown, Pennsylvania. She obtains a master's degree in history from Howard University in Washington DC and works as a statistical clerk for the War Manpower Commission and then enlists in the WACs. As a black woman, she experienced a great deal of discrimination and is instrumental in having a black band on base and allowing blacks to use the base swimming pool. After the war, she marries Bill Putney and has a son. When Bill dies in 1965 she obtains a PhD in history from the University of Pennsylvania and teaches at Bowie State College and then at Howard University. After retirement, she works as a volunteer at the Smithsonian.

Joe Foss

Joe Foss grew up in South Dakota on a farm. In 1940, he enlists in the United States Marines as a pilot. He flies an F4F-4 Wildcat to Henderson Field in Guadalcanal. He serves two tours of duty in the Pacific. After the war, he is elected governor of South Dakota. He remains an officer in the Air National Guard. He helped build a hospital for crippled children and becomes president of the Society of Crippled Children and Adults. When he leaves politics, he becomes the first president of the American Football League and other organizations. He retires to Arizona.

Caspar Weinberger

Caspar Weinberger is born in San Francisco. He attends Harvard where he works on the Crimson, the school newspaper. He obtains his law degree from Harvard. In August 1941, he enlists in the Army and is an intelligence officer on the staff of General Douglas MacArthur. After the war, he practices law in California and becomes an advisor to Ronald Reagan and served as Secretary of Defense in the Reagan presidency. When he leaves politics, he becomes the publisher of Forbes magazine.

Mary Hallaren

Mary Hallaren is from Massachusetts and is a junior high school teacher when the attack of Pearl Harbor occurs. She joins the WAACs. She serves in England, France and Italy and after the war, transformed the WAACs in to the Woman's Army Corps. She worked to give women a permanent place in the military. She becomes head of the



Women's Army Corps until she retires in 1960. Mary became active in WICS, the recruitment part of the Job Corps program.

Margaret Ray Ringenburg

Margaret Ray Ringenburg is from Hoagland, Indiana and becomes interested in flying as a child and secures her flying license after graduating from high school and enters the WASPS, testing and transporting planes for the military. After the war, she becomes a flight instructor. She participates in the Powder Puff Derby for twenty years and at the age of seventy two, participates in a round-the-world race.

Wesley Ko

Wesley Ko is born in Philadelphia. He is the son of Chinese immigrants. He is one of the first to land in Normandy on D-Day as a glider pilot and helps to liberate the Wobbelin concentration camp. After the war, he opens a printing business with his brother and a friend. He tries to relocate the business and it fails when he is in his seventies leaving him with a \$1.3 million loan. He secures a job and works to pay it off, and retires at the age of seventy-six.

Jeanette Gagne Norton

Jeanette Gagne Norton is from a Minneapolis suburb. She meets and marries Camille Gagne. She is pregnant when he leaves for basic training and ships overseas without even seeing his son, Robert. The baby is seventeen months old when Camille is killed. Jeanette eventually marries William Norton and his three daughters. She becomes a widow again in 1993, after forty-five years of marriage.

Charles Briscoe

Charles Briscoe is the son of a Midwest farming family. He is a sheet metal specialist who works for Boeing, helping to develop the B29 for the war with Japan. He served for nine months in the Navy and then returned to his job at Boeing. He retires at the age of sixty-seven but returns to help on special projects.



Objects/Places

Yankton

Yankton is the town in South Dakota about sixty miles from Sioux City where Tom Brokaw was raised.

Normandy

Normandy is an area of France where the D-Day invasion took place.

Washington DC

Washington DC is on the eastern coast of the United States and is the nation's capital.

South Dakota

South Dakota is a state in the American Midwest where many of the people in The Greatest Generation came from.

South Pacific

South Pacific has many islands that were in the theater of fighting in the war in the Pacific.

France

France is a country that was under German occupation and liberated by the Allies. Many of the people in the book fought in France.

Germany

Germany is a country that was taking over much of Europe. When the Allies invaded Normandy, they continued through to Germany and across Europe.

Italy

Italy is a southern European country that was a part of the Axis.



Sicily

Sicily is an island off the southern tip of Italy where there was heavy fighting.

North Africa

North Africa is where much of the training for D-Day took place. It was also the scene of combat.



Themes

Patriotism

Patriotism is a major theme of the book. Patriotism is always high when a nation is under attack and this was true of the people of The Greatest Generation during the World War II years. The nation was under attack and they wanted to do what they could do. Many people dropped out of school to enlist in the military instead of waiting for the draft. Many women went into nursing so they could contribute to the war effort. They served overseas in combat zones. Others left their jobs as lawyers, doctors, professors and other occupations to become a part of the war effort. People went to Washington to work in the war administration position leaving their own jobs. Women volunteered for service paving the way for women to be a permanent part of the military. Others led the war in fighting the discrimination that existed at the time. The blacks, Japanese and other minority Americans were just as patriotic as their white counterparts and wanted the chance to perform for their country. Not all service was overseas. The massive outflow of males into military service left many jobs available in war time industries. Many women left the home to work in these industries, leaving their children with friends and neighbors. This provided women with an opportunity to prove themselves in jobs that would never have been open to them and many went on to distinguish themselves in their respective fields. Why did these people do it? They did it because they wanted to. They know the patriotism they felt and some wonder if it is present in the current generation.

Values

Values are another theme of the book. Brokaw is constantly alluding to the values of the World War II generation even though he does not always call it values. Consider the section on values and commitment. Many couples married hastily during the war. The husbands were away for many years and the wives had to fend for themselves. Some never saw their children and others only saw them once or twice during the war years. After the war when the husbands returned home, they had to adjust to civilian and family life. They had to get to know their spouses again. Most of them made their marriages work. They didn't believe in divorce or that marriage was conditional on things going well. Brokaw points out that at most of the reunions of military groups, the men are with the original spouses. There are few divorces and remarriages only occur when there is the death of a spouse. If there are problems in a marriage, the couple worked out their differences and made the necessary compromises. They don't run to the divorce attorney at the first sign of problems. Marriages represented a commitment to build a life together and the values of the time were to honor that commitment. This is not what they saw in their own children. Many who had children who divorced could not understand the situation or how their children viewed it. The World War II generation had a commitment to hard work and this also applied to marriage. Values changed as society changed.



Service and Sacrifice

Service and sacrifice are a third theme of the book. The World War II generation is born during the Roaring Twenties where the nation was in a period of economic prosperity. This was immediately followed by the Great Depression in which many families lost what they had. When the war occurred, they were required to make further sacrifices. Men and women left their families to serve their countries. Some had no choice; others did. Many served in overseas combat situations and suffered injuries. Some spent years recovering from their injuries. Others gave their lives in the war effort. Women went into nursing and the WAVEs and WACs. They did not have to but they did it in the interest of public service. They sacrificed their careers or lives they could have had. This is also true of the people after the war. Many went into public service occupations or left high paying jobs with the private sector for lives in the public section. Many went into politics or teaching.

There was sacrifice in another way during the war. This sacrifice was demanded of Japanese Americans. They were forced out of their homes and communities and into internment camps. Many lost their businesses as a result of this and many had family groups separated. At first, Japanese Americans weren't allowed to serve in the military but eventually a unit was formed for them. These were loyal Americans who had to sacrifice even their dignity during the war. It was many years before the government apologized and paid reparations for their losses.

Style

Perspective

The perspective of the book, *The Greatest Generation*, is the perspective of the author, Tom Brokaw. Brokaw became interested in the World War II generation when he was making a documentary on the fortieth anniversary of the D-Day invasion. He was in Normandy. The project, he says, was just another assignment to him until he began talking to some of the veterans and hearing the stories they had to tell of the war and their lives. Brokaw realized that this generation affected not only him but also the whole country. Their contribution was valuable in terms of their valor and sacrifice during the war, but also in the massive spending on education under the GI Bill and the contributions they made to the community and economy afterwards. These people were a major reason why America became what it did and Brokaw realized this and wanted to tell their story. Along the way, he examines their attitudes toward patriotism, values, and discrimination.

Tom Brokaw is very qualified to write a book of this nature. He was educated at the University of South Dakota with a degree in political science. He went into journalism, working in Omaha and Atlanta and then joined NBC News in 1966. He worked as the White House correspondent and then anchored the Today Show and the NBC Nightly News. He has won every major award in broadcasting and is a very well-respected journalist. The reader will enjoy this book because Brokaw's perspective will stimulate them to think.

Tone

The tone of the book is objective and factual. Brokaw presents the story of various people who were a part of the World War II generations. He discusses the economic situation of the country in the 1920s and 1930s. The economy went from boom to bust, from the prosperity of the 1920s to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Then came the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States entry into World War II. Men and women left their families and entered the military or worked in war production industries. It was a time of sacrifice for all but they willingly made these sacrifices because they wanted. After the war, the GI Bill resulted in a massive investment in human capital as many attended school. This resulted in people going into a variety of professions and occupations that contributed to the prosperity of America and the gains it made during their generation. The World War II generation affected not only the life of Brokaw, but all of our lives. This is what Brokaw looks at in *The Greatest Generation*. The tone of the book and Brokaw's writing style makes the reader think about the points he is making. The reader will think about how different his own life is because of these people that became the educators, business leaders and politicians of the time. Brokaw presents a point of view that most people never thought about even though they all benefited from

the contribution of the World War II generation. The reader will appreciate Brokaw's writing style because he leaves them to draw their own conclusions.

Structure

The Greatest Generation is a well-organized and well-structured book. The structure is designed to show the contributions of the World War II generations, the circumstances they came from, what they did during the war, and what they did with their lives after the war. He explains his purpose in The Time of Their Lives section and then looks at the experiences of different groups of people in Ordinary People, Home Front, Heroes, Women in Uniform and Out, Shame, Love, Marriage, and Commitment, Famous People, and The Arena. His conclusions and summary remarks are presented at the end of the book in the Twilight of their Years section.

There is an Acknowledgements section in which Brokaw mentions those who helped in the preparation of the book. The section entitled Generations serves as an introduction to the book where Brokaw explains how he became interested in the book. There is a very informative Table of Contents at the beginning of the book showing the different sections, the name of the people with their locations, occupations and service and the page number where their section is located. There is a well structured and detailed Index at the end of the book that makes it easy for the reader to look up information. There are a large number of photos throughout the book for every section which allows the reader to associate names with faces.

The structure of the book works well for the book, complementing the points that Brokaw is making.

Quotes

"The stories that follow represent the lives of some of them. Each is distinctive and yet reflective of the common experiences of that trying time and this generation of greatness" (Times, pg. 12.)

"A sense of personal responsibility and a commitment to honesty is characteristic of this generation. Those were values bred into the young men and women coming of age at the time the war broke out. Its how they were raised" (Ko, pg. 37.)

"Other veterans shoved their war experiences to the far corners of their lives and sealed them off as best they could. They could never completely erase the memories or the residual effects of their training, but they were determined to start an entirely new life once the war ended" (Larsen, pg. 69.)

"My father and his friends were like Charles Briscoe. They loved to make things work, and although they were not formally trained they had an instinct for design" (Briscoe, pg. 93.)

"As he says of his World War II experience and what it should mean to others, 'Those of us who live have to represent those who didn't make it'" (Foss, pg. 124.)

"She signed up for the WAAC, never guess that her life's course was taking a new and rewarding direction. 'At the time,' she says, 'the only reason women went into the military was to serve the country; we wanted to help America win the war and come home. No one thought of a career'" (Hallaren, pg. 140.)

"When she was leaving the WAVES in 1945, the staff at the Joint Chiefs of Staff allowed her to take from the metallic war maps a handful of the tiny magnetic airplanes used to mark battles around the world. Then, they were symbols of terrible battles in distant places, of the powerful struggle to preserve freedom. Now, they keep in place on her refrigerator Scottie's reminders of what's coming up next in her long, rich life" (Nittel, pg. 162.)

"There has been a lot of progress but I have been disappointed. People need to be accepted on their merits and their character. Not everyone gets the same opportunity" (Shame, pg. 192.)

"That bitter experience was the beginning of a new place for the Nisei, the second-generation Japanese, in American life. When they returned to their homes following the war they knew they had to reach out beyond their own communities and develop political muscle" (Takasugi, pg. 224.)



"Outside of our own families, to those of us growing up in Yankton at the time, these World War II couples were emblematic of the values that shaped our lives. In many respects, their marriages and the way they conducted them were a form of community service" (The Dumbos, pg. 249.)

"World War II and the demands it made on all parts of the country was the quintessential American melting-pot experience. It was a great unifying force, requiring sacrifice and imposing new disciplines across the many layers of American society" (Bush, pg. 273.)

"As Greenberg said later, 'War brings out the worst in everyone; no matter how honorable you are...things happens that you feel ashamed of later on'" (Greenberg, pg. 325.)

"'You learn to hate with a passion in wartime,' he says. 'If you don't kill your enemy, they'll kill you'" (Hatfield, pg. 337.)

"The public area was not reserved only for those who ran for elective office. Some of the most distinguished and influential public servants to emerge from the World War II generation were men who moved easily in and out of the private sector to take assignments in public life. They are all well known now as their fellow veterans who chose elective office" (Weinberger, pg. 357.)

"They know what they have accomplished, and they are proud. They will have their World War II memorial and their place in the ledgers of history, but no block of marble or elaborate edifice can equal their lives of sacrifice and achievement, duty and honor, as monuments to their time" (Twilight, pg. 390.)



Topics for Discussion

Why does Brokaw refer to the World War II generation as the greatest generation? What did they do for America?

How did Brokaw become interested in the World War II generation when he did a documentary on the fortieth anniversary of D-Day?

What traits did the people of The Greatest Generation share? Why?

What is the dominant message in the section entitled 'Shame'? What kind of discrimination were these people subject to?

In what way are the values of the greatest generation different from those of the current generation? What do you attribute this to?

Why do so many people attribute their business success to the practices they learned in the military? What are some examples of this?

Why does Brokaw feel it is important to tell the story of the World War II generation?