

ABCs of Being Smart



J is for Journey

Dr. Joanne Foster

The old saying, “Life is a journey” may sound clichéd, but the words are nevertheless true. Children can learn a great deal from the travels and directions chosen by others, and especially from people whose life stories or experiences offer inspiration by virtue of their effort, perseverance, and acquired success.

What follows here is a list of accomplished individuals whose last names all start with the letter **J**. They’re representative of many men and women who have joined the top ranks in one field or another by working hard—jarring the status quo by juggling, jostling, or overcoming jeopardy (it can be a jungle out there!)—and often their journeys are jubilant and just.

(Jumping off point for parents and kids: Pick any letter, area of interest, or subject area, and see what journeys *you* can discover. And then share and learn from them!)

All that Jazz...

Musicians enhance the landscape of musical performance through melodies, production, lyrics, or creative forays into song and dance. The people below carefully prepared, rehearsed, fine-tuned, and shared their craft—entertaining and enriching countless lives with music and talent.

Michael **Jackson** (multi-talented entertainer); Quincy **Jones** (trumpeter/composer/ bandleader/producer); Mick **Jagger** (rock star); Janis **Joplin** (singer/songwriter); Billy **Joel** (pianist/singer/composer); Scott **Joplin** (ragtime composer/pianist); Elton **John** (singer/ songwriter/producer); Al **Jolson** (singer); Etta **James** (singer); Norah **Jones** (singer/songwriter)

Jockeying for position...

Exceptional athleticism involves practice, commitment, and a willingness to propel oneself toward excellence even when the competition is daunting. The athletes whose names appear here harnessed their strength, energy, and desire, and beat the odds to become exceptionally skilled in their respective sports.

LeBron **James** (basketball); Michael **Jordan** (basketball); Bobby **Jones** (golf/founder of the Masters Tournament); Jackie **Joyner-Kersey** (multiple Olympic gold medalist—heptathlon); Reggie **Jackson** (baseball); Magic **Johnson** (basketball); Florence Griffith **Joyner** (multiple Olympic gold medalist—sprinting)

Joys of jurisprudence and political pursuit...

Public service and leadership are commendable pursuits, but not everyone has the inclination to work in the limelight, or the sustainability to succeed in the public sector. Those who make their mark and strive to improve the state of societal affairs often have interesting life stories, and it can be intriguing to see how tenacity, decisions, learning, and proficiencies can lead to triumph, and even have broad impact.

Andrew **Jackson** (7th US president, 1829-37); Jacob K. **Javits** (politician—many Javits Scholarships are awarded annually in support of students who exhibit excellence); John **Jay** (first Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court)

Jolting!

Talk about impact! There is a techno-wizard who justifiably stands alone here. He revolutionized how we learn and acquire information, transforming the tools we use to express ourselves, and the ways in which we communicate with others on a personal and a global scale. He spearheaded many technological breakthroughs. Mindboggling!

Steven **Jobs**

Journals and other jottings...

Authors of all ages compose poems, articles, books, presentations, plays, and various other kinds of writings. Words have the power to change the way people think and act, and can be extremely influential. Parents and teachers are well-positioned to encourage children to write and also to read (and find good reading material); to share literary experiences; and to discuss the different kinds of messages words convey so children can develop meaningful understandings and learn to be discerning.

James **Joyce** (“Ulysses”); James **Jones** (“From Here to Eternity”); P.D. **James** (Phyllis Dorothy, author of many crime fiction and mystery novels); Thomas **Jefferson** (3rd US President, 1801-09, wrote first draft of the Declaration of Independence); Norton **Juster** (“The Phantom Tollbooth”—my favourite book!)

Creative juices...

Innovative thinkers have the capacity to alter day-to-day lives, including how people look at the world, and how they engage with all it has to offer—personal attire, perspectives, appreciation of the arts, health, and so on. For example, the individuals mentioned below might well have influenced these aspects of everyday life, and how we enjoy or even extend them. Who has transformed the way *you* live? And what lies beneath—and beyond?

Marc **Jacobs** (fashion designer); Carl **Jung** (Swiss psychiatrist—focused on the collective consciousness); Wolfman **Jack** (disc jockey/radio broadcaster); Peter **Jackson** (award-winning film director—Lord of the Rings trilogy); Edward **Jenner** (doctor—developed smallpox vaccination)

Consider the journeys—the jams, jitters, junctures, and joys...

(This instalment of “ABCs of Being Smart” is an ideal time for me to give special thanks to Jennifer **Jolly**—editor of *Parenting for High Potential*—who gives me both latitude and encouragement as I continue to work my way through the alphabet...) ☺



Author's Note

Joanne Foster, EdD is co-author (with Dona Matthews) of the award-winning book *Being Smart About Gifted Education* (2009, Great Potential Press), and *Beyond Intelligence: Secrets for Raising Happily Productive Kids* (in press, House of Anansi). She is a parent, teacher, consultant, researcher, and education specialist. Dr. Foster has more than 30 years of experience working in the field of gifted education. She has written extensively about high-level development and has presented on a wide range of topics at conferences and learning venues all across North America. She teaches educational psychology and gifted education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She can be reached at joanne.foster@utoronto.ca or visit her website at www.beyondintelligence.net