



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

By Georgia Bragg

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Everyone makes mistakes. Sometimes, epic failures even lead to super successes . . . sometimes they become deep dark secrets. But remember-to fail is human, to laugh about our shortcomings divine. From Montezuma II's mistaking a conqueror for a god to Isaac Newton turning from science to alchemy to J. Bruce Ismay's jumping the lifeboat line on the *Titanic*, *How They Choked* knocks fourteen famous achievers off their pedestals to reveal the human side of history.

Successful “failures” include:

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

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 5 Up—In this follow-up to *How They Croaked: The Awful Ends of the Awfully Famous* (Walker, 2011), Bragg pokes fun, plays up, and revels in the mistakes of 14 famous figures because "There's nothing better than reading about how someone else messed up." Some of the people have character flaws, others made bad decisions and one, Susan B. Anthony, just didn't live to see her major life goal achieved. The majority of the individuals are Western men with recognizable names, such as Marco Polo and Thomas Alva Edison, who will be remembered for more than their accomplishments once Bragg is done with them. She doesn't pull any punches when describing Henry VIII's indiscretions in Anne Boleyn's chapter, Vincent Van Gogh's complete lack of friends, or J. Bruce Ismay's cowardice on the Titanic, which puts a matte of humanity on the usually shiny package of history. O'Malley's fabulous caricature-like illustrations perfectly accentuate the text and spice up the layout. Written in a chatty style, full of wit and laugh-out-loud moments, this charmingly irreverent delivery of history is not only entertaining but packed full of lessons to be learned.—Heather Acerro, Rochester Public Library, MN

From [Booklist](#)

On the heels of *How They Croaked: The Awful Ends of the Awfully Famous* (2011), Bragg seeks to reconcile what she sees as a major flaw of the biography genre—that authors ignore the human potential for error. Her compendium is unapologetically full of bad news, criticism, and belly flops. Fourteen chapters are each devoted to a notorious name from the annals of history, sports, and science. Some obvious failures are included, such as Benedict Arnold and J. Bruce Ismay, the owner of the Titanic. Other subjects are much-lauded heroes and heroines, such as Ferdinand Magellan, Isaac Newton, and "Shoeless" Joe Jackson. Bragg's turns of phrase reveal a knack for capturing the true identity of notorious individuals such as George Armstrong Custer, who is described as "a peacock with a pistol," or Susan B. Anthony, who she explains was a "pioneering pain in the butt." The snarkily entertaining narratives are illustrated with caricatures of each subject. For better or worse, subjects are rarely as one-dimensional as most biographies paint them, and this book proves that nobody is perfect. Grades 5-8. --Erin Anderson

Review

"This all-too-informative study deserves the wild popularity it will without a doubt acquire." --"Booklist", starred review on "How They Croaked"

"Engaging, informative and downright disgusting." --"Kirkus Reviews", on "How They Croaked"

"Expect this one to be passed around and poured over." --"School Library Journal", on "How They Croaked"

"Carried away on a swift-flowing stream of body fluids, medical ineptitude, and O'Malley's deliciously snarky artwork, kids will agree they got exactly what they came for." --"BCCB", on "How They Croaked"

Awards for "How They Croaked" Texas Lone Star List, ALA Notable Book, ALA Quick Pick List, IRA Young Adults Reading List, Bank Street Best Book of the Year

"An insightful, informative narrative explaining how these individuals earned a place in history, including both their accomplishments and embarrassing and sometimes-tragic failures . . . Readers will be entertained

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"A delightfully snarky look at the remarkable mistakes of a few of history's famous figures . . . If you have not already added "How They Croaked" to your collection, buy both it and "How They Choked" immediately. Read it yourself, put it on display--it will get passed around with (disgust) delight." --"VOYA"

"Offers caustically humorous insights into history . . . Irresistible entertainment (and solid information) for readers." --"Publishers Weekly"

"A delightfully informative, humorous, and honest look at some of history's well-known characters." --"Library Media Connection"

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jacob Roberts:

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Gene Kistler:

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Shirley Morales:

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