

**BRAVE  
ENOUGH**

**JESSIE  
DIGGINS**

WITH  
TODD  
SMITH

# A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

for *BRAVE ENOUGH* by Jessie Diggins with Todd Smith

## PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

“*Brave Enough* is a befitting title for this brutally honest and powerful story. As an athlete, Jessie was brave enough to win on the world’s biggest sporting stage. As a writer, she is brave enough to share a raw, heart-wrenching, nothing-held-back look at the struggles she went through to succeed.”

—JACKIE JOYNER-KERSEE

“Readers will be encouraged by how one woman created a path forward for herself—and helped and uplifted so many in the process.”

—ANN BANCROFT

“*Brave Enough* is a powerful story that shows that striving for excellence can be essential in sport, yet not even Olympic champions are immune from its unforeseen destructive consequences. With admirable vulnerability, Jessie demonstrates how to be a leader and ‘best teammate’ while also being open to help and support from others. She is an inspiration for everyone!”

—KIKKAN RANDALL, *Olympic Champion and World Champion*

“Jessie has one of the most infectious positive and bubbly personalities of anyone I have ever met. That, combined with her fierce drive and unwavering grit, is what makes her an inspiration to so many people, including myself, but I never realized just how inspiring she truly is until I read this book. World, meet the force that is Jessie Diggins.”

—MIKAELA SHIFFRIN, *Olympic Champion and World Champion*

“Jessie Diggins was an elite athlete long before she became an Olympic gold medalist. In *Brave Enough*, she shows world-class courage by sharing the truth about her eating disorder, her therapy, and the multitude of challenges, doubts, fears, and assorted bogeymen that are so often an untold part of the journey to greatness.”

—WAYNE COFFEY, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Boys of Winter*

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

*Pyeongchang, February 21, 2018.*

In the nerve-racking final seconds of the women's team sprint freestyle race, Jessie Diggins dug deep. Blowing past two of the best sprinters in the world, she stretched her ski boot across the finish line and lunged straight into Olympic immortality: the first ever cross-country skiing gold medal for the United States at the Winter Games.

The 26-year-old Diggins, a four-time World Championship medalist, was literally a world away from the small town of Afton, Minnesota, where she first strapped on skis. Yet, for all her history-making achievements, she had never strayed far from the scrappy twelve-year-old who had insisted on portaging her own canoe through the wilderness, yelling happily under the unwieldy weight on her shoulders: "Look! I'm doing it!"

In *Brave Enough*, Jessie Diggins reveals the true story of her journey from the American Midwest into sports history. With candid charm and characteristic grit, she connects the dots from her free-spirited upbringing in the woods of Minnesota to racing in the bright spotlights of the Olympics. Going far beyond stories of races and ribbons, she describes the challenges and frustrations of becoming a serious athlete; learning how to push through and beyond physical and psychological limits; and the intense pressure of competing at the highest levels. She openly shares her harrowing struggle with bulimia, recounting both the adversity and how she healed from it in order to bring hope and understanding to others experiencing eating disorders.

Between thrilling accounts of moments of triumph, Diggins shows the determination it takes to get there—the struggles and disappointments, the fun and the hard work, and the importance of listening to that small, fierce voice: I can do it. I am brave enough.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

“I have loved being outdoors pretty much since birth,” Jessie writes to open *Brave Enough*. Diggins grew up in Afton, Minnesota, and had an extremely active childhood, surrounded by a natural world that became her imaginary kingdom. *In what ways did Jessie’s childhood setting inform her future career? In what ways are people a product of their environment?*

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Jessie was 15 years old when she entered the “Pain Cave” the first time. The “Pain Cave” is the loving nickname athletes give to that special place that they go into during a competition or training when every inch of their body hurts. For Jessie, finding a way to accept the pain cave was the key to unlocking her race potential. *Have you ever had an experience with the pain cave, whether in sports or in work life? Was it worth the suffering in the moment? What are different ways you can process pain?*

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Jessie is admittedly Type A, a personality marked by characteristics such as being goal-oriented, competitive, good under pressure, ambitious, impatient, having lots of energy, and perfectionism. Type-A students and athletes like Jessie can struggle with the desire to be “perfect” in everything they do in life. *Why do you think this is? Are we putting too much pressure as a society on our high school graduates as they graduate and apply to university?*

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One of the most emotional parts of *Brave Enough* is when Jessie reveals intimate details about her eating disorder and her time in treatment at the Emily Program. In her honesty, Jessie wanted to open a conversation about eating disorders. *How did these chapters affect you? What did you learn about eating disorders? How can we help others that are struggling with disordered eating?*

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After Jessie left the Emily Program she went through periods of low confidence and negative body image. Then in a pivotal moment, her U.S. National coach Matt Whitcomb told her, “Who you are is good enough.” It took Jessie many years, though, to learn how to be kinder to herself and treat her body with the same respect she gives others. In writing openly about body image, Jessie wanted

to create a more positive, affirming society for people of all shapes, sizes, and identities. “Let’s try to focus not on what our bodies look like, but rather what they can do,” Jessie said. *What are some ways you practice self care and self love? Would you be willing to share those tips with others to inspire them to treat themselves with more kindness? What are ways in which we can help the people in our lives create a more positive body image? How about ways in which we can help ourselves have a better body image?*

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Being on a team has always been a fundamental part of Jessie’s identity as a ski racer. Starting with youth ski clubs in Minnesota to the Stillwater high school team, from her Stratton Mountain T2 club Team to her long career with the United States National Team, Jessie has always believed that teamwork makes the dream work. *Have you experienced times in your life when having a team around you helped you achieve something you otherwise might not have?*

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Jessie has worked with a lot of amazing women and men during her career that all have different leadership styles. Kikkan Randall leads by example, Sophie Caldwell is quiet and supportive, Liz Stephen is the team Mom, and Jessie is the team’s cheerleader. *Which teammate’s style of leadership do you most relate to?*

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In 2012, Jessie embarked upon her first full World Cup season. She was selected on the 4x5k relay team along with three other members of the U.S. National Team. Jessie’s teammate Ida Sargent was not selected for the relay team. But Sargent’s reaction became legendary and what is now known as “The Fifth Leg.” *How did Sargent handle not being selected and how did it affect her teammates? What does it mean to be a good teammate? Looking forward, how did Sargent’s action in 2012 change the course of history for the U.S. Women’s National team?*

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During her development as a skier one of the key relationships in Jessie’s life has been her ongoing work with U.S. National team coach Jason Cork. At times, Cork has been a coach, trainer, parent, teacher, and friend. After a tough loss during the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics, Cork tells Jessie, “Even if it doesn’t happen, that doesn’t change how awesome you are as a skier and person. You skied an awesome race. If you say you gave it everything you had, then that’s absolutely true.

Because you're the toughest person I know." *Has there been someone in your life who has been a positive mentor? Has there been a coach or teacher or friend that helped you?*

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Jessie and her teammates go through a lot of funny travel situations in *Brave Enough*. From their escapades at the Snow Farm in New Zealand to her comedic horror movie experience in Russia to her misadventures in Europe, Jessie and her teammates always meet their adventures on the road head-on. *Do you have any wild travel stories from your life that are funny in hindsight?*

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In 2018, Jessie and teammate Kikkan Randall won the gold medal in the team sprint at the PyeongChang Winter Olympics. *What did it feel like to see Jessie charge toward the finish line in one of the most dramatic sprints to the finish in sports history? If you won the Olympics, what would be the first thing you'd like to do? What causes would you use your new platform for?*

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As a cross-country skier who has been traveling all around the world since her teens, Jessie has seen the effects that climate change has had on our world. For example, many World Cup races in mountain ski towns are now held entirely on man-made snow. *How have you seen the changing climate impact your life, or the lives of others as you travel? What actions can we all take to make a positive impact?*

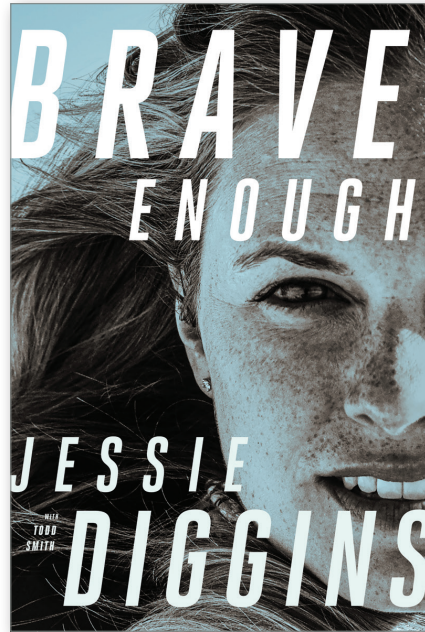


Image: Julia Kern

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Jessie Diggins** was raised in Afton, Minnesota, and became a professional skier at the age of nineteen. A two-time Olympian and four-time World Championship medalist, she is the most decorated U.S. cross-country athlete in World Championship history. She and teammate Kikkan Randall became the first Olympic Gold medalists in U.S. cross country history in the 2018 PyeongChang team sprint. She resides part-time in Stratton, Vermont, where she is a member of the Stratton Mountain School T2 elite team.

**Todd Smith** is author of *Hockey Strong*. He has contributed to the NHL Network and his work has been published in *The Rake Magazine*, *Minnesota Monthly*, and *Twin Cities METRO Magazine*. He has been a commentator on Minnesota Public Radio's 89.3 The Current and WCCO Radio.

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## MORE INFO:

[z.umn.edu/braveenough](http://z.umn.edu/braveenough)