

Star Power

For some stars, when the music stops and the curtain goes down, important issues take center stage. Kids are P. Diddy's cause; illiteracy makes Faith Hill "cry"; tackling the problems of inner-city kids is the game plan of football star Derrick Brooks. U2's Bono strikes the right chord in trying to solve Africa's problems, and Angelina Jolie is the star of the United Nations refugee program. Read on to see how these big names use their celebrity to help solve big problems.

A Rockin' Cause

U2's Bono describes himself as a spoiled-rotten rock star. However, he uses his fame to deal with an awfully big problem--Africa's AIDS **epidemic**¹ and debt crisis. After a benefit concert in Africa in 1985, Bono spent a month working in Ethiopia during a major famine². That experience changed his life. In 2002, he founded DATA, a nonprofit group whose letters stand for Debt, AIDS, Trade, and Africa. The group works to raise public awareness and **lobby**³ governments to help combat AIDS in Africa. According to figures supplied by DATA, 6,500 people in Africa die every day from AIDS-related illnesses, and 9,500 people contract HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. DATA also lobbies the governments of wealthy nations to forgive the debts of African countries. According to DATA, countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the area south of the Sahara Desert and the poorest region of the world, spend \$14.5 billion repaying old debts to wealthy nations. That money could be spent on healthcare and education, according to Bono.

Hero for the Homeless

When Angelina Jolie isn't battling bad guys as Lara Croft, she's helping the world's 20 million **refugees** as a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador. (A refugee is a person who flees to another country to escape danger.)

¹ **epidemic:** illness that spreads fast and sickens a lot of people

² **famine:** an extreme general shortage of food

³ **to lobby:** to try to influence public officials and especially members of a legislative body to speak up in favor of or against a particular cause

Reading Passage

Jolie first became interested in the **plight**⁴ of refugees in 1998 while reading the script for a film about a woman who helps refugees. The story so moved Jolie that she traveled to Africa so she could witness firsthand the refugee crisis in war-torn Sierra Leone. Jolie says that trip changed her life. She began her work for the United Nations in 2001. Since then, Jolie has spent two months between each of her films visiting refugee camps around the world. She has also donated millions of dollars to the cause. "You could die tomorrow, and you've done a few movies, won some awards--that doesn't mean anything," Jolie said. "But if you've built schools or raised a child or done something to make things better for other people, then it just feels better. Life is better."

She's Got Faith

Country music star Faith Hill knows firsthand the devastating effects of **illiteracy**⁵--her father never learned to read beyond a fourth-grade level. "My dad had to drop out of school at a young age to help support his family," said Hill. In 1996, Hill launched the Faith Hill Family Literacy Project. The organization helps collect books, raise money for literacy groups, and increase public awareness about illiteracy. According to the National Center for Family Literacy, more than 40 million adults in the United States have difficulty reading. That's why Hill has asked fans to bring books to concerts. She and a national restaurant chain also collected more than a million books in three months. "I hope that I can give an adult the inspiration to teach a child to read or [give] a child the resources he or she needs," said Hill.

A Good Bunch of Kids

Derrick Brooks owns a shiny Super Bowl ring and is one of the best football players in the NFL. It's his work with kids, though, that makes this star linebacker for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers really proud.

Five years ago, Brooks began giving money to middle schools and Boys and Girls Clubs in Tampa and St. Petersburg, Florida. He then founded the Brooks Bunch and set aside 24 seats at every Buccaneers

⁴ **plight**: a usually bad condition or state; predicament

⁵ **illiteracy**: the inability to read and write

Reading Passage

home game. He began taking kids on cool road trips to places such as New York City, the Grand Canyon, and South Africa. Brooks hopes that seeing new places will inspire kids to think big. Teens in the Brooks Bunch have to keep out of trouble, get good grades, and write papers on why they should be accepted into the group. "I want these kids to know they're shaping their futures right now," Brooks said. "I'm just trying to give back."

P. Diddy Runs the City

When hip-hop star Sean "P. Diddy" Combs decides to do something, he hits the ground running. On Nov. 23, 2003, Combs, after only two months of training, completed the 26.2-mile New York City Marathon in four hours, 14 minutes, and 54 seconds. He was running to raise money for kids from low-income families in the city.

Combs raised more than \$2 million. He gave the city's school system \$1 million to buy new furniture, books, and computers for schools in poor neighborhoods. Combs says he wants to even the playing field for kids in tough neighborhoods. Combs split the other million dollars between two charities.

Question Sheet

Name: _____

Date: _____

“Star Power” Questions

- ___ 1. All the following character traits describe the stars in the article except:
- a. generous.
 - b. considerate
 - c. gullible.
 - d. successful.
- ___ 2. Faith Hill thinks it is really important for people to
- a. visit refugee camps.
 - b. get books and be able to read them.
 - c. do something practical like build schools.
 - d. use their fame to get publicity for charities.
- ___ 3. “These kids should know they’re shaping their futures right now” means that kids should know that
- a. what they do now affects their future.
 - b. they are too young to worry about the rest of their lives.
 - c. they don’t need to think too seriously about their futures.
 - d. they shouldn’t let anyone else arrange their lives for them.
- ___ 4. The only people mentioned in this passage who do *not* have a difficult plight are the
- a. people sick with AIDS.
 - b. refugees.
 - c. kids who can’t read.
 - d. stars who are trying to help.
- ___ 5. Angelina Jolie alternates between film-making and working in refugee camps. Based on her work in these two fields, what character qualities do you think she has?

Question Sheet

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Date: _____

“Star Power” Answer Sheet

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Answers will vary but may include determination, hard-working, and ambitious.

*Suggested Additional Vocabulary:
benefit concert, to contract, inspiration, devastating*