



Fred Bowen is the author of Peachtree's popular *Fred Bowen Sports Story* and *All-Star Sports Story* series. A lifelong sports fanatic, he has coached youth league baseball, basketball, and soccer. His kids' sports column "The Score" appears each week in the KidsPost section of the *Washington Post*. Bowen lives in Maryland.

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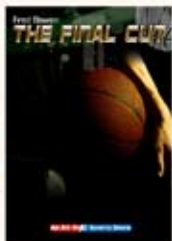
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## Playoff Dreams

**Summary:** Brendan is one of the best players in the league, but no matter how hard he tries, he can't make his team win.

**Teaching themes:** Baseball; realistic fiction, sports history (famous baseball players — especially Chicago Cubs — who never played in the World Series).

**Character Education:** Determination; patience, optimism, dealing with disappointment.

### Overarching writing prompts:

In Chapter Six, Brendan's dad, a jazz musician, tells Brendan that playing in a band is like playing on a team. How is playing on a band like playing on a team?

Brendan is discouraged because his team keeps losing. How does Brendan's attitude change after his uncle tells him about Chicago Cubs legend Ernie Banks?

### Discussion Questions by chapter (for oral or written understanding):

Chapters 1-3:

After reading Chap 1, who do you think this story is about? How do you know?

Are the Cubs playing well?

What is a triple play in baseball?

Who is Mr. DeCastro?

What was the final score of the game?

Where is Skeeter Wells from?

What nickname does Skeeter call Brendan?

Does Brendan think the cubs team is any good? Does he think he as a player is any good?

After looking at the season's score so far, which team is in first place? Which team is tied with the Cubs in last place?

What does Brendan's mom do for a living? What does his dad do? What team does Ryan Martinez play on?

Chapters 4-5:

Why do you think Brendan's game is so much better than his team's? What is he doing throughout the game? Is this something he can teach the other players to do?

Did Brendan's strategy work to extend the game?

Why did Brendan and Josh get into an argument?

Who is coming to visit Brendan?

Chapters 6-7:

What did Brendan's father and Skeeter help him to see by playing music together? Did Brendan get it?

What was the surprise Uncle Jack brought Brendan?

Where is Wrigley Field located?

Where did they eat lunch?

Why couldn't Brendan keep the ball he caught?

Chapters 8-9:

Who is Ernie Banks and what special saying did he have?

What inning did Coach DeCastro schedule Brendan to play in and why wasn't he pleased?

Chapters 10-13:

Did the Cubs in a game? Is it possible for them to make the playoffs?

What important lesson had Brendan learned from an earlier game that he remembered in the current games?

What was Brendan trying to do when he ran into the outfield fence? Was he successful?

Chapters 14-15:

What did Brendan's father bring him from Uncle Jack?

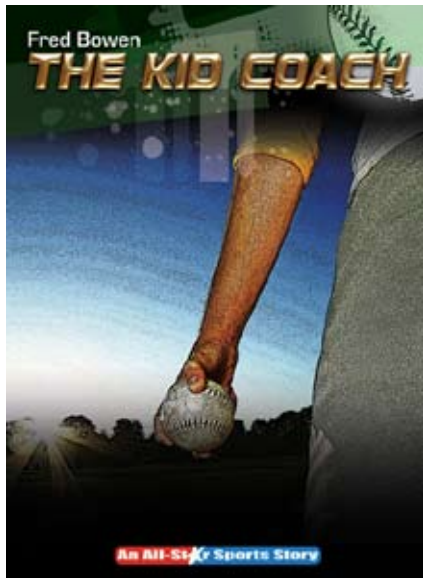
How did Brendan feel at the end of the book?

Did the Cubs make it into the playoffs?

The Real Story:

Which professional baseball player (from 1944-1962) never played in a playoff game or World Series yet played in 2,109 games?

What does segregated mean?



## The Kid Coach

**Summary:** Scott and his teammates can't find an adult to coach their team, so they must find a leader among themselves.

**Teaching themes:** Baseball; realistic fiction, sports history (famous player-coaches in baseball).

**Character Education:** Empathy; creativity; learning that everyone has special talents and can contribute to the team.

**Overarching writing prompts:** Benny loved sports, but he isn't very athletic. How does he become an

important member of the team?

Scott does a good job coaching the team. How would the team's experience been different with a grown-up coach?

### Discussion Questions by chapter (for oral or written understanding):

Chapters 1-2:

After reading chap 1, what do you think this book will be about?  
What did the three friends do to pass the time on that rainy afternoon?  
Why was Scott and his team able to play using his made-up lineup list?  
What were the results of the game using that list?

Chapters 3-4:

Why didn't Coach Skelly show up for that first practice game?  
What reason did he give the team when he next saw them?  
Does the team respect the coach? Why or why not? How do you know this?  
What did the team decide after Coach Skelly had to leave the game early?  
Where is the Youth Baseball board meeting being held?  
Did the board allow Scott to coach the Tigers baseball team?

Chapters 5-6:

Were the other coaches okay having Scott as a coach?  
Did the Tigers win their first game with Scott as coach?  
What could Scott have done differently in that first game?  
Is Scott enjoying his role as coach?

Chapters 7-8:

At the beginning of Chap 7, looking over the season's records, how many games have been played so far and what do you the L stands for in front of the final score of those first games?  
What did the team decide they wanted to do one day at practice? Do you think this new excitement will help them win upcoming games?  
Does, Scott, Fran and Drew feel the same about Benny" the Brain" Myles?  
Does Drew like Benny? How do you know?  
When Scott went to Benny's house to return his baseball glove, what did he and Benny discuss? Do you think this info will help Scott be a better coach for the team?

Chapters 9-10:

Did Benny's stats help determine what order the players were assigned?  
Was this helpful? How so?  
Can Scott keep a secret?  
Do you trust Drew at the end of Chap 10?

Chapters 11-12:

Why do you think Drew called Benny "peaches" after winning the game?  
Have you ever know someone who did mean or hurtful things without knowing why they did them? What could it be that causes them to do this?  
Was Scott's apology to Benny enough? Could he have done something else?

Chapters 13-14:

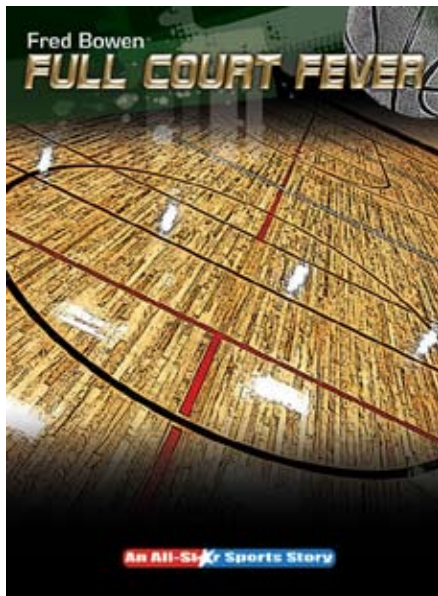
Did Drew trust Benny's ideas on how to play against the Red Sox? How do you know?  
Is being a coach making Scott a better player? How?

Chapters 15-16:

How did the Tigers play the season with Scott as coach?  
Did Benny's game improve?  
Why do you think the Tigers played so well that season?  
Is there a difference between knowing baseball and playing baseball?  
Give an example why you feel/think this way.

The Real Story:

Are there many player-coaches today?  
Who is Ted Williams?  
What is the Williams Shift?



## Full Court Fever

**Summary:** The Falcons have the skill but not the height required to win their games. Will they be able to win the dreaded end-of-the-season game against their much taller rivals?

**Teaching themes:** Basketball; Realistic fiction; sports history (UCLA teams of the 1960s).

**Character Education:** Creativity, teamwork, determination, resourcefulness.

**Overarching writing prompts:** Michael and his buddies discover helpful information when they are flipping through pages of old *Sports Illustrated* magazines together. How is surfing the Internet different from flipping through magazines and books?

How does Michael's team devise a winning strategy against players a lot taller than them?

### Discussion Questions by chapter (for oral or written understanding):

Chapters 1-2:

What did Kevin think was the reason his team lost?

After reading the first two chapters, does Michael seem to be a good ball player?

Chapters 3-4:

What is Coach Cummings's suggestion and strategy for the Falcons to win some of their games, even though the team is made up of shorter players?

In what time of year is this story set?

Looking at the Falcon's scorer's sheet, how many rebounds did Rosenthal score in the second quarter?

Which player scored the most points in this game?

Chapters 5-6:

Looking at the schedule, where will the team play on Feb 8th?

What the name of the new kid?

Could Michael's Christmas wish come true?

Is the coach interested in having the new student involved in the team? How do you know?

What did Michael buy at the House of Cards sports shop with his \$15 gift certificate that he got for Christmas?

Chapters 7-8:

Does Dikembe like Michael's playing strategy? Why?

Did Michael's plan work?

Chapters 9-10:

What did UCLA coach John Wooden say were the three things important for success in basketball?

Does Coach Cummings like the press strategy?

Chapters 11-12:

Looking at the schedule, how many games did the Falcons win from December 14 - February 22? How many more games do they have?

Create a cheer for your team as was done in Chap 11.

Did the girl's 7th grade team win against the 8th grade team?

What were Theresa's reasons for this?

Chapters 12-13:

Did Theresa's words stay with Michael?

What do you think this will do to his confidence when playing the game against the 8th graders?

What was the score of the game at the end of Chap 13? Does Michael's team still have a chance to win against the 8th graders?

Chapters 15:

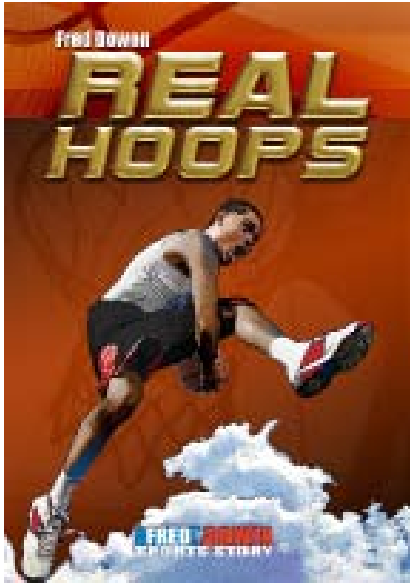
How did the game end?

Has Dikembe improved his game since he first started playing basketball?

The Real Story:

What man is considered to be one of the greatest coaches in the history of college basketball?

What did John Wooden and the UCLA Bruins prove using the press about playing big? What do you need to do this?



## Real Hoops

**Summary:** Can street ball and technical play mix it up on the court and score wins for the team? Can Ben convince Hud to leave his hot-shot style back on the pickup court?

**Teaching themes:** Basketball; Realistic fiction; sports history (famous playground basketball league — The Rucker League — and famous playground players.)

**Character Education:** Personal integrity; responsibility; friendship; acceptance of different kinds of people.

### Overarching writing prompts:

Why does Hud have such a bad attitude toward Coach George?

Why do you think Donut talked Hud into staying on Coach George's team?

### Discussion Questions by chapter (for oral or written understanding):

Chapters 1-2:

Where did Ben suggest he and Logan go to play some really good games?

Who is Hud and where does he currently go to school?

Why does Ben and Logan want Hud to transfer to their school?

Looking over the Tryouts notice, when is the cutoff time and date to sign up?

Is Ben excited about the team? Why do you think this?

Chapters 3-4:

What were the names of the two guys on a team at the Rec Center that beat Hud's team?

Why do you think one guy's nickname was Helicopter?

Why did Mr. Sims think the younger guys could beat Donut and Helicopters' team when the others had not? Was he right?

What was Coach George looking for in a player at tryouts?

Thinking about how Hud and Ben played ball together during tryouts, what is Hud's strongest playing technique?

Chapters 5-6:

Why do you think Donut never played high school basketball?

What special position did Ben earn for basketball season?

Where will Ben's team, the RHS Freshmen Basketball team, be playing on 1/24?

Looking over Coach George's rules, which rule do you think Hud will have a hard time following?

Chapters 7-8:

Did Ben's team win the first game of the season?

Do you think Coach George was pleased with how every player played in that game?

What did Ben discover on a chance visit to the Rec Center?

What do you think he should do?

Chapters 9-10:

What did Ben decide to do?

Why does Hud like playing at the Rec Center?

What was Hud's response to Ben when he suggested he stop playing at the Rec Center?

Chapters 11-12:

Even though Hud threw the winning shot for the game, do you think Coach George was pleased with his performance?

Why do you think Hud doesn't do what Coach George expects?

Why do you think the coach is so hard on Hud, and is he that hard on the other players? Why?

Chapters 13-14:

What did Mr. Sims tell Ben that made Ben want him to talk to Hud?

Have you ever wanted to do something that your parents, teachers, or coach made you learn how to do first before you were able to just do it?

What was it and how did you feel?

Why does Ben want to help Hud play?

Chapters 15:

Did Hud follow the coach's instructions in the game?

Was Hud still able to shine during the game?

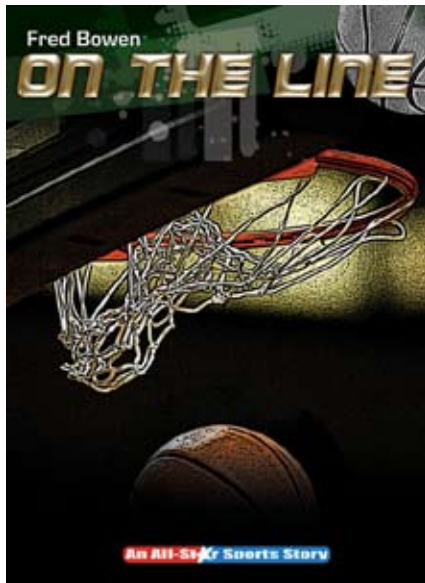
What rule did the coach excuse during holiday break?

Do you think he knows where Hud has been playing on the side?

What made Hud change his mind about quitting the Westwood team and just playing summer league?

The Real Story:

What is a pickup game?



## On the Line

**Summary:** Marcus is the high scorer and best rebounder on his basketball team, but he's not so great at free throws, until the school custodian helps him overcome his fear of failure.

**Teaching themes:** Basketball; realistic fiction; sports history (famous basketball players who shot free throws underhanded).

**Character Education:** Creativity, effort, dealing with fear of failure.

### Overarching writing prompts:

What are Marcus's first impressions of Mr. Dunn, the custodian?

How does Marcus's opinion of Mr. Dunn change?

### Discussion Questions by chapter (for oral or written understanding):

Chapters 1-2:

Who is the main character in this story and how is his game so far?

Chapters 3-4:

What does Marcus need to do in order to play better?

Looking over the coach stat sheet, which player scored the most points in that game?

Chapters 5-6:

What is Marcus planning on researching and writing about for his history report?

Where is Marcus planning to practice his foul shots in the evenings?

Chapters 7-8:

What did Mr. Dunn suggest Marcus do to make his foul shots?

Why does Marcus think Mr. Dunn is weird?

Is Marcus getting better at free throws?

Chapters 9-10:

Why did Marcus judge Mr. Dunn so poorly?

How did Mr. Dunn suggest Marcus start throwing his free throws and why is Marcus reluctant to use it?

What newspaper is Marcus using to research his project?

Looking over the newspaper clipping, what's the name of the senior who scored 282 points for Einstein High that season?

Who did Marcus learn that Roderick "Hot Rod" Dunn is?

Chapters Chap 11-12:

What does Marcus's dad call the underhand shot?

Do you think Marcus will use the underhand shot in a game?

Chapters 13-14:

What does "on the line" mean?

Why are foul shots difficult during a game?

How was this game different from the first game Marcus played at the beginning of the book?

Chapters 15:

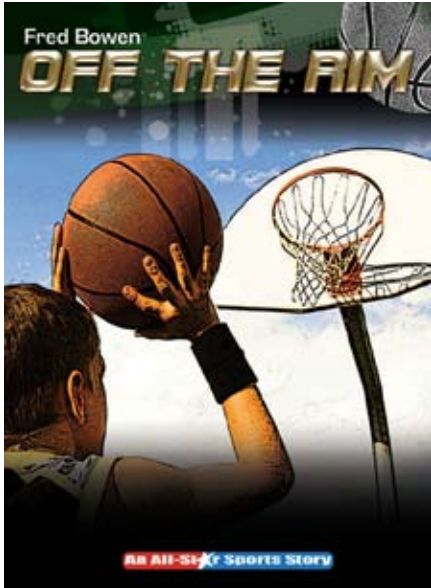
What did Mr. Dunn do when Marcus called him Hot Rod Dunn?

Did Marcus respect Mr. Dunn at the end of the book? Why do you think this?

The Real Story:

How far away is the foul line from the basket?

What's more important, looks or getting the job done?



## Off the Rim

**Summary:** Chris yearns to be more than a benchwarmer on the Oak View Middle School basketball team. With the help of his best friend Greta and her mom, Chris begins to change his defensive strategy and successfully learns to keep his opponents from scoring.

**Teaching themes:** Basketball; realistic fiction; sports history (6-on-6 girls' basketball).

**Character Education:** The importance of practice, effort, creativ-

ity, learning that not everyone can be the "star" of the team.

### Overarching writing prompts:

Chris wants to be the star shooter on his team, but he's not good enough. How does he manage to still enjoy playing on the basketball team?

One of Chris's character traits is determination. How does the author show Chris's determination?

### Discussion Questions by chapter (for oral or written understanding):

Chapters 1-2:

How do you play Around the World in basketball?  
What sport does Chris's sister Anna play?

Chapters 3-4:

Looking over the 90-second drill chart, how many shots did Chris get on 12/22? Who got the most shots on that day?  
Is Chris a confident player? Why do you think this way?  
Is Greta a confident player? What makes you think this way?

Chapters 5-6:

How does Chris decide to get better at his game?  
What did Greta tell Chris to start doing?

Chapters 7-8:

How is Chris's family different from Greta's?  
Name two ways that Greta's mom's games were played differently from how Greta plays basketball?

Chapters 9-10:

What is Greta's mom good at doing in basketball?  
Why do you think adding a morning run to his exercises will help Chris play better defense?  
How long did it take for Chris to get use to the morning run?

Chapters 11-12:

Did the coach notice Chris's efforts during the practice game?  
What does Mimi tell Chris he can do to play good defense?

Chapters 13-14:

How are Anna and Chris's positions on their teams similar?  
Why was Chris happy after the game even though he missed the final shot?

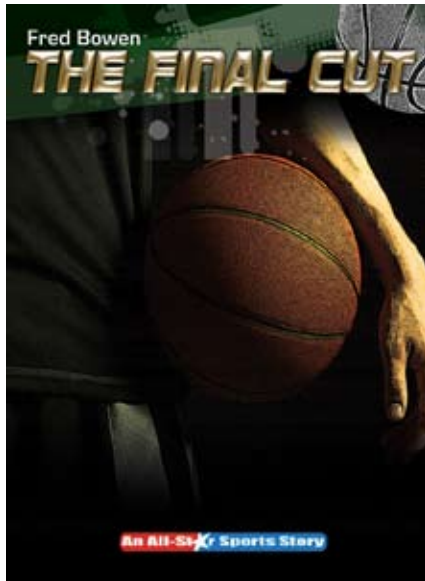
Chapters 15:

Does Greta feel that Chris is a better player at the end of the book?

Behind the Story:

In what year was basketball invented?  
Why were 6-on-6 games created for women?





## The Final Cut

**Summary:** Four friends who share a love of basketball have to go through tryouts for the school team. But will they all make the team?

**Teaching themes:** Basketball; realistic fiction; sports history (famous players — Michael Jordan and Bill Russell — who were not immediate successes at basketball).

**Character Education:** Dealing with disappointment; resilience; determination, effort; friendship.

### Overarching writing prompts:

Ryan is very discouraged when two of his best friends make the team and he doesn't. Why does he feel like "he lost more than a place on the team?"

The story ends on a hopeful note. How does the author indicate that some good changes might happen in Ryan's life even though he's not on the team?

### Discussion Questions by chapter (for oral or written understanding):

Chapters 1-2:

What sports games did the boys play in the first two chapters? Does Ryan think he and his friends, Miles, Zeke, and Eli have a chance at playing on the Slingo Stallions team this year?

Chapters 3-4:

Looking over the team roster, what's the name of the North Carolina team?

Who is Benny the Brain and what does he do to help the coach?

Chapters 5-6:

What famous ballplayer didn't make his high school varsity team? What name did Ryan and his friends come up with to describe their team? What team name would you make up to describe your friends and you?

Chapters 7-8:

Which two teams won to play against each other at the end of Chap 7, and what was the outcome of that game?

Chapters 9-10:

Looking over the Intramural stats, who had the highest Free Throw Percentage? Did Ryan make any of the lists? How did the coach describe the game of basketball and what was he looking for during the tryout drills?

Chapters 11-12:

Do Ryan and his friends still think they have a shot at making the final cut? How do you know? Does the coach notice Ryan during the tryouts? How do you know? Do you think Ryan has a chance to be on the team?

Chapters 13-14:

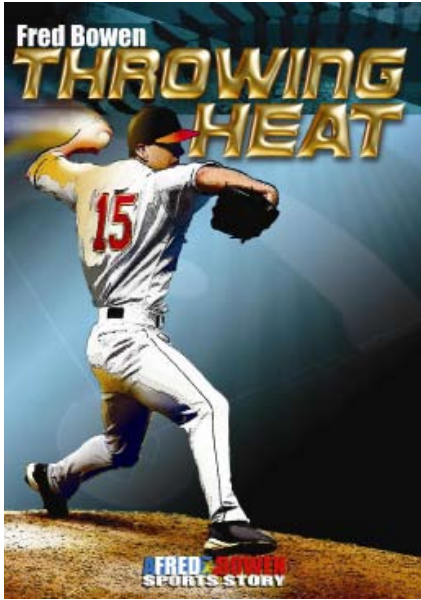
Why was Ryan reluctant to go by the gym with his friends Zeke and Eli to check the final cut list? Did Ryan make the team? Did any of his friends make the team? Why do you think Zeke felt the need to question the status of his friendship with Ryan at this time during the story? Have you or would you be angry/upset/jealous if someone got something you wanted? Does this help change the situation at all?

Chapters 15:

Is Ryan a good ballplayer? Why do you think he didn't make the final cut? Do you think he will make the team next year? Why do you feel this way?

The Real Story:

Where was Michael Jordan born? Who is Bill Russell?



## Throwing Heat

**Summary:** Last season, Jack's pitches were the fastest around, and he could always rely on them to strike out his opponents. But now he's playing in a new middle school league, where the distance between the pitching rubber and the catcher's mitt is a lot greater. Jack keeps throwing heat but he can't seem to get balls into the strike zone. Then Finn, a baseball coach at a local college, offers to help. He shows Jack some new pitches and tells him about Steve Dalkowski, a hard-throwing left-hander—often considered the fastest pitcher in baseball history—who never made it

out of the minor leagues. He didn't have enough control over his fastball, and he didn't throw other pitches like a change-up or a curve ball. At first Jack doesn't listen to the coach's advice. But soon, with the season on the line, he realizes that Finn was right. Is it too late to change his game plan?

**Teaching themes:** Baseball; realistic fiction; sports history (baseball pitchers who threw the ball very hard and fast).

**Character Education:** Listening to teachers and coaches; effort; learning that talent is not enough but that one has to work on the talent.

### Overarching writing prompts:

Jack is a very talented pitcher, so why does he need to practice so much? And why does he (eventually) listen to the advice that Finn gives him?

Why does Jack go online to research Finn's college baseball career? How is he surprised by what he learns?

### Discussion Questions by chapter (for oral or written understanding):

Chapters 1-2:

What is a speed gun? In addition to baseball, what other group uses them?

What did Jack do before getting in line to throw the baseball at the school fair? Why?

What does Jack have to improve doing during the game?

Chapters 3-4:

What job does Finn, Jack's sister Sarah's boyfriend, do that caught Jack's attention?

What are at least two things that Jack and Finn have in common?

Was Jack open to some of Finn's suggestions to improve his game?

Chapters 5-6:

What did Jack and Danny learn about Finn's high school baseball playing after looking him up on the Internet? Was Jack impressed?

What does "throwing heat" mean?

Chapters 7-8:

Why do you think Jack doesn't like Finn all that much?

What did Finn mean by Jack liking to throw the ball instead of pitch?

Chapters 9-10:

Why did the coach take Jack out of the game?

Looking over Steve Dalkowski's record, how many strikeouts did he get in 1962?

Looking at Koufax's chart, how many hits did he get in 1958?

Chapters 11-12:

What do you think is the difference between throwing and pitching?

What did Finn suggest Jack do during his practice sessions?

Why did Finn want Jack to record his "bricks" practice sessions?

Looking over the final chart in Chap 12, how many games has the team won so far?

Chapters 13-14:

Did Jack use Finn's suggestions in the next game? What was the outcome?

Did Jack become more confident after doing his practice sessions using the brick wall? What makes you think this way?

The Real Story:

What player was called "White Lightning" and why?

What's more important, that a pitcher throws strikes or fastballs? Why?

What does it mean for a pitcher to walk a batter?



## Dugout Rivals

**Summary:** Jake Daley loves baseball. He loves playing for the Red Sox in the Woodside baseball league. He loves playing short stop. Most of all, he loves to win. So Jake is excited when newcomer Adam Hull is selected to play for the Red Sox. Adam can do it all—pitch, hit, and field. But soon Jake's excitement begins to fade. As the Red Sox rack up win after win, Adam's talents dominate every game. Jake can't help but wonder: Do he or the other players even matter? It is only when Jake's father tells him the story of the unstoppable Babe Ruth and the 1927 Yankees that Jake realizes even the best players must rely on the talent of their teammates.

**Teaching themes:** Baseball; realistic fiction; sports history (famous athletes who were not the "best" player on their team).  
Character Education: Friendship; jealousy; empathy; learning that everyone cannot be the "star."

### Overarching writing prompts:

In Chapter Eight, Jake is very upset about Adam. Why does Jake say, "First he takes over the team and then he takes over my house?"

Later in the story Jake realizes that Adam isn't a bad guy at all. Why does he change his mind about Adam?

### Discussion Questions by chapter (for oral or written understanding):

Chapters 1-2:

Who do you think are the main characters in the book?  
How many twelve year olds are on the Red Sox team?  
Do you think Adam is a good ballplayer so far? What makes a good ballplayer?  
Do you think he may also be a good team player? What makes a good team player?

Chapters 3-4:

Why is Jake regretting getting such a good player on his team?

What dates are the Red Sox scheduled to play the Giants?  
How do you think Jake likes Adam as a person so far? What makes you think this way?  
How are Jake and Adam's home lives different?

Chapters 5-6:

What did the author do to help you realize when a character is thinking?  
Why do you think Jake's thoughts are the only ones a reader can "hear?"  
Why do you think Jake keeps comparing his playing skills to Adam's?  
Do you think Jake will become a better player because Adam is there?  
Do Adam's parents pay attention to him in the way that Jake's parents notice him?

Chapters 7-8:

Who do you think feels better about playing baseball, Jake or Adam?  
Why do you feel this way?  
Why do you think Adam stays around Jake's family a lot?

Chapters 9-10:

Does Jake like Adam? Why do you think this way?  
Does Adam like Jake? Why do you think this way?  
Do Adam's parents get along very well?  
Do Adam and his little brother, Chad, both notice in the same way how their parents get along?

Chapters 11-12:

Does Adam play better when his dad is at the game? What makes you think this?  
Looking over the player's stat page, what does R stand for?  
How many **Hits** did Kyle K. have so far that season? Who had the most?

Chapters 13-14:

Looking over the Red Sox schedule, how many games have the team won so far?  
How does Jake feel about Adam as a person and a ballplayer now?

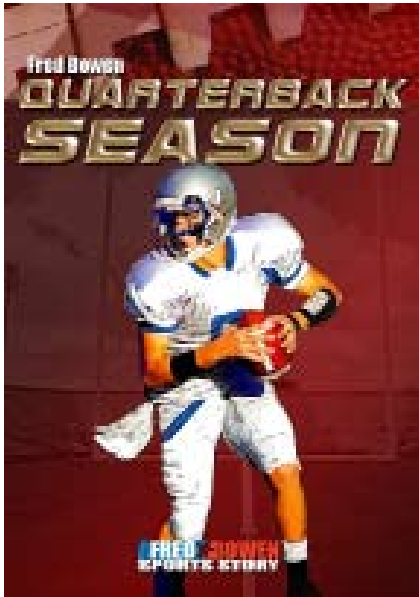
Chapters 15-16:

Why do you think there is a seventy-five pitch rule?  
Was Jake happy to have Adam on the team at the end?

The Real Story:

Is it important to be a good player and teammate? Why do you think/feel this way? Is one more important than the other? Why or why not?

# New Fall 2011!



## Quarterback Season

**Summary:** Matt Monroe is a shoe-in for starting quarterback for the Parkside Middle School football team this year. Or is he? Devro, a new seventh grader, looks pretty impressive. He's consistent and can run the plays almost as well as Matt. And he's got speed. As the fall football season unfolds, the team has more than its share of surprises and unexpected challenges, as well as plenty of victories and upsets on and off the field—all of which Matt records and analyzes in a journal he keeps for his English class. By the last kickoff of the season, Matt has learned that a team is only as good as the sum of its

parts and that playing together is the only way to win.

**Teaching themes:** Football; realistic fiction; journal; sports history (famous diary called *Instant Replay* about the 1967 Green Bay Packers).

**Character Education:** Jealousy; determination; learning to observe carefully; learning to like new things (writing).

### Discussion Questions by chapter (for oral or written understanding):

Chapters 1-2:

How are Matt's journal entries different after he uses his teacher's suggestions?

Chapters 3-4:

Looking over the fall schedule for Parkside Middle School, what time do most of the games start?

Name three pass patterns explained on Sept 15th.

What position does Matt want to play in the game and what does he like about it?

Who does Matt mention often in his journal?

How many yards did Gonzalez get in Game 1?

Looking at the chart, what does INTS mean?

Who is Matt's biggest competition for the position he likes playing?

Could this be why he writes about him more than the other players?

Chapters 5-6:

What do you think the quote at the end of Ms. Ignacio's e mail by Samuel Beckett means?

From Matt's journal entries, does Devro enjoy playing football?

On the third game, which player got the most yards?

How many touchdowns did Jenkins get?

Do you think Matt is a good quarterback?

If Devro were writing journal entries, who might he mention if they were about his football games?

Chapters 7-9:

What do you think the guys thought Devro had taken Matt's play book?

Why did Matt yell at Devro after already having felt bad about accusing him of taking his play book just moments before?

How many Superbowls did Elway play where his team won?

Why do you think Colby felt bad about Michelle learning that he isn't doing well in math?

Chapters 10-11:

What sport do you play to win The World Cup?

What's the best Halloween trick or treat you ever got?

How has Ms. Ignacio been communicating with Matt throughout the book? How do you know?

Chapters 12-13:

Was Michelle helping Colby with math?

How was a decision reached to have Parkside play in the championship game against Bullis?

What does a sportswriter do?

What award did Matt win that season for playing football?

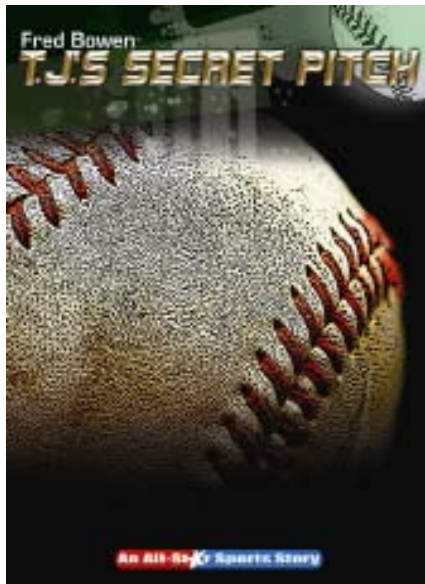
The Real Story:

How did Jerry Kramer write his journal?

What are some challenges that football players have playing the game?

What did Matt's grandfather, Pop-Pop, encourage him to read as one of the best sports books?

Would you be interested in reading this book for adults too?



## T.J.'s Secret Pitch

**Summary:** More than anything, T. J. wants to be a pitcher. But he's smaller than his teammates, and his pitches just don't pack the power they need to strike out the batters. When T. J. learns about one of baseball's early heroes, Pittsburgh Pirate Rip Sewell, he decides to try Sewell's secret weapon. But will his teammates give T. J. a chance to prove that he can be a pitcher? And will T. J.'s secret pitch help lead his team to victory?

**Teaching themes:** Baseball; realistic fiction; sports history (story of 1930/40s pitcher, Rip Sewell).

**Character Education:** Determination; resourcefulness; dealing with disappointment; friendship.

### Discussion Questions by chapter (for oral or written understanding):

Chapter 1-3:

What is T.J.'s goal and how has he prepared to reach it? Was it enough?  
Why did others say that T.J. could not be a pitcher?  
How successful was he at pitching the first chance the coach gave him?  
Were his coach, friends, and teammates supportive of his efforts?  
How do you think T.J. felt at the end of the first chapter?  
What happened to make him feel this way? Have you ever felt this way?  
What happened that made T.J. feel different by the end of Chapter 3?  
If you were T.J., what would you do if you found out about Warren Spahn?

Chapter 4-5:

What did T.J. discover?  
Do you think his new technique will allow him to pitch by season's end?  
What gave T.J. confidence to try his secret pitch on his team players (or during a real game)? Do you think it will work?

Chapter 6-7:

What did Coach Upton do the last inning?  
Why do you think he allowed T.J. to pitch?  
What is T.J.'s secret pitch? Does the pitch work? If you play baseball, do you think this pitch would be one you could use?  
Who is Rip Sewell?  
What is an eephus pitch?  
What book did T.J. and Grandpa use to look up info about Truett Banks "Rip" Sewell, aka Rip Sewell?

Reading a chart: (page 48)

Where was Sewell born?  
How many hits did Sewell get in 1939 in Pittsburgh?  
How long did Sewell play professional baseball?  
Did he have more wins or losses?  
What year did he play the most games?  
Why is there a space of time between playing his first and second year of professional baseball? Why do you think that happened?

Chapter 8-9:

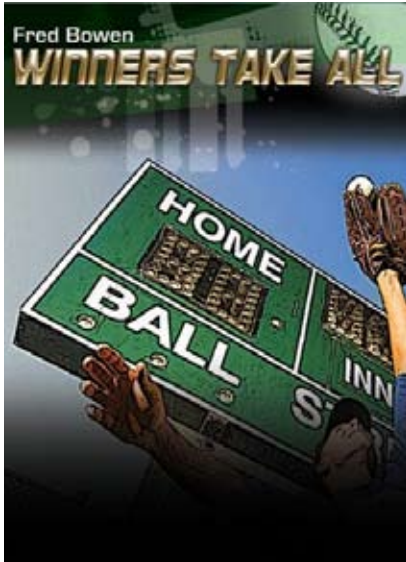
Did the coach like the way T.J. pitched at first?  
What changed his mind?  
Did the team support the coach when he had T.J. pitch the last game? Why or why not?  
How does T.J. feel the night and morning before the big game?  
Have you ever felt this way? If so, when? What was going on?

Chapter 10-12

Does T.J.'s pitch work?  
What does lefffielder Bobby do for every game that brings him luck?  
What does he claim to be able to do because of this?  
What did T.J. do to get a final strike and win the game?  
How did T.J. feel about the game?  
How did he feel about his secret pitch?

Chapter: The Real Story

What happened on Dec 7, 1941 (to the USA and to Rick Sewell)?  
What does "eephus" mean?  
Who was the one and only player to hit the eephus pitch and score a home run?  
Was it hit during a game?  
What lesson did Sewell learn during his baseball career.



## Winners Take All

**CLASSROOM COMPANION**  
For third, fourth, and fifth grades  
Reading Aloud

**Summary:** *In order to win an important baseball game, twelve-year-old Kyle claims to have made a difficult catch, which he actually dropped. The attention he receives is not enough to silence his conscience.*

*Boys and girls enjoy listening to **Winners Take All** by Fred Bowen.*

*The cliffhangers keep them engaged and eager to know what is going to happen next. And the plot turns on a kid-sized moral dilemma that gets them thinking and talking. Before you begin reading, you may want to introduce the story with these words: **Winners Take All** is a baseball story about kids who play on rival baseball teams. Some of them play for the Reds and the others play for the Cubs. As the story begins, the kids are in a tight game. The Cubs are at bat and leading by one run. The kids on the Reds team are very nervous. They are worried that they are going to lose the game.*

**Teaching themes:** Baseball; realistic fiction; sports history (great—and honest—baseball pitcher, Christy Mathewson).

**Character Education:** Honesty; responsibility; personal integrity.

### Writing Activity

The chapter-by-chapter Thinking Questions give students a chance to pause and think about the story and the important issues it raises. Their written responses provide a great opportunity to practice their writing.

### Class Discussion

After you have read aloud to your students (or listened together to the audiobook), and they have finished answering the Thinking Questions, gather them together for a whole-class discussion. They have already thought a lot about the story and will have a lot of opinions. Use the Wrap-Up Questions (at the end of the list of Thinking Questions) to guide the discussion.

### Thinking Questions

*Chapters 1-2:*

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A) Kyle's favorite place in the world is the town baseball field, especially when his team is playing the Cubs. Describe your favorite place in the world.
- B) The Cubs players, coaches, and fans yell at the umpire when he rules against them and they lose the game. What do you think the umpire is thinking when everyone is yelling at him? (Think about how you feel when someone is yelling at you.)

*Chapters 3-4:*

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A) Teamwork is an important part of sports. Describe someone who makes a good teammate. Now describe someone whose behavior hurts the team.
- B) Let's say that Kyle decides to tell his teammates right away that he faked the catch. Think about what he would say. Think about how Nate or Claire would react. Write a short scene starting with this line: The Reds gathered around and tried to lift Kyle up on their shoulders, but he twisted free and said:

*Chapters 5-6:*

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A) Think about the setting of this chapter. What kind of mood does the author set? What words or phrases does he use to set that mood?
- B) Kyle says, "I'm not a cheater. I made a mistake, that's all." What do you think about that statement?

*Chapters 7-8:*

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A) How important is attitude in sports and in school? Write about a time when you had a bad attitude and things turned out badly, or

when you had a good attitude and did better than expected?

B) Nate and Kyle play in a playground basketball game against Bryan Ford. There are no referees. Do you think that kids' games can be fair without grown-ups enforcing the rules? Why or why not?

*Chapters 9-10:*

Choose A or B and write your response:

A) Kyle is hoping that the caller didn't really see Kyle drop the ball. He wants to keep his cheating a secret. Can you think of a time that you were keeping a secret from somebody? How do you think Kyle will feel if he keeps his cheating a secret?

B) Honsey loves baseball. If you could see into her brain, you would see a lot of baseball facts. Write about what someone would see if he or she could look into your brain.

*Chapters 11-12:*

Choose A or B and write your response:

A) It looks as if the Cubs coach is going to publicly accuse Kyle of faking the catch. Write a short letter to Kyle and tell him what he should do.

B) Kyle's team has won the championship. He didn't cheat this time, but he doesn't feel like celebrating. Why not?

*Chapters 13-14:*

Choose A or B and write your response:

A) How would you feel if you were one of the Reds or one of the Cubs standing in the room when Kyle admits that he really didn't make the catch?

B) Do you think the commissioners make the right decision? Should they have benched Kyle (not let him play) in the final game? Why or why not?

*Chapters 15-16:*

Choose A or B and write your response:

A) Circle two words from the list here and tell why you think they best describe Kyle. Honest | Sneaky | Happy | Sad | Good Bad | Kind | Mean

B) Kyle spots Jason right after the game, but he doesn't care. Why doesn't seeing Jason bother Kyle anymore?

*The Real Story (Bonus Section at the end of the book)*

A) Honsey admires Hall of Famer Christy Matthewson. Write about

a ballplayer or other grown-up whom you admire.

B) Christy Matthewson would tell the truth even if the truth helped the other team. What do you think his teammates thought about him?

*Wrap-up Questions for a Group Discussion*

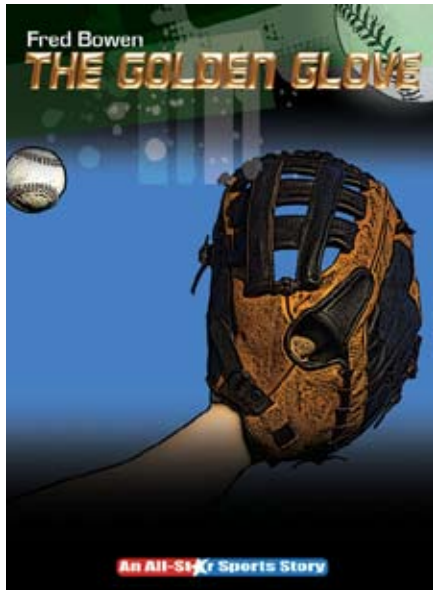
A) What do you think is the worst part of Kyle faking the catch?

B) Kyle almost told Claire that he had faked the catch. How do you think Claire would have reacted if he had? How would you have reacted?

C) Would Kyle have ever told the truth if Jason had never discovered the cheating and told Coach Rolfe about it?

D) How does this famous expression apply to Kyle: "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive?"

E) Playing to win is exciting and fun. And winning a tight game is especially thrilling. But Kyle wants to win so much that he makes a bad decision. Why does he feel so much pressure to win?



## The Golden Glove

**Summary:** Without his lucky glove, Jamie doesn't believe in his ability to lead his baseball team to victory. Then he learns that faith in oneself is the most important equipment for any game.

**Teaching themes:** Baseball; realistic fiction, sports history, lucky charms, neighborhood (development of baseball gloves through the years).

**Character Education:** The importance of hard work and practice; resourcefulness; personal responsibility (not blaming your equipment).

### Overarching writing prompts:

After Jamie loses his glove, his father refuses to buy him a new one. His dad has the money, so why won't he buy Jamie a new glove?

Jamie's worried that he won't play well without his old glove. What convinces him that he could be a good player with any glove? And what does he do to become a good player again?

### Discussion Questions by chapter (for oral or written understanding):

Chapters 1-2:

What's the name of the main character in this book?

According to Pete Bikakis, sports shop owner, how do you care for a baseball glove?

What time of year is baseball season?

In what position did Jamie mostly play during that first neighborhood game on Saturday?

What nickname did Jamie's friend Alex give his glove? What do you think that means?

Chapters 3-4:

What distracted Jamie? What did he leave behind at the park?

Who is Brad?

Where did Jamie go to look for his glove? Did he find it?

What could Jamie have done to help him remember his glove?

Have you ever lost something that you really liked? How did you feel?

How do you think Jamie feels at the end of Chap 4?

Do you think he will ever get his beloved glove back?

Chapters 5-6:

Was Jamie's game just as good using the glove he borrowed from Alex the next day?

Could it have been his glove that won him the game before or something else that made him play differently that 2nd day?

Who could have taken Jamie's glove?

What position is Jamie playing in his team games?

Who does Alex suspect stole Jamie's glove? Do you think he may be correct? Why does he think this way?

What do the boys plan to do to get it back? Do you think it's a good plan? Why or why not?

By the end of Chap 6, had Jamie found his glove?

Chapters 7-8:

Did Jamie tell his parents he lost his glove? How did they react?

How much did the glove cost?

What else could you buy with that amount of money?

What does Jamie's dad suggest he do to play baseball this season?

If you were Jamie, what would you do?

What was Jamie's and Brads' solution to getting a new glove?

How did that work out?

Chapters 9-10:

After reading chap 9, what do you think scrimmage means?

Who is Mr. McKenna?

Is Jamie playing a good first game? What could be the reason?

How does he feel after the first practice game?

What is a gamer?

According to Pete Bikakis, sports shop owner, how do some ball-players break in their gloves?

Chapters 11-12:

How have baseball gloves changed over the years?

What pointers did Pete give Jamie about playing ball?



According to Pete, what's more important, the glove or the player?  
Do you agree?  
What is a roster? What team is Jamie playing on?  
What sound word is used throughout chap 12? Can you list three other sound words?

Chapters 13-14:

What is the name of the opposing team?  
How did Jamie play in the first part of the game?  
What was the final score for the first game of the season? Which team won?

Chapters 15:

Where did Jamie finally find his missing glove and how does he suspect it got there?  
What does Jamie planning on doing with his glove? Would you do the same? Why do you think he choose to do this?  
What does Alex expect for Jamie to buy him?

The Real Story:

Were baseball gloves always used in the games?  
What player was the first to use a glove in a game?  
Were gloves popular at first? What turned this around?  
Have you ever accepted something just because others thought it was fine or imitated another person?  
What company sells sports equipment all over the world and in what city did it start?  
What did player Bill Doak add to the baseball that improved it?  
Has the glove improved baseball accomplishments?



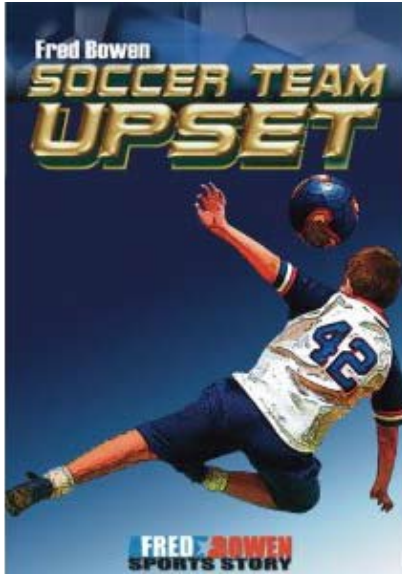
## Hardcourt Comeback

*Summary: Brett, 12, is an awesome basketball player and his team depends on him. But when his friends go to a rock-climbing center, Brett freezes on the wall. He's embarrassed and feels like a failure. After that, he starts losing his confidence on the basketball court. But then, with the help of his coach, he overcomes his fear and starts playing like a winner again.*

**Teaching themes:** Basketball; realistic fiction; sports history (basketball players who came back after very conspicuous failures in big games).

**Character Education:** Dealing with failure; physical courage; determination.

- In Chapter 7, Brett misses a buzzer basket that would have won the game. Write a short article for the Einstein Middle School website chronicling the highlights of the game and the outcome. Include quotes from the players and coaches, and a catchy headline.
- In Chapter 8, Brett realizes that he has a problem with his panicky feelings on the basketball court, but he doesn't tell his family. Act out a scene (or write a short script) in which Brett does tell his family about what happened on the climbing wall and how he's getting that same feeling in games. Would Brooke be understanding or would she poke fun at him? What would his dad and mom say to him? Would they try to help him find a solution? If so, what would they tell him to do?
- In the Real Story, the bonus history chapter, we learn about professional players who have felt like losers at times but persevered and "got their game back." Research your favorite basketball player (or other athlete). Focus on something about them — a great game, an awful play, their childhood — and write a fictional short story placing your favorite athlete as the main character.



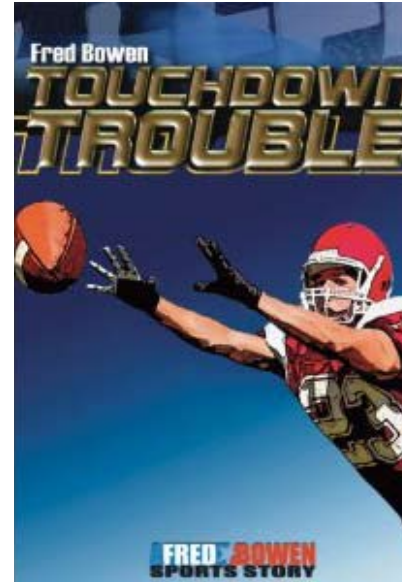
## Soccer Team Upset

**Summary:** *The Cougars, a middle school soccer team, start losing games when three of their best players leave to play for a hot-shot travel team. Two boys on the Cougars, Tyler and Mario, get very discouraged, but change their attitude and lead their teammates back to victory.*

**Teaching themes:** Soccer; realistic fiction; sports history (famous 1950 World Cup game in which United States beat England, 1-0).

**Character Education:** Friendship; effort; determination; seeing change as opportunity.

- Create cards for the main characters: Tyler, Mario, Zack, Coach Murray and Mr. Robertson. On the front, draw a picture of the character in action and, on the back, describe the character's traits and what the character does in the story.
- The author tells us that Tyler is really upset when Zack, his teammate and best friend, leaves to play on the travel team. But we don't know what Zack is thinking. Pretend you're Zack, and write a diary entry about the day you decided to play on the travel team. Include your feelings about leaving the Cougars and what you expect your experience will be on the travel team.
- Pretend you are the author and write a final chapter, Chapter 18. Decide whether Zack chooses to return to the Cougars or to stay with the travel team. Consider how the Cougars will react to Zack's decision. Include a lot of dialog. (Instead of writing a chapter, you may choose to use pictures and captions to show what happens.)



## Touchdown Trouble

**Summary:** *Sam, 12, loves playing football. His team, the Cowboys, is on an amazing winning streak. The team wins an important game, thanks to a big play by Sam. But the celebration ends when Sam and his teammates discover that they won because the referee made a mistake. After a lot of discussion, some of it very tense, Sam convinces his teammates to give the win to the other team.*

**Teaching themes:** Football; realistic fiction; sports history (1940 Cornell – Dartmouth football game).

**Character Education:** Honesty; responsibility; personal and group integrity; friendship.

- In Chapter 13, the Cowboys vote about the game that they won because of the referee's error to decide whether to keep the win or give it to the other team. Just like in the book, poll the class using secret ballots and then have a whole-group discussion so your classmates can share the reasoning behind their votes.
- Pretend that you are writing a blog. Begin today's by summarizing what happened at the game between Cowboys and Giants (Chapter 7) and what is at stake. Then explain what you would do and why you think that is a fair decision.
- Trey changes the most in the story. Describe how he felt toward Sam and the Cougars at the beginning of the story, during the big vote, and then at the end of the story. Why do you think he changed?