

Young Hoosier Book Award Novel Resource #4

Free Baseball



I. Book Information:

Author: Sue Corbett

Title: Free Baseball

Copyright date: 2006

Publisher: Penguin Group

II. About the Author:

www.suecorbett.com

Ms. Corbett grew up in New York. As a child she always wanted to be a writer. According to Ms. Corbett, writing is like air, water and food for her.

Ms. Corbett started as a reporter for television stations in Missouri, South Carolina and Florida. She currently is the reviewer for children's books for the Miami Herald.

Ms. Corbett is married to newspaper editor Tom Davidson. They have three children: Conor, Liam, and Brigit, and a beagle named Louie. They currently reside in Tampa, Florida.

Author's webpage address: www.suecorbett.com

Author's email: scorbett1@aol.com

Author's connections to the book:

Ms. Corbett got the idea for this book while watching her son at a baseball game. All of the kids got shirts of the home team's color and were allowed to run the bases after the game. When Ms. Corbett commented to another mother that it was hard to tell which child was her son the other mother commented that it would be a good time for a child to run away if they wanted. It was from this comment and event Free Baseball was born.

Awards for Sue Corbett:

12 Again won the 2006 California Young Readers Medal and was an International Reading Association Honor book.

Her second novel *Free Baseball* is a finalist for several awards. They include: Maryland's Black-Eyed Susan Award, Connecticut's Nutmeg Book Award, South Carolina Book Award, Virginia Readers Choice Award and Indiana's Young Hoosier Book Award.

Other books by Sue Corbett:

- 12 Again
- Baseball Crazy

III. Annotation:

Felix loves baseball; it's in his blood. His father was a baseball star in Cuba, but that's all Felix knows of him. Since his mother isn't eager to share more information Felix decides to find information out on his own. When, at a local baseball game, Felix hopes some Cuban members of the visiting team might have the information he desires. In the locker room he is mistaken for the bat boy which becomes a journey of baseball and family for Felix.

Sue Corbett writes a real page turner anyone would enjoy!

IV. Genre:

This novel fits into many genres. It fits into historical fiction, sports fiction and family fiction.

V. Point of View:

This novel is written in the third person point of view.

VI. Theme:

The theme of Free Baseball is freedom itself. Baseball allowed Felix and his mom to be free in America. Since Felix's dad was a baseball star in Cuba, his star status made it possible for Felix and his mom to flee Cuba.

The theme of freedom is also evident in the brick Felix carried in his backpack to strengthen his arms. This brick symbolizes Felix's desire to know his father and have him in American with Felix. During his time with *The Miracle*, which started with free tickets, this weight is lifted off of him when he learns about his father and his father's new life in Cuba. This leaves Felix free to go on with his life

and not be bogged down with questions about his father, always wondering about him.

Baseball also gives a certain freedom to Felix's mom as well. In getting the job of general manager with The Miracle she is now free to spend more time with her son. Also by telling Felix about his dad she is now free of the burden of carrying that information by herself.

As stated earlier the title Free Baseball has many meanings. Not only does it mean extra innings or the second game of a double header, it also means freedom in the literal sense. The freedom we enjoy here in America which baseball made possible for Felix and his mom.

VII. Conflict:

The conflict of this novel is internal with Felix; his internal conflict of wanting to know more about his father but being afraid of what he might find out. In the novel it was stated that Felix's mom tried to give Felix the information he wanted about his father but he wasn't ready to hear it.

This was also evident when Felix was eating before the game with Santi. Felix learned Santi knew of his father and the sad tragic story of his family. At this point Felix could have run after Santi to have him explain but he didn't.

Another example of Felix's internal conflict is when his mom comes to The Miracle's doubleheader. When Vic sends Felix to sit with his mom during the second game Felix's mom asks him if he is ready to talk about his father, but Felix instead teaches her how to keep stats.

VIII. Conflict Resolution:

Felix's internal conflict is finally resolved when he allows his mom to tell him why his father will never come to America to be with them. Upon learning that his father has a new life Felix is now free from the burden of the unknown. This freedom is evident at the end of the novel when Vic brings a display case for the baseball that Felix has that was given to his mother by his father.

IX. Characters:

Felito "Felix" Piloto de la Portilla

- Main character
- Eleven years old, almost twelve
- Born in Cuba
- Loves baseball

Coach Drew

- Felix's baseball coach

Jake

- Teammate of Felix
- Son of Coach Drew

Len Randy

- Felix wins baseball tickets from his radio station.
- Disc jockey for HOT102.

Claudia de la Portilla

- Felix's dad
- Left fielder
- Member and star of Cuban National Team

Connie

- Felix's mami
- Believes family comes before baseball

Fabiola

- Friend of Felix's mom

Tia Lupe

- Gave Felix the picture he has of his dad.
- Felix and his mother lived with her and Tio.

Tio Toni

- Uncle of Felix's dad
- Felix and his mother lived with him and Tia.

Maryann Lester

- Felix's babysitter

Dexter and Scotty

- Friend of Maryann Lester
- Teenage goons with spiked hair

Cookie

- Manager of The Miracle

Santiago "Santi" Diaz

- Catcher for The Miracle
- Puerto Rican

Bobby Piloto

- Player for The Miracle

Dicky

- Black slicked back hair
- Smokes cigars

Vic Mench

- President and general manager of The Miracles
- Dad's team won World Series with the Cardinals in 1967.
- Felix's friend

Don

- Blind radio announcer for The Miracle

Gizmo

- Seeing eye dog of Don

Homer

- Golden retriever
- Entertains at Miracle's home games
- Felix takes care of while at the ball park

Abby

- Vic's wife
- Died nine year ago of cancer

Jerome "Masher" Mashburn

- Third baseman for The Miracle

Ed Foley

- Sports columnist for the Ledger
- Finds out Felix is from East Naples

X. Setting:

This novel takes place in April, in and around the area of East Naples, Florida. There is no indication as to the year the story takes place.

XI. Interest Level and Reading Level

Interest Level: 6-8

Reading Level: 4.8

XII. Booktalk:

Felix wants to know more about his father; things his mom isn't ready to share just yet. Knowing his father was a baseball star in Cuba Felix runs away with a baseball team, unbeknownst to them, in hopes some of the Cuban players can help him. Does he find the answers he is seeking or does he just wind up in trouble?

XIII. Discussion Questions:

Pre-Reading

- Just looking at the cover what can you predict this book will be about?
- What do you think the gold circles are on the cover?
- Predict the setting of the novel by looking at the cover.
- Look closely at the cover see how it has a cracked affect? Why do you think it is like that?

Chapter 1 -

- What or who is the bambino? (page 1)

- Why do you think Felix is in such a hurry to leave baseball practice? (page 3)
- Why is Felix's mom so against baseball? (page 10)

Chapter 2

- Who do you think left a message on the machine? (page 13)
- Do you think Felix will be able to get Santiago Diaz or Bobby Piloto's attention after the game? (page 19)
- Do you think they would know Felix's dad? (page 19)
- What do you think will happen next? (page 19)

Chapter 3

- What do you think Felix is going to do? (page 31)
- How will Felix get back home? (page 32)

Chapter 4

- Why didn't Felix tell his mom the truth when he left a message? (page 39)
- Do you really think he will be able to spend the day at the ballpark? (page 43)

Chapter 5

- How is Felix going to get back home? (page 48)
- The Miracles need an office manager. Can you think of anyone who might be perfect for the job? (page 57)
- How long do you think Felix is going to get away with this? (page 60)
- What do you think Vic knows about Felix's dad? (page 65)

Chapter 6

- Do you think there is a bat stretcher? (page 78)
- Does Felix really think he is going to stay on with The Miracle? Is he just fooling himself? (page 84)

Chapter 7

- What do you think the tragedy is? (page 87)
- Who do you think was listening to Felix's phone conversation? (page 96)
- What do you think will happen now? (page 105)

Chapter 8

- Do you think Felix's mom will let him stay with the team? (page 109)

Chapter 9

- Were you surprised that Felix's mom is at the game? (page 117)
- Can you think of a solution to this problem? (page 122)
- What do you think of Felix's family's story? (page 131)

Chapter 10

- Did you think Vic would offer Felix's mom a job? (page 139)

Post Reading Questions

- What do you think should happen next?
- Do you think Felix becomes a famous baseball player?
- Now that you have read the novel. Explain the cover.

XIV. Language

- hoisted (page 27) - lifted
- machete (page 45) - a large knife that can be used as a weapon
- recanted (page 53) - took back
- haunches (page 58) - back legs
- putrid (page 75) - has a nasty smell
- blanched (page 79) - went pale
- flank (page 88) - shoulder

XV. Novel Content Standards

Grade 3:

English/Language Arts

Standard 1: 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.1.4, 3.1.6, 3.1.7, 3.1.8

Standard 3: 3.3.3, 3.3.4, 3.3.6, 3.3.8

Grade 4:

English/Language Arts

Standard 1: 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.1.6, 4.1.7

Standard 3: 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.6

Grade 5:

English/Language Arts

Standard 1: 5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.6

Standard 3: 5.3.2, 5.3.3, 5.3.4, 5.3.8

XVI: Anticipation Statements:

- Lucky charms work
- You could go to a sporting goods store and buy a bat stretcher.
- It is okay to sit wherever you want at a ball park regardless of what your tickets state.
- Dogs are smart.
- Miracles happen.
- There is more to life than baseball.

XVII: Read Aloud Passages

Passage #1: Page 13, last paragraph through page 21, first paragraph

In this passage Felix learns his mom isn't taking him to the baseball game which he won tickets for on the radio; his babysitter is. When they get to the game the sitter demands that they sit with her friends. During the game her friends pick on Felix, not letting him enjoy the game.

This passage is important because it is his anger at his mother and babysitter that leads up to his action of running away with The Miracles.

Passage #2: Beginning of page 89 through the first quarter of page 90

Felix meets Ed Foley who works for the Ledger as a sports columnist. Before Felix came over to Vic and Ed, Vic was reading a newspaper article. After Felix leaves Ed is taking notes but the reader doesn't know why. Is he doing a story on Felix or the team?

This passage leaves the reader wondering what Ed Foley is writing about for several pages. The purpose of this interaction becomes clear toward the end of the novel when Vic tells Felix he contacted his mom and she knows where Felix is.

XVIII: If you like this book, you'll love these:

Out Standing in My Field by Patrick Jennings

Strike Two by Amy Goldman Koss

Gold Dust by Chris Lynch

12 Again by Sue Corbett

XIV: Across Curriculum Connections

Connection #1: Spanish

Have a person who speaks Spanish come into the classroom and have them go over some of the words from the book.

You could also make labels in advance for different things in the classroom and have your speaker teach the class the Spanish word as he/she posts it. This will have the class learning Spanish throughout the day.

Standards: This activity does not meet any standards for language arts but this really would be a worthwhile activity.

Connection #2: Cuban Refugees

If you could find one, have a Cuban refugee come to the class and talk about their experience coming to America from Cuba. When the speaker has left have the students summarize what they learned for the speaker.

If it is impossible to find a speaker then have students in pairs peruse this website <http://balseros.miami.edu/Mainnavigation.htm>. Have students write down things they have learned in their own words and have them put together in a paragraph.

Grade 3:

English/Language Arts

Standard 1: 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.4, 3.1.6, 3.1.7., 3.1.8, 3.1.9

Standard 2: 3.2.1, 3.2.4, 3.2.5, 3.2.6

Standard 4: 3.4.3, 3.4.9, 3.4.6, 3.4.7, 3.4.8

Standard 5: 3.5.1

Standard 6: 3.6.1, 3.6.2, 3.6.3, 3.6.4, 3.6.5, 3.6.6, 3.6.7, 3.6.8

Standard 7: 3.7.1, 3.7.2

Grade 4:

English/Language Arts

Standard 1: 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.1.4, 4.1.6, 4.1.7

Standard 2: 4.2.2, 4.2.9

Standard 4: 4.4.3, 4.4.5, 4.4.10, 4.4.11, 4.4.12

Standard 6: 4.6.1, 4.6.2, 4.6.3, 4.6.4, 4.6.7, 4.6.8

Standard 7: 4.7.1, 4.7.2

Grade 5:

English/Language Arts

Standard 1: 5.1.2, 5.1.3, 5.1.4, 5.1.5, 5.1.6

Standard 2: 5.2.1, 5.2.2

Standard 4: 5.4.3, 5.4.5, 5.4.8, 5.4.9, 5.4.10

Standard 5: 5.5.6, 5.5.7

Standard 6: 5.6.1, 5.6.2, 5.6.8, 5.6.3, 5.6.4, 5.6.5, 5.6.6, 5.6.7

Standard 7: 5.7.2

XV: Resources:

Dillon, Quetzalli - friend and Spanish teacher

Domenech, Josep M. dir. Balseros. 2002. DVD. New York Group, 2006.

Stern, Steven. The Curse of the Bambino. Nar. Ben Affleck. 2003. DVD. HBO Video, 2004.

"The Cuban Rafter Phenomenon: A Unique Sea Exodus." 2004. The University of Miami Digital Library Program. 23 Jun 2008.

<<http://balseros.miami.edu/Mainnavigation.htm>.>

XVI: Book Activities:

Activity #1

Baseball: A Review Activity

*A book related activity for
Free Baseball by Sue Corbett*

Objective:

Students will review math skills recently learned.

Indiana Academic Standards:

Grade 3

Math: Standard 2: 3.2.4

Grade 4

Math: Standard 2: 4.2.4

Grade 5

Math: Standard 1: 5.1.1

Time:

One half to a whole class period

Materials:

- Bat
- Ball that is soft
- Bases
- Flash cards

Procedure:

If you can do this activity in the gym, otherwise you could do this activity in the room or outside. Place 3 bases and a home plate around the room taped to the floor or you could use desks. Students hit the ball when pitched to them and run. Fielders immediately get the ball to pitcher. When pitcher has the ball all runners must stop. Teacher approaches base where runner has stopped and flashes a multiplication fact card to both the runner and who

ever is playing that base. If the runner beats the infielder with the correct response the runner stays, if the infielder is first to answer correctly, the runner is out. Rotate fielding positions so that everyone is an infielder. More bases can be added in larger areas, less in smaller.

For 4th grade you could use both multiplication and division flash cards. For 5th grade you could use multiplication and division flash cards as well as rounding cards. Students could practice rounding whole and decimals to any place value and ordering decimals from smallest to largest and vice versa.

Assessment:

By listening to each student's answers you will get an idea of how they are grasping these mathematical ideas.

Activity #2

Baseball Science
A book related activity for
Free Baseball by Sue Corbett

Objective:

Students will utilize their measuring skills.

Indiana Academic Standards:

Grade 3

Math: 3.5.2, 3.5.9

Science: 3.5.2

Grade 4

Math: 4.5.1, 4.5.2

Science: 4.5.3

Grade 5

Science 5.5.1

Time:

- One class period

Materials:

- Paper
- Pencils
- Clipboards
- Tape measures

Procedure:

Using the link below print out enough diagrams for each student:

<http://www.hillcrestbaseball.org/Images/FieldDiagram.png>

In pairs have students take measurements of the school's baseball field. See Baseball Measurement Sheet.

When they are complete have them start their calculations.

Assessment:

Students will be assessed on the accuracy their completed sheets.

XVII: Bibliography

Free Baseball by Sue Corbett

<http://www.suecorbett.com>

<http://ideanet.doe/state.in.us/standards>

<http://www.help.lib.in.us>

<http://www.btsb.com/search/SearchResults.php>

http://wf2la7.webfeat.org/#b_Career

<http://balseros.miami.edu/Mainnavigation.htm>

<http://www.lessonplanspage.com/PEMathKickBall46Idea.htm>

<http://www.hillcrestbaseball.org/Images/FieldDiagram.png>

Baseball Field Measurements

Distance from home plate to first _____

Distance from first to second _____

Distance from home to second _____

Distance from second to third _____

Distance from home to third _____

Dimensions of home plate _____

Dimensions of first, second or third base _____

Distance from home to pitcher's rubber

Distance from pitchers rubber to second base _____

If you were to hit a home run what part of the outfield would you hit it in?

What is the distance between home plate and the edge of dirt on both base lines?

Calculate the area of the infield grass.

Calculate the area of the infield.

Calculate the area of the dirt.

Remember to show work and use labels!!