

# **YOUNG HOOSIER BOOK AWARD NOVEL RESOURCE**

BY SUSAN REIFF

## **Free Baseball by Sue Corbett**

**Published by Puffin Books, the Penguin Group 2006**

### **ABOUT SUE CORBETT**

Sue Corbett, the daughter of immigrants from Ireland, grew up in Long Island, New York. She went to college at Fairfield University and she was a journalism graduate at University of Missouri. Ms. Corbett started her career in the southern states as a journalist in television and writing, and she was also a regular magazine contributor. Currently she lives in Virginia with her husband, 3 children, and a dog as their pet. This is her second young reader novel. Her first was *12 Again* which won the 2006 Young California Readers' Award. Other awards that *Free Baseball* has won include: Maryland Black-Eyed Susan finalist, Nutmeg Book Award finalist, South Carolina Book Award finalist, and Virginia Readers' Choice Awards finalist. The author's personal website is; <http://www.suecorbett.com>



### **ANNOTATION**

Corbett, Sue, Free Baseball, Puffin Books, 2006

This author has won several awards in children's literature. She wrote another award nominee about growing up Hispanic in America. Corbett intends for the reader to get a better understanding of the situation in Cuba, and how many refugees have dangerously made their way to the U.S. Young adults will also get several mini-lessons in professional baseball and its terminology.

## **GENRE**

Realistic Fiction is the genre of this novel.

## **POINT OF VIEW**

Free Baseball is written in the third person, but it is told from the eyes of an eleven year old boy.

## **THEME**

There is a known term among baseball lovers called “free baseball”. This is baseball that goes into extra innings, and you end up getting more baseball than you paid for. Baseball fans really love doubleheaders because they include an entire free game. The overall theme of this novel is about a young boy finding his own place in the world. Felix Piloto discovers much more information about his father than just the one thing he’s always known – his father was a famous Cuban National Baseball Team member. Even though he hasn’t seen or heard from his dad since baby Felix left Cuba 10 years ago on an illegal boat, he has very close emotional ties through the love of baseball with his dad.

## **CONFLICT**

The first problem we come across in the story is Felix’s dislike of his mother’s lack of attention towards him. This conflict is external. It is between Felix and his mother. He needs to somehow get her attention, and then maybe she will go to a minor league game with him and not hire a babysitter.

Felix, our 11 year old major character, also has inner turmoil (internal conflict with self). He knows he is an ace fielder for his Little League team, the Tigers. He must find out more about his past and where he really came from. He knows his father was famous in Cuba, but why won’t his mom tell him the entire story? He must set out and discover it for himself. He hastily decides to runaway with a Florida minor league team to be their bat boy.

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Felix solves the smaller problem of where his roots come from by joining the Miracles team and asking trustworthy players information about his father. He discovers his dad really was a great player who couldn’t ever defect from Cuba. He also convinces his mother that he is mature enough to handle the whole story about their midnight escape from Cuba to the United States.

The major conflict of the story begins to be solved at the same time as the heart to heart conversation with Mami. He finally makes her see that he truly needs her attention, and she needs to participate more often with him. Mami discovers that even though she is the single breadwinner for the family, she also is only parent. She realizes he truly requires her ability to share his love of baseball and love of their heritage.

## **CHARACTERS**

The major character is 11 year old Felix Piloto, great fielder for his Tigers baseball team. He is the son the caring son of Claudio de la Portilla, a well-respected Cuban National Baseball player. Felix lives with his mom in Naples, Florida. He is a smart and determined boy who must continue to search for information on his famous father and himself.

The next important character is Felix's mom, Mami or Mrs. Piloto. She is an overprotective single mom in her early thirties, and the only family she has in Florida are members of her former husband's family. Mami is a smart woman who is attending college classes. She has an important job that calls on her too frequently as a computer technician for city hall. She works countless hours and doesn't have much time for Felix.

Another major character is Vic, the manager of the Miracles baseball team. He was widowed several years ago and can't stay overnight in his home because of the loneliness and memories that still affect him. He is somewhat older than Felix's parents, but he befriends, trusts, and cares for Felix.

The final major character is Homer, Vic's dog and Miracles' mascot. At times Homer seems almost human. He is extremely smart and predicting for a dog, and he instantly loves Felix. Homer seems to have some magic about him. The fans love Homer too because he runs the bases and fetches baseballs. Homer's character is based on a real team's mascot in Pompano Beach, Florida named Jericho.

Rounding out the list of characters are the minor ones. Felix's dad, Claudio de la Portilla, is referred to and mentioned several times throughout the story. He chose to send his family of 2 on the boat that didn't have enough room for him. He ended up being punished and banned from Cuban baseball for 2 years because his family fled to America. He had always planned on defecting from Cuba through baseball, but the government never allowed that to happen. The other minor characters were the minor league players that quickly became great friends with Felix when he became their batboy. They were Bobby, Masher, and Santi.

## **SETTING**

The setting for this story is during the present. It begins in Southern Florida on the Little League baseball diamond. Many flashbacks took place in Cuba and on their frightful journey across the Straits of Florida. The story continues on another baseball field, only this time it is a minor league field in Southern Florida.

## **INTEREST LEVEL AND READING LEVEL**

The interest level of this book is grades 4-7 or ages 9-12. The reading level of this novel is 5.2

## BOOKTALK

Literally and figuratively speaking baseball is in 11 year old Felix Piloto's blood. His favorite place anywhere is on a baseball diamond. He feels a strange connection to his father through baseball. Is his father still an active player for the Cuban National Team? After all he is famous in Cuba. Would anyone have heard of him in America? Surely a Hispanic player in the American leagues would know of his famous father. How would he ever get all of his important questions answered? Even if his mother had the time, she didn't think he was ready for the whole story and the complete truth. Could he convince Mami he truly was as ready as he'll ever be?

Felix has a moment's opportunity to sneak away from his babysitter into the team's dugout. This leads him to the locker room of the minor league team called the Miracles. The new batboy is late! The team needs their equipment and uniforms gathered up before they take their bus home. Are you the new batboy? Several players and even the team manager mistake his identity for the batboy who has yet to show. Yes! He is who they are looking for, so he claims. He makes the trip back to the team's home a few hours away. Where will he sleep? How long can he play the charade that might lead him to real baseball players that might know everything about his father? He is definitely hungry, and he has to find a phone to convince Mami he is just spending the night with a friend. Just how long can this dream job of being with real players day and night last, and how long until his real identity is discovered and they send him home? Felix must find a way to make this all work.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 1 - pre-reading/ Who has some previous knowledge or experience with baseball or softball? What are some terms and phrases about baseball you have heard on TV or from your coaches? What might the title Free Baseball be referring to?

During reading/ Felix's favorite spot on Earth is on a baseball diamond. Where is yours? (p.1) Describe and demonstrate how Coach Drew explained how to correctly bunt. (p.2)

Post-reading/ What was the white lie Felix told his coach? Why was Felix so intent on winning the radio station contest?

Chapter 2 – pre-reading/ Predict whether or not Felix and Mami will actually get to go to the game. During reading/ Just how much did Felix know about the home team?(p.19)

How does Felix describe school on the day of the big game?(p.11) Describe how Felix reacts when he discovers Mami can't take him to the game.(p.14) post-reading/What was your reaction to the way Maryann's friends treated Felix?

Chapter 3 – pre-reading/What prediction can you make about why this chapter is titled "The New Batboy"? During reading/ Describe the locker room when Felix was first finding his way around.(p.26) What do you think is meant by the quote on p. 29, "Ay! Tu hablas español."? Post-reading/ How would you have felt if your name was publicly announced, especially if it referred to your babysitter?

Chapter 4 – pre-reading/Elaborate on an experience you might have had that made you extremely uncomfortable such as being cooped up in a small, tight space. During Reading/ Describe the space in the baggage compartment.(p.33) How did Nick compare his running away to that of his mom's? (p.34) Post-reading/ Which player or players do you think Nick was most comfortable talking to? What made Diaz so interesting to Felix?

Chapter 5 – Pre-reading/ What excuse do you think Maryann gave to Felix’s mom about Felix missing? During reading / How did he explain his age and missing school to the team and manager? (p.50) Post-reading/ Evaluate the situation when Homer and Felix first met each other. Determine why Felix had an Egrets jersey when he was now employed by the Miracles. What was so unusual about the radio announcer?

Chapter 6 - Pre-reading/ What has been the conflict between Felix and his mother up to this point? During reading / Elaborate on the image Felix painted when describing meeting Maim in the boxing ring ( p. 66) Find the passage in the story that explains why Vic can’t sell his house (p. 68) post-reading/ Reconstruct the scene that describes the bat stretcher and why it was important to the story.

Chapter 7 - pre-reading / What might be the different implications of the word “stretch” used as a chapter title in a story about baseball? During reading / Summarize the scene where Felix realizes his father will never get to see him play baseball. (p.91) post-reading/ Find the Spanish words and phrases used in this chapter and translate them using the glossary in the back of the book.

Chapter 8 – pre-reading/ What is meant by telling a fib? During reading/ What was the fib that Vic confessed to telling? (p.106) Post-reading/ Do you agree with Vic calling Felix’s mother?

Chapter 9 – pre-reading/ How might a minor league coach be experienced with talking to his young players’ parents? During reading/ Explain why Felix was the given the day off during a ballgame? ( p.118) post-reading/ Do you feel Felix was mature enough and ready to hear the true story about their escape to America?

## **LANGUAGE**

Words that might need defined. DEFECT: Leaving one’s home country. As a baby, Felix had to defect from Cuba with his mother. (p.123) HYBRID: A combination of different things. Felix was a hybrid in the U.S. and Vic’s tomatoes were grown as hybrids ( p.133) HOISTED: To lift something up. Felix had hoisted the bag over his shoulder (p.27)

## **INDIANA ACADEMIC STANDARDS MET BY NOVEL CONTENT**

Grade 3 English/Language arts - 3.1.3,3.1.4,3.1.5,3.1.9,3.3.2,3.3.4, &3.3.6

Math – 3.1.1.3.1.12,3.1.14,3.2.1,&3.6.1

Science – 3.1.3

Social studies 3.1.7,3.2.2,&3.2.5

Grade 4 English/Language Arts – 4.1.1,4.1.3,4.1.6,4.3.2,4.3.3,&4.3.5  
Math – 4.1.1,4.2.14.6.2,4.2.12,&4.5.2  
Science – 4.2.4,4.2.6,&4.2.7  
Social Studies – 4.2.6 & 4.3.10

Grade 5 English/ Language Arts – 5.1.1,5.1.3,5.1.4,5.1.5,5.1.6.5.3.1,5.3.2,&5.3.4  
Math – 5.3.1,5.3.7,5.6.2,5.6.4,&5.7.1  
Science – 5.1.6&5.2.6  
Social Studies – 5.1.19,5.2.5,5.2.8,5.3.8,&5.4.3

## ANTICIPATION STATEMENTS

Answer A for agree and D for disagree before Free Baseball is introduced. Write A and D to the same statements after the story has been completed.

1. There really isn't such a thing as "free baseball".\_\_\_\_\_
2. A working mom should never miss her child's sport or event even if it threatens her job.\_\_\_\_\_
3. An 11 year old could sometimes stay home without a babysitter.\_\_\_\_\_
4. Minor League Baseball is just as exciting as the MLB.\_\_\_\_
5. The United States is most likely the only country that loves baseball.\_\_\_\_
6. The country of Cuba is nowhere near America.\_\_\_\_\_

## READ- ALOUD PASSAGES

In chapter 2 on page 12, I quoted a passage in module 7 because it did a good job introducing Felix, his mom, and his dad. It also gave us some insight about Felix's love for baseball and Mami's avoidance of it. "But he fought down those feelings. Tonight he was going. Maybe Mami would even enjoy it...how she had caught a foul ball hit into the stands by the All-Star outfielder, Claudio de la Portilla"

Also in chapter 2 on page 22, I quoted a passage where the conflict was beginning to build. Felix was being treated poorly by his babysitter, and he was extremely hurt that his mom wasn't the one to come with him to the game he had won tickets for. "During the seventh-inning stretch, the public-address announcer reminded everyone about the 'Diamond Dash'....He had a mountain of anger inside him-anger at Dexter for picking on him and at Maryann for letting him" .....

## **IF YOU LIKE FREE BASEBALL YOU WILL ALSO LIKE.....**

12 Again by Sue Corbett, Puffin, 2007.

Baseball Crazy by Sue Corbett, Dial, 2008. These two books are by the same author.

...And Now Miguel by Joseph Krumbold, Crowell, 1953. This young reader's novel is about about being Hispanic and living in America.

## **ACROSS THE CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

Math – Students will be learning to score and read the statistics in baseball, and they will also compare statistics in baseball.

Social Studies – Students will compare the size of Cuba to the state of Kentucky. They will also compare the government of a communist state to that of an American state.

IN Standards used

Grade 3 Social Studies – 3.2.1,3.2.2,3.2.4 &3.3.1 Science – Standard 1 Number Sense

Grade 4 Science – Standard 5 Math Social Studies 4.3.2

Grade 5 Science – 5.5.1 Math- 5.6.2 Social Studies – 5.3.1 & 5.3.2

## **RESOURCES**

The resources used to study this novel are as follows: <http://www.suecorbett.com>

Corbett, Sue, Free Baseball, Puffin Books, 2006

12 Again by Sue Corbett, Puffin, 2007.

Baseball Crazy by Sue Corbett, Dial, 2008 These titles by the same author are all about youth and they have a connection with baseball.

Indiana Academic Standards <http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/standards/welcome.html>

This website is used to get the required standards for each grade level 3-5 for this project.

## **BOOK ACTIVITIES**

1. An activity that is done with partners centers around the physical map of the U.S. on Cardinal Elementary's playground. In the classroom, pairs will research maps of Cuba and compare them to maps of the U.S. They will record 2 questions that they want to find the answer to and locate it on the outdoor map with chalk.

Soc.St.3<sup>rd</sup> – 3.3.1,3.3.2,3.3.3 4<sup>th</sup> – 4.3.2,4.3.3 5<sup>th</sup> – 5.3.2,5.3.3,5.3.5

2.Comprehension Baseball – The class is divided into 2 teams. They can choose their name, colors , and mascot. Questions will be asked of the team that is up to bat.

Questions have been premade to be worth: singles, doubles, triples, or homeruns. One spokesperson from each team decides the final answer, and after 3 outs the opposing team comes up to bat. Eng/Language Arts 3.3.3,3.3.4,3.3.6,3.3.8

4<sup>th</sup> – 4.3.2,4.3.3,4.3.5,4.3.7 5<sup>th</sup> – 5.1.2,5.1.5,5.1.6,5.3.2,5.3.3,5.3.4

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

[www.suecorbett.com](http://www.suecorbett.com)

[www.minorleaguebaseball.com/index.jsp](http://www.minorleaguebaseball.com/index.jsp)

[www.balseros.miami.edu/mainnavigation.htm](http://www.balseros.miami.edu/mainnavigation.htm)

[www.penguinroup.com](http://www.penguinroup.com)

[www.ideanet.doe.state.in.us/standards/welcome.html](http://www.ideanet.doe.state.in.us/standards/welcome.html)