

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Boy Who Saved Baseball

by
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Book Information

John H. Ritter, The Boy Who Saved Baseball

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Book Level: 4.4

Interest Level: MG

The fate of a small California town rests on the outcome of one baseball game, and Tom Gallagher hopes his team can win with the secrets of a disgraced former player, Dante Del Gato.

Award: NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts

Topics: Mysteries, Secrets; Sports/Recreation, Baseball; U.S. States/Regions, California

Main Characters

Alabaster Jones the president and owner of First Nugget Mortgage and Loan, who is in favor of development

Cruz de la Cruz a mysterious boy who rides into town to attend the baseball camp in Dillontown

Dante Del Gato a baseball legend who walked away from his team with no explanation right before the World Series and became a gruff recluse; coach of the Wildcats

Doc Altenheimer an elderly rancher who is ready to sell his property to developers; Tom's friend

Frankie Flores Tom's best friend; María's cousin

Helen Gallagher Tom's mother, who helps run the baseball camp in Dillontown

Hollis B Dillontown's "poet savant," who walks around town, talking into a broken cell phone

Jerry Gallagher Tom's dad, who runs the summer baseball camp in Dillontown

María Flores a strong member of the Wildcats who also pitches for a softball team; Frankie's cousin

Mayor Oscar Calabaza the mayor of Dillontown, who is in favor of the development

Tom Gallagher a twelve-year-old boy who does not want developers to change Dillontown

Vocabulary

boost a push or move upward or ahead; an act, happening, or circumstance that elevates, lifts, or raises something or someone; something that contributes to progress or growth; a lift; a raise

chaparral an area with dry summers, moist, cool winters, and dense, shrubby plant growth; a dense cluster of shrubs and small or stunted trees

fascinated powerfully or irresistibly drawn to something or someone; very interested; captivated; charmed or enchanted; intrigued; allured or attracted

gruff deep and raspy; having a stern manner or sound, as in a person or voice; harsh; crude; ill-tempered; grouchy; not friendly

intentions mental plans or goals; aims or purposes; reasons for doing something; desires for accomplishing something

lingered waited or stayed for a greater time than usual; was slow to leave; remained or tarried

perspective a position or view; a way of regarding a situation or subject; a viewpoint

physics the science of matter and energy and how they interact; the study of the laws and properties of matter; a class that deals with the laws and properties of matter

prophecy a prediction or foretelling about what will happen in the future; a prognostication

resumed continued to do something that was once stopped; took up again; began again; restarted; began anew

rugged hilly and rough; difficult to deal with or suffer through; tough; strong; not soft; not gentle; having been made tough or strong by hardship or hard work; able to take or suffer through hardship or difficulty

scurried ran with short, quick steps; moved quickly or in a rushed way

simulation a computer representation designed to imitate a real-world experience; a representation of reality; something that creates or provides the experience, effect, or appearance of a real-life situation

stucco made of or coated with fine plaster

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witnesses people who have seen or heard something happen; spectators who can describe what has happened; ones who can be called to testify or give personal observations

Synopsis

The future of Dillontown, a small town in rural California, is at stake. Elderly rancher Doc Altenheimer is ready to sell his 320 acres to big developers. This land includes a good part of Dillontown and its baseball field, Lucky Strike Park. After 12-year-old Tom Gallagher visits the rancher, Doc announces that his decision will be determined by a baseball game between the locals and the well-equipped summer camp team in nearby Lake View Mesa. If the Dillontown Wildcats beat the Lake View Vikings, Doc will not sell his land to the developers, but the odds are against the Dillontown Wildcats. The Vikings have beaten the Wildcats in the annual challenge game for several years.

The situation seems hopeless until a mysterious boy, Cruz de la Cruz, arrives on horseback with a baseball bat in the rifle holster on his saddle and a self-designed computer game that simulates the delivery of any pitch. Tom and Cruz also convince Dante Del Gato, a renowned Major Leaguer, to coach the team. Del Gato is a recluse and a native of Dillontown who years ago walked away from baseball with no explanation just before his team played in its first World Series.

The team practices hard, and most of the people of the town rally behind them, providing food, music, and encouragement. The Big Game seems to have reinvigorated the dying town. On the day of the game, however, Cruz de la Cruz, the star and inspiration of the Wildcats, is nowhere to be found. He was seen leaving on his horse very early that morning. The team almost loses hope, but Tom convinces them that Cruz has taught the team all they need, and they can win the game without him.

The Wildcats do win the game but discover that during the game, Doc Altenheimer had a heart attack and died. Doc has no current will and no relatives to inherit his property; it is feared that

developers will control the property after all. Everyone is feeling down until Tom reads what Doc wrote in the back of Tom's Dreamsketcher, a notebook in which Tom often draws and writes. Doc wrote a will leaving his property to Tom to do with as Tom saw fit. Dillontown is saved.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Literary Analysis

Authors sometimes use repetition in a story. In THE BOY WHO SAVED BASEBALL, wind is mentioned several times. How is wind important to the story?

Answers will vary but may include the following: Dillontown was known for its harsh and wild winds, but on the first day of summer baseball camp, there wasn't even a breeze. Right after the east wind gusted, Tom spoke up and told Doc that the Wildcats could beat the Vikings. Cruz de la Cruz rode in through the dust of the swirling wind. Blackjack Buck's prophecy mentioned the swirling wind. Cruz told a story about Babe Ruth in which the wind helped him get a home run. When Cruz explained how to throw the cross-fire hurricane, he said if the wind was just right, it would be very hard to hit. The author wrote several paragraphs describing how a lot depends upon the wind. In the Big Game, the wind helped win the game when Tom hit a pop fly.

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Literary Analysis

A tall tale is a humorous story with obvious exaggerations in which the hero easily does the impossible. Although THE BOY WHO SAVED BASEBALL is mainly realistic fiction, some parts have characteristics of a tall tale. Which parts of the story are like a tall tale?

The description of Cruz de la Cruz riding into Dillontown seems to fit the characteristics of a tall tale. The kids used exaggeration when they described Del Gato. One kid supposedly was electrocuted when he got too close to Del Gato's fence. It fried his skin off, and then he was eaten by the dogs before anyone could find his body. Tara reported that Del Gato ran with a pack of bloodthirsty mountain lions. Blackjack Buck made predictions that many in the town believed had come true. Del Gato explained that he hit so well because he could see the ball coming in slow motion. Cruz had a computer simulation that Tom's idea perfected, which helped the Wildcats become better hitters overnight. The wind was just right on the day of the game, so Tom's pop-up fly became a Major League pop-up, causing the Wildcats to win the game.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors

Understanding Historical and Cultural Factors

Understanding Characterization

Understanding Characterization

Comparing and Contrasting

Compare and Contrast

Understanding the Author's Craft

Understanding Author's Craft