

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Farm Team

by

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Book Information

Will Weaver, Farm Team
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With his father in jail and his mother working full-time, fourteen-year-old Billy Baggs finds himself in charge of running the family farm in northern Minnesota and having to give up the thing he loves most--baseball.

Award: ALA Best Book for Young Adults

Topics: Places, Farms; READNOW - Demco Media
Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read
Now Grades 9+; Sports/Recreation,
Baseball; U.S. States/Regions, Minnesota

Main Characters

Aaron Goldberg a nerdy young vacationer who helps Billy organize and then coach the Farm Team

Abner Baggs Billy's father, who treats him roughly and spends time in jail for vandalism

Billy Baggs a young boy whose love of baseball is threatened by his father's imprisonment and his responsibilities at home

Dale Schwartz the father of Heather Erickson's baby

Danny Boyer a large autistic boy who also joins the Farm Team

Gina Erickson Heather Erickson's younger sister

Gonzalez family migrant workers whose two sons play for the Farm Team

Harvey Olson a sheriff who is sympathetic to Abner and his family

Heather Erickson a young neighbor with an illegitimate child, who begins to pull her life together

Judge Langen the judge who sentences Abner to jail and paying restitution

King Kenwood a star pitcher and Billy's rival

Mavis Baggs Billy's mother, who builds a ball field and starts a team with Billy

Oswald Anderson the coach of the school baseball team, who tries to keep Billy playing baseball

Randy Meyers a crooked used car salesman whose lot Abner demolishes

Vocabulary

autistic suffering from a mental state marked by a lack of interest in external reality

cultivator a tool or machine used to loosen the ground and destroy weeds

hackles the hairs on the back of a dog's neck that can become erect

mucked out cleaned

Synopsis

Farm Team is the story of Billy Baggs, a teen-age boy who lives on a dairy farm in northern Minnesota. He has the talent to be a star pitcher, but a family crisis seemingly puts that dream out of reach.

Billy's father, Abner, believes he and his wife, Mavis, have been duped by Randy Meyers, a car salesman. After receiving no recompense, he takes the matter into his own hands by using his Caterpillar to crush many of the cars on the car lot. Not surprisingly, the law steps in and Abner ends up in jail for ninety days.

Billy's baseball dreams evaporate because he needs to do twice the amount of work to keep the family's dairy farm operating. Billy takes this responsibility seriously and even incorporates a new farming practice which proves successful.

His mother, Mavis, realizes the sacrifice Billy is making and suggests they build a baseball field and start a team. Despite how farfetched the idea seems, Billy and Mavis pull it off with the help of some old neighbors and new friends.

Billy's team, which he names the Farm Team, practices enough to become proficient and finally gets to prove it by playing a game against Billy's old

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city team. It turns out to be a close contest, but the Farm Team wins when Billy's dog makes a dramatic catch to end the game.

As the story ends, the reader is left thinking that Billy's family will return to normal, and Billy himself will be a success in whatever he chooses to do.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Mavis is a good influence on Billy because of the way she treats other people. List three ways in which she shows her compassion for others.

She shows Heather how to take care of her baby. She invites the Gonzalez family to stay overnight so they will not have to drive late at night. She makes sure Danny Boyer is included on the baseball team.

Literary Analysis

Billy Baggs seems to be a typical teen growing up on a farm. List three of Billy's best qualities and three of his worst qualities, and give instances from the story in which he displays each one.

Three of Billy's best qualities are his loyalty, work ethic, and honor. He shows that he is loyal to his friends by defending Heather in front of Dale Schwartz. He shows that he is hard working by taking care of the farm while Abner is in jail. He keeps his promise to Tiny Tim when he throws him a "fat" pitch in the baseball game. Three of Billy's worst qualities are his lawlessness, bad temper, and poor manners. Billy smokes cigarettes and goes for joy-rides in the truck illegally. Billy shows that he is hot-headed when he is frustrated by King Kenwood and tries to get in a fight. Billy also uses vulgar language and obscene gestures in public.

Inferential Comprehension

During the course of this story, Billy comes to many realizations about himself and life. What effect does learning that Suzy Langen works have on Billy?

He is surprised that she even has a job at all. Since her father is a judge, Billy assumes that she doesn't need to work, but she does so to be more independent from her parents. This helps Billy to see working from a different viewpoint.

Constructing Meaning

On several occasions Billy reminisces about his older brother, Robert, who died tragically in a farm accident. What does Billy mean when he says, "Family is people who leave marks on each other"?

Figuratively, he is saying a family member is so much a part of who we are that even when they're gone, our memories of them still affect us. Billy was definitely influenced by the times he and his brother shared. Literally, he could be referring to the scar that he left on Robert's chin from a baseball bat.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot The conflict in *Farm Team* begins when Abner Baggs takes the law into his own hands. Have your students brainstorm other ways that Abner could have tried to resolve the problem with Randy Meyers. Which of these would be the best?

Making Predictions Billy Baggs is profoundly affected by his older brother Robert's untimely death. He even imagines that Robert, his face formed in a cloud, is watching over the farm and baseball field. Ask your students to write a short summary of the story, in which Robert is still alive. Have them consider how some of the story's major events might be altered.

Differentiating Fact and Opinion When Billy first meets Anne Sanders, the social worker, he suspects that she works as a plainclothes FBI or Secret Service agent. He assumes she wants to put him in jail for helping Abner demolish the cars. Social workers are often portrayed in real

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life in a negative way. Have students research what a social worker does and then make a list of five ways they can help someone their own age. Have them share their ideas with the class.

Identifying Reading Strategies Abner takes a stand against someone he believes to be "crooked." Have your students choose a topic they feel strongly about and ask them to state their viewpoint on it. They should give five specific reasons why they think their view is true. For example: the San Antonio Spurs are the best team in the NBA.