

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Tangerine

by

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Book Information

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Paul, who lives in the shadow of his football-hero brother, fights for his right to play soccer despite his near-blindness.

Award: ALA Best Book for Young Adults; American Bookseller Pick of the List; BCCB Blue Ribbon Book; Edgar Award/Honor Book; Horn Book Fanfare; State Award; YALSA Top Ten

Topics: Character Traits, Self-Acceptance; Disabilities, Vision Impaired/Blind; Family Life, Brothers; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 9+; READNOW - Renaissance Learning, RLI - Grades 6-8 (Theme: Surviving); Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12; Recommended Reading, Children's Literature Choice; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice; Recommended Reading, NY Public Library 100 Best Titles; Sports/Recreation, Soccer

Main Characters

Arthur Bauer Erik Fisher's "goon" and his accomplice in the robberies

Erik Fisher Paul's eighteen-year-old brother; a star football player

Joey Costello Paul's friend from the neighborhood whose brother, Mike, is killed by lightning

Luis Cruz the older brother of Tino and Theresa, who has developed a new type of tangerine resistant to cold temperatures; he dies after being hit in the head by Arthur Bauer

Mr. Fisher Paul's father, Deputy Director of Civil Engineering, who is a fanatic about Erik's football career

Mrs. Fisher Paul's mother, who is very involved in community affairs

Paul Fisher a legally blind twelve-year-old boy who tries to remember how his eyes were damaged

Theresa & Tino Cruz seventh grade twins who become Paul's friends at Tangerine School; their family owns a citrus grove

Victor Guzman the eighth-grade captain of the soccer team at Tangerine Middle School

Vocabulary

blackjack a weapon consisting of a piece of metal enclosed with leather and a strap or springy handle

calisthenics rhythmic bodily exercises designed to improve cardiovascular health

goon a man hired to terrorize or eliminate others

smolder to burn sluggishly without flame but with much smoke

Synopsis

It is August and the Fisher family has arrived at their house in the new subdivision of Lake Windsor just outside Tangerine, Florida. Somehow it is not what they had expected with the muck, field fires, termites in the houses, and daily lightning storms.

Flashbacks during the move, starting at a new school, and making new friends on the soccer team stir memories in Paul Fisher as he struggles to remember what happened to his eyes to make him legally blind, requiring him to wear such thick glasses. Mr. Fisher is intent on getting Erik, Paul's older brother, off on the right foot with the football coach. To Paul, it seems like his father only cares about Erik's dream of playing college football. When school begins, Paul, an experienced soccer goalie, joins the middle school's soccer team. He is not allowed to play, however, because his mother tells the school about his vision. The season for Erik's high school football team is well underway when the team captain is struck by lightning and killed. Paul notices that Erik and his friend Arthur find the unfortunate death amusing. When a sinkhole

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destroys part of the Lake Windsor Middle School campus, Paul takes the opportunity to enroll at Tangerine Middle School, reportedly the tough, gang-ridden city school with a good soccer team.

At Tangerine School, Paul meets Theresa Cruz, her brother Tino, and Victor Guzman, the captain of the soccer team. The Cruz family owns a tangerine grove where their older brother Luis is developing a strain of cold-resistant fruit. During September, Paul's abilities at soccer gain him the respect of the other members, especially Victor, Tino, Maya, and Shandra. But Paul's parents, especially his father, pay no attention to Paul's games, concentrating instead on Erik's. Paul is frightened by Erik, who demonstrates an explosive temper around him. Paul's memories of earlier incidents with Erik return periodically but are never enough for Paul to fully understand what it all means.

As the month passes, Mrs. Fisher takes over as chairman of the neighborhood group to help with problems, which now include mosquitoes and robberies at many of the homes. While Erik's field goals are the talk of the newspapers, Paul's team, though undefeated, receives little attention. In October, while working on a school project, Paul visits the Cruz family's grove and becomes fascinated by Luis and his work with tangerines. He accepts Luis's offer to visit again. When the group comes to Paul's house to finish the project, Erik makes derogatory comments about the Cruzes, causing Tino to confront Erik, who in turn hits Tino across the face. A few days later, while watching football practice from under the bleachers, Paul sees Luis approach Erik and is horrified as Erik commands his friend Arthur to hit Luis with a blackjack. Paul keeps quiet because he is afraid of Erik.

A cold snap hits Tangerine on Thanksgiving, and Paul rushes to assist in an overnight attempt to save the trees. The following Tuesday, Paul learns that Luis has died from an aneurysm, which people, except for Paul, believe happened during the cold spell. At the Football Awards Night at Lake Windsor on Friday, Tino and Victor interrupt the ceremony

and beat up Erik and Arthur. Victor escapes but Tino is caught by the coach, so Paul jumps on the coach's back, forcing him to let go of Tino. Then Paul runs away from his father and the coach, only to meet up with Erik and Arthur in the dark field behind his subdivision. Erik is furious, and he threatens Paul with a baseball bat; however, Paul finally stands up to Erik. Paul tells him he and others witnessed Arthur hitting Luis. Erik smashes a headlight with the bat and leaves with Arthur, but memories of an earlier event surface for Paul. He remembers Erik with another friend accusing him of ratting on them and spraying paint in his eyes, causing the damage to his vision. Paul enters the house and confronts his parents, who realize they can no longer hide the past.

At a neighborhood meeting that Sunday, Mrs. Fisher tells the others that Erik and Arthur committed the robberies. As the Fishers ask the people to drop any charges, the police arrive and arrest Arthur in connection with the death of Luis. Then Paul agrees to give his statement to police about what he saw at the football field. That Monday, Paul and his mother are called to the principal's office at Tangerine Middle School along with Victor and Tino. While Victor and Tino receive a suspension from school, Paul is expelled from all public schools in Tangerine for assaulting the coach. The next day Tino calls informing Paul he is welcome to help out anytime at the grove and they are looking forward to having him on the soccer team next year. Paul realizes when Tino calls him "brother" that everything is okay.

Open-Ended Questions

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

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Initial Understanding

Why do you think Mr. Fisher is so determined to have Erik succeed in football?

Mr. Fisher never played football in college, so he might want Erik to be the type of student athlete that he never was. Or, considering Erik's explosive temper, perhaps Mr. Fisher is hoping that sports will help Erik relieve stress and ease his aggression.

Literary Analysis

How did events in Coach Betty Bright's track career help her to become an effective soccer coach?

Betty Bright had a terrific career as a track star, so she knew what training and discipline an athlete had to go through. Her problem during the Olympic trials when another runner punched her in the face showed how she faced difficulties. She did not whine or try to get revenge on people. Her attitude for her players reflected the same philosophy: play fair even if the other team does not.

Inferential Comprehension

Think about how Joey and Paul each react to attending Tangerine Middle School. How do their ways of dealing with similar situations differ?

Paul looks forward to being at a different school even though he has heard that it is a rough place. He accepts Theresa's guidance through the halls, is polite, and tries to get along. He decides to make the best of his new school situation, even trying out for soccer and asking to be included in group projects. Joey, however, does not accept Theresa's help and does not want anything to do with group projects or the students at the school. He complains about soccer practice and leaves the school when problems arise.

Constructing Meaning

How could an event such as having paint sprayed in a person's eyes be so traumatic it would cause the person to forget what happened? What helps trigger Paul's memory?

Students may say people who experience tragedy often desperately try to forget in order to block out the emotional pain, especially if that tragedy is caused by a loved one. Others may not feel this premise is sound enough, given the age of Paul when the event happened. Students may reason that the lights on the truck or the light outside the garage seem to aid in triggering his brain to remember.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Paul helps the Cruz family save their tangerine trees from the cold snap. Have students research fruit groves and orchards in Florida. Let them explain to the class through pictures or demonstrations the various aspects of orchard farming, including how the workers save the groves from cold weather.

Describing Actions or Events Paul has never before been through anything as frightening as the sinkhole destroying his school. Find out what a sinkhole actually is, what causes it, and how it destroys things. Have students use sand to create a model of the area and demonstrate how a sinkhole occurs.

Comparing and Contrasting For Erik and his father, football is everything, while Paul loves soccer. Have students create posters featuring the sport or activity they like most. Have students compare or contrast the pros and cons of their sport or activity with those of soccer or football.

Responding to Literature Paul learns that not telling the whole truth can hurt people in many ways. The neighborhood experiences problems due to developers not telling the truth and schools forfeit games because of lies. Paul even grew up hating himself because he did not know the truth. Have your students write a paragraph

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about how telling a lie hurt someone or how
telling the truth helped in a situation.