

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Year Mom Won the Pennant

by
Matt Christopher

Book Information

Matt Christopher, The Year Mom Won the Pennant

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Book Level: 4.0

Interest Level: LG

At first Nick is humiliated when his mother begins coaching the Thunderballs, but when the winning streak begins, he must change his tune.

Topics: Family Life, Mothers; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 4-6; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6; Series, Matt Christopher; Series, Matt Christopher Sports Stories; Sports/Recreation, Baseball

Main Characters

Bugs Wheeler catcher for the Tornadoes who teases Nick during the games

Burt Stevens the coach of the Tornadoes, who won the pennant the previous two years and has a hard time accepting Mrs. Vassey as coach

Gale Matson the Thunderballs' first baseman, who hit a homerun to win the pennant

Jabber Kane & Steve Dale Clowns' players who tease Nick about his mom coaching

Lefty Burns the Tornadoes' pitcher

Mr. and Mrs. Snow Wayne's parents

Mr. Vassey Nick's dad, who had coached the team the past four years and never won a pennant

Mrs. Vassey Nick's mom, who surprises everyone when she coaches the baseball team and wins the pennant

Nick Vassey a principal character of the story; a good baseball player who learns his mom is a good coach

Wayne Snow the Thunderballs' catcher, who comes from a wealthy family whose parents are seldom home

Vocabulary

knell a deep, mournful sound like the sound of a funeral bell

pennant the championship of a league in baseball

plate home base, usually a flat piece of heavy rubber

shag to chase and catch fly balls during batting practice

soprano the highest natural singing voice or a person having a high natural singing voice

Synopsis

Nick Vassey is worried his Thunderballs baseball team is falling apart. All the players' dads are too busy to coach the team. Without a coach, the players argue during practice and don't work very hard. Nick expects there will be no baseball this year, but then his mom volunteers to coach. Nick is shocked. He doesn't think a woman can coach baseball. He is sure they will lose. But the alternative is no baseball at all, so Nick and the rest of the team agree to let her coach.

Nick is not the only one who must get used to a woman coach. Players from the other teams tease Nick about his mom. Fans laugh when they hear her coaching, and Burt Stevens, the coach of the Tornadoes and winner of the last two pennants, declares he will not let a woman coach prevent him from winning the pennant. But Mom leads the Thunderballs to an impressive season, and Nick's confidence in her improves. Nick even becomes worried the team will lose when Mom is unable to coach one time and Dad fills in.

While all of this is going on, a subplot of the story revolves around Wayne Snow, the catcher for the Thunderballs. Nick and the other players envy Wayne's fancy things, but Wayne does not seem happy. His parents are rarely home because they are busy with their jobs. The players are surprised when Wayne goes on a family vacation, but arranges to return for the games. While the family is on vacation, Nick and some friends sneak into the

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Snow's pool. Mr. Snow finds them, but he does not become angry. Still, the boys feel guilty about trespassing. Another night, Mr. and Mrs. Snow cannot find Wayne. Nick finds him asleep in a tent in the Vassey's back yard.

In the final week of play, the Tornados beat the Thunderballs. If the Thunderballs beat the Clowns, they will win the pennant. If they lose, they will play a tie-breaker with the Tornados for the pennant. The game against the Clowns has many spectators, including Coach Stevens and Mr. and Mrs. Snow. Gale Matson hits a home run in the final inning of the game to clinch the pennant. After the game, Burt Stevens congratulates Mom and says he will treat the Vasseys to a Chinese dinner. He lost the race to the pennant and the bet with Mr. Vassey.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

When Nick found Wayne in the tent, Wayne said, "I did not mean to fall asleep. I just wanted to be here awhile, is all." Why do you think Wayne wanted to be in the tent?

Answers may vary. Some students may think he wanted to be in the tent because he liked it and because he had fun there earlier. Others may think he went to the tent because he was lonely at home.

Literary Analysis

What did Matt Christopher want to teach the reader about women coaches? How does he teach this?

Matt Christopher wanted to teach the reader that women can coach as well as men. Coaching ability is determined by knowledge of coaching strategy and ability to work with the players, not by gender. He shows this through Mom's winning record and through the changing attitudes of players, fans, and coaches toward Mom.

Inferential Comprehension

How did Nick's feelings about Mom coaching change from the beginning to the end of the story?

In the beginning of the story, Nick was embarrassed that Mom was the coach. He expected the team to lose all of the games. Eventually he became proud of the way she handled criticism. In the end, he was proud of her coaching ability.

Constructing Meaning

Nick said the Thunderballs would fall apart without a coach. Give an example from the book that shows the team was falling apart.

Before Mom began coaching, the Thunderballs' practices were disorganized. No one wanted to do anything extra, like going after foul balls or shagging balls from batting practice. They argued about whether they should practice batting or have outfield and infield practice. Everyone on the team wanted to do things his way.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Literary Features Nick was surprised when Mom asked to coach the Thunderballs because he did not think women could coach baseball. Mom pointed out that there were a lot of women in positions that men had doubts about years ago. Discuss the contributions of women in science, sports, art, literature, and other areas that interest the students. Emphasize the fact that both males and females can do many things. Ask each student to write an essay about what they would like to do when they grow up.

Understanding the Author's Craft Matt Christopher is known for his novels about sports. His skill in describing the action in sporting events makes his books exciting. Elementary school students especially like this type of action. Review a section of the book in which the author describes the action in the game. Discuss what makes the section exciting. Ask the students to write their own action stories. Remind them to use details that make the reader feel as though

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they are at the game. Ask them to make an illustration to go with the story.

Understanding the Author's Craft The reader can easily understand Nick's reactions to the events in the book because the narrator reveals many of Nick's feelings. Other characters may have had different reactions and feelings toward the same event. Discuss point of view with the students. Ask them to choose a short scene from the book and describe it from the point of view of another character. For example, it might be fun to know what Mom was thinking when Coach Stevens laughed and drove away, or what Mr. Snow was thinking when he found the boys in the pool.

Recognizing Details Although Mom had been to many of Nick's games, Nick did not think she knew anything about baseball. He was even more surprised to discover that she was a good coach. It might be fun to ask each student to interview a parent to discover an interest or ability of which the student might not be aware. Each student should write about the interview, either in a question and answer format or by writing a summary of the interview.