

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Rabbit Ears

by

### Alfred Slote

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### Book Information

Alfred Slote, Rabbit Ears  
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110 Pages  
Book Level: 3.3  
Interest Level: MG

Tip has the makings of a good pitcher, but he goes to pieces when his opponents heckle him until his younger brother offers a solution.

**Topics:** Family Life, Brothers; READNOW - Renaissance Learning, RLI - Grades 4-6 (Theme: Friends and Family); Sports/Recreation, Baseball

### Main Characters

Joe Dawkins the catcher on Tip's baseball team

Mr. and Mrs. O'Hara Tip's parents

Mr. Corunna Tip's baseball coach, who tries but can't seem to help Tip overcome his inability to ignore the other players' taunts

Roland O'Hara Tip's younger brother who has formed his own rock band

Tip O'Hara a fourteen-year-old boy who is an excellent pitcher, but he is unable to ignore the opponents' jeers

### Vocabulary

**amplifier** electronic equipment designed to increase the volume on microphones or other musical equipment

**balk** to begin the motion of pitching but fail to deliver a pitch

**cockeyed** a slang term meaning odd or unusual

**moseying** moving slowly

### Synopsis

Tip O'Hara had been a good pitcher all the years he played baseball, but now that he is in the fourteen-year-old division he is rattled by the taunts of the opposing players, coaches and fans. The

jeering bothers him so much that he begins pitching wildly and sometimes cannot get the pitch over homeplate. Everyone tells him he needs to learn to ignore the jeers, but Tip just can't seem to do that.

After pitching poorly and losing the first game, Tip hopes to avoid questions from his family about the game by taking the long way home. He manages to avoid his parents but encounters his younger brother, Roland, practicing in the basement with his rock band. Tip angrily tries to stop Roland and his band from making so much noise. He argues with Roland, who tries to talk him into giving up baseball and joining the band. Tip leaves the house and rides down to the river to his favorite fishing spot to have some peace and quiet. While thinking about how to cure his "rabbit ears" problem, Tip sees a large carp floating by. Not having a fishing rod or net, Tip decides to try to catch it with his hands. He falls into the water and temporarily snags the fish, but it gets away. Soaking wet, Tip bikes back home.

When he returns home, his parents question him about his confrontation with Roland and about his pitching problems. His father suggests he think about quitting the team, but Tip is unwilling to give up. He apologizes to Roland, who again tries to persuade him to join his rock band. The band is entering a Battle of the Bands contest and can use a fourth member. Tip declines to join the band.

The next day Tip does some jobs for some neighbor ladies and then goes to a special practice the coach has called. The coach tries to cure Tip's "rabbit ears" by having the team yell at him while he practices. Tip pitches well, and the coach thinks he will be okay. Tip knows he is not cured. In the next game, Tip again has trouble with the taunting, so his catcher, Joe Dawkins, gives him earplugs to wear. Tip is willing to try just about anything, so he puts them in. He cannot hear the jeering, but, unfortunately, he also cannot hear his teammate going for the same fly ball. He collides with the teammate, and Tip is pulled out of the game.

Tip thinks he might not be cut out for pitching and decides to quit the team. Tip's mother talks him into

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joining Roland's band. Tip calls Mr. Corunna, the coach, and tells him he is quitting, but Mr. Corunna doesn't accept this. Tip then helps Roland with his band.

One Saturday, Tip goes to the park with the Four Aces, Roland's band, to compete in the Battle of the Bands. By getting the crowd involved in a silly song, the band wins the competition. Roland hopes this means Tip will stay in the band, but Tip agrees to stay only if Roland can cure his "rabbit ears." Roland has a crazy idea to help Tip, and Tip is willing to give it a try.

Tip calls Mr. Corunna to say he has changed his mind about quitting the team. On Monday, Tip's team plays again, and Tip is ready to pitch. Mr. Corunna tells his teammates to make noise and support Tip on the mound, but Tip wants them to be quiet so that he can hear the opponents. Though this sounds crazy to Mr. Corunna, he lets Tip start as pitcher. As the opponents and fans all begin making noise, Tip takes Roland's suggestion and puts it to use. Tip picks out words from the taunting and makes songs out of them in his head. He sings them over and over to himself as he pitches, and it works. Tip pitches a great game and is cured. This means he will have to stay in Roland's band.

## Open-Ended Questions

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

### Initial Understanding

Tip mows lawns and trims bushes for some neighbor ladies even though they don't pay him much money. Why does he keep doing it?

*Tip says his father will make up the difference in pay for him, and Tip's mother tells him the ladies can't really afford to pay him more. The real reason Tip does the chores for the ladies is that he has been raised to be respectful and helpful to his elders. Tip's parents have taught him that money is not the only reward he should expect in life. Ultimately, Tip does the chores because he is a nice boy.*

### Literary Analysis

When Tip needs time to think about whether he is going to keep playing baseball or not, he goes to the river. What are some other places people go to do some thinking?

*People might choose a location that is quiet and makes them feel safe and comfortable. This location can be nearly anywhere, indoors or outdoors. Some people like to do something active while they think, and others choose to sit. Students may name places such as libraries, museums and forests.*

### Inferential Comprehension

Tip's coach tries a number of times to do what he thinks is helpful to Tip. Tip knows the coach's special practice isn't going to help him in a real game. Why does Tip feel this way?

*Playing in a game situation is always different than practice. In practice the pressure to perform well is not quite as intense. If mistakes are made in practice, there are chances to try again. Making an error in the game can cause the team to lose. Teammates might not be very upset with errors in practice, but in a game they might be if the errors result in the team's loss. Another reason practice is not the same as a game situation is because players usually do not purposely heckle their own teammates, but in a game the opponents do mean it and intentionally try to cause players to make errors.*

### Constructing Meaning

Why do you think Roland is able to convince Tip to try one last time while Tip's teammates are unable to convince him?

*After participating in the band contest with Roland, Tip feels a little closer to his brother and has a new level of respect for him. He probably feels he can trust that Roland somehow won't let him embarrass himself. He knows his teammates support him, but he also knows that nothing that they have done for him before helped.*

## Teachable Skills

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**Responding to Literature** Have students think of a situation that makes them feel tense or stressed, as Tip begins to feel on the pitcher's mound. For example, tests or music lessons may create these feelings. Have them write a poem or song to change these feelings, as Tip's nonsense song do for him.

**Recognizing Setting** Tip goes down to the river to think about his problems because it is quiet and peaceful. Ask the students to draw or describe the place they like to go for peace and quiet.

**Recognizing Feelings** To help the students understand how Tip feels while he is being heckled, arrange for the students to play a game while others heckle them. The game can involve either physical or mental challenges. Make sure each student has the chance to be the person who is being heckled. After the activity, discuss how it feels to be heckled. Discuss whether the students feel the heckling affects their performance. Consider whether heckling should be allowed in sports.

**Making Predictions** Roland is a very confident boy and seems to know just what he wants to do in life. He enjoys music and appears to understand what his audience want to hear. Have the students write a chapter about what they think will happen to Roland in the future.