

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Trading Game by Alfred Slote

Book Information

Alfred Slote, The Trading Game

Quiz Number: 5393

J.B. Lippincott, 1990

ISBN 0-397-32398-0; LCCN

200 Pages

Book Level: 3.3

Interest Level: MG

During a summer of baseball and baseball-card trading, eleven-year-old Andy makes discoveries about his father and grandfather, who played professional baseball, along with discovering himself.

Topics: Family Life, Fathers; Family Life, Grandparents; Family Life, Growing Up; Family Life, Sons; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; Sports/Recreation, Baseball

Main Characters

Alice Cartwright Andy's friend and teammate

Andy Harris the main character in the book, an eleven-year-old boy who loves baseball

Conroy Watson Tubby's father

Dick and Ruth Cartwright Alice's parents

Harold (Tubby) Watson Andy's friend and teammate

Helen Andy's father's second wife

Jamey Harris Andy's father

Jeffrey Cartwright Alice's younger brother

Jim Harris (Grampa) Andy's grandfather

Mr. Kessler Grampa's friend who owns The Grandstand

Mrs. Harris Andy's mother

Vocabulary

ominous a menacing foreshadowing of evil

overshadowed outweighed

schnozzola nose

spectators those who watch

Synopsis

Andy Harris lives with his mother in the town of Arborville. His parents divorced and his father remarried, but was killed in a car accident the previous Christmas. Andy's grandfather, Jim Harris, was a major league baseball player for a short time.

Andy loves baseball and is excited when his grandfather comes to visit during the summer. Andy's team is not doing well, and Andy hopes his grandfather will coach his team. However, Andy's mother forbids him to ask his grandfather to coach. Andy's mother is afraid that the exertion will harm his grandfather, who has a heart condition and is also worried about the effect Grampa's coaching may have on Andy and the team, since Grampa is "a competitor."

When Andy's grandfather arrives, he has Andy's father's baseball-card collection with him. Andy is not much of a baseball-card collector, but his friends Tubby and Alice are avid collectors. The only card Andy wants to own is the Ace 459, his grandfather's card. Although the book price for the card is only twenty-five cents, Tubby knows that to Andy, the card is priceless. Tubby agrees to give the card to Andy in exchange for a card worth \$2,500 from his father's collection. Alice, feeling this is unfair, takes the card and throws Tubby a quarter. Later, she drops the card off at Andy's house for him. Tubby and his father go to Alice's house to discuss the situation with Alice and her parents. Tubby maintains that the card is worth whatever someone will pay for it, but his father points out that friendship is worth something too, and sometimes people should just do what is right.

Grampa ends up coaching the team the day before their first game, and under his instruction the team greatly improves in only one practice. Andy is up to bat at the end of the game with two outs. Andy makes a great hit, and begins to run the bases for a home run. When his friend, Tubby, who is a catcher, freezes in place as Andy is running toward home, Andy chooses to avoid running into him. This decision costs Andy's team the winning run and

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makes his grandfather very angry. Andy realizes that although he and his grandfather both love baseball, his grandfather plays to win no matter what the cost, while Andy is less competitive and cannot choose to hurt a friend on the field or off.

When Andy's grandfather has a heart attack after the game, and Andy discovers Grampa will need surgery, he looks into selling the baseball-card collection to help pay for the surgery.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why did Andy want the Ace 459 card so much?

He had always identified with his grandfather and was proud of him; his family was important to him.

Literary Analysis

Why do you think Andy chose to lose the game rather than hurt a friend?

Andy felt sorry for him; it was only a practice game, and Tubby was unable to move out of the way.

Inferential Comprehension

Compare two of the main characters. How are they the same? How are they different?

Some of the characters and traits the students may identify are Andy--athletic, uninterested in money, proud of family, unwilling to hurt a friend; Tubby--unathletic, avid collector, proud of being rich; Alice--athletic, strong sense of right and wrong, willing to help a friend; Grampa--athletic, impatient with any perceived weakness, stubborn, independent.

Constructing Meaning

When you read that Grampa was going to coach the team, what did you think would happen? What parts of the story made you think that?

Most students will probably pick up on the foreshadowing of Grampa's heart attack and/or the foreshadowing of Grampa's competitive, win-at-all-costs attitude.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot In this story, Andy is willing to trade a \$2,500 baseball card for one worth twenty-five cents. Bring several packs of baseball cards to class and divide the students into groups. Give each group some baseball cards, and have the students go to the library and research the value of the cards. Have a class discussion or invite a guest speaker to discuss baseball-card trading.

Understanding Characterization At the beginning of the book, Andy identifies with Grampa, but by the end of the book he identifies with his dad. Have the students create a before and after advertisement using pictures from magazines to show how Andy's perception of himself has changed.

Describing Actions or Events The author provides a lot of detail when describing Grampa's coaching of the team. Have the students write a newspaper article about the game that provides answers to the six important information questions (who, what, where, when, why, and how). Have a class discussion about the differences in describing a scene for a novel and for a newspaper article.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning Have the students picture themselves at the practice game. Ask them to write a one page paper on what they see, hear, feel, taste, and smell while watching the game. Remind them to include as many details as possible in order to make the scene "come alive" for the reader.