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PEACHTREE
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Winners Take All

Written by Fred Bowen

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Also available in e-book

Ages 7–12 | Realistic Fiction
Fred Bowen Sports Stories Series
AR • AC • Lexile • F&P • GRL Q; Gr 4



ABOUT THE SERIES

Fred Bowen's fast-paced middle-grade stories offer readers themes of competition, cooperation, facing change, gender roles, overcoming challenges, and new experiences. In addition, they feature play-by-play action, snappy dialogue, and engaging plots. Bowen's books are not the usual sports-fiction fare; each book loops in a little sports history and includes back matter with fascinating glimpses into that history and the heroes who made it happen.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Kyle, a good kid, makes a bad decision to cheat in a big game. He fakes a catch to clinch the win against a long-time archrival. His teammates go wild with victory. But suddenly Kyle doesn't feel so good. His conscience is bugging him. And he feels like he's keeping a secret from his teammates, especially Claire. Kyle and Claire are good friends and her praise makes him very uncomfortable. But Kyle doesn't want to come clean and give up his hero reputation. Eventually he concocts a scheme to secretly throw a game to balance the false win and make his team even in the standings with their archrival.

Meanwhile a subplot has been building. Another kid actually saw the fake catch and is threatening to report Kyle to the Youth Baseball Commission. He says that he will keep Kyle's secret on one condition: that Kyle's team doesn't win the championship! Kyle feels trapped. He desperately wants his team to win the trophy, but if he plays hard and they win, the other kid will blab and

Kyle's secret will be out—everyone will know he cheated. He wishes he could put his life on rewind—he wouldn't fake that catch again. But there's no rewind button in life, so what can he do now?

NOTE: *This version of Brooks Spencer's Guided Novel Study is abridged and includes additions from the author where noted.*

THEMES:

Baseball | Realistic fiction | Sports history | Friendship
Honesty | Responsibility | Personal integrity
Personal character
Problems with secrets and the long-term benefits
of doing the right thing
Great and honest baseball pitcher Christy Mathewson

PRE-READING STRATEGIES

- Build interest around the book with which you are about to spend a few weeks.
- Read aloud one of the great picture books about baseball. My favorite for this is *Teammates* by Peter Golenbock. The story is based on actual events.
- Have students take this quiz silently on a scrap sheet of paper. The final answer will be what sport you are describing.
 - What sport has Angels, Giants, and Pirates?
 - In what sport are diamonds needed?
 - In what sport is stealing encouraged?
 - When is “going home” okay when you are in

the middle of playing game?

After going over the answers, work with students to brainstorm and make a list on the board of other facts they know about baseball.

- Ask how many students have played T-Ball. How many students have gone on to play in other leagues? How many girls switched to softball? What are three differences in baseball and softball? (size of ball, number of players, the way the ball is pitched) What's your favorite professional team? Who's your favorite professional player, past or present?
- Bring in an old transistor radio if you have one. Baseball games were broadcast live way before they were ever on TV. On YouTube, you can listen to famous announcers like Vince Scully and Phil Rizzuto, or famous songs like "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." You can watch/listen to Lou Gehrig's moving speech about retiring because of illness but feeling lucky to have lived such a great life.
- If your students understand puns, play the classic WHO'S ON FIRST routine by Abbott and Costello. Listen to it, then draw a baseball diamond on the board and label the players. Listen to it again and discuss.
- Kyle's grandmother is called "Honsey" in *Winners Take All*. Ask your students what they call their grandmothers and why. Traditional in the family? What the oldest grandchild called her? Accidental mispronunciation?

Note from the author Fred Bowen: *When writing Winners Take All, I was scheduled to do an online chat with students as part of a program called The Read In. I had to practice for it by "chatting" online with the director's grandmother, who turned out to be a huge baseball fan. Her online screen name was Honsey. The character in the book was going to be a grandfather but after my "chat," I changed it to a grandmother and called her...Honsey.*

WRITING PROMPTS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

aligned with Common Core Reading Standards

The following writing prompts give students a chance to pause and think about the story and the important issues it raises. Their written responses provide a great opportunity to practice their writing. After you have read aloud to your students and they have finished answering the prompts, gather them together for a whole-class

discussion. They have already thought about the story and will have a lot of opinions. Use the Wrap-Up Questions at the end to jumpstart the conversation.

CHAPTERS 1 & 2

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A. Kyle's favorite place in the world is the town baseball field, especially when his team is playing the Cubs. Describe your favorite place in the world.
- B. The Cubs players, coaches, and fans yell at the umpire when he rules against them and they lose the game. What do you think the umpire is thinking when everyone is yelling at him? (Think about how you feel when someone is yelling at you.)

CHAPTERS 3 & 4

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A. Teamwork is an important part of sports. Describe the kind of person who would make a good teammate. Now describe the kind of person whose behavior would hurt the team.
- B. Let's say that Kyle decides to tell his teammates right away that he faked the catch. Think about what he would say. Think about how Nate or Claire would react. Write a short scene starting with this line: *Kyle's teammates gathered around and tried to lift him up on their shoulders, but he twisted free and said:*

CHAPTERS 5 & 6

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A. Think about the setting of this chapter. What kind of mood does the author set? What words or phrases does he use to set that mood?
- B. Kyle says, "I'm not a cheater. I made a mistake, that's all." What do you think about that statement?

CHAPTERS 7 & 8

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A. How important is attitude in sports and in school? Write about a time when you had a bad attitude and things turned out badly, or when you had a good attitude and did better than expected.
- B. Nate and Kyle play in a playground basketball game against Bryan Ford. There are no referees. Do you think that kids' games can be fair without grown-ups enforcing the rules? Why or why not?

CHAPTERS 9 & 10

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A. Kyle is hoping that the caller didn't really see him drop the ball. Kyle wants to keep his cheating a secret. Can you think of a time that you were keeping a secret from somebody? How do you think Kyle will feel if he keeps his cheating a secret?
- B. Honsey loves baseball. If you could see into her brain, you would see a lot of baseball facts. Write about what someone would see if he or she could look into your brain.

CHAPTERS 11 & 12

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A. It looks as if the Cubs coach is going to publicly accuse Kyle of faking the catch. Write a short letter to Kyle and tell him what he should do.
- B. Kyle's team has won the championship. He didn't cheat this time, but he doesn't feel like celebrating. Why not?

CHAPTERS 13 & 14

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A. How would you feel if you were one of the Reds or one of the Cubs standing in the room when Kyle admits that he really didn't make the catch?
- B. Do you think the commissioners made the right decision? Should they have benched Kyle (not let him play) in the final game? Why or why not?

CHAPTERS 15 & 16

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A. Circle two words from the list here and explain why you think they best describe Kyle.
honest sneaky happy sad good bad kind mean
- B. Kyle spots Jason right after the game, but he doesn't care. Why doesn't seeing Jason bother Kyle anymore?

THE REAL STORY BONUS SECTION

Choose A or B and write your response:

- A. Honsey admires Hall of Famer Christy Mathewson. Write about a ball player or other grown-up whom you admire.
- B. Christy Mathewson would tell the truth *even if the truth helped the other team*. What do you think his teammates thought about him?

WRAP-UP QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What do you think is the worst part of Kyle faking the catch?
- Kyle almost told Claire that he had faked the catch. How do you think Claire would have reacted if he had? How would you have reacted?
- Would Kyle have ever told the truth if Jason had never discovered the cheating and told Coach Rolfe about it?
- How does this famous expression apply to Kyle: "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive"?
- Playing to win is exciting and fun. And winning a tight game is especially thrilling. But Kyle wants to win so much that he makes a bad decision. Why does he feel so much pressure to win?

AFTER YOU READ

- Have fun with baseball idioms and get parents involved too! The English language is full of idioms that come directly from the game of baseball—"Give me a ballpark figure," "I'll take a rain check," "Touch base with me later." (See the idiom activity sheet at the end of this guide.) Have your students ask their parents (and other grown-ups they know) for examples and then keep a running list in the classroom.
- Give each student a copy of the *Winners Take All* Multiple Choice Review Worksheets at the end of this guide. You can give it to them after finishing the book or, give it to them in sections after each group of chapters. (Answer key is provided at the end of this page.)
- Give each student a copy of the *Winners Take All* Fact or Opinion Worksheet at the end of this guide. Answer key is provided at the end of this guide.

ANSWER KEYS

Multiple Choice Review

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. b | 20. b |
| 2. c | 21. b |
| 3. c | 22. c |
| 4. a | 23. c |
| 5. b | 24. c |
| 6. a | 25. c |
| 7. c | 26. a |
| 8. b | 27. a |
| 9. c | 28. a |
| 10. a | 29. c |
| 11. a | 30. b |
| 12. c | 31. b |
| 13. b | 32. b |
| 14. a | 33. c |
| 15. c | 34. b |
| 16. b | 35. c |
| 17. c | 36. b |
| 18. b | 37. c |
| 19. c | |

Fact or Opinion?

1. F
2. F
3. O
4. F
5. F
6. O
7. F
8. O
9. O
10. O

BASEBALL:

Dugout Rivals
The Golden Glove
The Kid Coach
Lucky Enough
Perfect Game
Playoff Dreams
Throwing Heat
T.J.'s Secret Pitch
Winners Take All

FOOTBALL:

Double Reverse
Quarterback Season
Speed Demon
Touchdown Trouble

Available in the
Fred Bowen Sports
Story series

BASKETBALL:

The Final Cut
Full Court Fever
Hardcourt Comeback
Off the Rim
On the Line
Outside Shot
Real Hoops

SOCCER:

Go for the Goal!
Out of Bounds
Soccer Team Upset

REVIEWS

“A story with plenty of play-by-play action, a good plot, a valuable lesson, and some interesting baseball history... The story is told in an interesting, nondidactic manner that makes it a good baseball tale with a lesson in honesty. Bowen pitches a winner here.”

—*School Library Journal*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fred Bowen is the author of Peachtree's popular Fred Bowen Sports Story series. A lifelong sports fanatic, he has coached youth league baseball, softball, soccer, and basketball. His kids' sports column “The Score” appears each week in the KidsPost section of the *Washington Post*. Bowen lives in Maryland.

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Discussion Guide prepared by Brooks Spencer

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Multiple Choice Review**Name:** _____ **Date:** _____

1. **Chapter 1:** “Rally caps” is a term used to encourage teammates and fans to do what with their hats or caps?
 - a. throw them in the air
 - b. turn them around backwards
 - c. exchange them with the person next to them
2. Kyle didn’t seem to like Bryan Ford, but
 - a. he was his cousin
 - b. they had always been on the same team
 - c. he respected Bryan’s ability as a hitter
3. **Chapter 2:** Kyle almost immediately regretted faking the catch when
 - a. Bryan wanted to pick a fight
 - b. his dad left the ballpark in disgust
 - c. the teams’ parents were arguing with each other over the call
4. The umpires were clearly having a problem with Kyle’s catch because they
 - a. had to get out the rule book
 - b. had to call the supervisor of umpires to make the call
 - c. decided to flip a coin
5. **Chapter 3:** Why did Kyle not want to be carried on his teammate’s shoulders?
 - a. he was afraid of heights
 - b. he was feeling guilty about the fake catch
 - c. he was afraid they would drop him
6. Kyle’s grandmother, Honsey, seemed to be an expert on
 - a. baseball facts
 - b. knitting and crocheting
 - c. knowing when someone was hiding their feelings
7. **Chapter 4:** What really spoiled celebrating the victory with Claire?
 - a. The ice cream shop was closed
 - b. Claire had invited Bryan to come
 - c. The anonymous phone call to Kyle’s house
8. The anonymous caller claimed to have
 - a. seen Kyle make the catch
 - b. seen Kyle not make the catch
 - c. seen Claire make the catch instead of Kyle
9. **Chapter 5:** What did the caller threaten to do?
 - a. go to the police
 - b. write a letter to Kyle’s grandmother
 - c. tell the whole league Kyle was a cheater
10. What was Claire’s reaction to Jason’s threat?
 - a. she believed Kyle had caught the ball
 - b. she laughed because she thought it was ridiculous
 - c. she didn’t care because everyone knew that Jason was a liar
11. **Chapter 6:** Kyle’s favorite bat was a
 - a. Ken Griffey Jr. model
 - b. Babe Ruth slugger model
 - c. Mickey Mantle autographed model
12. During the Reds vs. Giants game, Kyle intentionally
 - a. hit a homerun
 - b. let the pitcher hit him
 - c. struck out
13. **Chapter 7:** “The score was knotted at 6-6” means
 - a. the score was confused
 - b. the score was tied
 - c. the score was over

14. If the runners are “at the corners,” where are they on the field?
- 1st and 3rd
 - 2nd and 3rd
 - 1st and 2nd
15. Nate and Kyle played ____ with Bryan at the park.
- Frisbee
 - bike relays
 - basketball
16. What caused Bryan to get so angry during the game?
- Nate called a foul against him
 - Kyle called a foul against him
 - Claire said he shot like a wimp
17. **Chapter 9:** What had Honsey been watching on TV when Kyle thought she was asleep?
- her favorite soap opera story
 - a movie
 - a golf tournament
18. In which sport do the players call penalties on themselves?
- tennis
 - golf
 - basketball
19. What player, who was so honest the umpire sometimes asked him to make the call, did Honsey tell Kyle about?
- Tiger Woods
 - Tom Kite
 - Christy Mathewson
20. Honsey believed
- “what goes around, comes around”
 - “a gentleman is expected to tell the truth”
 - “golfers are more honest than baseball players”
21. **Chapter 10:** “Kyle’s problem clung to him like the grass stains on his uniform.” This sentence is an example of
- alliteration
 - simile
 - personification
22. What was Kyle’s excuse for not playing well in the last regular game against the Cubs?
- he was sick
 - he was trying to throw the game
 - he couldn’t get his head into the game
23. When the ball meets the bat, it makes a *crack* sound. What example of figurative language does that represent?
- simile
 - alliteration
 - onomatopoeia
24. **Chapter 11:** How many innings does the Rising Stars League play?
- nine
 - seven
 - six
25. “The Reds bench was bedlam.” What does *bedlam* mean?
- quiet
 - calm
 - excited
26. What position did Cubs player Bryan Ford hold?
- catcher
 - pitcher
 - shortstop
27. **Chapter 12:** What was Claire calling Kyle about after they beat the Cubs?
- to tell him about the protest by the Cubs
 - to tell him to pick up his trophy from the coach
 - to take him for ice cream again

28. Who did Honsey think was as good as Willie Mays?
- Ken Griffey Jr.
 - Kyle
 - Enos Slaughter
29. **Chapter 13:** What finally made Kyle decide to tell the truth about the catch?
- everyone was shouting at him
 - he thought they would believe Jason over him
 - he would always feel guilty about it
30. How would you describe the atmosphere in the league meeting room?
- friendly
 - tense
 - quiet
31. **Chapter 14:** When Coach Daye turned away from Kyle when Kyle confessed at the meeting, we can infer
- Coach Daye was supportive of Kyle's decision to tell the truth
 - Coach Daye was disappointed in Kyle's decision to tell the truth
 - Coach Daye wanted to console the other players
32. A *unanimous* decision means all parties
- disagree
 - agree
 - are divided
33. **Chapter 15:** The way the Reds players were acting toward Kyle at the championship game, we can infer
- they didn't want him on the team
 - they were still upset with him
 - things were back to normal
34. Kyle's secret about not catching the ball had
- made him dislike baseball
 - taken all the fun out of the end of the season
 - caused him to lose all his friends
35. **Chapter 16:** What is a "full count" in baseball terms?
- 3 strikes
 - 3 strikes/2 balls
 - 3 balls/2 strikes
36. How many balls have to be called before a batter can walk to first base?
- 3
 - 4
 - 2 balls and 2 fouls
37. What is a "bunt" in baseball terms?
- a foul ball
 - when a hitter strikes at the ball while running to first
 - an intentional hit that only goes a very short distance

Figuring Out Idioms

Name: _____ Date: _____

Idioms are words or phrases that don't mean, literally, what they say. "Hold your tongue" does not mean stick your tongue out and hold it with your fingers! It means "Be quiet!" We use baseball idioms all the time. See if you can "translate" what the idioms in the following sentences mean.

1. We have to "touch base" with our mothers when we leave the movies.
2. Mr. Lee "went to bat for me" when I thought I had lost my homework.
3. Danny and George are ready to "give their pitch" for extra recess.
4. We need to get "a ballpark figure" for the cost of the picnic supplies.
5. I have to babysit tonight so I'll have to "take a rain check" on having pizza with you.
6. Jamie "hit a homerun" with his science presentation!
7. The sixth grade "dropped the ball" in the Keeping Your Hall Clean competition.
8. The boys were "out in left field" when it came to learning new dance steps.
9. Mrs. Jones is out today so Mr. Monaco is our "pinch hitter."
10. Mr. Parker's got a new job. He's "in the big leagues" now.

Extra Credit: Write the meaning of these other baseball idioms on the back of this paper:

"off base," "two strikes against him/her," "struck out," "stepped up to the plate," "knocked it out of the park," "on the ball," "threw a curve ball," "playing hardball," "the bases are loaded," "it's the bottom of the ninth inning"

Fact or Opinion?**Name:** _____ **Date:** _____

Place an “F” beside the statement if it is a **FACT** (can be proven or verified).

Place an “O” beside the statement if it is an **OPINION** (represents how someone feels about something).

- ___ 1. Christy Mathewson was a major league ball player in 1910.
- ___ 2. Mathewson was one of five players in the first group admitted to the Baseball Hall of Fame.
- ___ 3. Ty Cobb was one of the dirtiest players ever to play the game.
- ___ 4. Mathewson attended Bucknell University where he played football, basketball, and baseball.
- ___ 5. In his career, Mathewson pitched eighty shutouts.
- ___ 6. Mathewson was the best pitcher of his time.
- ___ 7. Mathewson’s great memory helped him as a pitcher.
- ___ 8. Tom Kite was not as great an athlete as Mathewson.
- ___ 9. Justin Leonard made a very bad decision to count the extra stroke if no one saw it.
- ___ 10. Players shouldn’t have to call penalties on themselves in golf.

BONUS: Practice your fact and opinion skills by writing two facts and two opinions based on *Winners Take All*.