

FENWAY FEVER TEACHER'S GUIDE AND LESSON PLANS

Contributed by Susan Vreeland, Author, Educator, and Historian



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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Billee has a knack for misquoting sayings and words. What in the world does “Samson and Goliath” mean? What image comes to mind? Who were these people, and what is the proper pairing? He also misquotes Shakespeare, using modern language and slang, as well as Einstein. Does he know that he’s making these up or not? Why doesn’t somebody correct him?
2. Consider the concept of balance. What meanings could balance have in baseball? In life? Who in the novel had it?
3. Consider the notion of “inter-connectivity.” What does balance have to do with connectedness for a ball club? For an individual? For a family?
4. To Stats, walking across the infield at Fenway Park was a sacred act, and he had the sense that he was on holy ground when he did so. Why? What is holy ground for you?
5. What does the grocery store mean to Stats? What do you think it means to Pops?
6. Stats considered Billee to be a genius because of the way he makes connections between many things. What other person that the world calls a genius made connections? What connections were they, and how did they benefit the world?
7. Pegasus is the name of the constellation of a winged, flying horse. In Greek mythology, Zeus, King of the Gods, instructs Pegasus to bring lightning and thunder from Olympus, the mountain where the gods reside. Pegasus allows the Greek hero Bellerophon to ride him in order to defeat a monster. His rider falls off his back trying to reach Mount Olympus. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Pegasus served as a symbol of wisdom and fame. In the twentieth century, psychologist Carl Jung saw in Pegasus the symbol of spiritual energy that permits access to the realm of the gods on Mount Olympus. Other sources

claim that his image is symbolic of inspiration. How do each of these symbols relate to the story? Don't be content with one or two. There are multiple connections to be made. For example, what connection can you draw between mount and mound?

8. Can anyone in class explain this sentence, appearing at the top of page 108: "The ground rule double that came next, of course, was on Billee, whose ERA, despite a ton of unearned BLR's, had ballooned from 3.13 to 9.50 in the past four weeks."? Why do you suppose the author wrote certain passages in the vernacular of baseball?

9. Billee makes a joke saying their problems are caused by a "hawk's nest monster." First, is it true? Second, what does this description also sound like?

10. What are the three meanings in Billee's phrase, "Here goes nut thing," on page 156?

11. What does Stats mean by *hawkness*, page 157?

12. What are the principles of tai chi? In what ways are they related to Fenway Park?

13. What is good, even brilliant about this sentence, on page 159?

[Teacher, read it aloud slowly. Explain Olympian, then read it once again.]

"...No occupations practiced within any of those landmark structures could compare in skill or complexity or worth to the high artwork of those men who had declared somewhere in their Olympian boyhoods the intention to dedicate their lives to mastering a child's game."

How does the context of the passage relate to Mount Olympus?

[Teacher, explain understatement. Use only examples outside this book. Then ask:]

What is the understatement that gives this sentence its power?

14. Billee comes close to defining friendship when Stats is tethered to the balloons and asks Billee why he chose to be Stats' friend. What did Billee want out of the friendship? Did he get it or would there always be some sort of imbalance between him and Stats?

15. Why was it necessary for Stats to be flying over Fenway Park for him to have the first man-to-man talk in his life?

16. To be assured of his ranking, why didn't Mark make the safer choice and sit out the game? Did he do the right thing? What quality did that decision show in him? Do you know of anyone in history who took a similar risk?

17. Why is Mark's story as a ballplayer interwoven into the greater story of Fenway Park? What does it add? What does it demonstrate about the sport? Think of the passage your teacher read aloud.

18. Why was Stats' speech so moving to the fans? What did they appreciate in it? How did they respond?

19. What does it mean that a no-hitter is borne of purely spiritual parts?

20. Why is Pops so beloved by his sons? Think of several reasons. Why is he beloved by the Red Sox Nation?

21. How do you account for Stats' healing? Is it a miracle or is it a natural outcome of his thinking? In the story, what elements may have contributed to it?

22. Looking back over the story, how do the prophecies and energies connected to the year 2012 connect with the various storylines of Mark, Pops, Stats, and Billee? Did any of them, for example, face the "end of the world" as they knew it? How does this tie into the book's opening lines?

READ ALOUD:

Just close your eyes and enjoy how John H. Ritter strings these images (word pictures) together as your teacher reads this marvelous passage aloud. Feel each image, and you'll understand the holiness of baseball in the journey of this great paragraph.

"Every clumpy crabgrass ball field in every small town across the land, with its foot-carved riverine base paths, its dented-metal Coca Cola scoreboard, its rock-clay pitcher's mound, had a bit of Fenway in it. Every dusty city dugout made of concrete blocks with splintered wood benches was made from particles of Fenway. Every empty city sandlot, every playground ball field Stats had walked past in all of his long short years held a bit of Fenway, in the same way every teardrop holds a part of the sea." (p. 161)

How do these words help you feel the unity and community of our country through Stat's eyes? That is, how is the theme of connectedness brought to life in this passage?

LITERARY WRITING TOPIC:

What does this passage on page 130 mean: "Love is love. Honor is honor. And family is family."

PERSONAL WRITING TOPICS:

1. Building Support:

On page 108, Ritter describes the ridicule that the hecklers yelled at Billee, calling him Birdbrain and Space Case. Despite the Red Sox's downward spiral, Stats asks himself why people "get like that" when the team needed enthusiastic supporters the most. What do you think is the reason for this name-calling? Do you ever see it among your classmates? What can you do to stop it?

2. Desire:

Like Billee climbing El Capitan in Yosemite National Park, like Stats pretending he's a famous pitcher, what are the things, even seemingly impossible things, that you want to do some day in your life? Billee's dreams seem to give Stats hope. Does this book give you hope? In what ways?

3. Perfection:

A perfect game is one in which no one on the opposition reaches a base.

Two parts to this writing:

A. For you, in your life, what might represent a perfect game? It might not be a game at all, although there might be opposition to your desires.

B. What would a perfect life consist of? Don't be too quick to answer this one. What you write will reveal what you value.

INDIVIDUAL CREATIVE PROJECT

Pick out one of your favorite characters in *Fenway Fever*. Write a six-line poem about the person revealing personality and certain characteristics. Have each line start with the following letters:

F
E
N
W
A
Y

GROUP CREATIVE PROJECT ON BASEBALL CARDS:

A. On page 64 you will find the customized baseball card that Stats designed for Billee. Just imagine that there are such trading cards for not only athletes, but also actors, singers, musicians, artists, dancers, rappers, and so on. Design one for a creative artist of your own choosing. Make the card have five categories like Billee's, but make the categories relate to the accomplishments and career of the person you've chosen. Do two versions for your person: one with the facts and also a humorous one that reflects the personality, flaws and all, of your chosen person.

B. Walk around the room in an inner circle and an outer circle. Stop and make five trades as you walk, one at a time. Take the time to read what others have written.

Has anyone received back the card he or she made?

[Teachers: You can assure students that they will be given back their cards. This exercise is just for sharing and exposure to other students' creativity.]

CREATIVE PROJECT SERIES ON FRIENDSHIP (GROUPS AND INDIVIDUAL)

Class discussion first: What does the novel tell us about friendship, particularly about friendship between people of considerably different ages?

A. Choose a person you know, or know of, who is at least five years older than you. This person can be ten, twenty, thirty, forty years older or more. It could be a relative, but doesn't need to be. He or she may not be a friend *yet*, but might be some day.

In class:

B. Write a description of this person in detail. Consider how this person looks, talks, and thinks; what he or she is good at and likes to do. What quality or characteristic of this person do you appreciate the most?

Homework:

C. Narrate an ideal day, imaginary or real, that you spend with this person. Write it in first person as though you are a character in your own story. Show the quality you appreciate in your friend, but do not name the quality in your story of the ideal day. Write that quality on a separate piece of paper.

The next day:

D. Pass your narration of an ideal day to another student (Reader One) who writes a sentence describing the quality expressed by the chosen person. Pass it on to a second student (Reader Two) who reads your day and the sentence written by Reader One and then writes the quality in two or three words. Pass it to Reader Three who reduces the quality to one word not mentioned by the

Writer, Reader One, or Reader Two. In this reduced form, the word will probably be a noun.

E. Compare the Writer's (that is, your own) quality written on a separate piece of paper with the qualities written by Readers One, Two, and Three.

F. Assign a one-word title to your ideal day narrative. It cannot be a proper noun (a person's name). It will most likely be a one-word naming of the quality your chosen person expresses.

G. How does your chosen friend help you and how do you help this person? Write it down on the separate page where you named the quality. It's more real when you write it down.

H. Write a sentence or paragraph of your own about friendship. Read them aloud in groups or to the whole class.

Here are some famous quotations about friendship:

[Teachers: provide a handout with these quotations. Read them aloud. Supply any needed explanations.]

a. To my friend: I love you not only for what you are, but for what I am when I am with you. I love you not only for what you have made of yourself, but for what you are making of me. -- Anonymous

b. I do not wish to treat friendships daintily, but with roughest courage. When they are real, they are not glass threads or frost-work, but the solidest thing we know. -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

c. If you have a friend worth loving, love him. Yes, and let him know that you love him, ere [before] life's evening tinge his brow with sunset glow. -- Daniel Webster Hoyt

d. In the life of a young man [or young woman] the most essential thing for happiness is the gift of friendship. -- William Osler

e. No man is useless while he has a friend.
-- Robert Louis Stevenson

f. A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him, I may think aloud. -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

g. The only way to have a friend is to be one. -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

h. Let there be no purpose in friendship save the deepening of the spirit. -- Kahlil Gibran
[The teacher should explain that here, *save* means *except for*.]

i. You can make more friends in two months by becoming more interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get people interested in you. -- Dale Carnegie

j. A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. -- Proverbs 17:17

I. Select one quote that you feel best expresses the friendship between Stats and Billee. Write out your reasons for this choice.

J. Select your favorite quote and explain in writing why you chose it.

WHOLE CLASS DISCUSSION OF HEART EXPRESSIONS

On page 110 Stats reads an article written in 1912, the year Fenway Park was built. It contains the mayor's speech at the dedication, beginning with, "This base ball playing field represents the sort of exceptional community involvement I support with all my heart."

As a class, make a list on the board of all the expressions you and your teacher can think of using the word *heart*. Here are some:
[Teacher, start them off with three or four from the top of the list. Try to get students to contribute more. You may need to explain some of the more obscure ones.]

- with all my heart
- from the bottom of my heart
- heartache
- heart felt
- heart throb (the person you have a crush on)
- dear heart
- Take heart.
- the heart of the matter
- heartbroken
- heart breaker (What's a heartbreak season, page 122?)
- after one's own heart
- at heart
- Eat your heart out.
- Have a heart.
- have one's heart in the right place
- in one's heart of hearts

- close to one's heart

1. Make up a new expression incorporating the word *heart*. Use it in a sentence. Share all sentences aloud.

2. Now write a **secret** sentence in which you somehow incorporate one of the heart expressions or your own, but keep it private. It is your own souvenir from Fenway Park, your own personal “sign of support” earned by engaging in these discussions and projects. Keep it somewhere safe.

The Teacher's Guide and Lesson Plans were developed and contributed by Susan Vreeland,
Educator, Author, and Historian.
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