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Activity Guide

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Baseball Saved Us

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ABOUT THE STORY

In the Japanese internment camps of the 1940s, there was little for young people to do. One group decided to play baseball to pass the time. This book tells about the way baseball helped the Japanese endure their time in the camps and later adjust to life outside the camps.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ken Mochizuki has lived in Seattle, Washington, for most of his life. He went to college at the University of Washington and worked as an actor and a journalist before beginning to write children's books.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Dom Lee lives in Seoul, South Korea. He went to college at Seoul National University and received a master's degree from the school of Visual Arts in New York City. He uses beeswax, oil paint, and colored pencils to create his illustrations.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask children if they have ever heard about the Japanese internment camps set up the United States in the 1940s to separate Japanese and Japanese-Americans from the rest of the population. Tell them that many Japanese people were removed from their homes and sent to these camps because the government feared that they would support the Japanese war effort. Encourage discussion about this event. Explain that the book they will read is about one of these camps.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- "How did Shorty feel about being in the camp?"
- "What was happening to Shorty's brother during his time at the camp?"
- "Why did Shorty's father decide to start a baseball team?"
- "What was the cause of Shorty's big hit?" (Draw conclusions)
- "How did baseball change Shorty's life outside the camp?" (Compare and contrast)

Vocabulary

Write these words and sentences on the chalkboard. Have children copy the sentences and write the correct word from the board in each blank.

irrigation barracks championship bleachers infield

1. People sat in the _____ to watch the baseball games.
2. Water from the _____ ditch flooded onto the dry ground.
3. Players in the _____ called out to the batters.
4. Shorty and his family had to sleep in _____.
5. Shorty's home run helped his team to win the _____.

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Social Studies: The Internment Camps

Have children work in small groups to find out about Japanese internment camps in the United States during World War II. Ask each group to focus on a particular camp and find out where it was, when it was established, how long it existed, and how many people were held there. Groups can report on what they learn to the class.

Physical Education: Baseball Players

Divide the class into nine groups, and have each group focus on one baseball position to research: catcher, pitcher, shortstop, first base, second base, third base, right field, center field, or left field. Groups can look in books about baseball to find out about their position's responsibilities and can learn about two or three great players in that position. Encourage groups to share their information with the rest of the class.

Language Arts: A Letter from the Camp

Ask children to imagine they are in Shorty's place in the camp. Have them write a letter to a friend outside the camp, describing how they feel about being in the camp and what life there is like. Children can read their letters aloud to the group when they are finished.

Social Studies: Pearl Harbor

As the book mentions, the lives of many Japanese changed after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Have children work with partners to find out what happened at Pearl Harbor. Ask them to write a brief report explaining the events of December 7, 1941.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.

Baseball and the Camps

Have children use the keywords Japanese internment camps AND baseball to find out more about the role of baseball in the camps. Ask them to jot down notes on the information they find and, if possible, to print out any pictures they locate. Children can share their findings with the rest of the class.