



A Different Game

Sylvia Olsen

Interest level: ages 8–11

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AR Quiz # 136786

Consider the following question as you read *A Different Game*:

How can friends help you in a time of great need?

Story

It's no secret. Never before has the Long Inlet Tribal School produced so many talented soccer players. In this sequel to *Murphy and Mousetrap*, the Formidable Four—Murphy, Danny, Jeff and Albert—are moving up to middle school and trying out for the soccer team. They're pretty confident that they will all make the team, but once the tryouts begin, Albert, the tribal-school superstar, plays like a second stringer and acts like a jerk. When Murphy and his friends discover the truth about their teammate, they realize that Albert is playing a whole different game.

Author

Sylvia Olsen is the author of two previous Orca Young Readers as well as two Orca Soundings. She lives in North Saanich near Victoria, British Columbia, with her partner Tom, and Jude, their very beautiful and energetic Australian shepherd.

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

- Murphy likes to look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary. Have students go back through *A Different Game* and select a number of words that are new for them. Ask them to use a dictionary—either in print or online—and record definitions for those words. Ask them to use each word in a sentence. As an added challenge, see whether students can use two or three of their new words in a single sentence!
- In chapter 14, Jeff tells Albert that friends are the best medicine there is. But friends aren't really *medicine*, right? This is what's known as a *figure of speech*. It's like saying *it's raining cats and dogs* or *I'm so hungry I could eat a horse*. Team students up and have them brainstorm a list of figures of speech they have come across, either in life or in the books they've read. Share these—and their meanings—with the class.
- *Dribble, deke, drill, trapping, blocking...*this book is full of soccer words! Have students find other examples of words related to the game of soccer. How many can they define, either from experience or just from the context of the words? See how many soccer words your class can come up with. As a group, create a soccer lexicon.
- Assign students to imagine that they are Albert. Have them write a series of journal entries that act as “snapshots” in his life as time goes on. Include his great summer playing with the guys, his feeling of slowly becoming sicker, the difficult tryouts at Riverside, his diagnosis and his reaction to his diagnosis. In the journal entries, students should be sure to have Albert reflect not only on himself and his situation, but on his friends' actions around him.

Drama

- The Formidable Four have a special cheer they like to do before games and during practice. This cheer motivates them and helps keep their spirits up. Divide students into teams of four and have them create their own team name and cheer. Share these with the class.

Science

- Use the jigsaw strategy to learn about leukemia as a class. (Budget a full class for the research, and another full class for sharing the results.) Divide students up into small groups. Assign one group to learn about the signs and symptoms of leukemia; another group to learn about the causes of leukemia; a third group to learn about how leukemia works inside our bodies to make us sick; a fourth group to learn about the different types of leukemia; a fifth group to learn about treatment options; and a final group to learn about what it's like for kids to stay in the hospital while they're undergoing cancer treatment. Students should, where possible, create visual aids to enhance their presentation.

Health/Personal Planning

- Family is very important on the reserve. For example, children call most adult males "Uncle" and most adult females "Auntie" because so many people are related by blood. In the book, have students find five other examples of how family is important. Assign students to interview five other people about how their family is important to them. These could be parents, siblings, friends or teachers. Share the results with the class.
- Murphy says Danny's the kind of guy who just gives up if his first try isn't successful. But Murphy is careful not to engage in negative thinking about making the soccer team at Riverside. Why is positive thinking so important for success? How does negative or pessimistic thinking limit our abilities to achieve great things? Discuss.
- Molly decides the friends need to organize a fundraiser to support Albert's family. Put students into small groups, and charge them with planning all the parts of a fundraiser. Guide them in thinking the task through from start to finish. A partial list follows:
 - ◆ selecting the style of fundraiser (bingo, car wash, silent auction, etc.)
 - ◆ deciding on the target audience (mall shoppers, golfers, etc.)
 - ◆ choosing a convenient date and time
 - ◆ assigning people to oversee aspects of the fundraiser (i.e., finding additional volunteer manpower, printing and distributing flyers, assembling prizes or materials, arranging for refreshments and entertainment, hosting the event, managing the monies, etc.)
 - ◆ deciding how funds will be managed/dispersed
 - ◆ managing correspondence and thank-yous
 Have groups share their prospective fundraiser with the class. Which idea is the most unique? Which would probably net the highest amount of funds?

Mathematics

- In chapter 8, Murphy does some mental math to see what his chances are of being selected for the Riverside goaltender. He reasons that he's one of three potential selections—and the others are quite good. He doesn't like his chances. What are his chances? Use this passage as an opportunity to engage your students in a discussion about probability and the terms we use to express probability.
- Albert's friends and family raise \$2200 to support his family in traveling back and forth between Vancouver while Albert undergoes treatment for his leukemia. Although there are few details in the book about which reserve Albert lives on, we get the feeling that it's somewhere near BC's lower mainland. Have students locate a number of possible First Nations reservations near Vancouver (possibilities include Squamish, Chekwelp, Cheakamus, Tsartlip, Songhees, etc.). Assign students to work in small groups and calculate the cost of a trip to Vancouver from one of these reserves. Students should be sure to include all costs, such as food, gas, ferry fare if applicable, parking and accommodation (Easter Seal House charges about \$20/night for a room, and is located a few blocks from the BC Children's Hospital). How many trips can Albert's mom afford to make with the \$2200 in donations?

Connecting to the Text

- In chapter 1, Murphy is in the net when Albert scores. Murphy acknowledges that Albert is skilled, yet he also seems confident when he shouts, "That won't happen next time," to Albert. Is there a special activity that you feel very confident at doing? Something where small setbacks are viewed as challenges and not as failures?
- At the end of chapter 6, the author uses a literary device called foreshadowing. Foreshadowing is where the author hints at something that will occur later in the story. What does Sylvia Olsen hint at in this case? How does *foreshadowing* make the story more enjoyable to the reader? Can students think of other stories—perhaps within the mystery genre—where they have encountered foreshadowing?
- A simile is a comparison using the words *like* or *as*. An example of a simile from *A Different Game* is the following: "Mrs. Adams looks tired and defeated—like she's played a hard game and lost 3–2 in overtime." Have students work in pairs to create several similes. Share them with the class.
- Make an overhead of the following list. Discuss with students some of the things that make a good story:
 - ◆ a plot that is exciting, suspenseful, baffling or extraordinary
 - ◆ interesting situations that are well explained and believable
 - ◆ characters you care enough about to make you want to keep reading

- ◆ characters you can relate to and who change and grow as they make decisions to solve problems
 - ◆ descriptions that make you feel like you're there
 - ◆ a variety of settings
 - ◆ a fast start—action, danger, humor
 - ◆ situations that provide an emotional response and give you something to think about
 - ◆ a good ending with problems solved and characters getting what they deserve
- Using these criteria, have students write a critical review of *A Different Game*. Students should ensure their review touches on a number of the criteria with examples and reasons for their assessment. Share these reviews with the class.
- Conflict is what keeps a story moving along. It's what makes things interesting! Typically, story plot follows one of these four basic patterns of conflict:
 - ◆ *Person against nature*. Tension comes from the character's battle against strong forces of nature.
 - ◆ *Person against person*. Tension comes through the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist.
 - ◆ *Person against society*. Tension comes from the main character's struggle against some societal factor that must be overcome.
 - ◆ *Person against self*. Tension is created as the protagonist faces internal conflict; the hero has two or more courses of action and must decide which course to take.

Guide students in a discussion of the kind of conflict pattern in *A Different Game*. Are there more than one, depending on which part of the story you look at? Which one predominates?

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of *A Different Game*, the four friends are nervous about going to middle school. They are used to Long Inlet Tribal School and aren't sure what to expect at Riverside. Why are people sometimes scared of change?
2. Uncle Rudy encourages the players with comments like, "Don't agonize over the last play, anticipate the next play." What does this comment mean? Is this a good way of approaching the challenges life throws at us? Why or why not?
3. In chapter 5, Molly walks with the boys after practice. Albert is extremely rude to her and puts her down as a "freak girl" and a "stupid girl." How do you think this makes Molly feel, after the support she has shown the group? Have you ever put someone down because of their gender, race or appearance? Has it happened to you? Discuss the hurt feelings that can come from making remarks like this.
4. In chapter 11, Murphy finally speaks up against Danny, who has been complaining that Albert has been getting too much attention because of his sickness. Murphy tells Danny he's not being very nice. This shows courage on Murphy's part; it takes a lot of guts to stand up to other people, especially if they are close friends. Have students journal about a time when they stood up for what was right, even if it was a scary experience. Have they ever failed to stick up for something and then regretted it later?
5. When Albert is sick, his friends are afraid. They don't know how to deal with a sick guy, or what to say. What do you think Albert would like? Why is sickness so frightening for people? What is it about illness or injury that makes it hard for us to just be ourselves?
6. Often Murphy confides in his cat, Mousetrap. Why does he do this? Do you have a special friend or animal that you can talk to? What or who is it?

Author's Note

Dear Readers,

Once I had written *Murphy and Mousetrap*, the characters in the story quickly became some of my favorite characters in any of my books. I imagined situations they could get into, friends they would make and life events that might happen. Many possible story lines came to mind—my task was to choose which one to write about. It wasn't hard to decide to write about Albert, but there will be more. The next story will probably revolve around Molly—the boys' new friend—but I'm not sure. Until then, I hope you enjoy *A Different Game*.

Sincerely,
Sylvia Olsen

Resources

Books

Fiction

- Bloor, Edward. *Tangerine*
Clements, Andrew. *Lunch Money*
Coerr, Eleanor. *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*
Fitzgerald, Dawn. *Soccer Chick Rules*
Gutman, Dan. *The Million Dollar Kick*
Karu, Tyler and Tim Karu. *Henry and the White Wolf*
Mantell, Paul and Matt Christopher. *Soccer Duel*
Negrón, Ray. *The Boy of Steel: A Baseball Dream Come True*
Richmond, Christina. *Chemo Girl: Saving the World, One Treatment at a Time*
Saltzman, David. *The Jester has Lost his Jingle*

Nonfiction

- Armstrong, Kristin. *Lance Armstrong: The Race of His Life*
Buckley, James. *Soccer Superstars (Boys Rock!)*
Clark, Brooks. *Kids' Book of Soccer: Skills, Strategies, and the Rules of the Game*
Crisfield, Deborah. *The Everything Kids' Soccer Book*
Christopher, Matt. *On the Field With Mia Hamm*
Hamm, Mia and Aaron Heifitz. *Go for the Goal: A Champion's Guide to Winning in Soccer and Life*
Keene, Nancy and Trevor Romain. *Chemo, Crazyness & Comfort: My Book About Childhood Cancer*

Online

Soccer Terminology

www.soccer-for-parents.com/soccer-terms.html

Soccer Games and Interactives

<http://funschool.kaboose.com/fun-blaster/soccer/>

Backgrounder About Leukemia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leukemia>

Leukemia in Children

http://kidshealth.org/parent/medical/cancer/cancer_leukemia.html

Cancer – a Primer for Children

http://kidshealth.org/kid/health_problems/cancer/cancer.html?tracking=K_RelatedArticle