

***Hurricane Heat***

Steven Barwin

Reading level: 3.3

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AR Quiz # 158476

Book Summary

Everything stops making sense for southpaw Travis Barkley when his parents die in a car crash and he is separated from his sister, Amanda. After years of being in the foster-care system, Travis receives a puzzling postcard from Amanda and heads to southern California to try to find her. His search is a dead-end until he meets Jessie and Ethan. With the help of his new friends, Travis continues to look for Amanda. Travis's love of baseball is rekindled when Ethan convinces him to pitch on his baseball team. His attention divided, Travis must decide between jeopardizing his chance at a future in baseball and connecting with his sister.

Prereading Ideas

- How far would you go to find someone you love?
- Why is it so important for us to fit in?
- How do you prioritize what's important to you?

Connecting to the Text

Plot

- Talk about the importance of grabbing the reader's attention in the first few pages of a book. Why is this important? Author Steven Barwin sets up excitement right away in *Hurricane Heat*, within the first paragraph. With a partner or in a small group, have students find the language that accomplishes this task.
- In the first few chapters of the book, what does Travis need? Have students boil this down to his core need (to find his sister). If desired, they can boil this down even further, to an intrapersonal level that reflects his values. As they read *Hurricane Heat*, have students keep track of the things that stand in the way of this need. Guide students to understand that this “need-it-but-can't-have-it” tension generally makes for good conflict in a book.
- A book is only exciting when the characters have to solve problems and sort out conflicts. Help students articulate the difference between problem and conflict in a story before tackling this activity. In chapter 1, we learn that Travis's sister Amanda sent him a postcard—but it was left blank. This is one example of how the author manipulates problems. How does this event propel the plot forward and deepen the conflict?
- Discuss with students the idea of a book's premise. The premise is a one-sentence summary of the main idea of the story. It's a statement of what happens to the characters as a result of the actions in the story. It's a bit different than plot, which is a listing of the events in the story. It takes a bit of practice to figure out the premise of a story. You might want to start by discussing the premise of some familiar stories, such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Three Little Pigs*, *Toy Story* or *Cinderella*. Divide students into pairs and see whether they can develop a clear statement of the premise of *Hurricane Heat*.
- The plot is how the story develops over time and as events unfold. A timeline is one way to lay out how the story evolves. Have students create a timeline for *Hurricane Heat*. If you like, spice things up a bit with this web interactive:
www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/timeline-30007.html.
 Invite students to share their timelines with the class.

Character

- Talk about what the word motivation means. Then discuss with students: characters are just like real people—they have motivations that determine how they act. There's a reason for nearly every action a character takes (or every thing a character says). Have students find three examples in *Hurricane Heat* where they clearly understand a given character's motivation for behaving in a certain way. Have them write the character's action, then beside it, write the reason why that character behaved so.
- Have students think about Travis. Is he a particularly likable character at first? What about when he first joins the baseball team, in chapter 3? How does he end up not ingratiating himself with the rest of the team? Could he do it differently—and if he could, why do you think he doesn't?

- Think about Jessie's character. Have students team up and discuss: how does she help make things happen and in turn, advance the plot? Does she fit any particular character archetype?

Theme

The theme is the “big idea” or message in a book. Often, books can have more than one theme. Have students determine the theme of *Hurricane Heat*. Is there more than one?

Vocabulary

Have students read the following section from chapter 2. Challenge them to find the most powerful, descriptive words.

I shrugged my shoulders. Just one pitch, I told myself. I stepped on the mound while Ethan retrieved the ball. He grabbed his catcher's glove from his bag, tossed me the ball and squatted behind the plate. My fingers rolled the ball in my hand, and I decided to throw a fastball. I stood at a slight angle, one foot on the rubber and the ball in my hand, chest high. I started my windup, extending the baseball behind me with my left hand. I felt how rusty I really was. I released the ball, and it smacked into Ethan's glove.

When they've finished this, ask them: What part of speech are most of those words? (students should say they're the verbs) Discuss with the students how powerful verbs can be in shaping a piece of writing. Ask them to find a passage from a different book, or from their own prior writing, and re-work the verbs to make the writing more powerful and descriptive.

Connecting to the Curriculum

English

- When Ethan takes Travis and Jessie to the foster family agency, Travis finds he can't take the first step to go through the door (ch. 4). Have students consider what might be going through Travis's mind at this moment. Ask them to choose one of the following activities to complete:
 1. Write a list of questions that Travis might have running through his mind. They might be directed at Ethan, or his sister, or the people inside the foster agency, or even himself. Maybe even his parents?
 2. Imagine that you're Travis, and you've got one chance to email your sister, Amanda, in an effort to reconnect. What do you say? How do you get to the next step?
- Jessie and Travis throw some pretty powerful sparks due to their mutual attraction. And Ethan is always urging Travis to seize the moment and ask Jessie out. Have students write out a text-to-text connection examining one or two other stories where a summer romance is involved.

- Good writing uses “showing” instead of “telling.” What do students know about this writing technique? Have them find places in the book where the “showing” language helps to create a detailed picture in the reader’s mind. Here’s an example from chapter 17: *I could barely hold in my laughter as the waiter looked at me, pursed his lips and walked away.* Can they find other examples?

Health/Personal Planning

- In chapter 7, when Ethan and Travis are conferring on the mound, the umpire calls, “You ladies done chatting?” Discuss each of the following questions with students: What is the implication, or the deeper meaning, of his words? What is it that makes some people draw disparaging comparisons to women? What does this say about our society and our beliefs? How difficult is it for girls and women to be taken seriously when these kinds of comments are so prevalent—and so accepted—within our culture?
- Travis uses Facebook to help him in his search for Amanda. Your students use Twitter, YouTube and Facebook every day, in a forum that’s much more public than what Boomers or Generation X ever grew up with. Take a moment to discuss with students the importance of their own digital footprint. Review with students the guidelines for using social media safely.
- Talk about the importance of interpersonal connection. Why is Travis so determined to find his sister? Why are we so compelled to build followers on Twitter and get friends on Facebook? What do friend counts really mean? Share with students the research of Dr. Robin Dunbar at the University of Oxford that states we can only truly manage about 150 human relationships at any given time. Use this fascinating article in *The Guardian* to kickstart your conversation: www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2010/mar/14/my-bright-idea-robin-dunbar.
- Travis meets Kevin Perry, who works at Two Oceans Tech and who has some information that can help lead him to his sister. The man says he got all he wanted in life except for a son. “Four girls—can you believe it?” he asks, and Travis nods, even though he doesn’t agree with Mr. Perry’s message (ch. 10). Discuss with students what makes Travis nod instead of speaking up. Why do we go along with other people’s biases and discriminatory behavior when we know better ourselves? What makes it so difficult for us to be true to ourselves, especially when we’re all well aware of the importance of sticking up for what we believe in?
- Experts say the majority of human communication is nonverbal. What we say to each other with our hand gestures, facial expressions and body positioning conveys more information than what we say. At the end of chapter 10, Travis notices Kevin Perry drumming his fingers on his desk, and he knows it’s time to go. Have students discuss the importance of being able to read people’s body language. Encourage them to design a role-play or skit around an instance where someone’s body language doesn’t line up with the words they’re saying.

Social Studies

- In chapter 6, when Travis tells Jessie not to be frustrated at the outcome of his visit to the foster agency, he tells her she can't blame any one person—it's just the system. But Jessie points out that the system *is* the people.

As a class, individually or with a partner, pick a system that you think could use some improvement. Maybe it's hospitals or health care. Maybe schools need to change. Maybe it's the passport office, or the library. Redesign that system. What changes would make it work?

Now reflect. Have students discuss why systems exist in the first place (hint: it isn't just to frustrate users). Why do they sometimes get so bogged down that they become inoperable?

- Task students to research either the history of organized sport, or the history of baseball. Have them write a short essay or create a PowerPoint or SlideShare presentation to share their findings with the class.

Physical Education

- Many sports require specialized equipment or uniforms. Have students make a comprehensive list of the specialized gear they need to play their preferred sport or engage in their preferred activity. Accept visual representations and diagrams, too. If time permits, invite students to share these with the class.
- What stereotypes exist around coaches? Have students draw and label a diagram of the most "coach-y" coach they can think of.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Travis's foster parents helped get him set up in Hermosa with friends of the family, and they even helped him get a job as a dishwasher. Of course, they're not his parents, which is partly why Travis is so eager to find his blood sister. Family: love them or hate them? What is your family worth to you?
2. Would achieving a fully-paid scholarship interest you? Where would you go to school, what would you take, and what sport or activity would most likely get you that scholarship? Do you think you could do it?
3. Travis cleans dishes in a restaurant to earn enough money to support his search for his sister. What's the value in working to earn your money? How would it be different for Travis if his foster parents had paid his way?
4. Travis is frustrated when the woman at the foster agency refuses to help him based on the fact that he's not the age of majority. What frustrates you about not being considered an adult?
5. When Ethan, Travis and Jessie are in the batting cages, Ethan sends up a silent prayer that he doesn't lose to Jessie, even though batting is his weakest link in baseball. What does this say about the character's ego? What does it say about his view of others, and his status in comparison to them?

6. In his search for Amanda, Travis sets up a Facebook page dedicated to his cause. What do you use Facebook for? Do you consider yourself a heavy user of social media?
7. Jessie wears a St. Christopher's medallion around her neck that her father gave to her. It's special because she feels it helps keep her safe when she's near or on the water. Do you have a prized possession? What makes it special, and why?
8. At the end of chapter 17, Travis reflects that baseball was the reason he had lost his family in the first place, and that he wasn't about to let it happen again. Why do we so often blame ourselves for events that we know we didn't really cause?
9. When Amanda and Travis are reunited in chapter 19, Amanda says they should never have been split up in the first place. She starts to talk about looking back, but then she stops herself. Why do we look back? What's the value in it? What's the risk? Contrast looking back to looking ahead. Where should we spend our energy?
10. In chapter 20, Travis thinks to himself that he doesn't have to save all his money for looking for Amanda anymore; now he can save toward his future. How does meeting one goal change all the other goals in your lineup? What do you do once you've met a given goal?

Author's note

Dear Reader,

When I came up with the idea for this book, I started to speak to lots of foster care agencies in California and was surprised to find, despite agency policy or a case worker's best efforts, siblings are often permanently separated. How frustrating would it be, I wondered, to be separated from my sister and have no way of reconnecting with her, constantly feeling like a piece of me was missing?

Baseball was the perfect venue for the story. California is one of my favorite places in the world and is known as the baseball factory of the United States, producing many talented players. As much as I like baseball and enjoy playing it, my real knowledge about baseball comes from conversations with my grandmother, who was a real expert. The Blue Jays were her team of choice, and we shared many in-depth conversations about the sport over the years. Combine all this with my passion for the mystery genre and I think I've got a book that my grandmother would be proud of!

Steven Barwin

Resources

How to Create a Slideshare Presentation

www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Slidecast-on-Slideshare

Baseball

The official site of Major League Baseball

<http://mlb.mlb.com/home>

Baseball Almanac

www.baseball-almanac.com

History of Baseball

<http://inventors.about.com/od/bstartinventions/a/Baseball.htm>

Baseball Hall of Fame

<http://baseballhall.org/museum/experience/history>

Foster Families

http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/home_family/foster_families.html

www.canadianfosterfamilyassociation.ca

Books

Fiction

Cannon, Janell. *Stellaluna*

Hawthorne, Rachel. *The Boyfriend League*

Heneghan, James and Norma Charles. *Bank Job*

Hinton, S.E. *The Outsiders*

Sonnenblick, Jordan. *Curveball: The Year I Lost my Grip*

Nonfiction

DK Eyewitness Books. *Baseball*

Levy, Janice and Whitney Martin. *Finding the Right Spot: When Kids Can't Live With Their Parents*

Nelson, Kadir. *We Are The Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball*

Sports Illustrated. *Sports Illustrated Kid Pro Files: Baseball*

Vernick, Audrey. *She Loved Baseball: The Effa Manley Story*

Wilgocki, Jennifer and Marcia Kahn Wright. *Maybe Days: A Book for Children in Foster Care*

Author Biography

Steven Barwin is a writer and teacher in Toronto, Ontario. He's written for sports, action and dramatic television shows, and has developed and written interactive DVD games. His previous novels have tackled the world of team sports, bullying and burnout. *Hurricane Heat* is his first novel in the Orca Sports series.

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