

# The Winners Take All

By Fred Bowen

## Guided Novel Study

By Brooks Spencer  
Reading Specialist/NBCT  
Cedar Lee Middle School  
Fauquier County, VA  
(Update: Brooks Spencer retired in 2015)

If you are looking for a novel to use in a class setting – guided novel study – with students who are not exactly excited about reading, this is your book. WINNERS TAKE ALL is everything you could want. It's just over 100 pages, the chapters are less than 10 pages long, so it's an easy read aloud. You can easily teach figurative language and critical thinking skills within the context of the book.

There are lots of enrichment activities that can be incorporated and themes to explore. It could be a week and a half unit to a three-week unit depending on the time you can spend.

You will love how Fred Bowen incorporates baseball facts with the story and the follow-up information at the end.

Warning, if you use this novel, make sure you have other Fred Bowen books available! Don't miss QUARTERBACK SEASON!

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

# Summary

## Winners Take All by Fred Bowen

(provided by the author)

### The Story

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. There's a lot of tension every time Kyle comes up to bat (will he strike out on purpose?) or goes after a fly ball (will he drop it?). But Kyle's drive to win proves too strong; there's no way he can throw a game.

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?

### The Audience:

*Winners Take All* is chiefly for the 8 to 12 year old crowd—boys and girls alike. Grownups will enjoy reading it aloud because of the sports-history angle: Kyle's baseball-loving grandmother tells him about Christy Mathewson, one of the first baseball Hall of Famers. Mathewson had the kind of personal integrity that kept him out of messy scrapes like the one Kyle got into.

### Themes

Personal character, friendship, the problems with secrets, and the long-term benefits of doing the right thing.

## WINNERS TAKE ALL Pre-Reading Strategies

Set the Stage – build interest around the book with which you are about to spend a few weeks.

### **Suggestions:**

**Read aloud** one of the great picture books (see list in this guide). My favorite for this is TEAMMATES by Golenbock. The story is based on actual events.

**Have fun with Baseball Idioms (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 in the guide). Have your students ask their parents (and other grownups they know) for examples and then keep a running list in the classroom.

**Trivia Questions** –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, let the students brainstorm and you and your students can make a list on the board of other facts they know about baseball.

### **Show of hands and sharing:**

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?

**Your Grandmother** – what do you call her and why?

Kyle’s grandmother is called “Honsey” in *Winners Take All*. Ask your students what they call their grandmothers. Begin with what you called your grandmother and why? Traditional in your 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 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.*

# Picture Books to have in your chalk tray

TEAMMATES – Goldenbock

HOME RUN: THE STORY OF BABE RUTH – Burleigh

STEALING HOME: JACKIE ROBINSON AGAINST THE ODDS - Burleigh

ACROSS THE ALLEY – Michelson

OLIVER’S GAME – Tavares

WE ARE THE SHIP: THE STORY OF NEGRO BASEBALL – Nelson

MIGHTY JACKIE: THE STRIKE-OUT QUEEN – Moss

MAMA PLAYED BASEBALL – Adler

LET THEM PLAY – Ellison

DIRT ON THEIR SKIRTS – Rappaport

GIRL WONDER: A BASEBALL STORY IN NINE INNINGS –

Widener

CASEY AT BAT – Bing (many authors)

WILLIE AND THE ALL-STARS – Cooper

HONUS WAGNER AND THE MOST FAMOUS BASEBALL CARD EVER – Yolen

H IS FOR HOME RUN: A BASEBALL ALPABET – Herzog

SLUGGER SAL’S SLUMP – Hoff – great for alliteration

BASEBALL SAVED US – Mochizuki – WW II internment camps

HOW GEORGIE RADBOURN SAVED BASEBALL – David

AT THE CRACK OF THE BAT: BASEBALL POEMS

EXTRA INNINGS: BASEBALL POEMS

OUT OF THE BALLPARK – Rodriguez

PLAYING RIGHT FIELD – Welch

BAT BOY AND HIS VIOLIN – Curtis

## Figuring out Idioms

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 mean in the following sentences.

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.

### Other baseball idioms:

"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"

# Winners Take All

## Multiple-Choice Review

### Chapter 1

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.

### Chapter 2

3. 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.

### Chapter 3

5. 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.

### Chapter 4

7. 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.

## Chapter 5

9. What did the caller threaten to do?
- go to the police.
  - write a letter to Kyle's grandmother.
  - tell the whole league Kyle was a cheater.
10. What was Claire's reaction to Jason's threat?
- she believed Kyle had caught the ball.
  - she laughed because she thought it was ridiculous.
  - she didn't care because everyone knew that Jason was a liar.

## Chapter 6

11. Kyle's favorite bat was a
- Ken Griffey Jr. model
  - Babe Ruth slugger model
  - Mickey Mantle autographed model
12. During the Reds-Giants game, Kyle intentionally
- hit a homerun.
  - let the pitcher hit him.
  - struck out.

## Chapter 7

13. "The score was knotted at 6-6." Means
- the score was confused
  - the score was tied
  - the score was over
14. If the runners are "at the corners" where are they on the field?
- 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>

## Chapter 8

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.

## Chapter 9

17. 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. Honsey told Kyle about what player who was so honest the umpire sometimes asked him to make the call?

- a. Tiger Woods
- b. Tom Kite
- c. Christy Mathewson

20. Honsey believed

- a. “what goes around, comes around”
- b. “ a gentleman is expected to tell the truth”
- c. “golfers are more honest than baseball players”

Chapter 10

21. “Kyle’s problem clung to him like the grass stains on his uniform.” This sentence is an example of

- a. alliteration
- b. simile
- c. personification

22. What was Kyle’s excuse for not playing well in the last regular game against the Cubs?

- a. he was sick
- b. he was trying to throw the game
- c. 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?

- a. simile
- b. alliteration
- c. onomatopoeia

Chapter 11

24. How many innings does the Rising Stars League play?

- a. nine
- b. seven
- c. six

25. “The Reds bench was bedlam.” What does *bedlam* mean?

- a. quiet
- b. calm
- c. excited

26. What position did Cubs player Bryan Ford hold?

- a. catcher
- b. pitcher
- c. shortstop

Chapter 12

27. What was Claire calling Kyle about after they beat the Cubs?

- a. to tell him about the protest by the Cubs
- b. to tell him to pick up his trophy from the coach
- c. to take him for ice cream again

28. Who did Honsey think was as good as Willie Mays?

- a. Ken Griffey, Jr.
- b. Kyle
- c. Enos Slaughter

### Chapter 13

29. 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

### Chapter 14

31. 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

### Chapter 15

33. 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

### Chapter 16

35. 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

## Winners Take All Fact or Opinion

(Questions taken from, *The Real Story*, which is the nonfiction chapter at the back of the book.)

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 to ever play the game.
- \_\_\_ 4. Mathewson attended Bucknell University where he played football, basketball and baseball.
- \_\_\_ 5. In his career, Mathewson pitched 80 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.

## ANSWER PAGE

### Winners Take All Multiple Choice Review:

#### Answers to chapter questions:

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

#### Winners Take All Fact or Opinion.

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