

Teaching *The Sweet Spot*



Sam is faced with an unexpected challenge when her baseball coach tells her that her attitude is holding her back. Her fight to gain her coach and teammate's respect leads her to face important ideas about herself, her friendships,

and her family relationships. As students read this book they should think about fairness, perseverance, and earning respect.

About the Author

Stacy Barnett Mozer is a middle grade author and an elementary teacher. During her teacher training at NYU she was introduced to the writer's workshop style of teaching writing and started her first writer's notebook. She never expected that would lead her to write "actual books," but every time she gave an assignment to her students, she would do it first. She used her own writing pieces as models in the classroom, enjoying writing in a way she had never remembered experiencing as a child.

When one of her third grade classes challenged the concept of revision, that Stacy became a novelist. The class told her that there was no way a real author who wrote real books could possibly revise their work as much as she asked them to revise. Stacy's been writing and revising her own novels ever since.

Book Stats

Grade Level Equivalent: 3-6 **Ages:** 7-11
Genre: Realistic **Pages:** 214
Themes: Fairness, perseverance, friendship, family relationships

Common Core Standards	Reading and Literature	Writing	Speaking and Listening	Language
Grade 3	3.3, 3.6	3.1, 3.8	3.1	3.3
Grade 4	4.3	4.1, 4.8	4.1	4.3
Grade 5	5.1, 5.6	5.1, 5.8	5.1	5.3

Book Summary

When thirteen-year-old Sam Barrette's baseball coach tells her that her attitude's holding her back, she wants to hit him in the head with a line drive. Why shouldn't she have an attitude? As the only girl playing in the 13U league, she's had to listen to boys and people in the stands screaming things like "Go play softball," all season, just because she's a girl. Her coach barely lets her play, even though she's one of the best hitters on the team.

All stakes now rest on Sam's performance at baseball training camp. But the moment she arrives, miscommunication sets the week up for potential disaster. Placed at the bottom with the weaker players, she will have to work her way up to A league, not only to show Coach that she can be the best team player possible, but to prove to herself that she can hold a bat with the All-Star boys.

Before Reading

Follow Your Dream All Sam wants is to play baseball but people keep standing in her way. Ask your students if they have ever wanted something really badly. What would they do if people told them that they couldn't follow their dream?

Discussion:

- Why would someone tell you that you can't do something?
- Should there be boy sports and girl sports?

Critical Thinking:

Should people who are treated badly fight back?

During Reading

Character Study (RL 3.3, 4.3, 5.1) Sam's coach feels she has an attitude. Does she? Do those traits change by the end of the story?

A **character trait** is a word that describes a character. A physical or **external trait** describes what the character looks like on the outside, but an **internal trait** focuses on a **character's** personality.

A good reader identifies a character's internal traits by noticing what the character does, says, and thinks. As your students read, have them keep track of how Sam demonstrated her traits throughout the book (Resource 1). They can then **Prove a Trait** (Resource 2) by finding a trait that is demonstrated in more than one way by the character.

Point of View (RL 3.6, 5.6) Another way we learn about character's internal traits is by noticing how other characters view the main character. As students read they can add the other character's opinions about Sam to their chart.

Students can experience different points of view by being forced to take a side. After your students finish the chapters listed below, you can assign them a point of view and have them debate the issues.

Chapter 3: On p. 16, Sam confronts her coach about travel and he tells her, "You're all attitude. Everything about you is about proving yourself, the team comes second." Sam doesn't believe this is true. Is Coach right? Is Sam?

Chapter 3: On p. 24, Sam promises her sister Deborah that she will come to her dance recital. Nancy says, "If you say you'll be there you need to mean it." Based on the evidence, is Nancy right to be worried that Sam won't come?

Chapter 5: In chapter 5, Sam and her best friend Mike get into a fight over whether or not Sam will continue to play baseball when she is older. By the end of the fight, Sam feels that Mike doesn't believe in her. Is she right? Is Mike right to think that Sam might not continue baseball when she gets older?

Chapter 18: In this chapter Steven overhears Sam calling the team she is playing on a bunch of babies. He tells her, "Instead of complaining and feeling sorry for yourself, why don't you try to have fun? If you're really good, the coaches will notice." Is Steven right? Has Sam only been thinking of herself?

(Page numbers refer to the print version of the book.)

After Reading

Expressing an Opinion (W 3.1, 4.1, 5.1) An important objective of the Common Core is for students to be able to express their opinion with reasons and information. After students read *The Sweet Spot*, have students write an expository opinion piece about the book. Here are some possible essay options:

Coach said that Sam had an attitude. Did she? Use facts from the book to support your opinion.

Sam was placed on the B league at the start of camp. Do you feel that was the correct placement? Use facts from the book to support your opinion.

Write a literary essay about *The Sweet Spot*. Pick an issue from the book you felt was important and explain why it was important and how it relates to your life.

Research the Facts (W 3.8, 4.8, 5.8)
The author of *The Sweet Spot* chose to write about discrimination in baseball. After reading *The Sweet Spot*, students can do their own research to see if this kind of discrimination happens in the real world. Students can practice taking notes on a topic, reviewing sources, and summarizing their findings.

Some resources:

Baseball for All
<http://www.baseballforall.com>

Girls Play Baseball
<http://www.girlsplaybaseball.com>

Why Can't Girls Play Baseball?
<http://time.com/3144240/mone-davis-girls-baseball>

Recommendation for Further Reading

For lists of books about girls who play sports, visit <http://SportyGirlBooks.blogspot.com>

Suggestions?

If you have any suggestions for activities that could be added, or if you have tried something with your class that you'd like to share, contact the author at mozerstacy@gmail.com.

By contacting the author and making suggestions, or sharing a wonderful classroom moment or student reviews or questions, you will also be eligible for a free 15 minute Skype visit.



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Name: _____

Date: _____

Resource 1

Record of Internal Character Traits

Page #	What the character did/said/thought	What it means
p. 1	Sam misses the ball on purpose and pretends to be upset.	This makes me think that Sam is <u>sneaky</u> because she is tricking the other team.
p. 1	Sam says, "I may have to slam the next one right at his..."	This makes me think that Sam is <u>vengeful</u> because she is planning to hit the pitcher because he doesn't think she can play.
p. 7	Sam tells coach to keep Mike in the game even though she thinks he's done.	This makes me think that Sam is <u>supportive</u> because she backs up her friend.
		This makes me think

Name: _____

Date: _____

Resource 1 Cont.

Record of _____'s Internal Character Traits

Page #	What the character did/said/thought	What it means
		This makes me think

Name: _____

Date: _____

Resource 2

Prove A Trait

