



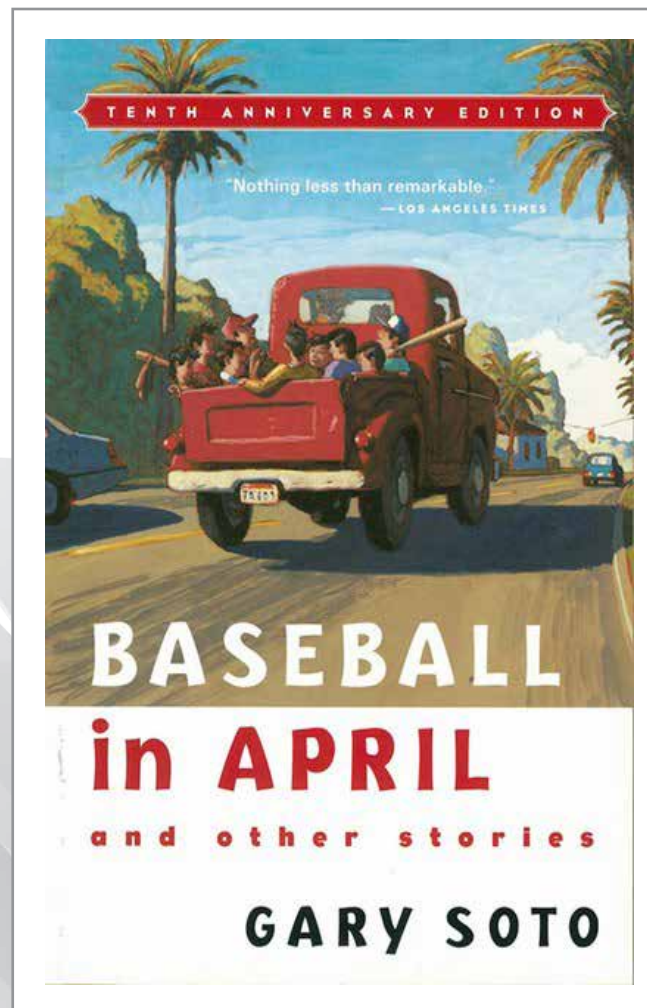
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Baseball in April and Other Stories

Gary Soto



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Baseball in April and Other Stories

Gary Soto

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Research, critical thinking,
decision making,
compare/contrast

Comprehension

Predicting, cause/effect,
evaluating decisions,
summarization

Writing

Journal, poetry, short story,
summary, letter, character
sketch

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation,
acting/drama

Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech,
pronunciation, antonyms,
glossary

Literary Elements

Conflict, irony, universal
themes, figurative language,
point of view, characterization,
setting, genre

Across the Curriculum

Science—gears, conducting
electricity; Health/Sports—
baseball, karate;
History—Confederate money;
Music—guitar; Foreign
Languages—Spanish,
French; Art—caricature,
diorama

Genre: short stories

Setting: lower-class neighborhoods of Fresno, California

Style: narrative; third-person omniscient

Tone: lighthearted, fun, often humorous

Themes: coming-of-age, race, culture, love, friendship, success/failure, life's lessons, self-discovery

Conflict: person vs. self, person vs. person, person vs. society

Date of First Publication: 1990

General Overview

In this novel, Gary Soto explores universal issues of young adolescents through the stories of 11 Latino teenagers growing up in Fresno, California. Through the children's stories, the reader is granted access to their world, experiencing the trials associated with the pre-teen and teenage years. This collection of stories provides an insider's understanding of the frustrations suffered and triumphs enjoyed through the experience of everyday juvenile activities, such as playing baseball, riding a bike, shooting marbles, or playing with Barbie dolls.

About the Author

Gary Soto was born on April 12, 1952, in Fresno, California, the second of three children born to Manuel and Angie Soto. He grew up in one of the city's *barrios*, or lower-class neighborhoods. When Soto was five years old, his father died in an accident while working at the Sun-Maid Raisin Company. Growing up in a culture of poverty, excellence in education was not something Soto pursued or achieved in childhood. He did, however, begin developing a love of reading by spending time in the school library. He attended Fresno College for two years after graduating high school. It was there that Soto discovered poetry. After two years, he transferred to California State University at Fresno where he took his first poetry class and studied under Philip Levine. Soto received a B.A. in English from California State University and an M.A. in Creative Writing from the University of California at Irvine. In 1975, he married Carolyn Oda. The couple had one daughter, Mariko Heidi. In 1977, Soto began teaching Chicano studies at the University of California at Berkeley where he continued teaching until 1993. Besides writing and teaching, Soto is also the Young People's Ambassador for the United Farm Workers of America and California Rural Legal Assistance. He currently lives in Berkeley, California.

Gary Soto's writing career began with his first book of poetry, *The Elements of San Joaquin*, published in 1977. His second volume of poetry, *The Tale of Sunlight*, was published in 1978 and nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Soto has since written many novels, volumes of poetry, and short stories for people of all ages. Among his many awards and honors are the Literature Award from the Hispanic Heritage Foundation as well as the Author-Illustrator Civil Rights Award from the National Education Association. *Baseball in April and Other Stories*, published in 1990, was Soto's first work for children. It won the California Library Association's Betty Award and was named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults. Soto continues to write and publish today.

Initiating Activities

1. Genre: As a class, use the Venn diagram on page 26 of this guide to brainstorm the differences between a novel and a short story. What literary elements are common and unique to both genres of writing?
2. Brainstorming: Using the Pros and Cons chart on page 27 of this guide, write “middle school student” at the top. Allow students to brainstorm the pros and cons of being a middle school student.
3. Writing: Have students write a short story about an event that might occur in a day in the life of a young teenager.
4. Prediction: Ask students to think about the title of the book, *Baseball in April and Other Stories*, and predict what the book will be about.
5. Diversity/Universality: Each of the book’s short stories focuses on different Latino young adults. As such, aspects of Latino culture are part of each of the main characters’ lives. Discuss how people of all races, ethnicities, or cultures can relate to a book whose main characters are a part of one specific culture. Then discuss the benefits of reading books about people from a variety of cultures and backgrounds.

Vocabulary	
	craning
	ambitious
	stucco
	assured
	bickering
	gusto

Discussion Questions

1. What kind of relationship do Hector and Luis seem to have? What qualities about each of them are factors in this relationship? (*They seem good-natured toward each other, and both seem to esteem the other for different reasons even though they are separated by an entire generation. Luis values his grandson's abilities to speak English and evaluate real estate costs, perhaps because Hector has grown up in the United States. Hector respects his grandfather's age and wisdom and feels very young and ignorant compared to the adults he deals with in the story.*)
2. Do you agree or disagree with Luis' wife that Luis should not think about buying a second house? Explain. (*Some may think she is being reasonable because they don't have enough money to buy a second house just to resell it. Others may think she is too harsh and that she should support her husband in his dream of taking a risk in order to become more financially secure.*)
3. Luis offers Hector money and a Confederate bill to call the realtor for him. Do you think it is worth it? Why doesn't Luis make the phone calls himself? (*Clearly, Luis doesn't get his money's worth on either phone call because Grandma's arrival cuts both calls short. By having Hector call the realtor, Luis feels more detached from the process. He knows his wife disapproves of the venture, so by not actually making the call, he is less liable for investigating the cost of the house that is for sale. Another reason Luis does not want to call could be that he feels intimidated talking to people who are native English speakers and may feel that his grandson can have a better English conversation because Hector was raised in America.*)
4. Do you think Luis will ever buy a house to resell? Why or why not? (*Answers will vary.*)
5. Discuss the significance of the title of the story. Who are the dreamers? What are their dreams? What are some of the obstacles they must face to achieve their dreams? (*Luis and Hector; Luis has a dream of retiring in Mexico as a rich man. However, he must overcome his wife's objections to some of his ideas about how to make money. Hector's dreams are less specific, but it is clear that he wants to get along with his grandfather and see his grandparents get along.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Figurative Language: Continue adding to your list. Examples: **Similes**—"his dream went out like a lightbulb" (p. 28); "woman's gnat-like voice" (p. 28); "looked at the phone as if it were a thing she had never seen before" (p. 31)
2. Journal: In your journal, outline a dream you have. Write down a list of short-term and long-term goals you can work toward to achieve your dream. Also, write down a list of obstacles you might have to face when working toward your dream. Remember that sometimes things must be sacrificed to achieve dreams and also that sometimes a dream must be put on hold so that you can achieve other goals that are more urgent and of greater importance.
3. History: Luis gives his grandson a Confederate bill as bribery to make the telephone call to the realtor. Research what Confederate money looks like. Then determine how much money, if any, a 1,000 dollar Confederate bill is worth to collectors today.

“Barbie”

Veronica is disappointed by her uncle’s gift of an imitation Barbie. The next year, her uncle arrives with his new fiancée, and the two of them present Veronica with a real Barbie. Veronica is elated and plays with her new doll with her friend Martha. On the way home from Martha’s house, Veronica realizes Barbie’s head is missing. In the end, Veronica is left with a damaged imitation Barbie and a headless real one, and she loves them both.

Genre: short story, young-adult fiction

Setting: Central Valley of California

Point of View: third-person omniscient

Themes: prejudice, irony, globalization

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. self

Tone: descriptive, emotional

Characters

Veronica Solis: young girl who is disappointed that her uncle gave her an imitation Barbie but is later excited to receive an authentic one

Helen: Veronica’s mother

Uncle Rudy: Veronica’s uncle; gives her an imitation Barbie and then an authentic one a year later

Donna: Rudy’s fiancée

Martha: Veronica’s friend; tries to swap her Barbie doll with Veronica’s

Vocabulary
imposter
sported
feigning
preoccupied
retraced

Discussion Questions

1. Veronica is very disappointed that she received an imitation Barbie from her uncle rather than an authentic one. Why do you think young girls feel that a Barbie doll is such a wonderful toy? Why is an imitation Barbie the “worst kind of doll” to Veronica (p. 34)? (*Young girls see Barbie dolls as the embodiment of female beauty. Girls don’t want to pretend they are beautiful or almost beautiful; they want authentic beauty. The “worst kind of doll” is one that possesses only fake beauty, like the imitation Barbie.*)
2. After damaging her imitation doll, Veronica calls it “ugly.” Do you think Barbie dolls represent beauty? If a Barbie is considered beautiful, does that make all other dolls ugly? Discuss the concept of beauty, especially as it relates to Barbie and other dolls. (*The image of beauty presented by Barbie dolls is very narrow and is itself an unrealistic portrayal of beauty. Barbie’s physical measurements are impossible for a human woman to attain. If Barbie is considered beautiful, that does not make all other dolls ugly. Beauty is not something that can be concretely defined. Answers will vary.*)
3. Do you think people tend to value things that are beautiful more than things that are not? Why or why not? Do you think things that are beautiful inherently possess more value than things that are not as pretty? (*Some people may tend to assign more value to things that*

Character Web

Directions: Complete the attribute web by filling in information specific to a character in the book.

