

Literature Circle Guide to BABE & ME:
A BASEBALL CARD ADVENTURE by Dan Gutman

Book Summary

Joe Stoshack has the chance to solve one of baseball's greatest puzzles: During the third game of the 1932 World Series, did Babe Ruth really predict his long home run to straightaway centerfield? When Joe has the chance to use one of his baseball cards to travel back to 1932 with his father, he takes the opportunity. Mr. Stoshack, Joe's father, who has never spent much time with his son, has been recently laid off from his job, and he has high hopes for using the trip to 1932 to make money. Arriving in 1932 in New York City, Joe and his father almost immediately meet the great Babe Ruth, who offers to give them as many autographs as they would like. Through several encounters with the baseball player, Joe gets to know him personally, and finds Babe Ruth to be a fascinating, complicated person. The baseball player even gives Joe and his father tickets to game three of the World Series, so they join the New York Yankees on the train ride to Chicago for the game. When Joe's father is thrown out of the game for causing a commotion in trying to get the attention of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Joe is on his own to see for himself whether or not Babe Ruth predicted his famous hit. After the game, Joe is reunited his father, who amazingly has managed to obtain the ball that Babe Ruth hit for his most famous home run. Together father and son return home to the present with a newfound trust, understanding, and admiration for each other.

Author Information

Dan Gutman was born in New York City in 1955, and grew up in New Jersey. He attended Rutgers University, planning on a career on psychology, but after a few years of graduate school, he decided that he instead wanted to pursue a career in writing. He began his career writing mostly humorous essays. He tried writing magazine articles and screenplays, but experienced little success in publishing his work. In 1982, Gutman started a video games magazine, and while working on the magazine, Gutman met his wife Nina, an illustrator hired to draw game screens. In 1985, he became a freelance writer, writing first about computers, and later about baseball. In 1992, he decided to try writing for children. He has since written many fiction and non-fiction books about sports: baseball, ice skating, and gymnastics. He also travels to schools, using sports to help students become more excited about reading and writing. Gutman lives in Haddonfield, New Jersey, with his wife and two children.

Suggested Answers to Literature Circle Questions

1. How is Joe Stoshack able to travel through time?

When he holds a baseball card from the 1950s or older, Joe feels a tingling sensation, and in about five seconds, he is transported to the time and place of the card.

2. What does Joe want to learn by visiting the third game of the 1932 World Series?
In this game, Babe Ruth belted a home run to straightaway centerfield. Joe wants to learn whether or not Babe “called his shot” – i.e., predicted just where he would slam his pitch, as baseball myth said he had.

3. At the World Series, why does Mr. Stoshack get arrested? What is he trying to accomplish?

Mr. Stoshack is trying to get the attention of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, then governor of New York. Mr. Stoshack figures that if he can warn the governor about the coming Holocaust in Europe, then when FDR is elected president he will be in a position to stop Hitler and put an end to the extermination of millions of people in the concentration camps, thus saving millions of lives (including Mr. Stoshack’s own extended family). He yells out to Governor Roosevelt, trying to attract his attention, but the governor’s bodyguards have him removed from the stadium.

4. While on the train to Chicago, Joe is thrilled to meet another baseball player, Lou Gehrig. What is Gehrig like, and how does he act towards Joe?

Gehrig has thick, curly hair and dimples. Joe first meets him when Gehrig brings Joe his coat to use as cover while he’s sleeping in the train. Gehrig is pleasant and kind, spending his time writing a letter to his mother rather than partying with the other ballplayers (pp. 81-2).

5. What is Mr. Stoshack’s three-part plan for making money while visiting the year 1932?
First, Mr. Stoshack plans to deposit five thousand dollars to earn interest in the bank. He figures that he would have more than \$160,000 in seventy years. Second, he plans to find a bookie to place a bet on the outcome of the World Series, since he knows that the Yankees will win. Third, he plans to get Babe Ruth to autograph as many bats, balls, and gloves as possible, to sell when he returns to his own time (pp. 20-1).

6. Describe the scene when Joe and his father first glimpse Babe Ruth. How does Babe act, and how does the crowd respond to him?

A great crowd of people are gathered around Babe Ruth as if he is a movie star, and Babe is enjoying the attention. Parents are lifting their children up to see Babe, and women are swooning. Babe speaks in a Southern accent, and the crowd cheers when he speaks. Someone in the crowd even yells, “You oughta run for president,” and the crowd begins chanting “Vote for Ruth! Vote for Ruth!” (pp. 37-8).

7. What are some of the reasons that Joe is frustrated with his father when the story begins?

Joe’s parents are divorced, and Joe’s father seems too busy to participate much in his only child’s life. His father is distant from his son – too preoccupied with his job and his own life. While his friends’ fathers come and cheer at all their sons’ games, Joe’s father hasn’t ever come to watch Joe’s baseball team play. And he’s never even taken Joe to see a baseball game.

8. Joe and his father are surprised by many of the differences between 1932 and their own time. What do they notice that is unusual or strange to them? List at least three or four examples of the differences they notice.

Joe and his father see many signs of the Great Depression, including the shantytown called “Hooverville” and a run on a local bank. They are surprised by the low prices they see advertised everywhere, and they notice that every man they see on the street is wearing a hat. Also, Joe’s father is surprised to discover that alcohol is illegal in restaurants, since Prohibition is still in effect.

9. Babe Ruth keeps telling Joe that he should be thankful he has such a great dad. What do we learn about Babe’s own father?

Babe’s own father didn’t give his son much attention, and was known on occasion to spank his son with a pool stick when he misbehaved. When Babe was seven, his father dropped him off at a reform school, where Babe lived until he was nineteen. His father never visited him or communicated with him once during those years (p. 68).

10. Joe’s mother has forbid him to do any more time travel, and she doesn’t trust Joe’s father. Why then do you think she agrees to let Joe’s father take Joe to the year 1932?

Joe’s mother knows that her ex-husband needs the money, and she also wants him to spend more time with his son, so she agrees to let Joe’s father take Joe to 1932 when Joe’s father promises to have Joe back home in three days (pp. 16-7).

11. In this story, Babe Ruth is shown to be a complicated character with both positive and negative character traits. Make a table with two columns labeled “positive traits” and “negative traits” and list as many of each as you can.

Positive traits – Spontaneous and fun-loving. Cheerful and generous with strangers. Loves people: spends time and money to help others.

Negative traits – A selfish father: doesn’t spend much time with his own children. Lacks self-control: Eats, smokes, and parties too much. Often thoughtless and impulsive. Moody and emotional.

12. Copies of real black and white photographs in this book help to tell the story of Joe Stoshack’s adventure in 1932. What did these photos add to your reading of the story?

Why do you think these photos were included in the book?

These photographs help readers visualize some of the real-life characters here, like Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. These photos also emphasize the historical aspect of this story, making this time-travel story seem more realistic.

13. Through the course of the story, how does Joe’s relationship with his dad begin to change? What does he learn about his dad? Has his father changed at all?

Joe learns why his father has seemed sad and distant: Mr. Stoshacks’s grandparents, aunts, and uncles were sent by the Nazis from their village in Poland to a concentration camp, where they were all killed. Only his father, Joe’s grandfather, survived, and for his whole life Joe’s father has felt guilty and sad

about what happened. He was unable to express his feelings about what happened to his family until he told the story to Joe. Through the course of the story, Joe and his father grow closer, and Joe comes to understand the deep sadness his father has felt his whole life. Joe also feels his father's love and protection for the first time. We also see how Joe's father comes to care more about the love and respect of his son than acquiring money.

14. To whom would you recommend this book? Would someone who isn't usually interested in baseball or history appreciate this book? Write a recommendation explaining who you think would enjoy *Babe & Me*.

Most students will respond that this book has wide appeal, even for those who don't usually enjoy sports or history. Though baseball is a central focus here, aspects of the game important to the story are well explained. Also, the firsthand account of events such as the Great Depression and the 1932 World Series make the history come alive.

15. At the end of the story, Joe makes the decision to give up the baseball his father managed to find – the ball Babe Ruth hit to make the most famous home run in history. Joe could have taken the ball back to the present as a memento of his adventure and possibly even sold it to make money, but instead he gave it away to some kids playing on the street. Do you think he made the right decision? In Joe's place, what would you have done?

Students' answers will vary. Many students might think that Joe should have kept the baseball as a memento of the incredible experience he has had. Yet Joe does not need a baseball to remember the experience of traveling back to 1932; by giving away the baseball, he shows that he values the memories of his time in 1932 with Babe Ruth and his father more than any tangible object.

Activities

1. If you could travel to another time and place, where would you like to go? What would you hope to see there? Joe used his baseball cards to travel to 1932; use your imagination to come up with a way you would travel to and from your destination. **Students may wish to write their own time-travel stories to share with classmates, using *Babe & Me* as a model.**

2. Make an illustrated map showing the places in New York City and Chicago that Joe travels to in 1932. You should use the photographs in the book as models for some of your drawings and use your imagination to re-create the others. You might want to include the following: Hooverville, the Ansonia Hotel, Fifth Avenue, Grand Central Station, and Wrigley Field.

This activity emphasizes the historical places mentioned throughout the novel. By creating a map, students will gain a better understanding of the geography and history in the novel, and be better able to visualize the corresponding scenes in the story.

3. Imagine that after their trip to 1932, Joe's dad wrote his son a note to express his thoughts and feelings about his son and their time-travel experience. What would he say? How would he explain his past behavior, and would he promise to act differently in the future? Write a letter from Mr. Stoshack's point of view to his son Joe.

The trip to 1932 helped to heal the relationship between Mr. Stoshack and his son, and Mr. Stoshack's letter would reflect this. Mr. Stoshack would likely apologize for his past neglect of his son, explaining that he was afraid that his son would be disappointed in him. He probably felt like a failure, as a father and husband, and it was easier to stay away from his son than to face up to the poor relationship between them. He would promise to be more involved in his son's life, attending his baseball games and spending time together.