

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

S.O.R. Losers

by
Avi

Book Information

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Everyone at South Orange River Middle School is expected to participate in one sport each year. This is the story of a soccer team that would rather be doing something else.

Topics: Community Life, School; Humor/Funny, Funny; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 6-8; Sports/Recreation, Soccer

Main Characters

Edward Sitrow (Ed) the main character and narrator of the story; a seventh-grade student who prefers academics to sports

Hays, Porter, Dorman, Lifsom, Radosh, Root, Barish, Eliscue, Macht other seventh-grade boys who comprise Mr. Lester's special soccer team

Kelly a boy who transferred out of S.O.R. Middle School before the first game

Lucy Neblet an intelligent, pretty seventh-grade girl who is sympathetic toward the soccer team; Ed has a "crush" on her

Mr. and Mrs. Sitrow Ed's supportive parents, who do not understand their son's lack of interest in winning

Mr. Lester the school's history teacher, who volunteers to coach the special soccer team

Mr. Sullivan the principal of South Orange River (S.O.R.) Middle School, who wants to maintain his school's winning record

Mr. Tillman S.O.R.'s school counselor, who meets with the team about its losing attitude

Ms. Appleton Ed's homeroom teacher, who tries to encourage and support the team

Saltz Ed's best friend, who writes poetry and is on the special team

Vocabulary

dynamic energetic

forfeit to choose not to play a game, allowing the other to win automatically

promptly very quickly or on time

prostrate lying flat, with face down

rivals competitors, opponents

straddles places one leg on each side of an object

trench a long narrow ditch

Synopsis

Ed Sitrow is a seventh-grader at South Orange River (S.O.R.) Middle School, where sports teams always win. Ed and ten other boys who prefer academics to sports are forced to form a special soccer team because every student at S.O.R. must play at least one sport. The boys wonder why they have to play soccer when their interests lie elsewhere. Mr. Lester, their history teacher, has volunteered to coach this special team although his only soccer knowledge comes from reading books on the subject. Because Ed is the tallest player on the team, he is appointed goalie.

The team's first game is at Buckingham Junior High, where Ed and his teammates face Buckingham's third-string team. The boys quickly change from relaxed to panicky as Buckingham scores within the first seconds of the game. After the game ends, players on the bus from other S.O.R. teams ridicule the special team's 32-0 loss. The teasing continues in school the next day. Mr. Lester appoints Ed team captain, since he is their best player, a designation that Ed sincerely doubts.

Although Mr. Lester encourages the boys to take soccer seriously, the boys avoid practice by asking Mr. Lester history questions. Shoreham, S.O.R.'s rival school and next opponent, defeats S.O.R. with

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a score of 40-0. The highlight of the game occurs when Ed's teammate Hays scores a goal -- for the wrong team!

Principal Sullivan attempts to give the team a pep talk about its attitude. He encourages the boys never to accept defeat. When Macht, a S.O.R. teammate, is kicked in the shins during the game against Sanger, the team stops playing to console Macht, allowing Sanger to score. It is apparent that the boys truly do not care if they lose. After the game, which they lose 22-0, Mr. Lester repeats that he believes the team can win. The boys continue to wonder why winning is so important.

Some fathers of the losing S.O.R. team get involved, calling a special practice and later attending the next game against Hopewell. Playing in the pouring rain, Ed slips in the mud and has the wind knocked out of him; his teammates, Eliscue and Macht, are simultaneously knocked unconscious by a waterlogged ball.

Mr. Tillman, the school guidance counselor, calls the members of the special team into his office to discuss their attitudes. Mr. Tillman's muscular physique leads the boys to believe the school rumor that the counselor had wanted to play professional football. Mr. Tillman echoes the philosophy that winning is most important and encourages the boys to believe in themselves so they can win. As they return from Mr. Tillman's pep talk, however, the boys destroy the posters that Ms. Appleton's class made to encourage the team to win.

In their game against Pennington, the S.O.R. special team scores a goal, although unintentionally, as the ball bounces off Hays's head and into the net! The final score, however, represents another S.O.R. loss, as Pennington wins 18-1. After the game, the eighth grade team captain and Mr. Tillman berate the boys for making the school look bad. Mr. Lester consoles the boys by saying that the opponent for their last game is Parkville, a team that also has not won a game.

Lucy Neblet, Ed's romantic interest, arranges a

secret meeting with Ed to tell him that she is sorry his team has been losing. Ed is disillusioned that Lucy does not understand his views about winning. He wanders into a pep rally taking place in the lunchroom and is embarrassed when he is asked to address the student body. After the pep rally, Ed calls an emergency team meeting, in which team members emphatically state that they do not care if they lose. Ed collects money from each of the boys and asks them to bring their team shirts to him early the next morning. Ed and Saltz add the word "LOSERS" to the backs of the shirts so the shirts now read "S.O.R. LOSERS."

The entire school is present for the final game against Parkville, a team desperate to end its season with a win. Saltz and Ed joke when Saltz falls and sits on the ball. Hays's attitude seems to change, however, as he charges toward the goal. He nearly scores but trips and falls flat on his face. Shamed, Hays begins to cry. Ed, anxious to remind Hays that winning is not important, shouts "SOR LOSER." The team joins hands, circles Hays, and begins to chant. The audience finally understands why Ed and the team are chanting and repeats "SOR LOSER." Hays begins to grin, lifts his arms in victory, and joins the chant. The team poses for the team picture in the locker room after the game, lining up arm in arm with their backs to the camera. At last they are having fun!

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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Initial Understanding

When Ed's father comes to Ed's room to talk, why does it take him so long to ask Ed about the team?

Since Ed deliberately avoided telling his parents about the soccer team, Mr. Tillman's phone call comes as a surprise to Ed's parents. Ed's father probably hopes that Ed will willingly volunteer some information about the team and provide him with an opportunity to discuss Ed's attitude. It is clear that Ed's father is uncomfortable, because Ed notices that his father straddles the chair backward, a posture he always uses to discuss something important. Mr. Tillman probably also told the parents that the boys do not want to play soccer and do not care if they lose. Most likely Ed's father is trying to find a non-confrontational way to tell Ed that he is expected to practice and improve his attitude and performance.

Literary Analysis

This story is written from Ed's point of view. In what ways would the reader get a different impression of the events and characters if Mr. Lester were to tell the story?

Mr. Lester appears to be a man who unquestioningly follows school policy. He repeats school philosophies such as "Everybody plays, everybody wins" and "S.O.R. believes in the whole person." He is constantly reading about soccer and ways to become a successful coach. If Mr. Lester were to tell the events of this story, he would probably explain his frustrations with his team's attitude, its losses, and his inability to coach the children in a sport that he does not know. Whereas Ed is upset at having to waste his time playing soccer, Mr. Lester may very well be upset that he is wasting his time with boys who do not care if they lose.

Inferential Comprehension

What things do Ed and Saltz have in common that make them such good friends?

Ed and Saltz have grown up living near each other. They share similar attitudes about many things. For example, they can discuss girls like Lucy. They can laugh at each other's mistakes on the soccer field without offending the other. They both love academics and can appreciate each other's enthusiasm for learning. Both boys recognize that they are accomplished in some areas and agree that they do not need to be accomplished in sports. Saltz demonstrates the kind of mutual support the boys give each other when he helps Ed with his plan for adding the word LOSERS to the team's shirts.

Constructing Meaning

Do you think the school's policy about student involvement in sports is a good one? Explain.

Answers will vary. Some students may agree that both physical and academic needs of students should be developed. They may also point out that sports promote teamwork. Others might feel a physical education class could provide all of the exercise that students need and may, therefore, think this policy is unnecessary. These students may suggest that students can be involved in many outside activities, such as working on a school newspaper, to develop teamwork skills without being involved in sports, in which winning is usually the primary focus.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Details Ed, his teammates, and his coach do not really understand soccer. Ed says of the first game: "We sort of backed onto the field. Lifsom, who was playing up front in the middle, shook hands with the opposite Buckingham players.... As for myself, I was strolling around in the goal area trying to remember anything, which wasn't much, about the rules." Have students find information about soccer rules and positions. Then have students draw a soccer field on poster board, using

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different symbols to mark the various playing positions. Each poster should include a legend to explain the symbols. Students should also write a brief description of how each position functions in the game.

Making Predictions The author reveals the character traits and personalities of many boys on the seventh grade special soccer team. Ask each student to select one player and write down details from the book about this boy's personality and interests. Then ask students to predict what their chosen character will be doing in ten years (age twenty-two). Students should support their predictions by using the details they found in the text.

Identifying Persuasive Language Saltz loves to write poetry; in fact, he writes a poem that shows how the seventh grade special team feels about losing. Poetry can express feelings and can also convince others that those feelings are appropriate. Have students pretend they are Saltz, who wants to help his friend Ed as Ed faces the student body. Students should write a poem that Ed could use to convince students and teachers that winning is not everything.

Understanding Literary Features When Ed talks about the games, the reader can tell that the tone, or the writer's attitude about the events, is humorous. Ask students to use a humorous tone to write about an embarrassing moment in their lives. Students can share their "most embarrassing moments" with each other in class and can discuss how humor may change how someone regards a bad moment.