Name: _____ Date: _____

The Last Pitch

Circle group

It was the bottom of the ninth inning. There were two outs, and the bases were loaded. Sam stood on the pitcher's mound. The ball felt wet in his sweaty hand. The whole stadium seemed to hold its breath. One more strike would win the championship for the Tigers. One mistake would end their great season.

Sam looked at the batter. He was a tall boy who had already hit two doubles that day. Sam tried not to notice his own pounding heart. Behind home plate, his catcher and best friend, Devon, signaled for a fastball. Sam shook his head. His fastball had been wobbly all day, and he did not trust it. Devon frowned for a second. Then he slowly changed the sign to a curveball.

Sam had practiced that pitch all winter in his garage. He squeezed the seams and snapped his wrist until his arm hurt. In practice, the ball dropped sharply at the last second. But in games, he had always been too nervous to use it. Now he took a long breath. He thought of what his coach liked to say: "Control the things you can control, and let everything else go."

He wound up and threw. The ball sailed toward the middle of the plate. The batter swung as hard as he could. He was sure he knew where the ball was going. Then the ball dipped down and away. The bat hit nothing but air.

Strike three! For half a second, it was totally quiet. Then the crowd went wild. Devon tore off his mask and ran to the mound. He almost knocked Sam into the dirt.

"I knew you could do it," Devon shouted.

"You're the one who called it," Sam laughed. He was still shaking. "I almost said no."

Later, the trophy sat on the bench beside them. Sam knew the pitch was not what won the game. What mattered was the trust between two friends. It was the courage to try something hard right when it counted most.

Questions

1. What was happening in the game when Sam threw the last pitch?

_____

_____

2. Why did Sam shake his head at Devon's first sign?

_____

_____

3. How did Sam practice the curveball?

_____

_____

4. Why had Sam never thrown the curveball in a game?

_____

_____

5. Sam says the pitch did not win the game. What does he think did?

_____

_____

Words to know

mound: the small hill of dirt where a baseball pitcher stands
wobbly: shaky and not steady
seams: the raised stitches on a baseball

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Last Pitch

Triangle group

The bases were loaded with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning, and Sam stood on the pitcher's mound with the ball in his sweating palm while the entire stadium seemed to hold its breath. One more strike would give the Tigers the championship, but a single mistake would end their remarkable season.

Sam studied the batter, a tall boy who had already hit two doubles during the afternoon, and tried to ignore the pounding of his heart. Behind home plate, his catcher and best friend, Devon, signaled for a fastball. Sam shook his head, because his fastball had been wobbling all day and he no longer trusted it. Devon frowned for a moment, then slowly changed the signal to a curveball.

Sam had spent the entire winter practicing that pitch in his garage, squeezing the seams and snapping his wrist until his forearm ached. In practice it dropped sharply at the last instant, but in games he had always been too nervous to rely on it. Now he drew a long breath and remembered what his coach liked to say: "Control the things you can control, and let everything else go."

He wound up and released the ball, which sailed toward the middle of the plate, and the batter swung with all his strength, certain that he knew exactly where it was headed. Then the ball dipped sharply down and away, and the bat cut through empty air.

It was strike three, and after half a second of complete silence the whole crowd erupted while Devon tore off his mask and sprinted to the mound, nearly knocking Sam into the dirt.

"I knew you had it in you," Devon shouted.

"You were the one who called for it," Sam laughed, still trembling. "I almost refused."

Later, with the trophy resting on the bench beside them, Sam understood that the pitch itself had not won the game. What mattered was the trust between two friends and the courage to attempt something difficult at the exact moment when it counted the most.

Questions

1. What was the situation when Sam threw the last pitch?

_____

_____

2. Why did Sam shake his head at Devon's first sign?

_____

_____

3. How had Sam prepared for the curveball?

_____

_____

4. Why had Sam never used the curveball in a game before?

_____

_____

5. What does Sam mean by saying the pitch was not what won the game?

_____

_____

Words to know

mound: the small hill of dirt where a baseball pitcher stands
seams: the raised stitches on a baseball
erupt: to burst out suddenly and loudly
sprint: to run as fast as you can for a short distance

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Last Pitch

Square group

The bases were loaded with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning, and Sam stood motionless on the pitcher's mound with the ball clutched in his perspiring palm while the entire stadium seemed collectively to hold its breath. One more strike would deliver the championship to the Tigers, but a single miscalculation would terminate their extraordinary season.

Sam scrutinized the batter, a towering boy who had already hit two doubles during the afternoon, and attempted to disregard the relentless pounding of his heart. Behind home plate, his catcher and closest friend, Devon, signaled for a fastball. Sam shook his head almost imperceptibly, because his fastball had been wobbling unpredictably all day and he no longer trusted it. Devon frowned momentarily, then deliberately changed the signal to a curveball.

Sam had devoted the entire winter to practicing that pitch in his garage, squeezing the seams and snapping his wrist repeatedly until his forearm ached. During practice it plunged sharply at the final instant, but in competitive games he had invariably been too anxious to rely on it. Now he inhaled deeply and recalled the advice his coach frequently repeated: "Control the things you can control, and let everything else go."

He wound up and released the ball, which sailed toward the middle of the plate, and the batter swung with tremendous force, entirely certain that he understood precisely where it was headed. Then the ball dipped abruptly down and away, and the bat sliced through empty air.

It was strike three, and after half a second of absolute silence the entire crowd erupted while Devon tore off his mask and sprinted toward the mound, nearly tackling Sam into the dirt.

"I knew you had it in you," Devon shouted exuberantly.

"You were the one who called for it," Sam laughed, still visibly trembling. "I almost refused."

Later, with the championship trophy resting on the bench beside them, Sam recognized that the pitch itself had not won the game. What genuinely mattered was the trust between two friends and the courage to attempt something difficult at the precise moment when it counted the most.

Questions

1. Describe the game situation at the moment Sam delivered the final pitch.

_____

_____

2. What motivated Sam to reject Devon's initial signal?

_____

_____

3. How had Sam developed his curveball?

_____

_____

4. What had prevented Sam from using the curveball in competitive games?

_____

_____

5. What does Sam conclude actually won the game, if not the pitch itself?

_____

_____

Words to know

mound: the small hill of dirt where a baseball pitcher stands
seams: the raised stitches on a baseball
erupt: to burst out suddenly and loudly
sprint: to run as fast as you can for a short distance

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: The Last Pitch

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: The Last Pitch

Easier · 338 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 2

1. It was the bottom of the ninth with two outs and the bases loaded. One more strike would win the championship.
2. His fastball had been wobbly all day, and he did not trust it.
3. He practiced it all winter in his garage, squeezing the seams and snapping his wrist.
4. He was too nervous to trust it in a game, even though it worked in practice.
5. The trust between him and Devon, and the courage to try something hard when it counted.

Triangle: The Last Pitch

This passage · 343 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 8

1. Bottom of the ninth, two outs, bases loaded. One more strike would win the championship for the Tigers.
2. His fastball had been wobbly all day and he did not trust it.
3. He practiced it all winter in his garage, squeezing the seams and snapping his wrist.
4. He was too nervous to trust it when it counted, even though it worked well in practice.
5. He believes trust between friends and the courage to try something hard were what mattered most, more than the pitch itself.

Square: The Last Pitch

Harder · 354 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 11

1. Bottom of the ninth, two outs, bases loaded, with one more strike needed to clinch the championship for the Tigers.
2. His fastball had been wobbling unpredictably all day, and he no longer trusted it.
3. He practiced it throughout the winter in his garage, squeezing the seams and snapping his wrist until his forearm ached.
4. Anxiety. He was too nervous to rely on it when it mattered, even though it worked in practice.
5. The trust between him and Devon and the courage to attempt something difficult at the decisive moment.