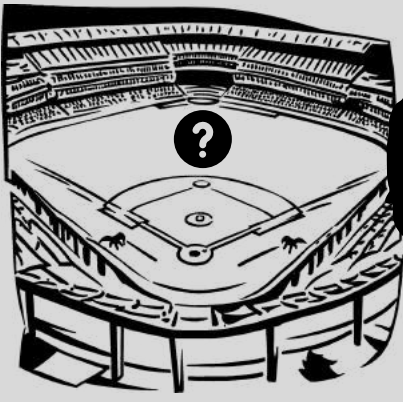


The Windup & the **STEAL**

BY AMANDA ZIEBA





The Windup & the **STEAL**

BY AMANDA ZIEBA

TEACHER FRIENDS!

I invite you and your students to join me for a mystery at the ballpark! This story includes a famous major league pitcher, a world renown thief, a fancy party for celebrities and a battle of wits.

With this short story and its accompanying resources, you'll be able to:

- Practice annotation skills (instruction/printable included)
- Extend vocabulary (slides included)
- Do some creative writing (prompts + tips + rubric included)
- Analyze a story on a deeper level with a 9 min podcast
- Compare prose and lyrical versions of the story
- And more!

Psst!! These prompts contain spoilers so avoid them until you've read the story!

Included in this Resource:

Standards ... 3-4

Lesson Plan ... 5

Pre-Read Anticipation Activity ... 6-7

vocabulary List + Slides --- 8-9

Alliteration Worksheet ... 10

Learn to Annotate ... 11

Read Aloud Video Link ... 12

Story Text (+ room to annotate) ... 13-26

Comprehension Questions ... 27-29

Podcast Activity Page ... 30

Stealin' the Game Song + Analysis Activity ... 31-34

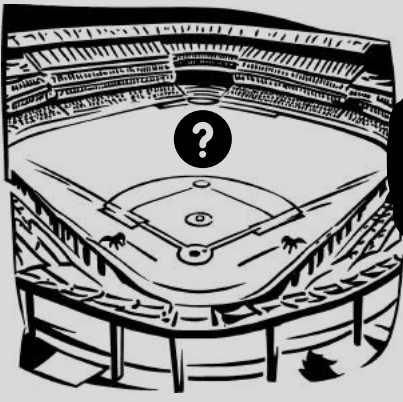
Creative Writing Prompts ... 35

Creative Writing Instructions + Rubric ... 36-38

I hope your students both enjoy the story and polish up their literacy skills.

Happy reading,

Amanda Zieba



The Windup & the **STEAL**

BY AMANDA ZIEBA

CCSS ELA STANDARDS

This bundle of activities hits a wide range of comprehension, analysis, writing, vocabulary, and media literacy skills—perfect for deepening understanding and engagement.

Word Count: 4,800 words

ATOS Reading Level: 4.5

Great for independent reading + grade level skill work!

Practice Your Annotation Skills (instruction + printable)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1

- Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5

- Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

Extend Your Vocabulary (slides included)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.4

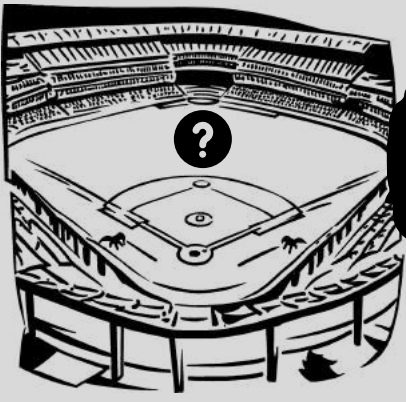
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 6 reading and content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.5

- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.6

- Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.



The Windup & the **STEAL**

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Do Some Creative Writing (sheets + rubric included)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3

- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.4

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.5

- With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting.

Analyze a Story on a Deeper Level with a Podcast

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.2

- Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1

- Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6

- Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

Compare Prose and Lyrical Versions of the Story

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.7

- Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.9

- Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.



The Windup & the

STEAL

BY AMANDA ZIEBA

There are many ways you can implement the resources in this lesson bundle, but if you are looking for a little assistance, here is one possible way to work through activities.

LESSON PLAN

Day 1

- Anticipation Activity
- Preview Day 1 Vocab
- Learn to Annotate
- Read/Listen to 1st half of Part 1 (pages 1-2)

Day 2

- Review Part 1 Annotations so far by sharing with a classmate
- Read/Listen to 2nd half of Part 1 (pgs 3-5)
- Part 1 Comprehension Questions

Day 1

- Introduce Alliteration
- Look through part one to find Alliteration examples
- Preview Day 2 Vocab
- Read/Listen to Part 2
- Part 2 Comprehension Questions

Day 4

- Read/Listen to Part 3
- Part 3 Discussion Questions
- Introduce Creative Writing Prompts and provide brainstorming time

Day 5

- Podcast Activity Page
- Creative Writing Prompt Work Time

Day 6

- Stealin' the Game Song Activity
- Creative Writing Prompt Work Time

Due dates as you see fit.

Notes



The Windup & the **STEAL**

BY AMANDA ZIEBA

ANTICIPATION ACTIVITY

Preview some of the topics, concepts and themes of the story by playing this fun would you rather game! It will get kids both moving and thinking!

*Access the activity
slides here:*



After you do the interactive portion, you can have students do a written reflection (next page), or just move right into the story! You know your students best, do whatever you think will keep them engaged with the story... do that!



The Windup and the Steal Anticipation Guide

Directions: Look at the below statements and then choose your response: Agree, Neutral, or Disagree. These statements will give you a few hints about the topics that will appear in the baseball mystery short story: The Windup and the Steal.

NAME: _____

STATEMENT

MY RESPONSE

AGREE NEUTRAL DISAGREE

Baseball is a boring game.

☐☐☐

Professional athletes deserve all the money and fame they receive.

☐☐☐

I would like to be famous, even if it meant being famous for something bad.

☐☐☐

Fashion is a form of art.

☐☐☐

There are some situations when stealing is okay.

☐☐☐

PICK ONE OF THE STATEMENTS ABOVE AND SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON IT HERE.



The Windup & the **STEAL**

BY AMANDA ZIEBA

VOCABULARY



Part 1: Pre-Game Vocabulary

- 1 formidable
- 2 pundits
- 3 sound byte
- 4 bizarre
- 5 heist
- 6 hallucinating
- 7 tabloid
- 8 notoriously

Access the vocab
slideshow here:

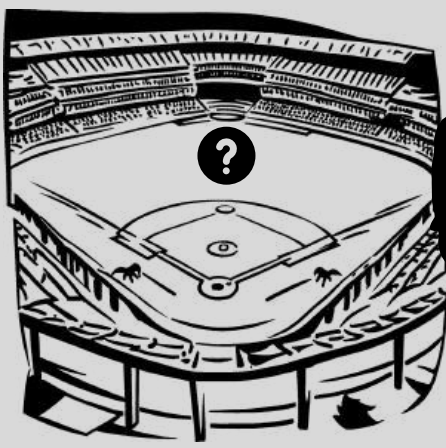


Part 2 Vocabulary

- 1 uncharacteristically
- 2 jumbotron
- 3 sequential
- 4 doused

Part 3 Vocabulary

- 1 exhibit
- 2 commemorate
- 3 inexplicably
- 4 ceased
- 5 decisively
- 6 eloquent



The Windup & the STEAL

BY AMANDA ZIEBA



VOCABULARY

Preview the vocabulary words for each part of the story before you read. After each word and definition is shared, challenge your student to say or write a sentence using the word and share it with a partner or the whole class. Each vocab word is highlighted in the story text.

Access the vocab slideshow here:



Sample Slides

PART 1: PRE-GAME

After each word and definition is shared, challenge your student to say or write a sentence using the word and share it with a partner or the whole class.

1 formidable	2 pundits
3 sound byte	4 bizarre
5 heist	6 hallucinating
7 tabloid	8 notoriously

THE WINDUP & THE STEAL

PART 1: PRE-GAME

FORMIDABLE

inspiring fear or respect through being impressively large, powerful, intense, or capable.

THE WINDUP & THE STEAL

PART 2: THE GAME

After each word and definition is shared, challenge your student to say or write a sentence using the word and share it with a partner or the whole class.

1 uncharacteristically
2 jumbotron
3 sequential
4 doused

THE WINDUP & THE STEAL

PART 2: THE GAME

UNCHARACTERISTICALLY

in a way that is not typical of a particular person or thing.

THE WINDUP & THE STEAL

PART 3: POST-GAME

After each word and definition is shared, challenge your student to say or write a sentence using the word and share it with a partner or the whole class.

1 exhibit	2 commemorate
3 inexplicably	4 ceased
5 decisively	6 eloquent

THE WINDUP & THE STEAL

PART 3: POST-GAME

EXHIBIT

publicly display (a work of art or item of interest) in an art gallery or museum

THE WINDUP & THE STEAL

Name: _____



ALLITERATION



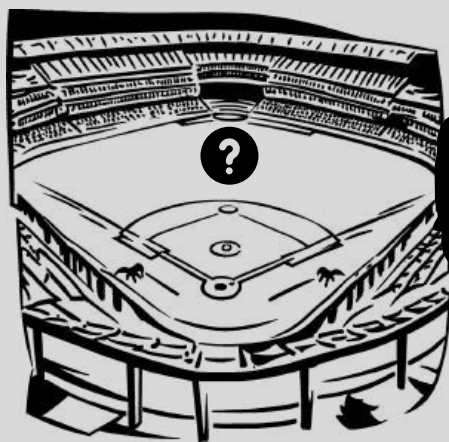
Repetition of initial sounds or letters in words, placed close to each other

Underline the letters that create alliteration in each sentence:

- Thirty Three Thousand teens think their teacher is tremendous.
- Amidst mostly mature classmates, Martin spilled his milk.
- Under a sky full of stars, several semis drove silently.

**As you read, record any alliterative phrases you find, here.
(Hint: Some (but not all) are highlighted in story.)**

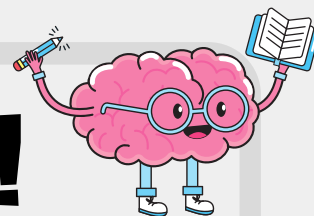
Write your own alliteration sentence below:



The Windup & the **STEAL**

BY AMANDA ZIEBA

LEARN TO ANNOTATE!



Annotating is a fancy word that means taking what you are thinking about in your brain while you are reading and putting it down on the page. You don't want this to take too long and pull you out of the flow, so jot down these symbols or a quick note and then keep reading!

Annotation Symbols



Emojis - Note how do you feel while reading with an emoji. Also note, now does the character feel?



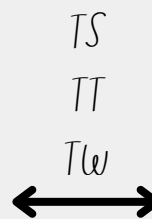
Hearts and Stars - mark your favorite or important parts with a heart or star, so you can easily find these sections again.



Exclamation points - if you find a part that shocks or surprises you, mark it with a !! Or a short phrase like WOW or HOLY COW!



Questions - when you have a question, write down a ?? or write out your full question.



Connections - note when you connect to the text or when it connects with another story or the real world

Underlining and circling important text/words are still more ways you can annotate.

Mark up the text so that when you come back to it, you can jog your memory to remember what you've already read without having to reread the entire text.

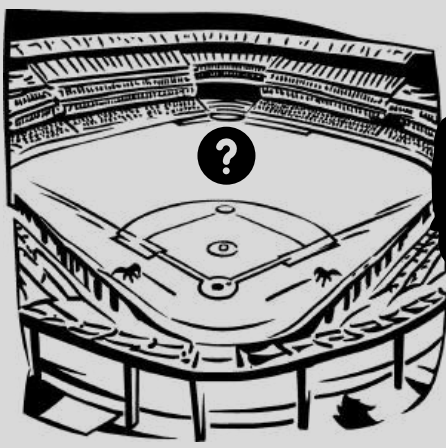
If you aren't thinking about anything while you are reading, that's your clue to STOP, go back and read again. Think of it like seeing the words play out like a movie in your brain. If you aren't seeing anything in your head, that's your sign to find a place free of distractions and try reading again.



LISTEN TO THE STORY READ ALOUD



Or, click this link:
[https://youtu.be/
yYUlgqgnFO0](https://youtu.be/yYUlgqgnFO0)



The Windup & the

STEAL

BY AMANDA ZIEBA

In this story, characters spend time at the Met Gala. Before you read the story, familiarize your students with this iconic event by reading this one-pager.

*Room for
Annotations*



What is the Met Gala?

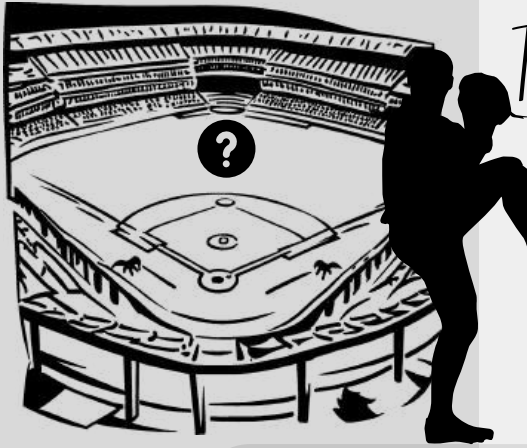
The Met Gala is one of the most famous fashion events in the world. It happens once a year in New York City at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, often called “the Met.” The event raises money for the museum’s Costume Institute, which is a special department that focuses on clothing and fashion as art. The very first Met Gala took place in 1948. It started as a simple dinner for guests who supported the museum. Over time, it became much more than that. Today, the Met Gala is a star-studded event filled with celebrities, designers, musicians, and athletes. Some people call it “fashion’s biggest night.”

Every year, the Met Gala has a different theme. This theme matches a fashion exhibit that opens at the museum the same night. Guests are expected to dress in outfits that fit the theme. These outfits are often bold, dramatic, and carefully planned. You may have seen pictures online of people wearing unusual or eye-catching clothes on the Met Gala red carpet—that’s part of the fun!

Besides fashion, the Met Gala is also important for pop culture. It brings together people from movies, sports, music, and art. Millions of people around the world look at photos and videos from the event. It often starts new trends and sparks lots of conversations.

While tickets are hard to get—and very expensive—the Met Gala has a big impact on the fashion world and beyond. Whether you care about fancy clothes or not, it’s a night when art, creativity, and culture come together in a powerful way.

Pretend you are chatting with someone who had never heard of the MET GALA. How would you explain the event to them in one sentence?



The Windup & the **STEAL**

Listen Along!



BY AMANDA ZIEBA

Name: _____

Room for
Annotations



Part 1: Pre-Game

His real name was Bartholomew. But no one ever called him that. Not since he was two. Nope, everyone called him Bear.

Over the course of the last forty years, Bear became a Major League legend. He'd been in the league nearly two decades. It was easy, even for newbie fans, to recognize him. Every bit of his six-foot, four inch frame personified his animal namesake. It was there, in the way he lumbered up to the pitching mound. It was there, in the size of his hands, that on more than one occasion, had been referred to as paws. It was there in his dark brown, bushy beard and eyebrows. There, in his fierce competitive drive. There, in the way he grunted and growled his answers to reporters at post game press conferences.

Pitch after pitch after pitch, Bear never seemed to tire. Even when the stadium thermometer read ninety and sweat ran down his neck in rivers, he stayed in the game. Inning, after inning, after inning. Bear had thrown more complete games than anyone else ever had.

When Bear started a game, everyone expected him to stay in for the long haul. What people didn't expect is what happened one fateful night game, mid-May. It was Bear bobblehead night and as Bear stood on the field and looked into the stands with his exceptional eyesight, he could see hundreds of miniature dolls, all wearing his signature number eight, nodding their heads at him.

"Yes, yes," the bobbleheads seemed to say. "This is what life was all about." A team of people you cared about. A game of skill. A **formidable** opponent. A crowd of adoring fans. At that moment, the stadium DJ started playing his infamous walk out song, his favorite song. A song that told his mind and body it was time to go to work, that it was time to play ball. But just as he wound up and was about to release a warm up throw to the catcher, something in the crowd caught his eye and he paused.



In addition to his rock-solid performances, fans could always count on Bear's pre-game ritual, a tradition nearly as legendary as his fastball. After warming up, he would walk from the mound, past the catcher, past the ump, and right up to the net behind home plate. Through the checker board of ropes, he'd chat with whoever happened to be sitting in those front-row seats.

Bear had seen all sorts of strange things behind home plate. Ecstatic fans, confused umpires, dancing mascots, famous celebrities—and, once, during an eight-game winning streak, an entire convent of nuns. And for every game he started, Bear chatted with them.

He never told anyone except his wife, but the first time he walked back behind the plate, he thought he'd recognized someone in those seats. When he got close, he realized it was a stranger. Not wanting to look foolish, he played it off and started talking to fans. He said it reminded him why he loved the game—that baseball was serious work, but also supposed to be fun. And you know what? It was fun. The conversations became his favorite part of game day, well, outside of the actual ball playing. He always loved that the most. While so much of his life followed a strict, repetitive rhythm, this one moment remained unpredictable and unscripted.

The media **pundits** always scoffed at these visits. But really, they were just jealous because Bear rarely gave them a decent **sound byte**. All he provided were his **stellar statistics**. Perhaps Bear enjoyed these little chats so much because there wasn't a microphone in his face?

But tonight, something was different. Stranger than any rock star, fanatic, or media stunt sat a thief. Not just any thief—the thief. As famous as Bear was on the mound, Danny Tortuga was in the world of crime.

In fact, Bear had just finished watching a documentary about him last night. Tortuga had stolen cars, statues, jewels, priceless paintings—even, on one **bizarre** occasion, a foreign kingdom. (Although he did give that one back.) But the real point was: he had never been caught. A **Houdini of heists**. And now, here he was, sitting calmly behind home plate at Bear's game, as if he belonged there.

The Windup & the
STEAL

Name: _____



Bear rubbed his eyes, wondering if he was **hallucinating**. But when he looked back into the stands, he knew what he saw. That face was too fresh in his memory. Too frequent on **tabloid** covers to not recognize. Bear turned to look at Robbie, the second baseman. He was the team prankster. Maybe he had hired an actor to create some sort of media stunt or a bit of funny business that only Robbie thought was funny. Which wasn't funny. This was a big game. Sure it was early in the season, but every game mattered.

The other thing Bear knew about Robbie though, was that he was a horrible liar. He could never hide his pranks for long. Bear scrutinized his second baseman. Robbie was all business, and not the funny kind. He didn't have even the hint of a smile on his usually friendly face. So maybe what Bear was seeing really was real?

One thing was for certain. There was no way he was going to be able to focus on the game if he didn't find out. Just as soon as he finished warming up he would go find out for sure. Unfortunately, the warm up didn't go well. Bear kept missing his spot. His eyes, which should have been trained on his catcher's glove kept wandering. To Danny. To see if he was still there. Eventually. Bear let out a giant sigh that sounded awfully close to his trademark growl and then began walking toward home plate.

"Hey!" Bear called to the man behind the foul ball net when he got close. "Are you Danny Torguga?"

Inexplicably, the man smiled. "I am."

"What are you doing here?" Bear asked. "At the game?"

"I came to watch you," Danny said.

"Aren't you afraid of being caught?" Bear asked. He was genuinely curious.

"On camera? Yes. Actually, I hoped I would be," Danny explained. "Being seen on national television is going to be a great alibi."

"A great alibi for what?" Bear asked.



"For the job I've got running right now."

The cameras were on them now, Bear could feel it. Half a lifetime of stardom had trained his nerves to know when he was up on the big screen and a stadium of people were focused on him. He guessed the commentators were wondering about the man behind home plate and what the country's best pitcher had to talk about with the world's most famous criminal. Bear wasn't mic'd up and he was glad for it. He was pretty sure that if everyone could hear what he and Danny were saying, Danny would stop talking. And more than anything, at this moment, Bear wanted to keep him talking.

"What's the job?" Bear asked.

"The Met Gala."

"Really. What a coincidence. I'm headed there after this."

"That doesn't really seem like your scene," Danny said.

"I know, but they're unveiling a new exhibit featuring sports uniforms, and my rookie year jersey is going to be included. So I got an invitation."

"Interesting," Danny said. And sounded like he really meant it.

"Are you going for the art or the celebrity jewels?" Bear asked. He wasn't sure where the questions were coming from. Why was he talking to this felon? Even if chatting with fans was part of his pre-game ritual, he shouldn't be talking to someone so notoriously naughty. It just didn't feel right. And yet, he couldn't stop.

"Why? Are you in the market?" Danny asked.

"No," Bear said. "Just curious, I guess." Bear had never broken the law. Despite his grizzly appearance and perceived demeanor, he was a play by the rules kind of guy. As a kid he loved playing cops and robbers. He was always the cop, leaving the scheming and thieving to his cousins. But he wasn't a kid now. He was a grown up. With a job to do. And yet, there was something about this strangely confident man on the other side of the net, that kept him magnetized to his presence... even if he was a criminal.



Abruptly, his conscience getting the better of him, Bear decided that this conversation had gone on long enough.

"Well, it was nice to chat with you," Bear said awkwardly, not really sure how to end the conversation. Did criminals appreciate **common courtesies**? Bear figured he'd rather be safe than sorry. He didn't want to be on this man's bad side. "Enjoy the game."

"Same to you," Danny said and tipped his ball cap in Bear's direction. "And thanks," Danny pointed to the big screen where their faces had resided for the past few minutes. "You just made my job a lot easier."

Bear didn't know how to feel about that information. He didn't want any part in Danny's crimes, no matter how interesting of a fellow he was.

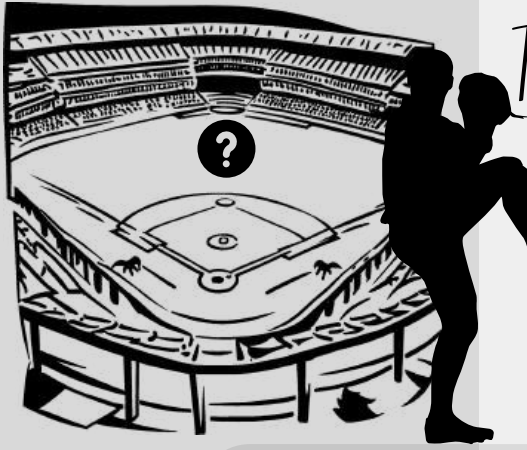
As Bear lumbered back to the mound, he wondered if he should tell someone about the upcoming robbery. He knew the answer was yes. But when? Right now? Should he just walk off the field and find a security guard or call the police? Wouldn't Danny know what he was doing? What would Danny do then? Would he lash out? Would he hurt someone? Danny had never resorted to violence before. At least, not according to the documentary Bear watched. Danny was the sneaky, silent sort of thief. But there was always a first time for everything, wasn't there?

If Danny did react badly, would the game be delayed? How would that affect the players? Would stopping the theft be worth the repercussions of putting the people in this stadium in jeopardy?

A thousand questions poured through Bear's mind as he made the 90 foot walk back to the mound. When he turned around and looked back at Danny, to better gauge the situation, Danny was gone.

Bear scanned the crowd, looking for Danny first, and when he couldn't find him, he looked for his wife. Anna. His Annabell. Who was always at every game. No matter what. Rain or shine. Winning streak or losing slump. More than he could count on any thing or one, any ritual or game, he could count on her. When their eyes locked, a piece of him that felt missing clicked into place. Bear brought his glove up to his chest, rested it over his heart and winked at her. Annabell repeated the gesture. With his final pre-game ritual complete, Bear was ready to begin the game.

END OF PART 1



The Windup & the **STEAL**

Listen Along!



BY AMANDA ZIEBA

Name: _____

Room for
Annotations



Part 2: The Game

Usually, Bear had no trouble focusing on a game. Whatever troubles and dramas were happening in the outside world didn't matter. During a game, it was just him, the ball and the three men at the plate - the batter, the catcher and the umpire. Nothing mattered more than the next pitch.

Last year, the night after his father died, Bear was scheduled to pitch. His coach offered to let him skip his turn in the rotation, but Bear wouldn't allow it. He looked forward to the distraction of counting balls and strikes. Of the feel of leather in his hands. Of putting everything else in his life away to deal with later, even if it was only nine innings later. That night Bear pitched a no-hitter. His 8th. A record breaking feat.

But tonight was a different story. Bear couldn't shake the questions that swirled in his mind. Thoughts flew up and into his conscious mind as unexpectedly as a thunderstorm in the desert, unsettling his usually steady demeanor.

What was Danny doing right now?
How long had he been planning this heist?
Would this be the time he gets caught?
Could I be the one who helps capture him?
What if I do nothing and he gets away? Again?

Twack. The crack of the bat brought Bear back to the game. The ball flew straight at his head - a line drive back at the pitcher, right back at him. Bear put his glove up instinctually and made the catch. A lucky break from a ball that could have broken his face.

Out number three. Inning over.

Bear was distracted, off kilter, out of sorts and it was affecting the game. The worst part was, Bear wasn't the only one who knew it.



Everyone was looking at him. Well, they were always looking at him, but never like this. Never with these side eyed glances and whispers behind their hands. They knew something was up, but did they know Bear wondered. Did anyone else know?

They weren't losing, but the game was close. Tied at eight runs each. He'd have to thank the hitters tomorrow for saving the game and putting up enough runs to cancel out his **uncharacteristically poor performance**. Maybe he'd order breakfast burritos to be delivered to the team meeting tomorrow.

Bear shook his head. What are you doing man? Thinking about **breakfast burritos!?!?** It is not tomorrow. It is tonight. It is now. It is game time.

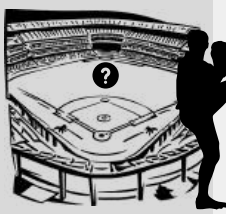
The next half an inning passed, but despite his best attempts at a self pep-talk, Bear was no closer to regaining control of his thoughts. They flew scattershot around the ballpark pinging off the **jumbotron**, the security guards, and the luxury watch advertisement poster hanging in left field.

What was Danny going to steal?
Had he done it already?
Did anyone know yet?

Without really realizing how, Bear was back on the bench. The sound of the organ interrupted his thoughts. Take Me Out to the Ball Game. The 7th inning stretch. Just two and a half innings left. Just two and a half more innings and he could go. Go... and do what? He didn't know. But something. Go and do something.

But first, however, he had to finish this game. Bear gripped the bench. Focused on the feel of the wood in his hands. The scratch of his metal cleats on the concrete dugout floor. When the final notes of the iconic song faded away Bear was clear headed or at least out from under the mental haze that had been fogging his brain.

While his team spent the next half an inning battling at the plate, Bear fought his way back to mental control one inch at a time. When the inning was over, Bear stood and made his way out to the field. It was time to go to work, for real.



The Windup & the STEAL

Name: _____



He threw out a warm up pitch. And a second. And a third. Bear directed every ounce of his nervous energy into the ball and sent it toward home plate. After the 4th, his catcher, Pete Ramos - a man who had been with the team almost as long as Bear, walked the ball back out to the mound.

"Glad to have you back, man," Pete said. "I was getting a little worried there for a bit."

"Yeah," Bear said, "I'm sorry about that. I'm distracted tonight."

"You're never distracted," Pete said.

Bear shrugged. "Only human, I guess."

Pete smiled. "Had me fooled."

"Listen," Bear said, letting his eyes stray from Pete's face to scan the crowd. "I have somewhere I really need to be. Mind if we finish this game up quick?"

"Fine by me."

"Thanks Pete." Bear took the ball from his friend. "Get ready. They're gonna come in fast." Pete nodded and then turned back to set up behind the dish.

Bear squeezed the ball in his hand and looked up at the jumbotron. In his daze, his team has scored a run. Top of the 8th and they were winning. But barely. Which meant that if the other team didn't score at all, they wouldn't need to play the bottom of the ninth and he could get out of there even faster. Could get to the Met Gala even sooner. Could find Danny and figure out what he is up to. Sooner.

In the next two innings, Bear did the unthinkable. He struck out **six sequential** batters on three pitches each. Boom. Boom. Boom. They won the game.

Bear skipped the team celebration. He refused to attend the press conference and answer the reporters' questions. He showered as if he was eight years old again and running through a sprinkler.



The Windup & the **STEAL**

Name: _____

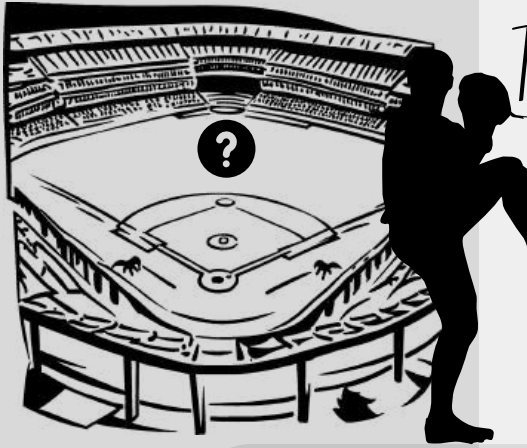


He slapped on his tux, **doused** himself in cologne, and sped over to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

As he dashed up the red carpeted steps and past a mob of disappointed photographers, he had only one thing on his mind.

I have to find Danny. I have to find Danny. I have to find...

END OF PART 2



The Windup & the **STEAL**

BY AMANDA ZIEBA

Listen Along!



Name: _____

Room for
Annotations



Part 3: Post-Game

Bear had been to the Metropolitan Museum of Art once before. On a date, with his wife, before she was his wife. Even though he didn't love fancy stuff like the paintings and sculptures featured here, she did. And he loved her. So he had gone. And now he was back... wishing he had paid more attention then, because he had no idea where he was going. A small part of him wondered where his wife was. They had planned to meet at the gala, but the bigger part of his brain kept repeating the same question.

Where was Danny?

Where was Danny?

Where was Danny?

And when he wasn't asking himself that, he was asking?

Is he still here?

Why would he be?

Where will he go next?

After searching the **exhibits** featuring jewels and European paintings he finally ended up in the fashion section and the display set up to **commemorate** this rookie year jersey. And there, **inexplicably**, tucked into a shadowy corner, was Danny. And he was smiling. Right. At. Bear.

At that moment, Bear's line of questioning finally **ceased**. His mind stopped and his feet took control. His feet moved him across the room, past the exhibit, past everyone who was not Danny Tortuga. Danny started walking too... away from Bear. At first Danny moved backward, keeping eye contact with Bear, but once he was sure the baseball player was following him, he turned and walked more quickly, out of the room, down the hall, through another doorway, and then to a staircase.

At the bottom of the staircase, there was a door and Danny took it. So did Bear. Suddenly, they were outside, beneath a sky full of stars.

The Windup & the
STEAL

Name: _____



At least, that's the way it felt to Bear. It might have just been the city lights, but for some reason, everything felt bigger and brighter to Bear tonight. Noisier. Fuller. Full of so many, many distractions.

"What are you doing? Where are you going? What did you steal?" The questions overflowed from Bear's mouth like fully cooked kernels from the concession stand popcorn machine.

"I came to steal from you," Danny said calmly.

"Me?" Bear asked. He thought he should be afraid, but he wasn't. He reached inside the coat pocket of his tux and pulled out his wallet. He thumbed through the bills. A few hundred at most. He handed it to Danny. He didn't know why.

"Not your money," Danny said with a soft chuckle. "I came to steal your focus. Steal the game."

For a full eight seconds, Bear said nothing. So Danny continued. "You are the greatest pitcher that has ever lived. Your skill, your focus, is legendary. Nothing rattles you. Nothing shakes your confidence. Nothing steals your focus. So I wanted to see if I could. Pretty great feat for someone not even on the field, huh?"

"I won," Bear said. "I mean, we did. We won the game."

"You lost," Danny said **decisively**.

Bear thought about it. About tonight. About how everything in his head went **topsy turvy** the moment he saw Danny at the game. How if this was a battle between just the two of them, Danny was likely the one who came out on top. "You're half right," Bear finally agreed.

"I didn't heist the game," Danny conceded. "But I definitely got your attention. So I'm considering it a win."

Bear wrinkled his nose and swallowed the bitter flavor in his mouth. He did not like to lose. Never had.

"And the Gala?" Bear asked. "Just a **convenient** meeting spot?"



Danny tipped his head back and looked up at the sky. “More than convenient,” he said. “This job, it’s a shell game. I’ve been busy, keeping everyone looking over here, over there, looking everywhere but where the action really is.”

“And where is that?” Bear asked.

“My guess is that you’ll likely find out tomorrow. In the news. I wish I could hang around and tell you all about it, but I have places to be. And shouldn’t you be finding your wife?”

At that final word, Bear turned on his heel, and charged through the door. But the door was locked. Of course it was. It was nothing more than an emergency exit. It wasn’t meant for visitors to go in. Or anyone to go in, really. Bear gave one final look over his shoulder at Danny before he bolted for the front entrance. His feet **pounded the pavement** and then the red carpeted stairs for a second time. He disappointed the photographers yet again and then disrupted the entire spectacle of people gathered in the entryway as he shouted, “Anna! Anna! Annabell Stone!”

In the end, she found him, her eyes filled with worry and confusion.

“Bear,” she said comfortingly. “Bear, I’m here.” She put her hands on his bearded face and pulled his line of sight down to match hers. “Bear, I’m right here.”

Bear pulled his wife into a huge bear hug. At that moment, nothing mattered more than Anna. In that moment, Bear decided he didn’t want anything to matter more than her ever again.

Bear officially retired from baseball the very next day. When he finally agreed to sit down with reporters to talk over his decision a few weeks later, the questions came at him **fast and furious**, but they all boiled down to pretty much the same thing, “Why are you retiring?”

Bear shook his head and looked straight at the camera. “For most of my life, baseball was number one. It outranked almost everything in my life. Every decision I made was balanced against the result it would yield on the mound.



The Windup & the STEAL

Name: _____



What I ate, how I exercised, sure. But more than that. How long I lived at my house here, in New York, or the one in Arizona during spring training. Whether Anna and I could go on vacation. Whether or not we would bring kids into this strictly-scheduled life. Baseball has given me so much. But it's taken some things too, things I'm not so sure I want to give any more. I'm grateful for all of it. The time with teammates, the wins, the awards, the personal satisfaction I've earned from doing a thing I love for so long. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to give this team, this city and this sport everything I have. But I've decided that I'm done giving my everything to this game. I've decided that I'm going to take for a while. Take some time for me. For my wife. For our life."

The reporters didn't know what to do with all of that. These were maybe more words than Bear had ever spoken at a press conference. Ever. Let alone strung together in such an eloquent and emotional message. So Bear surprised them again when he continued.

"You might not believe it, but I want to thank Danny Tortuga for helping me come to this conclusion."

"Danny Tortuga?" A reporter in the front row asked. "The thief who stole the Egyptian Sarcophagus last month?"

"Is that what he stole the night of the Met Gala? Nevermind, I don't want to know. What I do know is that Danny helped me realize I want to change my focus. He challenged me to a game, and I lost. And that loss might have been the most valuable lesson I've ever learned. And for that, I'm grateful. Danny, if you're listening, thank you."

Bear said that last line, looking right into the camera, hoping that Danny was watching.

"You're welcome!" Danny shouted from the back of the room.

The room was quiet for exactly eight seconds before someone shouted, "Get him!" and the press room erupted in pandemonium.

THE END



The Windup & the **STEAL**

NAME: _____



COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: PART 1 - PRE-GAME

According to the story, What makes Bear such a legendary and recognizable figure in baseball? (Do your best to cite text evidence w/ page #s!)

Why does Bear walk behind home plate before every game, and how does this tradition impact him?

What does Danny Tortuga say is the reason he's at the game, and why does that worry Bear?



The Windup & the

STEAL

NAME: _____



COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: PART 2 - THE GAME

How is Bear's performance during this game different from his usual focus, and what causes the change?

The author often uses lists to prove a point in this story. Make a list of all the ways the author **SHOWED** us Bear was distracted (in addition to simply **TELLING** the readers he was distracted.)

What motivates Bear to pitch so powerfully in the final innings, and how does it connect to his bigger goal?



The Windup & the **STEAL**

NAME: _____



COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: PART 3 - POST GAME

Why does Danny say he came to the game, and what does he claim to have stolen from Bear?

Who do YOU think was the “winner” in this psychological challenge - Bear or Danny? Why?

How does Bear’s decision to retire reflect what he learned from his encounter with Danny Tortuga?

What surprising event happens during Bear’s retirement press conference, and how does it connect to earlier parts of the story?



The Windup & the **STEAL**

DEEP DIVE: THE PODCAST



Listen Here!



Listen to 2 hosts discuss the story in this 9 minute podcast episode. Then, answer the questions using complete sentences.

1. What do you understand more clearly after listening to the hosts discuss and digest the story?

2. What is the benefit of listening to and reflecting on another person's thoughts, ideas and analysis? Do you think this was a helpful exercise, why or why not?

3. What is a Danny Tortuga moment in your life? (A profound change in your life based on an unexpected encounter or challenge)



STEALIN' THE GAME

Lyrics

Listen Here!



Read along and annotate as you listen to the song on YouTube!

Lyrics by Amanda Zieba & Lex

Room for
Annotations



STEALIN' THE GAME

A Ballad of Bear and the Man Who Messed with his Mind

[Chorus]

Don't let him in, don't let him win,
Keep your eyes locked on the game.
I'm the king upon the mound—
Won't let him steal my fame.

[Verse 1]

My name ain't Bartholomew, never was to me,
Call me Bear — a that name fits perfectly.
Six-foot-four, with paws for hands, a beard like untamed fire,
I pitch like thunder, cold as stone, and never seem to tire.

[Chorus]

Don't let him in, don't let him win,
Keep your eyes locked on the game.
I'm the king upon the mound—
Won't let him steal my fame.

[Verse 2]

I'd played for nearly twenty years, a living baseball myth,
A ritual man, I'd meet the fans, then start the game with grit.
But one May night, the crowd looked wrong — a glitch behind the plate,
A man too smooth, too smug, too known — a name the lawmen hate.

[Chorus]

Don't let him in, don't let him win,
Keep your eyes locked on the game.
I'm the king upon the mound—
Won't let him steal my fame.

[Verse 3]

Danny Tortuga — the thief of kings, the ghost they couldn't jail,
He'd robbed museums, stolen crowns, and vanished without a trail.
But there he sat, behind the net, in my bobbleheaded sea,
Grinnin' like a Cheshire cat — and starin' straight at me.

[Chorus]

Don't let him in, don't let him win,
Keep your eyes locked on the game.
I'm the king upon the mound—
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STEALIN' THE GAME

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[Verse 4]

I walked right up and called him out – “Aren’t you that wanted man?”
He tipped his cap and said, “It’s me – and yes, I’ve got a plan.
This chat of ours? It’s on the news. My alibi, you see.”
He winked and said, “While we’re on screen, the real job’s run by me.”

[Chorus]

Don’t let him in, don’t let him win,
Keep your eyes locked on the game.
I’m the king upon the mound—
Won’t let him steal my fame.

[Verse 5]

Back on the mound, my head was loud – my game went off the rails,
I thought of jewels and Met Gala heists, of clues and twisted tales.
But somehow, through that mental storm, I struck down every foe,
Three pitches flat, six batters gone – a legend’s final show.

[Chorus]

Don’t let him in, don’t let him win,
Keep your eyes locked on the game.
I’m the king upon the mound—
Won’t let him steal my fame.

[Verse 6]

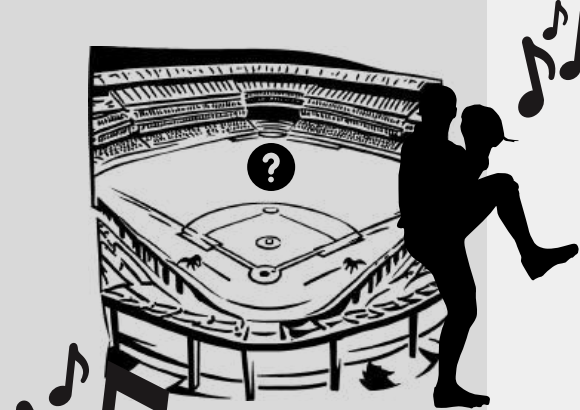
I found him in the museum hall, by my old rookie shirt,
He led me down a shadowed stair, through silence, dust, and dirt.
And there beneath the city lights, he said with wicked glee,
“I came to steal your focus, Bear – and you gave it up to me.”

[Chorus]

Don’t let him in, don’t let him win,
Keep your eyes locked on the game.
I’m the king upon the mound—
Won’t let him steal my fame.

[Verse 7]

“I won,” I said, but he just laughed, “You didn’t win and you know it.
You let doubt creep in, all I had to do was sow it.”
Then off he went, with a phantom grin, to pull his final thread,
And I turned back to find my wife – the home team in my head.



Room for
Annotations

STEALIN' THE GAME

Lyrics

Listen Here!



Read along and annotate as you
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STEALIN' THE GAME

A Ballad of Bear and the Man Who Messed with his Mind

[[Chorus]

Don't let him in, don't let him win,
Keep your eyes locked on the game.
I'm the king upon the mound—
Won't let him steal my fame.

[Verse 8]

I left the game the very next day, hung up my cleats for good,
Said thanks to fans and tipped my cap, the way a legend should.
I lost that game, I've gotta give Danny what he's due.
But if you ask me what I lost — I'll say I found what's true.

[Final Chorus — resolved, slower]

He got inside, but didn't win,
My fire still burns the same.
I found my heart, I found my truth—
And that's how I won the game.

DISCUSS!

- Which piece of the lyrics did you like the best? Why?
- Which piece of the lyrics did you like the least and why? How would you revise or change them?
- Do you think this song is an accurate portrayal of the story? Why or why not?
- How does the song portray the character of Danny Tortuga? Is he more villain, rival, or something else? How does that compare to his role in the story?
- What would you change about the sound of the song? Does it feel like a baseball song? A mystery? What qualities could be added to shift the song's vibe in either of those directions?



The Windup & the **STEAL**

STEALIN' THE GAME (SONG)

Listen Here!

Listen to this song inspired by the short story, The Windup and the Steal. Then, answer the questions below in complete sentences.



What specific events or details from the short story are captured in the lyrics? Can you find direct references or paraphrased moments?

What emotional tone or mood does the song convey compared to the short story? Which format—song or story—do you think makes the bigger impact, and why?

Why might the songwriter choose to end the final chorus with a shift in meaning? How does that mirror Bear's personal growth in the story?



The Windup & the **STEAL**

CREATIVE WRITING



Extend the story! Use these prompts to write your own adventure or mystery story! Be careful when you show/present these questions to students, because some contain spoilers.

Option #1 - What happens next? Is Danny caught at the press conference? Does Bear try to follow him? Where does he go? You can choose to write this story from the POV (point of view) of Danny, Bear or a reporter.

Option #2 - Write a story that helps us get to know Danny a bit better as real person, rather than as a mysterious figure people sort-of-know. Do this by telling about one of his pasts heists before the night he steals Bear's focus.

Option #3 - It is 20 years after Bear retires. What is his life like now? How does he spend his time? Is he still in touch with Danny? Try writing this in the format of a daily journal entry as if you are Bear or in the form of a letter that Bear is writing to Danny, telling him about his life AFTER his big decision and life change.

Option #4 - Pretend you are a reporter and write a news article detailing the events. Challenge yourself to use direct quotes for characters from the story, write vivid setting descriptions and use a few alliterative phrases just as the author Amanda Zieba does in the fiction story.

Option #5 - Pretend you are a podcaster. Write (and record if possible) a transcript for an interview that you do with Bear, Danny and/or both.



Use this rubric to first communicate your writing expectations to students and then to evaluate the writing products they create. Students and/or peers can also use this rubric to self/peer score/evaluate the pieces of writing.

I assign 2 points if the task was completed and well done, 1 if the task was attempted but not mastered, and 0 if the task was not attempted at all.

Task	0	1	2
Follows the prompt and stays on topic			
Uses correct grammar/capitalization/punctuation			
Thoughts are clearly presented and easy to follow			
Length is appropriate			
Format is correct (letter, fiction story, news article, diary entry, etc.)			

Total Points = ____/10

Task	0	1	2
Follows the prompt and stays on topic			
Uses correct grammar/capitalization/punctuation			
Thoughts are clearly presented and easy to follow			
Length is appropriate			
Format is correct (letter, fiction story, news article, diary entry, etc.)			

Total Points = ___/10

Task	0	1	2
Follows the prompt and stays on topic			
Uses correct grammar/capitalization/punctuation			
Thoughts are clearly presented and easy to follow			
Length is appropriate			
Format is correct (letter, fiction story, news article, diary entry, etc.)			

Total Points = ___/10

Task	0	1	2
Follows the prompt and stays on topic			
Uses correct grammar/capitalization/punctuation			
Thoughts are clearly presented and easy to follow			
Length is appropriate			
Format is correct (letter, fiction story, news article, diary entry, etc.)			

Total Points = ___/10