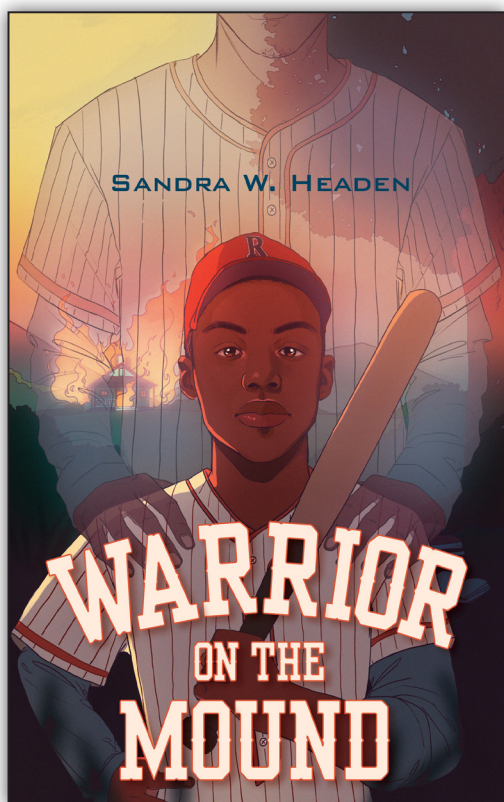


HOLIDAY HOUSE

READING GROUP

GUIDE



Warrior on the Mound by Sandra W. Headen

★ “An outstanding blend of history, sports, and coming of age: not to be missed.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

★ “This engaging novel tackles themes of bullying, racism, segregation, strength, and forgiveness. . . . A home run of a book that is brave enough to speak the hard truths.”

—*School Library Journal*, Starred Review

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

ABOUT THE BOOK

Narrated by twelve-year-old Cato, this intense and evocative story of racial unrest in prewar North Carolina ends with a dramatic match between white and Black Little League teams.

1935. Twelve-year-old Cato wants nothing more than to play baseball, perfect his pitch, and meet Mr. Satchel Paige—the best pitcher in Negro League baseball. But when he and his teammates “trespass” on their town’s whites-only baseball field for a practice, the resulting racial outrage burns like a brushfire through the entire community, threatening Cato, his family, and every one of his friends.

There’s only one way this can end without violence: it has to be settled on the mound, between the white team and the Black. Winner takes all.

Written in first person with a rich, convincing voice, *Warrior on the Mound* is about the experience of segregation, about the tinderbox environment of the prewar South, about having a dream, about injustice, and, finally, about dialogue.

Back matter includes an author’s note, historical background, biographical information about Negro League players, and more.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Setting is when and where a story takes place. Discuss the setting of this novel. Explain how the setting helps the reader understand the plot of the story.
- Cato and Hope Jones live with their grandparents in Pender County, North Carolina. Describe the Black community of Sycamore Grove. How is Papa Vee one of the most important citizens in the community? Gran is a healer. How do the people of Sycamore Grove depend on her to treat ailments and bring their children into the world? What are the medicines that Gran uses? Where did she receive her training? Discuss how Gran is training Hope to follow in her footsteps.
- Daddy Mo has been dead for four years. Why won’t Papa Vee and Gran tell Cato how his dad died? Explain what Papa Vee means when he says, “I want you and Hope to play in the sunshine just a little longer” (p. 24). What are the hints that Daddy Mo was the victim of violence? How can Gran talk about Daddy Mo in ways that Papa Vee can’t? Describe the words Gran uses to tell Cato about his daddy’s death. How does Cato come away with an understanding of why Papa Vee has been unable to tell him about Daddy Mo’s death? Discuss why the Jones family celebrates Daddy Mo’s birthday each year. How is this explained at the end of the novel?

- Who is Mr. Luke Blackburn? Describe the fear in Cato when he sees Mr. Luke. How does it take courage for Cato and Mason to enter Mr. Blackburn's store? Cato doesn't like the way Mr. Luke talks to them. How is this out of character for the way Mr. Luke treats them later in the book? At what point does Cato learn that Mr. Luke and Daddy Mo were friends? Explain the relationship between Papa Vee and Mr. Luke.
- Mr. Luke built Poplar Field for the white boys in New Hanover County. Cato and the Pender County Rangers, the Black baseball team, cut school to see the white boys' field. How are they blamed for vandalizing the field? Mr. Luke and Papa Vee agree on a punishment for Cato and Mason. How does Trace Blackburn treat them when they show up to work at Mr. Blackburn's store?
- Cato is often eager to fight or talk back to people who are mistreating him and his friends. How does Mason try to keep Cato out of trouble? Who is Freight Train? What is the first hint that he and his cousins, Digger and Mouse, are bullies? Describe Freight Train's reaction when Cato strikes him out in the first game between the Pender County Rangers and the Marlins. The first game between the Rangers and the Marlins was cut short because of trouble brewing. Explain why Mr. Luke and Papa Vee think the Rangers and the Marlins should play a second game. How does Freight Train threaten Cato?
- Explain the following simile: "His [Freight Train's] words hit me like a slap in the face" (p. 95). How does Trace Blackburn react to Freight Train's threat?
- Daddy Mo was one of the best pitchers in the Negro Baseball Leagues. How are Daddy Mo and now Isaac considered legends of baseball? Discuss the attack on Isaac when he comes home to Sycamore Grove. Compare and contrast what happens to Isaac with what happened to Daddy Mo. How are both attacks racially motivated? Gran tends to Isaac, and the entire family takes turns sitting vigil. Discuss the commitment and strength of the Jones family.
- Who is Philly Dan? How does Philly Dan help Cato prepare for the game with the Marlins? Why does Philly Dan suffer guilt for the attack on Isaac? Contrast Philly Dan's and Mr. Luke's guilt for what happened to Isaac and Daddy Mo.
- Describe the racial tensions in the book. What does Ms. Holmes, Cato's teacher at Pender County Normal School, do to help her students deal with the racial tensions? How are the poems of Langston Hughes appropriate literature during these times? Explain Cato's actions after the game when the Rebel Clan burns the Black school. Why does Papa Vee send Cato to hide out in Mr. Luke's barn? Explain why this makes Cato feel like a coward. At what point do Cato and Trace Blackburn become friends?
- Rev has been slow to forgive Luke Blackburn over Daddy Mo's death. How was Mr. Luke blamed for what he didn't do? Mr. Luke really wants forgiveness. Discuss the conversation when Cato gets Rev to forgive Mr. Luke.
- Papa Vee says to Cato, "The things you've done this summer show me that you are well on your way to being a man" (p. 174). What are the "things" that Papa Vee is referencing? How is Cato rewarded at the end of the novel?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sandra W. Headen, a former teacher and researcher at Chapel Hill, is a full-time writer. Her historical middle-grade novel, *Warrior on the Mound*, was awarded SCBWI's On-the-Verge Emerging Voices Award for writers from underrepresented groups; in addition, her short story "Papa's Gifts" (*The Carolina Quarterly*, March 2019) was awarded the Jones African-American Literary Prize by the North Carolina Writers' Network. Learn more about Sandra's work at SandraHeaden.com.