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The Contender
BY ROBERT LIPSYTE



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Name: _____

Date: _____

Activity

Many authors draw from their own life and experiences when they write. Using what you have learned from Lipsyte's biography, answer the following questions about Lipsyte's life and how it influenced his choices of characters and themes.

Life of Robert Lipsyte

Question	Answers
Where did Lipsyte grow up?	
What did his parents do for a living?	
Why did Lipsyte decide to become a writer?	
Where did Lipsyte go to college? (And where is this college?)	
What did Lipsyte do as a career before he began writing novels for young adults?	
What is a common theme in many of Lipsyte's books?	
How did Lipsyte get the idea for <i>The Contender</i> ?	
How did he get the idea for <i>One Fat Summer</i> ?	
How do you think he got the idea for his novel <i>The Chemo Kid</i> (1992)?	
What factors might have influenced Lipsyte's choice of setting for <i>The Contender</i> ?	
What factors might have influenced Lipsyte's choice to write about a minority character in <i>The Contender</i> ?	
What factors might have influenced Lipsyte in his desire to write books that help young people make good decisions?	

Name: _____

Date: _____

As You Read

Soundtrack

Objective: Creating a movie soundtrack to go along with *The Contender*

Movies use songs to add dramatic effect and influence the way the viewer feels about what he or she is seeing. Studies have shown that music has a very strong effect on people's emotions. In our everyday lives, we often associate a song with a memory or a feeling. In this way, these songs become the soundtracks of our lives.

Activity

As you read, create a soundtrack to go along with it. Try to pick songs that reflect something that is happening in the action of the plot. You can choose more than one song for each chapter, but be sure to specify which part of the action the song goes with, and why. Also, you may want to pick a specific part of the song that is most relevant to the scene it goes with. You can choose modern songs or ones that were more popular around the time of *The Contender*. Your choices do not have to be based on the song's lyrics or title, but could be just that you think the music fits the mood. When thinking about your choices, try to think about your favorite movies and how the songs go along with the scenes.

Use the following chart to keep track of your choices. A few examples from Chapter 1 are provided for you as a model, but make your choices personal.

Scene	Song	Reason
When Alfred is in the clubhouse and the older guys are giving him a hard time	R.E.S.P.E.C.T. by Aretha Franklin	The other guys are giving Alfred no respect, and it seems to go along with the time period and setting.
When Alfred is running to find James because he forgot to warn him about the alarm	Hard Times by RUN DMC	It fits the urban mood of the story. The music seems to go along with the mood.
When Alfred is crawling around in the garbage after he has been beat up by Major and Hollis.	One by Three Dog Night	The lyrics say, "One is the loneliest number" And Alfred is very lonely at this point. He is beat up and his friend James thinks he betrayed him.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 6

Simile

Objective: Identifying similes in the book
Constructing similes

Many writers and poets make use of similes to add life and color to their descriptions of objects. Similes also help the author to convey tone. For example, if a writer uses the simile, “the car’s tires hissed like snakes,” the simile suggests that there is something ominous, or unpleasant about the car. It also makes a comparison between the hissing sound of the tires and the noise of a snake.

A simile can be very literal, as in “he grinned like a fool,” or “his forearms were as thick as cannons,” or “the flower fluttered in the wind like a pinwheel.” These comparisons are easy to understand because they relate things that have obvious similarities. However, similes can also be more abstract, such as, “her smile was like a summer breeze,” or “the chocolates were like Sunday mornings.” The last simile compares two things that are not at all alike on the surface: Chocolates and Sunday mornings. The meaning is left almost completely to the reader.

Activity 1

In chapter 6, many similes are used to describe the scene in the gym. Go through the chapter, and pick out as many as you can. Then, fill in the columns in the **SIMILE CHART**. An example is done for you.

SIMILE CHART

Page number	Simile	What are the two things compared?	Your interpretation
60	...trying not to grin like a fool	Alfred's grin and a fool's grin	The grin makes him look dumb

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 8

Conflict

Objective: Observing how the conflict among characters has changed
Writing a journal entry about this change

In chapter 8, Alfred is confronted again, by Major, who wants him to disable the alarm in the Epsteins' store to make it easier to rob. But, something has changed in the dynamic between the two characters. Alfred is no longer unsure. He is confident when he firmly tells Major that his answer is no, even when Major threatens him with a knife. When Alfred gets inside, we learn that he was scared all the while, but he didn't show it. He overcame his fear, and he feels good about himself.

Activity

Pretend you are Alfred and write a journal entry about this interaction. It should start with something like, "Tonight, when I was walking back from Henry's I ran into Major again..." Write about the interaction and what has given you the strength to stand up to Major, when you couldn't before. Explain how Major has changed because he respects you now more, etc. Be sure to confess your fear, but write about how you overcame it. You may also want to write about why you couldn't stand up to Major before, and how your relationship with James has suffered as a result.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 13

Writing a Scene

Objective: Understanding how a writer conveys action through words

Writing action scenes is a challenge for most authors because it is difficult to convey action with words; people can see the action of a movie or in a photograph, but it's harder when you just have words and your imagination. Writers use various techniques to convey action, but the goal is usually that through the words, authors are able to capture the reader's mind and allow the reader to see the scene vividly. Often, this is achieved by attention to details. That is why the phrase, "One picture is worth a thousand words," is not completely accurate and why some people believe it should be, "One word is worth a thousand pictures."

Activity

In Chapter 14, there is a lot of action. Reread the fight scene, and pay attention to the techniques the author uses to convey the action. Write your own action scene using some of these techniques, as well as some of your own. You may write about anything you like (it certainly doesn't have to be fighting) as long as it contains action. For example, you could write a scene about a person learning how to dance, or running a race. It's up to you.