



Classroom Guide for **WILLIE WINS**

by **Almira Astudillo Gilles**
Illustrated by **Carl Angel**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grades 2-3

Interest Level: Grades 1-4

Guided Reading Level: M

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.2/.5

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Peer Pressure/Bullying, Self-Esteem/Identity, Father-Son Relationships, Sports (Baseball), Asian American Interest

Synopsis

When Willie needs a bank for a school contest, his father gives him one called an *alkansiya*, made from a coconut shell from the Philippines where Willie's Dad grew up. Dad's been saving the bank for Willie because inside is a surprise, a treasure Dad received as a boy from his uncle. At school, the class bully, Stan taunts Willie about the unusual bank. In the following weeks, Willie puts up with Stan's jeers and works hard to earn the most play money so he will win the prize—tickets to the circus. When it comes time to smash open his bank, Willie not only wins the contest, but finds the very special treasure that Dad has given him—a Willie Mays baseball card from 1964.

Background

According to the [National Institutes of Health](#) Medline Plus, "Bullying is when a person or group repeatedly tries to harm someone who is weaker or who they think is weaker. Sometimes it involves direct attacks such as hitting, name calling, teasing, or taunting. Sometimes it is indirect, such as spreading rumors or trying to make others reject someone."

As of August 2011, all but one state in the United States have laws addressing bullying or harassment, and half the states have laws that address cyber bullying. An interactive map with state bullying information is available online at the [Olweus Bullying Prevention Program site](#).

The Philippines is a nation of about 7,000 islands in the southwest Pacific Ocean. The Spanish arrived there in the sixteenth century and ruled until Spain lost the Spanish-American War to the United States in 1898. The U.S. occupied the country until it became a self-governing commonwealth in 1935. During World War II, Japan controlled the islands. The Philippines became an independent nation, the Republic of the Philippines, in 1946. Today, about four million Filipino-Americans live in the United States. About a quarter of them make their homes in Southern California. A portion of State Route 54 in San Diego is named the "Filipino-American Highway" to honor this community.

Teaching Tip

With its classroom setting, *Willie Wins* makes a good back-to-school selection. The story not only offers an opportunity to address the issues of bullying and sportsmanship, it also highlights the rewards of hard work.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing the book to students, you may wish to develop background, tap prior knowledge, and promote anticipation with questions such as the following:

1. How do you act when you have a bad day? Who helps you get over it? How does this person help you?
2. Have you ever received a very special gift? Why is it special? Who gave it to you?
3. What sport do you like to play the most? Why do you like it? How do you rate yourself as a player?
4. What do you know about baseball? What great players of the past can you name? Why were they great?

Exploring the Book

Display the book and read the title. Ask students what they think Willie Wins. Can they tell anything about Willie from the way he is dressed? Write students' responses on the board.

Have students look through the book and note the expressions on the faces in the illustrations. Explain that these expressions help tell the story.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out what Willie wins, how he does it, and what he learns from his prize.

VOCABULARY

Write the following three-syllable words from the story on the board. Read aloud each word and talk about its meaning. Assign a word to each student. Have students check a dictionary for their word's meaning and then write the three syllables in the word. Follow up by asking what smaller words students can find in each word.

favorite / fav-or-ite	tomorrow / to-mor-row	coconut / co-co-nut
anymore / an-y-more	visited / vis-it-ed	different / dif-fer-ent
confident / con-fi-dent	yesterday / yes-ter-day	buffalo / buff-a-lo
according / ac-cord-ing		

AFTER READING**Discussion Questions**

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop understanding of the content. Encourage students to refer back to the text and photographs in the book to support their responses.

1. The story begins on an unhappy note for Willie. What happens? How does he feel? How does his father try to help?
2. Why can't Willie stop thinking about Stan?
3. Why does Willie need a bank?
4. Why is Willie uncertain about the bank that Dad gives him? What does Willie think of the bank?
5. Why does the *alkansiya* have special meaning for Dad?
6. What happens when Willie brings his bank to school? Why does he have to defend it?
7. What promise does Willie make to himself?
8. How do you know Willie is a good student?
9. How does Willie open his bank? What happens when he opens it?
10. What treasure does Willie find in his bank? Why is it special?
11. How does Stan act when he sees the treasure? How do you think that makes Willie feel?

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might find the sections where Stan picks on Willie.
- The **Illustrator** might draw pictures of Willie enjoying his prize, a trip to the circus.
- The **Connector** might find other books set in the Philippines.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might find more information about Willie Mays.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *Literature Circles: Voice And Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize what they have read. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, essays, or oral discussion.

1. In the dedication to the book (page 3), the author mentions looking for "treasure in unlikely places." What does she mean? Write or tell about a time you found treasure in an unexpected place.
2. What is your definition of a good sport? Would Stan meet this? Why or why not? If not, how would you describe Stan?
3. The author and illustrator show different ways that Dad loves Willie. What are some examples?
4. Introduce students to the word *memorabilia* (things that bring up special memories or are collected for their connection to a particular area of interest). Why do people collect memorabilia? What do you think Willie will do with his baseball card? What would you do?

Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for students to share and discuss their work.

1. Have students work with a partner or in small groups to write a set of classroom rules for treating one another with respect. Alternately, students could write a list of ideas on how to act when confronted by a bully.

2. Have students go through the book and on a separate sheet of paper, write captions for the illustrations.
3. The coconut bank is different from the other banks students bring to school. How do you feel about being different?
4. Write a story about Willie's day at the circus. Tell who went with him and what they ate, saw, did, and heard.

ELL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners or who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Invite students to write or dictate questions about the story. Set aside time to help students explore and answer these queries.
2. Write these words on cards. Have ELL students find each word in the story and then identify the item in an illustration.

cap	mitt	bat	stove	window
stairs	box	clock	desk	shirt
bed	pencil	hammer	money	pillow

3. Once students have mastered a phrase or a sentence, have them reread it several times to develop fluency.
4. Offer frequent praise and support for students' reading efforts.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas.

Social Studies

Willie's Dad grew up in the Philippines. Have students locate this island nation on a world map or globe. Ask students to do research to learn about this country. For example: What is the capital? What bodies of water surround it? What are its nearest neighbors? How many islands does it include? What is the climate like?

Science

In the story, Willie is given a coconut bank. Tell students that the Philippines is a leading grower of the coconut palm tree. Help students create a diagram to show the parts (rind, husk, shell, eyes, seed with meat, milk) of a coconut. Then have students find out some of the different products of both the coconut palm and the coconut itself. If possible, bring in a fresh coconut for students to examine. Coconuts are available in many supermarkets and smaller groceries.

Math

1. Willie's class is learning about saving money. Use this opportunity to initiate a lesson on earning, saving, and spending money. Have students make a chart showing how they might earn money, what they might save it for, and how they might spend it.
2. Stan thinks that Willie's baseball card might be worth a hundred dollars. Ask students what they think a 1964 Willie Mays card would be worth today. Students might check their guesses online. They might be surprised that prices vary greatly. Discuss what determines the price of an old baseball card. Help students understand that the condition of a card is one factor. Others are the fame of the player, the scarcity of the card, and the demand for it. Ask students why an autographed card might be worth more than an unsigned one.

Sports

1. Baseball fans might research Willie Mays. Ask them to find information such as what his nickname was, where and how he grew up, what major league teams he played for, what his baseball statistics were, when he was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and what other honors he won. Have students plan a presentation for the class.
2. Remind students that Willie plays on a Little League team. Some of your students might also be members of a Little League baseball team. Invite those students to describe their experiences and what they have learned while participating in this organization. Interested students might also contact the [Peter J. McGovern Little League Museum](#) in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania, for more information about Little League baseball.

Art

Have students study the illustrations in the book to see some of the different kinds of banks Willie and his classmates bring to school. Then challenge students to make their own banks. Before students begin, brainstorm basic materials to use, such as empty coffee tins, plastic containers, boxes, old purses, or large envelopes. Remind students that, unlike the *alkansiya*, most small banks have a means for removing money as well as depositing it. Provide appropriate materials such as colored paper, stickers, tape, markers, and paint so students can decorate their banks. Display the finished banks for everyone to admire.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Almira Astudillo Gilles was born and raised in Quezon City in the Philippines. She now lives with her husband and their two children in Palatine, Illinois. Gilles did graduate studies at Michigan State University and taught at DePaul University Graduate School of Business before becoming a full-time writer. *Willie Wins* was her first book for children.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Carl Angel is a Filipino American who was born in Maryland and grew up in Hawaii. He is a graduate of the Academy of Art College in San Francisco. Angel's work as an artist, illustrator, and graphic designer has been exhibited throughout the San Francisco area and in Hawaii. He is also the illustrator of *Mga Kuwentong Bayan: Folk Stories from the Philippines*.

Book Information

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about **Willie Wins** at

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By Phone:

212-779-4400 ext. 25

212-683-1894 fax

By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, NY, NY 10016

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please contact us at general@leeandlow.com