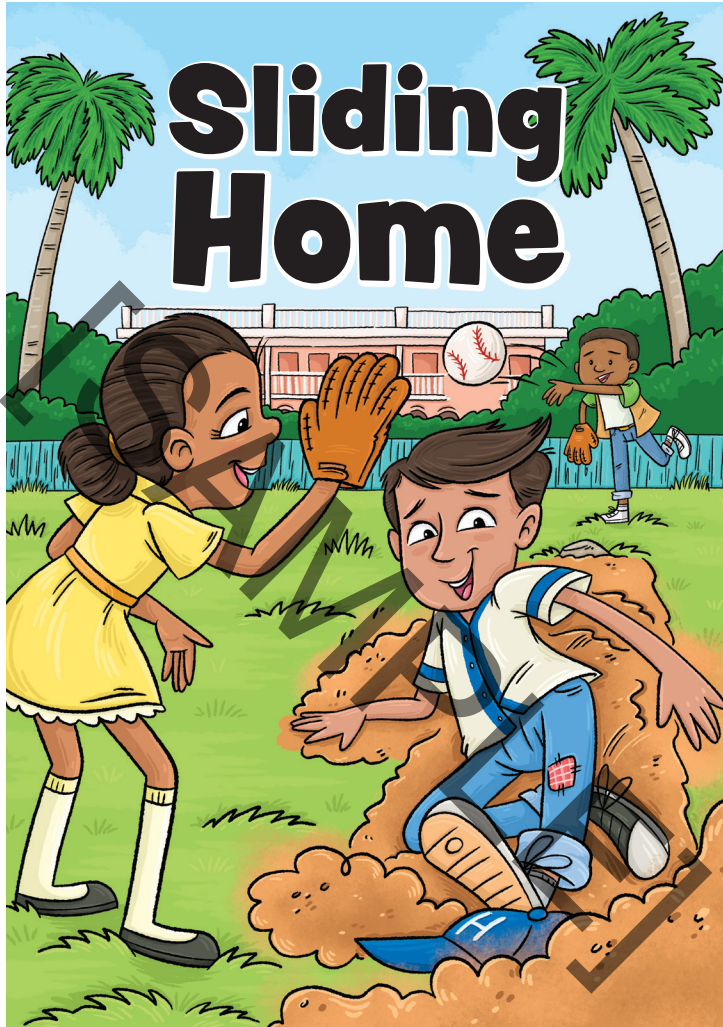


Sliding Home



By Antonio Sacre
Illustrated by Nikki Boetger



By Antonio Sacre, M.A.
Illustrated by Nikki Boetger

Consultant

Kristin Risdahl, M.S.Ed.

K-12 Social Studies Instructional Facilitator
Knox County Schools, Tennessee

Publishing Credits

Rachelle Cracchiolo, M.S.Ed., *Publisher*
Emily R. Smith, M.A.Ed., *VP of Content Development*
Véronique Bos, *Creative Director*
Dani Neiley, *Associate Editor*
Kevin Pham, *Graphic Designer*

Image Credits

Illustrated by Nikki Boetger

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sacre, Antonio, 1968- author. | Boetger, Nikki, illustrator.
Title: Sliding home / by Antonio Sacre, M.A. ; illustrated by Nikki Boetger.

Description: Huntington Beach, CA : Teacher Created Materials, [2022] |

Audience: Grades 2-3. | Summary: "Esteban has always wanted to see a baseball game in Havana. When he finally does, he's inspired to form his own team in his small neighborhood"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022006002 (print) | LCCN 2022006003 (ebook) | ISBN 9781087605524 (paperback) | ISBN 9781087632391 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Readers (Primary) | LCGFT: Readers (Publications)

Classification: LCC PE1119.2 .S237 2022 (print) | LCC PE1119.2 (ebook) | DDC 428.6/2--dc23/eng/20220217

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022006002>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022006003>

TCM | Teacher
Created
Materials

5482 Argosy Avenue
Huntington Beach, CA 92649
www.tcmpub.com

ISBN 978-1-0876-0552-4

© 2023 Teacher Created Materials, Inc.

This book may not be reproduced or distributed in any way without prior written consent from the publisher.

Table of Contents

Chapter One:	
Esteban's First Baseball Game	4
Chapter Two:	
A Cuban's Duty to Play Baseball	14
Chapter Three:	
A Ragtag Team	18
Chapter Four:	
Broken Window	24
Chapter Five:	
The Other Team	28
About Us	32

Chapter One



Esteban's First Baseball Game

“Hurry, Uncle Raymundo!” Esteban tugged at his uncle’s long, thin arm. “We’re going to miss the first pitch!”

“Slow and steady wins the race, my little nephew,” his uncle said.

“I’m not little!” Esteban cried. “I just turned 10! Slow and steady makes you miss the first pitch. Haven’t you heard that the early bird catches the worm? How can you have such long legs and walk so slowly? Let’s go faster. Pleeeeease!”



Esteban had been waiting weeks for this moment: March 31, 1947. It would be a date he'd remember forever. It was spring training. He was going to watch a real baseball game with real major-leaguers. Well, *almost* real major-leaguers. The Brooklyn Dodgers had sent their minor league team to Cuba to practice for the upcoming season. Today, they were playing a practice game against a Cuban league team. The field was two bus rides and a long walk from his house.

When they finally arrived, his uncle handed their tickets to the man behind the gate. Esteban sprinted toward the staircase to his seat. He tripped over someone's leg on his way up the steps. As he started to fall to the pavement in what seemed like slow motion, he braced himself—but suddenly he stopped falling. It felt as if he were floating.

He heard laughter around him and felt something tug at his waist. His uncle had caught him by the belt and held him in the air by his pants.

Esteban blushed red. “Please put me down, Uncle!”

“Walk slowly, *m’hijo*,” his uncle warned.

Esteban sprinted up the stairs again. He wanted to get away from the jeering adults, but mostly he wanted to catch the singing of the American national anthem. He caught sight of the players along the field just as the crowd stood. The green grass, the red dirt, the sun, and the stadium—it all brought tears to his eyes. The magic of it inspired him.

His uncle caught up with him as they began the anthem and put his hand over his heart.



“What are you doing?” Esteban asked.

“This is how the Americans do it. Look!” his uncle said.

On the first base line, Esteban saw the team pulling their hats off and placing their hands over their hearts. Esteban solemnly put his hand over his heart as well. He tried hard to understand the foreign words.

They found their seats on the hard, wooden bench. They sat down as the players took the field. “There he is!” his uncle excitedly pointed at an athletic fielder. He was smoothly and swiftly running onto the field. “Jackie Robinson,” his uncle said. “They say he’s going to be the first Black man to play in the major leagues.”

“Black people aren’t allowed to play baseball in America?” Esteban asked.



“They are, but only in their own league,” his uncle said.

“Here, there is just one league,” Esteban replied.



Esteban watched his team sprint across the diamond. “One day, I’m going to play for Havana, just like them.”

“Why not the Dodgers?” his uncle asked.

“I love Cuba!” exclaimed Esteban.

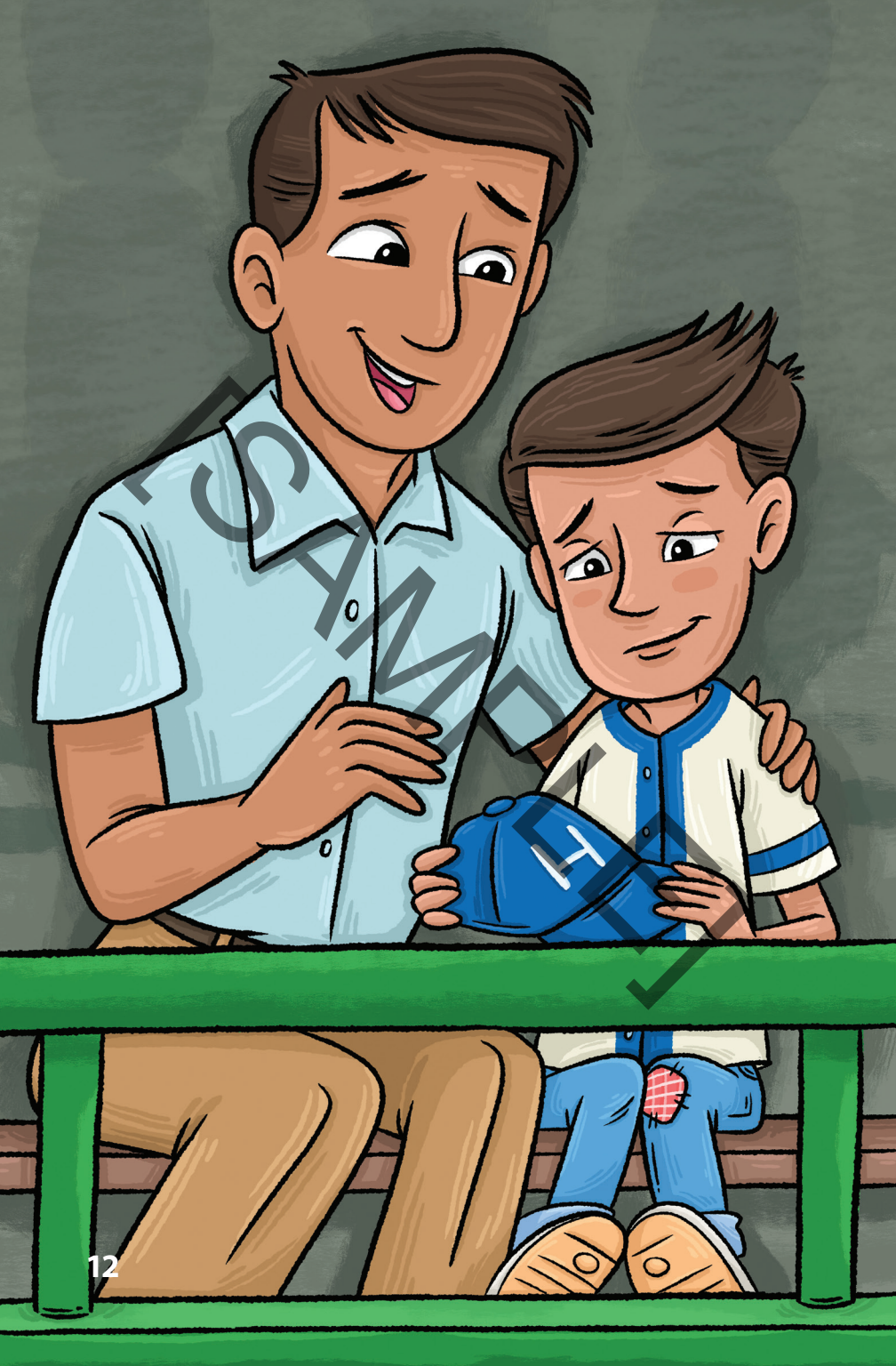
“Well, you’ve got a lot of work ahead of you,” his uncle said. “You couldn’t hit the ball if your life depended on it.”

“I’m fast!” Esteban said. “And I can throw a baseball across the field and hit a tin can!”

His uncle looked at him thoughtfully. “Do you know what happens when you shake a coconut tree?” he asked.

“Coconuts fall,” Esteban said.

“And so do 10-year-old boys who can run and throw well. But one who can also hit gets a path straight to the big leagues.”



“But there is no team in our neighborhood,” Esteban said.

“So?” his uncle asked.

“And we can’t afford a glove,” Esteban sighed.

“So?” his uncle asked.

“Or a bat!” Esteban said.

“And?” his uncle asked, throwing up his arms.

“And balls are hard to come by since the war,” Esteban sighed again.

“Why should any of that stop you?” his uncle asked. “Just because you don’t have what you need doesn’t mean you must stop doing what you love.”

Chapter Two



A Cuban's Duty to Play Baseball

Jackie Robinson hit a ball down the left field line. The crowd leapt to their feet.

“Wow! He’s so fast!” Esteban said. He couldn’t believe it. The left fielder scooped up the ball and threw it to the man at third base as Robinson ran toward him.

A cloud of dirt rose into the air, and the umpire yelled, “SAFE!” Esteban stood on his seat. He yelled and waved his hat wildly. Robinson called time-out and dusted off his uniform. He looked toward Esteban and tipped his cap.



“Uncle! He looked right at me!”
Esteban said, grinning.

His uncle yelled, “He looked right at both of us!”

“How cool would it be if he stole home?” Esteban asked.

“I doubt he will,” his uncle said. “Players in the Major League don’t steal bases like we do. In Cuba, it’s a different story. We’ve been stealing home since the Americans brought the game to us in 1868.”

“I thought we invented baseball!”

“*M’hijo*, no, we didn’t invent it,” his uncle said. “But we perfected it!”

The inning ended with Robinson stuck on third base.

“Do you know why we play baseball in Cuba?” his uncle asked.

“Because the game is super fun?”

“Yes. And to show up the Spaniards,” his uncle said. “Did you know that before we became independent from Spain in 1902, they wouldn’t let us play baseball?”

Esteban turned his attention from the field. “They wouldn’t let us play *baseball*?”

“No, they wanted us to watch bullfighting,” his uncle said. “Some people say that we fought for our independence just so we could play baseball.”

“When were we able to play?” Esteban asked.

“Sometime in the early 1900s—I forget the actual date. But we’ve been making up for lost time. Soon, we’re going to send a bunch of our players to the big leagues in America. Look at them,” his uncle said.

They both turned to watch the skilled players make a difficult game look easy.

Chapter Three



A Ragtag Team

The whole family crowded around the table. There were huge plates of rice, beans, and plantains piled high. Everybody talked and laughed together. Esteban could barely contain himself.

“And then he hit a home run. I never saw someone hit it that far! I’m going to start a baseball team in our neighborhood,” said Esteban.

The table quieted quickly as all eyes turned to Papá. He finished chewing and dabbed at his mustache with a napkin. Then he said, “Well, my son, your studies take precedence.”



Fabiana chirped, “I want a present!”

“*Precedence*, Fabi, not present,”
Papá said.

“Oh. I want a precedence!” Fabiana corrected herself. Everyone laughed. She sheepishly looked around the table. “What’s a *precedence*?”

“Fabi, it means ‘more important.’ It’s more important to learn as much as you can than play a game,” Papá said.

“I can do both, Papá!” Esteban said, trying not to whine.

Papá looked toward Mamá. She put her fork down. “Actually, Esteban, we were going to ask you to start working after school at the factory,” Mamá said. “We need the extra help there.”

Esteban said, “But, Mamá! I can study, work, and still play baseball!”

His father held a hand up and said,
“Esteban”

“Don’t say ‘we’ll see,’” Esteban sighed.

“We’ll see,” Papá said anyway.

At school the next day, Esteban ate his ham sandwich during lunch. His friend María asked, “But why do we have to play at three? It’s the hottest part of the day!”

Esteban said, “That’s the only time we are all available. Before going home, we can meet in the field and play a game.”

“But we’d have to invite Manolo,” Julio said. “He’s the only one rich enough to buy a baseball.”

“What’s the point?” María groaned.
“There’s no other team to play against, and it’s not like there will be.”



“*What’s the point?*” Esteban asked. “*What’s the point of playing a game that won us our independence from Spain? What’s the point of playing a game that will give us exercise and make us strong? What’s the point of playing the world’s most popular sport? What’s the point of smashing a baseball into the sky? We’re CUBANS! Baseball is our duty!*”

María chimed in. “Well, I disagree with your facts. I think our army had more to do with gaining independence from Spain than baseball did. But you are right that baseball is great! Let’s do it!”

Esteban looked at Julio. Slowly, he began to smile.

“You think we can do it?” Julio asked.

Esteban said, “Where there’s a will, there’s a way!”

María exclaimed, “My grandmother always says that!”

Chapter Four



Broken Window

A very sweaty Esteban stood at home plate. He stood just like Jackie Robinson. He stared out at María on top of a small pile of dirt that served as the pitcher's mound. A group of fielders stood in the tall grass behind her. Esteban tapped the squashed hat that was home plate. Then, he tightened his grip on the thick broom handle they used as a bat.

María fired in a fastball, and Esteban swung with all his might. He crushed the ball—right into Mrs. López's window! Glass littered the street. Every player on the field ran behind a huge mango tree.



Esteban stood in horror. He thought about running, too. But instead, he walked nervously up to the house.

The door opened, and a stern woman came out. She was holding their baseball. Scowling, she grumbled, “Did you do this?”

Esteban fought back the tears, but with little success. “Yes, I’m so sorry about your window.”



“Did you swirl into the pitch with your hips? Or did you just flick your forearms?” Mrs. López asked.

“What?” Esteban replied in shock.

“Show me your swing.”

In the distance, the kids peeked from behind the tree. They watched as Esteban showed his swing to Mrs. López.

“Now, Esteban, that’s your problem. You have to swirl your hips from the back. Like this,” she said, swinging the broomstick so hard it whistled in the air.

Esteban gaped at her. “If I fix your window, will you be our coach?”

She stared at him and then broke into a huge smile. “We can fix it together later.” She stepped toward the tree and yelled, “Come out, already! It’s time to learn how to hit.”

Chapter Five



The Other Team

A few weeks later, Esteban and his friends talked at the lunch table.

“Where did Mrs. López find another team?” María asked.

“I don’t know,” Esteban said.

“She said they are tough!” Julio said.

“But we are tough, too. They are going to get a taste of María’s fastball and my bat!” Esteban replied.

“I can’t wait until school lets out!” María said. The rest of the school day seemed to drag on forever.

When the time to play finally came, the kids stood just beyond the first base line. Their mouths hung open.

Out of Mrs. López's house ran the Havana baseball team. Their uniforms were freshly ironed. They walked toward Esteban's team and shook each kid's hand.

The kids stood there, frozen in shock.

Mrs. López walked over, dragging a big green bag. She said, "It's rude to stare!"

All their families came to watch. Uncle Raymundo walked over to Esteban, all smiles and love.

"Uncle Raymundo! What's going on?" Esteban hugged his uncle.

His uncle swung him into the air and back to the ground. "Ask *her*!" Uncle Raymundo said, pointing to Mrs. López.

Mrs. López said, “Every year, the Havana Cubans play a game to thank the town for their support. Your dad wrote a letter telling them about you and your team. He asked them to come here to play. Once I promised to iron their uniforms for free, they said yes. They also said they’d donate these.” She unzipped the bag. Inside it were a bunch of baseballs and leather gloves.

Esteban hugged Mrs. López and hugged his uncle again. Then, he ran over to the benches.

“Thanks, Papá,” Esteban said.

“Thank your mother, it was her idea,” Papá said.

“Thanks, Mamá,” Esteban said.

Mamá said, “Thank your sister. She’s the one who told Papá to write the letter.”

Esteban turned to his sister. She smiled at him. He hugged her. “Thanks, Fabi!”

Fabiana smiled and said, “In Cuba, baseball takes *presents* over almost anything else. Except for family!”

Everybody laughed.

Esteban said, “The *present* of this game is something I will never forget. But my family takes precedence any time.”

Mrs. López yelled, “PLAY BALL!”



About Us

The Author

Antonio Sacre was born in Boston, Massachusetts, to a Cuban father and an Irish-American mother. He speaks Spanish and English. He writes books. He also played baseball for a long time. He lives with his wife and two children. They all can hit a baseball.

The Illustrator

Nikki Boetger was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, which is the home of her favorite baseball team, the Cincinnati Reds! She She draws and takes photos to showcase her love of the outdoors. She lives in Indiana with her beau and three dogs who also love a good game of ball in the yard!

Book Club Questions

1. Why does Esteban's family need him to work in a factory?
2. What makes baseball so important in Cuba?
3. How would you feel if a law said you couldn't do something that you loved?
4. What do you think Esteban is thinking when the real baseball players turn out to be their opponents?

Sliding Home

Esteban has always wanted to see a baseball game in Havana. When he finally does, he's inspired to form his own team in his small neighborhood.

Reading Levels

Guided Reading: P

DRA Level: 34

Lexile® Level: 620L

121604

ISBN-13: 978-1-0876-0552-4



90000

9 781087 605524