

**ELLEN SCHWARTZ**

WITH A FOREWORD BY LINDA KAWAMOTO REID

# Heart of a Champion

**Educators' Guide**



Penguin  
Random  
House

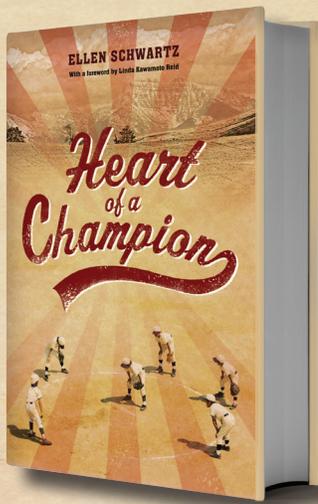
# DEAR EDUCATOR

*Heart of a Champion* is a story of persistence, hard work, big dreams and never giving up. The book can be used in the classroom in a number of ways, including:

- Exploring conceptual and thematic connections such as friendship, adversity, connection, change, perspective, family, pride, prejudice, racism and hope
- Conducting an in-depth study of character development and fiction inspired by true events
- As a companion to discussions and study surrounding Canada's involvement in World War II and its treatment of Japanese Canadians

The activity guide that follows includes discussion questions, writing activities and prompts to elicit a meaningful understanding of the text. Students will be encouraged to ask and answer questions to clarify and monitor their understanding, identify important ideas and synthesize information for a broader understanding. The activities and learning prompts can be used for a Social Studies and/or Language Arts unit, or they can be used as stand alone enrichment in whole class and/or small group book studies. Where applicable, activities have been aligned with Common Core State Standards.

## ABOUT THE BOOK



Ten-year-old Kenny (Kenji in Japanese) worships his older brother, Mickey (Mitsuo), a baseball hero whose outstanding performance on the Asahi baseball team has given him fame and popularity. Despite Kenny's suspected heart condition, he is determined to practice secretly with Mickey so he, too, can one day try out for the Asahis. But world events soon overtake life in this quiet community. When Japan attacks Pearl Harbor in 1941, everything for Kenny and his family spirals out of control: schools are closed, businesses are confiscated, fathers are arrested and sent to work camps in the BC interior, and mothers and children are relocated to internment camps. When Mickey is arrested for a small act of violence, Kenny manages to keep his family's spirits up, despite the deplorable conditions in camp. Coming across a "vacant" field covered with scrap wood, broken shakes and torn tarpaper, Kenny gets permission to clear it and convert it into a baseball field. One by one, the boys in the camp pitch in, and the work gives purpose to their long days. Kenny's persistence, hard work and big dreams shape the teen he is to become in this story of happiness found despite all odds.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ellen Schwartz was born in Washington, D.C., and now lives in Burnaby, British Columbia. She has published 16 books for children, including picture books, middle grade fiction, tween non-fiction and young adult novels. In addition to writing books, she has published hundreds of magazine articles and adult short stories. Ellen Schwartz teaches creative writing at Douglas College. Before becoming a writer, she taught special education and the primary grades, and worked as an environmental educator.



## PRE-READING DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

- What do you know about baseball as a sport?
- Have you ever heard of the Asahis?
- What do you know about Canada's involvement in World War II? There is a lot of important background historical information provided in the author's foreword. After reading, think about what you have learned that you didn't know before. What questions do you have?
- As you read, keep a reader's journal in which you record names of characters, places and important plot points. Refer back to this journal of notes as you complete and participate in discussions and post-reading activities.
- How did the author come to write this book? Have you ever been inspired to act after watching or reading something new? Write a short journal-style entry explaining this experience.

*(SL.3.1, SL.4.1, SL.5.1)*

## CHARACTER

- Refer back to your journal notes and as a whole class, small group or independently, make a master list of the main characters in the story. Identify five character traits of one of the following characters: Mickey, Keiko, Harry, Constable Murphy, or Tak. Explain your reason for choosing these character traits by referring back to their actions in the story. What role did this character play in the development of the story's plot? How did you feel about this character? Were there things you admired or disliked about them?
- Kenny's character changed significantly over the course of the story. How would you describe Kenny at the beginning, middle and end of the story? Name three events in the story that contributed to his evolution. For example, why did he become so much stronger physically? Harry tells Kenny that he always knew that his son wanted to be an Asahi, "...you have the heart of an Asahi. The heart of a champion." What was he referring to?
- Mickey was not one who boasted about his superior and well-regarded skills on the baseball field. Can you think of a word that describes somebody who does not boast about their successes? How did this aspect of Mickey's character influence how ashamed he felt about his outburst the first day they moved to the camp?
- One character stood out in the story for showing off and making fun of others. Who was this character? What events in the story may prompt the reader to feel sympathy for this otherwise unlikeable character?
- At the beginning of the story, Mickey is described as being a hero. Write a definition of the word "hero" and consider whether Mickey's accomplishments at the beginning of the story match your definition of what it means to be a hero. A different hero emerges as the story unfolds. Which character's actions could be considered heroic? Why? Write a short description of this character and clearly explain why you feel he was heroic.
- Consider Harry Sakamoto's character. Which of the following characteristics do you think best describe Harry as a character: caring, proud, responsible, cruel, selfish, passionate, brave, grouchy? Explain your justification for each choice and omission by referring back to events or information revealed in the story.
- Why did Keiko Sakamoto do her best to avoid the woodstove in her new hut? How might her ability to learn and use the stove correctly have boosted her confidence and given her hope?

*(RL.3.1, RL.3.3, RL.4.1, RL.4.3, RL.5.1, RL.6.1, W.3.1, W.3.2, W.4.1, W.4.2, W.5.1, W.5.2)*

## NATIONALITY AND CULTURE

- Although their culture, heritage and religion were quite different from one another, the Bernsteins and the Sakamotos had a very strong friendship. What did they have in common? Find two incidents in the story that show how both the Bernsteins and the Sakamotos suffered similarly.
- If you are not of Japanese heritage, what does the reader learn about Japanese culture from the novel? Consider the following aspects of culture: food, dress, behavior, language, and art. Select one of these categories to further research its importance within Japanese culture.
- Many of the people who suffered at the time of the novel were of Japanese heritage but were born Canadian. When speculating about what awful things the Canadian government might do after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, one woman said, “That can’t happen in Canada. It’s a democracy, remember?” What is the definition of “democracy”? Do you think the way the Canadian government treated Japanese Canadians at the time was democratic? Why or why not? Imagine you are one of the Japanese Canadians affected in the way that the Sakamotos were in the story. Write a letter to the government explaining how you feel about the situation and what you think they should do differently.
- Food plays a large role in the story in terms of helping identify Japanese culture. What are some of the Japanese dishes mentioned in the story? Research these dishes further and if possible find a recipe and cook one of them.
- What were Kenny’s, Mickey’s, Harry’s and Sally’s Japanese names? Why do you think they were called by different names other than their given Japanese names? Eventually, even these names seemed to be taken away by the government.

*What was worse was that he had a number. He was identified as 06247. Not just Sakamoto, Kenji, but a number. It made him feel as if part of him, his real, breathing, living self, had been taken away. That was how the registrar and the RCMP officer had looked at him—or, rather, not looked at him. He was just a Japanese. Nobody.*

Imagine your identity, your name, was taken from you and was replaced with a number. How would this make you feel? Think about the importance of your own name. How do you feel about it? Would you ever willingly change it? Write a reflection about the importance of your name.

- The Constitution Act of 1982 outlines the following fundamental rights of a Canadian:
  1. freedom of conscience and religion;
  2. freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;
  3. freedom of peaceful assembly; and
  4. freedom of association.

The story was inspired by events that occurred at that time in Canadian history. If the Constitution Act had been in place in 1941, how many of these fundamental rights would have been unlawfully taken away from the characters in the novel? In your opinion, are any of these rights more important than the others? Explain your thinking. Do you think a government is ever justified in restricting the rights of its citizens? Write a short opinion piece explaining your answer and, although a work of fiction, use some of the events in the story to support your opinion.

*(RL.3.1, RL.4.1, RL.5.1, RL.6.1, W.3.1, W.3.2, W.3.7, W.4.1, W.4.2, W.4.7, W.4.9, W.5.1, W.5.2, W.5.9)*

*Heart of a Champion*

## ASAHIS

- What does the word “Asahis” mean? Why would the team have selected this name for itself originally?
- From what you read in the Author’s Note and the novel itself, how did the Asahis come to be? What set them apart from their counterparts?
- In her foreword, Linda Kawamoto Reid wrote: “The Asahis not only bridged the gap between the Caucasians and the Japanese who shared a community, but also the generational gap between the first and second generation Japanese Canadians.” What does Reid mean? What events in the story demonstrate how both of these ideas may have been true?
- Why did Kenny want to play for the Asahis?
- Why was the creation of the baseball field and organization of teams such an important project to Kenny and the other boys? How might the project be seen as a symbol of hope? The boys created two teams to play each other. What names did they select? Design a logo for each team’s jersey that you feel would best represent each team.
- The style of baseball played by the Asahis was often referred to as “brain ball.” Why?

*(RL.3.1, RL.3.3, RL.4.1, RL.4.3, RL.5.1, RL.6.1)*

## OTHER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS and ACTIVITIES

- Do you think the ending of the story is hopeful? Why or why not?
- The author wrote the story after being inspired by a documentary she watched. Although a work of fiction, she based her story on true events in Canadian history. What do you think some of the challenges might be when writing a story based on history?
- Further research the experiences of Japanese Canadians in the early 1940’s in British Columbia. Locate on a map where different labor camps and resettlements were located.
- The Government of Canada issued a formal apology to Japanese Canadians in the House of Commons in 1988. Read more about the apology here: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/asian/20years-jap.asp>

*(RL.3.1, RL.4.1, RL.5.1, RL.6.1, W.3.7, W.4.7, W.5.7)*

## LINKS

[www.penguinrandomhouse.ca](http://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca)

[www.ellenschwartz.net](http://www.ellenschwartz.net)

Virtual Museum of Canada virtual exhibit on the Asahis:

<http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/virtual-exhibits/exhibit/asahi-canadian-baseball-legends>

Sleeping Tigers – NFB documentary:

[https://www.nfb.ca/film/sleeping\\_tigers\\_the\\_asahi\\_baseball\\_story](https://www.nfb.ca/film/sleeping_tigers_the_asahi_baseball_story)

# COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

## Reading: Literature

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.1* Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.3* Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1* Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.3* Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1* Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

*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.

## Writing

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1* Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2* Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.7* Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.1* Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.2* Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.7* Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.9* Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.1* Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2* Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.7* Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.9* Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

## Speaking and Listening

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.1* Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1* Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1* Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.