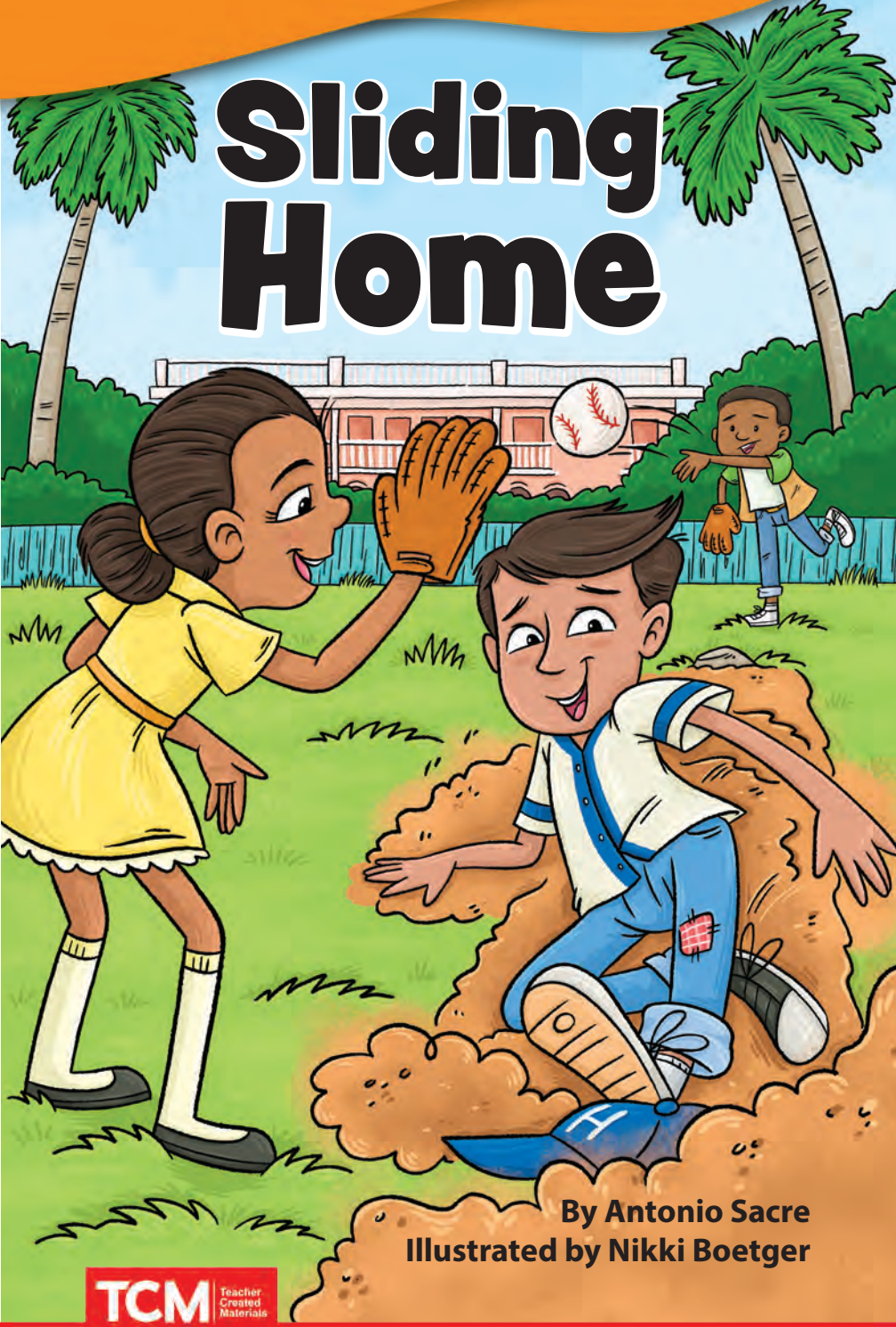

Sliding Home
By Antonio Sacre
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TCM
Teacher Created Materials

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For Review Only

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!"

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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.

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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.



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"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.

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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.

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