Practice Makes Perfect



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TCM Teacher Created Materials

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CHAPTER ONE



Curve Ball

Enrique stepped out of the batter's box and stared at the hulking giant on the pitcher's mound. Did that dude have a mustache? *I'd like to see that kid's birth certificate. If he's 10 years old, I'm Babe Ruth.*

Enrique clamped his jaw so tightly that the muscles in his cheek bulged out

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to make him look more menacing. He stared out at the pitcher as if his eyes could burn holes into his foe at any moment. This would surely generate unease—if not downright fear—into his opponent. He slapped down on his helmet like he'd seen some of the pros do on TV, but he hit himself too hard and couldn't help but flinch.

He heard a few parents in the stands laugh. Was it at him? He stole a glance into the opposing team's bleachers. Sure enough, two dads wearing Miami Mice baseball hats turned their heads quickly away, pretending that they didn't just make fun of a fifth grader trying to do one of the most difficult things in all of sports.

He glanced at the home field side and saw the oldest woman he knew—his grandma—his feisty abuelita.

She hoisted her fists menacingly in the air at the offending parents. "Don't let them bother you. They are wearing mice on their heads! You are the

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champion of my *corazón*!" she shouted.

Enrique loved his abuelita with every fiber of his being, and her voice soothed him and calmed his nerves at the same time. He readjusted his helmet and snarled to himself, "You got this!"

Abuelita jumped up in her seat again and screamed, "Umpire! Tell those tiny mice parents they are *sinvergüenzas*!"

The umpire smiled under his mask and bellowed, "Play ball!"

Enrique's Pelican teammates on the bench howled with laughter and smashed their forearms into each other. His best friend Roberto hung his wiry frame out of the dugout and yelled, "Reekay, your abuelita's got your back! Oh, man, she dropped the *sinvergüenza* bomb on them! Those dudes are shamed!"

Enrique dug his back foot into the dirt and gripped his bat while he stamped in his front foot.

Enrique stared down the pitcher while Roberto yelled louder, "Level

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swing, kid, give it a rope! Who's the MAN?"

Enrique whispered to himself doubtfully, "I'm the man."

"I can't HEAR YOU!"

"I'm the MAN!" Enrique sounded more confident this time.

"That's it, *hermano*!"

Enrique cleared his mind of the unkind dads, his spirited abuelita, and even his best friend emboldening him. The teenager masquerading as an 11-year-old lifted his front leg and catapulted the ball with lethal velocity right at Enrique's head!

Panic-stricken, he leapt out of the way a nanosecond before being decapitated, while the umpire screamed, "Strike three, you're out! Game over!" The hulk on the mound raised his arms in the air and looked toward the spectators, where one of the men with the Miami Mice hat thumped his chest at the pitcher.

Enrique turned back to the ump and lamented, "He nearly killed me with

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that pitch!" As the umpire sauntered away, he said, "Perfect curve ball, kid, a flawless pitch."

Roberto came over and draped his arm over his buddy. "Yeah, that curve was filthy. You weren't hitting that guy."

Enrique stared at the ground dejectedly and murmured, "But you hit his curve ball."

"But Reekay, I practice."

"I practice, too!"

"I practice before practice. Then, I go home and eat, and then I practice after practice. Then, I do homework and do you know what I do?"

"Go to sleep?"

"Practice."

Enrique kicked at the ground and declared, "I'm never going to hit as good as you, even if I practice more!"

"You never know until you try. Let's shake hands with those teenagers pretending to be fifth graders and get out of here. See you at school!"

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