

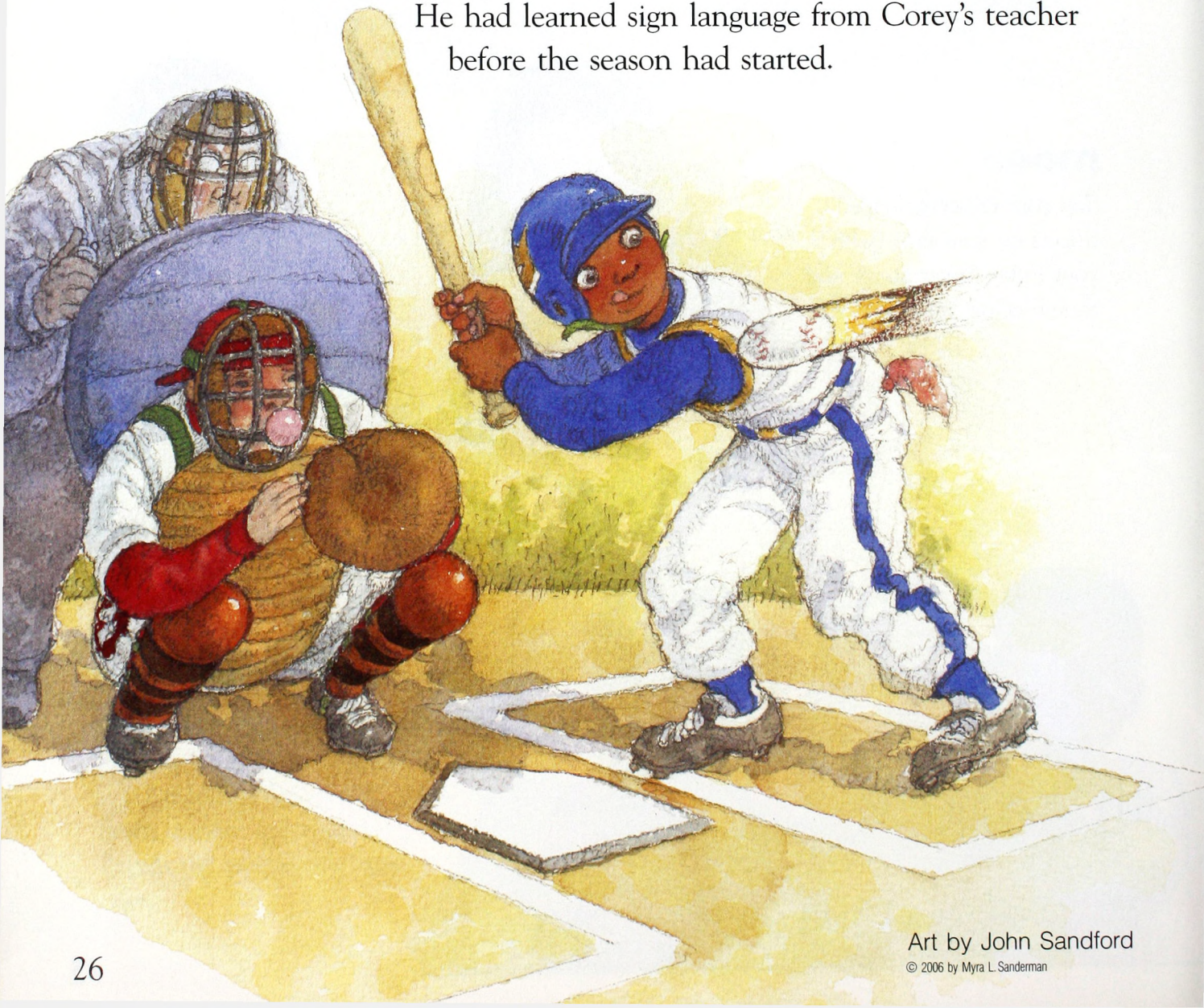
A Feel for the Game

by Myra Sanderman

COREY STOOD WITH his bat ready, watching the pitcher. The ball streaked toward him, but he let it go, sensing not to swing.

"Ball four!" yelled the umpire, although Corey couldn't hear him. He looked at Coach Lempert instead. The coach put his hands in front of him, palms down, and moved them back and forth. "Walk," the coach signed.

He had learned sign language from Corey's teacher before the season had started.



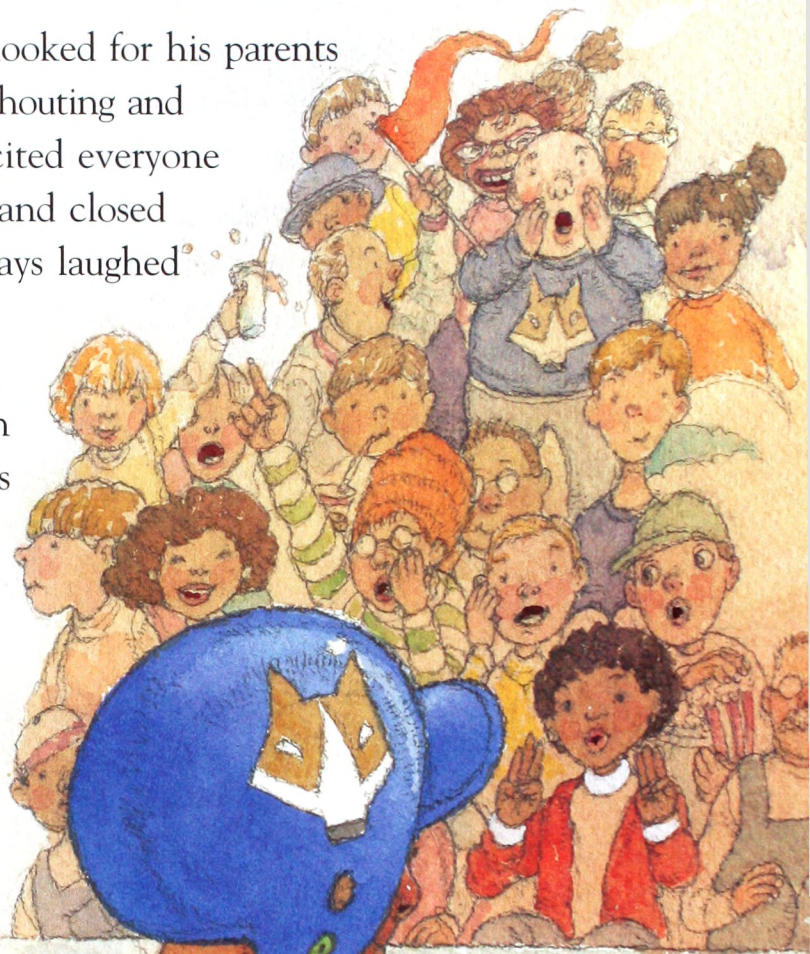
Corey tossed down the bat and jogged to first base. He felt great!

When he reached the base, he looked for his parents in the stands. He couldn't hear the shouting and cheering, but he could see how excited everyone was. Arms waved. Mouths opened and closed like dozens of crazy fish. Corey always laughed at how funny they looked.

His mom made an "o" with her mouth and held up three fingers on each hand, tucking her little fingers under her thumbs. "Wow!" she signed.

Corey had been afraid when he first tried out for the team. Coach Lempert wasn't sure it would work, either. But after Corey's parents talked to the coach, and after he saw Corey hit, Corey became part of the Northfield Huskies. If they won today, his team would be in the championships. Corey wanted that so much it hurt.

Robby was next at bat. The Huskies were losing by one run. Since this was the last inning, it was the last chance to score . . . or Corey's team was through for the season.



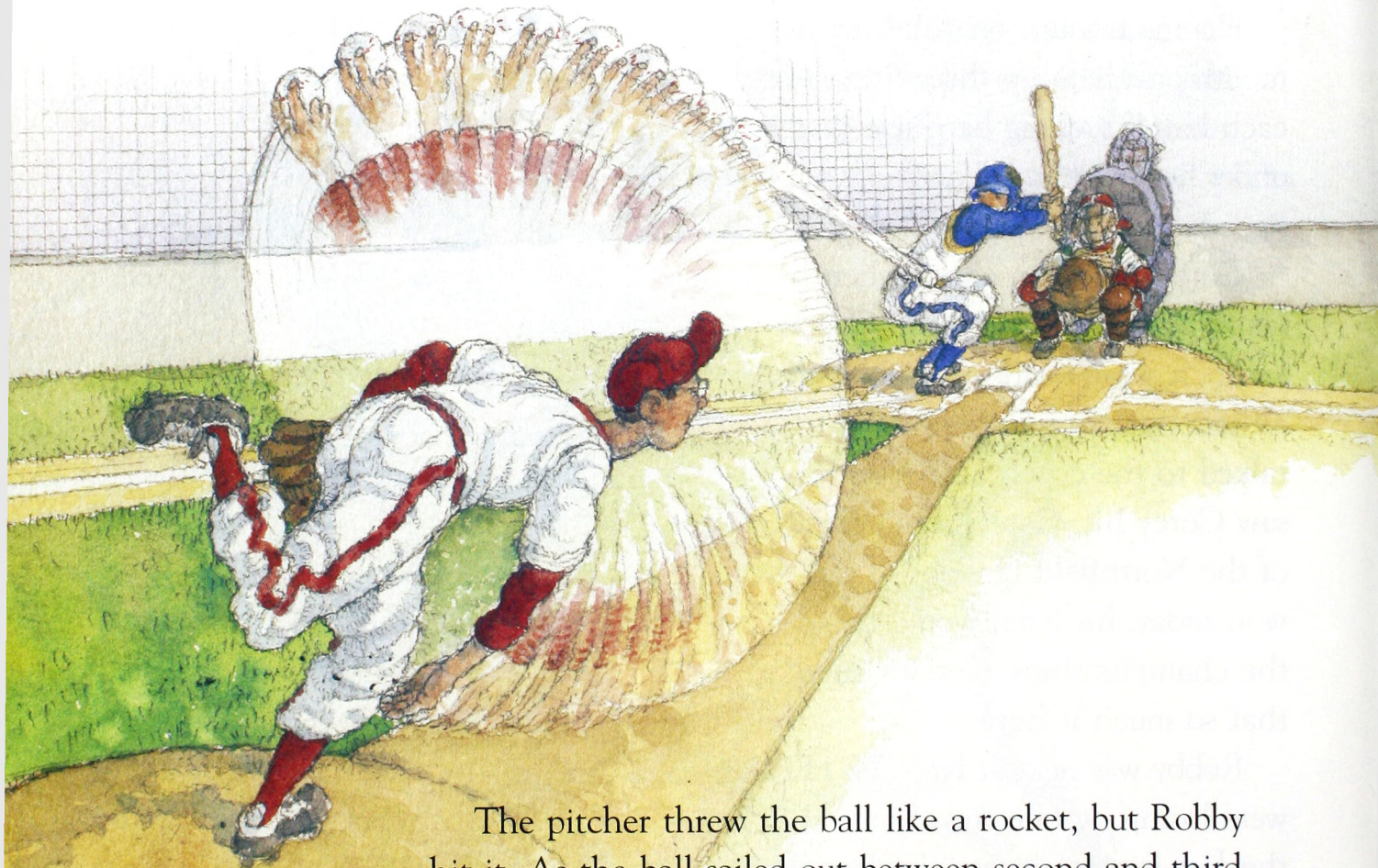
LET THE
TRANSMOOGIFICATION
CHAMPIONSHIPS,
SERIES OF GAMES
THAT DETERMINE
THE WINNER,
BEGIN!



ROCK
AND
ROLL

Corey felt he would burst, waiting for the pitch to Robby. Eddie was on third base. If Robby got a hit and Eddie could make it to home plate, they would tie the game. Then anything could happen!

He watched Coach Lempert carefully. Corey liked that some gestures were baseball signs that everyone learned, and others were from sign language that he and the coach had worked out. Either way, Corey was ready.



The pitcher threw the ball like a rocket, but Robby hit it. As the ball sailed out between second and third base, the coach interlocked his left thumb and right index finger and pushed them forward while wiggling his



other thumb and index finger. "Run!" he signed to Corey.

Corey raced toward second base, feeling the soft dirt shift like powder under his feet. Now Coach Lempert wound his arm in a big circle like a propeller. "Keep going!" he signed.

Corey rounded second. When the coach waved his two arms down, Corey hit the dirt and slid right into the third baseman, nearly knocking him over. Corey couldn't hear what the boy yelled at him, but his angry face told Corey he was safe.

Corey felt the ground shake as the crowd stamped their feet. His heart was pounding, too. Eddie had made it home on Robby's hit. The score was tied!

Mark was next at bat, nervously shifting his feet. He had struck out earlier in the game. The pitch came fast. Mark hesitated, swinging late, and missed the ball: strike one.

Corey made an "o" with his fingers and thumb, then quickly slid his thumb up between his extended middle and index fingers. "It's O.K.," Corey signed to him.

Mark got into position again. Corey kept his eye on the coach, ready for the sign to stay on third base or run for home.

Strike two!



C'mon Mark, Corey thought.
Send me home to score!

Mark's dad suddenly appeared on the sidelines. He had come to their practices before, trying to help Mark speed up his swing. But he shouldn't be on the field now! Corey suspected that Mark's dad cared a lot about the Huskies winning this game . . . maybe too much.

Move! Corey signed. I can't see the coach! But the man wasn't looking at him. He kept swinging an imaginary bat faster and faster.

Just then, Mark swung hard, and the ball took off. Corey looked for the coach's sign, but he couldn't see what it was. Mark's dad was still in the way!

Corey's teammates were shouting at him. But what were they saying? Go? Don't go? He couldn't read their lips. Sweat soaked his shirt, and he shivered despite the heat.

He saw the center fielder catch the ball and start to throw it home. If he ran now, could he beat the throw to home plate? Should he try

to score? If he didn't make it, he'd be out and they'd lose the game.





Without the coach, Corey felt alone in the middle of the crowded

ball field. But, he thought, I need to take a chance. I've got to try to win!

Corey pushed off the base and ran, his legs straining. Was the ball coming over his shoulder to beat him home? He could see mouths moving. Were they cheering or booing?

Ahead, he saw the catcher squat down, ready to catch the ball. Corey dove headfirst, sliding across the dirt, his hand feeling the rough edge of home plate.

Dust billowed up around him. He coughed and squinted. Did he make it? Through the dusty haze, he saw the umpire's outstretched arms. Safe!

Coach Lempert helped him up. "You won the game!" the coach said to him, slowly enough for Corey to read his lips.

Corey's teammates crowded around him. They pounded him on the back and hugged him. It didn't matter that he couldn't hear what they were saying. He didn't need a sign. He could *feel* every word. 🌟