

STORY GRAMMAR

STORY: *The Contender*

Author: Robert Lipsyte

PLOT: A bildungsroman based on a high school dropout in Harlem, N.Y., that learns a lot about himself and life as he trains to be a boxer at Donatelli's gym.

THEMES: Overcoming (one's environment). Success, (despite tough odds).

SETTINGS: The late 1960's, Harlem, New York. Donatelli's gym.

CHARACTERS: Alfred Brooks, (the main character, the "Contender"), James, (Alfred's best friend), Aunt Pearl, (Alfred has lived with her since his mother died three years ago), Charlene, Sandra, and Paula (Aunt Pearl's young daughters), Aunt Dorothy and Wilson, (Aunt Pearl's sister, and her husband) Cousin Jeff, (Dorothy's successful son), Major, Hollis, and Sonny, (neighborhood punks who give Alfred a hard time), Donatelli, (owner of the gym, and Alfred's boxing coach), Dr. Corey, Denny, Red, Bud, Spoon, (other boxers, and coaches at Donatelli's gym), Epsteins, (owners of the grocery store Alfred works at), Henry, (Alfred's peer who works at Donatelli's gym).

CHAIN OF EVENTS: Alfred Brooks' world is spinning out of control. He just dropped out of high school, his best friend has left him for some punks always getting into trouble, Aunt Pearl is always working and never around, and he is stuck in a dead end job.

One night Alfred goes to talk to his best friend James to find out why he did not meet him at the movies like they had done for so many years. James was spending a lot of time these days with Major, Hollis, and Sonny, older kids known in the neighborhood as trouble makers. As Alfred is talking about the store he works at, he lets out some secret information. Major, Hollis, Sonny, and James go to the store to try and rob the money out of the cash registers, but Alfred forgot to warn them about the silent alarm. Alfred got to the store just in time to see James taken away by the police.

Trouble with Major, Hollis, and Sonny continues to follow Alfred any time they see him. Alfred begins to spend most of his free time in his apartment to avoid getting beat up any more. Eventually Alfred decides to go and check out Donatelli's gym, a small boxing gym in the neighborhood an acquaintance, Henry, works at. He is very tentative at first to go to the gym. However, Alfred finally goes and starts training at the gym. Alfred loves the physical exercise. Running in the crisp morning air is his favorite. As he continues to train and get into shape, Donatelli begins teaching him boxing skills. Alfred gets better and better at boxing and notices many things in his life changing for the better, especially his confidence.

Alfred, however, does not have the killer instinct. Even though he is a very skilled boxer, he is unable to put his opponents away when opportunities present themselves because he doesn't like hurting people. This makes Alfred realize that even though he would love to be a champion, he will only be a contender in boxing. Although he will not be a champion fighter, Alfred learns that as long as he is true to himself and works hard for something, a contender is just as good.