

THE GOOD FIGHT: STUDY GUIDE



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ABOUT THE GOOD FIGHT

The Good Fight is a 224-page, full-colour graphic novel for readers aged 9 and up.

- Long-listed, City of Toronto Book Award, 2021
- Commended, OLA Light Reads, Great Stories List, 2022
- Commended, OLA Best Bets: Honourable Mention, 2022
- Commended, Best Books for Kids and Teens, Canadian Children's Book Centre, Starred Selection, 2021

The story is set during the summer of the real-life riot at Christie Pits in August 1933, an important but often overlooked event in the turbulent history of an evolving Toronto.

The book includes a comprehensive historical note and source references on background information.

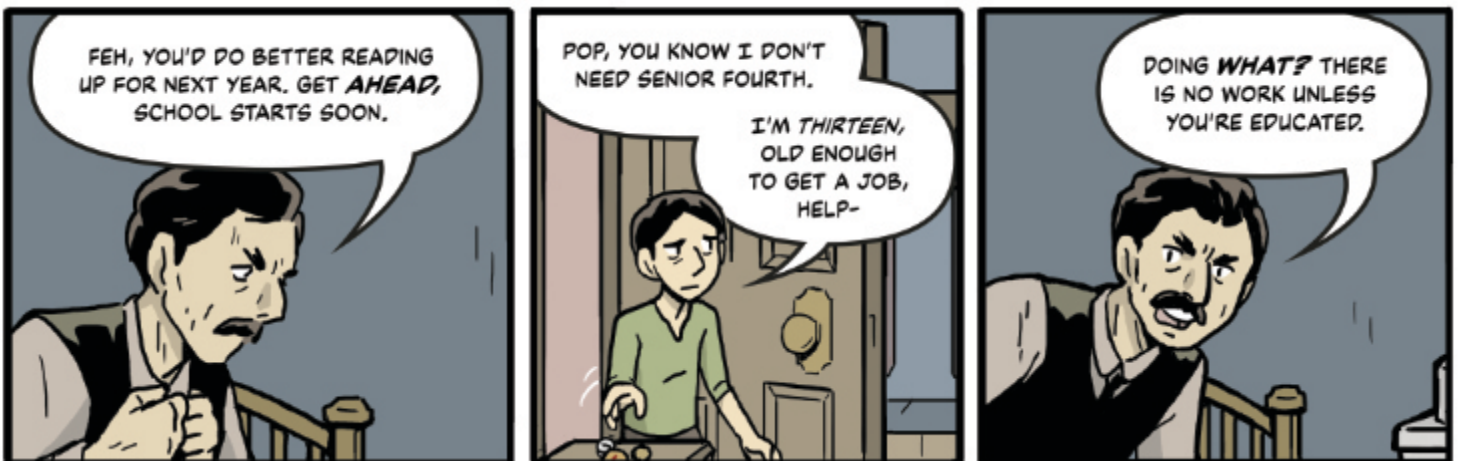
USING THIS GUIDE

This guide was created for use with students in grades 6 through 10. It contains a variety of activities, discussion questions, and prompts to be used alongside a study of *The Good Fight*.

Contained within is a **plot synopsis**, a list of **general themes** and **pre-reading activities**, followed by **chapter-by-chapter study material**.

Each chapter's section includes **content questions**, **definitions of key words and phrases**, and **discussion questions** that can also be used as journal response prompts.

Concluding the guide are suggestions for **supplementary classroom activities** related to themes, story, and the graphic novel format.



PLOT SYNOPSIS

The Good Fight is set in Toronto, August 1933. Jewish thirteen-year-old Sid Klein, and his Italian friends “Plug” and Rosie Venditelli, try to earn money for their families in a sweltering summer of the Great Depression. Sid and his father, Jake, rent a room in the Venditelli household in the Kensington neighbourhood. Jake and Mrs. Venditelli work in the garment trade on Spadina Avenue, as do many Jewish and Catholic immigrants. Mr. Venditelli, disabled in a construction accident, secretly sells homemade liquor. Intense like his father, Sid wants to quit school to work. Jake won't let him.

Barred by prejudice from what little work there is in the overwhelmingly white, Anglo-centric, Protestant city of the time, Sid and Plug are lured into a pickpocketing scheme by teenaged Tommy, who preys on the crowds at the ball games in local park Christie Pits (then called Willowvale Park). Their first effort results in a narrow escape and brings them to the notice of a mystery man, who shadows them and Sid's dad. (Jake and Mrs. Venditelli are secretly helping organize a labour union.)

Sid and Plug look for odd jobs with no success, witnessing breadlines, evictions and social unrest. Sid grows angry. At the gym where his dad used to box, Sid hears of antisemitic incidents in the Beaches neighbourhood. Residents have formed patrols to keep “undesirables” like Sid from their lakefront. Hitler has come to power in Germany and the patrols wear the swastika as their ID.

Tommy coaxes Sid and Plug to help him steal again. They get caught. The mystery man is a police agent who forces them to help the “Red Squad.” At the next ball game, they're to steal a document from someone, then replace it after the police photograph it. The boys are released when their fathers, told of the arrest by Rosie, arrive. The fathers, World War I veterans, encounter an old army friend, now an officer at the station. Walking home late at night they see someone painting a swastika on a park shelter.

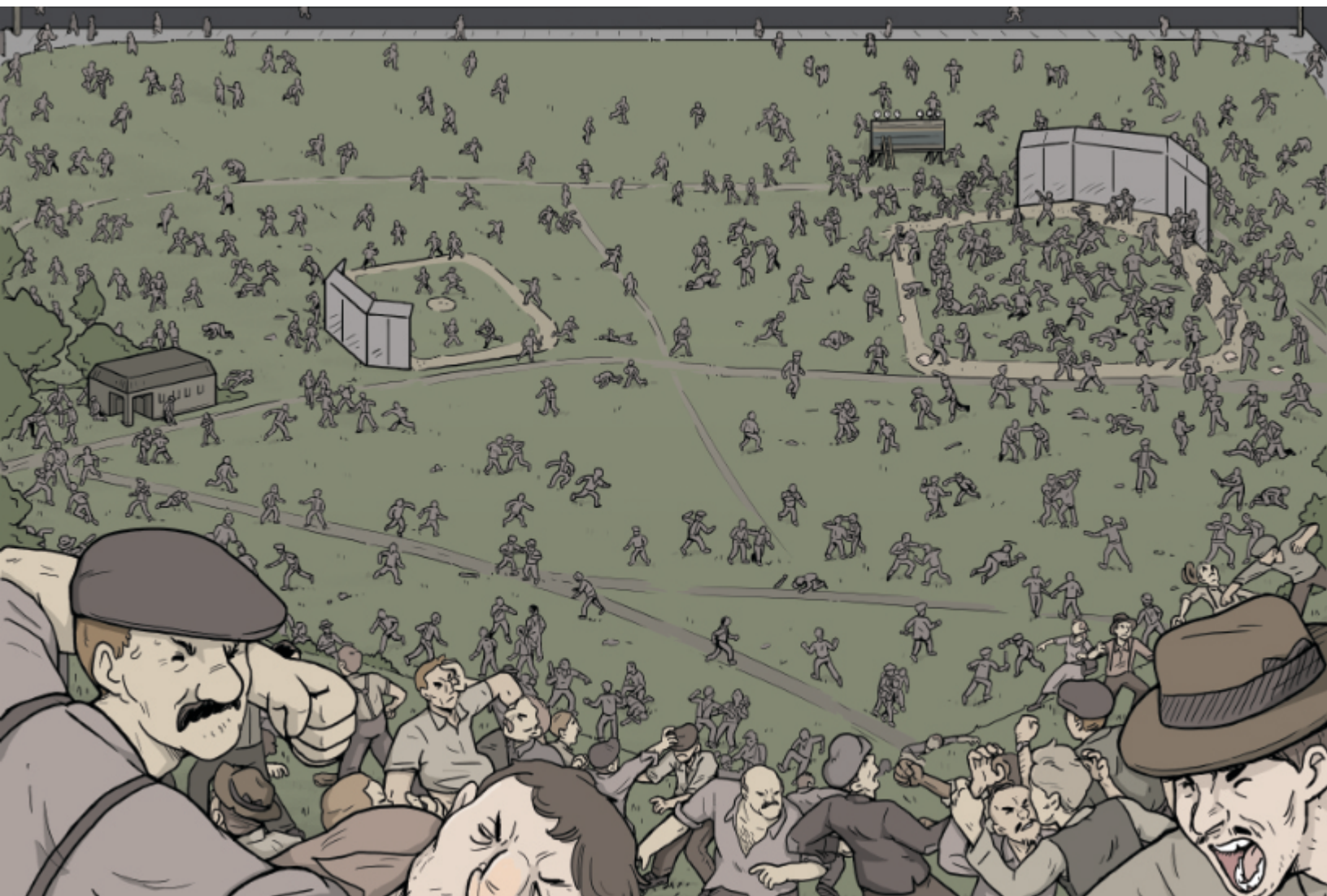


PLOT SYNOPSIS cont.

Tensions build to game night, August 16. A Jewish team will play an Anglican one. Christie Pits is packed; trouble is brewing. As the boys enact the plan, thugs unfurl a swastika banner, and a riot erupts. In the chaos that follows, Sid is attacked. Saved by Rosie, he almost gives in to violence himself. Instead, he and Rosie destroy the police film and hide the document – a list of the names of union activists that includes their parents. When the police agent demands the paper, Sid gambles and slips it into the pocket of his father's old army friend, who'd simply come to watch the game his son was playing in.

As hundreds of residents from Kensington flood into the park to do battle, the kids escape. Returning home, they explain what happened. Has the old friend found and turned in the list of names? Everyone dreads the arrival of the Red Squad. Instead, the old friend arrives and wordlessly destroys the list before leaving. The families toast peace and friends. There's work in the morning.

The book concludes with a brief epilogue about the aftermath for the city and the characters.



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

BOOK TRAILER

Watch the video trailer on the Scholastic Canada website:

The Good Fight | Scholastic Canada

www.scholastic.ca/books/view/the-good-fight

After watching the trailer, discuss with students:

Based on the trailer, what do you think will happen in the story?

How does the Toronto in the illustrations look, compared to Toronto today?

What differences did you notice about how kids dressed then and now?

GENERAL THEMES

The following themes and historical reference points in *The Good Fight* would make for good topics of discussion or study before reading the book:

- Combatting antisemitism and racism
- Cultural and religious tolerance
- Evolving attitudes to multiculturalism and ethnicity
- History of immigration in Toronto and Canada
- History of Toronto
- The Great Depression
- Hitler and the Nazi Party
- The Red Scare (sometimes referred to as “The First Red Scare”)



CHAPTER 1: DUKE MAN

CHAPTER ONE CONTENT QUESTIONS

Explain the roles of Tommy, Plug, and Sid as Mechanic, Stall, and Duke Man in their whiz mob.

Why do Sid and Plug feel it's extra hard for kids like them to find work in Toronto?

How did the Kleins and Venditellis come to share the rented house in Kensington?

Rosie likes to snap photos. What does she notice about Sid that shows us she's very observant?

Plug and Rosie's father, Angelo, also makes money illegally. What does he do?

Where do you think Sid's father, Jake, goes?

Who do you think the mysterious stranger on pages 12 and 25 is? Why would he be so interested in Sid, Plug and Tommy?

CHAPTER ONE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Families that live through hard times must figure out how to do without. Have you or your family ever had to do without? What things did you have to choose to give up? If you have not ever had to do this, what favourite "extras" would you give up to help your family now? Which treats, foods, activities, or gadgets would you miss most?

Is breaking the law to help your family or others ever a good idea?

Sid says Tommy's real name is Tadeusz Lepofsky, and that others have changed their names as well. Why would people have wanted to do that?

Sid and his Pop argue about Sid quitting school. Who do you think is right?

CHAPTER ONE KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Toronto, 1933 - 1933 was the middle of the Great Depression, a catastrophic economic downturn that lasted from 1929–39. Banks and business failed. Unemployment was at an all-time high: nearly 40 percent. People everywhere struggled to make ends meet.

Breadlines - The lines of people that would form to receive free food or grocery vouchers. People relied on this because times were so difficult and it was impossible to make ends meet.

CHAPTER ONE KEY WORDS AND PHRASES cont.

Whiz Mob - An old-fashioned term for a gang of pickpockets.

Mark, Stall, Mechanic, Duke Man - Names for the different roles in a gang of pickpockets. The Mark was the victim; the Stall man distracted the Mark while the Mechanic picked the pocket, then handed off the stolen goods to the Duke Man, who would leave with them, unnoticed.

The Pit Gang - The name for a gang that used to hang around Willowvale Park (Christie Pits) in the 1930s.

Shoot a rack - Play a game of pool/billiards.

Still in short pants - In the 1930s, men wore long pants and boys wore shorts till about age thirteen. Saying someone was “still in short pants” meant they seemed childish.

Hooch - Alcohol, usually of low quality.

Moonshine/Moonshiner - “Moonshine” is a term for homemade alcohol. A “moonshiner” was someone who illegally brewed and sold their own alcohol. People bought it because it was cheap.

Rotgut - Poorly made alcohol that would likely make you sick.

Pop and Angelo had been in the War - In this instance, “the War” means the First World War, 1914–1918, at the time referred to as “The Great War” or “The War to End All Wars.”

Influenza - Often just called “the flu,” influenza is a virus that still lives with us today. From 1918–1920 a particularly deadly influenza pandemic spread across the world, called the “Spanish flu.” Millions died.

Senior Fourth - What Grade 8 was called in the 1930s.

Schmatte - Yiddish for “rags.” The “schmatte trade” is slang for the clothes business. In 1930s Toronto, there were many clothing factories on Spadina Avenue. The poorly paid workers were usually Jewish or other immigrants.

The jakes - Toilet.

Kibitzer - Yiddish term for someone who likes to offer unwanted advice (originally at card games).

Craps - A dice game. Players bet money on the outcome of a single roll.

CHAPTER 2: STRIKE OUT

CHAPTER TWO CONTENT QUESTIONS

Why does Sid have trouble when he tries to sell newspapers?

This chapter shows two alternate uses for old newspaper. What are they?

Sid learns ominous news about Toronto and Germany in the paper and at the gym. How are these pieces of news linked?

How does Sid use some of his money to do something nice for Rosie?

List three odd jobs Sid tries to get as he goes around the neighbourhood.

How do the kids lose their busking money?

What dream jobs do Rosie and Plug imagine for them all?

What new way to make money has Sid learned about?

CHAPTER TWO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Sid has a temper. Gus offers advice to the boxers and to Sid about how to use their energy when things aren't going their way. What do you think he means? Do you agree?

In this chapter we witness more about the hard times people in Sid's neighbourhood are experiencing. The Great Depression left many Canadians poverty stricken at a time when there was no "social safety net." People began to discuss what help the government should provide for everyone. What things make up Canada's social safety net today? Is there anything that isn't in our social safety net that you think should be? How should we pay for these things?

What odd jobs could you do today in your neighbourhood to earn money?

CHAPTER TWO KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Nonna/Nonno - Italian for “grandmother/grandfather.”

Bailiff - A legal officer charged with overseeing something. In this case, it refers to a debt-collecting agency.

‘giorno/buongiorno - Italian for “good morning/good day”.

Potatoes, sugar, malt, bottles... - Ingredients used in moonshine.

Sammy Luftspring, Max Baer, Max Schmeling - Famous boxers of the era. Luftspring and Baer were Jewish; Schmeling was German.

Ice trucks - Many families didn’t have electric refrigerators or freezers, which were expensive. They would buy ice from delivery wagons and store it in the top of an insulated “ice box” – basically a refrigerator-sized food cooler in the kitchen.

Copper - Police officer.

Panhandling - The act of asking strangers for money in a public place.

Sunnyside - The Sunnyside amusement park was on the lakefront in the west end of Toronto. All that remains of it now is the large outdoor pool.

Grift - A scam, or swindle.

Dough - Money.

Amelia Earhart - A famous female pilot, and the first female aviator to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean.

Bing Crosby - A famous American singer and actor.

CHAPTER 3: SUCKER PUNCH

CHAPTER THREE CONTENT QUESTIONS

We know Sid has a temper. What do we learn about Sid's Pop and his weakness as a boxer?

Why does Tommy claim to be a hero?

Where does Tommy say this all took place?

How does Tommy now justify picking pockets at Christie Pits?

CHAPTER THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How much would you charge for hunting cockroaches? What would the price need to be, per roach, to convince you to do a job like that?

Why do you think Gus encourages Sid to hit him?

Gus says, "Just like your Pop." In what ways may Sid and Pop be the same?

Gus also tells Sid to stay out of trouble like the kind at Balmy Beach. What do you think people should do if others are making a racist demonstration?

CHAPTER THREE KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Terrarium - A glass habitat for plants or animals; a "dry" version of an aquarium.

Sour puss - A sour face, a bad mood.

Don't be a "mug" - A fool, or sucker.

They were going "Hiya Pal" - Tommy is making light of the fact that some of the marchers were performing the "Sieg Heil" salute, the greeting of Hitler's Nazi Party.

CHAPTER 4: DEVIL'S DEAL

CHAPTER FOUR CONTENT QUESTIONS

How does Rosie once again show how observant she is at the park?

Why is Duke Man the worst job to have if you're caught?

Why is the Red Squad policeman interested in Pop and Mrs. Venditelli?

What task does the policeman demand the boys do to get out of trouble?

Where do Pop and Mr. Venditelli know Bert Allison, the other policeman, from?

Why does Pop blame the police for what happened? Why does he still say he and Sid are lucky?

What do they see on the way home that tells them the trouble is far from over?

CHAPTER FOUR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

At the beginning of the chapter and as they're walking home at the end, Pop seems to want to tell Sid something but can't. What do you think Pop wants to say?

In this chapter Pop talks about some of the reasons he's angry. Is he justified?

Why do you think the police department thought it needed a "Red Squad" during the Great Depression? Should a police department have such a group?

Sid, Plug, and Tommy seem trapped. What would you do if you were in their shoes?

CHAPTER FOUR KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Kingston Pen - Kingston Penitentiary maximum security prison.

Rockefeller - One of the wealthiest families in American history.

Red Squad - A specialized unit within a police department, created to track communists, socialists, anarchists, labour unions and other so-called “dissidents.” The creation of Red Squads was popularized during the Red Scare of the 1920s – a reaction to the Russian Revolution in 1917 and Soviet aspirations to export Communism.

July Strike - A large demonstration of Toronto garment industry workers, who walked off the job for a day, July 11th, 1933, in protest against “Hitler-ism.”

Reformatory - A school for young offenders, not old enough to be sent to an actual prison.

Gamba ferita - Italian for “injured leg.”

Reds - Communists.

Tim Buck - General Secretary of the Communist Party of Canada, from 1929–1962.

CHAPTER 5: TOUGH SPOT TO PICK

CHAPTER FIVE CONTENT QUESTIONS

What advice does Gus repeat to Sid?

How does Harry Suitcase suggest Sid put the stolen paper back?

Why does Harry, a criminal, hate “Reds”?

Suggest why the Venditellis and Kleins don’t have a radio themselves.

Who had the Canadian government banned from immigrating since 1923?

What secret activities does Pop reveal to Sid?

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Why would Rosie – and others in the neighbourhood – not trust the police?

Why do you think Rosie doesn’t want to accept the pictures from Sid, once she finds out they were paid for with stolen money? Do you agree with Rosie?

At the kitchen table, the family discusses how Canada wasn’t letting many new immigrants into the country. Later, a government official infamously said Canada’s immigration policy toward Jewish people was “None is too many.” Sometimes there are still fierce debates about who should be admitted to Canada and why. How should we decide these questions? What makes them difficult?

In this chapter, Sid’s Pop reveals that he’s been involved in trying to organize a union among the garment workers this whole time. Was he right to keep this hidden from Sid until now?

CHAPTER FIVE KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Chamber pot - The pot Sid is carrying at the start of this chapter is a chamber pot, a small pot used as a toilet at night, usually emptied into the outhouse in the morning.

Ciao - Italian for “goodbye.” Note that in 1930s Toronto, the Jewish and Italian communities were so mixed that it wasn’t uncommon for Italian kids to speak a bit of Yiddish and for Jewish kids to speak a bit of Italian, as is the case with Sid here.

Plug cleaning bottles - Plug is cleaning out used bottles, likely for use in his father’s secret moonshining business.

Snaps - Photographs.

Roughhouse - A fight without rules.

Palooka - someone clumsy or incompetent. There was a popular comic strip at the time called “Joe Palooka” about a boxer who was neither.

Oy Gevalt - Yiddish for “Oh, violence!” Usually used as an expression of surprise or dismay.

Commie - Communist.

Amos 'n Andy/“I’se regusted” - A hugely popular radio comedy show of the era, about two Black men. It would be considered racist today. The show was performed by an all-white cast. Its stars had recently visited Toronto. “I’se regusted” was one of the show’s catchphrases and was typical of the exaggerated way of speaking the show’s performers used.

Coloured - A term used for a Black person in North America, until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

Orangemen - The Loyal Orange Institution, also known as the Orange Order. A powerful Protestant club that dominated political life in Toronto at the time. They held a big parade every 12th of July, celebrating a Protestant victory over Catholics in the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

Mensch - Yiddish for “a good/honourable person.”

Pinochle - A two-to-four player trick-taking card game.

Al Kaufman - Leader of a Toronto gang from the time, opposed to people wearing swastikas.

CHAPTER 6: SUICIDE SQUEEZE & EPILOGUE

CHAPTER SIX CONTENT QUESTIONS

What is Plug's reason for making so many bad jokes on the way to the park?

Who do Sid and Plug first encounter when they get to the ball game?

How does Sid accidentally spoil the photograph?

What does Sid discover about the document?

Where does Sid hide the stolen paper?

What does Teresa say will happen if the Red Squad finds their names on the paper?

How does Bert deal with the paper?

CHAPTER SIX DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Canadians have freedom of speech and expression, but what if some speech or acts are hateful? The boys who revealed the Swastika flag that led to the Christie Pits riot show a good example of this. There are limits on things we can do. Should there be limits on what we can say?

Sid stops before hitting the Pit Gang thug with the metal pipe and smashes the camera instead. Why? What would you have done?

The Riot at Christie Pits happened a long time ago, but the families of many of the people who were at the riot still live in Canada today. Has anyone in your family lived through a major moment in history like that, in Canada or anywhere in the world? What was it like for them?

People sometimes say history is boring. Why does history matter? How can stories make it more interesting?

CHAPTER 6 & EPILOGUE KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

It's a peach - slang meaning "it's really good."

Victrola - An old-fashioned record player.

Keister - Yiddish for "rear end."

Sugar sandwich - A common meal during the Great Depression for families who could only afford bread, sugar, and butter.

Ikey, Kikey, Sammy, 'Squali - Racial slurs for Jews and Italians.

That might have spoiled the shot - Cameras were very sensitive back then, and too much movement could be enough to ruin a picture.

Spoil the film - If undeveloped film is exposed to light, the film will be ruined and you'll never be able to make a photograph from it.

Blow a gasket - Get really angry.

Bob's your uncle - Expression meaning "and there you have it."

Saluti - Italian for "good wishes."

L'chayim - Hebrew for "to life." Frequently said before a celebration, or when drinking a toast.

The Christie Pits riot - The *Toronto Daily Star* claimed that more than 10,000 people took part in the riot that night, with many injured during the fighting. Only one photograph ever emerged of the event, though. The illustration on page 213 is an attempted reproduction of that photo. See the Historical Note at the end of the book.

Baer beating Schmeling - Earlier that summer, Jewish boxer Max Baer had fought the German former champion, Max Schmeling. The bout was seen as symbolic of the growing tension between Hitler's fascist Germany and the Jewish population worldwide. When Baer knocked Schmeling out in the first round, it was seen as a triumph by Jewish boxing fans.

Johnny Wayne and Frank Shuster - Wayne and Shuster were a popular Canadian comedy duo who met in high school (Harbord Collegiate) and rose to decades of fame in North America.

Six years from 1933 - In September 1939, six years after the Christie Pits riots, Germany would invade Poland, marking the beginning of the Second World War.

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Research Activity 1

Before the internet, newspapers were the main way people learned about current events. What were Toronto's newspapers of the time? What were the different views/political stances of each one? Which ones still exist?

Research Activity 2

Interview your own family about a historical event they've been through, large or small.

Research Activity 3

What remains today of the story's settings? Who lives there today? (Kensington Market, the garment district, Christie Pits, Balmy Beach/the Beaches) Find them on a city map, visit them, describe them.

Research Activity 4

Toronto has had waves of immigration from all over the world. What groups have come to the city and when? What parts of Toronto did they first settle in? What parts of Toronto are still associated with certain ethnic groups today?

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing Activity 1

Write a character paragraph for Sid, Plug, Rosie, and Tommy, describing their personalities.

Writing Activity 2

The family listens to someone else's radio at one point. Write a podcast/radio script dramatizing one of the scenes from the book.

ART ACTIVITY

Making a Comic

Write and illustrate an eight-panel comic episode based on the following plot:

Panels 1-2: Sid, Rosie, and Plug busk at Sunnyside, only to have a dog run off with the cap full of money.

Panels 3-6: The kids chase the dog around the amusement park. Will they race through games, the fun house, food vendors, rides, crowds? Escalate the chase and the chaos for fun pictures.

Panel 7: They catch the dog, but the money's gone.

Panel 8: What happy ending(s) would get them money anyway?



Some helpful hints:

In writing a comic you have three ways to tell a story: what the pictures show, what characters say, what the narration tells. Keep narration to a minimum.

No more than two speech balloons to a panel.

Always put the printing in the panels before drawing.

Some pictures should be “far away,” some “close up.”

Action goes left to right.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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