
The Big Game

Classroom Guide

Real victory is playing with heart, trusting your team, and lifting others up

CASEL Competency:	Relationship Skills
Grade Level:	Pre-K–4
Duration:	40–50 minutes
Category:	Sports & Teamwork

Learning Objectives

- Understand that teamwork means making others better, not just playing well yourself
 - Learn that mistakes on the field are part of the game, not the end of it
 - Discover that the halftime pivot — refocusing as a team — is where real games are won
 - Practice sportsmanship by honoring effort over outcome
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Overview & Preparation

Key Vocabulary

Teamwork • Sportsmanship • Halftime • Effort • Trust • Huddle • Cheer • Assist • Opponent • Heart

Materials Needed

- The personalized story
- Ball or beanbag for team activities
- Paper and crayons
- Whistle (optional)
- Pinnies or colored bands (optional)

Before Reading

Connection Question

Tell about a time you worked with a team. What was the best part — winning or playing together?

Background Building

Game day! Butterflies in the stomach, the uniform going on, the field looking ENORMOUS. In this story, the hero's team makes mistakes, falls behind, and doubt creeps in. But at halftime, the coach says: "Play TOGETHER. Have FUN." The second half is different — not because they're suddenly perfect, but because they trust each other. The big play isn't a solo moment — it's a PASS to a teammate.

During Reading — Pause Points

- **When the team makes early mistakes and falls behind** — The team is struggling! Mistakes are happening. Does that mean the game is over? What would YOU say to a teammate who just made a mistake?
- **At halftime when the coach says "play together, have fun"** — The coach didn't say "try harder" or "stop messing up." They said "play TOGETHER." Why is that better advice?
- **When the hero passes to a teammate instead of trying to score alone** — The hero could have tried alone — but they PASSED! Why is trusting a teammate sometimes the bravest play?

Discussion Questions

1. The hero's team fell behind early. What helped them come back — was it one person or the whole team?

↳ Why is a team stronger than one person alone?

2. The big play was a PASS, not a solo goal. Why is making someone else shine sometimes more important than shining yourself?

↳ When have you helped someone else succeed?

3. At the end, the hero shows sportsmanship to the other team. Why is that important, win or lose?

↳ How does it feel when someone is a good sport to you?

4. The coach said "have fun." Is fun part of winning? Can you have fun even if you lose?

↳ What makes a game FUN, regardless of the score?

Facilitation Tips

Be careful not to reinforce "winning is everything." This story deliberately leaves the final score ambiguous — the point is HOW they played, not WHETHER they won. Celebrate effort, teamwork, and sportsmanship equally.

Emotional Payoff

The scoreboard becomes secondary to the experience of moving together as one. The hero discovers that real victory is playing with heart, trusting your team, making others better, and showing sportsmanship — even to opponents.

After Reading Activities

Team Pass Challenge

Duration: 15 min | Materials: Ball or beanbag, open space

Stand in a circle. Pass the ball — but you **MUST** say something encouraging to the person you pass to: "Great catch, you've got this!" Count how many passes the team makes without dropping. The goal isn't speed — it's ENCOURAGEMENT. Compare: silent passing vs. encouraging passing. Which works better?

Halftime Huddle Practice

Duration: 10 min | Materials: None

Simulate a "halftime huddle." Present a scenario: "We're behind, mistakes keep happening, everyone is frustrated." Each child contributes ONE encouraging thing to say. Practice: how do you refocus a team? Role-play the coach's speech.

Sportsmanship Awards

Duration: 10 min | Materials: Certificate templates, markers

Children nominate classmates for "Sportsmanship Awards" — given for encouraging others, sharing, helping, or being a good sport. Awards celebrate **HOW** you played, not how you scored. Display on a class wall.

Writing Prompts

- Draw the moment when the hero passed to a teammate. What were they thinking? What were they feeling?
- Write about a time you were a good teammate. What did you do? How did it feel?
- If you were the coach, what would **YOUR** halftime speech say?

Home Connection

Family Letter

Dear Families,

Today we read "The Big Game," about discovering that real victory comes from teamwork, effort, and sportsmanship — not just the scoreboard. Your child practiced encouraging teammates, giving halftime pep talks, and learned that the bravest play is sometimes passing to someone else.

Here is how you can continue this learning at home:

- Watch a game together and look for moments of sportsmanship (high-fives, helping an opponent up)
- Play a family game and practice: encourage each other, celebrate effort, be gracious winners and learners
- Ask: "What would YOUR halftime speech be for our family?"

With warmth,

Your Child's Teacher

Related Books

- *Winners Never Quit!* by Mia Hamm
- *The Berenstain Bears Play T-Ball* by Stan & Jan Berenstain
- *Salt in His Shoes* by Deloris Jordan
- *Teamwork Isn't My Thing* by Julia Cook