



# THREE STRIKE SUMMER

Skyler Schremp

READING GROUP GUIDE

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Meet Gloria Mae Willard, a spunky young girl who lives with her family—Ma, Pa, and her older sister, Jessamyn—in Balco, Oklahoma. Her life on the family farm takes an unexpected turn when dust storms blow away the rich topsoil and the lack of rain kills the remaining crops. Their farm is ruined, and the family loses just about everything. What they do not lose is their pride and their willingness to work hard to improve their lives.

The family heads to California to find work picking crops. Gloria refuses to settle for a world without hope. When the family moves to the Santa Ana Holdsten Peach Orchard, she continues to pursue her long-cherished goal of playing baseball, even if it's on an all-boys team. When her Pa realizes that a labor strike is what will help the workers, Gloria supports him. Above all, Gloria realizes how important it is to promote social change and to care for one another.

Author Skyler Schrempp brings to life the trying times of the 1930s Dust Bowl. Her descriptive prose and her use of figurative language draws the reader into this page-turning story. An author's note explains its factual basis.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Part One

1. Identify and describe the following characters:

- Gloria
- Jessamyn
- Ma
- Pa
- The bank man
- Little Si

2. What problem is the family facing? What does Gloria do to try to solve the problem? How does her family react to what she did? Whose response do you agree with? Why?
3. What is Gloria's dream, and what does her sister Jess think about it? What do you think about her dream?
4. What did Gloria tell Jess about how Joe Franklin's son looked at her? How did Gloria's words make Jess feel? How do you know?
5. Even though they argue, how do Gloria and Jess show they care about each other?

## Part Two

6. When the family arrives at the Santa Ana Holdsten Peach Orchard, what did the man in the white hat tell them about the following working conditions?

- Organizing
- Paying rent
- The company store

What did Gloria and the other workers learn from the representative from the California Growers Association about:

- Hiring only native-born Americans
- Reds
- Getting organized

What do you think about these working conditions? Why do you think the Willards decided to stay? Do you believe it was a good decision or a bad decision? Why?

7. What happens when Gloria first tries to join the baseball team on the peach orchard? What does the boss kid say about a skirt's *disposition* in chapter seven? What do you think of his argument?

8. What things does Gloria learn from Davey-from-the-Bible about:

- The boss kid, Terrance Bowman
- The apricot team
- Arlon Mackie

9. What happened when Gloria was given a chance to try out for the team? How did Quentin try to help her? What does Gloria mean when she says that Quentin could "turn an angry tide peaceful just with words"? (Chapter ten) What deal does Gloria finally make with Terrance? Was it fair?

10. What happened to Grady? What does Gloria mean when she says Grady was playing for her team? How does Pa's opinion about organizing change?

11. What are Gloria's best qualities and strongest abilities? What qualities and abilities should she work on?

## Part Three

12. Explain what Arlon Mackie meant when he said, "It's like they want all hell to break loose.... Orchard

might as well be made of dynamite. All she needs is someone with a matchbook." (Chapter sixteen)

13. Discuss how each of the following contributed to the uneasy feeling in the orchard:

- Davey's fall from a "bum" ladder
- Sam Blight's conversation with Pa
- The men with the clipboards acting jumpy
- Pa standing up to the man from the California Growers Association

14. How were Gloria's feelings after the second baseball game different from her feelings after the first game?

15. Do you agree with Ma's comments about the difference between pride and honor? She told Gloria, "Pride makes you do foolish things you regret later. Like hurting someone when you could talk it out. Honor . . . well, it's got more to do with doing the right thing, even when it's hard." (Chapter nineteen) How do you know that Gloria understood what Ma meant?

16. How did the attempt at a strike end? What did Gloria mean when she realized that she was able to save her father from a beating by the policeman and the men in white by "holding on by holding together"? (Chapter twenty-four)

17. How did Gloria change over time? What was she like at the beginning of the story? What was she like at the end? What things do you think she learned?

## Epilogue

18. Compare the encounter the Willards had with, Saint Peter, the man in the white hat when they entered the peach orchard in chapter five with the encounter they had with the man in the tan hat when they entered the pear orchard in the epilogue.

19. What do you think will happen next? What might be the same at this new orchard? What might be different?

## Author's Note

20. What is "real" in this book? What is made up? What facts did you learn? What feelings did you have while reading the book?

# EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

**1. Examine How the Author Uses Anaphora to Emphasize an Idea.** The author uses repetition of words and phrases to emphasize a big idea that you should think about. The big idea is usually in the first sentence. In the examples below, Gloria reveals an idea to the reader. The sentences that follow include details that help explain this idea.

Read the examples below to see how the author uses repetition. Then answer these questions about each example:

- (1) What big idea is emphasized?
- (2) What details explain this idea?
- (3) How does repetition help readers understand a big idea?

## Example #1

I wanted to belong somewhere, even if it wasn't Oklahoma. I wanted to be someone people listened to, even if I was loud sometimes and maybe said the wrong thing once in a while. I wanted to be someone you could tell secrets to, and look up to, even if I wasn't going to be a big sister. And I wanted to play ball for real, not just by myself, knocking old apples out of a tree with a creek stone, or watching everyone else play. I wanted to be on a team. (Chapter four)

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## Example #2

I didn't need to look back to the team to know they were rooting for me. I felt it in the air. I felt it in the trees shaking their leaves back and forth above. I felt it in the shutterbugs down in the earth, in the field mice scurrying in the grasses. I felt it beating from the peach orchard kids, who crept closer just to see if it all was real. I felt it coming from Jess. (Chapter twenty-three)

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## Example #3

I listened for a moment. Listened to the whirl of the crowd. Listened to them sending my name up to the sky like a hope. Listened to the shuffling back and forth of the apricot boys, who couldn't stand still knowing they were so close to losing. Listened to all the fists of the peach orchard kids tearing up grass to keep from running wild with excitement. Some of them even looked like they were praying. (Chapter twenty-three)

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Try reading these three paragraphs aloud. Do you notice the rhythm of the words?

**Practice writing a paragraph using repetition. Do you like the effect?**

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**2. Examine the Author's Use of Similes.** Similes are comparisons between two different things using the word "like" or "as." In this book, the author uses similes to help the reader understand the content of the book. In the examples below, identify the two things being compared and then explain what the sentence means.

a) I figured Ma might crack open like an egg if you didn't take enough care around her. Split right down the middle. (Chapter one)

\_\_\_\_\_ is being compared to \_\_\_\_\_.

In my words, the sentence means: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

b) Through the screen door, Pa took the pen, and I started kicking, but Ma was strong and she was clamping down around me like that big cottonwood growing roots as I wiggled and twisted and screamed into her hand. (Chapter two)

\_\_\_\_\_ is being compared to \_\_\_\_\_.

In my words, the sentence means: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

c) Even though I was afraid to look at her because I didn't want a talking-to and I'd already said more than I should've, I could feel her smile coming off her like the cheers of a faraway crowd. (Chapter five)

\_\_\_\_\_ is being compared to \_\_\_\_\_.

In my words, the sentence means: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

d) He looked about as friendly as St. Peter to a bunch of sinners. (Chapter six)

\_\_\_\_\_ is being compared to \_\_\_\_\_.

In my words, the sentence means: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

e) The moving and the chatter around me stopped like a freight train coming to a tired halt. (Chapter nine)

\_\_\_\_\_ is being compared to \_\_\_\_\_.

In my words, the sentence means: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

f) I could hear the quickening of everyone's breath around me as we watched the policemen hoist Grady up and heave him into the back of the truck like a sack of grain. (Chapter eleven)

\_\_\_\_\_ is being compared to \_\_\_\_\_.

In my words, the sentence means: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

g) "Depends on what?"  
She let my question hang in the air like cigarette smoke, curling and filling the whole room up with itself. (Chapter fifteen)

\_\_\_\_\_ is being compared to \_\_\_\_\_.

In my words, the sentence means: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

h) The police outside the gate grew in numbers, especially after the leaflets reading *Fair Wages Are Worth Striking For!* popped up overnight like mushrooms. (Chapter fifteen)

\_\_\_\_\_ is being compared to \_\_\_\_\_.

In my words, the sentence means: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

i) He was smiling like a jack-o'-lantern. (Chapter seventeen)

\_\_\_\_\_ is being compared to \_\_\_\_\_.

In my words, the sentence means: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

j) The men with clipboards were all jumpy as cats in a room full of rocking chairs as they watched us head towards the orchard. (Chapter eighteen)

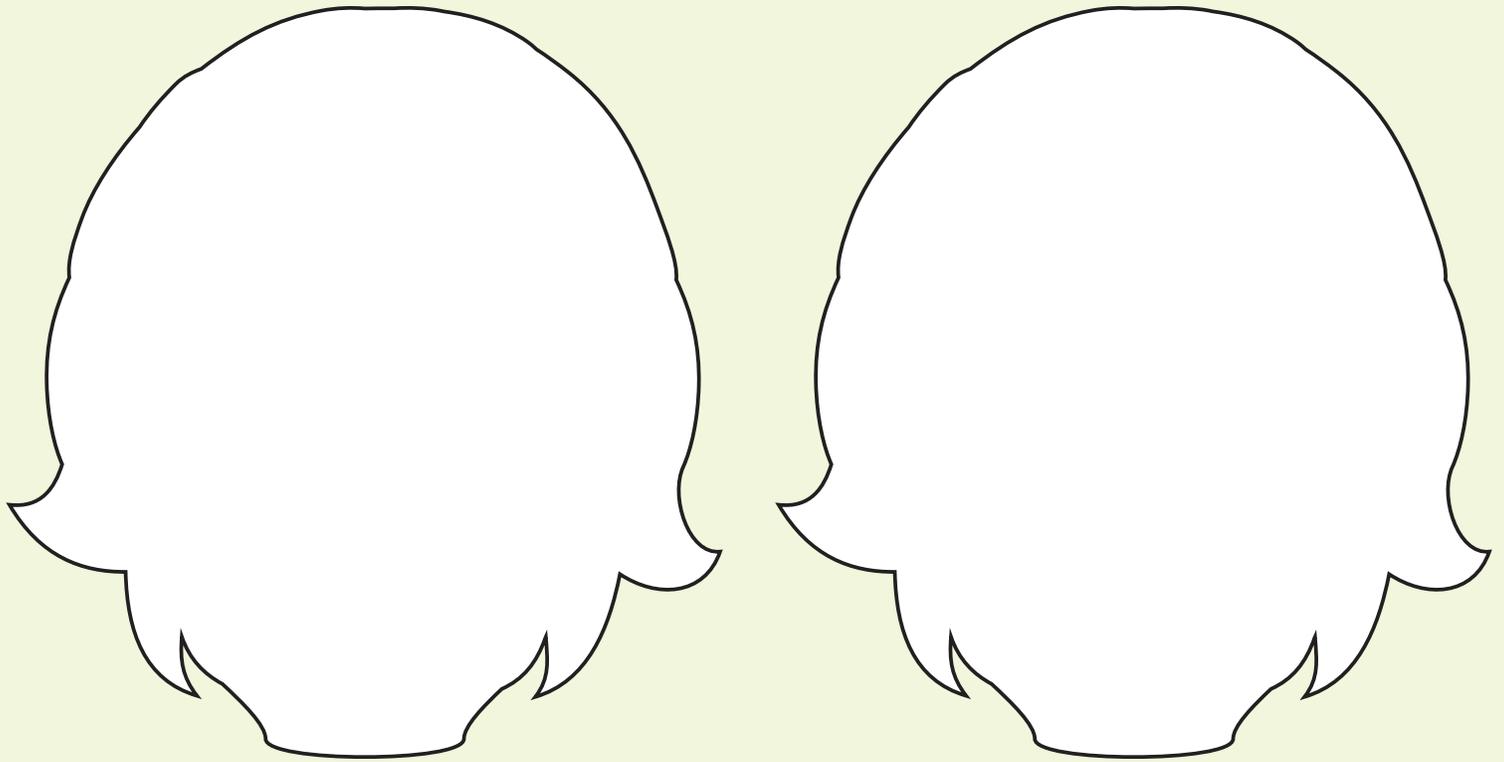
\_\_\_\_\_ is being compared to \_\_\_\_\_.

In my words, the sentence means: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.



## WRITING AND RESPONDING TO THE BOOK

**1. Open Mind Portraits.** What did the characters in the book think at the beginning of the story? What did they think at the end of the story? How have they changed? You can show how their thoughts have changed by creating open mind portraits. First, for each character you select, draw two empty faces with no features. Inside the first empty face, use words and pictures to show what the character thinks at the beginning of the story. Inside the second empty face, show what the character thinks at the end of the story.



In the first head, write sentences like the following: "It wasn't fair for the bank man to kick us out"; "I am good enough to play with the Balko boys"; "I showed the bank man what we Willards are made of." Consider adding illustrations.

In the second head, write sentences like the following: "I heard Pa speak up, saying that if we were so decent, why were we making sixteen cents an hour?"; "Ma told me that speaking up was different than tearing down, and she was right"; "I am sorry for the things I said to Terrance about his ma and pa"; "The boys on the apricot team are as good as gold." Consider adding illustrations.

**2. Writing from a Different Perspective.** The entire book is told from Gloria's perspective. What do some of the other characters think? Consider writing a significant scene from the perspective of one of the characters listed below:

- Jess
- Pa
- Ma
- Davey
- Quentin
- Terrance
- Arlon Mackie
- Sam Blight
- The man in the white hat (Saint Peter)
- The man from the California Growers Association
- Joe Franklin's sweet son

Write a memory of one or more of the events that happened in the story. What did the character you selected see and think about what happened? Here are some suggestions for topics to write about:

Terrance talks about agreeing to let Gloria play on the team.

Pa comments on why he changed his mind about the strike.

Ma discusses how she will behave in the future when the family works in the pear orchard.

Sam Blight argues that he did the right thing by supporting the owners rather than the workers at the peach orchard.

Joe Franklin's sweet son describes his feelings for Jess and his hopes for the future.

**3. Write a One-Page Play.** Use the dialogue in the book to help you write a one-page play. Decide on the characters to include. Use a narrator to provide any information that is necessary. After you finish writing, read your play with a partner. Then share your play with your classmates.

Here is an example of one way to begin:

**Topic:** Trying Out for the Team

**Characters:** Gloria, Terrance

**Terrance:** What are you doing here, and who told you how to find us?

**Gloria:** I'm here to try out for the team. I'm here to pitch for all y'all. I know you need someone. Ain't that right, fellas?

**Terrance:** Thought I told you yesterday, girl, we don't need a skirt on our team.

You can add to this play or use an idea of your own.

## EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE OF READING THE BOOK

Read other books and watch videos about life during the Dust Bowl. There is an excellent bibliography of books at the end of the author's note. Here are a few additional titles and videos:

*Children of the Dust Bowl: The True Story of the School at Weedpatch Camp* by Jerry Stanley

*Hoping for Rain: The Dust Bowl Adventures of Patty and Earl Buckler* by Kate Connell

Watch The Dust Bowl Intro at <https://www.pbs.org/video/intro/>

Guide written by Myra Zarnowski, a professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Queens College, CUNY.

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Watch the video An Environmental Catastrophe at <https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/environmental-catastrophe-dust-bowl-video-9012/ken-burns-the-dust-bowl/>

Learn more about author Skyler Schrempp by visiting her website at [www.skylerschrempp.com](http://www.skylerschrempp.com). Click on History Nerds at the top of the page to find interviews with other authors of historical fiction.