

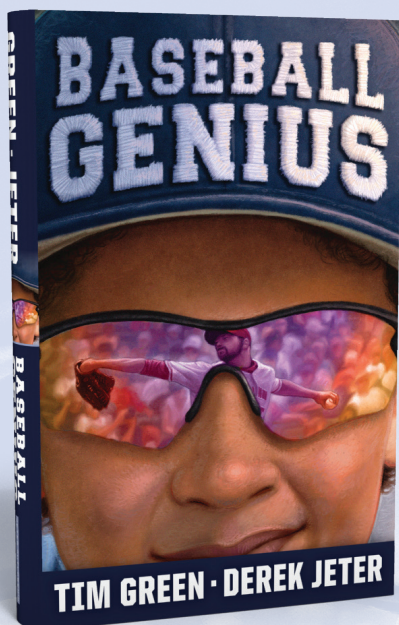
BASEBALL GENIUS

A Reading Group Guide



TIM GREEN • DEREK JETER

ABOUT THE BOOK



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About the Authors



Tim Green was a NFL first round draft pick and a star defensive player for eight years with the Atlanta Falcons. He is the *New York Times* bestselling author of dozens of books for adults and kids, including *The Dark Side of the Game*, *Football Genius*, *Football Hero*, and *Left Out*. Tim has been an NFL commentator for FOX Sports and NPR. He and his family live in upstate New York.



Derek Jeter is a fourteen-time All-Star and five-time World Series winner who has played for one team—the storied New York Yankees—for all twenty seasons of his major league career. His grace and class on and off the field have made him an icon and role model far beyond the world of baseball.

Jalen DeLuca loves baseball. Unfortunately his dad can't afford to keep him on the travel team. His dad runs a diner and makes enough to cover the bills, but there isn't enough to cover any extras. So Jalen decides to take matters into his own hands, and he sneaks into the home of the New York Yankees's star second baseman, James Yager, and steals some balls from his personal batting cage. He knows that if he can sell them, he'll be able to keep himself on the team.

Like the best-laid plans—or in this case the worst—Jalen's scheme goes wrong when Yager catches him. But Jalen has a secret: his baseball genius. He can analyze and predict almost exactly what a pitcher is going to do with his next pitch. He can't quite explain how he knows, he just knows. And after proving to Yager that he really can do this, using a televised game and predicting pitch after pitch with perfect accuracy, the two agree to a deal. Jalen will help Yager out of his batting slump, and Yager won't press charges.

However, when he begins to suspect that the team's general manager has his own agenda, Jalen's going to need his friends and his unusual baseball talent to save not only Yager's career, but also his own good name.

Prereading Activity

Ask the students what they know about Major League Baseball. Then, ask them what they know about the New York Yankees. How familiar are they with statistics and their use in baseball? What do they believe are the characteristics of a Major League Baseball player? Have them debate what is more important: a player's statistics, or his heart and soul for the game?

Discussion Questions

1. Jalen has never stolen anything in his life. Why doesn't he listen to his inner self when concocting his plan to break into New York Yankee James Yager's house to steal some baseballs? What made him so desperate that he was willing to steal? Was earning a spot on the travel team worth the risk of being arrested? How does Jalen justify his actions? Does he feel any remorse?
2. Coach Gamble is in charge of the Rockets' Summer League. Is he a good coach? What does he require of all his players? In his pursuit of winning, does Coach Gamble believe in leniency toward his players? Discuss the belief of winning at all costs, no matter what. Is that a healthy way to play?
3. Coach Gamble's son, Chris, is the Rockets' pitcher. Describe Chris's personality. How does he compare to his father? Do you think Chris is a bully? How so?
4. Jalen, Daniel, and Cat are best friends. How are they similar, and how are they different? What bonds the three of them together? Each friend has a special talent. Discuss how they complement each other.
5. Jalen's father works long hours at the Silver Liner Diner. Is the Silver Liner Diner a metaphor? Explain. What lessons does Jalen learn while working at the diner?

6. What is a "savant"? Jalen's fourth-grade teacher is excited that his test results suggest that he is exceptionally good in mathematics. So why does Jalen stop answering test questions correctly? Why is he afraid of receiving high marks?
7. What is Jalen's life dream? How does his lack of knowledge about his mother affect how Jalen feels about himself? What does Jalen come to realize about his father?
8. Would James Yager be considered a protagonist or an antagonist in the story? Explain.
9. After Jalen is caught stealing Yager's baseballs and subsequently escapes from Yager's shed, how did the two react when they met face-to-face at Cat's birthday party? How did Jalen convince Yager not to take him to the police, or at the very least, turn him over to his father?
10. Jeffrey Foxx, the general manager of the New York Yankees, informs James Yager that his days in the Major Leagues are over. Why does Foxx think Yager is at the end of his career?
11. How can Jalen predict a baseball pitch? What do you think of his special talent? Do you think Jalen is gifted or just plain lucky?
12. When Yager stops by the diner to speak with Jalen's dad and ask for permission for Jalen's help, there are some noisy customers. How does Jalen feel when Yager offers to help out with the situation? How does Yager help? What does this reveal about his character?
13. Jalen tries out a seat in Yankee Stadium that would give him a perfect view of the pitcher and the batting box. While Yager goes to get tickets for the game, Jalen wanders to the field. What does Jalen do to cause Foxx to try to arrest him? How does Jalen get out of the situation?

14. Yager questions whether it is fair to have Jalen help him with his batting. Jalen says it was smart to use every resource available to win. What do you think? Should Jalen be helping Yager, or is he giving Yager an unfair advantage? Are the signals that Yager and Jalen use to communicate legal?

15. Discuss how varying levels of economic status are depicted throughout the story. For instance, consider the Rockets players' brand-name gear versus what Daniel and Jalen wore. Compare the different living conditions of Jalen, Cat, and Daniel, and compare the different seats at Yankee Stadium.

16. Why is Foxx so anxious to undermine Jalen's help? What is he afraid will happen? What consequences to his career and the Yankees' reputation does he anticipate?

17. Cat decides that Yager should do a quid pro quo for Jalen's help. What is a quid pro quo? What does Cat decide Yager should do for Jalen? Is this a good idea? What are the consequences of this deal?

18. Jalen met a man named Mr. Moses while taking a walk during the first game. Mr. Moses offered some advice, saying, "See, if you do everything you can, it lets you sleep at night." How does this help Jalen? What else did Mr. Moses do to help Jalen?

19. Think of the baseball song "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." Compare the lyrics to Foxx's attempts to prevent Jalen from helping Yager bat 1,000 in three games.

20. In the final game of the three games, Yager must be perfect at bat. How does technology play an important role? What technology is used? How do Jalen and Cat provide signals to Yager?

21. Describe all the antics that occur at the end of the final game. Will there be any consequences for Jalen? Would they be deserved?

22. What is a genius? Would you consider Jalen a baseball genius? Why? What is the difference between a genius and a savant? Is it possible to be both?

Extension Activities

1. Outline the important parts of the story as a class. Then illustrate a picture book for younger readers. Present the finished project to another class.

2. Break into groups, and reenact a scene from the story. The best scenes are ones with action and dialogue. Each group should be assigned a different scene.

3. Sports players are sometimes known to have superstitions. Research some well-known superstitions. What is their reason for performing these rituals? How did Fabio's calamari become James Yager's superstition? Is there any basis for superstitions?

4. Choose a character from the story and have the character write a description of Jalen from his/her point of view. Compare these descriptions with the rest of the class.

5. Write a new final chapter of the book, explaining how Jalen deals with the authorities regarding his misbehaviors. How would Jeffrey Foxx react to seeing Jalen? How would Cat, Daniel, and Cat's mother react? How would James Yager help Jalen?

JETER CHILDREN'S



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