

Heat by Mike Lupica

Subjects: Brothers—Juvenile fiction; Orphans—Juvenile fiction; Cubans—Juvenile fiction; Little League baseball—Juvenile fiction

Book Lists: America, Latin America, Middle School, Reluctant Readers

Props: Baseball glove, baseball



Mrs. Cora was on her way home from the bank with her food money tucked inside her purse. She lived in the South Bronx of New York City in the shadow of Yankee Stadium. Yankee Stadium: home to the Sultan of Swat—Babe Ruth, to Yogi Berra, Mickey Mantle, and more recently to Ricardo Gonzalez, or El Grande as he was called by his fans. As Mrs. Cora slowly walked away from the stadium, past the stores selling Yankee merchandise, she was hit from behind. She fell onto the sidewalk and her purse was pulled from her arm as if whoever it was didn't care if he took Mrs. Cora's arm with it. She rolled on her side and managed to yell as loud as she could, "Stop, thief!" A policeman heard and started chasing.

The thief's name was Ramon. He was not the smartest 16-year-old in the South Bronx but he was very fast. His plan was simple: he needed spending money, so he would grab a purse and run. He would cut across Ruppert Place, run down the hill to the park, across the basketball courts, and ball fields, hop the fence at the far end, run underneath the overpass and he'd be gone. As he ran, Ramon looked around, saw the fat cop chasing him, wobbling like a car with a flat tire and wanted to laugh. No cop had ever caught him and no cop ever would. But as he ran across the out field, he felt a sharp pain in the back of his head. He went down like somebody had tackled him from behind. Ramon, who wasn't much of a thinker, tried to think what had just happened to him, but his head hurt too much. Then he passed out.

When he opened his eyes, his hands were already cuffed in front of him. The fat policeman was talking to a skinny boy with long arms and long fingers wearing a Yankees T-shirt, with a baseball glove under his arm. (*Bring out baseball glove and ball*) The boy was Michael Arroyo and he had thrown a baseball from home plate to hit Ramon dead center on the back of his head. "You got some arm, kid," the cop said.

Michael Arroyo was just 12, but he looked older and he was the tallest player on his All-Star Little League team. His papi, his father, had been the first to tell him he had an arm. It had been back in Cuba when Michael was 7- or 8-years-old. "You

cannot teach somebody to have an arm like yours," his papi had said. "It's something you are born with, a gift from the gods, like a singer's voice or an artist's brush." (*Put down glove and ball*) Michael's mother had died of cancer, and so it was just Papi who dreamed of Michael making it to the Little League World Series and playing in Williamsport, PA. To follow that dream, one night last year, Papi had taken his two boys, Michael and his older brother Carlos, on a boat away from Cuba across the water to Florida and then to New York City.

Mrs. Cora and Michael were friends. He was very happy that he had caught the thief who had taken her purse and money. They all lived in the same building together and they looked out for each other. Mrs. Cora was like a grandmother to Michael and Carlos and she shared their secret; the secret that their father was dead. It had been terrible, but no one could know he had died. Carlos would be 18 in a few months and until then they could tell no one or they would be taken into the child care system and they would lose each other. But as hard as the secret had been to keep before, it would be even harder now that Michael was a hero. The policeman had told the mayor about Michael's throw that had stopped the thief and reporters were calling Michael's apartment wanting interviews, wanting to talk to his father. Plus, Michael's coach was calling his apartment asking to talk to his father about his birth certificate. Some other coaches had accused Michael of being older than he was and they needed his birth certificate (which he didn't have) to prove that he was 12 and eligible to play. Plus the boys haven't seen the last of Ramon, the thief. And as if things aren't complicated enough, there's a girl about Michael's age. An uncommonly beautiful girl, with long dark hair and dark skin with big, dark eyes and she too is a very good baseball player.

Will there be a happy ending for Michael Arroyo, the boy from Cuba with a baseball dream? Read this story full of baseball thrills and heroes young and old. (*Hold up book*) *Heat* by Mike Lupica.