

A woman with dark, wavy hair is smiling and looking to her right. She is wearing a light green, short-sleeved top and a matching skirt. She stands in a room with wood-paneled walls. To her right, there is a light switch. In the foreground, a wooden chair is partially visible, and on a table next to it, there is a bowl filled with several red apples. The overall style is that of a textured, painterly illustration.

## Comprehension

### Genre

**Realistic Fiction** tells an invented story that could have happened in real life.



### Evaluate

#### Make Judgments

As you read, use your Judgments Chart.

Action	Judgment

### Read to Find Out

How does a baseball card cause so much trouble?

# HONUS *and* ME



by Dan Gutman

*illustrated by Ron Mazellan*

"JOEY, I'M HOME!" MOM SHOUTED AS THE SCREEN door slammed behind her. "How was the game?"

"Lousy," I reported honestly. "I fanned three times and let a grounder go between my legs to let the winning run score."

Mom threw her arms around me and ran her fingers through my hair.





“You’ll get ‘em next time, slugger.”

She flopped down in a chair. I could tell she was exhausted. Mom is on her feet most of the day. She works as a nurse in Hazelwood Hospital here in Louisville.

“So what did you make for dinner?” she asked with a smile, “I’m beat.”

“Oh, Mom, let’s go out to eat tonight.”

“Negative,” she replied. “When you sign your big league contract, you’ll take me out on the town. ‘Till then, we’re on a tight budget.”

“Fast food?” I suggested hopefully.

“Ugh!” she replied, holding her nose. “I’d rather starve.”

I wouldn’t say we were *poor*, but I sure wouldn’t say we were rich either. We never had a lot of money, but things got really tough after my parents split up two years ago. My dad lived in Louisville too, in an apartment. He came over to visit from time to time.

Money was always a problem. When I was a little kid my folks used to argue a lot about it. Dad always seemed to have a tough time landing a job. When he found one, he never seemed to be able to hold on to it very long.

I’ve always thought that if only my parents had had more money, they wouldn’t have split up. Mom said that was ridiculous. Money had nothing to do with it, she told me. Besides, she said, money doesn’t make you happy.

But how would she know? She never had any.

I always wished I had a million dollars. At least I could see if she was right or not. Even a half a million would have been nice.

Until we win the lottery, I’d try to make a few dollars here and there doing odd jobs. Yard work. Raking leaves and stuff. The winter before, Kentucky got a lot more snow than usual, and I made a bunch of money shoveling people’s sidewalks and driveways. I gave some of the money to my mom. The rest of it I spent on baseball cards.

Dad gave me his baseball-card collection and got me started collecting cards when I was seven.

I may not have been a great hitter, but I knew more about cards than any kid around. I put together a complete set of guys who played shortstop. That was always my position.

Mom says buying baseball cards is like throwing money into a garbage can. But I figure a kid should be allowed to have one harmless vice.

And besides, my baseball cards actually *saved* us money. When I got holes in my sneakers, I would slip a card inside so I didn't need to buy a new pair right away. I always used lousy cards, of course. I wouldn't think of stepping on a card that was worth anything.

"I got you some work today, Joe," Mom said as we chowed down on leftovers.





“Oh, yeah? What?”

“Miss Young needs her attic cleaned out. She’ll pay you five dollars. I told her you’d take it.”

“Oh, *man!*”

Amanda Young is this really old lady who lives next door. I know she’s way over one hundred, because my mom showed me an article from the paper that talked about Louisville’s Century Club. She’s pretty peppy for an old lady. Her skin is really wrinkly, though.

Miss Young never had any kids, and she was never married. I don’t even think she has any relatives who are still alive. She’s been living by herself in that **dilapidated** old house for as long as anybody can remember. She never comes outside. Her groceries are brought in.

My mom stops over to Miss Young’s now and then to see if she’s okay. I guess that’s how I got this job.

It’s not like I don’t appreciate the work or anything. It’s just that Amanda Young is kinda weird. I’ve run a few errands for her, and she starts talking to me about nothing and she goes on and on. I can’t understand what she’s saying half the time. I nod my head yes to be polite.

Sometimes, I must admit, I pretend my mom is calling so I can go home. Miss Young doesn’t hear very well, so she can’t tell I’m lying.

I’ve never seen Miss Young smile. She seems really sad, as if somebody did something terrible to her a long time ago and she never got over it.

I’ve heard kids say that Amanda Young is a witch. Kids always make up stories like that. I think she’s just a lonely old lady. I feel a little sorry for her.

Cleaning out Miss Young’s attic isn’t my idea of a fun afternoon, but five bucks is five bucks. There is a new set of baseball cards coming out next month, and I can use the money to buy a few packs.



### Make Judgments

Was it appropriate for Joey’s mother to accept a job offer without talking to Joey about it first? Explain.



I'm sure I would have felt differently about the job if I'd known what Miss Young had up in her attic.

We only had a half day of school the next day, so I thought it would be a good time to go over to Amanda Young's house. The shutters were hanging off the windows at an angle, and the place hadn't had a coat of paint in **decades**. You could tell home maintenance was not very important to the old lady.

Miss Young was in worse financial shape than we were. My mom said she could barely live off her Social Security checks.

After I rang the doorbell, I didn't hear a sound inside for a minute or two. I was afraid that maybe Miss Young was hurt or something, but then I heard her shuffling feet coming toward the door. She was really small, so when she opened the door a crack I could barely see her.

"Come in," she creaked. "Why Joseph Stoshack, you're getting to be so big!"

Inside, the house was like one of those historical houses some famous guy lived in and has been preserved just the way he left it when he died. It was filled with antiques, though I don't know if stuff is still called antique if somebody never stopped using it. The walls were covered with hats and dried flowers.

"Pirates, eh?" she said, peering at my baseball cap. "Are you a Pittsburgh rooter?"

"No, I just like this baseball cap, Miss Young."

"I used to root for the Pirates when I was a girl," she said. "Well, one Pirate anyway." She stopped for a moment and let out a sigh before changing the subject. "We didn't have television back then, or even radio. But we used to pore over the newspaper. Did you know that the manager of the Pirates invented those flip-up sunglasses outfielders wear?"

"Really?"

Miss Young had never brought up baseball the other times we'd spoken. For the first time, she had my interest.

"That's right," she continued. "His name was Fred Clarke. He's a Hall of Famer, you know."



I had heard of Clarke, but I didn't know too much about him.

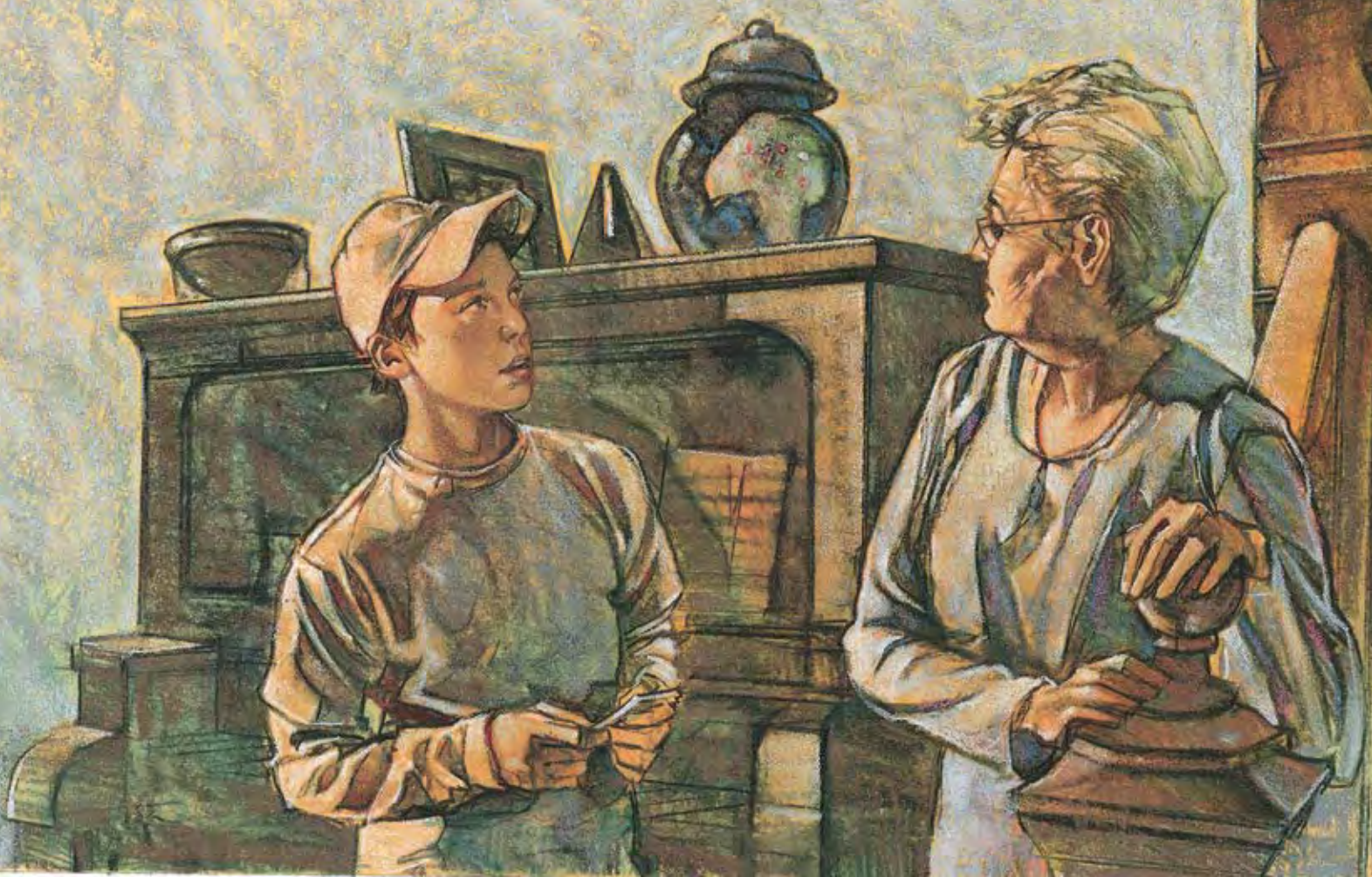
“And the baseball bat was invented right here in Louisville, Joseph. There was this fella named Pete Browning. He broke his bat one day, and a little boy took him home and carved Pete a new one on his daddy's lathe. His dad was a woodworker you see, who made wooden butter churns. Do you know what a butter churn is, Joseph? Oh, of course not. You're too young. Well, anyway, Pete took his new bat and got three hits the next day. Naturally, his teammates *all* wanted new bats. The woodworker stopped making butter churns and went into the bat business. And that's how the Louisville Slugger was born. Of course, that was before my time.”

I couldn't imagine *anything* being before her time.

“I want to show you something, Joseph.”

She put on a pair of old-lady glasses and opened a drawer in the bureau in her front hallway. After sifting through the junk in there for a minute, she pulled out a photo and held it under a lamp. It was an old-time baseball player. The image was fuzzy, but I could make out the word “Louisville” across the chest of his uniform.





The photo looked like it had originally been larger, but it was ripped in half. There was a white border at the top, bottom, and left side, but the right side had no border and the edge was jagged.

The picture had been taken in a garden. The ballplayer was facing the camera and his left arm was extending out to the jagged edge, like he was holding hands with someone. It was impossible to tell who the other person was, because that half had been ripped off.

I looked up and saw there were tears in Miss Young's eyes.

"I was supposed to hold onto this half of the picture until we saw each other again," she said softly. "I waited and waited. But he never came back."

She handed me the picture abruptly. "Throw it away with the rest of the junk upstairs. It's worthless."

I'm a collector. I never throw *anything* away. Who knows? A ripped picture of an old-time ballplayer might be

worth something to somebody. It certainly meant something to Miss Young a long time ago. As I stuffed the picture in my backpack, I wondered why it had made her so upset.

Miss Young led me upstairs and told me she wanted me to take everything out of the attic and put it on the street for the garbage men to take away. I figured she knew she wasn't going to live forever, and she wanted to clean up her affairs while she was still around.

As soon as I stepped up into the attic, I knew it had been a mistake to take the job. It was dark, filthy, and it looked like a junkyard. This was no five-dollar job, I thought to myself.

But a deal is a deal. I started picking through the trash and hauling it out to the street. The whole time I was thinking I should have gotten a paper route or some other real job.

Being a collector and all, I couldn't resist peeking into a few of Miss Young's old boxes to see what kind of stuff she had decided to hang on to all these years. But it was exactly what she said it was—worthless junk. Broken candlesticks. Old clothes. A set of encyclopedias. I chucked it all out.

After a couple of hours I had cleared the entire attic except for a few boxes. I was dog tired, and I picked up the next box without holding it from the bottom. The box had deteriorated with age, and the bottom ripped open in my arms. The contents spilled all over the floor. I was angry at myself for not being more careful.

I decided to take a short break before cleaning up the mess, so I lay down on the dusty wooden slats and stared at the **rafters**. In a few minutes I felt rested and rolled over on my side to look at the junk strewn across the floor.

It was papers, mostly. Nothing too interesting. Bank statements and tax returns from a long time ago. I started picking them up and putting them into a pile. When I picked up the stack, a single piece of cardboard fell out and fluttered to the floor.

It didn't register at first. But when I picked up the card, I felt a strange tingling sensation.





I turned over the card and looked at the other side. I couldn't believe my eyes.

It was a picture of a man's face. I gasped. **Instinctively**, I looked around to see if anybody was watching. Of course nobody was there.

The man in the picture was a young man, with short brown hair parted in the middle. He had a solemn expression on his face, with his head **swiveled** slightly so he was looking off to the left. His shirt collar was navy blue, and the shirt was muddy gray. It had four white buttons.

On the right side of his chest were the letters "PITTS" and on the left were the letters "BURG." There was no H.

The background of the card was burnt-orange. There was a thin white border on all four sides. Across the bottom border, centered in the middle, were these magic words . . .

WAGNER, PITTSBURG

My breath came in short bursts. I suddenly felt warm. My heart was racing. My *brain* was racing. The tingling sensation was all over me, and stronger than I had ever experienced it.

No doubt about it. I had just stumbled upon a T-206 Honus Wagner card—*the most valuable baseball card in the world*.

Every serious collector knows the legend behind the Wagner card. These early baseball cards were printed by tobacco companies and were included with their products. All the players agreed to be on the cards except for Honus Wagner, the star shortstop of the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Wagner was against cigarette smoking, and he didn't want his name or picture used to sell tobacco. He forced the American Tobacco Company to withdraw his card—but they had already started printing them. A small number of the cards reached the public before the card was discontinued.

That's why the Honus Wagner card is so valuable. Only about forty of them are known to exist in the whole world, most of them in bad condition.

I just found No. 41, and it was *mint*. Nobody had *touched* it in over eighty years.





I knew the piece of cardboard in my hand was worth thousands of dollars, but I didn't know exactly how *many* thousands. I remembered that a few years ago some famous athlete had bought one at an **auction**, but I couldn't recall who he was or how much he paid for it. It was a huge amount of money, that was for sure.

All my problems, I suddenly realized, were solved. Or so I thought.

I slipped the card in my backpack, being careful not to bend any of the corners or damage it in any way. A tiny nick in a card this rare might **decrease** its value by thousands of dollars.

Quickly, I gathered up the rest of the junk in the attic and hauled it out to the curb.

I had almost forgotten about Miss Young, but she called me over just as I was about to run home.

"Aren't you forgetting something, Joseph?"

She held out a five-dollar bill and **shakily** placed it in my palm. She grabbed my other hand and looked me in the eye.

"Thank you for helping out an old lady," she said seriously. "And because you did such a fine job, I want you to have *ten* dollars. I bet that's a lot of money to a boy your age."

Ten bucks? In my head I was thinking that I had a fortune in my backpack.

"Yeah, I could use ten dollars," I sputtered. "Thanks Miss Young."

"Buy something nice for yourself," she called out as I dashed away. "Money won't do *me* any good."

"I will," I called out as I left. "Believe me, I *will*."

Mom wouldn't be home from work for an hour or so. I grabbed my bike, hopped on, and started pedaling east on Chestnut Street past Sheppard Park and Founders Square.

As I cruised down the streets I was filled with an overwhelming feeling of joy. Happiness washed over my body. Nobody could touch me. Nobody could hurt me. Nobody could tell me what to do. It was a feeling I had never experienced before.

I didn't know if I should tell the whole world about my good fortune, or if maybe I shouldn't tell *anybody* in the world.

As I whizzed down the street, I felt like everyone was looking at me. I felt like everyone must somehow know what had happened to me. They knew what I had in my backpack. It was as if the news had instantly been picked up and broadcast around the globe.

Those feelings lasted about a minute, when a different feeling came over me. A bad feeling. The baseball card wasn't mine to take, really. It was Miss Young's card. If anybody deserved to get rich from it, it was *her*. She had been nice enough to pay me *double* for cleaning out her attic, and I had stolen her fortune.

Almost as quickly, my brain came up with reasons I shouldn't feel badly. Miss Young herself said that money wouldn't do her any good, so why *shouldn't* I keep the card? After all, *she* told me to throw the stuff away. If I hadn't found the card, *she* wouldn't have found it. It would have ended up buried in a landfill someplace, worth nothing to anyone.

Finder's keepers, right?

And besides, I thought, Miss Young isn't going to live much longer.

I felt bad, again, thinking that last thought.

I was feeling very mixed up. Deep inside I knew the right thing would be to give Miss Young back her baseball card.

But that didn't necessarily mean I was going to *do* the right thing.



### Make Judgments

Was Joey's action appropriate, or should he return the baseball card to Miss Young? Explain.

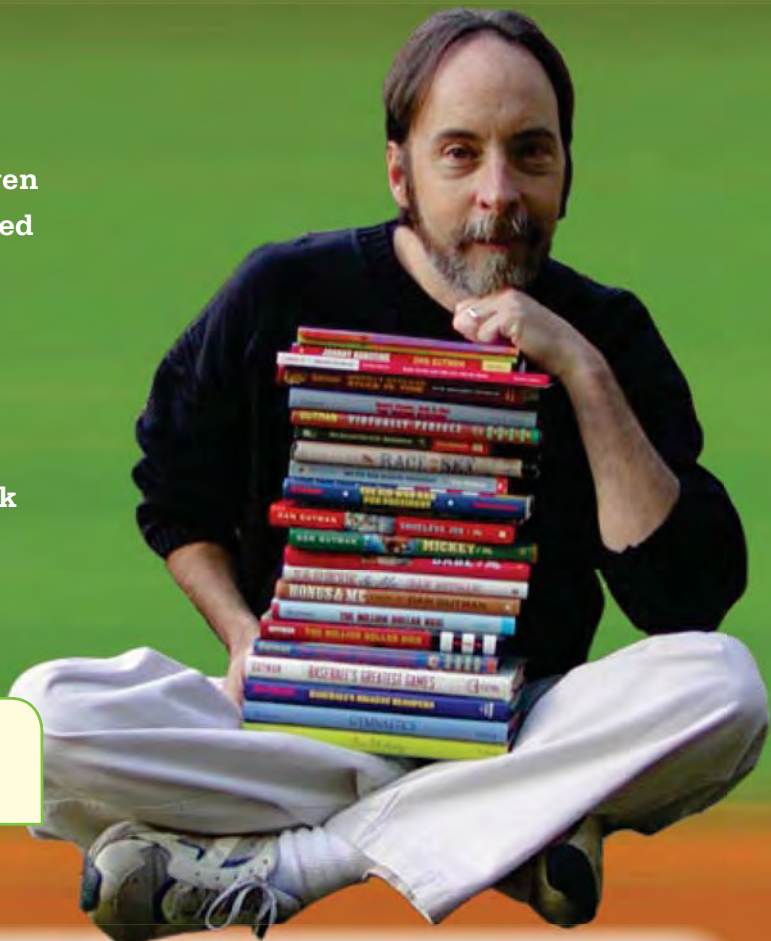


# At Bat with DAN GUTMAN

**DAN GUTMAN** has a section on his Web site called “Read My Rejection Letters.” *Honus and Me* was rejected seven times before a publisher accepted the manuscript. Dan said that during the three years he tried to get “Honus” published, he learned that persistence pays off! In the end, *Honus and Me* was nominated for 11 state book awards and won a California Young Reader’s Award.



Find out more about  
Dan Gutman at  
[www.macmillanmh.com](http://www.macmillanmh.com)



## Author’s Purpose

Dan Gutman worked very hard to get *Honus and Me* published. What do you think was his main purpose for writing? Explain.



# Comprehension Check



## Summarize

Use your Judgments Chart to help you summarize *Honus and Me*. Consider how money has an impact on the events of the story.

Action	Judgment

## Think and Compare



1. If Joey offered to split what the baseball card was worth with Miss Young, would this be an appropriate solution to his problem? Use facts from the text to support your answer.

**Evaluate: Make Judgments**

2. Why do you think Joey is so excited to find the baseball card? How can it change his life? **Analyze**

3. This selection ends before we know what Joey decides to do about the baseball card. How would you end the story? Why? **Synthesize**

4. Joey could use the wealth from the Wagner card to help his family. Is it all right to take unfair advantage of a situation, as long as you help someone in the end? Explain. **Evaluate**

5. Read “Grandpa and Me” on pages 544–545. How do Susan and Joey in *Honus and Me* make false judgments about the elder characters in the stories? **Reading/Writing Across Texts**