



◊ READING GUIDE ◊

THE WIZENARD SERIES TRAINING CAMP

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BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

In **TRAINING CAMP**, the first book of the Wizenard Series, readers meet the West Bottom Badgers community basketball team as the players are introduced to their new coach, Rolabi Wizenard. They soon discover that his methods are unexpected, even unexplainable.

Yet his methods work, not only to transform the way the boys play, but also to change how they think about the game and beyond it to how they live their lives.

Exciting basketball action combines with an eventful plot to reveal the personalities, viewpoints, and motivations of each of the key players, their interactions on the court and off, and how they negotiate the world they live in.

Basketball legend Kobe Bryant and author Wesley King give readers much to think about and discuss that, like Coach Wizenard's wisdom, will enhance their experience of the novel and enrich their lives.

This guide offers prompts to help get the conversation started whether the discussion group is in a classroom, in a gym, in the library, or at a friend's, and whether it is led by an adult or self-led by the young readers.

There are a few activities included to extend the book and add some fun as well.



BEFORE/DURING/AFTER READING

Below is a list of some life lessons the characters in the book and you as a reader learn from TRAINING CAMP. Look at the list before you start the novel and refer back to it as you read. Discuss with your group how Rolabi uses his magical abilities to communicate these ideas to the team. How do they change the boys? How do they impact the team as a whole?

What do you think about these lessons? Did someone teach them to you, did you discover them on your own, or was it a mix? Talk with your group about your individual experiences: How have these lessons played out in your life? Have your feelings about any of the lessons changed as a result of reading TRAINING CAMP?

- ♦ It's okay to make mistakes.
- ♦ How to be a leader
- ♦ How to be a follower
- ♦ How to control emotions
- ♦ Setting and achieving goals
- ♦ Success requires hard work.
- ♦ Know your strengths and weaknesses.
- ♦ Being healthy is important.
- ♦ How to deal with pressure and stress
- ♦ You're responsible for yourself.
- ♦ Life isn't always fair.
- ♦ Together everyone achieves more.
- ♦ There will be tough times.
- ♦ How to manage time efficiently
- ♦ Respect everyone.
- ♦ Focus on what you can control.



AFTER READING

Discuss how these statements apply to specific characters or scenes in the story.

- ♦ In both life and sport, there are rules, regulations, codes of ethics, appropriate behavior, etc.
- ♦ In order to do well in both, it takes a lot of hard work, determination, and sometimes a little bit of luck.
- ♦ In both life and sport, when we're ahead we feel good and are having fun, and when we're behind we sometimes feel lost and bored.
- ♦ Mentors, coaches, teammates, parents, extended family, and friends all contribute to the success or the failure of the individual and those who surround that individual in both life and sport.
- ♦ In both life and sport, there's one thing that increases our chances of being successful and winning.

Divide the statements below among the members of your book group. Take time to explore the meaning of these statements both in the novel and in your own life. Each group member should select one or two statements that are most meaningful to him or her and talk about why. As a group, talk about how hearing each other's thoughts has or has not changed your opinions and ideas.

- ♦ Be a defender. A defender must always be ready for his opponents. He must outthink, outwork, out-strategize.
- ♦ You are stronger as a team than as an individual.
- ♦ Building trust, relationships, and empathy are characteristics you need to be a winner/champion.
- ♦ All the players have individual strengths and weaknesses.
- ♦ They all have different reasons for playing ball.
- ♦ Everyone has a story.
- ♦ What people appear to be is not necessarily who they really are.
- ♦ "The lone wolf will soon starve." Who is the lone wolf in the story?
- ♦ An old saying is "seeing is believing." But this is also true in reverse: We only see what we believe.
- ♦ Look at the daisy until you see something new.
- ♦ It is okay to be afraid.
- ♦ Small things make the difference between victory and defeat.



- ♦ Character is important.
- ♦ The strongest remember that sometimes we are weak.
- ♦ If you don't like what you see out there, change it.
- ♦ Grana lives in people.
- ♦ All people have the power to change.
- ♦ Ego is detrimental to a team.
- ♦ Facing secrets is painful. We need to grow.
- ♦ Vision is more than what you see with your eyes.
- ♦ Sweat, pain, and fear are the road to the championship.

TRAINING CAMP presents its story through the voices and viewpoints of five different characters—five members of the West Bottom Badgers basketball team. How do the similarities and differences in the tellings change the story and your feelings about not just the events but also the characters? Did your feelings of empathy and your identification with characters change in the different sections? How? Do you trust any one of the voices more than others?

Coach Rolabi is certainly unconventional. But do you think he turned out to be a good coach? How did he demonstrate style, heart, thought, and philosophy? How is he like coaches you know? Would you want him to coach a team that you're on? Why or why not?

The Wizenard Proverbs are food for thought . . . and for discussion. For starters, what does the book group think is the meaning and wisdom (or lack of wisdom) in these three proverbs? Then each member of your group should select a favorite or especially meaningful proverb to him or her, and the group should discuss those as well.

♦ WIZENARD PROVERB #12

Everyone has a choice every moment of the day. Look, or look away.

♦ WIZENARD PROVERB #9

No one wins alone. Those that forget this do not win.

♦ WIZENARD PROVERB #38

If you are unsure of your destination, you might as well keep on walking.



Here are some quotes from real-world coaches. Talk about them and compare or contrast them with the way Rolabi handles situations in the novel.

- ♦ “A good coach will make his players see what they can be rather than what they are.” —Ara Parseghian, Football
- ♦ “You fail all the time, but you aren’t a failure until you start blaming someone else.” —Bum Phillips, Football
- ♦ “Perfection is not attainable. But if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence.” —Vince Lombardi, Football
- ♦ “The secret of winning is working more as a team and less as individuals.” —Knute Rockne, Football
- ♦ “Show up. Work hard. Try your best. It’s not hard to recognize, but it can be hard to do. I tell my players, if you don’t quit on yourself, then your coaches will never, ever quit on you.” —Paul Vincent, Hockey
- ♦ “The interesting thing about coaching is that you have to trouble the comfortable, and comfort the troubled.” —Ric Charlesworth, Hockey
- ♦ “I found out that if you are going to win games, you had better be ready to adapt.” —Scotty Bowman, Hockey
- ♦ “To be as good as it can be, a team has to buy into what you as the coach are doing. They have to feel you’re a part of them and they’re a part of you.” —Bobby Knight, Basketball
- ♦ “Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.” —John Wooden, Basketball
- ♦ “Good teams become great ones when the members trust each other enough to surrender the ‘me’ for the ‘we.’” —Phil Jackson, Basketball



Here are some broad questions to tackle with your reading group, using the insights and understanding you gained from reading **TRAINING CAMP** and from wisdom you've learned from coaches and teachers, as well as your own experiences.

- ♦ Why do people participate in sports?
- ♦ How do sports influence your life?
- ♦ How does social class affect participation in sports?
- ♦ What do you think are the responsibilities of a coach?
- ♦ What effect does a coach have on teamwork and execution of team tactics?
- ♦ What strengths and weaknesses do players bring to the field/court?
- ♦ What risks do athletes take on and off the field/court? What can we learn about teamwork and cooperation from playing team sports?
- ♦ What influence can working together for a common goal have on a team's success?
- ♦ How can working together on a team improve self-esteem and cooperation in life?
- ♦ How are we better together?
- ♦ How do communication skills contribute to team effectiveness?

ACTIVITIES

Like a basketball team working together to set up the perfect shot, every team member has a specific role to play in accomplishing tasks on the job. These activities demonstrate the power of teamwork to accomplish a task—and they're fun!

Building a Structure as a Team

Break your reading group up into pairs or groups of three. Each team will need a handful of uncooked spaghetti, 30 jujubes (jellylike candies), and a measuring tape.

This activity is an exercise in team building, developing communication skills, and understanding the roles within a team.

1. The task before each team is to design and build the tallest freestanding structure possible in the time allotted, using the materials supplied.
2. Before the team begins construction, each should take five to ten minutes to discuss their design and plan. If you like, teams can give their structure a name.
3. Once the teams get started, set a timer for ten minutes. When it rings, the teams should step away from their structures.



4. Then each team should measure their structure. Which team had the tallest?

Now it's time to talk about the experience. Some questions to ask each other: What have you learned about the way a team functions? Did you divide up the tasks, giving each team member a specific role? How did you communicate during the process—were you encouraging, critical, or neutral? What were your team's strengths and possible areas for improvement? How could you have done a better job? If you had to build your structure by yourself, how would the experience—and the result—be different?

Chairs

Break your book group up into teams of four. You'll need four armless chairs for each team.

1. Set up four chairs so that all are touching and facing out in opposite directions in a square.
2. Participants then sit sideways in the chairs, facing out in four different directions. With the four participants seated, they should each lie back into the lap of their teammate.
3. Remove one of the chairs.
4. After a moment or two, remove a second chair. Then remove a third chair.
5. Finally, remove the last chair so that only the teammates are left supporting each other.
6. The participants should remain in that position for as long as possible. Count out the seconds to see how long they last.

When everyone has had a chance to be on a team, the whole group should talk about who lasted the longest and why. How is this a great lesson on teamwork?

Blindfolded Shooting

Take an exercise from Coach Wizenard's book. The group should work in pairs on a basketball court. You'll need a ball and a blindfold for each team of two.

1. Place a basketball randomly on the court and blindfold one partner on each team.
2. The sighted partner spins the blindfolded partner in circles a few times.
3. Then, using only verbal cues, the sighted partner must direct his or her teammate toward the ball, then toward the basket, and then direct the partner where and how to shoot.
4. Switch players so everyone has an opportunity to be blindfolded. Repeat the exercise.

Discuss the outcomes with the whole group. What did you learn?