

Million-Dollar Throw Study Guide

Million-Dollar Throw by Mike Lupica

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Plot Summary

In *Million Dollar Throw* by Mike Lupica, Nate Brodie is an 8th grade quarterback for his school's football team in Valley, Massachusetts. Nate learns important lessons in keeping promises, loyalty, friendship and overcoming obstacles. Nate learns these lessons through the problems experienced by people he loves. His father has had to take a part-time job for which he is overqualified when he loses his job, his mother has to work two jobs and his best friend, Abby McCall is going blind. Nate's playing during the season is affected by these challenges as well as the stress of an upcoming football throwing contest in which he has the chance to win a million dollars. Nate and Abby's friendship is threatened when she learns that she may have to go away to a special school for the blind. Then, Nate's dad loses his part-time job. Pressure is on in every corner of Nate's world. However, he realizes that his stress is nothing compared to what others are experiencing. Nate's positive attitude gives him an advantage. Ultimately, he meets his football hero, the Patriots' Tom Brady, on the night of the throwing contest. Nate wins the contest and offers the million dollars to Abby so that she can have surgery to correct her eyesight.



Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4

Summary

Nate Brodie is a 13-year-old boy who loves football and plays quarterback on his school team. Playing football comes easy to him, but other things in his life have been more challenging lately. School work does not come easy to Nate, and he is very upset about what is happening to his friend, Abby. Nate's friends call him "Brady" because a pro football player, Tom Brady, is his idol. At the beginning of Chapter 1, Nate is playing a great game, and he hopes his Mom is catching it all on video to show to his Dad later. Coach Rivers commends Nate for his great throws in the game, and the team wins 22-7.

In Chapter 2, Nate has finally saved up the \$500 necessary to buy the Tom Brady limited edition autographed football he had seen at the SportsStuff store a year ago. Nate's parents agreed to pay half the cost of the ball if Nate saved the rest. Things in the house are more difficult financially now, but his parents made a promise and they intend to honor it. Nate's Dad has lost his job at a big commercial real estate company and now works at two jobs. Nate's Mom has also gone back to work to help the family.

Nate recalls that he first became interested in Tom Brady while in the fourth grade, and Brady has been his favorite player ever since. Nate's father tells Nate that being a real champion in sports is being able to perform when the pressure is on and Brady is always able to do that. Nate's Mom and Abby accompany Nate to SportStuff to buy the Tom Brady football. While at the store, Abby notices the information for "The SportStuff Million-Dollar Throw" contest in which the winner has the chance to win a million dollars by throwing a football through a 20-inch hole during halftime of the New England Patriots' game on Thanksgiving night. Nate signs an entry form for the contest and takes it home along with the Tom Brady ball. A couple weeks later, Nate's ticket is drawn as the winner.

In Chapter 3, Winning the chance to win a million dollars has made Nate famous in the area. Several newspapers and television stations run a story on him. His friends Abby, Pete, Malcolm and LaDell have come over to Nate's house to watch a clip about him on Sports Center. Later that night, Nate, his Mom, and Abby watch the recorded program again. Nate's Mom makes him promise that he will enjoy this whole contest experience. Abby begins drawing in her sketchbook before dinner at Nate's house. Nate thinks she is the smartest and prettiest girl in school, as well as the best artist. Nate tells Abby that he is anxious about the contest because winning the money could change so many things for his family. Abby reminds him that he is to look at the contest as an adventure, not a job. Abby promises to be in the stands when Nate makes the million-dollar throw. Nate hopes that is true, but the truth is that Abby is going blind.

In Chapter 4, It was a year ago when Nate and Abby went to the movies that he first learned that she was going blind. Abby had not told Nate before this that she was



having a hard time seeing at night and that her peripheral vision had started to diminish. Now Nate knows the name for Abby's disease--retinitis pigmentosa. Abby's sense of color has also been affected which makes her paintings look different; but, she is determined to keep painting while she still can.

One day Nate and Abby go to Coppo Park and Abby wears the special orange sunglasses that reduce the amount of light that hits her eyes. The glasses make her more comfortable. Abby doesn't like to wear them in public, but it is very bright today. Abby declares that she will not be wearing the glasses on the night that Nate makes his throw no matter how bright the stadium lights will be.

Analysis

The author introduces the main characters of the story--Nate and his best friend, Abby. They have been friends since grade school. Abby is the only girl in Nate's circle of friends, a fact which does not bother Abby at all. Things are changing rapidly in Nate's world. His family's finances have been reduced since his father lost his job. Nate also has some challenges in school. But, none of these compare to the fact that Abby has retinitis pigmentosa and is going blind.

The author introduces an important theme in this chapter--performing under pressure. Nate's father tells Nate that the mark of a true champion is someone who can perform when the pressure is on. This defines Tom Brady in Nate's eyes and makes the football quarterback heroic to him. Nate's father is also a champion. After the loss of his job, he must work two different jobs to support his family. Nate's father is under serious pressure while looking for another job and managing the household on less money than the family is used to having. Abby is certainly a champion for Nate as she tries to keep her life as normal as possible while the threat of blindness hangs over her. Abby maintains a positive attitude in spite of all the changes happening in her world. These are all important lessons for Nate as the story continues.

The author also introduces the theme of honoring promises in this section. Nate's parents had promised that they would pay half of the cost for the Tom Brady autographed football if Nate could save the other half. When Nate achieves his part of the deal, his parents honor their promise to him and pay for their portion even though money is tight at the moment. This is a lesson that will be important to Nate as the story progresses.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Abby reluctant to make a big deal about going blind?

Discussion Question 2

How does life change in Nate's house after his father loses his job?



Discussion Question 3

Why is Tom Brady a hero to Nate?

Vocabulary

scanned, instinctively, stride, conversion, certificate, authenticity, salaries, commercial, collectibles, memorabilia, authentic, miscalculated, prime, expression, representative, combinations, concentration, tangle, pedicures, complained, peripheral, version, progression, congenital, specialist, remarkable, expressions, brilliant



Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8

Summary

Nate and Abby have a half day off from school; so, they go to Coppo Park to toss the football back and forth. Nate makes Abby wear her special glasses even though she doesn't want to wear them. On one of the passes, Abby stumbles and falls but not before the football hits her in the head, knocking off her special sunglasses. Nate rushes to Abby to help her, and she thanks him for keeping her in the game one more time.

In Chapter 6, things are different around Nate's house because his dad is working a second job as a night manager at Big Bill's Sports store in a neighboring town. Nate and his dad can no longer spend time talking sports in the evenings. During the days, Nate's father goes to his tiny real estate office even though there have been no prospects of any sales. The Brodies' house is for sale, and Nate hates it when people walk through it and can see all their family things. Nate's parents tell him that there is nothing to worry about and that they will not be leaving the town where they live, Valley, Massachusetts. One night Nate awakens to the sound of his parents' raised voices talking about money problems. His father says that they could use a million dollars.

In Chapter 7, Nate thinks about how much he loves football practice. He knows that great quarterbacks like Tom Brady are always prepared. Nate knows all 75 of the plays Coach Rivers has written and his teammate, Eric, compliments Nate on how he knows the plays better than the coach himself. The defensive coach for the team is Malcolm's dad, Coach Burnley. At practice one night, Nate has trouble landing throws. Coach Rivers tells Nate that maybe he is overthinking, but Nate wonders what he is thinking too much about.

In Chapter 8, Nate's Dad plans to go to Nate's Saturday game because he has rearranged his work schedule. But, that morning, Nate's father learns that he does have to go to work that day. Nate's father apologizes to Nate and puts on the red "Big Bill" shirt that he hates because he thinks it shouts to the world what is happening to him. During the game, Nate is glad to see his Mom and Abby in the stands and notes that Abby is not wearing her special glasses. When a player on the other team scores a touchdown, he runs past Nate and comments, "Who wants to be a millionaire, you?"

Analysis

Nate and Abby try to keep life as normal as possible such as going to the park to toss the football around. When Abby stumbles and falls, it is clear that nothing is the same and that her eyesight is fading. Abby feels the most comfortable around Nate because she doesn't mind wearing her special glasses around him. Since she does not want anyone else to see her in them, Nate is not surprised when she is not wearing them in



the stands at the football game. Abby's odd glasses seem to be a symbol that point out that she is different from everyone else because she is going blind. It is understandable why she doesn't want to wear them. The same thing goes for Nate's Dad's red "Big Bill" shirt. He hates the shirt because it is a visual indicator that his life has gone off track and he is forced to take a job that does not pay enough to support his family properly. But, the important thing to note is that even though Abby and Nate's father hate the symbols of their circumstances, they each go about their lives doing the best they can and trying to remain positive.

The million-dollar contest begins to enter Nate's life in that he hears his father say that what the family could use is a million dollars to help their financial strain. The pressure on Nate to win the money starts to grow even though his parents have not said anything directly to him. Nate is sensitive and knows that the money would be a huge help for the family now. The contest also becomes a point of contention when a player from the opposing team makes a snide comment about becoming a millionaire when he scores a winning touchdown against Nate's team. The contest will only increase in importance in Nate's life.

Discussion Question 1

Why are Abby's special glasses and Nate's father's red "Big Bill" shirt uncomfortable for each of them?

Discussion Question 2

What could be on Nate's mind to distract him from playing well during football practice?

Discussion Question 3

According to Nate, what is the best thing a quarterback can do for the team?

Vocabulary

condition, negotiating, nervous, graceful, stumbling, focus, embarrassed, imaginary, statistics, interceptions, attempt, convenience, circumstances, phrases, argument, pretending, repetition, gutter, options, formation, hamstring, fantasy, stride, realize, offense, actually, slant, lumbering, penalty



Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12

Summary

At halftime during the game against the Blair Bears, the score is 7-7. Nate is having an off day. Coach Rivers tells him to forget about the bad plays, to adopt sports amnesia like the pros do. Nate continues to throw incomplete passes which frustrates him. He also notices that his mother and Abby are no longer sitting in the stands. Nate's team loses with a final score of 14-13. Nate feels low because he knows his playing was not up to par today. Coach Rivers also tells Nate that Abby fell in the stands and Nate's mother took her to the hospital.

In Chapter 10, Nate speaks to his mother on the phone. She tells him that she and Abby are leaving the hospital and that the coach will drop Nate off at Abby's house. Nate's mother tells him that Abby had tried to get closer to the football field at the game today to send Nate good vibes, but she tripped going down the bleachers. Abby will be fine, but she has a few bruises and a bandaged cut on her face. When Nate arrives at Abby's house, he greets his mother and Abby's mother and tries to make jokes to lighten the situation about Abby's fall and his disappointing play during today's game. Abby takes Nate to her art studio, and he sees a half-finished portrait of himself that Abby hurries to cover. Abby reiterated what Nate's mother had told him about how she fell. She tells Nate that she is sorry that his team lost today.

In Chapter 11, Nate heads to Coppo Park to practice throwing a football through a tire swing. Nate still feels low about losing the game to Blair. He just wants to throw the football. Nate also wishes that there were not things to worry about like his Dad's losing his job and Abby's going blind, for even just a short time. Nate tries to imagine that it is the night of the Million-Dollar Throw contest and tries to visualize himself making the winning throw. Suddenly Nate is surprised by his father who has shown up after getting off work tonight. Nate shares with his father that he is feeling bad about today's game and that the pressure of the upcoming contest is getting to him. Nate's father launches into a tirade about what real pressure is--the pressure he feels about not being able to do anything he loves anymore and not being able to provide for his family like he did before losing his job. When Nate's father walks away from the park, Nate watches him and feels even worse because his Dad called him out on his attitude.

In Chapter 12, it is Sunday but Nate does not feel like watching football with his Dad, opting instead to go see Abby who has a new Mobile Reader that she wants him to see. Abby is really excited about the handheld device which speaks the words when it is run over the text in a book. Abby has started falling behind in school a little bit because it is hard for her to see small print now. Abby can sense that something is bothering Nate and he confides in her about the conversation he and his father had at the park yesterday. Nate wishes he felt better about the football throw contest and Abby tells him that it is the only good thing that is going on for a lot of people right now so they can believe that good things can still happen.



Analysis

The pressure in Nate's life is beginning to show itself in how he is playing football. Even though the coach tells him he is overthinking his throws, Nate is not sure what it is exactly that he is thinking about. There are several things in Nate's world that have him feeling on shaky ground. But, when he complains to his father about the pressure related to the contest, his father gives him a dose of reality about real pressure. Nate is old enough to understand that there is more to life than football. He has a wonderful opportunity to do something he loves and possibly be greatly rewarded for it. His father tries to give Nate some perspective on life, but it takes Nate by surprise because he is normally not that direct with Nate.

Abby also gives Nate some perspective when he tells her that he is not necessarily looking forward to the football contest. Abby tells him that he needs to understand that a lot of people in Nate's world are facing very difficult situations right now and that the possibility of Nate's winning the contest shows them that there is still hope that good things can happen. Abby is known for her positive outlook on life and Nate could pay closer attention to what she is struggling with personally and how she projects herself in the world. Abby does not want to be perceived as a whiner. She has a diplomatic way of telling Nate that he needs to pull back on his self-absorbed thinking sometimes.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think sports amnesia would be an easy thing to do when you're an athlete like Nate?

Discussion Question 2

Are you surprised by Nate's father's response to Nate's complaint about the pressure related to the Million-Dollar Throw contest?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Abby think that the Million-Dollar Throw contest is important to several people in Nate's world right now?

Vocabulary

despite, intended, spiral, interception, conversion, unusual, effective, slashing, apologize, ideally, somehow, especially, miracle, interrupting, definitely, different, concentrating, wondering, expensive, consolation, wisdom, sludge, regulation, previous, commissioner, striding, khaki, informed, casual, pressure, clenching, blitz, complained,



whined, amnesia, gadget, regulation, activate, uncommon, altogether, embarrassment, leveling, acute, guilty, valuable



Chapters 13, 14, 15 and 16

Summary

Nate is feeling a lot of pressure about the upcoming game with the Manorville Rams because people from Sports Illustrated and The Today Show will be there to do features on him and the contest. Nate tells Abby that he doesn't deserve all this attention because all he ever did was have his name drawn. Nate is really nervous during the game and keeps an eye on the sidelines where the cameraman from The Today Show is filming him. At the end of the first half, Nate runs the ball for a touchdown which his teammates think is brilliant, but Nate knows that he was just afraid to throw the ball.

In Chapter 14, it is the third quarter of the game. Nick is feeling the presence of the media on the sidelines. His confidence sags as the other team scores. But, Nate is able to throw a successful pass, and his team wins 14-8. A few days later, Nate's parents receive an advance copy of Sports Illustrated with the feature about Nate. His story also runs on The Today Show. All the attention makes Nate nervous because he's just not confident about his throwing arm anymore.

In Chapter 15, it is the following Saturday. Nate's team plays on Sunday this weekend. Nate's Mom tells him that there are people coming over to see the house which could mean a sale; but, Nate hates to have strangers looking at their personal space. Anytime people come to view the house, Nate hides his Brady ball in his closet and tidies his room. Nate plans to go see the Batman movie with his friends. He calls Abby to see if she wants to go along, but she declines and says she will meet him for pizza after the movie. At the pizza parlor, Abby tells Nate that she might be going away to school during second semester.

In Chapter 16, Abby tells Nate that the new school is the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts. It could be beneficial for Abby if she were to attend the school now and learn how to manage as a blind person before she actually goes blind. Nate is surprised by the sudden news that Abby may be going away. She tells him that her parents have been in contact with the school because Abby is struggling more and more in regular school. Then, Abby really surprises Nate by telling him that she is actually leaving for Perkins tomorrow for a trial week. The Perkins school is very expensive, and the week will give Abby and her parents a good idea whether or not she will benefit from going there before they make the full investment. The next day Nate finds a gift from Abby on the front porch. It is a painting of the target for the Million-Dollar Throw contest. She dated it for Thanksgiving night.

Analysis

The theme of overcoming obstacles is an important one in this section. Nate is feeling pressure because of all the media coverage of him at a time when he is not feeling



especially strong in his throwing ability. He manages to rise above it and win the game against Manorville but only because he runs a play instead of throwing the ball to a receiver. He also has to rise above the personal pain of having people come to view their home which is for sale. It is very uncomfortable for Nate to know that people are looking at their private family space. Yet, he has to do what is best for the family and that is to cooperate so that the house might be sold. Nate does the only thing he can in protecting himself by hiding the Brady football so people will at least not have a view of this treasured object. Abby, of course, is truly trying to overcome the obstacle of impending blindness. She is being proactive about going to the Perkins School for the Blind to see if the school is a good fit for her. It must be so frightening to know that you are going blind; but, Abby's positive attitude and optimistic outlook help her see the best in all situations, including this one. Abby even rises above her own personal discomfort and fear and paints a picture of the target Nate will be facing during the contest in the hopes that she can lift his spirits and get him more excited about the big night.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Nate so nervous about all the media coverage of him prior to the Million-Dollar Throw contest?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Nate not like it when people come over to look at their house which is for sale?

Discussion Question 3

What qualities does Abby exhibit when she agrees to attend the Perkins School for the Blind?

Vocabulary

definitely, impress, feature, publicist, relax, basically, deserves, favorite, expressions, righteously, lousy, version, sequel, confidence, perfection, intention, audible, excessive, brilliance, confident, aggressive, arrogant, defensive, exhausted, ferocious, nudged, technically, conversation, occasional, dialogue, mysterious, interesting, complaining



Chapters 17, 18, 19 and 20

Summary

It is early November, and Nate's team is playing away against the Melville Cowboys. Nate thinks it is a perfect day for football and too good to feel bad about anything. Nate decides to focus on today and not worry about the football contest coming up later this month. Unfortunately, Melville scored in the first 3 minutes of the game; but, Nate completes a pass to Pete who scores. The game is tied. Then, Melville quickly outplays Nate's team, and the score is now 21-7 at halftime. Nate feels bad because his passing is off again today. At the end of the third quarter, Coach Rivers takes Nate out of the game and puts in Eric as quarterback.

In Chapter 18, Nate can't remember every being benched in a game before, but he is not really surprised after the way he has been playing. With Eric as quarterback, the whole feeling of the game changes. The team beats Melville. Nate feels low after the game and wonders if he'll get his position back after the way Eric just led the team to victory. Nate goes home and tells his parents that he was benched. He goes to his room to see if Abby might be online, but she isn't. He wonders how she is doing at Perkins.

In Chapter 19, Nate's Mom tells him that she has taken a second job as a hostess at a restaurant in addition to her job at a gift shop. Nate tells his Mom that winning the million dollars would sure help their family. She admits that it would, but she does not want him to worry too much about it, that it will be a great night for them regardless of the outcome. Nate goes to his room and stares at the target painting that Abby gave him and imagines himself making the throw and hearing the roar of the crowd when he wins. Nate would feel better about it if his throwing skills would pick up before then.

At football practice, Coach Rivers gives Nate the example of Bill Parcells, the New England Patriots coach who said that he didn't judge quarterbacks after they threw three or four touchdown passes and won a game, but after he had thrown a bunch of interceptions and the crowd was booing and everybody wanted the backup to play. Parcells said that that was when truly big players stepped up and showed what they were made of. Nate keeps this in mind as he watches Eric during practice act as if he is the starting quarterback.

In Chapter 20, Abby is home from Perkins and calls Nate to come over to her house right away. Abby tells Nate that she may still be returning to Perkins for second semester and that she had met with a top eye doctor in Children's Hospital in Boston. The doctor told her that her vision should not be deteriorating so quickly at her age. Since the blindness is progressing rapidly, she needs to paint as much as possible now. Abby also tells Nate that she did not have time to call him while she was at Perkins because she was busy and she really enjoyed being there. Abby acknowledges that Nate has been having trouble in football lately but that he'll pull it together before the



night of the big contest. Nate snaps at her because she can't know that, and he leaves Abby's house.

Analysis

For the first time in his life, Nate is benched by a coach. He understands why the decision was made, but he just can't get his throwing arm back to where it used to be. Even though Nate says he is not going to focus on anything but the beautiful football weather, there are too many things in his family's life and Abby's life that are distressing and are taking a toll on his subconscious mind. Nate is lucky that he has Coach Rivers though. The coach had to take Nate out of the game because the goal is to win, but he also does not want to destroy Nate's self esteem. During the next practice, the coach tells Nate about how Bill Parcells, the coach for the New England Patriots professional football team, measures a quarterback--it does not all stem from the hours of glory when the team is winning and the crowds love you. The true measure of a great player is someone who can step up when things are not going well and persevere until things turn around. Coach Rivers is trying to tell Nate that he is a consistently good player who just happens to be having a slump. The real test is whether Nate can rally and come out on top again. This lesson is important to the theme of overcoming obstacles because sometimes road blocks to success can't be seen, only felt, and Nate has plenty of those in his life right now.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Nate have mixed feelings about being benched in the Melville game?

Discussion Question 2

What lesson does Coach Rivers try to teach Nate by telling him about how Coach Bill Parcells of the New England Patriots judges a quarterback?

Discussion Question 3

Why does it make Nate uncomfortable that Abby has enjoyed her time at the Perkins School for the Blind?

Vocabulary

surrounded, practically, transmitters, priceless, humming, spiral, sure-armed, upstate, clinched, lousy, impression, formation, hesitate, conversion, rove, possession, intercepted, basically, shield, miraculous, despite, volunteer, reverse, momentum, lofted, stationery, brunches, particular, attitude, amazing, replica, awe, pity, relieved, exception, confidence, ridiculously, deteriorating



Chapters 21, 22, 23 and 24

Summary

For the first time in their friendship, Nate and Abby go all weekend without speaking. Saturday's game against Salisbury was a muddy mess played in the rain. Despite the rain, Nate had a pretty good game with his team winning 6-0. Nate wants to call Abby when he gets home, but he doesn't. They are cordial but cool when sitting together on the bus Monday morning. At school, Abby sits in the first row in every class. In math class, she has a monitor on her desk to see the blackboard. Abby trips and falls while leaving math class, and Nate helps her up. For the first time, he sees panic on Abby's face. Abby makes Nate promise not to tell that she tripped because the teachers have been instructed to notify Abby's parents. The instructors at Perkins have started training Abby to use a cane, but she doesn't want to draw attention to herself.

In Chapter 22, Nate's team plays the Whitesboro Panthers. He has a decent first half, but he freezes up in the second half, making some bad calls. The coach puts Eric in as quarterback. The game ends with Liberty beating Whitesboro with a score of 28-21. Nate just knows that this is the end of his quarterback career. When Nate gets home, he learns that his father has lost his job at Big Bill's.

In Chapter 23, Nate's father tells him that he was laid off because the company had to cut costs and his father was overqualified for the job anyway. Nate looks at his mother who is crying. His father says that he will have to find another job as soon as possible so the family will not lose their house. Nate's father gets even more upset and leaves the house. Nate goes to his room. He cannot get the day's game off his mind. Nate takes the Brady ball out of its case and thinks that Tom Brady must have had some down days, too, before becoming the great quarterback he is today. Nate determines that he is going to turn things around. He grabs the target that Abby painted for him and asks his mother if she will help him hang a dream catcher. The two of them fit the target painting into Nate's old pitch-back net so that Nate can practice his throws.

In Chapter 24, Coach Rivers announces that Eric will be the starting quarterback in Saturday's game against Westboro. Eric knows that it's the best decision for the team. The coach plans to play him at wide receiver and tight end positions. Eric is hesitant to take the lead, telling everyone that it is Nate's team; but, Nate says that the team belongs to all of them. Ironically, Nate feels more like part of the team while playing the other positions than he has for a long time playing quarterback.

When Nate gets home that night, his father is cooking dinner. They have a chance to talk, something that hasn't happened for awhile. Nate's father tells Nate that what they are experiencing is happening to many families right now and everyone will get through it. It's just a matter of having the right attitude along the way. Nate's father hugs him and tells him to keep believing in happy endings, no matter how hard that may seem sometimes. After dinner, Nate goes to his room to do homework and notices that he has



a Google alert that he had set up. He printed the story and waited for his mother to come home from work. After Nate's mother reads the print out, he tells her that she needs to take him to Boston as soon as she can. She hugs him and tells him that he is still leading with his heart.

Analysis

The theme of friendship is important in this section. Nate and Abby have been friends for a long time. Even when they fight, they still think about the other and want to talk. They try not to make too much out of their spat, and Nate soon realizes that Abby has bigger issues on her mind. Her eyesight is failing faster than it should be for someone of her age with the disease. She needs Nate to be on her side, not fighting with her. Nate also knows that Abby's blindness will alter the nature of their friendship because she will be going away to school and they will no longer be able to spend time together like they always have. Their friendship is definitely going to be challenged. However, the author provides hope through the nature of these two characters that the friendship can survive the obstacles.

The author also provides a sense of intrigue by stating that Nate got a Google alert. This poses the question about what he signed up to receive. Then, when he asks his mother if she can take him to Boston as soon as possible, there is a real sense of mystery to the request. Is it related to the Million-Dollar Throw contest or is it something even more important?

Discussion Question 1

Since Abby has tripped in front of Nate before, why is she so panicked when she trips in front of Nate in the math classroom?

Discussion Question 2

What is the turning point for Nate when he decides to rally and get control of what happens from now on?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think the coach is proud of Nate's behavior when he puts Eric in the game as quarterback for the Westboro game?

Vocabulary

attempted, awkwardly, quicksand, closed-circuit, audiovisual, knockdown, defenseless, respond, terrified, righteously, obviously, shrugged, opinion, jeopardy, ceiling, veteran,



deserving, technically, handiwork, fortunate, merit, competition, attitude, slumps, exception, functioning



Chapters 25, 26, 27 and 28

Summary

Nate and Abby's relationship still feels strained since their fight. Nate figures that this is the nature of who they are now since their worlds are going in different directions. Nate misses school one day when his mother is able to take him to Boston for a meeting she had arranged for them. Abby is missing more school days, and she and Nate rarely speak anymore. When Nate comes home from school one day, he has received a package he had forgotten that he ordered. He takes the package to Abby's house and leaves it at the front door for her. Abby calls him later that night and tells him to come over.

Nate had given Abby an audio book entitled *The Story of My Life*, written by Helen Keller, which he had found after Abby mentioned Helen Keller's achievements one day. When Nate arrives at Abby's house he notices that all the paintings in her studio have been covered. Abby is not wearing her special glasses because all the shades in the room have been drawn to make it darker and easier for Abby to see. Abby tells Nate that she knows he has been pushing her away so that when she really does have to leave it won't be so difficult. Nate admits that Abby is correct and that he does not want her to go and he can't keep lying about that.

In Chapter 26 Nate comes home to an empty house after school because his mother is working and his dad is showing houses and has a job interview after that. Nate practices throwing at the target in the back yard just like he does every night. Nate comes to the conclusion that the only way to get his mind right about the contest is to stop whining and worrying about it. His parents aren't complaining about the difficult things they are doing lately and neither is Abby, so the least he can do is get his problems in perspective.

In Chapter 27 Coach Rivers puts Nate in as quarterback in the fourth quarter of the Westboro game because Eric has injured his hand. For the first time in a long time Nate feels comfortable calling the plays and leading the team in a game that ended in a 21-14 victory for them. Coach presents Nate with the game ball, and he heads over to the sidelines where his parents are waiting with Abby. Nate takes her arm and leads her to the parking lot. She says she was able to see everything. Nate sure hopes so.

In Chapter 28 Nate feels really good about football again which makes everything seem a little better. One afternoon Abby arrives at his house after school and starts to cry, telling Nate that her father lost his job at the bank. Nate thinks that Abby's parents still have enough money to get them by; but, a lot of the money was lost in stocks, and they no longer have healthcare insurance. Abby can't stop crying so Nate puts his arm around her, pulls her close and tells her that everything is going to be all right.



Analysis

The friendship between Nate and Abby is deep, and they can rise above any temporary troubles they may be experiencing. This is evidenced by the fact that Nate has ordered an audio book for Abby about Helen Keller. He takes it to her house even though they haven't been on great speaking terms lately. Abby is brave enough to tell Nate that she knows that he is pushing her away so that when she actually leaves for Perkins, their parting won't be so difficult. Nate has to confess that Abby is right and values her enough to tell her that he owes her the truth; that he was distancing from her to prevent a painful parting. However, now he knows that the truth is better than letting Abby think that Nate was just angry with her.

The theme of overcoming obstacles continues as Nate reaches a tipping point in his thinking about the Million-Dollar Throw contest. Abby and his parents are dealing with stresses that he can't even imagine so he determines that the best way to approach the contest is to stop worrying about it. Putting the problems of everyone around him into perspective, Nate realizes that he has a good problem. The others in his immediate world are worried every day about how they will meet tomorrow's challenges. Abby's world darkens even more when her father loses his job and the family no longer has healthcare insurance. This will severely impact Abby's ability to get medical treatments or to attend the Perkins School for the Blind. Nate is given another instance of seeing someone whose problems are of a greater magnitude than his. This sharpens his perspective.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Nate continue to push Abby away from him after they have had their quarrel?

Discussion Question 2

What finally helps Nate get his football problems and the Million-Dollar Throw contest in perspective?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Abby so touched by Nate's gift of the audio book?

Vocabulary

frequently, interview, autobiography, barriers, crypt, deny, prospective, verge, complain, amazing, hand-off, intercepted, hesitate, accurate, assumed, economy, penalty



Chapters 29, 30 and 31

Summary

It is twelve days before Thanksgiving, and Nate's team is playing an away game against the Dennison Browns. Winning would mean going to the championship playoffs in two weeks. Abby had told him yesterday that she is going back to Boston for some more tests on her eyes which will determine whether she should enroll at Perkins permanently. The coach starts Eric as quarterback in the game, and the first half ends 14-0 in Dennison's favor. Coach then puts Nate in as quarterback. Before long, Valley scores and then scores again with only five minutes left on the clock. Nate gets crushed in a tackle, and somebody steps on his hand; but, he gets up trying to hide the pain on his face. He figures that if he can make a fist his hand is not broken. Nate doesn't want anyone, including his coaches, to see that he is injured and take him out of the game. Valley finally defeats Dennison 21-14 and they advance to the championship game.

In Chapter 30, Abby is leaving for Boston on the Sunday before Thanksgiving to keep her doctor's appointment. Nate is saying goodbye to her in her studio, and she asks about his injured hand. He has told no one else about the injury because the contest is in four days. Abby promises that she'll be at the stadium on Thanksgiving night to watch Nate throw in the contest. Abby and her parents say goodbye to Nate, and he thinks about happy endings. When Nate is at home practicing his throw later that night, his dad announces that he has sold a house.

In Chapter 31, Nate's family decides to celebrate Thanksgiving on the day after because of all the excitement of the contest on Thanksgiving night. The SportsStuff company had arranged accommodations for Nate, his parents, and Malcolm in Boston. A limousine will be taking them to Gillette Stadium for the event. They are ushered to the VIP suite to watch the first half of the Patriots game until it is time for Nate to go on the field and throw the football. Before the game starts, Nate and Malcolm go out on to the field so Nate can get a feel for the lights and any wind that might be blowing tonight. Nate also confirms with the SportsStuff rep that Abby and her parents will be allowed on the field at halftime to see him throw the football. Nate tries to take in the awe of being on the Patriots' home field, which is one of the most exciting places he has ever been.

When the game starts, Nate tries to concentrate on Tom Bradys' moves. Abby tries to reassure Nate that he is going to win the contest. Finally, it's time for Nate to make his way back on to the field for the contest. He makes sure to bring his Brady ball with him. Abby links arms with Nate who tries to avoid looking into the crowd and keeps his eyes on the target. At last, the announcer introduces Nate who walks onto the field and takes his position. The roar from the crowd is so powerful that it almost knocks Nate down, and his legs go weak. Nate is given the option to warm up. The crowd goes wild when Tom Brady comes running out on to the field.



Analysis

The theme of friendship continues with Nate and Abby in that Abby declares that she will be at the stadium in Boston with Nate on the night of the Million-Dollar Throw contest. Abby will be in Boston because she has an appointment with a doctor who will make a determination on the progress of her blindness and whether or not she should enroll right away at the Perkins School for the Blind. This would probably be all consuming for most people to have to deal with; but, Abby is dedicated to Nate. She can't imagine being anywhere other than the stadium on the big night. Abby's selflessness makes her a wonderful friend. It is a big part of why Nate is so attracted to her.

The author does a good job of providing a sense of expectation leading up to Nate's throw on Thanksgiving night. He paces the writing so that the reader feels almost as anxious as Nate does prior to his big night. He also ends Chapter 31 with the biggest cliffhanger of all for Nate--he finally gets to meet Tom Brady who has come back onto the field to help Nate warm up for the contest.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Nate not want anyone to know that his hand has been hurt in the Dennison game?

Discussion Question 2

How does Nate exhibit generosity on the biggest night of his life so far?

Discussion Question 3

What does it say about Abby as a person that she can be excited for Nate's big night in Boston when she has come to Boston to learn the extent of her blindness?

Vocabulary

undefeated, concentrate, frustrated, blitz, momentum, exhausting, accurately, blubbering, credentials, circumstances, gesture, rehab, complications, squinting, caravan, rousing



Chapters 32, 33 and 34

Summary

Nate meets Tom Brady, and he is so excited that he drops the Brady football. Tom Brady picks it up and comments that the pressure is on him now, too, to help Nate make a winning throw. Nate and Brady toss the football back and forth for a few minutes so Nate can warm up. Then, Brady tells him to just believe he can win the contest. Nate reveals that he is scared. Brady confides that he still gets scared, but he never stops believing. Brady then walks to the sideline to wait beside Nate's parents. Nate takes one last look at Abby and then throws the ball and watches as it slips through the target effortlessly. Nate has won the million dollars. Nate locks eyes with Tom Brady and feels for a few moments what it must be like to be him.

Nate can hardly remember the award ceremony, but he does remember seeing Abby crying tears of joy on the sidelines. Nate hugs Abby, and she asks him what he is going to do with all his money. He replies that he is giving it to her because he has found a way for her to see.

In Chapter 33, it is the day after Thanksgiving. Nate and his mother plan to have their Thanksgiving feast when Nate's father returns from showing a couple of houses with his new job at a real estate company. Nate tells his mother about his plans for the million-dollar prize. He has found a surgeon who had restored the eyesight of a boy who suffered from the same disease as Abby. Nate's mom knew he had been interested in finding a surgery or cure because she had taken him to Boston to see a doctor at Children's Hospital. The doctor had told them how expensive the surgery would be and now Nate has the funds to take care of it. Nate wants to help Abby and he's not sure her procedure will take all this prize money but he feels compelled to try. Nate's mother tells him that he always leads with his heart.

In Chapter 34, it is a year later and Nate is the quarterback of the freshman team. The Valley Patriots have won the championship and Nate is awarded the game ball. He turns to Abby and tells her to go long and he throws it to her, watching as she runs happily and turns to catch the ball. Nate runs down the field after her and thinks that nothing can ever stop either of them.

Analysis

The theme of loyalty is very important in this section. Nate has been a loyal fan of Tom Brady's for a few years, even purchasing the Brady football at great expense. Now Nate's dreams have come true in that he has not only met his hero, but Brady is giving advice to Nate on how to keep a positive mindset about obstacles and challenges. The people who are loyal to Nate are also on hand--Abby, of course, his parents, and his friend, Malcolm, have all come to support Nate in what is probably the biggest night of



his life so far. The real show of loyalty comes from Nate, though, who tells Abby that he is going to give her his million dollar prize because he has found a surgeon who can help restore her eyesight. This is an amazing gesture of friendship and loyalty between two true friends, especially of such a young age. Most kids would keep the money and possibly spend it in outrageous ways; but, Nate has always led with his heart and he has made a selfless decision that will change the course of Abby's life. Nate is a football hero, for sure, and a hero in life where it really matters.

Discussion Question 1

What advice does Tom Brady give Nate just before he throws the football in the Million-Dollar Throw contest?

Discussion Question 2

How would you characterize Nate's decision to use his prize money to pay for Abby's surgery?

Discussion Question 3

What does Nate's mother mean when she says that Nate leads with his heart?

Vocabulary

crashing, surgeon, restored, expensive, clinched, random, amazingly, cradled, sprinted, celebration

Characters

Nate Brodie

Nate Brodie is a 13-year-old boy from Valley, Massachusetts, who is a big football fan. Nate is a quarterback for his school's 8th grade team, and he loves to watch his favorite professional team, the New England Patriots, on TV with his dad. Nate's favorite football player is Tom Brady, the quarterback for the Patriots. For that reason, friends sometimes call him "Brady." Nate is not only a good athlete but also a loyal friend and great team leader. Nate grows up a lot during the story because he learns how people manage challenges in their lives. Nate's family is financially challenged when his father loses his job. Nate learns from his father how to keep promises and to overcome obstacles. Nate also learns how to be a faithful and loyal friend to his best friend, Abby, who is losing her eyesight. In the end, Nate behaves selflessly by giving his huge sports prize of a million dollars toward surgery that will restore Abby's eyesight.

Abby McCall

Abby McCall is an eighth grade student in Valley, Massachusetts. She is the best friend of the main character, Nate Brodie. Abby is an artist who has a studio at her home where she and Nate often meet to talk. Abby has a very optimistic attitude about life in spite of the fact that she is going blind due to retinitis pigmentosa. She keeps her sense of humor and even begins to call herself Abby Wonder as a nod to the blind singer, Stevie Wonder. Abby is a great support for Nate because she encourages him to do things and take chances that he might otherwise avoid. Abby is always present at Nate's football games, and he counts on her being there. Abby knows that her physical capabilities are dwindling; yet, she does not want to wear special glasses in public or use a cane to help her walk. Abby may have to leave school to attend a school for the blind, but she tries to keep a positive outlook on the experience so that she can get the help she needs before going completely blind. Abby is selfless where Nate is concerned and does not miss his big night at the Million-Dollar Throw contest. She stands on the sidelines, cheering him on.

Bill Brodie

Bill Brodie is Nate's father. He has lost his job at a big real estate company; so, he works part time at a sporting good store to help take care of his family. Even though Mr. Brodie is underemployed now, he tries to set a good example for Nate in how important it is to keep promises and how to keep persevering in spite of obstacles.



Sue Brodie

Sue Brodie is Nate's mother. Since her husband lost his job, she has worked take two jobs to help the family. She has a good relationship with Nate and tries to keep him upbeat as the family works through its challenges. She even takes Nate to Boston to meet with an eye surgeon who can help Abby regain her eyesight. Mrs. Brodie is sensitive to the emotions of her husband and son. She is also a great support to Abby during her challenges of losing her eyesight.

Pete

Pete Mullaney is one of Nate's good friends. He plays the position of wide receiver on Valley's 8th grade football team.

Malcolm

Malcolm Burnley is one of Nate's good friends. He plays center on Valley's eighth grade football team. Malcolm accompanies Nate to Gillette Stadium in Boston for the Million-Dollar Throw contest.

LaDell

LaDell is one of Nate's friends. He plays on the Valley eighth grade football team.

Coach Rivers

Coach Rivers is the coach of Valley's eighth grade football team. Coach encourages Nate to persevere even when Nate is not playing well. He tries to teach Nate that true champions are measured by how they act when they're down, not when they're winning and the crowd loves them.

Abby's parents

Abby's parents are supportive of her and provide anything she needs to help manage the problem of going blind. They encourage her to continue her art and to get the help she needs to manage as a blind person before she completely loses her sight. Abby's father loses his job at a bank which makes the family vulnerable financially. However, they still want to try to send Abby to the Perkins School for the Blind because it's a great place for blind students.

Tom Brady

Tom Brady is the real life quarterback for the New England Patriots football team. He is Nate's hero. At the end of the story, he helps Nate warm up for the football throw contest and tells Nate that he should never stop believing in good things despite what is going on at the present time.



Symbols and Symbolism

Tom Brady Football

Nate saves up half the \$500 needed to purchase a football autographed by his hero, Tom Brady. His parents had told him that they would pay the other half. They honor that promise, even though Nate's dad has lost his job and the family is struggling financially. The ball not only symbolizes the importance of keeping promises but also how important it is to dream and believe that great things are possible.

The SportStuff Million-Dollar Throw promotion

Nate's father and Abby's father have lost their jobs. Both of the families are vulnerable financially. Abby is losing her eyesight which will alter her life forever. The Million-Dollar Throw contest is a symbol of hope for all of them. Good things are still possible even at times when things look bleak.

Abby's orange sunglasses

Abby has a special pair of orange sunglasses that she should wear that will reduce the strain on her eyes while in bright light. They are very noticeable, though, and Abby hates to wear them because they send a big signal to the world that she is blind, making her different from everyone else. It is possible that Abby thinks that if she doesn't wear them, the issue of blindness will not be real. She avoids them when possible.

For Sale sign

Nate's house is for sale since his father lost his job and the family is struggling to keep it. For Nate, the sign symbolizes the loss of life as he used to know it. To the outside world, it shows that his family is going through some difficult challenges he would prefer to forget.

"Big Bill" red shirt

Nate's father has taken a part-time job at a sporting good store called Big Bill's. He hates the job because he is underemployed and he doesn't make enough money to support his family. Every time his father wears the red "Big Bill" shirt, it symbolizes that he has lost so much and is in danger of even losing his home.



Mobile Reader

When Abby's eyesight deteriorates markedly, she gets a mobile reader which will provide audio when it scans printed text. This is important to Abby because her world is going dark; yet, the mobile reader gives her a glimmer of hope that she can still learn through written material.

Helen Keller audiobook

Because of her imminent blindness, Abby is very interested in the story of Helen Keller, the woman famous for overcoming blindness and deafness. Nate is tuned into why this is important and encouraging for Abby. He gives her a surprise gift of an audio book of Helen Keller's story.

Dream Catcher

Nate asks his mother to help him build a dream catcher, which is what he calls the target that he practices his throws with in the backyard. Nate feels that if he can practice and visualize, he will have a better chance of seeing the million-dollar dream come true at the big contest.

Target painting

Even though her eyesight is worsening, Abby paints a target painting to motivate Nate. She hopes that he can use it to visualize the winning throw in the contest. The painting is a symbol of Abby's optimistic outlook on life and her support of her best friend, Nate.

Million dollar prize

When Nate wins the million dollars in the contest, there are hundreds of things he could spend it on. However, he chooses to put the money toward an operation that will restore Abby's eyesight. The prize money not only symbolizes Nate's ability to overcome obstacles, but also his selflessness for the benefit of Abby whose life will be altered radically for the better by his kindness.

Settings

SportStuff store

SportsStuff is one of the largest sporting goods chain stores in New England. In addition to the usual sporting goods products, SportsStuff sells collectibles and memorabilia in a special section called "The Hall." Nate purchases the Tom Brady autographed football at SportStuff. It is here that he and Abby learn about the Million-Dollar Throw Contest that Nate enters.

Valley, Massachusetts

Valley, Massachusetts is the hometown of Nate Brodie. He lives there with his family and plays football on the school's 8th grade team.

Coppo Park

Coppo Park is a place where Nate goes to practice throwing the football for the contest. He and Abby spend time there tossing the football. Nate's father also finds him there one evening, and they have a talk about overcoming pressures in life.

Gillette Stadium

Gillette Stadium is located in Boston. It is the home of the New England Patriots. Nick wins the Million-Dollar Throw contest at this stadium on Thanksgiving night.

Valley Football Field

Nate and the 8th grade team spend a lot of time practicing and then playing on the Valley school football field. Abby and Nate's parents also attend the games and sit in the stands at the football field.

Themes and Motifs

Friendship

The theme of friendship is an important one in Million-Dollar Throw. Nate has several friends on the football team but his primary friendship is with Abby McCall. Nate and Abby have known each other for several years and trust each other implicitly. Abby is able to lift Nate's spirits as he and his family go through financial challenges. She is also the one who encourages Nate to enter the Million-Dollar Throw contest and motivates him when he has feelings of doubt about whether or not he can step up to the challenge. Even though Abby's failing eyesight is forcing major changes into her life, she is still supportive of Nate, even showing up at Gillette Stadium on Thanksgiving night to cheer him on during the contest. Abby will not say whether or not she actually saw Nate's football throw but she is there for him regardless which shows her selflessness for her friend.

Nate is also supportive of Abby who is going blind due to retinitis pigmentosa. Nate understands when Abby does not want to wear her special glasses or use a cane because they set her apart from the other kids at school and she doesn't want to be seen as different. Nate also covers up for Abby when she trips due to her failing eyesight. He wants to save her dignity and pretends not to notice when she stumbles or can't see things as well as she used to. Nate thinks so highly of Abby and wants her to have the best life possible but that looks difficult when Abby's father loses his job and the family no longer has healthcare insurance. It is then that Nate determines to find out how he can help Abby and makes an appointment with an eye surgeon in Boston whose fees are very costly. When Nate finally wins the million dollars in the contest, he is able to tell Abby that the money is hers so that she may have the surgery and get her eyesight back. Nate's selflessness and dedication to his friend are remarkable for a person of any age, but especially for someone so young.

Loyalty

The theme of loyalty is an important one in Million-Dollar Throw. Nate is the quarterback of the 8th grade football team but when his throwing arm is off for awhile, he is benched and then sent in at a different position. This occurs for a few of the football games. Some boys might be angry and bitter but Nate is loyal to the team and wants what is best for it to win, even if that means that he has to suppress his own ego and take one for the team. Nate is also loyal to his support of the New England Patriots football team, especially his hero, Tom Brady.

Nate is also loyal to his friends, especially Abby who is going blind. Some kids might abandon someone who is ill or who can no longer do things he or she used to be able to do but Nate values Abby's friendship and is loyal to her throughout the story. Nate also protects Abby as a form of loyalty too. He supports her when she does not want to wear



her special glasses or use a cane to walk. He is even supportive when she goes away for a week to the Perkins School for the Blind to see if she might benefit from getting an education there. Nate wants whatever is best for Abby even though it will dramatically change his everyday life and the nature of their friendship. Nate makes the ultimate gesture of loyalty when he gives Abby the million dollars he wins in the football throw contest. This money will allow Abby to have surgery to restore her eyesight which will dramatically alter the course of her life.

Performing Under Pressure

The theme of performing under pressure is an important one in Million-Dollar Throw. For the first time in his life, Nate sees his parents struggle with financial problems due to the loss of his father's job at a big real estate company. His parents don't tell Nate the full extent of the challenges they face, but he hears them arguing sometimes and knows that they are under a lot of pressure. Nate's father finally reaches a tipping point and tells Nate about real pressure when Nate complains about the pressure of the upcoming football throw contest. According to Nate's father, real pressure is being forced to do work that is not satisfying and still not having enough money to support your family properly. Nate is ashamed for whining about the pressure in his life when his father and mother are clearly facing serious issues but still maintain their dignity and their love for the family.

Abby also performs well under pressure. She is a young teenage girl who is going blind from retinitis pigmentosa. Probably the most natural thing to do would be to feel sorry for herself and withdraw from life but Abby tries very hard to maintain her normal lifestyle. Even when Abby is forced to wear her special glasses or attend the blind school for a trial week, she keeps an optimistic outlook and a healthy sense of humor. Abby even supports her friend, Nate, with his problems instead of being self-centered in her challenges.

At the end of the story, Nate gets a lesson about performing under pressure when he goes to Gillette Stadium for the million-dollar throw contest. Tom Brady tells Nate that even though he still gets scared, the thing to do is to persevere. This gives Nate the final push he needs to win the contest in front of thousands of fans in the stands that night.

Overcoming Obstacles

The theme of overcoming obstacles is important in Million-Dollar Throw. Nate's parents are struggling with financial problems since Nate's father lost his job. His father takes a part-time job at a sporting goods store to help support his family and his mother eventually takes two jobs to help make ends meet. They don't give up, however, and eventually Nate's father gets a good job at a real estate company. The family is on the way to solvency again. Nate's parents never give up and work very hard during a very difficult time. Eventually, things turn around for them.



In his own way, Nate has obstacles to overcome. He has to maintain a positive mindset for Abby's sake so that she won't feel so bad about the changes happening in her life. Nate's personal pressures take their toll on his emotions, too, and his football playing suffers, ending in his being benched or put in at different positions other than quarterback. Nate swallows his pride and continues practicing and playing for the team and eventually gets back to his role of quarterback. Nate also overcomes the obstacle of anxiety of the football contest and is able to win the big prize for his efforts.

Perhaps, it is Abby who works the hardest to overcome obstacles. She is going blind at a faster rate than is normal for the disease, and she must learn how to do the most basic tasks as a blind person would. Abby has the most to lose in the story. Her eyesight will soon be gone and she will never recover. The other people in the story have challenges such as financial problems, but those can be overcome. Abby is a lesson in overcoming obstacles and showing grace at the same time.

Honoring Promises

Honoring promises is an important theme in Million-Dollar Throw. Nate's parents had promised him that they would pay for half of the \$500 Tom Brady autographed football he wanted if Nate could save the other half. When Nate has accumulated his part of the deal, his parents honor their promise and pay the balance even though the family is struggling financially at the time. It is important to Nate's parents that Nate learns the value of making good on promises and the best way to do that is to honor the promises they make to him.

His parents' example teach Nate to honor his promises. Nate is able to keep his promises to the coach to be a team player, even if he is not playing the prime position of quarterback. Nate is also able to honor his promises to Abby. He tells her that he will stick by her no matter what happens, and he does just that. But, the ultimate promise that Nate keeps to Abby is giving her the money she needs to have the eye surgery that restores her eyesight. At the end of the story, Nate and Abby are once again tossing the football together and Abby can see clearly again, validating that Nate has honored his promise to help his friend.



Styles

Point of View

Like many novels, *Million-Dollar Throw* is written in the third person omniscient point of view. This means that the author writes the story using third person pronouns such as "she" and "he." The author also has insight into what the characters are thinking which makes it an omniscient view, as opposed to a limited view where only the activities of the characters are reported. For example, the author writes, "But on a Saturday morning like this, underneath all the sun and blue sky, with the guys in the line already into their blocks and Nate feeling as if he had all day to throw the ball--feeling that weird calm he always felt in the pocket--he had all the answers." Without giving Nate dialogue, the author lets the reader know Nate's thoughts and feelings. If the author had not used the omniscient point of view, the reader would simply know that it is a sunny day and Nate is playing in a football game. Adding this extra dimension to the story provides the reader with a richer experience, adds more depth to the character and provides greater insight into the story.

Language and Meaning

Because *Million-Dollar Throw* is set in modern day, the language is current for the times. The author uses 21st century terminology and euphemisms in narration and dialogue to show authenticity. The author uses things like current movies and pop culture icons so that the modern day audience can relate to them. Nate and his friends really like Batman movies and they use digital texting and online communications which show current times. The author also keeps the language authentic to the characters, especially Nate and his friends who talk like regular 13-year-olds. For example, during a football game, Pete tells Nate, "No, Brady, this time I really mean it. That throw was, like, righteous." This sounds like dialogue between a couple of young teenage boys so the author is keeping in character. The author also does a good job of sharing Nate and Abby's relationship through dialogue. When Nate contends that he may not want to do the football throw contest, Abby tells him, "You do not want to tangle with me on this," Abby said. "You're the one who's always telling me that the very best part of sports is how it can make a new memory for you practically every day. And right now you've got a memory going that will last both of us our whole lives, whether you make the throw or not."

Structure

The structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character, milieu, event, or idea. While a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. *Million-Dollar Throw* takes the structure of a character form. These types of novels tend to show a character's personal growth as the story extends. A character structure shows



transformation as being important as opposed to an event story which is more concerned with what a character does. It is easy to identify a character structure novel because there comes a point in the story when the main character reaches a point of frustration with life or a set of circumstances that are no longer acceptable for personal growth. The character then decides on changes, both small and dramatic, that will move the character's life in a different direction. The story concludes then when the character has resolved his or her issues and feels satisfied with the transformation or decides to stay in the current situation. Nate learns so many lessons throughout the story about overcoming obstacles and performing under pressure as well as how to be a good friend. By the end of the book, he is feeling confident because of the emotional growth that has occurred in him and this will make him be a better person for the rest of his life.



Quotes

A promise is a promise," his dad had said, "even if it's one you make only to yourself."
-- Nate's father (chapter 2 paragraph 8)

Importance: Nate's parents had promised to pay for half of the Tom Brady football if Nate could save the other half. His parents honor their promise to Nate even though his father had lost his job and family finances are strained. They told Nate they would help him pay for the football because it was important to Nate and they know it is important to keep promises.

We're like the Patriots," he'd said to Nate. "They were down when Belichick started coaching them, but look where they are now. They're the team to beat pretty much every year now. It'll be our turn again soon."
-- Nate's father (chapter 6 paragraph 6)

Importance: Nate's father tries to encourage Nate and let him know that the difficult time the family is experiencing will not last forever. Bad situations eventually turn around. Nate's father uses the Patriots football example because it is something that Nate can relate to easily.

Do you get it?" his dad said. "Because I'm not sure you do. I'm not sure anybody does. Pressure?" he said again. "Pressure is doing a job you hate, that even makes you hate sports sometimes, so you can hold on to what's supposed to be your real job, except you can't make a living at that job anymore."
-- Nate's father (chapter 11 paragraph 4)

Importance: Nate has been moping about losing a football game and worrying about the football throw contest when his father loses his patience and tells Nate what real pressure is. Nate's father has lost his job and cannot provide as much money for his family like he used to do and the pressure of those perceived failures has taken an emotional toll on him. Nate's father thinks that Nate is old enough to understand what is going on in the family and he reaches a tipping point and tells Nate what his personal pressures are.

That throw is the thing that we all gotta believe in, Brady, what keeps us all going," Abby said. "That great things can still happen."
-- Abby (chapter 12 paragraph 10)

Importance: When Nate questions whether or not he can win the Million-Dollar Throw and how it is hard to be excited about it, Abby reminds him that there are people in his life who are going through some really hard times. Those people are looking forward to Nate's winning because it will provide encouragement for them. It will mean that good things can still happen.



I'm not smart enough to say the right thing. Or know what the right thing is.
-- Nate (chapter 16 paragraph 2)

Importance: Nate has been struggling with how to talk to Abby about her going blind so when she tells him she is going to a blind school for a trial, he is shocked and does not know how to respond appropriately. So instead of saying something trite, Nate simply admits the truth, that he does not know what to say. This honesty is the foundation of their relationship, and Abby appreciates his authenticity.

But I was there," she said. "Not here. There everybody was like me, or worse off than me, people who have been blind since they were born. Here they're not. Here I don't fit in anymore.

-- Abby (chapter 21 paragraph 5)

Importance: Abby's eyesight is deteriorating rapidly and she can no longer keep up pretenses that she is fine and that everything will be fine. She and Nate realize that Abby's life is about to change dramatically and that she will no longer belong in his world.

I'm not going to lie to you, son," his dad said. "That's a possibility. Has been for a while. The way it is with a lot of other people right now. It's why I have to go back into the want ads tomorrow and see if I can find a job as soon as possible." He smiled, almost like he was making fun of himself, before he said, "Another dream job.

-- Nate's father (chapter 23 paragraph 9)

Importance: Nate's father has lost his part-time job at Big Red's, which is another blow to his dignity and to the family's finances. His father is frustrated that he has been unable to find a job that allows him to provide for his family the way he used to provide for them. He is both humiliated and frustrated by the experience. How his father handles this new challenge will be visible to Nate. He will probably learn how to handle his own problems by his father's example.

You and me," she said. Me and you. Us. And the way you've been pushing me away so it won't be hard for me to leave you when I leave here--if I do end up at Perkins full time--and don't even think about trying to deny it.

-- Abby (chapter 25 paragraph 5)

Importance: Abby knows that Nate has been avoiding her to distance himself so that when she leaves for Perkins, the parting won't be so painful. But, it occurs to Nate that letting Abby think that he doesn't want to be with her is probably more painful than any departure could be; and, he tells her that after she tells him that she knows what is going on with him.

I still believe in happy endings," Abby said. "Just so you know.

-- Abby (chapter 30 paragraph 5)

Importance: Abby has an unrelenting sense of optimism about life. At this point, her



father has lost his job. Therefore, they have no healthcare. The family's financial situation could radically affect her education and medical treatment for her blindness. Though she is going to Boston the next day for an appointment with her doctor to find out the extent of her blindness, she still believes in happy endings.

But, see, that's the beauty of sports," Tom Brady said. "I still get scared. But I never stop believing. The way I never stopped believing I would come back and play this way again after my knee surgeries." Then he said something Nate couldn't believe, as if he'd gotten inside Nate's head. "Now go make this movie come out the way you want it to."
-- Tom Brady (chapter 32 paragraph 2)

Importance: Tom Brady is Nate's hero; so, it means a lot that he has come onto the field prior to the contest to give Nate some motivation. Brady understands the influence he has had on Nate and tries to instill a final measure of confidence so that Nate can win the Million-Dollar Throw contest

"I'm giving it to you," he said. "I found a way for you to see."
-- Nate (chapter 32 paragraph 4)

Importance: After Nate wins the Million-Dollar Throw contest, Abby finally asks him what he is going to do with all the money. He surprises her by telling her that he is giving it to her so she can see again. This is an amazing, selfless act of a true friend.

"I don't know if it will cost a million, Mom," he said, talking fast. "But it's going to cost a lot, and Abby's dad lost his health insurance and... and I don't care, as long as Abby can see again."
-- Nate (chapter 33 paragraph 7)

Importance: Nate reveals to his mother why he has chosen to give Abby all she needs of the million dollars he has won. Nate's decision to help his friend just further validates his good heart and why his mother always says that he leads with his heart. Nate makes decisions that benefit other people. He is a rare person in his selflessness.