

SYNOPSIS: “Searching for Solidarity: Joey’s Story” is the story of a fifth grade boy who’d rather play video games and run track than study. His teacher assigns the class a report on the UAW sit-down strike of 1937. For Joey, she also assigns an oral presentation on the subject because he rarely pays attention in class or does his homework. While researching the report in the library, Joey is transported back in time and meets a young boy named Danny whose father is a sit-down striker. Joey, Danny, and Danny’s mother, Mrs. Flanagan, take some Irish stew to the plant, Fisher Body No. 2, in Flint, Michigan. Soon they’re caught up in an event that became known as “The Battle of the Running Bulls,” during which the picketers break open the lock of the gate so they can take food to the strikers. Officials from General Motors had locked the gate so that people couldn’t bring food to the strikers. They also had turned off the heat in the plant. Joey wants to do something to help the strikers. Along with Danny and Mrs. Flanagan and the rest of the picketers, they move en masse toward the gate. A group of 30 people tries to persuade the guards to unlock the gate; they say they don’t have the key. Some of the picketers break open the lock. Police arrive with tear gas and fire at both the strikers inside the building and the picketers outside. Joey and his friends escape the scene unharmed, but fourteen injured people are taken to nearby Hurley Hospital. When Joey “returns” from his time travel, he chooses to write his report instead of go to track tryouts. He’s learned the importance of his studies, and he’s found a subject in which he’s truly engaged and interested.

THEMES:

Literary themes:

- There's **sacrifice and risk** involved when you stand up for what you believe.
- There's **power in solidarity**. As the people gather to support the sit-downers, they find that they have a collective voice. So, too, do the sit-downers. They've crippled the company by staying inside the plant because production is halted for 44 days.
- **Doing the right thing** (homework vs. play) is empowering. Joey chooses to write his oral presentation and miss track tryouts.
-

Michigan history: Labor history is a vital part of Michigan history and the UAW strike is critical to autoworkers because they gained a collective voice with which to bargain for their pay, health care and other needs.

Global perspective: The UAW is an international union with 513,000 active members and more than 575,000 retired members in the U.S., Canada and Puerto Rico. The story shows how the UAW became a bargaining unit for General Motors and hence, illustrates in story fashion, the seeds of its formation.

Related 4th Grade GLCE Requirements:

GLCE requirement: 4 – H3.0.6: Use a variety of primary and secondary sources to construct a historical narrative about the beginnings of the automobile industry

and the labor movement in Michigan.

R.AT.04.01 Be enthusiastic about reading and do substantial reading and writing on their own.

- This is the moral of the story involving Joey – he becomes so engaged in the book about the sit-down strike and his adventure back in time that he foregoes track practice to complete his research report.

- **R.NT.04.03** Analyze characters' thoughts and motivation through dialogue, various character roles, and functions including hero, anti-hero, or narrator; know first-person point of view and identify conflict and resolution.

- The students reading the module must anticipate what's coming next in the story and what they would do if they were in Joey's shoes.

Characters:

Joey Fontana — a 5th grade boy who'd rather run track and play video games than do his homework.

Anita Fontana — Joey's mom. She's a working mother who tries to encourage Joey to be responsible but doesn't seem to be succeeding.

Mrs. Brooks — Joey's teacher. She's tired of Joey's excuses for not turning in his homework and not paying attention in class so she assigns him extra work – he must make an oral presentation in addition to a written report on the UAW sit-down strike.

Hector — Joey's best friend, a smart and studious boy who tries to please Joey at his own expense.

Olivia Page — the new girl in Sycamore who Joey befriends while trying to research his report in the school library.

Mrs. Finch — the librarian at Sycamore Public Library who helps Joey find the book that transports him back in time.

Danny Flanagan — the young Irish boy whose father is a sit-down striker. Danny lends Joey his clothes and takes him to the scene of the strike.

Mrs. Flanagan — Danny's mother, a member of the Women's Emergency Brigade. She's trying to get some Irish stew to her husband and his friends inside the plant when the "Battle of the Running Bulls" breaks out.

Victor Reuther — a now-famous strike organizer.