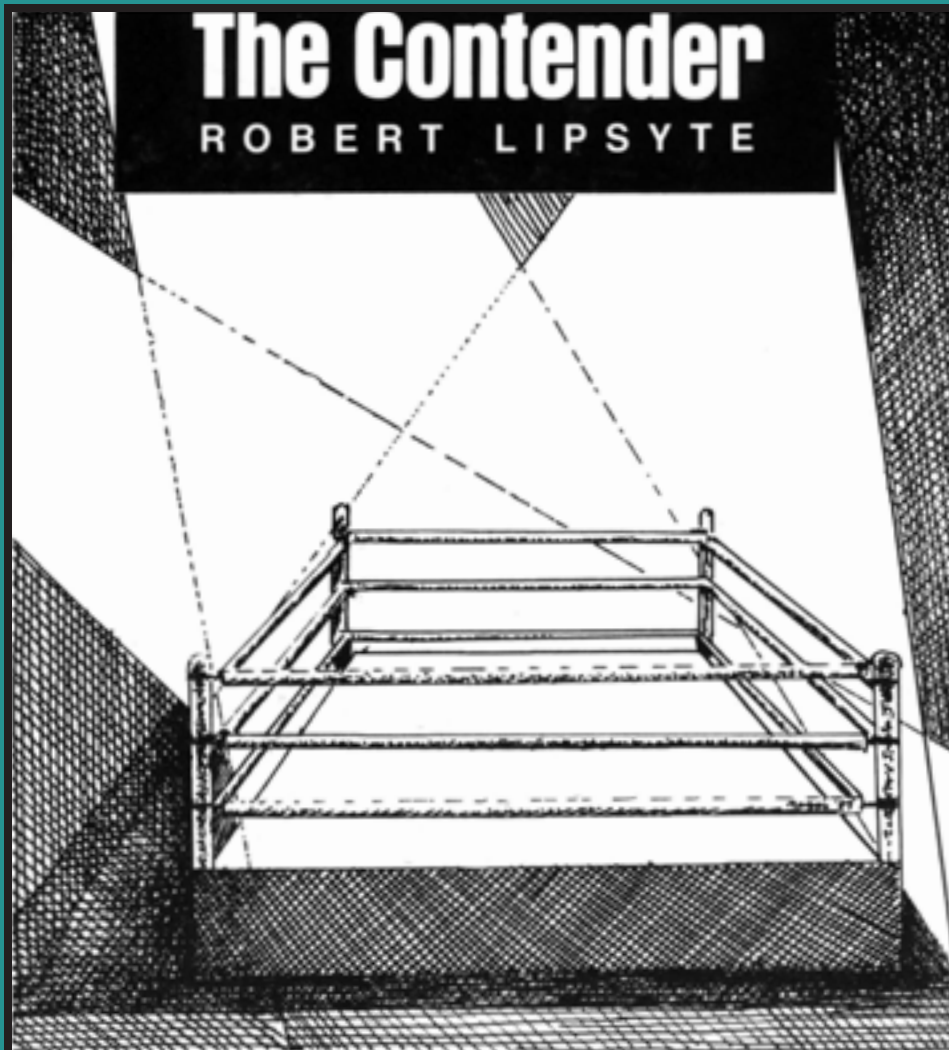


# Novel·Ties



## A Study Guide

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**LEARNING LINKS**

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## For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide consists of lessons to use in conjunction with the novel *The Contender*. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

In a homogeneous classroom, whole class instruction with one title is appropriate. In a heterogeneous classroom, reading groups should be formed: each group works on a different novel on its reading level. Depending upon the length of time devoted to reading in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in three to six weeks.

Begin using NOVEL-TIES for guided reading by distributing the novel and a folder to each child. Distribute duplicated pages of the study guide for students to place in their folders. After examining the cover and glancing through the book, students can participate in several pre-reading activities. Vocabulary questions should be considered prior to reading a chapter or group of chapters; all other work should be done after the chapter has been read. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. The classroom teacher should determine the amount of work to be assigned, always keeping in mind that readers must be nurtured and that the ultimate goal is encouraging students' love of reading.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

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## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Preview the book by reading the title and author's name and by looking at the illustration on the cover. What do you think the book will be about? Where and when do you think it takes place? Have you read anything else written by the same author?
2. **Cooperative Learning Activity:** In *The Contender* many of the characters assess others, not as individuals, but rather as stereotypes. A stereotype is an unvarying, oversimplified image of a person, group, or issue usually held in common by some segment of society. Work with a cooperative learning group to discuss each of the following issues:
  - How do you think stereotypes come about?
  - Do you belong to a group that others stereotype?
  - What is the usual stereotype of teen-agers?
  - How do these stereotypes damage the lives of those people against whom they are aimed?
  - How can the practice of stereotyping be stopped?
3. Read the Background Information on boxing on page two of this study guide. Alfred Brooks, an inner-city teenager and the main character in this novel, becomes a boxer. Would you consider boxing as a career? Why do you think Alfred did? How do you think his family reacted to his choice? What is required to become a boxer? Why do you think boxing has lost much of its popularity?
4. This novel is set in Harlem, a section of New York City that some people have characterized as an African-American ghetto, although it was once elegant and fashionable. A ghetto is defined as "a slum section of a city where minority groups live because of economic and/or social pressure." Read the first paragraph of the book. What are the negative words that describe the neighborhood? How do you think this once-fashionable area could have become a ghetto?
5. Write a paragraph describing your own neighborhood that could be used as the opening for a novel. Then analyze what you have written. Is it negative or positive? Now write a description of your neighborhood as if you were a real estate salesperson. In what ways has your descriptive paragraph changed?
6. Do you believe it is possible to grow up to be good in a bad neighborhood? What must a young person do in order to avoid drugs, alcohol, or the temptation to drop out of school?
7. What is the likely future for teen-agers who drop out of school? What alternatives are available to young people who decide they want an education after dropping out of high school?
8. Look at newspapers and magazines to find articles about boxers and the sport of boxing. Who are the important boxers in the sport today? What can you find out about the lives of the people engaged in boxing? What are the problems that exist in this sport? Compare your findings with those of your classmates.

**Chapters 1 - 4 (cont.)**

3. Why do the boys hold Alfred responsible for their foiled robbery attempt and James' arrest?
4. How has the relationship between James and Alfred changed? Why did this happen?
5. Of all the things that went wrong, what bothers Alfred the most? Why does he think about lying in bed forever?
6. What does Donatelli mean when he tells Alfred, "If you quit before you really try, that's worse than never starting at all. And nothing's promised you, nothing's ever promised you."
7. What does Uncle Wilson suggest to Alfred for his future? Why do you think this might be a good idea? Why does Alfred reject it?

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. What is "peer pressure"? What kind of peer pressure does Alfred have to endure? How does he respond? What is the result? Have you ever been pressured by your peers to do something wrong? How did you respond? What was the result?
2. Why do you think Alfred maintains his values despite peer pressure? Who has been the most important positive influence in his life? If such a person has influenced your life, tell who it was and what values were under pressure.

**Writing Activity:**

Reread the section of the book that describes Alfred's reactions when he enters Donatelli's gym. Notice how the author elicited the senses of sight, sound, touch, and smell to make the scene come alive to the reader. Write about a time when you were in a frightening situation, such as the first day of school, a new neighborhood, or a bad dream. Tell about the experience, evoking as many of the five senses as possible.