

Casey at the Bat

by Ernest Lawrence Thayer

This amusing poem about a baseball game was written in 1888.

It looked extremely rocky for the Mudville nine that day:
The score stood four to six with just an inning left to play;
And so, when Cooney died at first, and Burrows did the same,
A pallor wreathed the features of the patrons of the game.

A straggling few got up to go, leaving there the rest
With that hope that springs eternal within the human breast;
For they thought if only Casey could get one whack, at that
They'd put up even money, with Casey at the bat.

But Flynn preceded Casey, and so likewise did Blake,
But the former was a pudding, and the latter was a fake;
So on that stricken multitude a death-like silence sat,
For there seemed but little chance of Casey's getting to the bat.

But Flynn let drive a single to the wonderment of all,
And the much-despised Blaikie tore the cover off the ball;
And when the dust had lifted, and they saw what had occurred,
There was Blaikie safe on second and Flynn a-hugging third!

Then from the gladdened multitude went up a joyous yell,
It bounded from the mountain-top, and rattled in the dell,
It struck upon the hillside, and rebounded on the flat;
For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.

There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place,
There was pride in Casey's bearing, and a smile on Casey's face;
And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed his hat,
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.

Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt,
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt;
Then, while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,
Defiance glanced in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.

And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,
And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there;
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped:
“That ain’t my style,” said Casey. “Strike one,” the umpire said.

From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,
Like the beating of the storm-waves on a stern and distant shore;
“Kill him! Kill the umpire!” shouted some one in the stand.
And it’s likely they’d have killed him had not Casey raised his hand.

With a smile of Christian charity great Casey’s visage shone;
He stilled the rising tumult; he bade the game go on;
He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the spheroid flew,
But Casey still ignored it; and the umpire said, “Strike two.”

“Fraud!” cried the maddened thousands, and the echo answered, “Fraud!”
But the scornful look from Casey, and the audience was awed;
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,
And they knew that Casey wouldn’t let that ball go by again.

The sneer is gone from Casey’s lip, his teeth are clenched with hate;
He pounds with cruel violence his bat upon the plate;
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey’s blow.

Oh, somewhere in this favoured land the sun is shining bright,
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light,
And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout;
But there is no joy in Mudville—mighty Casey has struck out.

Questions

Idioms are phrases that have a separate meaning to a special group or in a special area. The sport of baseball has many common idioms, such as “home run” or “hit it out of the park.” Below are a some of the idioms used in “Case at the Bat.” Write what you think each idiom means.

1. “Cooney died at first”

2. “the latter was a fake”

3. “...Blaikie tore the cover off the ball”

4. “Flynn a-hugging third”

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. pallor
2. patrons
3. preceded
4. multitude
5. doffed
6. writhing
7. haughty
8. visage
9. tumult
10. bade

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "A **pallor** wreathed the features of the patrons of the game"

- a. flush; redness b. halo or ring of light c. sadness or grief d. paleness; colorlessness

2) "A pallor wreathed the features of the **patrons** of the game"

- a. supporters; fans b. players or teammates c. coaches d. dugouts

3) "But Flynn **preceded** Casey"

- a. followed; went after b. stood in for c. went before; went ahead of d. warmed up

4) "Then from the gladdened **multitude** went up a joyous yell"

- a. press box b. large group; crowd c. loudspeaker d. heavens; angels

5) "And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly **doffed** his hat"

- a. threw or tossed b. tipped or removed c. put on; donned d. autographed; signed

6) "Then, while the **writhing** pitcher ground the ball into his hip"

- a. twisting or squirming b. snarling; frowning c. smiling or grinning d. dripping; sweating

7) "Casey stood a-watching it in **haughty** grandeur there"

- a. happy or joyous b. wicked; mischievous c. modest; shy d. snobbish or arrogant

8) "With a smile of Christian charity great Casey's **visage** shone"

- a. talent or ability b. eyeglasses c. face; features d. goodness; kindness

9) "He stilled the rising **tumult**; he bade the game go on"

- a. uproar or riot b. temperature; heat c. troubled waters d. nervousness or anxiety

10) "He stilled the rising tumult; he **bade** the game go on"

- a. hoped or wished b. feared; dreaded c. directed; instructed d. opposed or prohibited