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# HE MADE A FEDERAL CASE OUT OF IT: STEVEN FRANK'S *CLASS ACTION* AND THE SALVATION OF CHILDHOOD

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**Mackenzie Decker**  
Westridge Middle School

In Steven Frank's 2018 novel *Class Action*, middle-schooler Sam realizes something needs to change. When his teacher sends home a practice test to take over the weekend, Sam snaps. He stands on his desk holding up a hand-drawn "NO HW" sign and encourages others to do the same. When Sam is suspended his journey begins.

Sam solicits the help of his neighbor, retired attorney, Mr. Kalman. Together they, his sister Sadie, and his three best friends, Catalina, Alistair, and Jaesang sue the school district.

The case moves through the legal system, all the way to the Supreme Court. Across the country other students are inspired to join the fight against homework. Sam inspires students across the country to regain their childhood.

Foster's *How to Read Like a Professor, for Kids* mentions the importance of a quest in young adult literature. Frank's 2018 novel includes this quest and its five important components.

- a. quester: Sam
- b. place to go: The courts
- c. stated reason to go: To ban homework
- d. challenges and trials: Sam is suspended; the first two courts throw out Sam's petition; raising money for attorney fees; Sam's mom loses her job because of the lawsuit; Sadie's grades start to slip from lack of focus.
- e. real reason to go: Give children their childhoods back and alleviate school-related stress.

Some readers might also enjoy the multicultural study aspects of the novel. While the main focus of the novel is the pressure the American education system puts on students, there is a wide range of diversity. For example, Catalina is Hispanic and speaks Spanish throughout the novel. Jaesang is a second-generation Korean immigrant who talks about his grandparents' inability to speak English.

Middle school readers can identify with characters, as Sam and his friends have a wide variety of interests including basketball, cooking and piano.

An appeal to teachers teaching literary terms is the author's playful use of literary concepts like oxymoron, as in this example: "'An act of civil disobedience,' Sadie says. 'Civil disobedience in a classroom, is an oxymoron. There is nothing civil about a disobedient boy.'" (p. 36).

Because Sam has to find his voice to stand up to the adults around him, students can learn to respectfully disagree with the systems that directly affect them. While his suspension shows that

actions have consequences, students can learn that some battles are worth fighting. Sam accepts the suspension because he realizes there is a bigger picture, and that his subsequent act of defiance can change the course of history.

The author also mentions real life court cases like *Goss vs. Lopez*, and includes a glossary of legal terms in the back. This opens an opportunity for teachers to introduce law and politics. Along with learning their legal rights, students also see how law affects teachers.

What I like best about this novel is that Frank is a fantastic storyteller who makes you want to keep flipping the pages. While the premise of the book is not realistic, having a fantasy world where homework could be made illegal is heartwarming.

If parents do not find this book appropriate, then Dave Barry's *The Worst Class Trip Ever* could be a suitable alternative. Both books have Washington D.C as a location, focus on middle school students, and include a quest.

### Author Biography

I am a Tulsa, Oklahoma native currently living in Lenexa, Kansas. I graduated from Pittsburg State University in May of 2022. This is my first of year teaching. I currently teach a reading intervention course for eighth graders in Shawnee Mission School District. My favorite novel is *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte, and my favorite book series is *Outlander* by Diana Gabaldon. I have a five-year-old orange tabby cat named Charlie, and he is my best friend. You may reach me at [deckermackenzie@gmail.com](mailto:deckermackenzie@gmail.com).

