



Email: [bridget@paperdragonreads.com](mailto:bridget@paperdragonreads.com) Phone: (407) 212-7759

## "Curveball" Lesson Plan Guide

by Pablo Cartaya

### Unit Overview

**Duration:** 1 week

**Grade Level:** 3–5

**Subject Integration:** ELA, Visual Arts, Social-Emotional Learning

**Essential Question:** How do we find new joy and connection when the activities that define us are suddenly taken away?

---

### Learning Objectives — Students will be able to:

- Analyze how graphic novel format uses visuals to show character emotion
- Explore themes of identity, resilience, and the value of play beyond competition
- Examine how sibling relationships can open unexpected doors
- Express understanding through reflective and creative projects

---

### ONE-WEEK LESSON PLAN

#### Day 1: Introduction to Elena and Graphic Novel Storytelling

**Objective:** Build understanding of graphic novel format and introduce Elena's story

**Materials:** Book, examples of graphic novel panels for comparison

#### Opening (10 min):

- Quick-write: "Name one activity that really matters to you. How would you feel if you couldn't do it for a year?"
- Partner share

#### Main Activity (35 min):

- Introduce graphic novel format: How do panels, expressions, color, and layout tell the story?
- Introduce Elena Rueda—serious athlete, knee injury, life upended
- Read opening pages together; pause to discuss: "What does Elena's face tell you that the words don't?"
- Predict: "What do you think Elena will discover while she's sidelined?"

#### Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "What is one thing the visuals show that words alone couldn't?"

**Assessment:** Genre understanding, visual literacy, empathetic prediction

#### Day 2: Identity and the Weight of an Injury

**Objective:** Analyze how Elena's sense of self is tied to her sport—and what happens when it's taken away

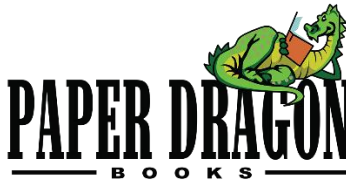
**Materials:** Emotion tracking chart, specific panels selected in advance

#### Opening (10 min):

- Think-pair-share: "What would it feel like to lose the thing you're best at?"

#### Main Activity (35 min):

- Study selected panels showing Elena's emotional response—identify specific emotions shown visually



Email: [bridget@paperdragonreads.com](mailto:bridget@paperdragonreads.com) Phone: (407) 212-7759

- Discuss: How has Elena built her identity around being an athlete?
- Quick identity web activity: students list 5 words that describe them (note how many are activity-based)
- Big question: "Who is Elena beyond being an athlete? Who are YOU beyond what you're best at?"

**Closing (5 min):**

- Exit ticket: "Name one thing about yourself that has nothing to do with achievement."

**Assessment:** Emotional intelligence, visual literacy, self-concept exploration

**Day 3: Enter Benji—Play Without a Scoreboard**

**Objective:** Explore what LARP is, why Benji's invitation matters, and what activities without winners offer

**Materials:** LARP overview (brief video or visual explainer), comparison chart

**Opening (10 min):**

- Discussion: "Has someone ever invited you into something totally new? What happened?"

**Main Activity (35 min):**

- Introduce LARP: what it is, how it works, why people love it
- Analyze Benji's role: How is sharing something you love with a sibling an act of generosity?
- Compare sports to LARP: winners vs. no winners—what does each offer?
- Discuss: "Why might playing something just for fun be just as valuable as competition?"

**Closing (5 min):**

- Partner share: "One activity I do just because it's fun, not to win, is..."

**Assessment:** Understanding of varied forms of play, sibling relationship analysis

**Day 4: Resilience—Finding Joy in a New Direction**

**Objective:** Synthesize how Elena's journey redefines resilience

**Materials:** Character arc chart, resilience discussion prompts

**Opening (10 min):**

- Quick-write: "What does 'resilience' mean to you? Does it always mean bouncing back to the same place?"

**Main Activity (35 min):**

- Track Elena's character arc from injury to discovery on a class timeline
- Discuss: This story doesn't end with Elena scoring the winning run. Why might that be a more honest ending?
- Connect to real life: Name a person (real or fictional) who found a new path after losing something important
- Theme statement: Students complete "Curveball is really a story about \_\_\_\_."

**Closing (5 min):**

- Exit ticket: "What does Elena's story teach about who we are when things get hard?"

**Assessment:** Character arc analysis, theme identification, real-world connection

**Day 5: Visual Storytelling Project**

**Objective:** Apply learning by creating original visual storytelling work

**Materials:** Art supplies, writing materials

**Opening (10 min):**

- Preview project options; select and begin

**Main Activity (35 min):**

- Option A: Create a 4-panel comic strip showing a moment of loss → discovery in your own life or Elena's story
- Option B: Design your own LARP character sheet with name, skills, and backstory
- Option C: Write and illustrate an "identity web" showing all the things you are beyond one role or activity



**Email:** [bridget@paperdragonreads.com](mailto:bridget@paperdragonreads.com) **Phone:** (407) 212-7759

- Gallery walk or partner share to celebrate finished work

**Closing (5 min):**

- Class closing: "One thing Curveball made me think about differently is..."

**Assessment:** Visual storytelling, personal reflection, creative expression

---

**Differentiation**

- **Advanced learners:** Compare visual storytelling techniques across two different graphic novels
  - **Students needing support:** Provide pre-labeled panel templates and sentence starters for writing
  - **English Language Learners:** Leverage the visual format as a strength; pre-teach key vocabulary
- 

**Materials List**

- Class set of "Curveball"
- Graphic novel panel examples for comparison (Day 1)
- Brief LARP explainer video or visual overview (Day 3)
- Identity web graphic organizer template
- Art supplies for Day 5 project
- Chart paper and markers