

VISIONS IN POETRY



ERNEST L. THAYER

CASEY AT THE BAT

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOE MORSE

ABOUT THE VISIONS IN POETRY SERIES

Visions in Poetry is an award-winning series of classic poems illustrated by outstanding contemporary artists in stunning hardcover editions. "Casey at the Bat" is the fourth book in this exciting series.

ABOUT "CASEY AT THE BAT"

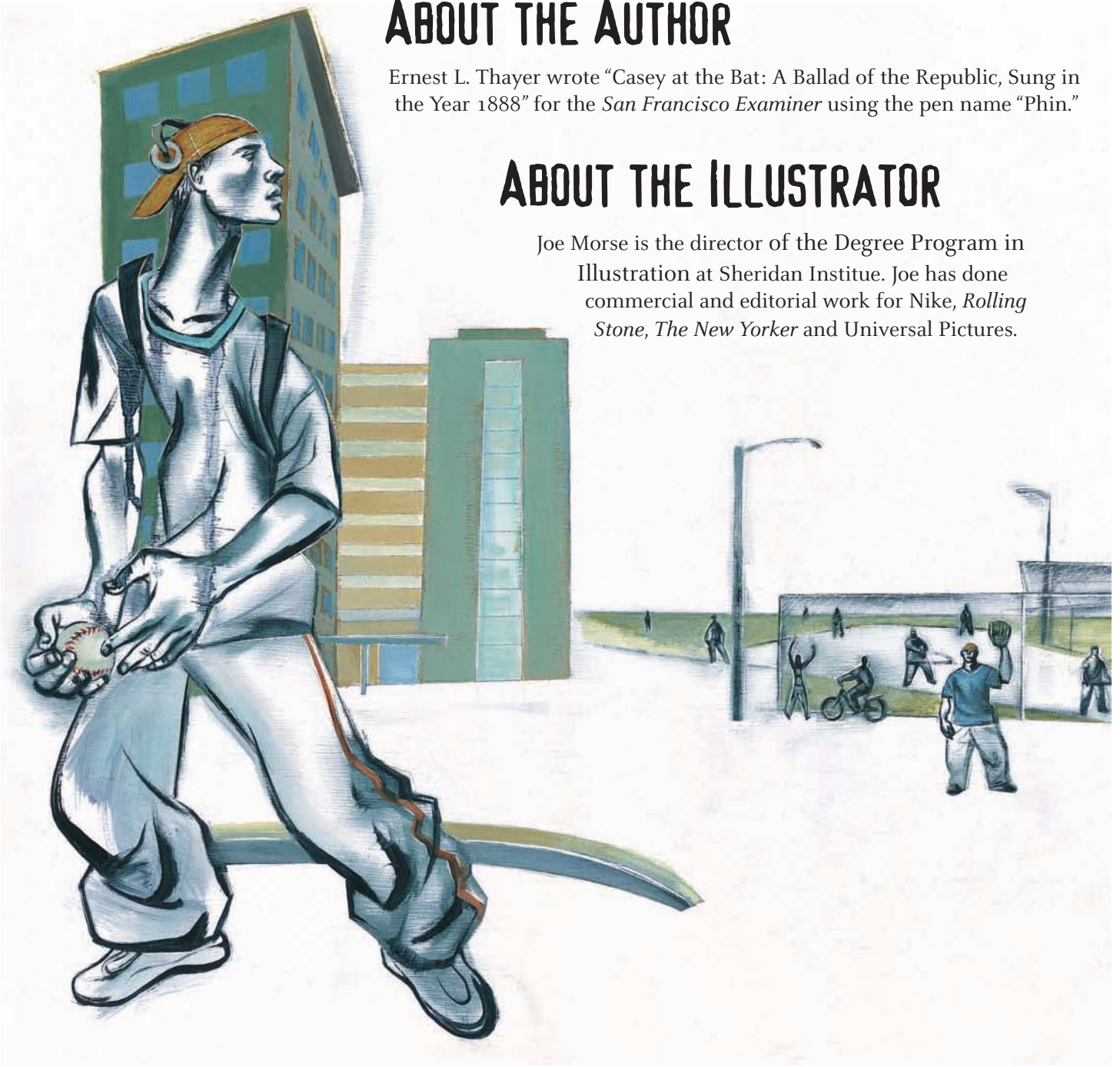
"Casey at the Bat" is more than a poem about a proud and mighty slugger who strikes out during the big game. It is a slice of Americana, as much a part of baseball as hot dogs and the seventh-inning stretch. Illustrator Joe Morse sets the poem on gritty urban streets with a mixed-race cast of characters. It's a startlingly fresh approach that not only revives the poem for a new generation, but also brings it new richness and depth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ernest L. Thayer wrote "Casey at the Bat: A Ballad of the Republic, Sung in the Year 1888" for the *San Francisco Examiner* using the pen name "Phin."

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Joe Morse is the director of the Degree Program in Illustration at Sheridan Institute. Joe has done commercial and editorial work for Nike, *Rolling Stone*, *The New Yorker* and Universal Pictures.



DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

The following discussion topics and activities are suitable for classes in language and literature, media and visual arts.

Please note that some of the activities in this learning resource require students to visit their local library or use the Internet for research.

1. There are many artistic renderings of Ernest L. Thayer's classic poem "Casey at the Bat." Most are nostalgic, humorous and playful, but Joe Morse offers a unique interpretation that is both modern and edgy.

As an individual in-class assignment, ask students to find another visual interpretation of the poem (i.e. a painting, sketch, picture book, comic strip) and write a one-page essay comparing and contrasting it with Joe Morse's version. Students should conduct their research at the library or through the Internet using their favorite search engine. As part of their research, ask students to compare and contrast the setting, character depiction and mood of both artists' interpretations. Ask students to answer the following questions: Which interpretation is more appealing to you and why? What are the major stylistic differences? Once they have completed their essays, have each student partner with a classmate and share their work.

2. The main character in Thayer's poem is a fictional baseball player named Casey. As part of a class discussion, ask students to list characteristics, in point form notes, that they feel best describe Casey. Once the list is complete, divide students into groups of three or four and ask each group to name a person who they think best represents Casey's character today. Students can refer to a political figure, a celebrity, a person that they know in their own lives or themselves.

Ask each group to answer the following questions: Why did they choose this person? What similarities does this person share with Casey? Why do they think this person best represents Casey today?

Have each group present their responses to the class once they are done.

3. Thayer's poem ends on a dismal note with Casey striking out at bat and letting down his teammates, the fans and himself. "But there is no joy in Mudville — mighty Casey has struck out." (p. 44)

Divide students into groups of four or five and ask each group to re-examine the ending of the poem and discuss what message it sends to the reader. Within their groups, have students debate this subject for 15 minutes and then open up the discussion to the class.



4. As part of an in-class assignment, divide students into groups of four or five and ask each group to re-write the poem as a one- or two-page feature article for a mock newspaper. First ask students to bring in articles from each section of a real newspaper to read in class. From the list below, have each group choose which kind of article they would like to write.

News; Arts and Entertainment; Business; Life; Sports; Celebrity Gossip

Ask students to read the articles they brought in while paying close attention to tone, language and the author's point of view in order to give them a better idea of how to write their piece. Students should also include an illustration that they feel best represents the angle of their story, as well as a catchy headline.

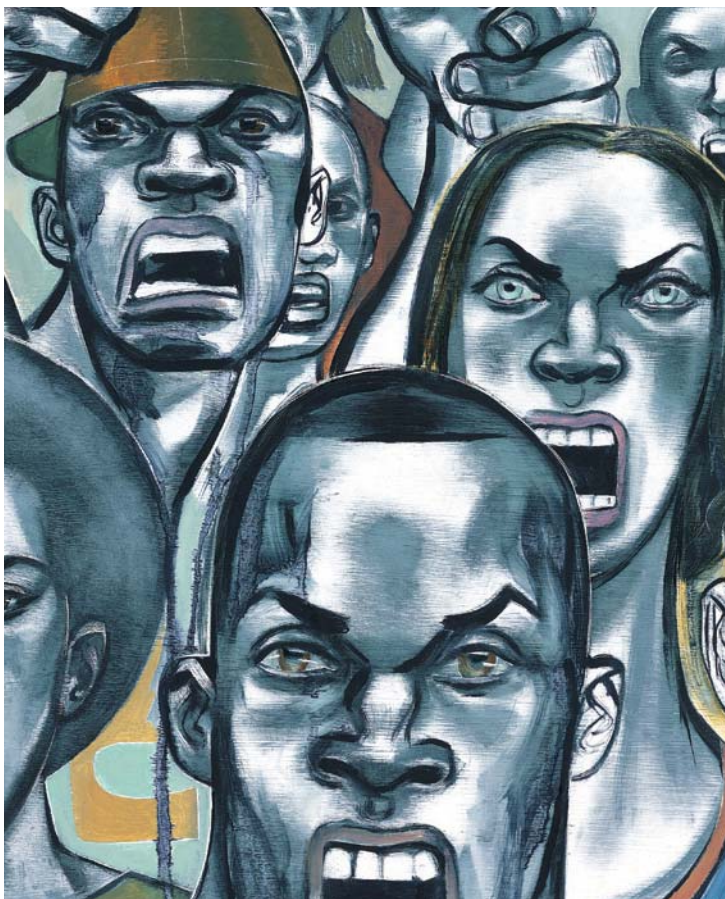
Once each group has completed their article, ask the students to put them all together and come up with a name for the newspaper (for example, *The Mudville Times*).

During class time, ask students to read each section of their newspaper and discuss how the tone, language and point of view change from section to section.

5. Although Casey is the main character in the poem, Joe Morse emphasizes the narrator and the crowd as important characters in his illustrations.

As part of an in-class discussion, ask students to answer the following questions: What role does the narrator play in the poem? What role does the crowd play in the poem? What effect do these characters have on the poem? Why do you think Joe Morse places so much emphasis upon these characters in his illustrations? Ask students to use examples from the poem and from Morse's illustrations to back up their responses.

6. Joe Morse emphasizes race and class as important themes in this poem by portraying the characters as multiracial inner-city kids. Ask students to write a one-page opinion piece about the statement they feel Morse is trying to make with regards to race and class through his illustrations. Students should use examples from the book to back up their response. Once students have completed their essays, ask them to share their opinions with the class.



7. As part of an individual in-class writing assignment, ask students to go through the poem and identify words that are used in an unfamiliar way. Here is one example:

“And the former was a **HOODOO**/ While the latter was a **CAKE**;” (p. 15)

Have students create their own definition of each word using only the context of the poem, then look up the word in the dictionary and write down the meaning. Students should compare their meaning to the meaning they found in the dictionary to see how accurate their definition was.

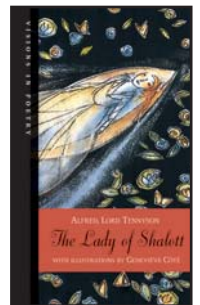
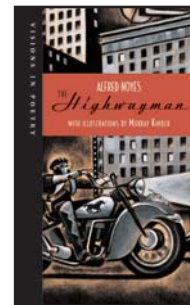
Once students have completed their assignments, ask them to share their responses with a classmate.

8. When Thayer wrote “Casey at the Bat” in 1888, he used humor to parody passionate sports fans.

In 2006, on the other hand, Joe Morse's illustrations focus on the seriousness of violence in sports. For example, the illustration on pages 30 and 31 depicts the fans as a sea of faces contorted in anger, threatening to lynch the umpire in response to his call against Casey.

With your class, discuss how violence affects sports, fans and athletes today. Ask students to re-read the poem and answer the following questions: What message is Thayer attempting to convey in the poem about violence in sports? What message is Joe Morse attempting to convey through his illustrations?

Also available in the Visions in Poetry series



Coming in Fall 2006, *The Raven*

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Casey at the Bat © 2006. Written by Ernest L. Thayer and illustrated by Joe Morse.



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