



# Educator Discussion Guide

## TOP PROSPECT

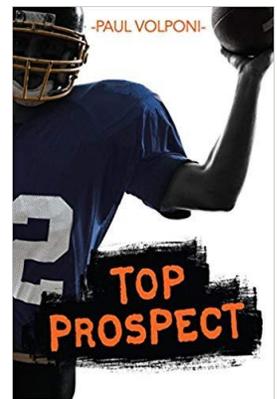
by Paul Volponi

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2018-2019  
Grade 6-8**

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### ABOUT THE BOOK

Travis and his brother Carter live in Alachua with their mother, who is a single parent. When Carter, a senior in high school, is offered an athletic scholarship to play football at Gainesville University, Coach Goddard comes by to speak to him and sees the two brothers play football in the backyard. Astounded by Travis' talent and level of skill, he also offers Travis a scholarship to play football for the Gainesville Gators. As his situation becomes known to the public, Travis has a difficult time dealing with the publicity, causing tension with schoolmates.



Striving to be the best quarterback, Travis attends training classes at Gainesville University and becomes friends with Alex, a teammate of Carter's. Travis is faced with a similar level of pressure as Alex, but will he go down the same path?

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Volponi is the author of 11 novels as well as a teacher and journalist living in New York City. His books are targeted towards the middle and high school age group. He often makes school visits either in person or by video conference. In the 1990's, he taught incarcerated teenagers literacy skills which lead to him to write two ALA award winning novels. He also went on to teach kids in drug treatment facilities which lead him to write yet another ALA award winning book.

Bibliographic information taken from the Author website at

<http://www.paulvolponibooks.com>

Accessed October 1, 2017

### PREREADING ACTIVITIES

#### Recruiting Rules

Ask students if they know the NCAA's Recruiting Guidelines. Make a list of rules/requirements for recruiting based on their existing knowledge. After creating the list, share with them the guidelines from the NCAA's website <http://www.ncaa.org>. Ask students to reflect on differences between the lists.

## **Group Discussion on Drugs**

Have a group discussion with the students about drugs. Have the students break into smaller groups and come up with ideas of why they think people take drugs. Have them think of possible ways in which drugs may negatively impact someone's life. Afterwards, have each group read out their answers and have a follow up discussion.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Do you think Travis Gardner's recruitment is believable? Do you think it could happen in real life?
2. What is the significance of the title *Top Prospect*? Do you think this is a good title? If not, what would you change it to and why?
3. What was the most pivotal point in the book? How would the story have changed if this moment hadn't happened?
4. Was the book's ending satisfying? Did the author leave the reader happy with how he leaves Travis Gardner?
5. How have Travis and his brother changed throughout the book? What key moments from the book shape the changes?
6. Does this book compare to any others that you have read? How so?
7. Did you learn anything from this book? What is your big take away and why?
8. Have your thoughts or views changed after reading this book?
9. What will happen next for Travis? What evidence do you base your prediction on?
10. How does Travis's actions within the novel shape his future?
11. What themes apply to the book? What evidence supports these themes, and were they adequately supported in the text?
12. This book is set in the present; how does this impact the story? If it was set in a different time period (future or past) how would the story change?
13. Throughout the novel, what motivates Travis's actions?
14. What lessons can be learned from the choices that Alex made?
15. Travis went to his brother for advice when he was given drugs. Why do you think this was a smart choice?

## **CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

### **Health and Physical Education:**

- Alex and Travis's involvement with drugs could have been avoided. Contact local police officers that are D.A.R.E. certified instructors to share a lesson with the students about the biological effects of drugs on the body. Learn more about drugs affecting today's youth at <https://www.dare.org>.
- The fitness level of students playing football on a collegiate level is most likely higher than that of a middle school student athlete. Have students review a sample summer fitness program and test their athletic ability by completing the workout at the following link. <http://www.huskers.com/pdf8/836632.pdf>

### **Language Arts:**

Have students read the following articles about students recruited while still in middle school:

- <http://usatodayhss.com/2017/jaheim-oatis-football-scholarships-alabama-recruiting-columbia-miss>
- <http://www.ncsasports.org/blog/2015/02/18/ncsa-data-on-recruiting-middle-school-athletes/>

Upon completion of reading, have students write an essay comparing the book to the real-life instances of middle school recruiting.

### **Science:**

- Travis sustains a shoulder injury during one of his football games. Learn about the various muscle groups that make up the human musculoskeletal system. Have the student fill out a crossword puzzle relating to this body system.  
<http://sciencespot.net/Media/hlthskelmuscpcuzz.pdf>.
- Instead of turning to drugs to heal his injury, Alex could have instead used natural cures. Teach the students about safe remedies to heal injuries and the science behind them.  
<https://www.runnersworld.com/injury-treatment/natural-cures-for-running-injuries>  
Try, if possible, to have a Doctor of Neuropathic Medicine come in a speak to the students about tips to improve muscle healing in a natural way.

### **Social Studies:**

With the use of computers, have students research student athletes recruited in middle school. Students should create a graph that tracks location, grade level when recruited, and any other trends that they see through their research.

### **Vocabulary:**

Overcompensated	Audible	Inspiration
Turf	Visualize	Conversion
Conscience	Confidence	Absorbing
Opposing	Gazing	Corporations
Vaulted	Hauled	Endorsing
Scrimmage	Cruising	Amateur
Convertible	Projected	Illegal
Rhythm	Vital	Inquiry
Juicing	Infinity	Boosters
Internal	Drilled	Evidence
Obligations	Lumbering	Accuracy
Progression	Momentum	Dealership
Tranquility	Shifting	
Crater	Steamrolled	

## **RELATED WEBSITES**

### **NFL's Beginners Guide to Football**

<http://www.nfl.com/rulebook/beginnersguidetofootball>

The NFL provides a basic introduction to the rules and penalties of football.

### **NCAA Recruiting Information**

<http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/future/recruiting>

NCAA has very specific recruiting rules for how students are exposed to a prospective university. This site provides detailed information in how this process works.

### **College Athletes Stress Levels**

<https://visual.ly/community/infographic/sports/stress-college-athletes-vs-other-students>

The book showed that athletics and stress are often intertwined. Have the students read about this common problem.