

Section 1: English/Language Arts

Directions

Read the article “For All the Marbles.” Then answer the questions.

For All the Marbles

by Sean McCollum

- 1 Andrew Martinez kneels down as he nears the end of his quest. His agate¹ shooter is jammed between his index finger and the tough-as-leather callous on his thumb. His head bobs as he lines up the shot, his eyes locking on the target six feet away. The crowd falls quiet. This is for all the marbles. Flick! The shot flies out of his hand . . .
- 2 Andrew shares characteristics of the gunslingers from the Old West. The Colorado teen has unbreakable concentration, nerves of steel, dead-eye aim. (He even has something more: a loving mother reminding him to practice.) Over the past four years, he has honed² these talents, chasing the title of United States marbles king. And in June 2000 he traveled to Wildwood, New Jersey, for one last shot at walking out with the tallest trophy in the 14-and-under national championships.

What It Takes

- 3 Andrew’s quest began in Palisade, a small town in western Colorado. His fifth-grade teacher Leah Lee, Andrew, and some of his classmates formed a marbles club. Andrew won the local tourney and qualified as the first Coloradan to compete at the national tournament.
- 4 “I came in 16th out of 30,” says Andrew, who did win the sportsmanship award that year. “After that I realized what it would take to win at that level: dedication. Practice is everything.”
- 5 He returned home and created a marble ring on the concrete floor of the family garage. He coated the surface with gray paint to simulate the ring in

¹agate—a type of mineral with colored bands

²honed—sharpened

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New Jersey. And then he went to work, with Ms. Lee as his coach.

- 6 He practiced every kind of shot: the break shots that start the game, long distance shots, and the short shots that seem like sure things but are the difference between winning and losing. He perfected the backspin on his shooter so that the shooter would knock the target marble from the ring and then “stick”—come to a dead stop so he could shoot again.
- 7 As he practiced, the skin on Andrew’s shooting thumb split and bled, then became tough. His knees ached from the constant kneeling. As the 1998 tournament approached, he practiced four hours a day.
- 8 “That was the hardest part,” he says, “getting into the habit of practice. My mom definitely helped, too, reminding me to keep at it.”
- 9 He finished sixth at nationals that year. His determination grew. Now he started practicing a different part of the game—the mental part.
- 10 “Some players are really good, but when the pressure’s on, they have problems. You’ve really got to psych yourself up.”
- 11 It worked. In 1999, his climb continued. He finished second.

Last Shot

- 12 When Andrew flew to New Jersey for the 2000 nationals, it was his last chance to compete in the 14-and-under tournament. Besides the pressure to play, he led the singing of the national anthem to open the tournament. “I was most nervous about that,” he says. Then his march toward the championship match began.
- 13 In the end, Andrew faced Ralph Dillon, a good friend from West Virginia, for the championship. “We had to set our friendship aside for a while,” he says. The match went back and forth as each boy tried to be the first to win eight out of 15 games.
- 14 Finally, Andrew faced that six-foot shot. Flick! Clack! The blue marble shot out of the circle. It had taken four years and thousands of hours of practice, but Andrew Martinez was the last man kneeling. Ralph jumped up and gave him a huge hug . . . then joined the other players in the tradition of tossing the champ into a swimming pool.

GO ON 

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Using His Marbles

- 15 Andrew won that tall trophy he’d sought plus a \$2,000 college scholarship. He was on TV and in every major Colorado newspaper.
- 16 His city declared “Andrew Martinez Day” and he had to give a speech. In it, he summed up the larger lessons he had learned during his four-year quest:
- 17 “When I look back at my life when marbles first started for me, I was just a little kid who had no goals for my life. Then when marbles came along, it was like a blueprint for life. I set goals and always had something to work for.”
- 18 It’s clear that Andrew Martinez knows how to use his marbles.

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1. Which TWO parts of Andrew’s hobby are MOST challenging? Support your answer with details from the article.

