Based on

Nothing But the Truth
by Avi

About the Book:
Phil thinks that his running ability and his sense of humor will take him far. When his English grade does not allow him to try out for the track team, he can’t fathom that he is to blame. Rather than asking for extra work from Miss Narwin, Phil decides that if he annoys her enough he can switch to another English class. He succeeds in aggravating the dedicated teacher by humming during the playing of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” After two trips to the assistant principal’s office, Phil is suspended from school. His parents are outraged that the teacher would not allow Phil to sing the national anthem each morning. How could she be so unpatriotic? This issue does not stop there. As the story spreads, the truth is lost. This becomes national news. Because it is a school board election year and a tough budget year, the school system does not want any bad press. Miss Narwin is asked to take a leave of absence. Phil becomes known as a hero for standing up for his rights. However, he and his fellow students know what really happened, and he is embarrassed to return to his school. Phil finishes his school year at a private school that does not have a track team.

Set the Stage:
Use the following to get the students ready to read:

- Read the First Amendment of the Constitution to the class. Discuss the concept of freedom of speech. Give examples and non-examples. Have students come up with their own examples.

- Discuss the idea of respect. Have students share their thoughts about the differences between respectful students and disrespectful students.

- Take a poll of students whether they think the typical news story is accurate or not. Then have students debate this point.

Review:
After reading the book, discuss the following:

- Why do you think the author only used dialogue, memos, letters, and diary entries to tell the story?

- How do we know that Phil was not being patriotic?

- Phil tried to manipulate his situation so that he could get out of Miss Narwin’s class. What suggests that his father might have behaved in a similar manner at work? How do Phil’s parents respond to his statements that the teacher is out to get him?

- Explain how Phil’s parents could have responded to this situation in a way that would have led to a better outcome. What would your parents do if faced with a similar situation?

- Phil could have avoided suspension if he apologized. Why did he refuse to do so? What would you have done? Have you ever taken responsibility for something you did not do? Have you ever refused to take responsibility for something you did do? What was the outcome?

- Why did Phil hesitate to talk to the reporter?

- Describe how the story changed as it hit the national news. How could this happen? Do you think that it happens in real life?

- Dr. Joseph Palleni, Dr. Gertrude Doane, and Dr. Albert Seymour each wrote a memo about what had occurred. Compare and contrast their memos. Which one was the most accurate? What could have been done to make sure that everyone knew the correct information?

- What was ironic about the ending of the story? Analyze how this situation impacted each of the main characters. Were they treated fairly?
Student Activity (found on the last page of this PDF):
In this activity, the students will distinguish between facts and opinions.

Related Activities:
To extend students’ enjoyment of the book, try these:

- **Telephone Game**: Phil’s actions in the class varied greatly from what the national newspapers reported. To illustrate why stories change, play the telephone game with the students. Whisper a short message to one student. Have that student whisper the message to another student. Go around the class until every student has heard the message. Have the last student tell the message out loud. Then compare the final message with the original. How did the message change? Discuss with students why this happens.

- **What Did You See?**: When the principal was interviewing the students in Phil’s class about what happened, they did not seem to notice the same things. Discuss with students how we look at things from a different perspective or angle. Plan a three- to four-minute skit with another adult in which you engage in an argument. After the skit, have students write down what they saw and heard. Then record on the board their responses. Discuss the differences.

- **The Other Side**: Robert Duval interviewed Miss Narwin about her view of what happened. His article never appeared in print. Have students write the article that he might have written. Have students share what they wrote.

- **National Anthem**: Have students research the origins of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Provide students with a copy of the lyrics and listen to the music. Discuss what the lyrics meant at the time they were written. Then discuss what they mean today for our country and for individuals.

- **In the News**: Have students find newspaper articles that they think are one-sided. Have students present the article and give their view regarding the accuracy of the story. Then have others in the class brainstorm possible alternative truths to the article or omitted information.

- **Bill of Student Rights**: Divide students into groups of four or five. Have each group write a Bill of Rights for students. Have the groups display their rights on poster board. Then have the groups present their boards to the class.

- **You Be the Judge**: Lead the class in establishing a set of criteria to determine if actions are helpful or hurtful. Using these criteria, have students evaluate whether Phil’s parents were helpful or hurtful. Then, have students write a summary of their evaluation.
Just the Facts
Based on Nothing But the Truth by Avi

Directions: Place an F next to the fact statements and an O next to the opinion statements.

_____ 1. Phil Malloy was a great runner.
_____ 2. Miss Narwin taught English at Harrison High School.
_____ 3. Miss Narwin did the right thing by asking Phil to leave the classroom because he was causing a disruption.
_____ 4. Every child should have the right to sing the national anthem.
_____ 5. Phil’s parents were right to be supportive of the actions he was taking.
_____ 6. Students who took Miss Narwin’s English class have scored higher on the SAT verbal test.
_____ 7. Interviewing the students was the best way for the principal to find out what had happened.
_____ 8. Ted Griffin was running for school board.
_____ 9. The best thing for Phil was to move him out of Miss Narwin’s class.
____ 10. Teaching is a tough job.