Winning contest essay describes women at bat during World War II.

I'm sure you know what baseball is. You might have seen it on TV once or twice, or you might be the biggest fan in the world! And I'll bet you know that only men play in the professional league. But have you ever heard of women playing professional baseball? This is the amazing story of a woman who was part of women's minor league baseball during World War II (1939-1945).

Throughout the United States, young men, including popular baseball players, were sent off to fight in the war. The owner of the Chicago Cubs, Philip K. Wrigley, decided to start a women's baseball league to keep the sport going. [The league ran from 1943-1954, with hundreds of women hitting the baseball diamond to play for teams throughout the Midwest.] That's how Mrs. Fran Russmann came to play ball! Her team, the Blue Island Dianas, was a minor league team in Chicago, Ill.
Mrs. Russmann was 22 years old when she started playing. A few boys she knew asked her whether she wanted to play baseball, and she replied yes. She was very sports-minded and decided to try it. She traveled all over Illinois to play games, and she had to take a streetcar to practices! [That is a bus-like vehicle that moves on rails around cities. Streetcars were common in the 1940s.] The Blue Island Dianas played mostly on the South Side of Chicago and in small towns throughout Illinois.

People reacted differently when women started playing baseball. "We were a novelty, seeing girls play," Mrs. Russmann told me. A novelty is something unique or different. Female players had to be ladylike as well.

She remembers how she felt while playing baseball. Her favorite position to play was second base, and she loved the game, though she was a bit nervous-but excited-when everyone was watching. [Thousands of fans filled stadiums to watch the women's teams play games.] Mrs. Russmann's favorite thing about baseball was hearing the crowd cheer because she knew she was entertaining them. Back then, there was no TV or Internet, so this was entertainment.

When I asked Mrs. Russmann about the thing she disliked the most, she chuckled and answered, "Sliding into second base. When you did, you got strawberries." A strawberry is a bright red bruise that can sometimes bleed. Female baseball players got them more because they had to wear skirts as part of their uniform, unlike men, who wore pants. [When women slid in skirts, their legs often got scraped and bruised.]

Mrs. Russmann told me the most important thing she will always remember was having fun and learning sportsmanship. That is fair and respectful behavior by an athlete. "Just being out there was wonderful to me," she said.

When I asked how she felt about being part of a historic event, she said, "I never thought I was part of a [historic] event until I watched the movie A League of Their Own. Then I realized I was!" Mrs. Russmann played baseball for two years. "I'm so happy I tried out," she told me. "It was a wonderful experience."

**Lessons Learned**
"It doesn't matter whether you're a guy or a girl, whether you have dark skin or light skin, whether you're young or old. All that matters is that if you want to do something, then go for it! You might just think it was one of the best things you've ever done. And you might just make history!"  -Maria Cieslarczyk, fifth grade
1. What caused the shortage of male baseball players?
   A. Women were gaining independence and strength.
   B. Men were sent to fight in World War II.
   C. The economy entered a slump, and even banks ran out of money.
   D. Men were in the professional leagues.

2. The author describes a sequence of events related to the development of a women's baseball league. What event takes place first?
   A. Fran Russmann joined the Blue Island Dianas, a minor league team in Chicago, Illinois.
   B. The women's baseball league ran from 1943 to 1954.
   C. Young men, including baseball players, were sent off to fight in World War II.
   D. Philip K. Wrigley decided to start a women's baseball league.

3. Based on the information in the second paragraph, what can the reader most likely conclude about Phillip K. Wrigley, the person who started the women's baseball league?
   A. Mr. Wrigley knew that the Blue Island Dianas would earn money for him.
   B. Mr. Wrigley cared greatly about the sport of baseball.
   C. Mr. Wrigley did not think female baseball players would be as popular as male players.
   D. Mr. Wrigley had always dreamed of starting a women's baseball league.

4. What can be concluded about the experience of the women who played in minor league baseball?
   A. They were rejected by many baseball fans who did not think female players were as good as the male players.
   B. They faced certain challenges male players did not have to face.
   C. They were treated poorly by the owners of the minor league baseball teams.
   D. They were so inspired by the positive experience of playing in minor league baseball that they continued to work in professional sports.
5. What is the essay mainly about?
   A. the differences between women's baseball and men's baseball during WWII
   B. the impact of World War II on society in America
   C. one woman's experience on a women's minor league baseball team
   D. how the sport and culture of baseball has changed over the course of several decades

6. According to the text, what are strawberries and what causes them?

7. In what ways was Mrs. Fran Russman part of a "historic event," as stated by the author?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

   _____________ she was nervous to play in front of thousands of fans, Mrs. Fran Russman enjoyed hearing the crowds cheering.
   A. Instead
   B. Initially
   C. For example
   D. Even though