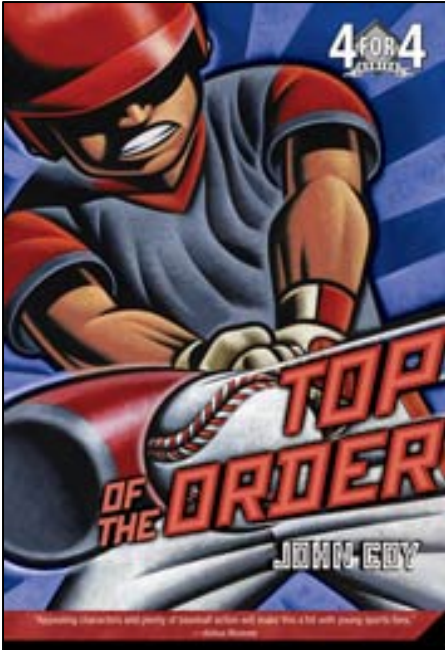


## DISCUSSION GUIDE



### ***Top of the Order*** **by John Coy** (Book One in the *4 for 4* series)

Grades 3-6 / Ages 8-12  
ISBN: 978-0-312-37329-0

#### **About the Novel**

Jackson's parents are divorced and his mother has started dating. Gig's dad is in the National Guard and has been called up to serve in Afghanistan. Isaac's dad wants him to go to a different middle school than all his friends. Diego is the new kid in school, a power-hitter who works with his family on the weekends and can't make every team practice. These four friends lead different lives, but on the baseball field, they're a strong team, the top of the order. In this crucial last year of elementary school, they're faced with preparing for middle school and dealing with a new member of their team—a girl!

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. *"I still think of the divorce and dipped cones together. I never get that kind anymore."* (p. 28) Jackson can't help associating the memory of divorce and DQ dip cones. Why? Do you associate certain tastes, actions, sounds, smells, or objects with a bad (or good) event?
2. G-Man tells Jackson that "sometimes you have to challenge yourself," but Jackson's dad says that "sometimes you have to do what you want" (p. 30). Which one do you think is right? When is it better to challenge yourself, and when is it better to do what you want? Does Jackson make the right decision about staying on the Panthers?
3. Why are they so surprised when Sydney comes to join their game? They say she can't because she's a girl, but is that the real reason they don't want her to play? Why is Gig so angry about his sister joining the game? Is it right for them to try to "force her out"? (p. 44-45) What would you do if you were Jackson?

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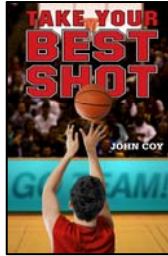
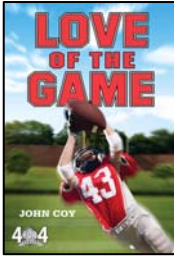
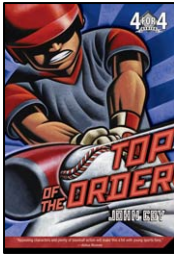
- 4.** Gig says that “Baseball was the one place I didn’t have to deal with her. Now she wants to wreck that, too.” (p. 47) However, Sydney tells Jackson that “I’m not doing it to him. . . I’m doing it for me.” (p. 59) How do Gig and Sydney’s points of view differ? Jackson can see both of their perspectives, but to what extent do Gig and Sydney understand what the other is feeling? Who does Jackson decide to side with, and why?
- 5.** How does Sydney react to her teammates’ and opponents’ teasing? What does her response say about her personality? What would you do if one of your teammates was being teased like the other team teases Sydney? What would you do if you were Sydney? Have you or one of your friends ever encountered bullies? How did you deal with them? (p. 127)
- 6.** If you could send a message to yourself in the future, what would you say? What would you say to yourself one year in the future? What about five or ten years from now? What do you think your future self would think of the person you are now?
- 7.** Jackson’s not happy about having to catch instead of playing shortstop. How does he handle having his favorite position taken from him? Is he a better player as a shortstop or as a catcher? What does he learn in his new position?
- 8.** Jackson dreams of being a tree split by lightning. (p. 115-117) What might the different things in his dream represent (running behind all his friends, being stuck in the mud, turning into a tree)? What things have split in his life?
- 9.** How does Jackson make up with Gig when Gig’s mad at him? Is there anything Jackson could have done differently to repair their friendship?

  - What does Gig do to make up? What do their responses say about each of them? While we see how upset Jackson is about his best friend’s silence, we don’t get to see Gig’s thoughts. What might he be thinking when he acts mad at Jackson? Do you think his thoughts match his words?
- 10.** What do you think the superhero Jackson creates says about him?
- 11.** Follow Hayes’ instructions to create a superhero. What’s his, her, or its name? What superpowers does your hero have? Write a short story or draw a comic about his, her, or its adventures. (p. 133-136)

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Overarching Questions and Activities

#### **4 for 4 Series by John Coy**



*Top of the Order:* 978-0-312-37329-0

*Eyes on the Goal:* 978-0-312-37330-6

*Love of the Game:* 978-0-312-37331-3

*Take Your Best Shot:* 978-0-312-37332-0

Grade Range: 3-7 grade; Age Range: 8-12 years

#### **Discussion Questions**

**1.** *"I don't notice day-to-day changes, but when I think back to fifth grade, a lot has changed."*(*Take Your Best Shot* p. 125)

The 4 for 4 series covers seven months, from May of the boys' fifth grade year to November of their sixth grade year. How have Jackson, Gig, Isaac, and Diego changed between *Top of the Order* and *Take Your Best Shot*? What specific events in each book changed them or taught them something? Who do you think has changed the most?

Think back to seven months ago. How have you changed since then? What have you learned? What events in your life have caused you to change? Have you changed as much as Jackson, Gig, Isaac, and Diego have?

**2.** *"You have to know what you want. Otherwise, he'll decide for you. . . He'll push, but if you stand your ground with him, he'll respect your decision."* (*Top of the Order* p. 56)

The four boys sometimes clash with authority figures like parents, teachers, and coaches, but at times they have to stand up for what they believe in or what is right for them. When do they admit that they were wrong, and admit that adults were right? When do they stand up for themselves because they know what they want? How do their decisions change them and help them grow?

**3.** How do Jackson's first impressions of people change after he gets to know them? Does he ever misjudge people, and think a person is different from how he or she actually is? Why? How does he discover what they're really like?

For example, why is Jackson surprised when Ted comes through for him? (*Love of the Game* p. 151-152)

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

4. “Right now my best chance to start is switching to defense. I don’t care what Gig and Isaac think. I’ve got to do what’s best for me.” (*Love of the Game* p. 77)

Throughout the books, Jackson, Gig, Isaac, and Diego talk a lot about how important it is for them to stick together. However, they sometimes realize that they need to make decisions on their own, even if their friends disagree. How do they each learn to make decisions independently? What do they each decide to do that the others don’t approve of?

5. Do each of the boys have a different sport that they’re best at and enjoy the most? Which sport is it for each character? Do you have a favorite sport? Is it the same as the one you are best at?

6. What are their different strengths and weaknesses of each of the characters, in sports and in life? Do you find that some of the things that you are strong with in sports are also things that you’re strong with in other areas of your life? Do some of the things you struggle with show up in other areas. Or is there a difference between success in sports and success in other areas of life?

7. What new challenges do you think will face the boys during the rest of the school year? The rest of middle school? How do you think baseball will go for them in sixth grade? Will Sydney come out for the team?

8. Which of the characters do you relate to the most? Why? Do the other characters remind you of people you know? Do you think you and some of the people you know would make good characters in a book?

### Author Bio

John Coy is the author of many acclaimed books for young readers and teens, including *Night Driving*, *Crackback*, *Eyes on the Goal*, *Love of the Game*, and *Take Your Best Shot*. He lives in Minneapolis, where he writes full-time and teaches writing workshops for children and adults. He travels all over the world promoting his books and literacy. Visit John at [www.johncoy.com](http://www.johncoy.com).



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