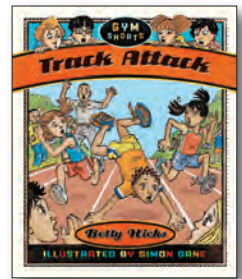
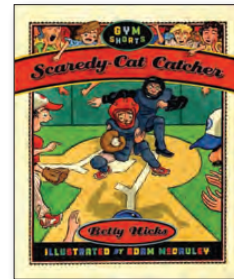
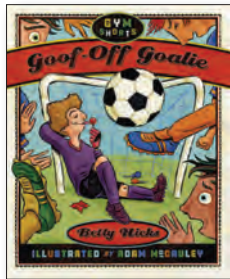
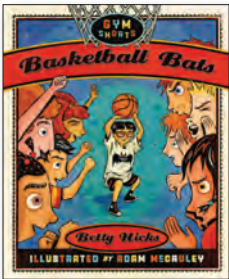




Classroom Guide



The Gym Shorts books by Betty Hicks

are excellent first novels for children who are stepping beyond “beginning readers” and into full-length fiction for independent reading. The series will introduce students to all the literary elements of fiction: plot, characters, themes, voice and setting—while at the same time entertaining them with fast-paced, action-filled sports stories. The cast of kids in every book includes characters your students will recognize—they are like their friends and they are like themselves. The situations are realistic, too, with friends working together and supporting each other in an effort to reach a goal.



In this guide, you'll find activities to develop the ways your students think about and talk about literature through examples found in the GYM SHORTS series. Here, too, is a brief Q&A with author Betty Hicks—a way for you and your class to get to know her. So get ready to dig in . . .



ILLUSTRATED BY ADAM MCCAULEY



Plot

SPORTS INTERVIEW ACTIVITY

Athletes love to be interviewed by the media, and the characters in Betty Hicks’s books should be no different. For each of the novels, have your students identify the characters they will interview, then devise questions to ask each character about the events in the novel and in the games. For example, after reading and discussing *Basketball Bats*, your students can interview Henry, Rocky, Rita, Goose, and Jazz. The interview questions should be appropriate to the character and the action. Then switch roles and create questions to interview members of the opposing team, the Tigers.

The interviews can be presented to the class as if they are on TV or radio with an introduction such as: “Folks, this is [student’s name], coming to you from a neutral court as the Rockford Road Bats just defeated the Tigers in basketball. Let’s talk to the star of the game Rocky . . .”

You’ll need two interviewers, one to interview the Bats and the other to interview the Tigers. That means twelve kids will be participating. If you do this interview activity for all of the books in the GYM SHORTS series, there should be enough parts for every student in your class.



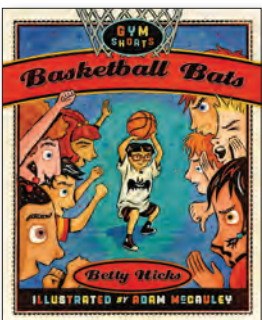
Characters

GRAPHIC ORGANIZING ACTIVITY

Each of the novels in the GYM SHORTS series reveals a little bit more about each of the characters. For example, in *Goof-Off Goalie* we see that Goose has trouble focusing on a task, and in *Swimming with Sharks*, Rita is afraid to get water up her nose. Have your students create a graphic organizer showing the character traits of the Rockford Street kids. It should include the good traits and the bad ones. It doesn’t matter which book they read first. With every new book they read, they can add new traits to the list.

Here is a sample organizer:

GYM SHORTS SERIES BY BETTY HICKS		
CHARACTER TRAITS OF THE ROCKFORD STREET KIDS		
CHARACTER	GOOD TRAITS	BAD TRAITS
GOOSE	GOOD FRIEND	TROUBLE FOCUSING
HENRY	GOOD FRIEND	
RITA	GOOD FRIEND	



BASKETBALL BATS

Henry and his friends on Rockford Road can’t be beat in basketball on their small driveway court, but can they take on the bigger and older Tigers at the huge YWCA?

ISBN: 978-1-59643-243-7



Themes BOOK GROUPS

One of the best ways to explore the themes of a book—the author’s “messages”—and to enjoy a book is to discuss it with others who have read the book. Organize a weekly GYM SHORTS book group in your classroom. Any student can participate, as long as they’ve read at least one of the books in the series.

Provide the group with a list of possible discussion questions, and allow one of the students to lead the discussion. We’ve prepared this list of discussion topics so that the week’s discussion leader can select those she or he wants to discuss and use them as is.

1. Cooperation or team-work (since the books are sports centered) is a major theme of the novels. Introduce the subject of cooperation by citing an example of how the kids in the books cooperate. A good place to start is to identify the goal in one of the books. Then ask: What did the kids do together to reach the goal? Have any of your classmates read other books, seen any movies or television shows, or heard a real-life story about how cooperation helped achieve a purpose? Can any of them talk about a personal experience with cooperation that made a job easier to accomplish?

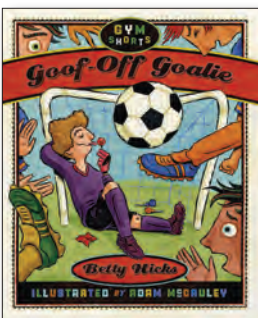
2. Competition is another theme in the GYM SHORTS books. Betty Hicks tells us how she feels about this subject: “Win or lose, I think competition should be fun, fair, and exciting. It helps young people learn how to be part of a team and how to handle victory as well as defeat—all things which come in handy in many areas besides sports.” With this in mind, talk about competition and winning. How do you and your classmates feel about it in the sports you play yourselves? How about the sports you watch? Are you true to your teams whether they are on a winning streak or losing?



3. Another theme in the books is that success/winning is never guaranteed, but it’s a sure thing that you can’t succeed unless you work hard and try. Which characters learn this lesson in which books? Have your classmates ever tried really hard, but still didn’t succeed to the level they hoped? Talk about the way the characters in the book feel and react to this? How did the kids in your class react to this in their own lives?

4. Another important theme in the GYM SHORTS titles is being true to yourself. Friends are important—in your life and your classmates’ lives, and in the lives of the characters in the books. But it is even more important for each person to understand who he or she is, and to be the best person possible. Certainly, Rita learns this lesson in *Swimming with Sharks*. Sometimes you can’t just fit in with everyone else—but that doesn’t mean you all can’t be friends. What experiences have your classmates had that showed them the truth of this lesson?

5. Friendship is the most important theme of all in the GYM SHORTS books. Talk about the kinds of friends your classmates have and the kind of friend each of them is. Kids often say, “I’ll do anything for my best friend.” Do your classmates agree? Would you lie for your best friend? What are the most important qualities of a friend?



GOOF-OFF GOALIE

Goose wants to be the goalie on the soccer team, but he is a slacker. Can Henry and his Rockford Road pals help Goose focus and succeed?

ISBN: 978-1-59643-244-4

Voice WRITING ACTIVITY

Betty Hicks tells the GYM SHORTS novels in the third person, but through the eyes of the main character so that we know what he/she is thinking. For example, in Chapter Three of *Basketball Bats*, when Goose blocked Tough Guy's shot, she tells us:

*Henry wanted to scream, "In your face!" at the Tigers.
But he didn't want to be a bad sport.*

Here we see not only the action, but also how Henry feels about it.

Ask your students to write this short scene in three other voices:

- If Henry was the narrator, telling the story in the first person.
- If Tough Guy was the narrator, telling the story in the first person.
- If there were an omniscient narrator—a person who tells the story in the third person but is not a participant in the story.

How does this change the book?

Listening for voice is a new skill for your students. To give them more experiences, look at Chapter 2 in *Goof-Off Goalie*. There are two characters, Goose and the coach. Divide the class into two groups. Have one group rewrite the story with Goose as the narrator in the first person, and the other group with the coach telling the story in his voice. Remind your students that they will be telling the story from that character's point of view. How does this change the story? What would Goose add? What might the coach say? When your students have finished their re-writes have them read their stories aloud and then discuss the differences.

Setting DISCUSSION

As new readers, your students may not have considered setting before. To introduce them to this aspect of literature, have a class discussion to answer some of the following questions:

1. Where do you think the GYM SHORTS novels take place? We know the kids live on Rockford Street, but what kind of town is it in? Talk about some of the places in the town. How is the town the same or different from the one in which your students live? When do the Gym Shorts novels take place? In the past? The present? The future? In what season does each of the novels take place?

2. How does Betty Hicks tell us about the setting? What words does she use? What other clues do we have? Do the illustrations help us know about the setting? How?



SWIMMING WITH SHARKS

Does Rita have what it takes to swim with the Sharks?

ISBN: 978-1-59643-245-1

Interview with **Betty Hicks**

WHY SPORTS? DO YOU PLAY SPORTS? WHICH ONES? ARE YOU A SPORTS FAN? WHICH SPORTS? WHAT TEAMS?

I've always loved a variety of sports. When I was growing up, there weren't a lot of team sports for young girls. Instead, I had neighborhood friends (like Henry, Rita, Jazz, Rocky, and Goose) who could always be rounded up for a backyard game of roll-a-bat, dodge-ball, or touch football. As I got older and more sports became available, I took a shot at basketball, field hockey, water-skiing, snow-skiing, volleyball, diving, bowling, softball, ping-pong. You name it—I tried it. Everything but cartwheels. I have never been able to do a cartwheel!

Today, I hike, play golf, and shoot backyard hoops with my grandchildren. And yes, I am definitely a sports fan. But mostly, I'm a huge, huge, huge fan of college basketball. My team is the University of North Carolina. My husband and I drive sixty miles to every home game. I cheer, groan, celebrate, and/or agonize over every possession of the ball. I also wear the team's colors, even when I'm only watching the game on TV, because if I don't have on Carolina blue, I'm convinced that my team will lose.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT COMPETITION AND WINNING?

Okay—I just confessed that I superstitiously wear light blue to help UNC score more points, so obviously, I want my team to win. But if they lose, my life does go on. Win or lose, I think competition should be fun, fair, and exciting. It helps young people learn how to be part of a team and how to handle victory as well as defeat—all things which come in handy in many areas besides sports. Of course, winning feels great, but, to me, enjoying the sport and the camaraderie of teammates is even better.

One time, I remember sitting on the bench for a softball game. My team was short on subs, and the coach finally had no choice but to put me in the game—playing third base. No one, including me, had much faith in my ability, so I stood at third base and prayed that the ball would stay far, far away. Naturally, the first hit came straight at me. I caught it on the first bounce and threw it straight to first base, a distance which seemed at least a mile away to me. The ball landed, smack, right in the first baseman's glove. The runner was out! I have no idea who won the game, but 47 years later, I still remember the play that earned me a starting spot on the softball team.



Rocky was the best catcher in the league until he broke his arm. Can he overcome his fear of getting hurt and get back in the game?

MOST WRITERS ARE READERS. WHAT DO YOU READ? WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE CHILDREN'S BOOKS?

To say that I'm a reader is like saying that Babe Ruth was a baseball player! I love to read even more than I love sports. I read everything—fiction, non-fiction, books, magazines, newspapers. I try to read at least two books a week. Sometimes it's *War and Peace* plus *Peter Pan* (okay, *War and Peace* takes more than a week), other times it might be *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, *Water for Elephants*, and *Minders of Make Believe*.

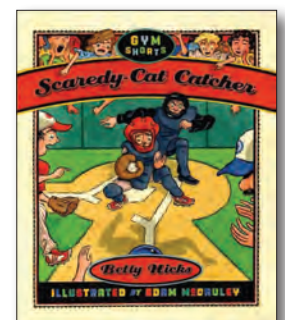
My favorite children's books? There are too many to name! All right, I'll try to be specific. No! Honestly. I can't. It's an impossible question. What if I simply list the best books I've read lately? In the last six months, I've read (or reread) a variety of children's books—everything from young adult to picture books, some of them old, some new. My recent favorites, in no particular order, have been: *The BFG*, *The Book Thief*, *Clementine*, *Tangerine*, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, *Gooseberry Park*, *Poppy*, *Chicken Soup with Rice*, *There is a Bird on Your Head!*, *Bad Kitty Gets A Bath*, *Elijah of Buxton*, *The True Meaning of Smek Day*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Blue Two*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *A Year Down Yonder*, *Al Capone Does My Shirts*, *Wave*, *The Underneath*, *Jamberry*, and *The Incredible Book Eating Boy*. Six months from now, I look forward to having a new and equally outstanding list.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE READERS WILL GET OUT OF GYM SHORTS?

I wrote GYM SHORTS because I wanted beginning readers to have access to books about the activities that they love. But I especially hope that soccer fans will also read about baseball. And I want sprinters to discover basketball and swimming and more. Reading about any sport is fun, whether you play it or not. I even hope that non-sports fans will enjoy hanging out with the neighborhood friends on Rockford Road, because these books aren't just about sports. They're also filled with friendship, humor, family troubles, school problems, goofy dialogue, Tootsie Pops, scabs, and skateboarding dogs.

SCAREDY-CAT CATCHER

ISBN: 978-1-59643-245-8





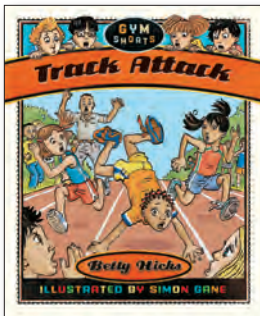
Art Activity Extension

TEAMWORK

Materials needed for each student:

- 50/50 WHITE T-SHIRT
- ACRYLIC FABRIC PAINTS OR FABRIC MARKERS
- PAINT BRUSHES

In *Basketball Bats*, to help boost team spirit, Henry decides to make a team T-shirt for Rocky. This helps Rocky and the other members of the team to do their best. Your students also work in teams in the classroom, so they should have team shirts, too. Have your students design T-shirts that represent their reading groups. The design should represent something about each member of the group as well as a collective image. During art they can paint the shirts. Then whenever they go into their reading groups they can wear their shirts and truly be a team.



TRACK ATTACK

ILLUSTRATED BY SIMON GANE

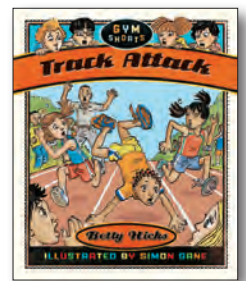
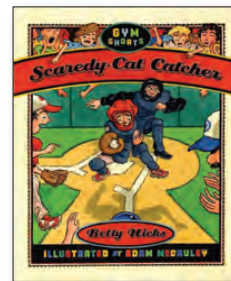
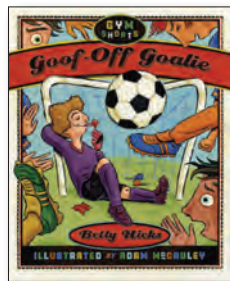
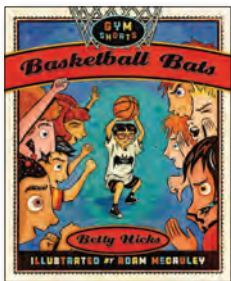
Jazz loves to run, but can she focus on the race while her dad is having a track attack?

ISBN: 978-1-59643-488-2 • ON SALE 7-21-2009



Get your head in the game
with the **Gym Shorts** series

Betty Hicks



Coming in November in paperback from Square Fish—

BASKETBALL BATS and **GOOF-OFF-GOALIE**—two books in one.

978-0-312-58247-0

ROARING BROOK PRESS  WWW.ROARINGBROOKPRESS.COM

An imprint of Macmillan Children's Publishing Group

This guide was prepared by Clifford Wohl, Educational Consultant