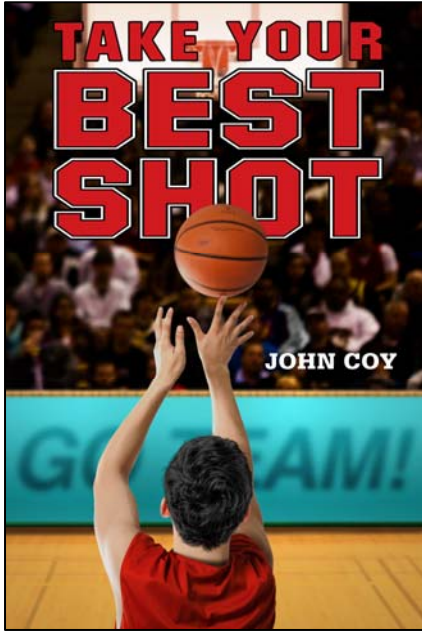


## DISCUSSION GUIDE



***Take Your Best Shot***  
**by John Coy**  
(Book Four in the *4 for 4* series)

Grades 3-7 / Ages 8-12  
ISBN: 978-0-312-37332-0

### **About the Novel**

The school year is in full swing, and though Jackson survived football season, new challenges await him on and off the basketball court. Detentions are the least of Jackson's new middle school problems. His crush, Ruby, becomes a lead in the school play and shoots to stardom. Then Gig's fears become a reality when his father is badly injured in Afghanistan. When Jackson's mom decides to marry Ted, Jackson realizes that his life is going to change a lot—and he'll have to change with it.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. When Jackson interviews Diego in Spanish for extra credit, he's surprised by some of his answers. Why? Why didn't he know these things about his friend before?

2. *"I don't like calling attention to what my dad's doing. He doesn't either. He says it's his job, part of signing up for the National Guard. . . Drawing attention to it makes me nervous. It feels like it increases the chances of something bad happening."*

Gig says he doesn't like calling attention to his dad's work because it might make something bad happen. Have you ever felt like this? What other reasons do you think Gig might have for not wanting to talk about it? Are his reasons for being quiet and his dad's reasons different?

3. *"I'm also worried about how much Ruby is into plays and musicals and what a star she is and how little I know about any of that. It feels like a foreign land with different rules."*

Jackson feels left out because Ruby acts and he doesn't. Does she feel the same way about Jackson and his sports? In the end, is Jackson right to feel like he's in a different

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world from Ruby's? Could he have done anything to prevent that feeling? Do you ever feel left out because your friends participate in different activities? What do you do about it?

**4.** *"Saturday afternoon, we've got a basketball game, and it feels so insignificant, so unnecessary. We should cancel it until we hear about Mr. Milroy."*

Jackson's devastated when he hears about Mr. Milroy's injury. Is he right to want to call off the basketball game? What would Mr. Milroy want them to do??

**5.** *"He didn't like how I was playing. He thought I was dominating the ball and shooting way too much."*

In *Top of the Order*, G-Man wants Jackson to sign up for the traveling team, but Jackson refuses because that would break up his group of friends. Now, in *Take Your Best Shot*, Isaac's dad wants him to play on the traveling team, so he does. How are G-Man's and Isaac's dad's arguments in favor of the traveling team different? What's the difference between Jackson's and Isaac's decisions? How did each boy's decision change the dynamic of their group and force them to adapt?

**6.** *"The two of them are so different yet they're dealing with the same huge thing."*

Compare Sydney's and Gig's reactions to their dad's injuries. How would you try to comfort each of them if you were in Jackson's position? Is there anything you would have done that Jackson didn't do?

**7.** *"She's got her same smooth skin and pretty face, but she looks different to me now, more far away, like somebody acting."*

What changes Jackson's perception of Ruby? Which impression was more correct, his first one or what he thinks of her now?

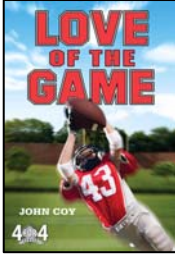
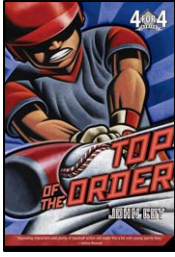
**8.** Why does Gig feel like his father's injury must somehow be his fault? How would you try to convince a friend in Gig's situation that what happened isn't his fault? Have you ever felt responsible for something beyond your control? What did you do to convince yourself that it wasn't your fault?

**9.** How has Jackson changed in the course of *Take Your Best Shot*? Isaac? Gig? Diego? Sydney? Who do you think has changed the most? Why?

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### 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)

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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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