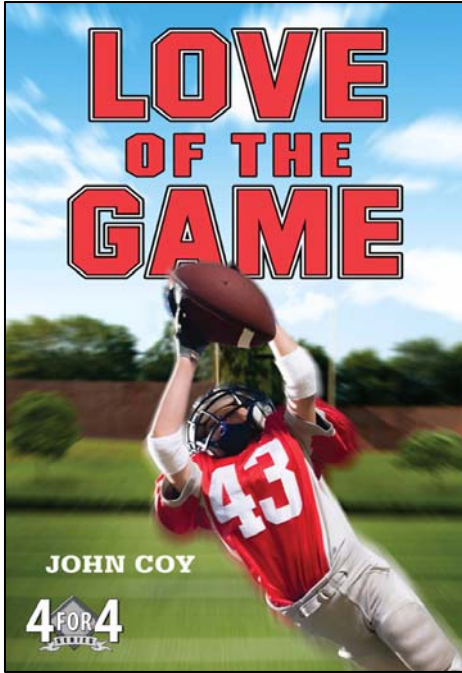


DISCUSSION GUIDE



Love of the Game
by John Coy
(Book Three in the *4 for 4* series)

Grades 3-6 / Ages 8-12
ISBN: 978-0-312-37331-3

About the Novel

Middle school is full of new challenges for Jackson, Gig, Isaac, and Diego, four sports-loving friends who have always stuck together. Lockers that won't open, older (and bigger) kids, classes that are far apart, tons of homework—there's a lot to get used to. One thing the boys are looking forward to, however, is making the football team. Not every one will get what he wants, though, on the field and at home.

Discussion Questions

1. *"In middle school, people pay attention to who you hang out with."* (p. 30)
Where does Jackson fit into the middle school hierarchy? How does he see himself in relation to his friends and his classmates?
2. What new friends do the boys make in middle school? How does that change them? Does it have any impact on their friendship or how they see themselves?
3. How does Jackson deal with the bullies he encounters? Does he avoid them, fight them, befriend them or use another method to make the attacks stop? What should he do when bullies confront him and make demands?
4. Why does Jackson avoid Mr. Amodt, the librarian, when he tries to get him to sign up for READ Club? Why doesn't he want to join the group, and why does he change his mind later?

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5. Gig's guidance counselor tells him that "different family members handle these things differently." (p. 84)

How do Gig and Sydney's responses to their father's deployment in Afghanistan differ? What do their responses suggest about their personalities?

6. *"This was never our house, just a place we were staying while Mom's friends were gone. Even so, it felt like home. I've never even seen Ted's house. There's no way that's going to feel like home."* (p. 74-75)

Jackson's family is house-sitting for friends, and though they live in a nice place, it doesn't feel like home. What makes a place feel like home? What would have to change in order for Jackson to feel like the place he lives is his home? Try to define "home."

7. At first, Jackson sees Tiny and Nick Speros as potential bullies, but eventually he sees them in a more positive light. Why did he see them that way in the first place, and why did his opinion of them change? What did they do or say to change his idea of them? See if you can find specific passages where changes occurred.

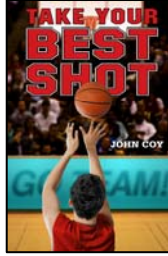
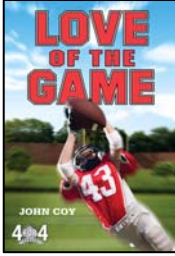
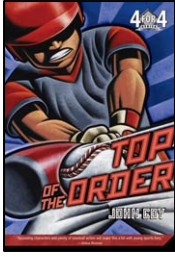
8. *"I don't care if Gig gives me a hard time about Ruby. He's just jealous because no girl came to watch him."* (p. 180)

In *Eyes on the Goal*, Jackson had a crush on Angela, but eventually he gave up on her. Why? How are his interactions with Ruby different from those he had with Angela? What do you think will come of Jackson and Ruby's relationship?

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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.



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