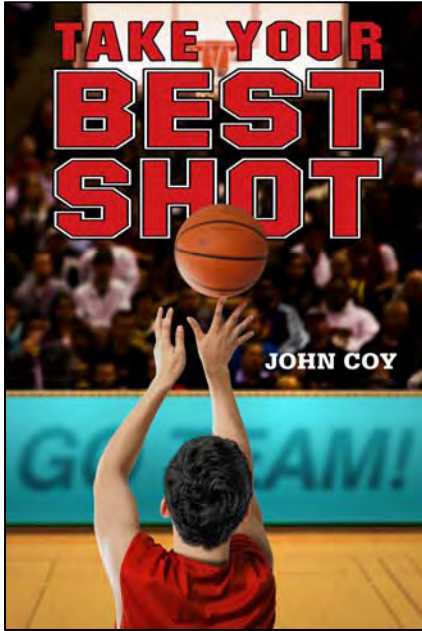


DISCUSSION GUIDE



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?

