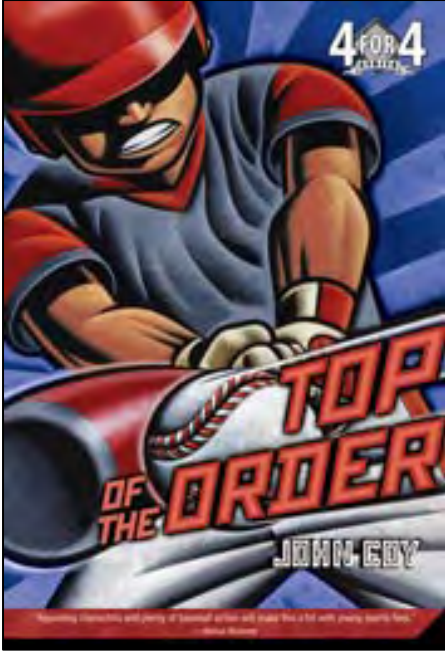


DISCUSSION GUIDE



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)

