

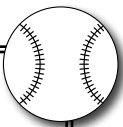
OFFICIAL PLAYBOOK

to the books by

MIKE LUPIGA



**Curriculum, Connections, Discussion Questions,
& Classroom Activities**



THE LINEUP

Attention all sports fans!
This booklet contains the following
discussion questions and activity suggestions:

MEET THE MVP

Get to know Mike Lupica, newspaper columnist, TV sports commentator, and author of many *New York Times* bestselling and loved books, such as *Heat* and *Travel Team*. Use the information provided to help jumpstart an awesome author study unit that your students—especially boys, reluctant readers, and sports fans—will truly enjoy.

NEXT YEAR'S DRAFT

Be the first to get the inside scoop on Mike Lupica's next book, *Batboy*, which will be available in the Spring of 2010.

OFFENSE VS. DEFENSE

Start a true—and fun—literature debate in your classroom! Pair or group your students up and let them express and defend their opinions on the books they read. Discussion questions are included for *Heat*, *The Big Field*, *Miracle on 49th Street*, *Travel Team*, *Summer Ball*, *Million-Dollar Throw*, and the *Comeback Kids* series.

OVERTIME

Enrich your Lupica-based classroom unit by taking advantage of the extension activities we've included for each of the books listed above. From language arts and creative writing to current events and art projects, there's something for every area of the curriculum.

TEAM WORK

Mike Lupica's books lend themselves to many areas of thematic study, and as such, can be easily incorporated into classroom discussions and serve as prompts for writing workshops. Combine the elements and characters found in several books to make a complete lesson about a number of important topics.



MEET THE MVP

All About MIKE LUPICA



Photo © Diane H. Reilly

MIKE LUPICA is one of the most prominent sports writers in America. Over the span of his successful career as a sports columnist, he has proven that he can write for sports fans of all ages and stripes. His column for New York's *Daily News* is syndicated nationally. And as the author of multiple bestselling books for young readers, including *Heat*, *Travel Team*, and *The Big Field*, Mr. Lupica has carved out a niche as the sporting world's finest storyteller.

He began his newspaper career covering the New York Knicks for the *New York Post* at age 23. He became the youngest columnist ever at a New York paper with New York's *Daily News*, which he joined in 1977. For more than 30 years, Lupica has added magazines, novels, sports biographies, other non-fiction books on sports, as well as television to his professional resume. For the past fifteen years, he has been a TV anchor for ESPN's *The Sports Reporters*. He also hosted his own program, *The Mike Lupica Show* on ESPN2. Lupica has published articles in many magazines and has received numerous honors, including the 2003 *Jim Murray Award* from the National Football Foundation.

His young adult and middle-grade novels have shot up the *New York Times* bestseller list and been selected for many state children's choice awards across the country. Lupica is also what he describes as a "serial Little League coach," a youth basketball coach, and a soccer coach for his four children, three sons and a daughter. He and his family live in Connecticut.

Visit Mike Lupica at www.mikelupicabooks.com

NEXT YEAR'S DRAFT: Special Sneak Peek! An Insider's First Look at Mike Lupica's Next Book.

BATBOY

Coming Spring 2010

14-year-old Brian eats, sleeps, and dreams baseball—just like his father always did. For 14 years, his dad bounced around from city to city. And when the game no longer needed him, Brian's dad still needed the game. More than he needed his family. So he became a pitching coach, leaving Brian and his mother with a baseball ghost forever haunting them. Yet, somehow, Brian gets it, because he loves the game just as much. So when he lands his dream job, spending the summer as batboy for his hometown Detroit Tigers, he can't imagine life could be better. Not that this stops him from looking up into the stands before every home game, staring at the seats he and his father used to sit in, hoping to see that familiar face staring back.

Now, after two years away from the game, Hank Bishop, Brian's idol is making a comeback with the Tigers, determined to reach 500 home runs for his career and to prove he wasn't reliant on steroids when he was exiled from the sport years before. Brian cannot believe his luck. Yet the friendly Hank Bishop portrayed to the media is, in reality, a sullen jerk—a man chasing a lost reputation and ignoring those around him. Including his family. Including the new batboy, Brian, who wants only to befriend his idol. It doesn't happen easily for either, but this boy in need of a father and this man in need of a family find each other, along with a little baseball magic along the way.

Visit www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians for a sneak peek at the first chapter of *Batboy*!



HEAT

THE GAME PLAN: About the Book

Michael Arroyo has a pitching arm that throws serious heat. But his firepower is nothing compared to the heat Michael faces in his day-to-day life. Newly orphaned after his father led the family's escape from Cuba, Michael's only family is his seventeen-year-old brother Carlos. If Social Services hears of their situation, they will be separated in the foster-care system—or worse, sent back to Cuba. Together, the boys carry on alone, dodging bills and anyone who asks too many questions. But then someone wonders how a twelve-year-old boy could possibly throw with as much power as Michael Arroyo throws. With no way to prove his age, no birth certificate, and no parent to fight for his cause, Michael's secret world is blown wide open, and he discovers that family can come from the most unexpected sources.

OFFENSE VS. DEFENSE:

Discussion Questions

- ① Heat begins with a scene involving two exceptional athletes, Ramon and Michael. Compare and contrast the ways each of these boys utilizes his athletic gifts. How are they the same? Different?
- ① Though we never meet Papi in this story, we learn a lot about him from Michael and Carlos. Was Papi a good father? What evidence in the book could lead to this conclusion? Find examples to support your opinion.
- ① Mrs. Cora, Manny, Father Montoya, Uncle Timo, and Mr. Ruiz all help Miguel and Carlos conceal their father's death. Is withholding the truth different from lying? Did they do the right thing when they agreed to conceal Papi's death?
- ① Ellie keeps her father's fame a secret from Michael and Manny. What motivated her to keep this information from her new friends?
- ① Michael and Carlos fear "Official Persons" interfering in their lives. In the book, they come across several "Official Persons" including Officer McRae, Mr. Lima, and Mr. Gibbs. Are Michael and Carlos' fears justified by these characters? Explain.
- ① When Michael is benched, he takes over as the third base coach. How does Michael continue to contribute to the team in this role?
- ① Baseball is a team sport. How did Michael's teammates step up to the plate while he was benched? What are some of the specific contributions his teammates made during the playoffs?
- ① In chapter 26, Manny tells Michael, "You are really due for a happy ending one of these days." Do his words prove true? How does Manny help make a happy ending a reality for Michael?
- ① In chapter two, Michael says, "If there are real angels in the world, how come they're never around when we need them?" Does Michael's position on angels change by the end of the book? Who are the living angels in Michael's life?
- ① Heat is written from Michael's point of view. In what way would the story change if it were written from Carlos' perspective?

OVERTIME:

Extension Activities

- ⑩ Heat ends before the Clippers reach the Little League World Series. Write an article for your school sports page about their games in Williamsport.
- ⑩ “El Grande” is the nickname for the fictional Yankees’ star in *Heat*. Create a nickname for Michael when he reaches the Major Leagues. Why does this name suit him? When you finish with Michael’s nickname, create nicknames for yourself and your classmates.
- ⑩ Mr. Minaya uses inspirational quotes from famous coaches to inspire his team. Pretend you’re the coach and write a speech to inspire the Clippers while they are playing in the Little League World Series.
- ⑩ Championship teams need championship gear. Design t-shirts and hats that could be worn by Clippers’ fans. Select colors and logos for each item. Explain your choices.
- ⑩ The Yankees played their last game in Yankee Stadium on September 21, 2008. They will move across the street to a brand new stadium for the 2009 season. Write a story about the “Ghosts of Yankee Stadium” moving to their new home. Use research on Babe Ruth, Joe DiMaggio, Lou Gehrig, and Mickey Mantle to help you create your characters.

A WORD FROM MIKE LUPICA ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING PART OF A TEAM:

“Sports teach kids about being on a team, being part of something greater than themselves if they play hard and well and unselfishly. If they can learn that, they can apply it to anything they do, in or out of sports, for the rest of their lives. The great coaches in Little League are the same as the great coaches in the big leagues, or managers: Get a bunch of different kids, every one with different talents and backgrounds and attitudes and get them on the same page—get them to be better in the end than they thought they could be. When it works, it’s a wonderful thing. I still use the first coaching plan I ever got, when my middle son first started playing YMCA basketball, from my best friend Paul Westphal, a great NBA player and coach:

- ⑩ If you’re open, shoot.
- ⑩ If somebody else is more open, pass him the ball and let him shoot.
- ⑩ Have fun.





TRAVEL TEAM

THE GAME PLAN: About the Book

Twelve-year-old Danny Walker may be the smallest kid on the basketball court—but don't tell him that. Because no one plays with more heart or court sense. But none of that matters when he is cut from his local travel team, the very same team his father led to national prominence as a boy. Danny's father, still smarting from his own troubles, knows Danny isn't the only kid who was cut for the wrong reason, and together, this washed-up former player and a bunch of never-say-die kids prove that the heart simply cannot be measured.

OFFENSE VS. DEFENSE:

Discussion Questions

- ① Coach Ross seemed determined to destroy the Richie Walker All Stars/the Warriors; however, he played a big role in their formation. Describe some of Coach Ross' actions that helped create and then improve the Warriors.
- ① The Tri-Valley League is a boys' travel league, although The Warriors could never have won without help from some girls. Describe the contributions made by females to the Warriors' team both on and off the court.
- ① Richie Walker was involved in two car crashes in his lifetime. Describe how the first crash destroyed his life. How does the second crash restore it?
- ① Rickie Walker tells Danny, "You never know which day is going to be the best day of your whole life." Looking at the book as a whole, what was Danny's best day? Why? Was that same day the best day for Richie? Ali? Ty? If not, what were their best days? Explain.
- ① Before the Vikings/Warriors game Will says to Danny, "You're the biggest kid here." What is the significance of this statement? Describe how the smallest kid on the team manages to live up to being the biggest? Find specific examples in the book.

OVERTIME:

Extension Activities

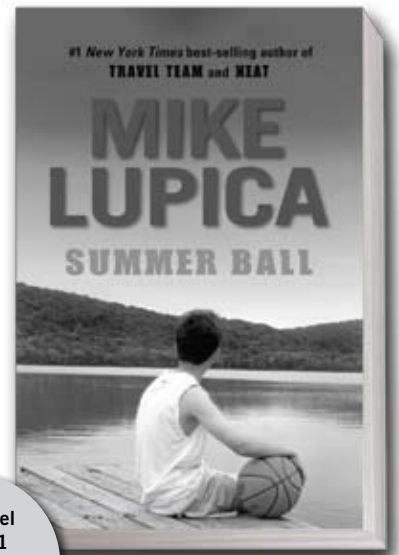
- ① During the first quarter of the Vikings/Warriors playoff game Coach Ross leaves his spot on the bench to go be a spectator with Richie Walker. Write a dialogue these men may have had while watching their sons play together.
- ① Research the heights of the players on your favorite NBA team. Plot their heights on a Line Plot. What is the average or the mean height? What is the range of heights on this team? If Danny reaches his fathers' height of 5'10", where would he rank on this team? Present your findings to your classmates.
- ① Danny's driveway is his "special place." Tess later describes it as his "magic garden." Where is your special place? Draw a picture of it labeling its special features. Write a short description about its meaning to you.



SUMMER BALL

THE GAME PLAN: About the Book

When you're the smallest kid playing a big man's game, the challenges never stop—especially when your name is Danny Walker. Leading your travel team to the national championship may seem like a dream come true, but for Danny, being at the top just means the competition tries that much harder to knock him off. Now Danny's heading to Right Way Basketball Camp for the summer, and he knows that with the country's best players in attendance, he's going to need to take his game up a notch if he wants to match up. But it won't be easy. Old rivals and new battles leave Danny wondering if he really does have what it takes to stand tall.



The sequel to the #1 New York Times bestseller *Travel Team*!

OFFENSE VS. DEFENSE:

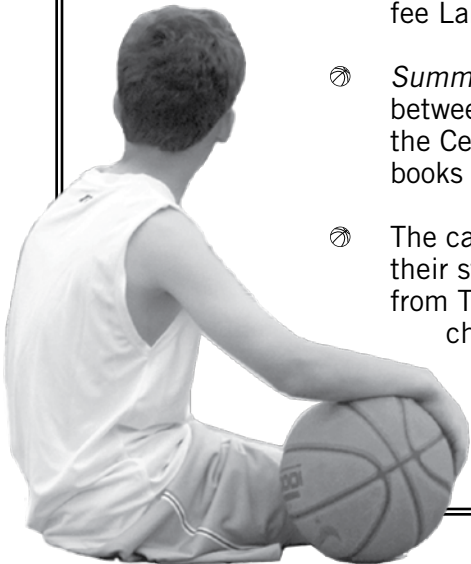
Discussion Questions

- ⌚ At the beginning of the book, how does Danny let his height get the better of him? Describe some of his failures both on and off the court.
- ⌚ Zach is having a hard time adjusting to basketball camp. How does Danny reach out to him? Why does Danny want to help Zach? Who helps Danny adjust to basketball camp?
- ⌚ In Chapter 11, Danny fakes a knee injury. Describe the reactions of his father, Nick Pinto, and Tess. Who does the best job making Danny realize this was a bad idea? Explain.
- ⌚ In Chapter 19, Danny and Zack get into a fight with Lamar. How does this fight change Danny's relationship with Rasheed? Why isn't Lamar punished for fighting?
- ⌚ Evaluate Ed Powers as a coach. Does he inspire his players to succeed? Or, do his players succeed despite his coaching? Use evidence from the book to support your opinion.

OVERTIME:

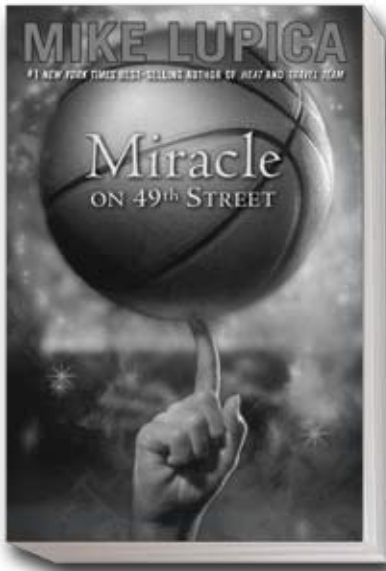
Extension Activities

- ⌚ Draw a map of The Right Way Basketball Camp. Include some of the dorms, Coffee Lake, and any locations important to the book's plot.
- ⌚ *Summer Ball* is the sequel to *Travel Team*. In *Travel Team*, the final game is between the Warriors and the Vikings. In *Summer Ball*, the final game is between the Celtics and the Lakers. Compare and contrast the final games in both books using a Venn diagram.
- ⌚ The campers at The Right Way Basketball Camp have limited phone access during their stay. Many would have sent letters or post cards home. Design a post card from The Right Way Basketball Camp and write a letter home from one of the character's perspectives. Include events from the book in your letter.



MIRACLE ON 49TH STREET

THE GAME PLAN: About the Book



Josh Cameron is MVP of the championship Boston Celtics and a media darling with a spotless reputation. He has it all . . . including a daughter he never knew he had. When twelve-year-old Molly Parker arrives in his life, claiming to be his daughter, she catches him off guard. Molly says her mom, Jen, revealed his identity before losing her battle with cancer. Josh isn't so sure about this girl—she must be trying to scam him for his money. Still, there's something about Molly that reminds him so much of Jen. But as Molly gets to know the real Josh, the one the camera never sees, she starts to understand why her mother never wanted her to know her dad. Josh has room in his heart for only two things: basketball and himself. Does Molly really want this man for a father? Together, these two strangers learn that sometimes, for things to end up the way you want them to, you have to fire up a prayer at the buzzer and hope it goes in.

OFFENSE VS. DEFENSE:

Discussion Questions

- ⑦ What evidence from the book suggests Josh Cameron never stopped caring for Jen Parker?
- ⑦ Molly describes her efforts to make Josh love her as a “test”. How would you describe both of their performances on the test? Were there any outside influences that helped them succeed? Who or what were these influences?
- ⑦ Describe Molly and Kimmy's relationship. Did Molly enjoy Kimmy? Did Kimmy enjoy having Molly in her home? What evidence in the text leads to these conclusions?
- ⑦ Molly's personality was a combination of both her parents' traits. In what ways is she like her mother? In what ways is she like her father? Look for specific references in the text.
- ⑦ In Chapter 2, Molly provides the following description of Sam: “Sam Bloom was basically shaped like a frog, although Molly would never tell him that. Somehow he seemed to get wider as he went from top to bottom. But to Molly, he was a fairy-tale frog who turned into a prince every time he opened his mouth and either smartened her up or made her laugh.” What are some of Sam's princely acts in the book?

OVERTIME:

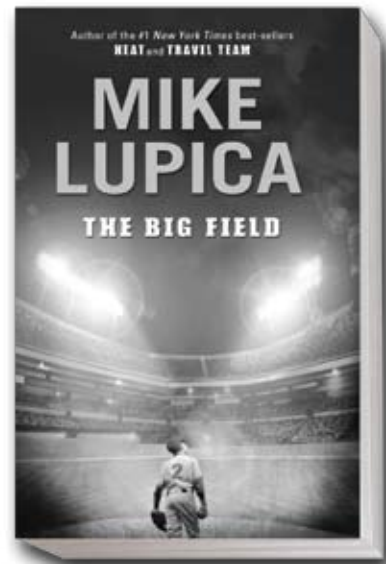
Extension Activities

- ⑦ Now that Molly and Josh are on the road to becoming a happy family, they will need to eliminate negative influences in their lives. Brainstorm possible actions they will have to take to make this happen. Select one of these actions, write a scene showcasing that action, assign character parts, and perform the scene for your class.
- ⑦ Josh Cameron signs a major Nike contract in *The Miracle on 49th Street*. Create a print ad or a commercial for Nike that features Josh and Molly together.
- ⑦ The Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center provides the backdrop for Josh and Molly's “miracle.” A tree that can create miracles has to be incredibly special. Use the internet to research the requirements that a tree needs to meet in order to become the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center. Create an informative poster about this year's tree.

THE BIG FIELD

THE GAME PLAN: About the Book

Playing shortstop is a way of life for Hutch—not only is his hero, Derek Jeter, a shortstop, but so was his father, a former local legend turned pro—which is why having to play second base feels like a demotion to second team. Yet that’s where Hutch ends up after Darryl “D-Will” Williams, the best shortstop prospect from Florida since A-Rod, joins the team. But Hutch is nothing if not a team player, and he’s cool with playing in D-Will’s shadow—until, that is, the two shortstops in Hutch’s life betray him in a way he never could have imagined. With the league championship on the line, just how far is Hutch willing to bend to be a good teammate?



OFFENSE VS. DEFENSE:

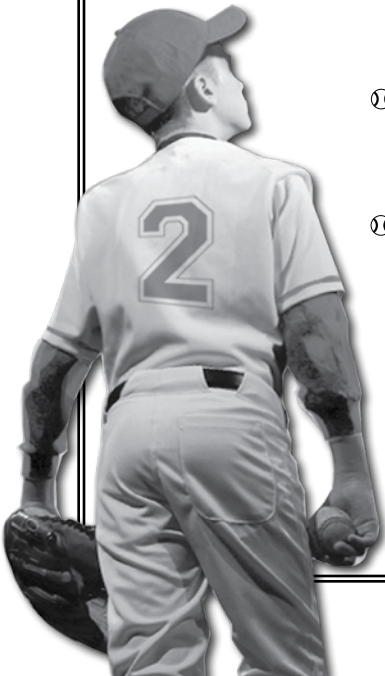
Discussion Questions

- ① Darryl reveals his father is not in the picture and while Hutch’s father is physically present, Hutch describes him as being “absent” from his life. Describe how both boys’ lack of relationships with their fathers influences them.
- ① Hutch is surrounded by shortstops whose influence play an important role in his athletic and personal development. Select one of these shortstops and describe his impact on Hutch’s life.
- ① After Hutch commits an error in game two of the American Legion playoffs, Cody says, “What do you think was worse? Hutch’s error or . . . Spider-Man 3?” How does this insult prove Cody is a great friend?
- ① Darryl is upset when Hutch is named Captain of the Cardinals. How does Darryl demonstrate his frustration? Does Darryl’s position change? What evidence in the book leads to this conclusion?
- ① Hutch’s relationship with his father evolves throughout the book. Describe the change in their relationship using evidence from the beginning, middle, and end of the book.

OVERTIME:

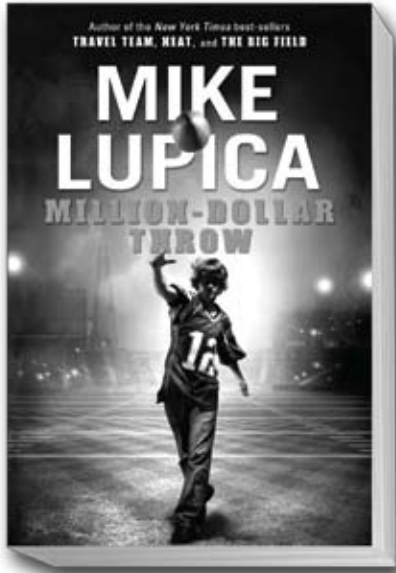
Extension Activities

- ① Create a baseball card for one of the players on the Cardinals. Illustrate the character on the front of the card and provide character details on the back. Include physical characteristics, character traits, and feelings on baseball.
- ① Select one of the many memorable plays described in *The Big Field* and write a play-by-play Readers’ Theater script of this moment in the game. Perform in front of the class.
- ① At the end of chapter 31, Darryl is preparing for his TV interview. Imagine you are he reporter; write questions you would like to ask Darryl. Create your own responses, or, select a partner to play the roll of Darryl and respond to your questions.



MILLION-DOLLAR THROW

THE GAME PLAN: About the Book



What would you do with a million dollars, if you were 13? Nate Brodie is nicknamed “Brady” not only for his arm, but also because he’s the biggest Tom Brady fan. He’s even saved up to buy an autographed football. And when he does, he wins the chance for something he’s never dreamed of—to throw a pass through a target at a Patriots’ game for one million dollars.

Nate should be excited. But things have been tough lately. His dad lost his job and his family is losing their home. It’s no secret that a million dollars would go a long way. So all Nate feels is pressure, and just when he needs it most, his golden arm begins to fail him. Even worse, his best friend Abby is going blind, slowly losing her ability to do the one thing she loves most—paint. Yet Abby never complains, and she is Nate’s inspiration. He knows she’ll be there when he makes the throw of a lifetime.

OFFENSE VS. DEFENSE:

Discussion Questions

- ⊗ At the beginning of the book, Nate saves \$250 to put toward a football signed by Tom Brady. What does this tell us about Nate? Nate’s parents pay the other \$250 for the ball. Why is it important to them to follow through on their promise to help Nate with this purchase even after Nate’s father loses his job?
- ⊗ Abby says, “I’m no good at going blind.” Even as her vision decreases, Abby resists using anything to assist her, including special goggles and a cane. Why is Abby hesitant to use these tools?
- ⊗ What contributes to Nate “losing his arm,” making it impossible for him to complete passes that were once easy for him? How does Nate’s father react when Nate says he is feeling pressure? Is it fair for Nate’s father to react this way? Has Nate’s father caused any of this pressure? What would have been a more helpful reaction?
- ⊗ Abby says, “That throw isn’t just for money, it’s for something a lot more valuable than that.” What does she mean by this? Whom does the throw mean the most to in this book?
- ⊗ Do you think it is a good idea for Abby to attend the Perkins School for the Blind? Give reasons for your opinion.
- ⊗ What do Abby’s orange sunglasses have in common with Nate’s father’s “Big Bill’s” shirt? What did being benched help Nate realize? Did it make him a better player?
- ⊗ Nate creates distance between himself and Abby after she returns from her week at the Perkins School. Why does he do this? When does he realize this is a mistake and what does he do to fix it?
- ⊗ Nate’s mom says Nate “leads with his heart.” How does he demonstrate this throughout the book? How does his decision for what to do with the million dollars reinforce this?

OVERTIME:

Extension Activities

- ⊗ Think of something you enjoy doing. If you lost your sight, how would this task would be harder? Create an invention that would help you complete this activity. Draw a diagram or a picture of your invention and write a paragraph explaining its beneficial qualities.
- ⊗ Nate receives a lot of attention from the press in the months and weeks leading up to his “Million-Dollar Throw”. Create a TV segment or write a magazine article that documents the moments leading up to the big throw.
- ⊗ There are many resources for the visually impaired. Find information on Braille, seeing-eye dogs, or adaptive devices that enlarge or enhance images. Present your findings.
- ⊗ Nate was not a math whiz in school, but he did know how to calculate a quarterback’s passer rating. Look up the formula for calculating passer ratings. Then, look up the passer rating of your favorite quarterback. If the highest rating a quarter back can receive is 158.3, how does your quarterback stack up?
- ⊗ In 2005, an Army veteran named Chris Bostic completed a 25 yard pass for a million dollars during a Florida State/Clemson game. Find an article about Bostic’s amazing throw. Compare Bostic’s throw with Nate’s throw. For fun, see if you can throw a football through a target. How far can you go?



Official Sneak Peek! An excerpt from Million-Dollar Throw—

This was always the best of it for Nate Brodie, when he felt the slap of the ball in his hands and began to back away from the center, when he felt as if he could see the whole field, and football made perfect sense to him.

Sometimes when you were thirteen nothing seemed to make sense, and the world came at you faster and trickier than flying objects in a video game.

It was never like that for Nate in football.

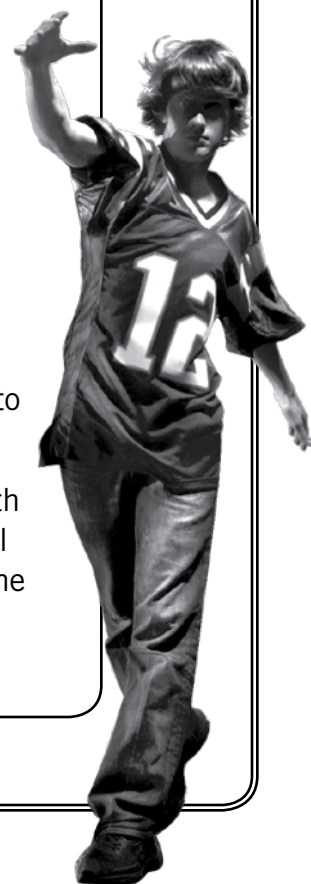
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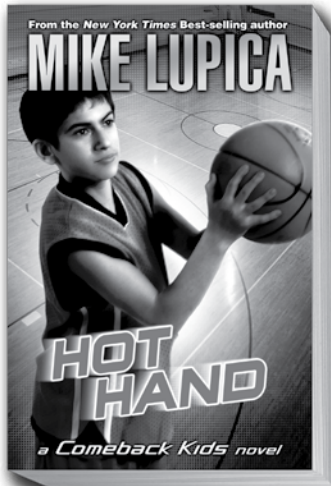
He had been having more and more trouble figuring out his world lately, especially with everything that had been happening to his family. School was school—he tried hard, but there were times he just felt lost, in search of answers that wouldn’t come.

And no matter how hard he tried, how hard he could try, he was never going to make sense out of what was happening to his friend Abby.

But on a Saturday morning like this, underneath all the sun and blue sky, with the guys in the line already into their blocks, and Nate feeling as if he had all day to throw the ball—feeling that weird calm he always felt in the pocket—he had all the answers.

Football was like this for Nate Brodie.





HOT HAND

THE GAME PLAN: About the Book

It's simple. All Billy Raynor wants to do is shoot. After all, he is one of the best shooters in the league. But with his dad as his coach, and his parents newly separated, somehow everything's become complicated. His brother Ben hardly talks anymore. His mom is always traveling on business. And his dad is always on his case about not being a team player. But when Ben's piano recital falls on the same day as the championship game, it's Billy who teaches his dad the meaning of being a team player.

OFFENSE VS. DEFENSE:

Discussion Questions

- ⑦ "Sometimes Billy felt like he'd been missing his mom even more than his dad, even though she was the parent still living in the house." Why does Billy feel this way? What events in the book help you understand his feelings?
- ⑦ Why does Billy delete the message from Ben's piano teacher that said Ben skipped practice? Did he help Ben by doing this?
- ⑦ Does having his father coach him in basketball help Billy's relationship with his father or hurt it? What evidence in the book supports this opinion?
- ⑦ Joe Raynor complains that Billy is not "involved" enough with his team and implies that Billy is a selfish player. Do you believe Billy is a selfish player? With their family, who is more "involved," Billy or his father? How could Joe benefit from some coaching from his son?
- ⑦ Billy chooses his brother's recital over his championship game. What does this do for his relationship with Ben? What does this do for his relationship with his father?

LONG SHOT

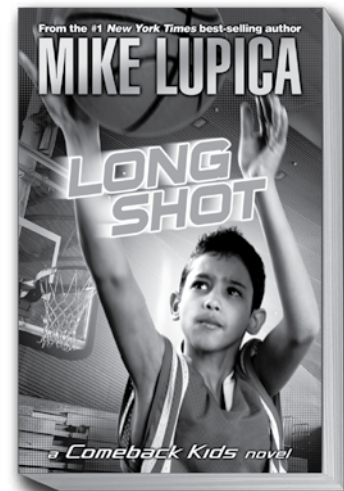
THE GAME PLAN: About the Book

Pedro Morales has always been content helping others look great. The ultimate point guard, he plays the game to set up his teammates—Ned, in particular, the star forward on the receiving end of Pedro's pinpoint passes. Pedro wants to make his father proud, and so he runs for class president. Yet doing so means going one-on-one against Ned, easily the most popular boy in school. And Pedro learns the hard way that being a good teammate doesn't mean that others will return the favor. Now Pedro wants to win more than ever—but this time, it's for himself.

OFFENSE VS. DEFENSE:

Discussion Questions

- ⑦ How does Ned feel about Pedro running for president? How does he express his feelings? What are some specific things he does to show Pedro how he feels?
- ⑦ Luis Morales has a strong influence on his son. How does his influence lead Pedro to run for class president? How does he help change Pedro's attitude toward basketball?
- ⑦ When Pedro and his father are together for "Soccer Saturdays," they spend a lot of time talking about their dreams. What are Luis' dreams for Pedro? What are Pedro's dreams for himself? What are Luis dreams for his family? How do their dreams fit together?
- ⑦ What was different in the way Ned and Pedro each prepared for their debate? Whose method paid off in the end? Why was that person's method a better strategy?
- ⑦ Before the election results are announced, Ned says to Pedro, "I was so afraid I might lose at something that I forgot the way real winners are supposed to act...Real winners act exactly like you." How does Pedro act like a winner throughout the book? How does Ned show the qualities of a winner toward the end of the book?



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SAFE AT HOME

THE GAME PLAN: About the Book

Nick Crandall feels like he doesn't belong anywhere. He never *has* felt like he belongs, really. He doesn't fit in his new family with his new foster parents, both of whom are professors. They don't know the first thing about sports—and he's not exactly a model student. It's only a matter of time until they realize he's not the right kid for them. And Nick certainly doesn't belong playing varsity baseball. He's only twelve years old! His teammates want a catcher their own age, not some kid. But Nick needs to prove something. He needs to prove that he belongs—to his parents, to his team, and to himself.

OFFENSE VS. DEFENSE:

Discussion Questions

- ⑩ How did Nick end up playing varsity baseball as a seventh grader?
- ⑩ What kind of reception did Nick receive from his varsity teammates when he joined the team? Why did they treat Nick this way?
- ⑩ Nick felt that his adoptive father did not understand him. How did his father prove he was wrong? What efforts did Nick make to connect with his father?
- ⑩ How did Gracie help Nick through his baseball slump? Use specific examples from the book to support your answer.
- ⑩ Nick felt connected to the comic book character Captain Marvel. What did Nick and Captain Marvel have in common? What special power did Captain Marvel have that Nick envied? Why did Nick want this power?



TWO-MINUTE DRILL

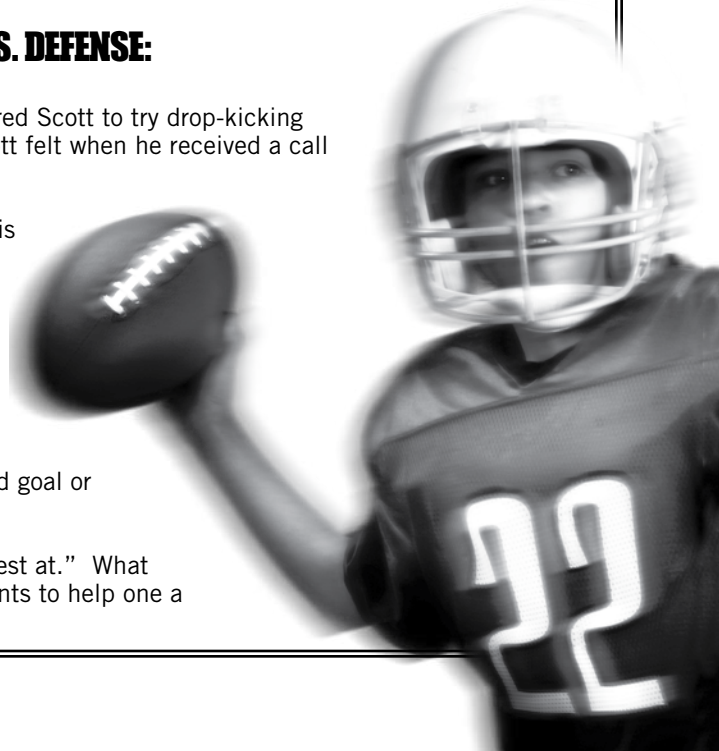
THE GAME PLAN: About the Book

Chris Conlan is the coolest kid in sixth grade—the golden-armed quarterback of the football team and the boy all the others look up to. Scott Parry is the new kid—the boy with the huge brain, but with feet that trip over themselves. These two boys may seem like an odd couple, but each has a secret that draws them together, and proves that the will to succeed is even more important than raw talent.

OFFENSE VS. DEFENSE:

Discussion Questions

- ⑩ Which professional player inspired Scott to try drop-kicking the ball? How do you think Scott felt when he received a call from this player?
- ⑩ What character trait helped Chris improve his school work? How did Scott use this trait to help Chris learn?
- ⑩ How do you think Coach Dolan and his son, Jimmy, will view Scott after the championship game? Do you think Scott will change his opinions of the Dolan men?
- ⑩ What was the bigger accomplishment: Scott kicking a winning field goal or Chris passing his test? Explain.
- ⑩ Scott's dad says, "You don't always get to pick the things you're best at." What thing was Scott best at doing? Chris? How did they use their talents to help one another?

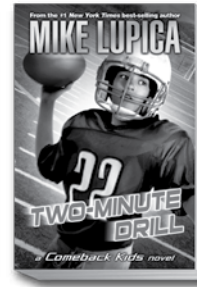


TEAM WORK

Thematic Connections

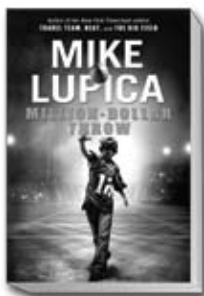
Mike Lupica's books lend themselves to many areas of thematic study and as such, can be easily incorporated into classroom discussions and serve as prompts for writing workshops. Combine the elements and characters found in several books to make a complete lesson about a number of important topics.

FRIENDSHIP



Friendship can take on many different forms but a supportive and loyal bond is always at the foundation of any good relationship. Still, problems can arise and learning to work through these issues is what makes friendships stronger. In *The Big Field*, Hutch is betrayed by the people he thought were his friends, and he has to put it all behind him in order to succeed. In *Long Shot*, Pedro helps his friends and teammates strive to do their best and hopes for them to return the favor when he runs for class president. True friendship can be seen between Nate and Abby in *Million-Dollar Throw*. They inspire and support each other throughout the story. Friendship can even be found between the most unexpected people. *Two-Minute Drill*, Chris—the coolest kid in school—befriends Scott—the smart but clumsy new kid. These two boys may seem like an odd couple, but each has a secret that draws them together. Ask your students to define friendship. What does the word mean to them? Students should make a list of adjectives and nouns that describe and represent their idea of friendship and then use these words to create a poem. Or let each student pick a friend who is special to them, whether it be in or outside of class, and write a letter to that person telling them what their friendship means to them.

HEROES



Heroes are usually thought of in a much larger context—sports players, movie stars, famous folks from history. But many of the best and brightest shining heroes can be found right in your hometown, school, or even your very own family! In *Million-Dollar Throw*, Nate is nicknamed Brady because he's the biggest Tom Brady fan, but Nate also finds inspiration—and heroine qualities—in Abby and her struggle to keep her eyesight. In *Miracle on 49th Street*, Josh is the MVP of the Boston Celtics and has many fans who consider him their hero—but he has to learn how to be an entirely different type of hero to his twelve-year-old daughter, Molly. In *Travel Team*, Danny becomes his team's most unlikely hero. In *The Big Field*, Hutch, a huge Derek Jeter fan, has to pull it together to help win the championship and become his own hero. Ask your students to make a list of their top three heroes. How many of the children automatically listed a family member, friend, or teacher? A sports player? Have each student choose one hero to research and give an oral report on. Have them bring in old magazines and newspapers, and search the internet or conduct interviews for information.

THE UNDERDOG



Life throws us plenty of curveballs, and whether we attempt to hit them or let them fly by, we all make decisions to overcome these obstacles. Nate struggles with several obstacles in *Million-Dollar Throw*—including his ailing throwing arm—as he prepares for the throw of a lifetime. And it's this throw that Nate believes is his shot to help his family recover from the challenges they're facing. In *Summer Ball* and *Travel Team*, Danny must overcome his height disadvantage and prove he's a capable ballplayer, even at his size. In *Heat*, we're introduced to Michael and Carlos, who have to conquer huge obstacles just to be seen and heard. In *Safe at Home*, Nick must win over his teammates to prove he's good enough to be their catcher, even though he's much younger than the other boys on his new team. Have each student write a short story using one of the characters from the stories above. Have them invent scenarios where the characters make different decisions to overcome the obstacles they face than they did in the books. How does this change the outcome?

TEAMWORK



Working together is a key ingredient in getting things accomplished, whether it is a win for the team, finishing a school project, or completing a task in a family or community. In *Long Shot*, Pedro helps to make his team look good and encourages them to work together for a big win. When we meet Hutch in *The Big Field*, we find that he's able to easily help out any member of his team, even when they're not so gracious in return. In *Heat*, Carlos and Michael must use teamwork in their efforts to try to stay together as a family. We can see that Billy knows what teamwork is when he helps his father make some tough choices in *Hot Hand*. As a class, come together and discuss the importance of teamwork and where we would be without it. Have each student discuss a situation where they needed to use teamwork to achieve a purpose. How would the end result have been different if they had worked alone?

GIVING 100%



Striving for perfection is very common. Everyone wants to do their very best, even when certain circumstances make it challenging. In *Safe at Home*, we meet Nick, who is the new kid in town. In an effort to belong, Nick tries very hard to fit in playing with the varsity baseball team—even though he's only twelve. In *Travel Team* and *Summer Ball*, Danny must show his team that despite his height, he's still a great player. In *Long Shot*, Pedro balances giving 100% on the basketball court with giving 100% to his race for class president against the most popular kid in school. Ask your students to think of something that they worked very hard for and gave their all to get. Have them write a passage about how they achieved their goal. Then ask your students to make a list of long term and short term goals and a plan for how they'll accomplish each goal.

THE ROSTER

books by

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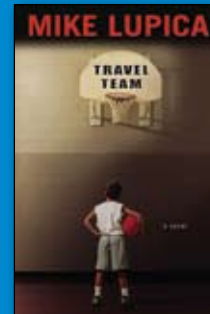
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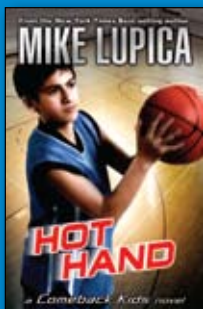
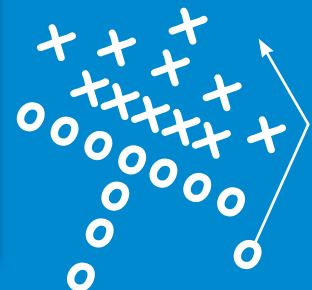
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