



CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR

Airball: My Life in Briefs

by **Lisa Harkrader**

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Square Fish, 2008

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Barb Bahm, library goddess for the Tonganoxie, Kansas, school district, created this curriculum guide for the William Allen White Children's Book Awards. It is used with her permission.

SYNOPSIS

Kirby Nickel, an uncoordinated seventh-grader from Stuckey, Kansas, joins the school's basketball team in hopes of meeting NBA star Brett McGrew, whom he thinks is the father he has never known.

GENERAL REVIEW

An untalented group of seventh-grade boys get a chance to meet its small Kansas town's basketball hero when his jersey is retired at a University of Kansas game. The school board refuses to let the team go unless they win games. Next comes the coach's unique way of motivating the players (hint: "The Emperor's New Clothes"). Told from a first-person narrative, the reader will laugh at times but also feel the Kirby's pain while trying to figure out if the home town basketball hero is the father he has never known. Experience life in a small town that revolves around youth or college sports. Fun book that would make a good read aloud during the middle school basketball season.

AWARDS

William Allen White Children's Book Award

Kansas Notable Book

Junior Library Guild Selection

Friends of American Writers Juvenile Literary Award

NY Public Library Best Books for the Teen Age

Bank Street College Best Books of the Year

Thorp Menn Award Finalist

Texas Lonestar Award list

Maine Student Book Award list

Washington Sasquatch Award list

Florida Sunshine State Young Reader Award list

THEMES

Basketball—Fiction; Fathers—Fiction; Coaches (Athletics)—Fiction; Kansas—Fiction.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Standard 3, Benchmark 3

- In the book, Kirby assumes that Brett McGrew was his father because of circumstantial evidence. Have you ever assumed something was true because of something you have heard or seen?
- In the book, the coach had a unique way of motivating his players. What are some ways in which your parents, teachers and coaches motivate you?
- Are there any connections between this book and your own life?
- Out of the twelve players on the team, which player would you like to have your family meet? Why?
- What are your favorite lines or quotes? Why?

ACTIVITIES

- Write a team song for Kirby's team. Pick a tune that is familiar, then write the lyrics that include details that would encourage the team. Perform the song for class.

Standard 3, Benchmark 4

- Compare *Airball* to one of the following movies: *Like Mike*, *Angels in the Outfield*, or *The Mighty Ducks*. After watching the movie, make a Venn diagram showing similarities and differences.

Standard 2, Benchmark 2; Standard 3, Benchmark 1

- Research University of Kansas basketball. Find out if there were any players who played for the University of Kansas and were born in Kansas who made it to the NBA. A site you might use is:

<http://kuathletics.cstv.com>

Standard 1, Benchmark 5



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