

Student's Name: _____ School: _____ Level: _____

Abby Takes Her Shot
by Susan M. Dyckman

A blast of the buzzer ended the game, and the Hawks had won another close one.

“Yes!” shouted Abby, leaping from the bench. Her throat hurt from cheering so hard. The Hawks were undefeated after thirteen games—the best record a Willow Grove Middle School team had ever had.

1a. What have you learned about Abby?

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Not that Abby had made much of a contribution. Her playing time totaled only about ten minutes for the entire season. It didn't help when her brother Michael teased her as she walked toward the locker room. “You're a cheerleader in a basketball uniform,” he said. “All you need are pompoms.”

1b. What more have you learned about Abby?

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Abby felt her Mom's eyes on her from the bleachers. Abby forced a little wave, but her eyes stung from tears. She ducked into the bathroom before joining Coach McKenzie and her teammates.

Coach was all smiles. "Girls, your defense was awesome," she said. "And Kathy, your free-throw shooting helped a lot. Nice game."

Abby felt like shouting, "My free-throw shooting could help, too—if I could just get in the game!" She thought of the hours she'd spent practicing. Foul shots, lay-ups, dribbling.

Mom said it was worth it. Abby was a fifth-grader, and she'd made the team. Made it through two rounds of cuts during the try-outs. But Abby learned quickly that making the team and playing in the games were two different things.

Mom was waiting in the car. Abby blinked back tears as she opened the door. She knew Mom wanted her to succeed as much as Abby wanted to herself.

"Are you OK?" Mom asked.

Abby swallowed hard and nodded. Mom squeezed her hand as they pulled out of the parking lot. Mom always knew when it was best to say nothing.

Suppertime was quiet. Dad had taken Michael to a Scout meeting, so Abby was spared her brother's teasing. She and Mom talked about next week's class trip to the aquarium. After clearing the table, Abby went to her room to do her homework.

When she'd finished, Abby grabbed her basketball and raced downstairs. As she flicked on the outdoor lights, Mom came up behind her. "Want some company?" she asked.

"I guess," Abby answered.

Mom took her spot under the basket. Abby always led off their "make it, take it" games.

"I know what you're going to say," Abby began. "I made the team, and I should be happy."

"Not this time, Abby," Mom said. She passed the ball back, and Abby hit her second jump shot in a row. "I just want to say that I'm proud of you for hanging in there."

Abby's next shot bounced off the rim. Mom grabbed the ball and dribbled back to the free-throw line.

"What time is your game on Saturday?" Mom asked as she shot.

"Ten-thirty," Abby said. She held the ball tightly and looked at Mom. "I really thought I'd play more. Even in fifth grade."

"I know you did, honey." Mom put her arms around Abby and hugged her tight. "Your time will come."

2. What do you think will happen in the rest of the story? What makes you think this?

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The gym was packed for Saturday's game, the last one of the season. The lead seesawed back and forth, and the Hawks' starters were breathing hard at half time. Coach McKenzie was encouraging. "Stick to your game," she said. "Work the ball around until you get an open shot."

The crowd cheered as the second half began. Abby watched intently as the players ran up and down the court. The score remained close, and the Hawks trailed by one point in the final minute.

"Come on, Hawks," Abby breathed. A few seconds later, Kathy stole the ball and raced toward the basket. As she went up for the shot, an opponent slammed into her, knocking her to the floor. Kathy did not get up. The gym got very quiet as Coach McKenzie and the trainer checked her ankle.

3. Picture what is happening right now. Describe it including as many characters as you can.

The referee came over to the bench. "Coach, you need a sub at the free-throw line. She gets two shots."

Coach looked at the players on the bench. She'd always stressed the importance of free-throw shooting. Who had paid attention? Kathy, for one. And...Abby. She hadn't played much this season, but she can certainly shoot.

"Abby," Coach said. "You're in."

Abby's stomach flipped. "Me?" she said. "Now?"

Coach stepped closer to her. "I've watched you in practice," she said. "You can do this."

Abby jumped up, reported in at the scorer's table, and walked to the line.

She glanced at the scoreboard. Two points and a few seconds of defense would win the game. The referee handed Abby the ball. She took a deep breath. Two bounces. She crouched and let the ball fly.

Swish.

The crowd roared.

"One more," Abby thought. She caught the ball. Bounce, bounce. Shoot.

The gym exploded with cheers as the ball went through the hoop. Seconds later the buzzer sounded. The Hawks were undefeated. Abby's time had come.

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4. What can you learn from Abby's experience?
