

★ American Girl®

# Julie

1974

A Teacher's Guide to

## The Big Break

*A story about the 1970s,  
a time of change in America*

Lexile measure: 670L



## About the Book

Growing up in San Francisco in the 1970s, fourth-grader Julie Albright is struggling to deal with her parents' recent divorce at a time when divorce wasn't common. She is moving from her house to an apartment in a new neighborhood with her mother and older sister. She misses her dad, though she sees him on weekends, and she wishes her sister, Tracy, didn't blame the new situation on him. At Julie's new elementary school, the only person who makes her feel welcome is T. J., a boy who appreciates her interest in playing basketball. There are no girls' team sports at Jack London Elementary School, so Julie decides she wants to play on the boys' team. When the coach tells her the team is for boys only, Julie circulates a "Let Girls Play, Too" petition and delivers it first to the coach, who tosses it in the garbage, and then to the principal. Julie finds out that it takes courage and perseverance to create change, and through it all she begins to accept the change in her family as well. (Lexile measure: 670L)

## About This Guide

This guide encourages students to be careful readers without diminishing the pleasure they gain from reading. The layered discussion questions deal with the themes of family, friendship, courage, change, trust, belonging, and changing women's roles. While the decade of the 1970s isn't usually taught as part of the elementary school curriculum, Julie's story and this guide offer natural connections to the language arts, social studies, math, and science curricula. Some activities take longer to complete than others, and a teacher should feel free to use only those activities that meet the learning needs of most of the students in the class. It is recommended that students read the entire book before engaging in a detailed study of the novel.

## Common Core Standards

Common Core Standards are applied to the discussion and activities to aid schools that use the standards. Those schools that don't use the standards should simply ignore them and recognize that the guide supports a quality reading program.

## Pre-Reading Activity

The 1970s are often referenced in popular culture, and many students' parents grew up in the 1970s, so students may be familiar with aspects of the decade's culture or events. Ask students to share what they know about the 1970s. Then have them read "Inside Julie's World" (p. 104-109), and lead a class discussion about the social changes of the era. Have students list the social changes they learned about in the essay. What would such changes mean for a fourth-grade girl like Julie? Have students write a paragraph that predicts the conflicts in the novel: How might the era's social changes play out in Julie's story? Allow time in class for students to read aloud what they have written. Consider all ideas and make a class prediction about *The Big Break*.

*Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Reading Informational Text: Key Ideas & Details RI. 3-4.3; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 3-4.1; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 3-4.4; Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 3-4.4.*

## Thematic Connections

### Family

Describe Julie's family. How has the divorce changed each relationship? Contrast how Julie's mom and dad react to her effort to get on the basketball team. How does Julie's family project help her come to terms with the divorce? How do Julie and Tracy help each other cope with difficult feelings about their family?

### Friendship

Describe Julie and Ivy's friendship. How does Julie's petition temporarily threaten her friendship with Ivy? Debate whether Ivy or Julie is being selfish in the argument that leads to their falling-out. How does Ivy repair their friendship? Describe how Julie and T. J. become friends. Contrast T. J. with the Water Fountain Girls. How do they treat Julie? Discuss whether the Water Fountain Girls accept Julie by the end of the novel.

### Courage

Define courage. How does it take courage for Julie to ask Coach Manley to allow her to try out for the basketball team? Describe the coach's reaction, and explain how it gives Julie the courage to keep pushing for her right to play on the team. How does Hank inspire Julie in her effort? Cite other examples of times when Julie needs courage, such as taking her petition to the principal, confessing to Tracy about having damaged her science project, and telling her class about "the worst thing that ever happened" to her.

### Change

What changes does Julie face in her life, and how does she deal with them? Discuss which change is the hardest for her. What does Julie learn from Hank about ways to change people's minds on important social issues? After Julie tears up her petition in a fit of frustration and anger, how does Hank change her mind about giving up? Use examples from the book to show how Principal Sanchez is more open to change than Coach Manley. Think about the novel's title, *The Big Break*. What does it refer to? Together as a class, make a list of its possible meanings, using examples and incidents from the story.

### Trust

Julie is worried about making friends in a new school. Her mom says, "Sometimes you just have to trust in yourself and take a chance." (p. 8) Discuss how Julie's mom took a chance when she started her own business. How does Julie learn to trust in herself and take a chance?

### Women's Roles

Why is Julie's class surprised when their teacher introduces herself as Ms. Hunter? Do you agree with Ms. Hunter's reason for using this title? Describe the reactions of Ivy, Julie's father, and Julie's mother when Julie announces that she wants to play on the boys' basketball team. Debate whether you think Julie's experience trying to join the basketball team will make her care about women's roles and issues in the future.

*Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 3-4.1, RL. 3-4.3; Craft & Structure RL. 3-4.5, RL. 3-4.6; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 3-4.7, RL. 3-4.9; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-4.1; Knowledge of Language L. 3-4.3; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 3-4.1, SL. 3-4.2, SL. 3-4.3; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 3-4.6.*

## Curriculum Connections

### Physical Education/Sports

The 1970s brought many changes for women in sports. Those striving to gain equal rights for women were older and didn't have the advantages of Title IX when they were fourth-graders like Julie. One of the women credited with paving the way for girls in sports is Billie Jean King. Read about King and watch the video where she talks about women's sports and her experience with the Battle of the Sexes on the following website: [womenintheworld.com/2017/09/21/billie-jean-king-speaks-about-impact-of-beating-one-of-her-heroes-in-battle-of-the-sexes](http://womenintheworld.com/2017/09/21/billie-jean-king-speaks-about-impact-of-beating-one-of-her-heroes-in-battle-of-the-sexes). Instruct students to write a letter that Julie might write to Billie Jean King telling her about her own struggle to join the boys' basketball team at Jack London Elementary School. At the end of the letter, students should pose three questions for King about her journey to gain equal respect as an athlete.

*Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Reading Informational Text: Key Ideas & Details RI. 3-4.2; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-4.2.*

### Social Studies

Julie's mom tells her, "Anytime you try to change something, it's going to be difficult." (p. 44) Then she tells Julie about the hard work it took to get women the right to vote. Have students take a virtual field trip to the Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, New York: [nps.gov/wori/historyculture/index.htm](http://nps.gov/wori/historyculture/index.htm). Instruct them to document in writing each exhibit (see the People, Places, Stories, and Collections links). What is the most memorable exhibit? How does the park trace the long struggle for women's rights? Ask students to write an overall reaction to the field trip. Why is the park important?

*Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-4.2, W. 3-4.3.*

### Language Arts

*Simile* is a type of figurative language that writers use to create images in the reader's mind. Similes use *like* or *as* to compare two objects or ideas. Explain the following simile that describes how Julie felt when approaching strangers to ask them to sign her petition: "Each time, it was like stepping out onstage at a school play, worrying she'd trip over a prop or forget her lines." (p. 39) What is Julie's stage? What is her prop? What are her lines? How does the simile convey what Julie is feeling?

*Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 3-4.5.*

### Vocabulary/Use of Language

The vocabulary in the novel isn't difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them using clues from the context. Such words may include *exotic* (p. 2), *confident* (p. 5), *prism* (p. 5), *demerit* (p. 11), *chauvinist* (p. 30), *petition* (p. 35), *exasperation* (p. 40), *legendary* (p. 74), *conspiratorial* (p. 77), *riveted* (p. 83), and *mettle* (p. 99).

*Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Reading Literature: Craft & Structure RL. 3-4.4; Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 3-4.4.*

## About the Author



Megan McDonald grew up in a house full of books and sisters—four sisters, who inspire many of the stories she writes. She has loved to write ever since she was ten, when she got her first story published in her school newspaper. Megan vividly remembers growing up in the 1970s, from making apple-seed bracelets to learning the metric system. She lives with her husband in Sebastopol, California, which is about 90 minutes north of San Francisco. Megan writes the Judy Moody series and many other books for young people.

## More Stories About Julie

- *Julie Takes a Stand*  
Find out what happens after *The Big Break*. (Lexile measure: 710L)
- *And the Tiara Goes To: A Julie Albright Movie*  
This 15-minute movie is loosely adapted from *The Big Break*. It features Julie’s basketball storyline and can be watched on YouTube.
- *An American Girl Story—Ivy and Julie 1976: A Happy Balance*  
This 43-minute movie focuses on Ivy’s family and her Chinese heritage, and can be watched on Amazon Prime.

## Key to Common Core Standards Referenced in This Guide

### Reading Literature

#### *Key Ideas & Details*

RL. 3-4.1—Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RL. 3-4.3—Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text.

#### *Craft & Structure*

RL. 3-4.4—Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text.

RL. 3-4.5—Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.

RL. 3-4.6—Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

#### *Integration of Knowledge & Ideas*

RL. 3-4.7—Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

RL. 3-4.9—Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events.

## Reading Informational Text

### *Key Ideas & Details*

RI. 3-4.2—Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.

RI. 3-4.3—Describe the relationship between a series of historical events in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.

## Language

### *Conventions of Standard English*

L. 3-4.1—Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

### *Knowledge of Language*

L. 3-4.3—Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

### *Vocabulary Acquisition & Use*

L. 3-4.4—Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade-level reading and content.

L. 3-4.5—Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meaning.

## Speaking & Listening

### *Comprehension & Collaboration*

SL. 3-4.1—Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade-level topics and texts with peers and adults in small and large groups.

SL. 3-4.2—Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

SL. 3-4.3—Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.

### *Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas*

SL. 3-4.4—Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.

SL. 3-4.6—Speak in complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification.

## Writing

### *Text Types & Purposes*

W. 3-4.2—Write information/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

W. 3-4.3—Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events; include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings; use temporal words to

signal event order; and provide a sense of closure.

*Production & Distribution of Writing*

W. 3-4.4—With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.

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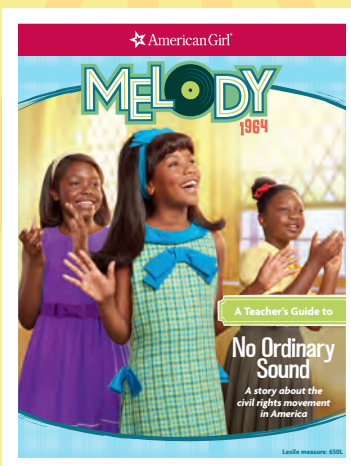
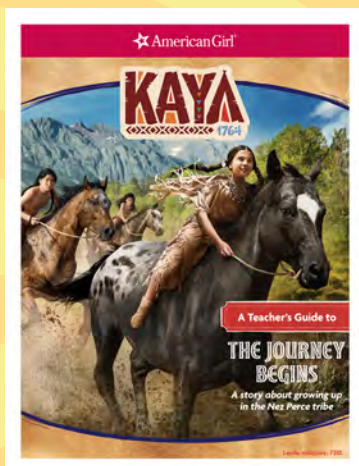
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## Characters That Teach

American Girl's line of historical fiction for middle-grade readers was originally conceived and developed by a former classroom teacher. These books and characters are grounded in thorough historical research and bring history to life for children.

Each historical character's story helps readers make connections. Girls and boys can explore the past, find their place in the present, and think about the possibilities the future can bring. They will see how a young person can stand up for what he or she cares about most: helping others, protecting the earth, and overcoming injustice. Through these stories, young readers will discover how staying true to their own beliefs helps define *their* character.

Find more Teacher's Guides at [www.americangirl.com/guides](http://www.americangirl.com/guides).



Developed by Pat Scales, Children's Literature Consultant, Greenville, SC.  
 Advisory committee: Brenda Autz, Park Elementary School, Cross Plains, WI;  
 Susan Hamblin, Teacher-Leader Social Studies, retired, Madison (WI) Metropolitan  
 School District; Jenniper Hylbert, Park Elementary School, Cross Plains, WI;  
 and Kristen McDaniel, Social Studies Consultant, Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction.