

the  
**HIGHEST**  
NUMBER  
in the **WORLD**

Roy MacGregor

ILLUSTRATED BY  
Geneviève Després

ACTIVITY GUIDE

TUNDRA BOOKS

# DEAR EDUCATOR

*The Highest Number in the World* is a lovely intergenerational tale that all students can relate to. Teachers can use the text in a number of ways including:

- As an instructional tool for learning to retell narratives
- As a way to teach how to identify problems and solutions in stories
- As a discussion point about making personal connections to characters and story events
- As a fun and engaging read-aloud experience

The activity guide that follows includes discussion questions, activities and prompts to elicit a meaningful understanding of the text for children in grades K–2. All activities can be adapted to suit your students' ages and needs.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Nine-year-old Gabe (DON'T call her Gabriella) Murray eats, sleeps and breathes hockey. Her lucky number is 22, the same number as her hero, Hayley Wickenheiser. But when her new coach hands out the team jerseys, Gabe is stuck with number 9. She's crushed. How can she play without her lucky number?

Gabe's grandmother, Gabriella (DON'T call her Gabe), soon sets her straight. The number 9 has a long and interesting history and little Gabe has lots to learn about the players who wore it — including Gabriella herself. Gabe begins to see that the number 9 isn't so bad after all ...

A celebration of the legendary number 9 in hockey and a touching tale of a love for the sport handed down through generations, *The Highest Number in the World* is a story for hockey fans big and small.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roy MacGregor is the author of many hockey literature classics such as *The Screech Owls* series; *The Home Team: Fathers, Sons & Hockey*; and *Home Game: Hockey and Life in Canada*. He was named a media inductee to the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2012, and he has been involved in hockey all his life, from playing all-star hockey in Huntsville, Ontario, against the likes of Bobby Orr, to coaching. He still plays hockey in Ottawa where he lives with his wife, Ellen. They have four grown children, and Roy was inspired to write *The Highest Number in the World* when his now grown-up daughter starting playing hockey as a young girl. His lucky number is 13.



Photo credit: Fred Lum / *The Globe and Mail*

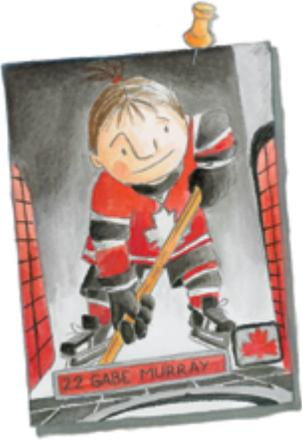


Photo credit: Geneviève Després

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Geneviève Després completed a degree in industrial design at the Université de Montréal, but decided instead to pursue her first passion: drawing. She turned to illustration and has worked in educational publishing, advertising, editorial and children's literature. Geneviève has illustrated many books for children, including *Le petit chevalier qui n'aimait pas la pluie* and *La grève du bain*. As a girl, Geneviève was very athletic and was always picked first for games — even before the boys! She didn't play hockey because girls weren't offered the opportunity, but she cheers for all three of her boys (including her husband) who play. Geneviève lives in Saint-Lambert with her family.

# BEFORE YOU READ



- Introduce the front cover and title of the book. Ask for predictions as to what the story will be about. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:
  - What characters are in the story?
  - What is the setting of the story?
  - What do you think might happen?
  - What do you think the problem that needs to be solved will be?
  - What do you think the title means?
- What does it mean to feel disappointed? Can you think of a time that you felt disappointed? How did you deal with your feelings of disappointment?

# AFTER YOU READ

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use the following prompts to guide a class discussion after reading.

- How was Gabe different from the other children trying out for the Spirit? How do you think she felt when she learned that she made the team? Why wasn't anybody surprised she made the team?
- What special jersey did Gabe wear during the tryout? Who is Hayley Wickenheiser?
- How did Gabe know that she wasn't going to get number 22 before the coach handed her the jersey? Why was she so upset with the jersey she was given?
- Gabe's mom tries to reason with Gabe and says, "Don't you think you're overreacting a bit? It's just a number." What does she mean? Have you ever overreacted to something?
- Who is Gabe named after? Why does Grandma tell Gabe that she is lucky? How does Grandma convince Gabe to change her mind about wearing the number 9 jersey?
- Which famous hockey players wore the number 9? Why doesn't anybody wear it anymore? Grandma tells Gabe that "The number's too high." What does she mean?
- Do you have a favorite number? What is its significance?
- What was your favorite part of the story? What was your least favorite? Why?



# VOCABULARY

- Locate the following words in the text. Read each word in the sentence in which it is found to help determine the word's meaning.
  - nifty
  - autographs
  - squealed
  - replica
  - embarrassing
  - rafters
  - idol
  - overreacting
  - dazzling
  - shrine
  - silhouette



# SEQUENCE

- Cut out the sentence strips. As a class, in small groups or individually, arrange the sentence strips in the correct sequence. Draw a picture to match each sentence strip.

**Coach Lebrun handed Gabe the jersey with number 9.**

**Gabe tried out for the best hockey team in town.**

**Gabe went to her first Spirit practice wearing the number 9 jersey.**

**Grandma explained to Gabe that she wore a hockey sweater with the number 9.**

**Gabe hid her Spirit jersey in her room.**

# EVENTS

- Every story needs a strong beginning, middle and ending. As a class, in small groups or in partners, divide the book into three sections: beginning, middle and ending.
- Select one major event in the story and rewrite the event. For example, what if Gabe's grandmother had not come to talk to her? How would the rest of the story change?



# EVENTS (CONTINUED)

- Draw a picture of what you think was the most important event in the story. Write a sentence underneath explaining why you chose the event.



The most important event in the story was

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This was important because

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# PROBLEM / SOLUTION

- Every story has a problem that needs to be solved. What is the major problem in this story that needs to be solved? How is it solved? Illustrate and/or write about the problem and solution in the story.

**PROBLEM**

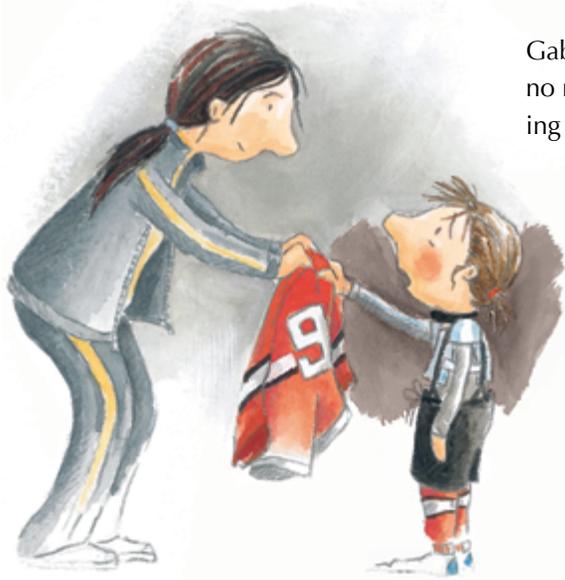
**SOLUTION**



# GABE'S IDOL

- Who is Gabe's idol in the story? What do you know about her? Visit [www.hayleywickenheiser.com](http://www.hayleywickenheiser.com) to learn more.
- Gabe drew a picture of herself with her idol. Do you have a personal idol? What qualities does your idol have that makes him or her your idol? Draw a picture of you and your idol together.

## EMOTIONS



Gabe experienced many different feelings throughout the story. Make a list (with no repeats) of the different emotions Gabe felt by considering how she was feeling when:

- She was trying out for the team.
  - She learned she made the team.
  - She was waiting to receive her jersey from Coach Lebrun.
  - She received the number 9 jersey.
  - She hid the jersey in her room.
  - Her mom came to talk with her.
  - Her grandmother told her she used to wear number 9.
  - She put on the wrinkled number 9 jersey for the first team practice.
- Select three of the emotions listed above. Think of a time when you experienced a similar emotion. Draw, write and/or act out the situation that led you to feel this way.

## PERSPECTIVE

- The illustrations in the story are drawn from different points of view. Locate illustrations that have the following points of view: looking down from above, looking straight on and looking up. Why did the illustrator draw the illustrations with varying points of view?
- Select an event from the story and illustrate it three ways: from above, from head-on and looking up.

## AUTOGRAPH

"She'd spent the evening before the tryout practicing the autographs she'd soon be signing. She wrote 'Gabe Murray' as carefully as she could, with a big looping Y at the end."

- What is an autograph? Have you ever asked for somebody's autograph?
- Why might somebody want your autograph? Practice writing your autograph three different ways. Draw or paint a picture of yourself doing whatever would make somebody interested in asking for your autograph. Sign your autograph at the bottom of your picture.



# PRAISE FOR *THE HIGHEST NUMBER IN THE WORLD*

“MacGregor’s writing packs an emotional punch without relying on sentimentality (“Gabe’s heart felt as if a skate had just run across it”). Expressive pencil drawings, brightened with color washes, perfectly capture the characters’ feelings. From the moment Grandma begins to share her past and her passion hockey, the story’s context becomes broader, more complex, and more meaningful. A memorable, intergenerational picture book perfect for sharing.”

– **Starred Review, *Booklist***

“As pleasing as a warm memory.”

– ***Kirkus Review***

“The story may have most meaning to children in Canada, but it could appeal to young hockey fanatics no matter where they live. Després’s gouache illustrations are light and simple. The warmth between the grandmother and granddaughter as well as Gabe’s initial disappointment are shown clearly in their amusing expressions.”

– ***School Library Journal***



## OTHER BOOKS BY ROY MACGREGOR

*Face-Off at the Alamo*

*Panic in Pittsburgh*

*The Mystery of the Russian Ransom*

*The Boston Breakout*

*Reality Check in Detroit*

*Mystery at Lake Placid*

*The Night They Stole the Stanley Cup*

*The Ghost of the Stanley Cup*

*Sudden Death in New York City*

*Peril at the World’s Biggest Hockey Tournament*

## LINKS

[www.screechowls.com](http://www.screechowls.com)

[www.geneviedespres.ca](http://www.geneviedespres.ca)

