



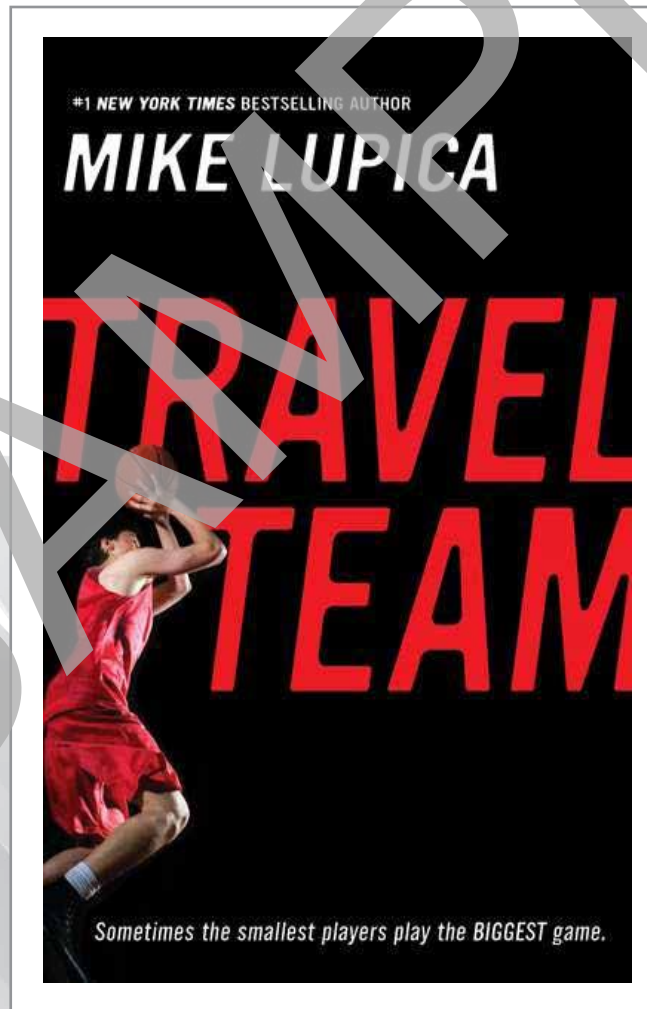
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Travel Team

Mike Lupica



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Travel Team

Mike Lupica

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Brainstorming, research, critical thinking, decision-making, creative thinking

### Comprehension

Predicting, evaluating decisions, summarizing

### Writing

Essays, book chapters, summaries, poetry, journal, autobiographies, newspaper articles

### Listening/Speaking

Oral presentation, discussion, interviewing

### Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech, context clues, synonyms/antonyms

### Literary Elements

Setting, conflict, tone, characterization, point of view, theme, symbolism, figurative language, antagonist

### Across the Curriculum

Art—photography, collage;  
Health—alcoholism; Math—  
budget; History—basketball

**Genre:** young-adult fiction

**Setting:** a small town called Middletown, present day

**Point of View:** third-person omniscient

**Themes:** determination, redemption, persistence, power

**Conflict:** person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. society

**Tone:** conversational, descriptive

**Date of First Publication:** 2004

## Summary

Twelve-year-old Danny Walker, though not very tall, is an excellent basketball player with a gifted mind. He is devastated when he is not chosen for the seventh-grade travel team until his absent father, a former professional basketball player, returns to town and decides to coach a second team. The season is very competitive, and the team is challenged both on and off the court. As Danny and his father improve their shaky relationship, Danny also learns lessons of forgiveness, courage, and determination in the face of great adversity.

## About the Author

Mike Lupica was born on May 11, 1952. He grew up in New Hampshire and graduated from Boston College. At age 23, he began his sports writing career following the New York Knicks for the *New York Post* in 1975. He was the youngest regular columnist to ever write for a New York City newspaper when he began working for the *New York Daily News* in 1977. He has since written for many magazines, including *Esquire*, and is a syndicated columnist for the *New York Daily News* in which he has a weekly column, "Shooting from the Lip." He has co-written autobiographies for famous athletes and coaches and written a teleplay based on one of his novels. He is a regular anchor for ESPN's *The Sports Reporters* and hosted his own short-lived program on ESPN2. Among his many awards, Lupica was awarded the Jim Murray Award from the National Football Foundation in 2003. Apart from his magazine articles and newspaper columns, Lupica has written other young-adult novels including *Heat*, *Miracle on 49th Street*, *Summer Ball*, *The Big Field*, and the *Comeback Kids Series*.

Lupica is himself a Little League coach, youth basketball coach, and soccer coach. He currently lives in New Canaan, Connecticut with his wife, Taylor, and their four children.

## Chapters 1–3

Danny practices basketball on the court in his yard as he tries to deal with the disappointment of not making the seventh-grade travel team. His father returns to town, talks with Danny about basketball, and says he might stay a while. Danny must face his classmates, who know he did not make the team, as well as accept the fact that he will never live up to his father, whose professional basketball career seemed to begin with his seventh-grade travel team's win at nationals.

### Vocabulary

heave  
floodlight  
rookie  
execute  
retrieving  
routine  
scrimmaged  
evaluators  
commentators  
momentum  
essential  
parochial  
impersonating  
prophecy  
commiserate

### Discussion Questions

1. Who is the main character? How does the author portray him at the beginning of the story? (*Danny, a short boy who is an excellent basketball player because of his speed and passing accuracy, is the main character. He loves to practice on a basketball court in his yard. His parents are divorced. He did not make the seventh-grade travel team and is very disappointed.*)
2. Describe what Chapter 1 reveals about Danny's family life. (*Danny seems to be an only child. He lives with his mother, who is a teacher and cares well for him, though money is sometimes tight. His father used to be a big-name basketball player in the town but is not around very much. Danny's father returns to town the night his son is cut from the travel team that he was once a part of. Danny's mother makes sure his father talks to him about his disappointment in not making the team.*)
3. How does the author draw readers into Chapter 1? (*The author uses foreshadowing to hint at what is happening in Danny's life without giving everything away at once. He starts with a description of Danny and talks about this day being the worst day of Danny's life*

*but does not say why until much later when Danny's mother is talking to Danny's father. Readers then also learn that Danny's father was a good basketball player when he was Danny's age, hinting at a backstory.)*

4. How is Richie's description of a "guy hug" symbolic of his relationship with his son? (*In a guy hug, you get close to the other person but without leaning too far. It is like Danny and Richie's relationship because they are capable of being close to each other, just "not too close" [p. 10].*)
5. Why does Danny fail to make the travel team? (*Answers will vary. Danny admits that his second night of practice was not great, particularly because he could not play with all of the best players. As a passer, he needed taller guys and good shooters to catch his passes. However, he also tells his father that he overheard Jeff Ross instructing the evaluators to make the team "bigger" this year than last. Danny believes he was eliminated not because of his basketball abilities but because of his size.*)
6. What is Richie Walker's story? (*He has a bad hip and walks with a limp that seems to keep him from playing basketball. He has a history with Jeff Ross, the president of Middletown Basketball. While he has an unsteady relationship with his son, the two are able to talk basketball with each other. His ex-wife is still angry at him for leaving his family. Richie's rise to basketball stardom began with the seventh-grade travel team and a game televised nationally, during which he scored the winning basket in the last minute. He was on the all-America team in high school, a second-team all-American in college, and was a first-round draft choice to join the Golden State Warriors. During his rookie season, he was named to the All-Rookie Team but was also injured in a car accident.*)

7. How has Danny reconciled his parents' divorce in his own mind and heart? (*Danny believes that he can offer his dad a part of his heart but expects only part of his dad's time in return. He is okay with his father's absence because he believes it is all his father can give. He takes what his father offers and calls it enough, though he is saddened that most of what he learns about his father comes from Internet searches rather than Richie Walker himself. He does not feel that he knows his father any better than anyone else in town. He does not expect his relationship with his father to change any more than he expects his father to change, so he does not get too emotionally attached.*)
8. What conflicts emerge by the end of Chapter 3? (*Answers will vary. Danny has an internal conflict with his failure to make the travel team [person vs. self]. He does not see his size as a handicap even though others do. Danny also experiences some internal conflicts about his father, whom he wants to stay even though he tries not to hope for more than his father can give [person vs. person]. In addition, Danny must deal with his schoolmates and their responses to his being cut from the travel team [person vs. person].*)
9. **Prediction:** How will Danny's relationship with his father change?
10. **Prediction:** How will Danny get over his failure to make the team that began his own father's basketball legacy?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Figurative Language: Begin keeping a chart of similes, metaphors, and personification you find in the novel. Add to the chart as you read the novel. Examples: **Similes**—"...this driveway was...Like a special club with a membership of one" (p. 3); "low enough to the ground to be like a rock he was skipping across Taylor Lake" (p. 5); "so fast...he should leave a puff of smoke like one of those old Road Runner cartoons" (p. 6); "the bounce of the ball in the driveway. Like the real beat of his heart" (p. 7); "desperate to make [a basket]...like this was some test he needed to pass right away" (p. 11); "sneakers look like life rafts" (p. 28); **Metaphors**—Richie Walker and his teammates: "a Disney movie" (p. 22); Ali Walker: "the 'queen of sales'" (p. 27); Danny: Ali's "streak of light" (p. 29)
2. Writing: Write a poem about disappointment.

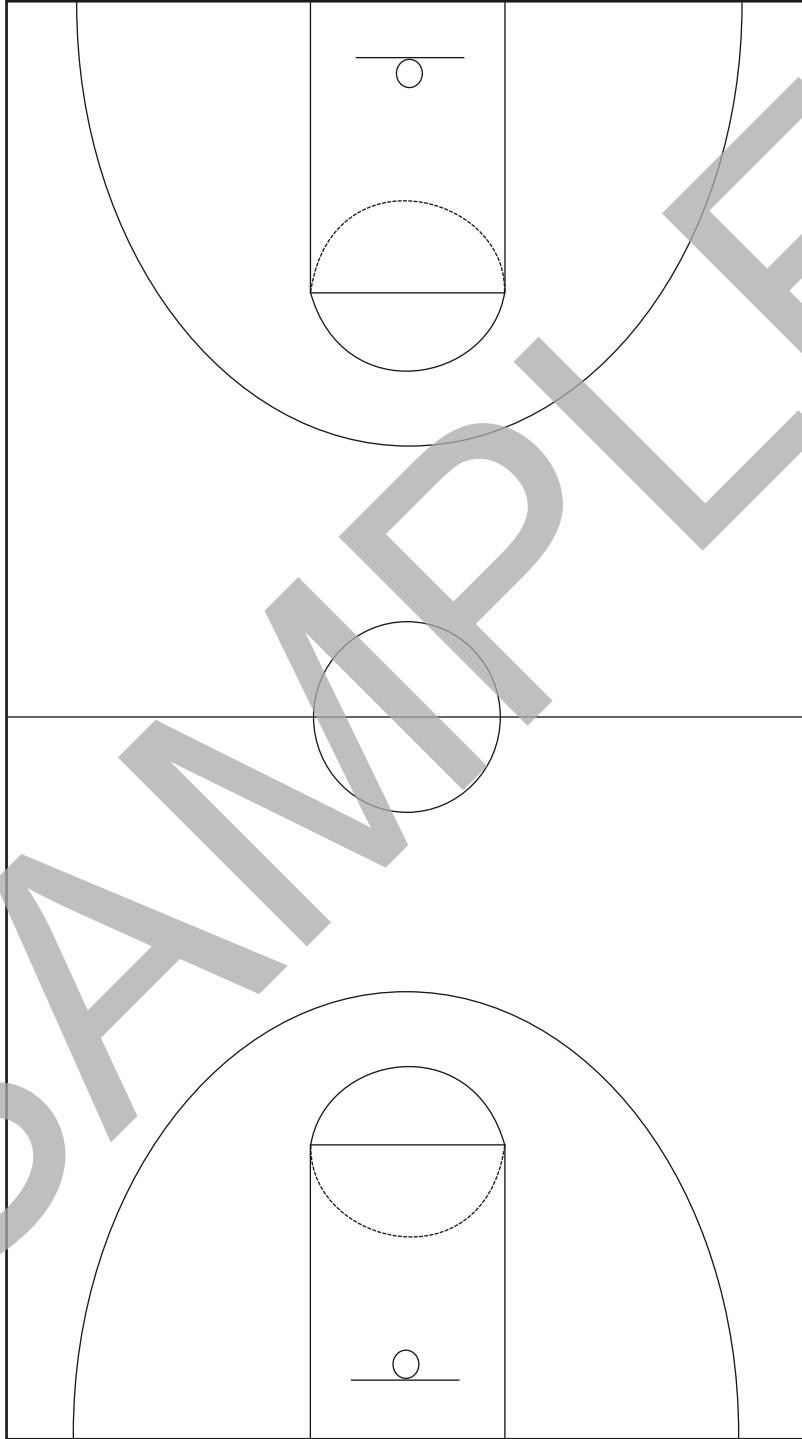
### Chapters 4–6

Danny deals with his peers after he fails to make the Vikings travel team. He likes Tess and wants to talk to her more than anyone else. The Vikings have to practice at the St. Patrick's gym. Danny chooses to wait around for them to arrive rather than avoid them. Ty Ross tells Danny he should have made the team. Danny secretly watches the Vikings practice for a while and wishes he was on the court with them. He decides to take off a season of basketball, against his mother's and Tess's wishes.

### Discussion Questions

1. How do students react to Danny when he goes to school after failing to make the travel team? How does Danny respond? (*They all seem to know. Danny feels conspicuous. Emma Carson gives him a particularly hard time, and Danny lashes out at her. He is glad that his best friend is late because he does not want to spend the entire day discussing his disappointment, even when people genuinely feel bad for him.*)

# Court Diagram



## Characterization

**Directions:** Write the name of a character from the novel in the center rectangle. In each oval, write an adjective that describes the character's personality. Then fill in each dotted rectangle with a detail about the character that illustrates that part of the character's personality.

