

The Southpaw

by Judith Viorst



Dear Richard,
 Don't invite me to your birthday party because I'm not coming. And give back the Disneyland sweatshirt I said you could wear. If I'm not good enough to play on your team, I'm not good enough to be friends with.
 Your former friend,
 Janet

P.S. I hope when you go to the dentist he finds 20 cavities.

Dear Janet,
 Here is your stupid Disneyland sweatshirt, if that's how you're going to be. I want my comic books now—finished or not. No girl has ever played on the Mapes Street baseball team, and as long as I'm captain, no girl ever will.
 Your former friend,
 Richard

P.S. I hope when you go for your checkup you need a tetanus shot.

Dear Richard,
 I'm changing my goldfish's name from Richard to Stanley. Don't count on my vote for class president next year. Just because I'm a member of the ballet club doesn't mean I'm not a terrific ballplayer.
 Your former friend,
 Janet

P.S. I see you lost your first game 28-0.

Dear Janet,
 I'm not saving any more seats for you on the bus. For all I care you can stand the whole way to school. Why don't you just forget about baseball and learn something nice like knitting!
 Your former friend,
 Richard

P.S. Wait until Wednesday.



Dear Richard,
 My father said I could call someone to go with us for a ride and hot-fudge sundaes. In case you didn't notice, I didn't call you.
 Your former friend,
 Janet

P.S. I see you lost your second game, 34-0.

Dear Janet,
Remember when I took the laces out of my blue-and-white sneakers and gave them to you? I want them back.

P.S. Wait until Friday.

Your former friend,
Richard

Dear Richard,
Congratulations on your unbroken record. Eight straight losses—wow! I understand you're the laughingstock of New Jersey.

Your former friend,
Janet

P.S. Why don't you and your team forget about baseball and learn something nice like knitting maybe?



Dear Janet,
Here's the silver horseback riding trophy that you gave me. I don't think I want to keep it anymore.

Your former friend,
Richard

P.S. I didn't think you'd be the kind who'd kick a man when he's down.

Dear Richard,
I wasn't kicking exactly. I was kicking back.

Your former friend,
Janet

P.S. In case you were wondering, my batting average is .345.

Dear Janet,
Alfie is having his tonsils out tomorrow. We might be able to let you catch next week.

Richard

Dear Richard,
I pitch.
Janet

Dear Janet,
Joel is moving to Kansas and Danny **sprained** his wrist. How about a **permanent** place in the outfield?

Richard

Dear Richard,
I pitch.
Janet



Dear Janet,
 Ronnie caught the chicken pox and Leo broke his toe and Elwood has these stupid violin lessons. I'll give you first base, and that's my final offer.
 Richard

Dear Richard,
 Susan Reilly plays first base, Marilyn Jackson catches, Ethel Kahn plays center field, I pitch. It's a package deal.
 Janet
 P.S. Sorry about your 12-game losing streak.

Dear Janet,
 Please! Not Marilyn Jackson.
 Richard

Dear Richard,
 Nobody ever said I was unreasonable. How about Lizzie Martindale instead?
 Janet

Dear Janet,
 At least could you call your goldfish Richard again?
 Your friend,
 Richard

GETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY.
 Complete each of the following sentences by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. Each sentence helps you get the meaning of the story.

- In her first letter to Richard, Janet said that if she was not good enough to play on the team then
 - a. she was not good enough to be friends with.
 - b. she would practice and try to get better.
 - c. it didn't make any difference to her.
- In his first letter to Janet, Richard said that
 - a. Janet could play anywhere she wanted on the team.
 - b. no girl had ever played on the Mapes Street baseball team.
 - c. he was thinking about leaving the team soon.
- Because she was angry at Richard, Janet
 - a. said she would never speak to him again.
 - b. changed her goldfish's name from Richard to Stanley.
 - c. told him to give up his job as captain.
- The only way Janet was willing to play on the team was if she
 - a. played the outfield.
 - b. played first base.
 - c. pitched.

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

REVIEWING STORY ELEMENTS. Each of the following questions reviews your understanding of story elements. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer to each question.

- Which statement best *characterizes* Janet?
 - a. She is the kind of person who gives up very easily.
 - b. She refused to give in when she felt she was right.
 - c. She had no friends and very few interests.
- What happened last in the *plot* of "The Southpaw"?
 - a. Janet asked Richard to return the sweatshirt she said he could wear.
 - b. Richard's team lost its first game by the score of 28-0.
 - c. Janet offered Richard four players, all girls, for his team.
- What is unusual about the *style* of this story?
 - a. The story is told through an exchange of letters.
 - b. The author uses long sentences that are difficult to understand.
 - c. The writing is beautiful because the author describes nature.
- Which word best tells the *mood* of "The Southpaw"?
 - a. sad
 - b. mysterious
 - c. amusing

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS. Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. If you wish, look back at the words before you answer the questions.

- Danny could not play because he sprained his wrist. The word *sprained* means
 - a. looked at closely.
 - b. kept thinking about.
 - c. hurt by a sudden twist.
- Richard needed more players, so he offered Janet a permanent place in the outfield. Something that is *permanent*
 - a. lasts for a long time.
 - b. pays a lot of money.
 - c. looks very good.
- Richard returned a silver horseback riding trophy to Janet. Which of the following best defines (gives the meaning of) the word *trophy*?
 - a. a birthday present
 - b. a prize for winning something
 - c. a ticket to a show
- When Janet was angry at Richard, she became his former friend. As used in this sentence, the word *former* means
 - a. close.
 - b. past.
 - c. happy.

× 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

ADDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE. Complete the following paragraph by filling in each blank with one of the words listed in the box below. Each of the words appears in the story. Since there are five words and four blanks, one word in the group will not be used.

Cy Young won more baseball games than any pitcher who ever lived. He _____¹ for 22 years and won 511 games. Young finally gave up _____² at the age of 44. He was still a very _____³ pitcher. But he had gained so much weight, he couldn't bend down to _____⁴ the ball.

baseball	friends
catch	
played	good

× 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

THINKING ABOUT THE STORY. Each of the following questions will help you to think critically about the selection. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer.

- Clues in the story suggest that Janet was a
 - a. very poor baseball player.
 - b. fair, or average, baseball player.
 - c. very good baseball player.
- We may infer (figure out) that Richard
 - a. finally agreed to let girls play on the team.
 - b. decided he would rather lose games than have girls on the team.
 - c. didn't care what Janet thought of him.
- Probably, Janet wrote the first letter to Richard because
 - a. she wanted to make friends with him.
 - b. she was so angry, she didn't want to speak to him.
 - c. he asked her to write to him.
- Which one of the following was probably the most important reason Richard changed his mind?
 - a. He wanted Janet to vote for him for class president.
 - b. He was afraid Janet wouldn't return the things he had given her.
 - c. His team had lost every one of its games.

× 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

Thinking More about the Story. Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- Richard and Janet were good friends before the story began. They stopped being friends for a while. But they were friends again at the end of the story. Prove that these statements are true.
- Explain how Richard gave in to Janet. In what way did Janet show that she, too, was willing to give in?
- A "southpaw" is a left-handed baseball pitcher. Some people say that southpaws are known for speaking their minds. Do you think that "The Southpaw" is a good name for this story? Explain.

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises.

GETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY

+

REVIEWING STORY ELEMENTS

+

EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS

+

ADDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE

+

THINKING ABOUT THE STORY

▼

Score Total: Story 6