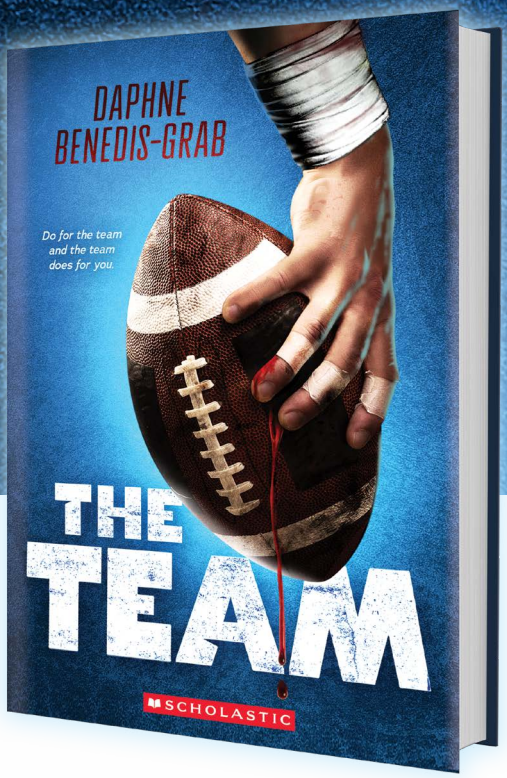

BOOK GUIDE

THE TEAM

BY DAPHNE BENEDIS-GRAB

The Team
By Daphne Benedis-Grab
HC: 9798225085148 • $25.99
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Ages 9–12 • Grades 4–7
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The Story

Cottonwood Middle School's undefeated football team, the Coyotes, are on the field, working to maintain their record. But suddenly the game comes to a halt. A hard hit has taken a player down—and he's been injured so badly he'll never play again. And then the very next day, the athletic office and coach's computer are found totally trashed.

A culprit is found almost immediately: Brian Miller, "the Destroyer," one of the best players on the team. Except . . . why would such a loyal and talented player do something like that to his own team?

Unless he didn't actually do it. Three kids decide to figure out what really happened. But as they start to ask questions, the threats start arriving.

What happens when winning is more important than anything else, and when obedience to the team is more important than anyone else? This is a gripping read about what happens when a culture of total loyalty goes too far.

Reading Group Questions

1. Have you ever been on a sports team? What did you love about the culture of the team, or what would you have changed about it?
2. A cliffhanger is when a story or chapter ends in a way that leaves the audience in suspense. Cliffhangers often leave readers wanting to keep going! Can you think of some examples of cliffhangers from this book? How did you feel as you read them?
3. This book is told from three different points of view. Did you connect the most with Simone, Tommy, or Ethan, and why?
4. Does your school have a policy about bullying? What does it say? Or what do you think it should say?

About the Author

Photo © Greg Benedis-Grab.

Daphne Benedis-Grab is the author of the Secrets and Lies novels, middle grade books that include *I Know Your Secret* and *I Know You Started It*. Her middle grade novel *The Angel Tree* was made into a Hallmark Original movie. She earned her MFA from the New School and is currently an elementary school librarian in Colorado. She lives in Boulder with her husband and two cats. Please visit her at daphnebg.com.

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Author Q&A

Are you a big football fan? Did you have to do any research as you worked on this book?

My football fan origin story is this: my parents decided we should not have a TV in the house (kind of like parents saying no phone today). But when I was five my dad broke down because he could no longer live without watching sports, and our family became the first one on our block to get a color TV. The TV was only ever on when sports were playing, but as a TV-starved child I wasn't fussy. If the TV was on, I was watching. The other plus was spending time with my dad who was a high strung, busy man who wasn't quite sure how to handle a five-year-old. But when I asked him to explain football to me, he was surprisingly good at it. And once I understood how the game worked, I got super into it. Football connected me and my dad for his whole life–no matter where I was we'd talk on Sunday, breaking down games and analyzing our team's game plan for that day.

The research I had to do was about middle and high school football, and it helps a lot that I used to work in a secondary school with a team. That was how I learned about things like the eligibility list, pep rallies (boy do those get loud!), and passion shown by the community every Friday night.

You are an elementary school librarian! What's something that everyone should know about school libraries?

I think Hermione Granger said it best: "when in doubt, go to the library." The library is for everyone and all are welcome. It's space to reset when things in class or at home feel overwhelming, it's where you learn how to do research and how to find reliable sources in a world of misinformation. And if that wasn't awesome enough, there are books for all readers there! Libraries are where you get to choose what you feel like reading, what is going to nourish or inspire you, or just make you laugh. It's also where you go to learn about cool things like astrology, magic tricks, and gaming. So whenever you feel doubt of any kind, head to the library.

The kids in this book are reluctant to turn to an adult for help. What do you think they *should* have done instead if this was real life?

This is such an important question because when any type of cruelty or bullying takes place, it's essential to talk to a trusted adult. The moment Ethan and Simone started getting threats they should have gone to a teacher or family member. What's tough is that it can feel like telling that adult might make things worse. It's easy to think about how you could be humiliated or that by telling someone you make things into a bigger deal. Or that payback will come if you "snitch." These are real concerns, but that's how bullies get away with bullying: no one stops them. You want to think about the adult you decide to talk to—be confident they will listen to you and hear your concerns. Then, together, you can figure out the best plan forward.

Was being a writer something you always wanted to be, or were there some other career stops along the way?

I had a lot of stops along the way to becoming both a writer and a school librarian. I was a waitress but I wasn't very good at it! I once even threw a soda in someone's lap—it was an accident but that was the end of that job. I also built houses with Habitat for Humanity in Georgia and taught English in China for two years. I wasn't actually that great at building houses either—I once dropped a hammer into wet cement and it had to be repoured which was a huge hassle. But the people I worked with understood that mistakes are often how we learn, so I got better. I learned a lot living in China, too. It's really cool to see how other people live. I ate fish eye soup (the eyes were kind of like boba) and lived in a house with spiders as big as my hand (they were surprisingly timid and gentle). But nothing's as exciting and surprising as teaching pre-K to 5th grade students who, on any given day, share stories of loose teeth, have to be reminded not to use the library furniture as a parkour course, and applaud after the read aloud of an especially awesome book.

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