

Educator Guide

Grades 3-7



Schneider Family Book Award Honor

GET A GRIP, VIVY COHEN!

Sarah Kapit



Age Range: 8-12 years

Grade Levels: 3-7

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Cover Artist: Vivienne To

★ "A satisfying baseball story that never minimizes the challenges of autism but celebrates skill, determination, and love for the game." —Kirkus (starred review)

★ "Vivy is a heartwarming protagonist; her daily routines, struggles, and wishes will resonate with young readers who will be rooting for her from the first page. The unique storytelling format of letters and emails will have even the most reluctant of readers turning the pages quickly." —School Library Journal (starred review)

★ "The story is so undeniably charming, the sports so exciting, the protagonist so sympathetic that readers will get sucked in." —ALA Booklist (starred review)

ABOUT THE BOOK

In this perfectly pitched novel-in-letters, autistic eleven-year-old Vivvy Cohen won't let anything stop her from playing baseball—not when she has a major-league star as her pen pal.

Vivvy Cohen is determined. She's had enough of playing catch in the park. She's ready to pitch for a real baseball team.

But Vivvy's mom is worried about Vivvy being the only girl on the team, and the only autistic kid. She wants Vivvy to forget about pitching, but Vivvy won't give up. When her social skills teacher makes her write a letter to someone, Vivvy knows exactly who to choose: her hero, Major League pitcher VJ Capello. Then two amazing things happen: A coach sees Vivvy's amazing knuckleball and invites her to join his team. And VJ starts writing back!

Now Vivvy is a full-fledged pitcher, with a catcher as a new best friend and a steady stream of advice from VJ. But when a big accident puts her back on the bench, Vivvy has to fight to stay on the team.



Sarah Kapit is the author of numerous titles for middle grade readers. Her novel *Get a Grip, Vivvy Cohen!* received the Schneider Family Honor and Washington State Book Award. Her most recent novel is *Second Chance Summer* (Henry Holt Books for Young Readers, 2023). In her past life, Sarah earned a PhD in History from UCLA. Sarah is involved with disability advocacy work and serves on the Board of the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network. She lives in Bellevue, Washington with her partner and goofy orange cat. Sarah is available for in-person author visits in the Seattle area, and virtual visits anywhere.

GET A GRIP, VIVY COHEN!

Discussion Questions

1. What does the book's title, *Get a Grip, Vivvy Cohen!*, make you think of? What are the connections between the book's title and the themes explored in the story? Include examples from the text. If you could think of an alternate title, what would it be?

2. This book is written in an epistolary format, which means it's told entirely through letters and emails. Why do you think the author made that choice? What would be different if it were told in another way?

3. Vivvy writes several letters to VJ Capello before he ever writes her back. Tell us about Vivvy. Why do you think she keeps writing these letters, even when she doesn't get a response?

4. When Coach K first sees Vivvy pitching with her brother, he tells her about two baseball players, Mo'ne Davis and Eri Yoshida (p. 15). What is important about this? Why do you think this means so much to Vivvy?

5. Vivvy's mom is worried that she can't play baseball because she's a girl and she's autistic, but Vivvy knows that's not true. Why does her mom think that? How did that make you feel, as a reader? Is there something you love to do, whether play a sport or an instrument, or sing or dance or draw? How would you feel if someone told you that you couldn't do it?

6. Vivvy often flaps her hands when she's excited. This behavior is a form of "stimming," or a repetitive body movement. Stimming is associated with autism, even though a lot of people—maybe even everyone!—stims. Other stims could be cracking your knuckles, sucking your thumb, or tapping your foot. What else could be a stim? Did you notice any other stims in the book? Do you stim?

7. Coach K's son, Kyle, bullies Vivvy for being a girl and for being "weird." VJ tells Vivvy that she should tell her parents or the coach about Kyle's bullying, but she wants to handle it herself. If you were Vivvy, how would you feel? What are the consequences of speaking up? What are the consequences of staying silent?

8. In the beginning of the book, Vivvy and Nate spend a lot of time together. What changes? How does Vivvy cope without her brother? How does it make her feel?

9. When Kyle tugs Vivvy's ponytail, she gets really upset and has what her mom and therapist call a "meltdown." Vivvy says, "everything was bad...everything was wrong." (p. 70-71) What are examples of some of the things that felt bad to Vivvy here? Do you ever feel like that, like things are too much?

10. Vivvy becomes good friends with Alex, her catcher. In a letter to VJ, she says, "I don't use any of Sandra's rules with him." (p. 97) What are some of Sandra's rules from social skills class? Do you agree with them? Do you disagree? Why do you think Vivvy doesn't use any of the rules with Alex?

11. After getting hit by a ball during a game, Vivvy gets a concussion. All she wants to do is play again, but her mom won't let her. Why is her mom so scared? How do they come up with a compromise?

12. A lot of people underestimate Vivvy, like her mom. Who else underestimates Vivvy? People at school? Her teammates? The other teams? Provide examples from the text. How does Vivvy prove them wrong?

13. Vivvy and VJ both face different challenges in life, and they often disagree about the best ways to handle them. What are some of the struggles that VJ faces as a Black Major League Baseball specialty pitcher? How are VJ's struggles similar to and different from Vivvy's?

14. Vivvy sometimes has a hard time finding the right words to say, but finds that writing things down is easier, like when she writes a letter to her mom. Have you ever felt this way? Why do you think it might feel easier to write things down? Have you ever tried this?



Research Activity: Women & Girls in Baseball

In *Get a Grip, Vivy Cohen!*, Vivy learns about other girl baseball players from Coach K, like Mo'ne Davis and Eri Yoshida. Did you know about these baseball players? If not, why do you think you'd never heard of them?

There have been a lot of women and girls in baseball throughout history, from the **All-American Girls Professional Baseball League** to **Little League** to **Baseball for All**. Pick one of the names in the turquoise box below and do some research. Can you answer the following questions about them?

1. What is their connection to baseball?
2. What teams were they connected to?
3. If they were a player, what years did they play? Did they play in a league? What league did they play in? What position did they play?
4. What challenges did they face? Provide at least three examples.

Interested in learning more?
Check out the **Baseball for All**
organization at
<https://baseballforall.com>
or the **Baseball Hall of Fame** at
<https://baseballhall.org/women-in-baseball>

Lizzie Arlington	Dorothy "Mickey" Maguire
Chelsea Baker	Jackie Mitchell
Genevieve Beacom	Connie Morgan
Ila Borders	Lizzie Murphy
Helene Britton	Kim Ng
Amanda Clement	Lavonne "Pepper" Paire
Dottie Collins	Maria Pepe
Babe Didrikson	Olivia Pichardo
Edith Houghton	Toni Stone
Mamie "Peanut" Johnson	Alta Weiss
Effa Manley	Kelsie Whitmore





Writing Exercise: Your Personal Hero

by Sarah Kapit



In *Get a Grip, Vivy Cohen!*, Vivy writes to her favorite Major League Baseball player, pitcher VJ Capello. Vivy met VJ years ago and he inspired her to become a baseball player. As she explains in her letters, Vivy admires VJ's willingness to work hard as an athlete. She strives to be like VJ in this way.

Select one person that you admire and write a letter to your hero. Your personal hero can be a friend, family member, or celebrity that inspires you.

Some questions to think about as you write your letter:

1. What do you admire most about your personal hero?
2. How has your personal hero served as a role model to you?
3. What questions do you have for your hero?
4. What are some of your favorite memories involving your hero and why are they special to you?

Use specific examples from your life and the life of your hero.

When you're done, you can send the letter if you choose!