Southpaw
Judith Viorst

They used to be best friends, but now she hopes he gets cavities. What has he done?

Dear Richard,
Don’t invite me to your birthday party because I’m not coming. And give back the Disneyland sweat shirt 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 twenty cavities.

Dear Janet,
Here is your stupid Disneyland sweat shirt, 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 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.
Your former friend,
Richard
P.S. Wait until Friday.
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,

Ronne caught the chicken pox and Leo broke his toe and Elwood has these stupid violin lessons. I’ll give you first base. 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 that I was unreasonable. How about Lizzie Martin-dale instead?

Janet

Dear Janet,

At least could you call your goldfish Richard again?

Your friend,
Richard
THINK AND DISCUSS

Understanding
1. How does Janet respond to Richard’s refusal to let her play?
2. What does Richard say is his reason for not wanting Janet on the team?
3. What is Janet’s attitude about girls and baseball?
4. Why does Richard agree to let Janet play?

Analyzing
5. What was the relationship of Richard and Janet before this conflict? How do you know?
6. Janet uses **hyperbole** in her letters. What examples can you find? What is the effect of the hyperbole?

Extending
7. What **connotations** do the words **baseball**, **ballet**, and **knitting** have? Do you think these connotations depend on whether you are a boy or girl?
8. If you were Janet, would you have wanted to play on Richard’s team? Explain.

BIOGRAPHY

**Judith Viorst**

1931–

Judith Viorst is a poet and journalist as well as a successful short-story writer. Her books for children deal with everyday events in a sensitive and humorous way. She often challenges traditional roles for boys and girls. Her male characters demonstrate affection, and her female characters are often athletic.

Viorst was born and educated in New Jersey. Her publications for young children include **Sunday Morning** (1968); **Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day** (1972); and **The Tenth Good Thing About Barney** (1971).