



Rugby Warrior

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Gerard Siggins

Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

RATIONALE & THEMES

Eoin returns to Castlerock and expectations are high that his rugby team can recreate the glory they achieved winning the Fr Geoghegan Cup the previous year.

He soon discovers that he has a new set of challenges to face, both as team captain and as custodian of some very valuable historical artefacts.

However, with the benefit of advice from some very unusual quarters, he manages to steer events calmly.

The themes explored are:

- Courage
- Hope
- Impact of domestic violence
- Friendship
- Fairness
- Taking responsibility
- Loyalty

SUMMARY

Eoin Madden returns to a new term at Castlerock. After his impressive performance for the winning rugby team the previous year, there is considerable expectation that he will repeat the performance. However, this year he is not the only skilled rugby 'bogger' from Ormondstown; newcomer to the village, Dylan, will be joining him at Castlerock and Eoin anticipates a developing friendship with the new boy.

Settling in and renewing old friendships, the new rugby coach selects Eoin as team captain, immediately putting him at the centre of conflicting expectations for the scrum half position between his pal Rory and Dylan, a situation that threatens to sour their friendships.

Galvanized by a history project he has been asked to undertake, Eoin researches the life of Dave Gallaher, the seminal

All Black player from Co Donegal and manages to source some unique and priceless artefacts from an unexpected source to ensure a winning presentation.

As the rugby season develops, injury offers the opportunity for Dylan to make the team without dislodging Rory and all seems well until Dylan's past rears its head and the Gardaí become involved with real concern about his safety.

Final day at the Aviva Stadium is a climax of drama and excitement, both on and off the pitch as the team battles to secure victory and thwart a kidnapping.

APPROACH

This story is very fast paced and lively with the characters solid and easy to relate to. The themes relate easily to PSHE / PDMU and will facilitate a discussion-based approach to the novel.

This guide has divided the story into three sections and the activities offer suggestions on developing the themes.

Section 1 Back in School Pages 5 - 59

SUMMARY

Eoin's final kicking practice is interrupted by his grandad, Dixie, who is excited about some photos he has just received from last year's final and also by Dylan, a new friend, recently moved to Ormondstown who will be joining him in Castlerock for the new term., arrives

Viewing the photos with Dixie, Eoin recalls all the drama and excitement of the day and a blurry image in one of them particularly, reminds him of his ghostly friend Brian who helped to support him against the bullying and lack of confidence

that marked his first term at the school.

Later, Eoin acquaints Dylan with all he needs to know about the school and learns that Dylan has to deal with some serious domestic issues.

At Castlerock, Dylan discovers that he is in the same dorm as Eoin and his friends. Acquaintances are renewed and introductions made and the boys discover that their new rugby coach, Mr McRae, has an illustrious All Black pedigree.

As the new term grinds into action, Eoin and his friends identify some of the 'hazards' for Dylan who causes a little friction by revealing his ambition to take Rory's scrum half position on the team. They also discover that their new history teacher is also a Kiwi but prefers soccer and cricket to rugby.

When Mr McRae begins to gauge their rugby skills, it becomes evident that Dylan will be able to mount a credible challenge for Rory's position and the scene is set for contention.

Enjoying a day's excursion to the Aviva as a treat from the school governors, bully Richie Duffy resumes his campaign of intimidation against Eoin, but it backfires amid applause for Eoin when the video of his performance in the final is shown again.

After the speeches and disappointed not to meet his ghost friend Brian again, Eoin's interest is galvanized when Mr McRae describes a man called Dave Gallaher's role in developing the first All-Black team. All the more interesting was the fact that Gallaher was from Donegal.

Back at school, Eoin confides his 'ghost secret' to Alan. Dylan begins to move into Duffy's orbit and Eoin is concerned.

Deciding to do some research, Eoin visits the school library and is pleased to

discover that they have a copy of Gallaher's book 'The Complete Rugby Footballer'. Opening the book, he is surprised to find Brian's name on the flyleaf and shocked when with a gasp of amazement he hears Brian materialize beside him in the library.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p15): A Garda has challenged Eoin and Dylan, for wearing a hoodie without an apology or explanation. Do you think that this is an acceptable action? If you were to organize a debate in your class, could you defend the action of the Garda? What objections have you to his behaviour?
- (Read pp30-31): The policy on mobile phones at Castlerock seems to be quite intolerant. How do you think that Mr McCaffrey might defend the policy? What objections could you use to challenge the policy? What restriction on the use of mobile phones in school would you accept as reasonable?
- (Read p40): Eoin confidently gives his assessment of Richie to Mr McRae. Do you think that was wise of him to do so? What do you think it reveals about Eoin's character and why do you think that he didn't try to claim the position for himself? What do you think that Mr McRae made of the exchange?
- (Read p44): Eoin is confident that Mr McRae will select the 'best man' for each position. What do you think that this really means? What considerations would influence your decision if team selection were your responsibility? Do you think that competition should be the only factor in deciding the team? What other factors do you think are important?

ACTIVITIES

1. The Photo (Read p13)

Eoin has asked for a copy of the photo with Brian standing by the goals. It is a special photo for him.

Do you have a photo that is significant for you?

Could you make a copy of it and explain why it has a special significance for you?

2. In My Day (Read p17)

Dixie shares a school memory with Eoin about his kicking practice. It can be very interesting to compare recollections about school with older members of your families.

Ask an older member of your family to share a school memory with you and then compare it with what happens now.

You could compile a 'Then & Now' chart for your class.

3. Just Right (feng shui)

(Read pp19-20)

Eoin knows that there is a definite science in picking a bed, and not just deciding whether the mattress is lumpy or not.

You need to think about where the bed is in the room, where it is facing, how far you are from the door etc.

Alan has bed selection down to an art form and he confides to Eoin and Dylan that there are five points he always considers and tests to make sure he has the perfect place to sleep.

Could you recreate his list of points and add illustrations and tests to help Dylan chose the most comfortable bed?

4. 5 x Facts (Read p33)

Mr Finn has introduced the new history teacher, Mr Lawson, who is from New Zealand.

As a welcome activity he suggests as homework that each of the boys research 5 facts about the country.

Eoin decides to find 5 really interesting facts and Alan decides to discover 5 really unusual facts.

Work in small groups to create the lists that each of them discovered?

How will you decide whether a fact is interesting or unusual? What criteria could you use?

5. The Originals (Read p47)

Mr Finn has asked the team to create a short biographical paragraph to accompany the photo of The Originals and explain Gallaher's contribution to rugby development in New Zealand.

He has suggested these section headings: Irish roots / Kiwi rugby / WW1 legacy.

Can you help Eoin to research and compose his piece?

You can use these sites for background information:

www.nzrugby.co.nz/the_game/history/the_1905_06_originals

www.nzhistory.net.nz/the-originals-kick-off-the-all-black-tradition-with-a-55-4-victory-over-devon-at-exeter

6. A Ghost! Really!

(Read pp52-53)

Alan listens to Eoin's explanation about Brian with incredulity. He is not convinced that Eoin actually saw a ghost.

That evening he tries to make a list of possible explanations for what Eoin believes that he saw. He adds a pro & con statement for each of them.

Despite his best efforts, he can only add 4 credible explanations to his list.

Work in small groups to recreate what you think his list contained?

7. Abracadabra (Read p58)

Brian confesses that he is unable to explain how the book has summoned him and suggests that it might have the power of Aladdin's lamp.

If there was one character from any book that you have read that you could summon; who would it be and why?

Create the dialogue that might take place between you? What would you ask and how do you think they might reply?

8. The Trophy (Read p59)

The O'Brien Press thought that they might include an illustration of the trophy to add effect to Brian's information.

What type of illustration do you think might suit the description (*simple line drawing or colour*)?

Do you think that you could create 3 illustrations in different styles for them to consider?

Try these sites for ideas:

www.creativebloq.com/illustration/top-book-illustrations-11121235

www.illustrationweb.com/styles/children

Section 2 Castlerock Pages 60 - 121

SUMMARY

The squad is divided up to play against each other to allow the coaches to assess potential and Dylan is assigned to the 'B' squad. When it is announced that Eoin is captain this year, to his dismay, both Rory and Dylan immediately begin to lobby him to influence the choice of scrum half in their favour.

Mr Lawson organizes the individual topics for the history projects and Eoin persuades

him to agree to Dave Gallaher as his choice for a topic.

When Eoin confesses to Alan that Brian the ghost has reappeared in the library, they both pay a visit in the hope of meeting him, however despite their efforts, they are unable to coax his appearance.

When Dylan and Rory's simmering antipathy explodes into a row, Eoin escapes to a secluded spot in the school grounds to read Dave Gallaher's book in peace; once again experiencing a ghostly encounter, this time, however, with Gallaher himself.

Mr McRae discusses some of the team positions with Eoin who makes him aware of his difficulty with Dylan and Rory's increasing competition for scrum half selection.

Eoin continues to be the focus of Dylan and Rory's ambition to be scrum half and with Mr McRae slotting him into Duffy's position, he's in Duffy's bad books too; he complains to Brian how awkward things are becoming for him.

Brian's advice is to stop complaining and deal with it and when the team is announced, Eoin rounds on his two friends, challenging their behaviour and affirming that he is not involved in team selection.

Mr Finn directs Eoin towards his grandfather Dixie as a resource for his project and together with detail from the ghost of Dave Gallaher; his project begins to take shape.

As mid term approaches, Mr McRae's team selection has delivered four consecutive wins and Eoin has attracted praise from the principal both for his performance on the pitch and also his history project, however when he offers Dylan a lift back to Ormondstown for the holidays, he is rebuffed rudely.

Back at home Eoin decides to ask his dad if he knows anything about Dylan's family that might explain his hostile attitude towards him.

Chatting later to his grandfather, Eoin discovers that he is a wealth of information for his project on Dave Gallaher, as Mr Finn had suggested.

When his father reveals from a friend in the Garda that Dylan's father is a major gangland criminal and that the family are sheltering in Ormondstown, Eoin sets off to visit Dylan at home, determined to mend fences with him and offer support.

With relationships mended, Dylan accepts a lift back to school with Eoin and his dad, however he still seems preoccupied with his own thoughts.

During the next match, an injury offers the opportunity for Dylan to come on, however when Eoin can't see him on the subs bench, he is told that the principal had summoned him urgently during the 1st half.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p65): Eoin has explained that picking the best team is the essential criterion. This reinforces the concept that the primary objective is winning. Do you think that participation in sport should always be about winning? Do you think that this makes sport inclusive or exclusive? Is it better to take part in a sport or be a spectator?
- (Read p67): When Alan promotes the idea of having a soccer team, Eoin initially shows his bias, arguing that it would be a distraction and then presumes that he would be asked to play both sports. What do you think that this reveals about the character of Eoin?
- (Read p85): Eoin's dilemma is that he is a friend to both Dylan and Rory and both expect his support as they vie for selection as scrum half. How do you think a captain should behave when friends are involved? How can Eoin make sure that like 'Caesar's wife' he is above reproach? Do you know the reference to Caesar's wife? Perhaps you could look it up.
- (Read p92): When Duffy attempted to leave the team talk Mr McRae prevented him. Why could Mr McRae not allow Duffy to leave? What do you think was happening between them?

ACTIVITIES

1. David's Boots (Read p62)

The author was unsure whether to include a paragraph to describe how David Vincent felt as Dylan replaced him.

The two boys had to pass each other on the pitch, one coming off and the other coming on.

Put yourself in David's boots and describe his emotions? How was the change over announced? How did the others feel? How did he walk off the pitch etc?

Create the paragraph that might have been included to describe this incident?

2. The Rugby Shirt (Read pp66-67)

Eoin and Alan have been discussing the advantages and disadvantages of playing in the C & D squads.

Draw two blank outlines of rugby shirts? Label one of the shirts the C-D squad and the other shirt the A-B squad.

In small groups, use your imagination to decide what the members of each squad might think about themselves and also their opinions of the members of the other squad.

Now write these as short comments on to each of the shirts.

3. The Petition (Read p70)

Mr Lawson has agreed to ask the principal about starting a football squad. However he is new to the school and unfamiliar with all the routines and traditions so he asks Alan to prepare some notes to help him persuade the principal.

Alan has asked for your help and decides to present 3 points in favour only, trying to anticipate some of the principal's arguments.

Create the notes that Alan prepared for him?

4. Time Lapse (Read p80)

Dave Gallaher is surprised to find himself in Ireland in 2014 and Eoin realizes that there are some things that he will have to explain to him in order to avoid confusion.

Working in small groups, make a list of 10 things that you think it is essential for Dave to know in order for things to make sense for him in 2014.

Decide on a priority for the list and include reasons for each item being included in the list.

5. Thoughts (Read p97)

As Eoin listens to Dave describe the last terrible moments, as his comrades died in the trenches, he is struck by the thought that they all took comfort from a memory of something pleasant.

In his mind he can see these thoughts as flowers blooming in the mud of Flanders and decides to recreate a picture to represent the flowers using both text and illustration.

Try to recreate his picture to illustrate the thoughts of the dying soldiers?

6. Memory Box (Read p109)

Eoin enjoys being back at home among familiar sights and sounds.

This is an experience we all enjoy when we return home after being away for a time.

If you had to leave home for a few months, what memories, familiar things or associations would you include in your personal memory box to remind you of home.

Choose 5 and explain why you have chosen them.

7. Two Faces (Read p114)

Eoin and Dylan have had different experiences of Richie Duffy. One is positive and the other is negative, but both are views of the same Richie Duffy.

Create the conversation between Eoin and Dylan as they discuss Richie, each trying to convince the other that their view is correct?

Who will win the discussion and reveal the true Richie Duffy.

You might perform your work for the rest of the class.

Section 3 The Secret Pages 122 - 174

SUMMARY

After the match Dylan confides to Eoin his mother's concern about his father discovering their whereabouts.

As the deadline for submission of the project looms, Eoin meets the ghost of Dave again who gives him two precious artefacts to use, a photograph of his wife Nora and the priceless silver fern emblem that he himself had worn as an All Black. Eoin needs to be vague about the provenance of these items, by they, together with a handwritten original war poem secured by his grandfather, earn him Mr Lawson's amazed admiration.

The team's progress through the Begley Cup competition receives a set back when one of the team picks up an ankle injury playing soccer, ruling him out of the team. Mr McRae co-opts Dylan onto the wing and is rewarded with a four-try demolition of their opposition in the next game.

Eoin is delighted to learn that his project is one of the eight from the school selected for exhibition in the final at the RDS.

Standing by his project display, Eoin becomes suspicious when Dylan disappears as a stranger approaches. Distracted, he fails to notice that the stranger has stolen the silver fern from his display and is shocked when Dylan returns to confirm that the stranger was his father.

Dylan is escorted back to school by the principal who returns to the RDS just in time to hear Eoin announced as the winner.

Gushing, Mr McCaffrey offers suggestions for the trip they have now won and is a little deflated when Eoin suggests the battlefield at Ypres as their destination.

Back at school, Eoin suggests to Alan that they take a walk in the grounds where he introduces him to the ghost of Dave Gallaher as he returns the photo and explains the theft of the silver fern.

As the day of the rugby final dawns, the team completes their traditional preparations quietly and Mr McRae's team talk dispels superstitions galvanizing them by focusing on their skills and strategies.

Stung by a powerful try from an improved St Osgur's, Eoin and Dylan create a little magic with Dylan crossing the line for a try to leave Castlerock only trailing by two points at the break.

After the break, Castlerock move up a gear and run out comfortable winners with Dylan generously gifting a try to Rory on the line.

After the final whistle, Dylan is shocked to discover that his sister Caoimhe has disappeared.

The Garda suspect that Dylan's father has taken her and prepare to escort Dylan to safety.

Brian warns Eoin that her father, who is now searching for Dylan, has drugged and locked Caoimhe in a red van in the car park.

When Eoin returns to the dressing room alone, he too is drugged and tied up with Caoimhe in the back of the red van.

When Brian alerts Alan to where Eoin and Caoimhe are, Alan loses no time in informing the Gardaí who capture Dylan's father and release Eoin and Caoimhe from the van, assisted by Mr McRae who dramatically uses the school bus to block its exit from the car park.

When the excitement has subsided the class go on their trip to Ypres to visit the grave of Dave Gallaher where Eoin gets the opportunity to say thanks and

a poignant farewell to Dave who insists that Eoin keep the recovered fern as a memento.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p123): Dylan's description of his father suggests that his mother was a victim of domestic violence. Do you think that the Gardaí treat this type of crime as seriously as every other crime? Why do you think it is so difficult to discover this type of crime?
- (Read p128): In August 1914 Britain entered the war and thousands of young men from Ireland and across the world eagerly flocked to their deaths on the battlefields of France and Belgium convinced that it was the right thing for them to do. If you were there then, would you have enlisted and why?
- (Read pp132-133): At Castlerock the purpose of sport is to enhance the prestige of the school. Do you think that this is a fair comment? Competition is fierce for a place on the rugby team. What do you think that competitive sport teaches the boys about themselves and others? Will this be a benefit for them when they leave school? Can this level of competition be a negative thing?
- (Read pp141 & 169 & 173): Why do you think that the fern was stolen? Did Dylan's father realize its value or did the author add the theft to create a thread in the story allowing Dave to finally donate it to Eoin? What evidence can you find to support either opinion? Do you think that introducing the theft was a successful element in the story?
- (Read pp149-150): When the principal leaves the dressing room Mr McRae immediately debunks his superstitions, reminding the boys that it is skill and not a 'rabbit's foot' that will ensure victory. Do you believe that he is correct? Should superstitions play any role in their preparations or are they just harmless nonsense? Why do you think that some people believe in superstitions?

ACTIVITIES

1. Can You Tell Me (Read p127)

Eoin has met and spoken to two ghosts. If you had the opportunity to have a conversation with a ghost, who would it be and what would you ask them?

Can you think of 5 questions you would ask them?

2. The Silver Fern (Read p128)

Eoin decides to write a short paragraph to be displayed with the fern explaining what it is, where it is from and what it represents.

Unfortunately he is very short of time and needs help.

Could you research and write it for him?

You can find information at:

www.nzflag.com/silverfern.cfm

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silver_fern_flag

www.newzealand.com/travel/en/media/features/maori-culture/maori_new-zealand-icon-silver-fern.cfm

3. History Winner (Read p143)

The *Evening Standard* needs a short piece to accompany their photo of Eoin with the winner's trophy.

Can you write it for them?

Remember that you will need an interesting headline. You can use the **5 x W & H** formula (*who, what, when, where, why & how*) to give as much information in your opening sentences and then add a little more relevant detail in the remainder of the piece.

Try these sites for more ideas:

www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks2/english/writing/newspapers/read/1/

news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/school_report/4784843.stm

4. The Commentary (Read pp151-156)

RTE Sport is running a competition for young sport reporters.

You have to prepare a one-minute commentary on the final between Castlerock and St Osgur's.

Read the report of the match and choose any incident that you would like to create the audio / podcast about.

Remember that everyone listening to your report will have to rely on your voice to get a sense of the excitement of the match.

Audacity is a useful program to use to record your piece and can be downloaded free from: audacityfreedownload.org

5. Incident Report (Read p167)

With Dylan's dad locked up and everyone safe, the Garda sergeant begins to write his report.

He has to try to record the facts and sequences of what has happened without any opinions or comment and has to rely on what he has seen and what others have told him.

Create a copy of the page he used from the incident report book?

6. What Next? (Read p173)

Rugby Warrior is Gerard Siggins' second book about Eoin Madden. (*The first was Rugby Spirit and it is just as exciting.*)

If the author uses Dave Gallaher's suggestion that Eoin's story twenty years from now will be very interesting as the

prompt for his next book, could you offer him any suggestions about the plot that the story might have?

Write a brief synopsis of your ideas for the plot (*You can use 'bullet' points if you like*), and a short promotional paragraph (called the 'back cover blurb') for the back cover. You can even include an illustration for the front cover.

If you wish you can send your ideas to the author via The O'Brien Press.

CLASS PROJECT

As a follow up to the story the class might enjoy compiling an anthology of Irish Sporting Heroes.

This could be presented as a Hall of Fame exercise asking the children to research and find heroes with an unusual back-story.

They could also consider the contribution that their hero has made to the development of the sport as well as discussion on what constitutes the award 'Hero' to any particular sports person.

Useful research materials can be found on the following sites:

(*Good Internet use practice with classes always includes close supervision and monitoring of the site by the teacher beforehand.*)

www.turtlebunbury.com/published/published_books/sporting_legends/pub_books_sports_contents.htm

www.ulstersportsmuseum.org



Gerard Siggins lives in the shadow of Dublin's Aviva Stadium. Initially a sports journalist, he worked for many years in the *Sunday Tribune*, where he became assistant editor.



Rugby Spirit, the first book featuring Eoin Madden.

Eoin's has just started a new school ... and a new sport. Everyone at school is mad about rugby, but Eoin hasn't even held a rugby ball before! And why does everybody seem to know more about his own grandad than he does?

'brilliant story for rugby-mad youngsters ... its simple approach ensures it can be enjoyed just as much by those new to the game' *Sunday Independent*

'if your lad - or indeed lassie - plays rugby, they'll love this book ... and if your lad or lassie doesn't play but would like to, there's no better and no more entertaining manual than *Rugby Spirit*' *Sunday World*

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