



Bernard Dunne: Champion of the World

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Bernard Dunne

Teaching Guide

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RATIONALE AND THEMES

The purpose of this guide is to help the reader to understand the themes of this autobiography, and to develop empathy skills – all through a range of reading, writing, talking and listening activities, which pupils can complete either individually or in groups. Key themes include:

- Determination
- Family
- Social Class
- Sport
- Success / Failure
- Principles

SUMMARY

Born and raised in Neilstown, west Dublin, Bernard Dunne became super-bantamweight World Champion in 2009. This autobiography takes us on a fascinating rollercoaster ride from the streets of west Dublin to the sprawling beaches of LA as Bernard relives his boxing career, starting as a six-year-old boy and ending as World Champion. In this book, he shares the philosophy that helped him reach the top of his career and has us in stitches with some funny stories.

APPROACH

This is a very enjoyable and entertaining read with many opportunities for discussion and research. It also contains some important life lessons as Bernard shares his unique life philosophy that helped him succeed. This guide has divided the story into four sections, and the activities offer suggestions on developing the themes.

Chapters 1–5 Route to the Olympics

The first section of the book starts with Bernard as a young boy living in Neilstown and getting into scrapes with his friend Redser. He remembers his very first fight and

how boxing was a lifeline for many young people in his area, teaching them discipline and giving them some direction in their lives. As a young boxer, Bernard travels the world, working hard to achieve his goal – competing for Ireland in the Olympic Games, like his Dad.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p7):** Bernard Dunne describes people's ideas about Neilstown: "you'd think the place where I grew up was a war zone, a dangerous, horrible place to be". Why do you think we have preconceptions about areas? Are there any areas in your town that have a negative reputation? Why? What do you think someone from there feels like when they hear this?
- (Read p23):** Sport can give children and young people direction and teach them new skills – what else can do this? Do you think it's important to have hobbies that involve working with others? Why?
- (Read p24):** Bernard puts himself in quite a lot of danger, such as when he starts setting fire to big bonfires under power cables. What might have happened? What other dangerous things have you seen children do? Is there a way to help children act more responsibly?
- (Read p27):** Should there be an age limit? Should six-year-olds be allowed to fight? Should children be allowed to follow their dreams no matter what?
- (Read p29):** Bernard explains his nickname is 'Rasher'. Have you a nickname? What is it? Why do you have this? Do you like the nickname?
- (Read p30):** Bernard compares himself to a Jack Russell. Why does he do this? What sort of dog would you be? Why – what characteristics do you share?
- (Read pp37–40):** Bernard describes himself as having the "natural killer instinct" and says that he and his fellow young boxers "were like animals".

- (Read p42):** Why do you think crowds are hostile to opponents? How does this make you feel? Teams talk about playing at home and the crowd being like an extra player – do you think this is important? Why?
- (Read p58):** "I believe that everything, good and bad, happens for a reason." Do you agree? What sort of man is Bernard to have this philosophy? Have you ever taken this approach to anything?

ACTIVITIES

1. Neighbourhood Watch

On page 8, Dunne describes Neilstown as "one of those places where neighbours were actually neighbours". What makes a good neighbour? Work in small groups to draw up a "neighbourhood charter" that would help people improve your neighbourhood, and present your ideas to the rest of the class.

2. Urban dictionary

Bernard describes being called a "gurrier" on page 10. What does this mean? Language can change a lot depending on the area in which you live. Is there any slang or dialect words common to your area? Create a dictionary of 10 words or phrases that only someone from your area might use (ask your parents/grandparents for help) *Extension:* Is your dialect strong? Complete the dialect quiz in the *New York Times* – does it bring up anything surprising about your use of language? www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/02/15/upshot/british-irish-dialect-quiz.html

3. Childhood shenanigans

Bernard's childhood was filled with naughty adventures. Re-read pages 10–12 to remind yourself – how does he create humour in his stories? Have you ever got up to anything like this? Write a short story explaining what happened. Remember to try and give little snippets of information a little bit at a time

to keep your reader engaged. If you're stuck, ask your parents – maybe they have a story or two you could use instead!

4. Project boredom

On page 19, Bernard complains that: "There wasn't much to do in the area, very little in the way of activities or facilities to keep young people occupied." What do you do to stop being bored? Is there much to do in your area? Why is it important to have things to do? Work in small groups to design a plan with three key actions to improve your local area for young people – remember that there will be budget restrictions, so try to keep it realistic! Either write a letter to the local council persuading them why your actions would improve the area or present your ideas to the rest of the class. Remember to use as much persuasive language as you can!

5. Motivational talk

Something that Bernard remembers clearly are the older, successful athletes returning to speak to the youngsters on pages 20 and 21. Imagine you are a sporting legend who has been asked to motivate young people. What sort of things would you say? Is it important for young athletes to maintain focus on their studies? Why? Research what some famous sportsmen and women have said. Write a very persuasive speech and either create a short video or present to the rest of the class. *Extension:* Create a series of Instagram posts with motivational quotes about the benefits of boxing and other sports. Remember to keep them short and snappy – can you use strong, persuasive language?

6. Six-year-old wonder

Bernard had his first fight at the age of six – do you think this would have been unusual? In small groups, create a news report for before and after the fight. Think about who you might interview before and after the fight. What sort of questions would you ask?

7. Jet-setter

In the qualifiers for the Olympics, Bernard gets to travel the world. Is there anywhere you'd like to visit? Create a tourist brochure on a place you'd like to visit. Try to include an itinerary of the "perfect day", as well as some information about the place. Remember to try to keep it persuasive.

8. Women in sport presentation

In the boxing match on page 49, Bernard comments on how the game was adjudicated by the first female referee. In small groups, research female referees in other sports. Is there equality between male and female referees? Does anything need to change? How do you think it could change? Be prepared to present your findings to the rest of the class.

Chapters 6–8 From Ireland to LA

SUMMARY

After failing to make the Irish team for the Olympics, Bernard takes a break to think about the next steps in his career. Despite the disappointment of not making the Olympics, other doors begin to open in the professional world, but he receives some worrying medical news which puts his career at risk. In the middle of it all, he moves to America to work with a very famous coach. Life is tough, but his boxing keeps him grounded.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p64):** Bernard gets some terrible news about having a cyst on my brain. How do you think he felt? How will his wife feel? Should he give up boxing? Draw up the pros and cons in small groups.
- **(Read p67):** Were they right to keep it a secret? What if another fighter had forced a fatal injury? What are the moral arguments?
- **(Read p74):** Bernard says that "In chasing any dream, tough choices have to be made, and this was one of those choices." Do you agree with this? Is there any dream that you have that you would be prepared to do anything to achieve?
- **(Read p79):** Bernard is a bit afraid. What advice do you think someone who visits a strange city needs to hear?
- **(Read p90):** Bernard and Pamela find a new Irish family in the States. Why do you think Irish people stick together when they move away? Do you think this is a good thing, or does it stop them from integrating into society?
- **(Read p98):** Why do you think Bernard wants to come home to Ireland? Do you think it is a good idea? What is he risking? Is it worth making the jump?

ACTIVITIES

1. Head safety

On page 65, Bernard tells us about how he fractured his head as a child. Why is it so important to protect children's skulls? In small groups, create a short presentation on why it is so important for children and young people to wear helmets when cycling, skateboarding or taking part in other similar activities.

2. Letter from Dad

Imagine you are Bernard's Dad. What is going through your mind as you wave goodbye to your son on page 73? Write a letter to your son that you will put secretly in his pocket before he boards the plane.

3. Los Angeles: The City of Angels

On page 75, Bernard describes LA – but does he really capture the place for his readers? Write a better description for him, including interesting adjectives and sensory details.

4. Loneliness leaflet

On page 80, we see Bernard alone in his motel. Have you ever felt lonely? What can we do in society to stop people feeling lonely? What can be done at school to make sure everyone feels included? Work in pairs to create an advice leaflet to combat loneliness.

5. California dreamin'

Bernard's description of Santa Monica on page 85 sounds like paradise! In small groups, create a script for a travel programme and present it to the rest of the class. It can be California or somewhere in Ireland. In your programme, try to include interesting facts about culture, history and food.

6. Pep talk

On page 92, Bernard is about to fight a man mountain. Imagine you're his Dad giving him a pep talk beforehand. What would you say to stop his fear? Write a short motivational speech to fill him with confidence.

7. Fight report

On page 93, Bernard shocks the boxing world with his victory. Imagine you are a sports journalist attending the match. Write a news report on the fight, using as much exciting language as you can – and lots of boxing terminology. Remember, this would have been a shock!

Chapters 9–10 Europe Awaits!

SUMMARY

This section of the book opens with Bernard having made the decision to move back to Ireland, and follows him on his journey to become Champion of Europe – but can he hold on to his belt for long enough to enjoy it?

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p108):** Bernard talks about the “little monster” inside him. What does he mean? Do you think everyone has a “little monster”?
- **(Read p115):** Do you believe in bad luck? What other superstitions can you think of? Why do you think people believe in them?
- **(Read p118):** Bernard gets knocked down and talks about the idea of failing “in front of the whole world”. How do you think sportspeople recover? Do you think failing in front of people is any different than doing it in private? Should you worry about what people think of you?

ACTIVITIES

1. Fair play

Pickering tries to gain a psychological advantage over Bernard with his “tough talk” inside and outside the ring. In response, Bernard makes him wait in the ring for 13 minutes before he enters. Do you think these games are fair? In a group, define what makes sport fair, and draw up a charter: “Rules of fair play”.

2. Salary debate

On page 113, Bernard explains that he gets paid a lot. Nowadays, certain sportsmen get paid millions of euro a year. Do you think it is fair that they get paid so much? As a class, debate whether or not sportsmen should receive the wages they do. Consider how much a fireman gets paid – or a female athlete. In your speeches, use facts and statistics to support your ideas – and remember to use as many persuasive techniques as you can.

Chapters 11–13 The End of the Road

The final section describes Bernard’s comeback against all the odds. However, the team around him have begun to squabble about the details of contracts and the business side of the sport, while Bernard just wants to fight. Building himself up again after the defeat is a slow and steady journey, but Bernard’s spirit remains undefeated as he claws his way to the very top.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p123):** Bernard gives a lot of credit to the team of people supporting him. Why do you think this is so important? What sort of man is Bernard if he’s acknowledging all the help? Do you think this comes from growing up in Neilstown?
- **(Read p125):** Despite everything, Bernard is determined to improve. What does this tell us about him? Have you ever pushed through? Why?
- **(Read p132):** Bernard tells us the journalists “were outside my circle of trust”. Is it important to have a circle of trust? Who is in yours?
- **(Read p132):** Is it good advice from his Dad to ignore what other people say. Is this easy? Why do people say nasty things to others?
- **(Read p148):** The money has become an issue. Why do you think it becomes so important? Do you think it has too much influence in sport? Remember the debate on salaries.
- **(Read p145):** Bernard has a very balanced view on life as he thinks back to his defeat without regrets, focusing instead on it improved his boxing. What lessons can we take from this?
- **(Read p153):** Do you think he was right to step away from boxing? Do you think it was a difficult decision? What arguments do you think his wife Pamela gave?
- **(Read p157):** Bernard refers to this as the second chapter in his life. Why is this such a positive way of looking at life? How can we adopt this approach in our own lives?

ACTIVITIES

1. Masculinity

On page 128, Bernard has his wound sewn shut and describes himself as “squealing like a little baby”. Of course he would be! Why do you think men feel they have to be tough? Is this what masculinity is? Work in small groups to create a presentation on the many different ideas of masculinity in Ireland today.

2. Motivational music

Bernard comes out to *O Fortuna* from Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXF5K0ogeg4) on page 136. Listen to the music. Why do you think he chose that song? Choose five adjectives or phrases to describe what the music suggests. What song would you have? Why? Present it to your classmates with an explanation of what you are trying to suggest.

3. Mother’s diary

On page 139, Bernard is on the ground, looking at his Mum. How do you think she feels? Write a diary entry exploring her thoughts and feelings on watching her son take a beating in the boxing ring.

4. Bernard Dunne

Even after taking a battering, Bernard keeps going, as we see on page 142. Write a description of the sort of man he is. Consider what interesting adjectives you could use.

5. A fair fight

After just one fight, Bernard loses the World Championship on page 151. Do you think this is fair? Work in pairs to create a new system for boxing. Present it to the rest of the class, using persuasive language to convince them that your idea is best.

Extra Activities

1. Writing to your heroes

Bernard Dunne is an exemplary sportsman – humble and level-headed. Who is your sporting hero? Why do you admire them? Write them a letter explaining why you look up to them.

2. Lessons learned

Not only is Bernard a sporting legend, but he’s also full of wisdom. What lessons have you taken from his story? Write him a letter outlining why you’ve enjoyed his book so much and what you’ve learned.

3. Interviewing Bernard Dunne

Imagine you have been given the task of interviewing Bernard. What questions would you ask him? How do you think he would respond? Work in small groups, with someone in the hotseat acting the part of Bernard.