



# Aim High

Donny Mahoney, illustrated by Eoin Coveney

## Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

### RATIONALE & THEMES

The author has set himself the challenge of answering the question, 'Why sport matters?' He succeeds wonderfully in this short series of Irish sporting biographies.

The stories catalogue the contribution to sport, both professional and amateur, across a broad range of disciplines involving athletes from a range of backgrounds, including both contemporary and historical.

Commitment and determination sparkle through the stories to inspire a new generation of young sports people.

The themes include

- Dealing with challenges
- Resourcefulness
- Friendship
- Determination
- Prejudice
- Danger
- Healthy lifestyles

### SUMMARY

The range of sporting activity presented is broad, covering sports like rugby that require strength to sports like snooker that need a different type of skill.

The athletes are presented primarily for the resilience and determination they bring to their discipline rather than on their trophy hauls.

We get a glimpse of who they were/are and the contribution they made/make to Irish sport at local, national and international level.

Their kaleidoscope of Irish sporting achievement is celebrated through a 200-year history. In each section, it is the sports people themselves who are the most powerful advocates for the qualities of resilience and determination linked to skill that define Ireland as a remarkably diverse sporting nation.

### APPROACH

The topics in the book are particularly relevant to the requirements of the SPHE & PSHE curricula as well as the history elements in both the SESE & WAU curricula.

The structure and presentation of the material suggests that a group activity-based approach would be the more effective.

To facilitate the most effective use of the book, the stories have been collated into several sections.

### Water Sports Pages 53, 57 & 62

### SUMMARY

Water plays an important part in our daily lives. Its presence is everywhere, from the sandy coastal beaches to the inland lakes and rivers. Water is part of our landscape.

The sports people in this group, see water as an exciting environment where they can test their skill and match their strength. A place where they can feel comfortable; where they can feel the same excitement as a runner feels when they lean into the final bend of a race and accelerate towards the finish line.

For these discussion and activities, you will need to read all the profiles together.

#### Discussion Points:

- (Read pp53, 57 & 62):** For these athletes, water is where they feel comfortable. How would you describe the particular attraction of water as a sporting environment? Why are they drawn off the land to exercise their skills and enjoy the thrill of taking part?
- (Read p57):** The O'Donovan brothers row as a team, while the others are individual athletes. Is it easier to participate in a sport as an individual or as a member of a team? Which would you prefer to do?

- (Read p57):** Gary and Paul became well known after their success in the Olympics. How important a goal is international success for anyone taking part in a sport? Why do we need to win to enjoy taking part?
- (Read p62):** Why do you think that the author has mentioned that Mona is from Sligo? Is it important to know where she is from? Why is it important for Sligo to produce champion swimmers? What benefit would come to Sligo if Mona became an international swimmer?

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. WOW! (Read p53)

Easkey's grandmother went on a trip to California where she first saw people surfing. She was so impressed that she brought two boards back to Donegal.

Before she came home, she wrote to her son Barry, Easkey's dad, to describe her excitement when she first saw surfing and her belief that it could become popular in Donegal.

Make a copy of her letter.

#### 2. Slí an Atlantaigh Fhiaín (Read p53)

Easkey's dad Barry has asked Fáilte Ireland to include information on surfing in Donegal for their 'Wild Atlantic Way' tourist promotion, to encourage people to try the activity.

They have asked him to send his ideas as a poster.

Help him to create a poster that will explain the story of how surfing came from California to Donegal and share the excitement of streaking towards the beach on the top of a breaking wave.

[youtu.be/97Q-aTLr-Kw](https://youtu.be/97Q-aTLr-Kw)

### 3. The Interview (Read p53)

RTE are preparing a short documentary about surfing along the Atlantic coast and have decided to interview Mary Britton because she was the first person to introduce surfing to Ireland.

In groups decide on five questions for Mary to answer and compose the answers you think she may have given.

You can perform the interview in pairs for the class.

### 4. Regular Irish (Read p57)

The public liked Gary and Paul because they used colourful expressions.

Their famous simile 'To pull like a dog' won them many admirers.

Rowing Ireland were pleased with the publicity and offered a competition for the funniest cartoon to illustrate the boys, their boat and the simile.

Submit an entry.

### 5. Similes (Read p57)

Using similes adds colour to our speech. The O'Donovan simile was clear and amusing.

In small groups, create an illustrated list of five similes to describe the endeavour that an athlete needs to produce to win in five separate sporting disciplines. What do they mean and who do you think might say them? [www.scoilnet.ie/uploads/resources/14865/14504.pptx](http://www.scoilnet.ie/uploads/resources/14865/14504.pptx)

### 6. Your Way (Read p57)

Gary and Paul O'Donovan won an Olympic medal by doing things their own way; the Skibbereen way.

Use your imagination to describe how you might win an Olympic medal in your favourite sport by doing things your own unique way.

How would your way be special and what advantage would it give you?

### 7. Sailing Away (Read p57)

Sailing is an exciting sport. It combines speed with balance and strength as the sailor uses the sail to wrestle the wind and make the boat slice through the waves.

Irish Sailing want to encourage more young people to take up the sport and need a poster campaign to promote their Summer courses.

Design a poster with exciting illustrations and text that would encourage you to try the sport.

[youtu.be/uv-qFVLG4OI](https://youtu.be/uv-qFVLG4OI)  
[sailing.ie](http://sailing.ie)

## Individual Sports

### Boxing (pp 5, 42 & 49)

### Snooker (p 33)

### Golf (pp 38 & 39)

#### SUMMARY: BOXING

Boxing is a very popular sport in Ireland and many world champions have come from here.

Traditionally it was a sport for male athletes, however, nowadays, it is increasingly popular with female athletes also.

It is one of the sports where athletes compete against each other individually to test their skill, strength and courage.

Modern boxing competitions have clear rules and a range of safety equipment to protect the boxers from serious injury, however, in the past this was not always the case and some of the competitions could be very violent.

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read pp5, 42, 49): If two people began to box each other in the street, the Gardaí would arrest them for a crime. Why is it not a crime to do the same thing in a boxing ring? How is it different? In boxing, you are trying to punch your opponent to knock them out. Can this be called sport?
- (Read p49): Katie Taylor and Kellie Harrington are two successful female boxers, however, is boxing an appropriate sport for women? In addition to skill, boxing requires a lot of aggression. Does this make it unsuitable for female athletes?
- (Read p42): Francie Barrett is an outstanding boxer who represented Ireland at the Olympics. However, his Travelling community background prevented him from being accepted by his local sporting community. Why is there prejudice against the Travelling community? Is it justified? How can these prejudices be challenged?  
[itmtrav.ie/strategic-priorities/anti-racism-interculturalism/anti-traveller-racism/](http://itmtrav.ie/strategic-priorities/anti-racism-interculturalism/anti-traveller-racism/)  
[socialistworkeronline.net/irish-travellers-the-reality-of-racism/](http://socialistworkeronline.net/irish-travellers-the-reality-of-racism/)

#### ACTIVITIES

### 1. The Long Arm (Read p5)

During the nineteenth century, travelling shows and exhibitions were popular entertainment.

People would flock to see anything that was unusual.

The story of Dan Donnelly's long arms would certainly have attracted a lot of curiosity.

In any town the arrival of the exhibition was announced with a poster.

Design a poster to encourage people to come and pay to see the arm. Remember that the exhibition would also have other curiosities so use your imaginations.

### 2. The Ballad of Dan Donnelly (Read p5)

Many people in the nineteenth century couldn't read so news was passed by word of mouth. One of the common ways to do this was to write a song about an event. Songs were easy to remember.

A popular ballad described the fight with George Cooper.

Write the first and last verses.

### 3. Clones Cyclone Clinches Crown (Read p5)

The night Barry McGuigan won the WBO featherweight title was a special night in Irish sport.

Create a short newspaper report of the bout including some interview comments and exciting headlines.

### 4. The Traveller (Read p42)

As a boxer Francie Barrett represented Ireland; however, as a Traveller, he faced prejudice and exclusion.

When he returned to Galway as a hero, he wrote to his younger siblings advising them how to overcome the prejudice he faced.

Make a copy of his letter.

#### SUMMARY: SNOOKER

Snooker is a popular sport. Audiences generally watch matches on television and the elite players travel the world to compete in championship events and matches.

Ireland has produced several world champions.

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p33): Snooker is an example of television influencing how a sport

is played. Many more people watch snooker on television than attend matches. How does television affect how a sport is played? Is this always a positive influence?

- (**Read p33**): Snooker is a game that most players learn by watching others. It isn't taught in school like Gaelic football or rugby. Should snooker be a school sport? Why do you think it isn't?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Snookered (*Read p33*)

Great skill is needed to play snooker and bouncing the ball off one of the cushions is a very difficult skill to acquire.

Even without a snooker table you can try it yourselves with mirrors and a torch: in small groups, use the torch for the path of the ball and the mirrors for the cushion, position them to construct a bouncing network and see how many 'bounces' you can achieve.

## SUMMARY: GOLF

The island of Ireland has sometimes been described as one large golf course because we have so many courses. Whether links or parkland, everyone who wants to enjoy the sport has ready access to a local course.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- (**Read p38**): Mark Twain once described golf as '*a good walk spoiled*'. Was he right? Many people play golf at different levels of skill so would it be reasonable to describe golf as a pastime rather than a sport? What is the difference?
- (**Read p39**): Golfers earn huge prize money for playing and appearing. How can this be justified? Is the game really worth the payments that the players get?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Golf Ireland (*Read pp38 & 39*)

Fáilte Ireland wants to organize a golf trail across Ireland for golfing tourists.

How would you persuade them to include your local area in the itinerary?

In groups, think carefully about what a group of golfers need to enjoy golf in your area. What type of courses are available? Where would they stay? What would they eat? What might they like to see / do in the evenings?

## Equestrian Sports (pp 16 & 41)

## SUMMARY

Ireland has a long and successful tradition of breeding and training race horses and show jumpers.

In addition to breeding outstanding horses, Ireland has also produced a formidable cohort of successful riders, both male and female.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- (**Read pp16&41**): Betting is a major attraction in horse racing, with many people gambling on the outcome of a race. Is this a sensible way to enjoy a sport? What are the risks in this type of behaviour? Is it fair to the horses, to breed them and then race them for our entertainment?  
[bbc.co.uk/newsround/44736452](http://bbc.co.uk/newsround/44736452)  
[bbc.co.uk/news/education-50056136](http://bbc.co.uk/news/education-50056136)
- (**Read pp16 & 41**): Many people condemn the circus for training animals to perform tricks. Is show jumping really the same as a circus? Horses are trained to jump for our entertainment. Is this a sport?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Show Jumpers (*Read p16*)

In your next PE lesson, in small groups construct a safe jumping obstacle course that you have to complete in a timed circuit.

When you have finished, write a comic description of the activity from the horse's point of view. What did s/he think was the point of the activity and how did s/he feel when it was the rider who got the prize?

## Team Sports

(pp 6, 12, 19, 26, 29, 30, 37, 45, 46, 50, 54, 58 & 61)

## SUMMARY

Team sports attract many fans who identify with 'their' team. These fans are usually very loyal and partisan. They will dress themselves in their teams' colours to demonstrate their support.

Team sports are often very exciting to watch as they provide the opportunity for groups of players to co-operate and share their skills to achieve a result.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- People who watch team sports generally support only one team in any match. They follow a team rather than the sport and might not watch other games if 'their' team is not playing. Is this a reasonable way to enjoy a sport?
- Soccer and Gaelic players enjoy public recognition. Many people expect them to be role models. Is this reasonable? If they break the law then there is a media outcry. Should they have the right to privacy and to be judged only on their sporting skills?
- Every team sport nowadays has the opportunity for women to compete. However, they play in separate teams and leagues. Should male and female team sports now be fully integrated?
- The object in team sport is to win. How does this affect how the game is played? Is there enough encouragement for those who simply want to play for enjoyment? Do team sports have anything to offer these people?

## ACTIVITIES

The activities in this section can be used with any of the team sports (pp6, 12, 19, 26, 29, 30, 37, 45, 46, 50, 54, 58 & 61), but I have suggested some specific examples under each activity.

### 1. Flying High & Low (*Read pp45, 58 & 61*)

Choose two teams from a sport that you follow; one that you are a fan of and the other that you are not.

Explain why you are a fan of one and not the other. Give detail and avoid expressions like '*they are better*'.

In the style of the author give a description for each of the teams.

### 2. Hidden Gems (*Read pp29, 30, 37 & 46*)

Talented team sports people can be found in every part of the country. However, not all of them will become famous and will remain known only locally.

Chose a local outstanding sports person who is not well known, but who should be included in the book and write their entry.

### 3. I Aimed High

(Read pp29, 30, 37 & 46)

If this book were to be updated in the year 2040 and you were to be included, what sort of profile could be written about you?

Use your imagination to decide which sport you pursued and what achievement you had.

Was the journey easy? How did your determination reveal itself when disappointment inevitably happened?

### 4. Q & A

(Read pp29, 30, 37 & 46)

In groups of three choose one sports person from the book that you think most appealing and prepare a list of three questions that they could be asked.

Then, separately write the answer that **YOU** believe they would give to each question.

Finally, as a group compare each answer and together choose one that you all think is closest to the answer they might give.

### 5. A Sporting Nation

(Read pp29, 30, 37 & 46)

For the next edition of the book, The O'Brien Press want to change the cover of the book to give the impression that sport is very important to everyone across the whole island.

The new cover has to demonstrate all the excitement and diversity that represents sport across the island.

Create both front and back covers.

### 6. I'm included

(Read pp29, 30, 37 & 46)

It is exciting to watch team sports where there is a high level of elite performance, however, for many of us, participation at this level is unrealistic.

Sport Ireland would like to improve levels of participation in sport and has asked every club to write an **'Inclusivity Statement'** for their club to indicate how they will include everyone regardless of ability in their activities.

In groups, write a template statement for the clubs to use.

## Athletics

(pp 22-23, 34, 62-63)

### SUMMARY

Athletics are an exciting collection of disciplines and many communities across

the country have popular running clubs, encouraging participation for a wide range of ages and abilities.

Over the years, Irish athletes have achieved success at both World Championships and the Olympics, representing Ireland with distinction.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

When we watch an Irish athlete win and listen to *'Amhrán na bhFiann'* as the tricolour is raised, we feel a sense of pride. Why is this? We have made no contribution to either the race or the athlete's preparation. How are we involved? Would we feel the same if the athlete was competing under a different flag? Are we cheering the athlete or the flag? What does this say about how we follow sport? [youtu.be/ROD8WSThGHk](https://youtu.be/ROD8WSThGHk)

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Marathon

John Treacy is another Irish athlete, famous for long distance and marathon running.

The author had intended to include a profile of him, but has mislaid his notes.

Create a similar illustrated profile for John Treacy.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Treacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Treacy)

[youtu.be/uiikQHsDu5E](https://youtu.be/uiikQHsDu5E)

[athleticsireland.ie/fanzone/hall-of-fame/john-treacy/](https://athleticsireland.ie/fanzone/hall-of-fame/john-treacy/)

#### 2. Olympics

The Irish Olympic Committee have praised this book and suggested a collage competition for the next Olympics to demonstrate the extent of Irish involvement over the years.

Create a collage including pictures, illustrations and interesting pieces of information about the Irish involvement over the years.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland\\_at\\_the\\_Olympics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland_at_the_Olympics)

[irelandxo.com/ireland-xo/news/chronicles-insight-irish-olympians](https://irelandxo.com/ireland-xo/news/chronicles-insight-irish-olympians)

[bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/art-and-design-ks1-ks2-creating-a-collage-landscape/zfrfbdm](https://bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/art-and-design-ks1-ks2-creating-a-collage-landscape/zfrfbdm)

[www.scoilnet.ie/search/?q=collage](https://www.scoilnet.ie/search/?q=collage)

#### 3. The Final Bend

(Read pp22-23 & 34)

Coming off the final bend and finding the energy to accelerate and lose the field is a tremendous feeling that every athlete has

tried to describe.

Use your imagination to create a Haiku poem to describe the sensation.

Use the first line to describe your tiredness and the second line to describe the surge of energy as you accelerate and the final line to describe the feeling as you cross the finish, irrespective of your final position.

[www.scoilnet.ie/search/?q=haiku](https://www.scoilnet.ie/search/?q=haiku)

## Road Racing Sports

(pp 20 & 25)

### SUMMARY

Road racing is thrilling to watch; however, it can be dangerous to participate in and has claimed the lives of many famous competitors.

Ireland is a particularly exciting venue for these events because of the narrow country roads and tortuous bends.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

□ (Read p25): Road racing is extremely dangerous. Is danger an important ingredient for these events? Why is danger exciting for us? How can a sensible line be drawn between excitement and danger in any sport?

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Follow Me (Read p20)

Watching an interview with Sean Kelly and Stephen Roche on RTÉ, Shay Elliot listens as they nominate him as their hero; as their inspiration for taking up cycling and decides to write a personal letter to them to thank and congratulate them and share some memories.

Write the letter he sent.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen\\_Roche](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Roche)

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sean\\_Kelly\\_\(cyclist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sean_Kelly_(cyclist))

#### 2. Flashing Past

(Read pp20 & 25)

During a race, everything whizzes past so quickly that it is barely recognizable, however, the rider's brain still identifies everything it sees.

Watch a camera feed of a race and then try to give a description of the impressions your brain receives as things whizz past.

How will you adapt your normal writing style and vocabulary to give a sense of what is happening?

[youtu.be/63W7RqKAorw](https://youtu.be/63W7RqKAorw)

### 3. 100mph @ 79 (Read p25)

When she stepped out of the F1 car, Rosemary was interviewed for a racing magazine.

In pairs prepare five questions for her interview and then swap with another pair to create the answers she might give.

How did the answers compare with what you thought she might say?

## Multi - Sport Athletes (pp 10 & 11)

### SUMMARY

Many people can manage a respectable skill level in one sport; however, to be competitive in several different sports requires a particular sporting ability.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p11):** Modern coaching develops skills that are specific to a particular sport. It is unlikely that James Cecil Parke would today represent Ireland in so many disciplines. Does coaching encourage or limit participation in different sports? How does this type of coaching help to develop sport?
- **(Read p11):** Jim Stynes won the Brownlow Medal for Fairest & Best Player in the AFL. How important is fairness in a competitive sport where the object is to win? How would you recognize it if a team considered fairness more important than winning? Explain if fairness is more likely to be found in team or individual sports.
- **(Read pp10&11):** Athletes who enjoy participation in several sports best represent the idea of sport as joy in physical activity. Should children be encouraged to participate in several sports instead of concentrating on only one? Would this help to promote the idea that sport is for participation and not always for competition?

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Sporting Skills

Each sport requires specific skills; however, there are common skills, both mental and physical, that every athlete must develop to enjoy participation.

In groups compile a list of the five essential physical and mental skills that an athlete must try to develop. Rank and illustrate your list in a humorous style.

#### 2. Imagine (Read pp10 & 11)

Imagine a conversation between Parke, Stynes, Kyle and McHale. They are discussing their sporting careers and commenting on the values and opportunities in modern sport explain how they enjoyed their experiences.

In groups, create the dialogue they had. Make sure to include at least one contribution from each of them.

#### 3. Sport for All (Read pp10 & 11)

Multi-sport athletes enjoy the sense of achievement that physical activity can bring, an enjoyment that should be available to everyone.

Using examples from the book, create a poster to encourage young people away from their screens and sofas to challenge themselves to find entertainment and a healthy lifestyle on a sports field.

[www.scoilnet.ie/search/?q=%20sport%20for%20all&fq=school\\_level%3A1](http://www.scoilnet.ie/search/?q=%20sport%20for%20all&fq=school_level%3A1)

#### 4. Medals (Read pp10 & 11)

During their conversation, the athletes discuss medals and how every country tries to win as many as possible in any competition. Maeve remembers that she has seen an interesting medal puzzle and challenges the others to solve it?

You can find it on this link  
[rich.maths.org/661](http://rich.maths.org/661)