



Gerard Siggins

Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

RATIONALE & THEMES

This story charts Eoin's journey as he copes with the demands of Castlerock, his new boarding school and adjusts to everyone's expectations that he'll display the same rugby prowess as his grandfather, Dixie.

He is forced to overcome both prejudice and his own sense of inadequacy as he strives to master a sport he has never played before.

He soon realises that a tragic event has driven a wedge between the Dixie who attended Castlerock and the grandfather he knows and loves.

Eoin is determined to discover the secret, however it is only when his grandfather falls seriously ill that he is finally able to solve the mystery and fulfil his sporting potential in heart-stopping style.

The themes include:

- Friendship
- Prejudice
- Self belief
- Commitment
- Rivalry
- Tradition
- Values
- Expectations
- Bullying

SUMMARY

When Eoin Madden is sent to boarding school at Castlerock College, little does he realise the weight of expectation and tradition he will be asked to shoulder. His grandfather, Dixie, was a rugby sporting legend at the school and his presence is everywhere.

At home in Tipperary, Dixie never talked about rugby and Eoin realises that there is a tragic secret behind his grandfather's silence, a silence that only Dixie himself can break.

Eoin has never played rugby before, however Castlerock is a rugby school and he is expected not only to play, but also to display the 'Madden magic'.

Despite the bullying prejudice of the team captain, Eoin's skill quickly develops and along with advice secured from a strange encounter with a player called Brian on a school trip to the Aviva stadium, he manages to secure a place on the 1st XV.

When his grandfather takes ill suddenly, Eoin visits him in hospital and when he raises the subject of his illustrious rugby pedigree, Dixie promises to tell him the story when he recovers.

Following a relapse in Dixie's recovery, Mr Finn, Eoin's history teacher and Dixie's schoolfriend, drives Eoin home to visit his grandfather and is able to renew an old and dear friendship with Dixie.

Dixie finally tells Eoin the reason behind the abrupt and tragic end to his rugby career.

When Eoin cracks a rib during a match and it seems as if he will lose his place in the final, his friend from the Aviva gives him an old remedy, which does the trick.

The final is to be played at the Aviva and Dixie is well enough to travel to see Eoin play.

Just before half time, the captain is injured and unable to continue so Eoin is slotted into out-half position to control the game.

The second half is very evenly balanced but when Eoin remembers the tactical tip from his friend Brian they are able to score a try and recover the match to within a point of their opponents.

With the clock run down and with Brian's assistance, Eoin guides the conversion between the posts and the final whistle sees Castlerock win by the narrowest of margins.

The best celebration for Eoin is Dixie's smile and the knowledge that the ghost of the tragedy that ended his rugby career has now been exorcised completely.

APPROACH

The story identifies several pertinent and very interesting concepts around all of the themes.

A useful approach would facilitate group discussion to establish and challenge how outcomes are influenced.

These are highlighted in the discussion points for each section.

The guide is presented in three sections to reflect the development of the story.

Section 1 Settling In Page 7-63

SUMMARY

Eoin has been separated from family and friends in Tipperary and delivered into the unfamiliar setting of a rugby-obsessed boys boarding school in Dublin: Castlerock College.

He is unsure how he will cope and more than puzzled to discover that the memory of his grandfather Dixie seems to be everywhere.

As Eoin begins to settle in and meet people he realises that there is an expectation of his rugby skills that he doesn't share, especially as he has never played the game before.

After a brief introduction to the basics of the game from Alan, his room mate, Eoin joins the 'C' team for their first practice session.

The rugby coach, Mr Carey is less than enthusiastic about their ability and when

Eoin momentarily forgets where he is, taking a high ball with ease before slotting it expertly between the posts for a point betraying his Gaelic football credentials, he has to endure some raucous ribbing.

Despite a caustic comment, Mr Carey is impressed and later advises Eoin that he sees potential in his skill; he gives Eoin a book on basic tactics that was written by Mr Finn the school's history teacher.

Alan continues with Eoin's rugby education and despite the unwelcome attention of Duffy, the 1st XV captain and school bully, Eoin begins to grasp the essentials of the game.

As the training sessions continue, Eoin's developing skill begins to create an impact and he is promoted through the teams, much to Duffy's disgust as some of his friends lose their places to accommodate Eoin's promotion.

Alan continues to explain the finer points of strategy for Eoin as they prepare for their first game.

Trailing with ten minutes left on the clock and Rory the Castlerock scrum half changes strategy. Their opponents are big and physical, but have tired. Castlerock take advantage; moving the ball quickly to the back line and running it. A fumble presents their opponents with an opportunity to seal the game; however Eoin spots where the final pass is going and manages a perfect intercept running in a try himself to win the game for Castlerock.

In the middle of the celebration, Mr Carey observes that Eoin has obviously read Mr Finn's book. Alan wickedly observes to Eoin that now he will have to spend the weekend actually reading the book to prepare for Mr Finn's match analysis during history class on the Monday.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p 8): The school crest has a Latin inscription. Why do you think people use a language that few understand to describe themselves? Do you think things become more important if they are said in Latin? Who do you think might be more likely to use Latin and what are they really trying to say about themselves?
- (Read pp 27, 29 & 36): What is the point of sport? Is the important element the 'winning' or the participating? What benefit should you expect from being involved in sport and how does either winning or participating help to deliver this? Can winning and

participating ever be separated? Do you think that the boys in the 'C' team feel part of the school team? What do you think is the unspoken message for them?

- (Read p11): Nowadays every child lives within travelling distance of good schools, yet some parents choose to send their children to boarding school where they will be away from home for long periods. Do you think that this is reasonable for a child? What benefits might a parent expect for their children's education by sending them to boarding school?

ACTIVITIES

1. School Days: (Read p 9)

Memories are important and events add character to any school.

Could you research the events / anecdotes / characters that have attended your schools and create a simple memory box of stories / artefacts / pictures that you think are significant to your school?

You can concentrate on the previous term / year or go further back if you wish. You should write a brief description for every item that you include and you can decorate the box in your school colours.

2. Rear View Mirror: (Read p 12)

As Eoin's dad drives away from the school, he glances in the rear view mirror and sees Eoin standing by the school door.

The author was going to include a short paragraph to describe how his dad felt remembering his own time at Castlerock as he watches Eoin grow smaller in the mirror.

Could you help him to compose a suitable paragraph? What do you think his thoughts are?

3. What You're Never Told: (Read p 23)

Every school will have a prospectus and lots of information for new pupils; however it is sometimes the information that you are NOT told officially that can be the most useful. This is the kind of information Alan has given Eoin.

Do you think that you could prepare the unofficial guide for your school?

You could work in groups to prepare the information and present it as a series of

humorous 'bullet points'.

You will need to prioritise your list with the most useful information at the beginning.

4. What's the Score? (Read p 47)

Alan has explained the scoring system used in rugby to Eoin:

- TRY: 5 pts
- CONVERSION: 2pts
- PENALTY: 3pts
- DROP GOAL: 3pts

What do you think is the lowest score you can get in a game? Are there any scores less than 40pts which are impossible to get?

If you score three unconverted tries you will score 15pts; however if you convert the first try, is it still possible to score 15pts?

Could you work in small groups to create some "What if" number puzzles for your friends?

5. Match Report: (Read pp 55-60)

Although no longer coaching, Mr Finn always writes a short (200-300 word) match report for each of the games. He writes under a pseudonym, and pins it to the noticeboard, but everyone knows it is him. It is a Castlerock tradition.

His style is very witty and he is able to use extra details from his classes to add to the players profiles.

Do you think that you could write his report for the Castlerock v St Ignatius match?

6. What Happened? (Read pp 62-63)

Before you read any further in the story, do you think that you could use your imagination to help Eoin uncover the mystery of Dixie's rugby career?

What do you think might have happened and what effect did it have?

You can keep your work to compare with the real reason when it is revealed later in the story.

7. Rugby: Facts & Stories (Read pp 49-52)

Alan realises that a lot of the technical information he is giving to Eoin might seem a little dull so he has prepared a page of interesting facts and funny stories about rugby from all over the world for him to read as well.

Work in small groups to compile the page that you think he prepared for Eoin? What selection would you have made?

You can use these sites to help you:

www.irishrugby.ie/irfu/history/from_the_archives.php

www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/14854802

www.rugbyfootballhistory.com/

Section 2 Injured pp 64 - 116

SUMMARY

Eoin's performance has earned him promotion to the B team; however he is unsure whether his ability will match the challenge and is unwilling to leave the comfort of his friends in the C team.

Alan is annoyed at Eoin's promotion and a rift develops between them bringing the informal rugby lessons to an abrupt end.

While waiting in the dressing rooms for his first B team appearance; Eoin is horrified when Mr Carey bursts in announcing that there has been an injury in the A team and he is required to step in as a replacement.

Eoin misses a tackle conceding a draw and walks off humiliated with Duffy's stinging criticism ringing in his ears.

Both the B and C teams are defeated heavily and the rumble of resentment tells Eoin that he is being held responsible.

Thoroughly dejected and with a growing sense that rugby is not for him, Eoin joins Mr Finn on a school trip to the Aviva, where unimpressed by the facilities and with no one to talk to, his curiosity leads him to become lost in the underground labyrinth of passages.

Entering one room he startles Brian, a young man seated alone on a treatment table. When their conversation reveals similar circumstances, Eoin is buoyed by Brian's encouragement and rejoins his school trip determined to give rugby another chance.

Eoin has settled on the B team and when Alan realises that the string of defeats suffered by the C team has nothing to do with Eoin, they resolve their differences over a packet of peanuts.

Eoin shares Brian's advice and he

and Alan put in some extra practice. However the school nurse has been searching for Eoin and when they return from practice she informs him that his father has been ringing the school to speak to him.

The news is disturbing; his grandfather has taken ill and is on his way to hospital in Dublin. Eoin's parents are to collect him from school on route to the hospital.

His friends and Mr Finn are shocked and the trip to the hospital does little to reassure Eoin. Fortunately Dixie begins to recover and during one particular visit agrees to reveal the secret of his rugby career when his health improves.

Back at school Eoin's delight at securing a place on the A team is tempered when he realises that his promotion has relegated one of Duffy's friends to the bench.

Eoin's dad has arranged a treat. They are going to watch Munster play Leinster at the Aviva. Eoin goes to buy a hot dog and meets Duffy and Flanagan. In the rush to escape their nasty comments he becomes lost in the VIP section of the stadium.

He bumps into Brian again and their conversation helps to allay Eoin's fears about playing for the A team; however Brian's reminiscences leave Eoin very puzzled.

Rejoining his dad, they enjoy a thrilling match, watching O'Gara snatch a victory for Munster from a final second drop goal. Not even Duffy's sour comments can dampen his spirits when he returns to school that evening.

Duffy reveals his intention not to allow Eoin any ball at all and earns a rebuke from the coach at half time for questioning Eoin's inclusion in the team. Eoin, however, still manages to make an impression as the team maintain their unbeaten run in the cup.

As the Christmas holidays approach, they have one more match to play; an away fixture to Tipperary.

The team remain in school an extra night so that they can all travel together. Mr Carey has organised a Christmas treat and when one of the team foolishly eats too much, Rory finds himself called off the bench as a replacement.

Their opponents are huge and Duffy's prejudice reveals itself when Eoin engages the opposition with some

good-humoured remarks.

A nasty vicious remark creates a sour note and Eoin accidentally receives the retribution intended for Duffy who made the remark.

The resulting tackle leaves Eoin injured with a cracked rib and the doctor's advice suddenly throws doubt on his continuing progress in the competition as his recovery time might exclude him from the finals.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read pp 64, 65 & 92: Rugby is now a 'professional' sport like soccer and the players are paid to train full time, unlike the GAA. Do you think that being professional is better for the sport than remaining amateur? Think of all the merchandising with the sport. Is this really only commercialism? Do you think that rugby lost anything when it became professional?
- Read P 107: The team are referred to as '*Special*'. Why do you think this is? Do you think it is a good thing to create heroes or 'special' people just because of a particular ability that they might have? What effect do you think this might have on the person themselves?
- Read p 110: At the end of rugby matches the teams will line up to shake hands as a sporting token. Do you think it is only a gesture without any real sincerity? Does Duffy's outburst reveal the true attitude in any game? If you are only there to win, do you think it is ever possible to be sporting towards an opponent?

ACTIVITIES

1. Team Spirit: (Read p 66)

Alan is upset that rugby at Castlerock seems to be only about those with skill. He is not skilled at rugby, however he is a very talented letter writer and he is annoyed at what he sees as an injustice. He believes that sport really should be about participation rather than competition.

He decides to write to Mr Carey to challenge the ethos of rugby selection being only for the elite?

Can you write the letter that you think he sent?

2. Grand Memories: (Read p 83)

Eoin recaptures all the times he spent with his grandfather and as he thinks about them, they comfort him.

Do you have a favourite memory of a time that you spent with an older relative?

Can you describe the memory and explain why you think it is special?

(You can use the 5 x W and H: who, what, when, where, why & how)

3. Lansdowne Road

(Read pp 71-75)

When they return to school, Mr Finn sets the class the task of writing a brief paragraph on the history of Lansdowne Road. They are to choose three events only from the history of the ground that they think are significant.

Eoin hasn't been paying attention and now needs your help. Can you use the link below to research three events for him?

You will have to write the information in note/bullet point form and he will use your notes to write his own paragraph.

You can try this activity in pairs by swapping notes and then writing paragraphs based on each other's notes.

You can find useful information at these sites.

www.avivastadiumevents.com/stadium-history.aspx

www.rugbyfootballhistory.com/lansdowne.html

4. Poster Boy: (Read pp 71-75)

Before the end of their tour, the guide announces that Aviva have organised a competition for schools to create a poster to advertise their school's programme for 2013.

They have decided that the poster has to include historical aspects and appeal to both girls and boys as well as highlight all the benefits of being involved with rugby.

Eoin and Alan decide that they will design a collage of pictures from the Internet as well as including pictures that they have drawn themselves.

Do you think that you could create a similar poster?

5. The Simile Bin (Read p 98)

The author uses the image of a rabbit running to describe the flight of the ball. This is a simile and they are sometimes

used to add power and description to an action.

Most sports journalists have their own list of favourite similes that they like to use when describing the action in a match.

Do you think that you could make your own list of ten similes to describe the actions that take place during a rugby game?

(HINT: think of the action first; then try to find a simile e.g. The front row crouched then thudded into the scrum like ...)

You can find some examples of similes at these sites:

www.mywordwizard.com/similes-for-kids.html

www.buzzle.com/articles/examples-of-similes.html

6. Analysis: (Read pp 101-103)

During every match, Mr Carey makes very brief notes on each player's performance, including compliments and points to work on. He adds his comments as the match progresses so that he has a list of points on each player by the end of the match.

The notes are very cryptic; usually only a word or phrase and include underlining, stars / asterisks.

If you were to see the page he created for the Ligouri match what do you think his remarks for Duffy's and Eoin's performance would look like?

7. The Bully Identikit:

(Read pp 108 & 112)

Richie Duffy is a bully. He is opinionated, abusive and prejudiced; yet he is tolerated by his teachers and he has a circle of friends.

Do you think that you could recognise a bully? What sort of clues in their behaviour would you use to identify them?

Can you draw the outline of a bully on one side of your page and then decide what heading you will use on the other side? i.e. clothes / friends / behaviour etc.

Try to include a comment under each heading that you think will help you to identify someone as a bully.

8. The 10 Commandments

(Read p115)

In any modern sport, particularly where young people are involved, health and

safety is treated very seriously indeed. There are very clear guidelines in place to protect them.

Nevertheless, Mr Carey has issued each boy with a list of his own safety rules. He calls them his Ten Commandments and they cover every aspect of play, training, conduct and kit.

Working in small groups, how many of his 'Commandments' do you think you could recreate?

For effect, Mr Carey also included a simple 'stick man' traffic sign illustration for each rule

Section 3 Recovery pp 117 - 184

SUMMARY

Eoin's hopes of being fit in time for the final are dealt a blow when the X-ray indicates a longer period of recovery for him.

Rory is the hero of their semi-final win and his defection to Duffy's gang is confirmed, causing friction in the dormitory.

A second trip to the doctor and X-ray confirms Eoin's agonisingly slow recovery. Returning to school, he misses his stop on the DART and finds himself at the Aviva. Deciding to explore, he meets Brian again who suggests an old remedy – comfrey – to heal his ribs. He is shocked to discover that Brian is a ghost and learns about the tragic accident that killed him.

Back at school Mr Finn disrupts a confrontation with Duffy and advises Eoin to be careful. Eoin mentions the old remedy and Mr Finn confirms its properties, agreeing to source some that evening from a hedgerow in the school.

Later, Eoin receives news that Dixie is in hospital again. Mr Finn offers to drive him home in the morning.

When they arrive, Dixie is sleeping, however Mr Finn has remembered the comfrey and Eoin's mum makes a poultice from it and straps it to his ribs.

When Dixie awakens, he is delighted to meet his old friend Mr Finn, but before they speak he asks everyone to leave except Eoin and then he tells him the story of how his wife, Eoin's granny, was killed by a fallen tree during a match; she managed to save her child, Eoin's dad,

Kevin. Dixie's grief was so intense that he burned all reminders of rugby and turned his back on the game.

This he regrets now and through Eoin he has been able to find a way to enjoy the sport again.

At school, Eoin continues to apply the comfrey poultice and persuades Mr Carey to arrange another X-ray. He is delighted with the doctor's diagnosis that the effects of the injury have disappeared completely and he is selected to play.

The day of the final dawns for the team and returning from their jog they are awed to see the great Dixie Madden parked at the school steps. For Eoin he is just granddad and when he rushes to greet him, Dixie tells him how proud they are of him.

Eoin fluffs his first touch and they are punished with a try and conversion. Duffy's scathing criticism is unexpectedly deflected by the team who mutter a defence of Eoin's game.

With seconds to the interval, Duffy's arm is broken in a crunching tackle forcing Mr Carey to draft Eoin to take Duffy's position in control of play.

To calm his nerves, Eoin retreats to the bathroom where he meets Brian again; Brian reassures him that his talent and ability are up to the challenge before imparting a final piece of strategy advice.

Castlerock claw their way back into the game and with seconds remaining, the score at 13:7 Eoin sees Brian at the sideline and remembers his advice.

Spinning a huge pass to the wing, he puts Shane, the fastest runner in the school, on his own with a ten-metre start.

The resulting try leaves the score at 13:12 with the clock run down and Eoin to take the conversion with the last kick of the game

As he gauges the angle and distance from the spot kick, he sees Brian for the last time standing between the posts encouraging him and willing the kick to fly straight and true.

The eruption of cheering confirms that his kick is good as the final whistle blows and when Eoin reaches his family in the VIP box Dixie rewards him with the best smile he has ever seen.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read pp 121-123): Since Rory has secured his place on the team; he

is not as friendly to Eoin and Alan. Why do you think this is so? How do you think peer pressure influences people? What do you think Rory's behaviour says about him and his desire to 'belong' to the team? What qualities do you think are needed to be able to resist the pressure to change your behaviour?

- (Read p 151): Dixie is devastated by grief over the loss of his wife and despite offers of support; he blames rugby for the loss. Do you think grief can be eased with the support of friends? What sort of things can usefully be said and what things should be avoided? www.r.d4u.org.uk/ www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk/Children.html
- (Read p 168): Tradition means repeating something in a particular way or sequence. Why do you think that traditions are important? Why do you think that people will follow traditions especially before important events?

ACTIVITIES

1. Try This: (Read p 122)

Photo journalists are very skilled at using a picture to capture all the action and excitement when a try is scored.

Find a suitably exciting rugby action picture from a newspaper. Then cut it in half. Do you think that you could redraw the missing section?

2. The Friendly Ghost:

(Read p 138)

Eoin was able to believe in ghosts because he had heard so many stories from his grandfather.

Do you think that you could write a story about a friendly ghost? Think about how you might meet them and discover that they were a ghost. What sort of help do you think they might be able to give you?

3. Knit Bone: (Read pp 141-142)

When you visit the hospital or chemist it is hard to imagine that up until quite recently, people also used herbs and other remedies to help cure illnesses.

Can you do a little research at home with your parents or grandparents to discover the remedies that they used? Can you make a list of the illnesses they were meant to cure and explain what a modern cure might be? Why do you think that the

old remedies are not so popular now?

www.oldtimeremedies.co.uk/

www.ehow.com/about_5437431_irish-folk-remedies.html

4. Match Poster: (Read p 160)

Alan is delighted that Eoin has made the starting XV and in his enthusiasm has suggested to Mr Carey that they should have a poster to complement the team list.

Mr Carey thinks it a great idea and asks Alan to create one immediately.

Alan realises to his horror that he has only a few hours to complete one. Can you help please?

5. Victoria Concordia Crescit (Read p 169)

When Mr Finn has made his speech, Charlie leans across to Eoin and asks him what the motto, 'Victory comes from Harmony' really means.

Eoin thinks for a second and then realises that he now knows exactly what it means and he can give an example.

He turns to Charlie and in a few short sentences he explains it perfectly.

What do you think he said?

6. The Tunnel: (Read p 170)

As Eoin and the team wait in the darkness and silence of the tunnel to move into the light, space and noise of the stadium, they think of the journey they have made as they prepared for this moment.

Do you think that you could capture their feelings in a short poem (Haiku or Cinquain) as they move through the tunnel?

You could illustrate your poem with a drawing of the tunnel as the players see it.

www.primaryresources.co.uk/english/englishC7c.htm

7. Honest to God: (Read p181)

Brian leaves the pitch and the Aviva with a huge grin plastered over his face and moves on.

Sometime later, he stands before God, who asks him what he has been doing.

Unable to contain his exuberance, Brian begins to describe the match to God.

God raises his hands smiling at Brian and says,

'Just the highlights Brian. Just the highlights. Please!'

Brian gulps and begins again.

Can you write the description he gave to God of the match? How do you think he spoke to God?

Remember he is absolutely bubbling with excitement and pleasure.

Class Projects

1. STORY OF A BALL

Professional sport including rugby hold interesting anomalies that are worth exploring in terms of merchandising and the unequal distribution of wealth between the low-paid workers who manufacture the equipment and those who play the game at a professional level.

Interesting areas could include:

- How the price you pay for a ball is divided? What % of the price that you pay goes to the worker who made the ball?
- Where are the balls etc manufactured? Why are they made there? What are the working conditions etc?

There is scope for a range of investigations and activities could include:

- Letter from a worker, which is hidden inside a ball
- Newspaper expose
- Letter to IRFU expressing concern

Some websites that might get the conversation started:

www.spiegel.de/international/world/globalization-in-pakistan-the-football-stitchers-of-sialkot-a-683873.html

www.laborrights.org/stop-child-labor/foulball-campaign/news/11736

www.crin.org/resources/infodetail.asp?ID=1177

www.talonfairtrade.org/

www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/photo-gallery-the-football-stitchers-of-sialkot-fotostrecke-52894.html

2. HEINEKEN ALL-STARS

If the Heineken Cup organisers decided this year to introduce a promotional event similar to the GAA All-Stars team to play exhibition / charity matches; who do you think from all the teams might be selected?

The activity might include creating a talent matrix that players performance might be measured against or scanning and summarising the match reports from a small selection of newspapers; particularly those who ascribe scores out of ten for performance.

Activities might include:

- Writing to / inviting a sports journalist to talk to the class on how they judge performance in a player.
- Presenting their ideas to the Heineken sponsors explaining how this might enhance the competition and submitting their own All-Star panel.

This website gathers all statistics from the 2012 Heineken Cup:

www.statbunker.com/rugby/btb/index.php?PL=competition&Code=5730113