



Ayeisha McFerran

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Teaching Guide

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RATIONALE AND THEMES

This guide has been designed to complement a class reading of the text in a way that brings the text alive whilst also enriching students' critical abilities. The activities aim to inspire young readers by encouraging them to examine Ayeisha's background, her personality and how she develops over time. The guide also aims to develop empathy skills, stimulate discussion and encourage readers to develop critical thinking skills through exploring the central character's motivations in light of the wider world.

The activities included are designed to hone communication, presentation and literacy skills – as well as tell the story of one of Ireland's greatest sports stars, from the tragic loss of her mum as a teenager to her appearance at the Tokyo Olympics. Themes include:

- Following a dream,
- Friendship,
- Courage,
- Family,
- Sport and new beginnings.

SUMMARY

This biography tells the tale of one of Ireland's greatest sports stars, Ayeisha McFerran. From a chance training session in Larne to becoming the world's best hockey goalkeeper, this is the story of how the young Larne woman overcame personal tragedy to make her name on the world stage.

Part 1 Picking Up the Stick Pages 7–69

Ayeisha's story starts with the hockey game against Canada that saw the Irish Women's Hockey team qualify for their first ever Olympic games. It's full of drama, thanks to a very tense penalty shoot-out. The next chapter

takes us back to Larne, where Ayeisha was born. We meet her family and hear about her dreams to travel far from Northern Ireland and see the world. From the start, playing in goal is her passion when she's invited to join in a game of soccer with her friends. Young Ayeisha is full of energy – but hockey isn't a sport she knows about, until she and her mother are randomly handed a leaflet by a family friend.

Ayeisha's first taste of hockey leaves her wanting more, but it becomes clear that she's also talented in many other things. She's musical and an Irish dancer, with a whole host of trophies to her name. We find out more about her family and her close relationship with her grandparents. We also find out how important her mother is to her and how Ayeisha's family don't have as much money as some of her peers.

Ayeisha makes the move to Larne Grammar School, where she quickly becomes the team's goalie – a position she's not very keen on because the routine of preparing takes so long, leaving her feeling left out from the rest of the team. However, that all changes after a successful turn in between the posts.

Sadly, Ayeisha's mum gets some very difficult news. Ayeisha reacts by busying herself and being as helpful as possible. The local community are incredibly supportive and fundraising gives Ayeisha and her family the opportunity to fulfil a dream of going to Disneyland Paris.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read p.7.** Ayeisha can't sleep because of the sound of the rain. Have you any tips for getting to sleep when you're too excited or when it's too noisy? Explain to a partner.
- Read p.11.** Have you ever watched a penalty shoot-out? How did it feel? What happened? Do you think it's a fair way of deciding the outcome of a match? Why do you think this?
- Read p.12.** Ayeisha says to herself, "Walk out slowly." Why do you think she does this? Do you think it makes a difference? Why?
- Read p.17.** Ayeisha is described as "an excitable chatterbox". How do you think your teachers would describe you? Are you the same in school as at home? Why do you think people behave differently in different situations?
- Read p.19.** Ayeisha describes the little habits her siblings have. Have you any brothers or sisters, or younger cousins? How would you describe them? What little habits do they have? How do you think they would describe you?
- Read p.20.** Ayeisha imagines the journeys of all the boats in and out of the harbour to places around the world. Have you ever looked up at the sky and followed plane trails? Why do you think we are so interested in wondering about travel? Where would you most like to visit in the world? Why?
- Read pp.28–29.** Ayeisha finds the new sport strange. Have you ever tried something new and unfamiliar? What happened? How did it feel? What did you do? Discuss with a partner.
- Read p.32.** Ayeisha's travel to competitions with her mum is one of the things she enjoys most about competing. Why do you think Ayeisha enjoys this time so much? Have you ever had a routine with your parents like Ayeisha's drive to the competitions with her mum? What is it like? If not, is there any small routine you could create – maybe you could do a chore around the house together? Or help with the grocery shopping? Discuss with a partner.
- Read p.33.** Ayeisha's mum tells her that the most important thing is to enjoy herself. Do you agree with this statement? Why do you think this? Do you think Ayeisha agrees? Why do you think this?

- **Read p.41.** Without even hearing what she’s signing up for, Ayeisha volunteers. Is this a good philosophy – to sign up for things without knowing what you’re agreeing to? Why do you think this? What advice would you give Ayeisha?
- **Read pp.48–49.** Do you think the time taken to put the gear on and take it off is enough of a reason to stop being goalie, even when she loves it? Why do you think this? What advice would you give Ayeisha?
- **Read p.59.** Ayeisha responds to her mother’s news by helping out more around the house. What does this tell us about her? Do you help around the house? What else could you do? Why do you think it is so important to share the chores in a household?
- **Read p.69.** Ayeisha declares, “I’m not afraid of anything.” Do you think this is an accurate description? Why do you think this? Do you think it’s okay to admit if you’re scared of something?

ACTIVITIES

1. BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS

On page 8, Ayeisha declares that “I’ll be ready once I have my porridge”. Do you think this is a good breakfast for an athlete? Why do you think this? Why is breakfast so important? Create a choice of three different breakfast options for the school canteen. With a partner, do some research on the sorts of breakfast foods that really set you up for the day. Think about nutrition, cost and how easy they are to make (the school canteen won’t have all day!). Present your three options to the rest of the class. *As a class, can you decide on two options to present to the school canteen?*

2. HOCKEY FACTSHEET

On page 9, we start to find out more about different plays in hockey – but how much do we understand? In pairs or small groups, do some research on hockey. How many players are there? How is the match split in terms of time? What are the different positions? What are the different ‘set pieces’ of plays? What are the rules of play? Use the glossary on pages 180–182 to create a short fact sheet on the ten most important things to remember about hockey.

3. OLYMPIC DREAM

On page 15, we find out that Ayeisha and the team are the first Irish team to qualify for the Olympics. Create a news report celebrating the result. Include the drama

of the penalty shoot-out, an interview with key players and maybe some eye-witness accounts from spectators in the stand. The report can either be a written newspaper report or it can be script for a TV bulletin.

4. NEGLECTED IN NETS

On page 24, we find out that the team take it in turns to play in goals. What do you think about the team system of taking it in turns to play in goals – what does this say about the position of goalie? Why do you think people don’t want to be in goal? Do you think this is fair? How would you persuade people to play in goals? In small groups, create a presentation that persuades people about the benefits of playing in the goalkeeper position.

5. INSIDER SCOOP

On pages 33–35, we get to see the inside of the changing rooms at an Irish dancing competition. The atmosphere is enthusiastic and competitive but friendly – how would you describe it? Imagine you are a TV commentator. Describe the scene – what’s happening? Why is it happening? What do you think is going through the minds of the people involved? What are your thoughts on what’s happening? Use the text from the book for inspiration.

6. AYEISHA’S DIARY

Ayeisha’s first introduction to goalkeeping on pages 44–45 isn’t the best – but she keeps going. What does this tell us about her? Ayeisha explains her excitement at being in goals, but that she “missed playing outfield with her friends”. Imagine you are Ayeisha. Write a diary entry the night before your first game in goals. Explain your hopes and fears for the game ahead. What are you feeling? Complete a diary entry for after the game as well.

7. LETTER TO AYEISHA

Imagine you are Ayeisha’s mum. How do you feel about your daughter’s future? Write her a letter exploring how proud you are of her and what your hopes are for her in the future. Tell her how much she means to you. *Extension: Choose someone in your life you’re close to. Write them a letter telling them how much they mean to you. You don’t have to give it to them if you don’t want to – but it will DEFINITELY make them happy if you do.*

Ayeisha has become famous for her talent and has been performing at Ulster level. When she makes the team, she ends up being driven to and from practice by her friend Ruth’s parents, because her mum is ill. However, her mum is growing weaker and tragically passes away. Ayeisha is devastated, but her family and friends offer as much support as they can. Her uncle Eamonn brings her to and from practice. The Ulster team is a welcome distraction, as she has many friends and some exciting competitions to keep her occupied.

However, Ayeisha isn’t coping very well and eventually has to move out of her aunt and uncle’s home and into foster care, which means she is separated from her siblings. She quickly settles in to her foster home and continues to excel at sports, travelling to London to compete in a javelin competition.

Ayeisha is invited to play for a famous senior women’s hockey team. She’s nervous about leaving all her friends at Larne Ladies, but soon begins to settle in. She’s astonished to find her first meeting with her new team is a competitive match, but really enjoys herself and plays well. She continues to gain in strength and skills and soon competes in the Irish team. Her first run-out is against the world’s best team and although she’s disappointed when they lose, her team and coach are very happy with her performance.

Ayeisha is soon playing with the women’s senior Irish team and earns her first senior cap on her eighteenth birthday. As she becomes an adult, she leaves school and decides to move to Dublin. Unfortunately things don’t work out and she defers, joining another team on her return to Northern Ireland. She earns the chance to play in the qualifiers for the Rio Olympics.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p.75.** Mrs Farrell advises Ayeisha to “think of the funny times with your mum”. Do you think this is good advice? Why do you think this? Is there any other advice you would give Ayeisha at this point? Why?
- **Read p.75.** Coach Parker offers to be there for Ayeisha whenever she needs support. Can you think of something kind a teacher or adult did for you? What happened? How did it make you feel? Why do you think acts of kindness make such a difference?

- **Read p.81.** Ayeisha is really sad her mum isn't there to talk to when she's feeling low. What do you think her mum would have said to her? Why do you think this?
- **Read p.85** What do you think is really going on with Ayeisha and her family? What advice would you give Ayeisha? How do you think her aunt and uncle feel? What would you say to them? Why would you say this?
- **Read p.99.** Do you think there have been indications of just how good Ayeisha is before this? Why do you think she doesn't recognise this? What does this tell us about Ayeisha?
- **Read p.101.** Ayeisha is nervous about leaving Larne Ladies. Why do you think she is right to leave? What advice would you give her? Have you ever found yourself in a situation like this? What happened?
- **Read p.119.** Due to financial difficulties, Ayeisha decides not to move to Dublin and to stay in Northern Ireland. Do you think it's the right decision? Why do you think this? What would you do if you were Ayeisha? Why?
- **Read pp.119–120.** Ayeisha explains that she feels it is "important to show her commitment by being punctual". Do you agree? Why do you think this?
- **Read p.127.** Ayeisha finds it strange when the crowd are chanting her name. How do you think they know her name? What has she done to deserve this level of attention? What sportspeople do you know of? Why are they important to you?

ACTIVITIES

1. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Re-read pages 88–89. What are your first impressions of Nick? How is he presented? Choose three adjectives or short phrases to describe his personality. Then select three quotes from the text that back up your description. Write this up in three separate paragraphs. Each paragraph should start with a statement about your impression of Nick and quote the piece of the book that proves your point. Then you should explain *exactly* how the quote you've chosen proves the point you're making about his personality.

2. MEET YOUR HERO

On page 96, Ayeisha is thrilled to meet Alex Danson, one of her hockey heroes. Have you ever met one of your heroes? What happened? Write up a description of meeting your hero. What did/would you say? How did/would you approach them? What did/would they say to you?

3. FREEZE FRAME

As Ayeisha makes her way across Belfast and onto the plane with her javelin, she causes quite a stir. What would you do if you saw someone just marching around with a 'spear'? In small groups, create four freeze frames of different parts of Ayeisha's journey. Think about what's going through everyone's minds, including the little girl at the beginning. Be prepared to answer questions in character.

4. COACH PARKER

On page 100, Miss Parker offers to transport Ayeisha to and from hockey, and on page 103, she tells Ayeisha to just call her 'Parker'. What sort of person is Miss Parker? Why do you think she is so willing to help her student? Imagine you are Miss Parker. Write an email to a friend describing how you're helping your student and why it's so important to you that Ayeisha gets these opportunities.

5. BON VOYAGE

As she progresses in hockey, Ayeisha is getting the chance to travel – just like she dreamed of when she was a little girl. How do you think she and the other team members feel? In groups, script and act a short documentary about their preparations for Spain. Interview Ayeisha, Ruth and some of the other players about how they feel and what they've been doing to prepare. How did they feel when that first kit arrived?

6. READ ALL ABOUT IT

Back in Larne, the local newspaper runs a story on how Ayeisha is Ireland's youngest ever hockey goalkeeper. Write the article. Think about what she has achieved, how she has got to this point and what obstacles she has overcome. Include quotes from people like her old schoolfriends, hockey friends from Larne Ladies and her teachers – maybe Miss Parker?

7. FAIR PLAY

Re-read page 128, where the other players complain to the umpire until she changes her mind. Is this fair? Should players be allowed to speak to the referee in games? Why do you think this? Many sports have a 'fair play' charter – a list of good behaviours expected from every player. In pairs or small groups, draw up your own 'class fair play charter' – for both the classroom and the playground.

Ayeisha moves to America to play for the Louisville Cardinals on a full scholarship. Her four years there pass quickly – and are filled with awards. She makes history by winning the All-American Award four years in a row. In her last year, she returns to Europe, where Ireland make astonishing progress in the Women's Hockey World Cup, ending up in the final. Ayeisha starts to gain global attention for some of her spectacular saves, winning Goalkeeper of the Tournament.

As runners-up, the team return to Ireland to a hero's welcome. Not only do they get to travel in luxury, but it seems like the whole country has come out to celebrate. Once back in the USA, Ayeisha finds it a little difficult to readjust to the pace of more regional hockey. She graduates with mixed feelings and decides that she wants to move back to Europe to play hockey in the Netherlands, where the standard is the best in the world.

Ayeisha earns her 100th cap for Ireland in dramatic style. Playing on tour in South Africa, she picks up an illness from the unclean water on the pitch that leaves her in hospital.

As the global pandemic starts to become more serious, Ayeisha is glad to have a break from hockey – playing at the highest level for five years has left her exhausted. However, it puts the Olympics under threat. Thankfully, the team can travel to Tokyo, becoming the first Irish Women's Hockey team ever to compete in the Olympic Games. It's a wonderful experience, and the book ends with Ayeisha walking out on to the pitch as an Olympian for the first time.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p.132.** When she's in the USA, the other girls are very interested in her accent. Have you ever had anyone comment on your accent? What other accents do you know? How important do you think accents are? Some people judge others on their accents – why do you think they do this? Do you think this is fair? Why do you think this?
- **Read p.134.** Ayeisha doesn't like being in the spotlight, as she thinks of hockey as a team game and that everyone should be celebrated equally. Do you agree with her? What does this attitude tell us about Ayeisha? Can you think of any sports

where you think individual players are given too much attention? Why do you think this? How do you think the other team members would feel about this?

- **Read p.136.** Ayeisha's teammates are pleased that Ireland are the underdogs. What does this expression mean? Why do you think some teams see it as a good thing? Do you agree? Why do you think this?
- **Read p.142.** Ayeisha has a good-luck ritual of eating chocolate before a game. Why do you think some players have such superstitions? Can you think of any others you've heard of? They don't have to be related to sports stars – it could be something your granny does. Why do we have superstitions?
- **Read pp.153–154.** Why do you think so many people have come out in support? Why do you think people are so passionate about following their country's sports teams?
- **Read p.157.** Ayeisha tells a boy that you shouldn't give out to other players. Do you agree? Why do you think it's important to treat your teammates with respect? Is this something we should do in everyday life too? Why do you think this?
- **Read p.157.** Ayeisha has mixed feelings about leaving America. Why do you think this is? What advice would you give her? Have you ever felt like this? What happened? What did you do?
- **Read p.164.** Ayeisha is alone in hospital. How would you try to help keep her spirits up? What advice would you give her? What do you think of her determination to keep playing even though she is sick? What does this tell us about her?
- **Read p.166.** Ayeisha is getting tired of hockey. Why do you think this is? What advice would you give her? Have you ever felt like giving up on something? What happened?
- **Read p.167.** Ayeisha keeps busy baking bread and doing things during lockdown. Did you have any projects? Why do you think so many people tried to learn new things or spent time doing creative things? Why do you think being creative is so important for our mental health? Is there anything you'd like to learn? How would you do it?
- **Read p.168.** Ayeisha and Anne decide to stop looking at the news and to think positively about the Olympics. Do you agree that this is a good idea? Why do you think this?

ACTIVITIES

1. IMPORTANCE OF TIME KEEPING

In the Irish camp, if you're late to a team meeting, the punishment is that you have to sing – so Ayeisha has never been late. Do you think this is a good deterrent for lateness? How would you feel if you had to sing any time you were late to class? Do you think people should be punished for lateness, or rewarded if they are always on time? What's the policy on punctuality like at your school? In pairs, come up with three suggestions on how to improve punctuality. Write to your headteacher, explaining your suggestions and persuading the teacher why they could work.

2. WORLD CUP PRE-MATCH BRIEFING

At major sports tournaments, there are usually briefings about the teams before the game. Imagine you are a reporter preparing a briefing before the quarter-final against India. Think about interviewing certain players and certain experts, and include some information on how Ireland have progressed in the tournament – use the descriptions of the games so far and give a bit of background on their star player, Ayeisha. Your presentation should be a couple of minutes long.

3. SUDDEN DEATH

How do you think Ayeisha feels before the 'sudden death' penalty shoot-out on page 147? What do you think is going through her mind? In pairs, create a list of five questions you would ask Ayeisha and think about how she would respond. Take it in turns as a class to hotseat Ayeisha to try to understand what's going through the keeper's mind.

4. GAINING SUPPORT

The Dutch team have lots of sponsorship and they're playing against amateurs. Is this fair? Why do you think the teams are so unbalanced? Do you think women's hockey should have more support? In small groups, do some investigation and discuss why and how they deserve more recognition and support. Present to the rest of the class.

5. SKINCARE

On page 161, it's pointed out that Ayeisha has very fair skin and red hair – which means she needs to look after her skin in the sun. Why is it so important to look after our skin in the sun? Research how we can best look after our skin, and create an information guide on the top five things people can do to take care of their skin.

6. WATER SAFETY

When in South Africa, Ayeisha is hospitalised, possibly due to splashes from unclean water. Access to clean water is a basic right, but nearly one billion people around the world live without clean water. Big improvements need to be made. In small groups, research the global situation. Use charities like wateraid.org to find out more. Give a presentation on why clean water is a basic human right and what we can do to improve the situation for many people.

7. FEMALE SPORTS STARS

When she gains sponsorship on page 170, Ayeisha says that one of her main aims is to promote women in sport. What other famous Irish female sports stars do you know of? As a class, create a wall display of female sports stars. Make sure at least five are from Ireland. You should create a poster outlining where they're from, when they played, how they got there – and of course what sport they play or played! Look at the design on the front of this book – can you find or create an image like that for your sports star?

CLOSING ACTIVITIES

1. EXPANDING THE ENDING

Why do you think the book finishes here and not with the journey through the tournament? Write an alternative final chapter to the book that covers Ireland's progress in the Olympics. You will need to research what actually happened.

2. LETTER TO AYEISHA

Write a letter to Ayeisha McFerran telling her how much you enjoyed the book and how impressed you are by her life and what she has achieved. Have you any questions for her?

3. AYEISHA CHARACTER STUDY

Ayeisha is a very interesting character and we've learned a lot about her through the book. What sort of person is she? Has she changed in the story? Write an extended character study – choose 7–8 adjectives to describe her personality and choose a short quote (no more than three lines) for each adjective. Write it up, with each paragraph making a point, using a quote and explaining how the quote proves your point.