



All to Play For

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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 question the characters' motivations and the overall themes. The guide aims to develop empathy skills, stimulate discussion and encourage readers to dissect literary techniques in fresh and engaging ways. There are also activities included that are designed to hone communication, presentation and literacy skills. This contemporary novel centres around the life of a teenage girl as she tries to come to terms with difficult events and themes include:

- Grief
- Friendship
- Courage
- Bullying
- Family
- Ghosts
- Sport and new beginnings

SUMMARY

Set in contemporary Ireland, the novel tells the story of Anna Hogan, a teenager living in the west of Ireland. Her father has just died and her world has fallen apart. Her grief overwhelms her, forcing her out of school and away from the Gaelic football pitch she desperately loves. Things get even worse when her mum decides that the three of them (mum, Anna and little brother Charlie) are going to move away from Galway to Wicklow where her mum is from to be closer to her grandparents and her mum's own support network. For Anna, this means leaving behind her friends, especially her best friend Sally who has been a rock for her in her time of need.

Once they arrive in Wicklow, they soon settle in with Anna's grandparents and Anna is even persuaded back to the game she loves. However, it's difficult being the new girl and although she feels some of the excitement

coming back, she can't really translate it into skill, playing badly and below her best. School is also difficult – even though she's starting at the same time as the rest of the year group, she's still isolated and the first few days leave her feeling very isolated.

Gradually though, things begin to improve. She starts to find her place in the squad and this friendliness with the other girls begins to filter through to school too. However, the GAA coach's daughter, Tina, has taken an immediate dislike to Anna and there are some arguments between them as Anna refuses to bow down to Tina's bullying ways. To make matters worse, her mum has begun a friendship with Tina's dad Stephen.

But Anna has a special weapon up her sleeve – or down her socks. On the day he died, Anna's dad gave her a pair of orange football socks and she finally makes the decision to wear them. Every time she does, she plays brilliantly, catching every ball, reading every play by her team-mates. It's as if her dad is there, giving her the pep talk that was part of their ritual. Anna feels as if he's watching her from the side-lines, especially when she notices a strange shadowy form just by the goalposts where he always used to stand. She tries to explain this to her mum, but she becomes very upset and tells Anna she's imagining things.

Anna's relationship with Tina grows even more sour as Tina is determined to make her life a misery, posting cruel things online and taunting Anna with some very personal insults. She even manages to manipulate her dad to keep Anna off the team, even though Anna's one of their best players, which causes friction between her dad Stephen and Anna's mum Emma. Things come to a head just before the county finals – but will they manage to resolve their differences for the good of the team?

APPROACH

This is a very enjoyable and entertaining read, with many opportunities for discussion

on topics as diverse as cyberbullying, grief and working together. This guide has divided the story into three sections and the activities and discussion points aim to initiate the development of an understanding of the themes, techniques and characterisation within the novel.

Part 1 New Beginnings Pages 7 – 124

We first meet Anna in the present moment on the side-lines of a football game waiting to go on. She's cold and wet and feels very much out of place. We hear about the recent death of her father through a few flashback chapters. Anna was grief-stricken, but was starting to piece her life back together again – until her mum made the decision that they were going to move, leaving their friends behind in the west to move to Wicklow with her grandparents.

Anna is finding life in Wicklow very difficult. Football was a thing she did with her daddy and since his death, she didn't go near a pitch – until they move to Wicklow when she starts training again. However, she seems to have lost the knack of it and her efforts are terrible – far from the brilliant player she used to be. As football season starts, so does the school year. Her first day goes badly as she knows no-one, but gradually, as she gets to know more girls through training, she starts to find her feet in school too. There's only one problem – Tina. She's the daughter of their coach and she's a bully who is determined to make Anna's life a misery – both on and off the pitch.

Anna is still finding it hard living without her dad. When there is a laundry mishap, old memories flood back as Anna has to wear the socks her father gave her the day he died. However, something strange happens – she has a great game of football, but she thinks someone is watching her play. Could it be her father? She knows it sounds strange,

but she can sense a shadow at the goal-line, just where he used to stand.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p.7.** On the very first page, Anna builds a picture of the weather by using the word ‘lashing’. What does this mean? What sort of rain is it? Can you think of any other words we use for rain? What do each of them mean? Do you think we have a lot of words to describe the rain in Ireland? Why might this be?
- **Read p.11.** Anna is only just on the pitch when she is knocked over by a girl from the other team. Do you think she should have said something to the referee? Why/ why not? Why do you think the other players and her coach weren't sympathetic? How would you have reacted in this situation? Why?
- **Read p.19.** What do you think of Anna's daddy's plans that the socks will make her stand out? Is this a good tactic? Do you have a lucky pair of socks or something else? Have they ever brought you luck? Why do you think we have these superstitions?
- **Read pp.28-29.** Anna has a lot of memories of her daddy. What kind of man do you think he was? What evidence from the text gives you this impression? What do you think he would say to Anna if he could see how unhappy she is?
- **Read pp.34-36.** What do you think of Anna's mum's explanation of why she wanted to move? What sort of things does she say? Do you think she has given it a lot of thought? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 45.** Anna gives her thoughts on football: ‘That's the thing about football: it rises above the cliques.’ What is a clique? What do you think she means by this? Can you think of any other sort of activity that ‘rises above the cliques’? Do you think that avoiding cliques is a good thing? Why?
- **Read p.62.** On Anna's first day, she's feeling very isolated, especially sitting on her own in the lunch hall. Have you ever had to sit alone in a room full of people who are all in groups? How did it feel? Why do you think the other girls are laughing at her flask of tea? What does that say about the sort of girls they are? What do you think they should have done? Why do you think this?
- **Read p.91.** After their argument in training, Tina is determined to get revenge on Anna. Why do you think this is? Why do you think no-one steps in to help Anna with Tina? Why do you think Tina is behaving in this way? What would you have done in this situation? Why? What do we learn about Anna from her

reaction to Tina's threat?

- **Read p.95.** Despite Tina's bullying, Anna is still determined to go to training. Do you think this is a good idea? Why? Why do you think Anna is so certain that Tina won't stop her from playing football?
- **Read pp.101-103.** Anna really misses her dad and her mind keeps coming back to shared happy memories. What sort of things does she remember about her family when her daddy was still alive? Do you think they seemed happy? Do you and your family have any rituals that are special – little things like the after-dinner quiz?
- **Read pp.121-122.** Anna's first half doesn't go particularly well and she describes it as a ‘nightmare’. Is Anna being too hard on herself? Why do you think this? Would Stephen be so positive if she was as bad as she thought? What advice would you give her at this point?

ACTIVITIES

1. Describe Your Cosy Place.

While she's shivering in the driving rain at the side of the pitch at the opening of the novel, Anna dreams of snuggling up warm at home with her hands wrapped around a hot chocolate. What do you dream of when you're cold? Do you have a cosy place? Write a description using as many details as you can. Try and bring it alive for your reader – use some interesting adjectives, some similes and metaphors and try and include sensory description like smell. Once you're finished, get a partner to draw and label your scene. Is it how you imagined? If not, what do you need to do to your writing to make it more vivid?

2. Pep Talk

It's her first game without her father and Anna is very upset. Do you think she should keep this hidden from the other girls? What do you think they'd say if they knew how difficult she was finding the game? Imagine you are there with her at the beginning of the match. What would you say to her to get her going? Would you talk about how proud her dad would be? Write a one-minute speech to give her confidence and enthusiasm. Try and include as many persuasive devices as you can.

3. Welcome The New Girl

Anna remembers her first training session with Ballymarra on pages 40-46. Why are the other girls so cruel to her? Do you think they realise the effect it is having on Anna? What should you do with a new person to make them feel welcome? Write a series of 5 – 8 pieces of advice or guidelines that should

be used in situations where someone new is joining the group – this could be a classroom situation or a sports club or another sort of group.

4. First Day At School Advice Video

Anna finds her first day at a new school very difficult. Everything has changed and she has no-one to talk to. Can you remember your first day at school? What happened? How did you feel before? Was there anything you were especially worried about? What happened – were you right to be worried? Work in small groups to prepare a three-minute video giving advice for students about to begin their first days at school. Talk about your own experiences and what that meant for you. Is there anything you wish you'd known beforehand? What was it?

5. Little Acts Of Kindness

On page 64, Anna's terrible day is improved by a small gesture: ‘it's amazing how one act of just-a-little-kindness from one person can completely lift another person's day’. What sorts of things can we do to help one another? Watch these videos for inspiration and then work with a small group to design a campaign of kindness in your school. What sorts of gestures would be appropriate to make your school a kinder place? How will you get the message out? Will you have a ‘Day of Kindness’?

[youtube.com/watch?v=7s22HX18wDY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7s22HX18wDY)
[youtube.com/watch?v=X3ld9_p2b50](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3ld9_p2b50)

6. Analysing Tina

Re-read pages 79-82. What are your thoughts on Tina? What do you think of Anna's reaction to her behaviour here? Write an analysis of Tina based on what we've learned about her so far and the way in which she behaves in this section. Remember to include quotes from the text to support your ideas and opinions.

7. Against Cyber-Bullying

Re-read pages 107-108. Tina has started a campaign of cyber-bullying against Anna. What does this mean? In small groups, research the idea of cyber-bullying and how to prevent it and grow awareness of its dangers (for starters, visit this website: webwise.ie/html-heroes/).

In your groups, create an awareness campaign for your school, creating posters and a three-minute presentation exploring what it is, why it's dangerous and what can be done to stop it. Make sure you also include some top tips on how to stay safe online.

Part 2

Settling In

Pages 125 – 209

One evening, Anna runs to answer the door, only to find it is her coach Stephen who has come to take her mum out for a drink. After her mum leaves, she becomes very upset and has a long conversation with her granny about her feelings and gets some of her worries off her chest. School is going well – she’s making more friends and enjoying her classes. Football training is also going well and she’s forming a closer friendship with Debbie – even though Tina is still bossing everyone around and being unpleasant. At home, Anna overhears a conversation that makes her feel uneasy. However, she and her mum have a few honest conversations and clear the air. Semi-final day comes and Anna gets a nasty surprise, which throws the other girls into a state of confusion and later causes tension between her mum and Stephen. She’s been put on the subs bench and as she watches the game from the side-lines, she manages to smother her disappointment. When Debbie takes a nasty hit, Anna gets her chance to play. She just wishes it wasn’t her friend Debbie she was replacing.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read pp127-128.** When Stephen is at the door, Anna’s mum makes fun of her a little, which she doesn’t like. Have your parents ever done that to you – talked to the adult to show you up? What happened? How did you feel?
- **Read p.129.** When Anna realises her mum and Stephen are going for a drink, she’s annoyed and a little upset. Does she have the right to feel this way? How do you think you would feel? Why do you think she doesn’t say anything to make her mum feel bad? Do you think her mum should’ve warned her beforehand? Why?
- **Read pp.135-136.** Anna is annoyed that her mum is being ‘showy-offy’. Why do you think this is? Is she trying to impress or could she just be nervous? Has your mum or anyone ever done a ‘posh voice’ when they’re on the phone? Why do you think people do this?
- **Read pp.141-142.** Anna’s granny gives her a lot of advice and comfort about how she feels about her mum going for a drink with Stephen and Anna reveals that she’s worried about forgetting her daddy. What advice would you give her? Would it be the same as the advice her granny gives her? Why? What do you think Anna’s mum would say if she knew this was how Anna felt?

- **Read p.153.** Anna really likes Debbie and finds her great company. After practice, their conversation is interrupted by Tina. What do you think Tina calls Debbie over? Do you think it’s just to get her away from Anna? Why would she behave like this?
- **Read pp.160-173.** Anna and her mum are really open with each other about their thoughts and feelings. Why do you think it’s important to be honest while still trying to respect others’ feelings? Do you think Anna’s mum does a good job of explaining her friendship with Stephen? Do you think this has made Anna feel better? Why? Should Anna just ask? Why is it important to keep communication going well? Why is it so important that adults allow children the option to ask questions and feel comfortable being honest?
- **Read p.181.** When Anna is preparing to find out who has been given what position, she disagrees with Stephen’s statement that ‘the subs are just as important as the first fifteen.’ Who do you think is correct – Anna or Stephen? Why do you think this?
- **Read p.185.** When the team is called out, Anna gets a very nasty surprise. What do you think has happened? Why has Stephen excluded Anna from the team? Do you think she should say something? Why/why not?
- **Read p.203.** Once she has got over the nerves, Anna’s playing really well and feeling very happy. Is there anything that makes you as happy as football makes Anna? Explain to a partner. What is it? How do you feel? Why do you think this is?

ACTIVITIES

1. Hotseating Stephen

On pages 126 – 133, Stephen stands in the Hogan household as Anna’s mum explains their plans for the evening. How do you think Stephen feels at this point? Do you think he feels comfortable? Do you think he regrets not just waiting in the car? In small groups, draw up a list of questions for Stephen and then take it in turns to put yourself in Stephen’s shoes and take your place on the hotseat, answering the questions as if you were Stephen.

2. Diary Entry

How do you think Anna’s mum feels leaving the house in such a way? Do you think she feels guilty? How does she think Anna is feeling? Read up to page 143 and imagine you are Anna’s mum. Write a letter to your husband explaining how you’re feeling and what your worries are for the future.

3. Slang Dictionary

On page 148, Anna uses the phrase ‘cop myself on’ What do you think this means? Can you explain to someone who doesn’t know Irish slang? On page 150 Anna uses the phrase ‘giving out’ – what does this mean? Can you think of other phrases that are used in Ireland that someone may have trouble understanding? Write a list of 10 and write a definition of what these words or phrases mean. Share your answers in small groups. Why do you think we use slang? People used to think that slang meant that someone was uneducated and tried to avoid using it in higher class society – why do you think they might have thought this? Do you think this is the case now? Why?

4. World of Minecraft

Anna and her brother Charlie spend their evening designing worlds on Minecraft. Anna’s passion for football even stretches to Minecraft as she’s making a model of Croke Park. If you had the skill, what Minecraft world would you build? Why? Design it on paper and label it so someone can write a description. Swap your design with a partner and write a description as if you were standing in the world. What can you see? What can you hear? Are there any noticeable smells? Write around 100 words, using as much descriptive detail as possible.

5. Commentating on the Game

Before many sports matches shown on TV, the commentators will have a discussion of the game beforehand. Re-read pages 175-179. What do we know about the team? What do we know about the opponents? Work in small groups and imagine you are in a TV studio discussing who is going to win the game based on your knowledge of the players.

6. Impact Sub

Her other players know she is devastated at not being picked to play, so on page 187, they joke with Anna that she could be an ‘impact sub’. What does this mean? Do you think this could be the case? Do you think this could help Anna? Imagine you are Anna’s daddy. Write the script for a pep talk to give her confidence that if she plays, she will be great. Try and use his own words (we learn about them in Anna’s memories of him at different stages of the book).

Part 3

Road to the final

Pages 210 – 330

This section opens with Anna chatting to her old friend Sally about everyone back in Mountbridge. Sally promises to come

and visit for the county final, which makes Anna happy as she misses her best friend. Stephen comes to visit again, but this time it's not as pleasant. Anna hears tension in his voice and listens as her mum scolds Stephen for giving in to the demands of Tina and her mum and not starting Anna in the semi-final. Anna makes the decision to arrive at training earlier to try and bond a bit better with the other girls. As she approaches the other girls, she's worried she's made the wrong decision, but they warm to her quickly and she's soon pleased that she made the decision to get to know them all a bit better. As usual, however, Tina goes out of her way to be unpleasant, but this time, Anna sees red. She reveals her beliefs about the lucky socks to her mum and lets slip about the shadow, which makes her mum very upset.

The next morning, Anna is surprised to find that Stephen and Tina are coming to visit to sort things out. Anna's mum tries to get Anna to understand that Tina is probably going through a difficult time and Anna surprises herself by showing empathy for her.

The county final arrives and Anna is emotional that her dad won't be there to see her play. Her preparations start to go wrong when she can't find her special orange socks, but with the bus waiting for her, she has to leave and trust her mum will find them and bring them to her. Everyone is nervous, but Stephen's pep talk gets them all fired up and ready to go. Anna is thrilled that Sally and her mum are there and things get even better when Patrick puts his faith in her and Debbie. However, the game isn't going well and Anna feels terrible at half-time at how badly she's been playing. Even worse – her mum hasn't arrived yet. But her mum (and the socks) makes it just in time to persuade Stephen to give Anna a chance in the second half – but will this be enough for a famous victory?

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p.211.** Do you think Anna is jealous of Sally's new friend? Why do you think this might be? What do you think Sally would say if she knew? Do you think Sally is a good friend? Why? What do you think makes a good friend?
- **Read p.218** Anna's mum is angry with Stephen for allowing himself to be bullied by his ex-wife and daughter. Do you think she is being fair on him? What sort of man is he? What do you think of him being afraid of his teenage daughter? Why do you think he let Tina get what she wanted? What advice would you give him?
- **Read p.225.** When Anna arrives for training early, she's afraid that she'll be

left standing on her own. Why is she so nervous about whether or not they'll speak to her? What sort of people would they be if they just ignored her?

- **Read p.231.** During practice, Anna goes and pairs with Amanda even though she doesn't really know her. Why do you think she does this? What sort of a girl do you think Anna is? Why?
- **Read pp.233.234.** Why do you think Tina has said this to Anna? How do you think the other girls feel about this? What do you think about Anna's reaction? Why? page 233-234. Why has Tina said this? What about Anna's reaction?
- **Read p.238.** When he gives Anna a lift home after her fight with Tina, Patrick says it may not have been a bad thing that it happened to Tina. Do you think this is a responsible thing for an adult to say? Why has he said it? What does he mean?
- **Read pp.250-254.** Anna tries to explain to her mum about the socks and the shadow. Do you think the socks are bringing her luck? Or do you think her mum is right? Why? Do you think Anna is seeing her daddy's ghost? Why? Why do you think her mum is so upset?
- **Read p.260.** Anna's mum has invited Tina and Stephen to the house to try and clear the air. She tries to encourage Anna to have sympathy for Tina by suggesting that 'Bullies usually have difficult lives.' Do you think this is true? What do you think is likely to happen when Tina arrives? Does Anna's mum understand? Why is it important to put yourself in someone else's shoes to try and understand their motives?
- **Read p. 267.** Do you think Tina will be nicer from now on? Why? Why not? Were you surprised by her reaction? What would you have done if you were Anna? Was she right to hug Tina?
- **Read p.304.** Should Stephen let Anna start the second half? Is Anna's mum being hypocritical in forcing Stephen to allow her daughter to play when she told him off for doing the same thing with Tina? Why do you think Tina said that about Anna's poor performance putting her off? Does this change your view of Stephen?
- **Read p.317.** As they're coming to the end of the game, Debbie has an incredible opportunity: 'just Debbie, the ball and the open net.' How do you think Debbie feels? Why? How would you feel in this situation?

ACTIVITIES

1. Mum Analysis

What are your impressions of Anna's mum? Take another look at the way she speaks

to Stephen in Chapter 21 and the way she opens up to Anna when she is upset. Write a list of five adjectives to describe her personality and choose quotes from the text to support your ideas and opinions. Write these up into five paragraphs.

2. Friend Quality

What sort of girl is Debbie? Why does Anna like her so much? Do you think she would make a good friend for Anna? Why? Write up a short response, using quotes from the text that shows her personality. Make sure you explain what you think makes a good friend.

3. Fight Drama

Tension has been building between Tina and Anna for most of the novel and on pages 232-235, things come to a head in some very dramatic scenes. In small groups, freeze frame the whole incident. Make sure you include all the people watching. Aim for five or six 'shots.' *Extension: what happens next? Create another three or four frames to show what happens once the chapter ends.*

4. Text Message Debate

Is Anna correct when she says on page 262 that it's important to use full language in a text message? Why do you think she says this? Do you think there's a difference between writing something in school and writing something online? Do you think adults still have to use emails as formally as letters? Why? In small groups, create three or four arguments on the idea that 'Digital writing should have the same rules as physical writing.' Be prepared to do some research and debate your arguments as a class.

5. Anna Analysis

On page 265 Anna hugs Tina. What sort of person is she? Write a full page analysis of her personality, using quotes. Think about how she treats people, how she speaks to them, the things she says and does.

6. News Report

Ballymarra are champions! Write a news report for the local paper on the game. Use Anna's commentary from the game for details – try and make it exciting but with all the correct details.

7. Critic's Choice

The ending is very unusual and emotional. Do you think it works? Work in small groups to discuss what makes a good ending to a book and argue whether or not this book fits your criteria. Imagine you are on a book club panel (like the reviewers on TV) What sort of things will you say? Be prepared to present your discussion to the rest of the class.