



Football Spirit

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Teaching Guide

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RATIONALE & THEMES

This is a lively and entertaining story, fizzing with ghosts and all the adventure that we have come to expect from Eoin Madden and his pals Dylan and Alan from Castlerock College. The friends are in their Transition Year with time to spare and they decide to set up a soccer club.

This proves to be a challenge in a 'rugby school', however despite the difficulties, they manage to field a decent side.

Their new sporting associations introduce them to some different ghostly friends.

Fearlessly and at breathtaking pace the intrepid group thwart a cruel plan and earn the gratitude of a local soccer legend.

The themes explored are:

- Loyalty
- Rivalry
- Sportsmanship
- Friendship
- Jealousy
- Gamesmanship
- Team work
- Frustration
- Asserting yourself
- Esteem
- Equality
- The supernatural

SUMMARY

At the end of the summer, Eoin prepares to return to school with his friend Dylan.

Transition Year is less structured and Eoin suggests that he, Dylan and Alan, set up a soccer club to keep themselves entertained. Their idea is met with considerable opposition from the headmaster, as the school is a 'rugby school'.

However, they persevere and a team emerges and takes shape.

Reluctantly, Eoin agrees to join the senior rugby panel for training.

Dylan organizes a trip to Dalymount Park to watch Bohs play Limerick. The game is very entertaining and they meet Alfie, a Bohs stalwart and a mine of information. He reveals that Liam Whelan, an exceptional local talent who played for Manchester Utd and was killed in the Munich air crash, once played in a team with the same name as their own.

The headmaster is unhappy about Eoin playing soccer and issues an ultimatum. Eoin threatens to give up rugby for the year and Mr Finn, Eoin's first year mentor is called back to mediate. A solution is agreed and Eoin can play both sports.

Alan's dad is anxious to meet Alfie and learn more about his own father's playing career and agrees to attend the next Boh's match to meet him.

Their first match is an enjoyable friendly against Ligouri College. The score is close, and the Ligouri coach provides valuable advice about competitions.

Alfie tells Alan's dad about Phil, his father, and how he was on the point of joining Man. Utd when his friend and mentor Liam Whelan was killed in the Munich air crash and he retired from the game.

Eoin is injured playing rugby and can only watch as the Rockets progress through the competition towards the final with Alan playing an inspired game wearing an old pair of his grandfather Phil's football socks.

Brian, their ghost friend, appears with two friends, Phil, Alan's grandfather and Liam Whelan. They are uneasy about a danger that is threatening.

The danger is revealed when Eoin overhears a plot to cripple Boh's star striker with a tackle in the match they are about to watch. The boys act quickly, the danger is averted and the culprits arrested.

The Red Rockets have reached the final of their competition and it falls to Eoin to take

the final penalty and secure the trophy.

APPROACH

This is a fast-paced and thrilling story with easy-to-relate to characters. The themes support development in both PSHE and PDMU and will facilitate a discussion-based approach to the novel.

This guide has divided the story into three sections and the activities offer suggestions on developing the themes.

Section 1 Alfie Pages 7-61

SUMMARY

Returning to school after a busy summer playing rugby in New Zealand, Eoin and his friend Dylan anticipate a less demanding Transition Year.

Eoin confesses to his ghost friend, Brian, the stress of playing rugby to the exclusion of everything else and suggests that he will try to promote soccer this year as a distraction.

Alan and Dylan are enthusiastic about the idea and Eoin agrees to approach the headmaster for permission to play soccer. His negative reaction irritates Eoin, especially when the rugby coach reinforces the headmaster's objections.

Dylan takes the initiative and posts a notice to trawl for interest.

The idea is popular with the Transition Year and Dylan takes ownership of the idea, declaring that the team will be the Castlerock Red Rockets. Eoin is invited to take part when he's not involved with rugby training.

The team colours are red, but with no official kit, they wear a motley collection of red tops from different Premier and provincial teams.

Dylan is pleased that their first training session identifies potential talent and they

begin to consider player combinations.

They decide to watch a live game to improve their experience and visit Dalymount to watch a Boh's home game.

Their inexperience is spotted by Alfie, a Dalymount stalwart who reminisces with them about some of the great players who graced the pitch, including Liam Whelan, one of the Busby Babes who died in the Munich air crash. The boys are enthralled.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p11):** Eoin is keen to have a quiet anonymous Transition Year. Sporting success brings considerable public attention, creating celebrities. Why does this happen? Is it healthy to want to know what they eat or want to wear the same clothes as they do? How do manufacturers use this to encourage us to buy their goods?
- **(Read pp27-29):** The school makes it clear to Eoin that he is expected to play rugby and discourages him from playing soccer. Why is his opinion ignored? Who does this decision benefit? Why is the school's sporting achievement valued so much? Should the school's reputation be more important than the pupils' wishes?
- **(Read p48):** From the bus through the inner city, the boys realise how fortunate they are with the facilities they have at their school. Why is there such a division between what is available in schools? Which schools make it easier for pupils to reach their potential? Is this really a fair system for everyone?
- **(Read pp54-55):** The boys are shocked when Alfie mentions The Red Rockets. Is it a coincidence? Is Alfie correct that they were influenced by something else to choose the name? Can we be influenced without realizing it or is it simply coincidence?

ACTIVITIES

1. Packed and Ready (Read p10)

Eoin's mum has everything ready for him to pack to return to school.

It can be difficult to remember everything that you'll need or miss.

In groups, imagine that you will be staying with a relative for a month in the summer away from home.

Your bag is packed but there are five things you will definitely not leave without.

Decide as a group what they are; rank them and explain why they are essentials.

2. Save, Save, Save (Read p13)

When his dad gives him some spending money, Eoin declares that he'll save it for a 'rainy day'. Saving is an important life skill for everyone to have.

Design a poster to encourage children like you to save. How would you persuade them that it is a good idea?

scoilnet.ie/search/?q=save%20your%20money%20&fq=school_level%3A1

3. Tá Fáilte Romhat (Read p17)

When Eoin and his friends return to school, they find some new pupils there. These new boys will be unfamiliar with the school.

Prepare a Welcome Pack to help new pupils settle comfortably into your school.

In groups decide what information the pack should include and how it should be presented. Will you need basic phrases for children who don't speak English? What Irish phrases should be included?

4. Fans (Read p24)

Eoin and Alan discuss the teams they support and what it means to be a fan.

Many clubs have a huge fan base and make a great profit from selling merchandise to their fans.

Create an illustrated profile for a loyal fan for your club.

What is expected from them and what are they expected to do?

Explain how they support the club and what they get back in return. Is it a fair exchange or a good deal?

5. Certainly Not (Read pp27-31)

After his conversation with Eoin, the headmaster speaks to Mr Carey, the rugby coach. It is an angry conversation as they discuss what Eoin has suggested.

Create the dialogue that they had. Make it clear why they are annoyed with him.

In pairs, perform the dialogue for the class.

6. Soccer Basics (Read p34)

Alan and Dylan realise that their knowledge of soccer skills, tactics and coaching is quite limited. Create an illustrated guide of five basic skills, coaching drills and activities that should form part of their first training session.

scoilnet.ie/search/?q=soccer%20coaching%20&fq=school_level%3A1

scottishfa.co.uk/performance/high-performance-resources/skills/

7. The Red Rockets (Read p37)

Alan and Dylan are excited about the name they have chosen for the team and share ideas about a crest.

Help them to design an exciting crest that will make it clear who they are exactly.

Section 2 The Red Rockets Pages 62-124

SUMMARY

When the headmaster learns that Eoin and his friends have travelled across the city to Dalymount, he is angry and his permission for the fledgling soccer club is in danger of being withdrawn.

Eoin has made it clear that if he can't play soccer, he won't play rugby. Mr Finn, Eoin's retired mentor is called in to mediate and a compromise is reached with Eoin permitted to play soccer, but with rugby as his first priority.

Alan has spoken to his dad about Alfie and his recollections of his grandfather and Mr. Handy agrees to organize a trip to the next Bohs game to meet him.

Their first Red Rockets match is a friendly against Ligouri College whose coach is impressed by their potential and gives useful advice about a local competition.

When Mr. Handy meets Alfie, he is astonished by a story about his father and his connection with Liam Whelan that he had never heard before.

When he is included in a senior rugby panel, Eoin is anxious about playing against boys who are much older than him. He is brought on with ten minutes to play, however, a late tackle and a serious ankle injury puts Eoin in hospital and out of any action, soccer or rugby for six weeks.

Alan receives a pair of his grandfather's old football socks and decides to step in as Eoin's replacement, believing that this connection to his grandfather's skill will give him the advantage that he needs.

An agitated Brian the ghost appears and warns Eoin to be vigilant as there is danger approaching.

Alan takes the field wearing his grandfather's socks for the return leg of their friendly with Ligouri College and he is delighted when he is able to loft a perfect pass to Ernesto to drill the equalizer to get a well-deserved draw.

Later, Brian reappears with two other ghosts, Liam Whelan and Alan's grandfather Phil.

When Alan reveals the name of their team, the ghosts are shocked as this was the name of the team that Liam played for at the start.

The ghosts are convinced that they are on the right path to discover the source of the danger that is threatening.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p70):** Brian is a ghost and the author uses several ghost characters in the story. However, do ghosts really exist? Why do some people believe that they do exist? If they do exist how would you find out more about them and what they do? scoilnet.ie/search/?q=ghosts&fq=school_level%3A1
- **(Read p95):** Alfie tells them that Phil became a target when it was learned that he was to play in the Premier League; he had his ankle broken in a foul tackle. Why does success provoke envy in some people? How would you recognize envy in what someone says or does? How could you challenge envy if you saw it?
- **(Read p111):** Alan feels ten feet tall. Why is it important to feel good about ourselves? How can you make sure that you develop this attitude to yourself? How should you react to people who make negative comments either to you or about you? scoilnet.ie/search/?q=wellbeing&fq=school_level%3A1
- **(Read p124):** The ghosts Liam and Phil are surprised to hear that Dylan has called their team The Red Rockets. Is this a coincidence? Does coincidence exist? Are there influences that we are not really aware of that control us and the events in our lives? Is this comforting or alarming?

ACTIVITIES

1. Healthy Options (Read p62)

Eoin realizes that he has not been choosing healthy eating option during the Summer.

Create a simple two set interlocking Venn diagram to advise him about food choices.

One set should hold really healthy options. The other set should hold food to avoid and, in the overlap, food he can eat occasionally.

Try to make the choices fun and include some simple illustrated recipes.

scoilnet.ie/search/?q=healthy%20food%20choices&fq=school_level%3A1

2. Assertion (Read p68)

Eoin knows that he is right and he is prepared to stand up to the headmaster and not be intimidated.

It takes courage to stand up for yourself.

In groups, create a list of five 'Golden Rules' that will help you to stand up for yourself if you feel intimidated.

What can you say or do and what should you try to avoid saying or doing?

scoilnet.ie/search/?q=how%20to%20deal%20with%20a%20bully&fq=school_level%3A1

bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/znhmwty/articles/zrv67nb

biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/how-to-raise-assertive-child

3. I Didn't Know That (Read pp91-94)

Alan and his dad discover a story about Phil, Alan's grandfather, that they weren't aware of.

Research at home to find an interesting story about one of your relations that you weren't aware of.

Write a short description of it, explaining why you think it is interesting. **(Make sure that you get permission first to share the story).**

4. What might have been (Read p97)

Some scientists believe that there are many different universes and that everything that can happen has already happened.

Use your imagination to create a fantastic story of how your day might have been different if you had simply changed one small detail in your routine. E.g., The day you wore red socks instead of your usual blue ones.

5. Dear Mr & Mrs Madden (Read p108)

The headmaster realizes that Eoin probably shouldn't have been playing senior rugby.

Now he has to write to Eoin's parents to explain what has happened.

How do you think he can disguise his own role in forcing Eoin to play? Who will he try to blame? How will he make sure that the school isn't blamed?

Make a copy of the letter he wrote to them.

6. The Socks (Read p109)

Alan is very excited when he realizes that the socks belonged to his grandfather.

That night, when the others are asleep, he slips out of bed and tries them on.

Closing his eyes, he feels his head echo with

noise and light as he feels a strange tingling in his feet.

Use your imagination to describe to rest of his experience.

7. Dylan's Diary (Read p88)

That evening after the match, Dylan's brain is simmering with ideas.

He writes a report on the match with Ligouri College and his impression of their coach in his diary along with his own plans and ambitions for the team.

Create a copy of his entry for that day.

Section 3 Heroes Pages 125-204

SUMMARY

The Red Rockets have reached the quarter finals of the Gillespie Cup and Eoin has been able to shed his bandages and crutches.

An impressive 5-1 victory takes them to the semi-finals and Eoin negotiates the use of a school pitch for the match with a reluctant headmaster.

Mr Finn intervenes and agrees to accompany the boys to another Bohs match to avert a confrontation.

The match is exciting with a masterly display from the Bohs star, Seb Joyce.

Liam and Phil appear and announce that Man. Utd. scouts are at the match and intend to sign Seb for their club. They are still unsettled by a danger they cannot yet identify.

As he takes the field for the semi-final, Alan realizes that he has forgotten his grandfather's socks and his performance is well below par.

Eoin retrieves the socks for him at the interval and his confidence restored he delivers a magnificent cross for Ernesto to convert and win the match.

A penalty-taking competition forms part of their training for the final and Eoin, his recovery almost complete wins and earns himself a place on the bench for the final.

Mr Finn agrees to accompany them to the Bohs replay and they agree to meet him close to the ground.

Waiting in the park for Mr Finn, Liam appears again and is very agitated. The danger is imminent.

The boys are unsettled and sit at a café table to gather their thoughts, where Eoin overhears a plot by the owner of the team

Bohs are to play to pay two of his defenders to cripple Seb during the match.

Horrified, the boys realize that they must try to stop them.

Eoin finds Detective Sweeney whom he knows and persuades her to act, while the others contact Alfie who arranges for Seb to stay on the bench during the first half until the Garda arrest the culprits at the interval.

Seb joins the action in the second half and secures both the match and his future with Man. Utd.

For their final in the Gillespie club, the headmaster surprises them by presenting them all with an official team kit.

Still drawn in the dying seconds and heading for penalties, Alan calls Eoin off the bench so that he is available to take a penalty.

Liam gives him some last-minute advice on taking a penalty and as Eoin steps up for the final penalty, he remembers the advice and watches with satisfaction the back of the net rippling as it receives the ball, signaling their victory.

The trophy is presented by Seb, who has a special word of thanks for Eoin and Alan is left to reminisce with his dad and the ghost of his grandfather.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p126):** Alan suggests that they pick first and second teams to play each other. This will identify eleven players who are not likely to be on the team. Is this a fair way to treat everyone? How else could they decide who was on the team? How could they make The Red Rockets a more inclusive project and not only about the eleven on the team?
- **(Read p129):** On the way home, Mr Finn compliments the skill of the goalkeeper, nominating him as the most important player. Is he right? Where does the strength of a team lie? Is it with the forwards who score goals or with the defense who prevent them?
- **(Read p142):** After the Bohs match, the boys ask the Man. Utd. scouts for their autographs. Why do some people collect autographs or selfies? What is the point of them? What benefit does it bring to you to have a signature from or a photograph of someone who is really a stranger to you?
- **(Read pp177&186):** Both Eoin and the Ligouri coach are sportsmen. This is clear from their attitudes and actions. What is a sportsman or sportswoman? How would you recognize them? What

qualities do they have? How do they treat others, including opponents? How do the deal with winning and losing? How is sportsmanship and gamesmanship different?

[youtube.com/watch?v=PFO3R0EWSyM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFO3R0EWSyM)
[bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z93fg82/revision/1](https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z93fg82/revision/1)

- **(Read p201):** Liam Whelan denies that he is a hero, preferring to be remembered as a footballer. Why would people call him a hero? How would you recognize a hero? Who deserves to be called a hero? Are all heroes well known? Who in your family / class is a hero for you?

ACTIVITIES

1. Pick your Time Carefully (Read p134)

Eoin has to ask the headmaster for permission to attend the Bohs match and he knows that he will have to be careful how he asks him.

In groups, create an illustrated one-page guide with five simple suggestions about how to successfully ask to get what you want in difficult situations.

Think about when is the best time to ask. How might you start the conversation? Etc.

Include reasons for your suggestions?

2. Mr Finn (Read p135)

The boys are embarrassed by Mr Finn's cap and Eoin suggests that he keep it in his pocket.

The publishers thought that they might include an 'head and shoulder' illustration of Mr Finn wearing his cap at this point.

Create a comic image of what he might have looked like.

3. That's Very Funny (Read p135)

The boys enjoy Mr Finn's company and are looking forward to him coming with them to the match.

Alan suggests that since Mr Finn enjoys corny jokes, they should collect some to entertain him during the interval.

Collect an illustrated list of five of the corniest jokes you can find to help them out.

[scoilnet.ie/uploads/resources/29873/29609.pdf](https://www.scoilnet.ie/uploads/resources/29873/29609.pdf)

4. The Penalty (Read p154)

Ernesto has been practising penalty taking with Charlie, however, he is unsure if his technique is developing.

Identify the top three penalty taking and penalty saving skills they will need to

develop.

Create an illustrated 'HELP' card for each of them with suggestions for drills.

[news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/skills/4188836.stm](https://www.news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/skills/4188836.stm)

5. The Nasty Plot (Read pp157-161)

Detective Sweeney remembers Eoin and listens carefully to him as he explains what he has heard about the danger Seb Joyce is in. He must give her the details clearly, briefly and quickly, answering any questions he thinks she might have.

Create the monologue he might have delivered.

6. What Now? (Read pp170-171)

After Detective Sweeney leaves there is a stunned silence for a few seconds, then everyone begins to talk at once.

What happened next?

The author thought he might include a paragraph to describe the confusion in the room as the manager tried to restore order before they went back onto the pitch for the second half.

Create a short description of the confusion.

7. What a Match (Read pp173-175)

Bohs have won. It was a rollercoaster of a game with Seb Joyce on the bench until the second half. As the crowds leave, the newspaper reporters rush to write their match reports.

Create a copy of a report.

How would they explain Seb's absence for the first half and the missing defenders in the second half? How will they capture the excitement of the night?

Remember that you'll need an exciting headline.

8. Parents & Past Pupils (Read p177)

Since The Red Rockets have reached the final, the headmaster has decided to email all the parents and past pupils to share the news with them.

Alan has told his dad about the headmaster's opposition and Mr Handy has told some of the other parents.

The headmaster suspects that some of the parents know that he opposed the team from the start.

Create the email that he wrote to them. How did he deal with his opposition?