

# Rugby Heroes

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## Gerard Siggins

### Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

#### **RATIONALE & THEMES**

His Junior Certificate year promises to be a dizzying whirl of activity for Eoin. Following success representing Ireland in the Junior World Cup, he now finds himself included in the squad for the inaugural 4 Nations tournament. In addition, his school is having a successful run in the Junior Leinster Cup and is anxious to retain the trophy.

Eoin will need all his resources as well as the advice and support of his expanding congress of ghostly friends if he is to manage the demands of rugby as well as his study commitments

The themes explored are:

- Loyalty
- Rivalry
- Sportsmanship
- Friendship
- Jealousy
- Sports skills & tactics
- Team work
- Frustration
- Equality
- The supernatural

#### **SUMMARY**

World Cup success at U-16 has prompted the idea of an equivalent U-16 Home Nations competition to take place over a weekend in tandem with the senior tournament; some of the Castlerock players have been selected for the squad.

Despite his performance in the World Cup competition, Dylan has been unsuccessful in selection and his resentment is evident, exacerbated to smug self-importance when the team coach appoints him captain of the school team for the season in order to ease Eoin's commitments to both rugby and study.

A growing sense of dread created by his ghostly friends worries at Eoin as he completes all the tournament preparations needed for success, finally revealing itself

as a potentially catastrophic danger that he manages to avert.

Uncomfortable with all the resulting media attention, Eoin retreats to his studies and preparation for the Leinster School's competition, where the final proves a bruising physical encounter.

In the heat of the encounter, Eoin and Dylan rediscover their friendship and with their partnership restored they prove irresistible as they secure the trophy for the final time at U-16 level.

#### **APPROACH**

This is a very fast-paced and thrilling story with believable and 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 An Opportunity For Dylan Pages 7- 69

#### **SUMMARY**

Eoin's delight at selection for the inaugural Home Nations Championship squad is tempered by the theft of several of his friends' new bicycles while he is at home for the Christmas holidays.

Suspecting an organized gang, he and Dylan decide to investigate the old haunted Lubov mansion at the edge of town, where they discover the stolen bikes along with the thieves hiding in a disused barn.

The boys distract the thieves, then Dylan keeps guard while Eoin summons the Gardaí who make arrests and recover the stolen

bikes, Dylan managing to claim his own bike before the Gardaí impound them as evidence.

Back at school, they deliberate the academic and sporting challenges facing them. To Dylan's irritation Eoin reveals that he's been selected for the Championship squad.

At their first team meeting, their coach, Mr. Carey, announces his intention to ease Eoin's responsibilities by only selecting him when they really need him and making Dylan the school team captain for the season.

Dylan reacts to his promotion with predictable self-importance that soon begins to drive a wedge between them when Eoin refuses to behave with the deference that Dylan now expects.

Renewing his ghostly friendships, Eoin learns of a growing, but still undefined, threat that is causing them unease.

Observing the first game, Eoin is impressed with Alan's statistical analysis, however he attracts Dylan's annoyance when he challenges him about boasting of his individual try tally.

Recalled for the quarterfinal both Eoin and the coach are unimpressed by Dylan's display of pique at not being the playmaker.

The game won, Eoin is taken off, but must watch as the team's composure crumbles when Dylan and Duffy seem more interested in selfish individual plays. The final whistle prompts a triumphant display from Dylan that does nothing to ease Eoin's sense of distaste.

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

- (**Read p15**): Eoin is from Munster, yet at school he has the opportunity to play for Leinster however he is reluctant to wear his Leinster kit at home lest he cause offence. Why should flags and colours cause offence? How can anyone feel threatened by a colour? Why do people

need to wear specific jerseys that identify where their support lies?

- **(Read p41):** Mr. Carey points out to Dylan that rugby is a team sport, and everyone's contribution must be recognized and valued. If this is really true, why then do we insist on identifying some players to make them stars? Why do we have 'Man of the Match' awards in a team game? Should 'stars' have any role in a team game?
- **(Read p44):** Eoin needs to be reassured by the coach that he is in no danger of losing his place. Why does he feel insecure? Is it important to know your own worth? How can you discover your own skill level and when do you think that confidence changes to arrogance?
- **(Read p53):** Dave Gallaher, Eoin's ghostly All Black friend, remarks that none of the Baby Black team will ever be selected again. What does this reveal about his attitude to sport? Is he correct that sport is about winning and those who can't win shouldn't play?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. The Trophy (Read p8)

Eoin can vividly recall every detail of the moment that Charlie held the trophy aloft.

Create an exciting illustration or picture that will capture the thrill that Eoin remembers from that day.

### 2. Ghosts (Read p21)

As he cycles past the deserted Lubov mansion, Eoin catches a glimpse of his ghost friend Alex.

Tales of ghosts and hauntings are common in every part of Ireland.

Can you identify an interesting local ghost and tell their tale?

Perhaps your class could create an illustrated anthology of entertaining local ghost stories.

### 3. Safe and Sound (Read p27)

Since their local Garda station operates only daytime hours now, the Gardaí have decided to distribute a leaflet to every home and business offering advice on how people can protect themselves and their property and what they should do in case of emergency.

Work as a group to create a copy of the leaflet containing the information that you think would be most useful.

[www.garda.ie/en/Crime/Burglary-theft/Security-for-the-Older-Person-Leaflet.pdf](http://www.garda.ie/en/Crime/Burglary-theft/Security-for-the-Older-Person-Leaflet.pdf)  
[www.dit.ie/media/healthandsafety/documents/General%20safety%20advice.pdf](http://www.dit.ie/media/healthandsafety/documents/General%20safety%20advice.pdf)

### 4. I Saw It (Read p32)

The thieves are incoherent with shock when the Gardaí arrest them. It seems that they have had a ghostly encounter.

Could you create a short paragraph to describe what happened and explain the effect it had on the thieves?

Try to write two separate accounts in different genres, one comic and the other scary and then choose which one you prefer.

### 5. Night and Day (Read p36)

Eoin wakes and feels a sense of the magic of nighttime in the darkness and stillness around him.

Do you prefer day or night?

Make a list of two attractions each for day and night and combine them into a Haiku poem.

The first line will describe how you feel about daytime and the second line will describe your feelings for night. Use the third line to explain which you prefer and why.

[www.kidzone.ws/poetry/haiku.htm](http://www.kidzone.ws/poetry/haiku.htm)  
[writeshop.com/writing-haiku-poem/](http://writeshop.com/writing-haiku-poem/)

### 6. Congratulations (Read p40)

In any sport, achieving a national jersey is a great honour.

Next year the IRFU have decided that each kit, whether at senior or junior level will include a short letter from the IRFU to congratulate and welcome the wearer to the international squad and explain what it means to represent Ireland.

The language for each letter will differ but the sentiments will be similar.

Create a draft of what you think each letter should say.

### 7. Twittersphere (Read pp48-49)

Dylan's arrogant attitude has divided the team, some accepting it while others are irritated by it.

The team has taken to Twitter to comment about his behaviour.

Create a series of Tweets that demonstrate the division and reveal how his teammates feel about his behaviour.

## SUMMARY

Feeling the strain from rugby training and study, Eoin isn't too disappointed to learn that he will miss the semi final of the school's competition to attend the international training camp, however before he leaves, his ghostly friends express growing concern at their unexplained summons, suspecting that some catastrophe is imminent.

The international camp allows Eoin to renew friendships as he settles into a training routine before learning that Castlerock has been held to a draw and must replay the semi final.

In the first match – against a Scottish team determined to avenge their World Cup defeat – both teams struggle against terrible conditions, with Eoin's brace of penalties almost trumped by a last-gasp Scottish try that thankfully isn't converted.

In the lull before their next match Eoin invites Paddy for a quick tour of the stadium, hoping to meet Brian and get an explanation for the disturbing premonitions the other ghosts have.

Surprised that Paddy is not only unsurprised, but also familiar with ghosts, Eoin learns that Brian is really concerned about water seepage onto the stadium pitch and more importantly, what might be causing it.

Their match against Wales is less challenging leaving only the final crunch match against an in-form England to determine the championship.

Eoin makes a snap decision to pay a quick visit back to school where he meets Brian again and learns that his premonition of imminent catastrophe is growing.

The match against England has attracted predictable attention, the buildup remaining uneventful until their principal requests his pupils, including Eoin, be withdrawn from the international match at half time to facilitate their inclusion in the school team for the replay match on the following day. Shocked by the principal's request and expecting his coach to be very angry, Eoin takes the initiative and resolves the situation, persuading the principal to withdraw his request.

England use their formidable second row to storm to an early lead, but Paddy levels the score before half time.

The second half is a grinding battle as Ireland struggle to maintain a lead they gained early in the half. With England looking increasingly threatening, Eoin puts the game beyond their reach with a superb try from broken play and Ireland finish winners.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- (*Read pp72, 75 & 109*): Eoin has conflicting demands on his rugby skill. Is it reasonable for the school to expect to be first priority? Are they thinking of Eoin or the success that his skill might bring? Where should Eoin's loyalty lie? What does he really 'owe' to each of them? Are they loyal to him? Should he expect anything in return for his loyalty?
- (*Read pp93-94*): His opponent must score with the last kick of the match to win; yet Eoin is willing him to miss. Is this the behaviour of a sportsman? Is winning all that matters? Why does the other player need to fail in order for Eoin's team to feel good about their performance?
- (*Read pp101-111*): Eoin and Paddy accept that they can see ghosts and both trust Brian's premonition. Are these unusual qualities? Have they got special powers? How would you recognize these powers? Could they simply be superstitious and delusional? Can we really communicate with those who have died?

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Dylan (*Read p76*)

As Eoin and the others board the bus, Dylan bounds up the steps into the school refusing to acknowledge them.

What thoughts are churning in his head as he disappears into the school?

His heart is pounding fast and his thoughts are short and barbed.

Create the dialogue that he has with himself and then perform it for the class using an appropriate voice tone.

#### 2. Welcome (*Read P27*)

Neil has just learned that he must make a speech at the gala diner and has asked Eoin and Paddy for help.

They decide that a short speech will be best and make a brief list of the things he should say including some appropriate jokes.

Can you help them to prepare the speaking notes and the jokes?

#### 3. The Kit (*Read p78*)

This is the inaugural U16 4-Nations

Championship and the IRFU have announced a competition to design the logo that will appear on all the kit items.

The logo will have to represent each of the provinces and present an exciting and appropriate image for Ireland at this level.

Could you design a suitable logo?

#### 4. To Camera (*Read pp89-94*)

The result and full match report of the Ireland Scotland match is too late for inclusion in the main evening news, however there is time for a 20-second 'to camera' piece in at the end of the sports news.

With this type of report, the reporter has to speak directly to the camera and give both the main points and a sense of the drama of the match: all within 20 seconds.

Can you prepare and perform the piece

#### 5. The Media scrum (*Read p112*)

As captain, Charlie has to do a lot of media interviews and is anxious that he represents both rugby and Ireland well.

The IRFU media dept. is aware that he is anxious and prepares a simple guide on how to answer awkward questions outlining what he should and should not say to reporters in any interviews.

Can you make a copy of their guidance notes?

[www.advocatesforyouth.org/topics-issues/organizational-development/244-working-with-the-media](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/topics-issues/organizational-development/244-working-with-the-media)  
[www.purepublicrelations.com.au/the-dos-and-donts-of-media-interviews/](http://www.purepublicrelations.com.au/the-dos-and-donts-of-media-interviews/)

#### 6. Mr. McCaffrey (*Read pp116-117*)

Neil decides to telephone Mr. McCaffrey to discuss his concerns about the availability of the boys to play for Ireland.

It is a brief, very tense conversation. Neil is furious and Mr. McCaffrey is persistent, however both remain polite and neither loses their temper.

Work in small groups to create the dialogue they had, particularly the beginning and end of their conversation. You can perform it for the class.

#### 7. Like an Animal (*Read p132*)

The scrum half is described like a 'cobra waiting to strike'. It is a very effective metaphor.

In groups, compile a list of the other rugby field positions and try to create animal metaphors to describe the action of the

players for as many of them as you can.

Remember that some of them require skill and agility while others need power and endurance.

Now use as many of the metaphors you have chosen to describe a passage of play. You can create it either as text or audio. You might like to add animal sounds for greater effect.

## Section 3 Perfect Finish Pages 135 - 199

### SUMMARY

Eoin's elation after their win is immediately deflated when Brian shows him the structural damage caused by the sinkhole under the stadium.

Realizing the imminent danger of collapse, Eoin races to inform an official who quickly organizes the evacuation of the stadium.

Rejoining his teammates, he manages a lame excuse to explain where he was while Neil takes Paddy's teasing about ghosts being involved very seriously.

As the stadium is evacuated, the media begin a hue and cry to discover what has happened. Eoin retreats to the hotel to meet his parents and attempts to underplay his role in the discovery of the sinkhole.

Any hope he had of maintaining his anonymity is dashed as he watches Rory identify him as the hero in an interview during a television news broadcast.

Relying on his friends to distract the media, Eoin is able to enjoy a quiet meal with his grandfather, Dixie, and learns how the ghost of his grandmother played an important role in the decisions affecting his life.

Eoin is early for breakfast next morning before they travel for the school match and Neil gently reassures him about the newspaper coverage of his role in the stadium evacuation, then guardedly questions him about his ghostly friends before divulging that Brian is an ancestor of his and requesting that Eoin try to arrange for them to meet.

Arriving to cheers at the Dodder Woods grounds, Eoin notices that one person is not cheering them.

Dylan has detached himself from the welcome.

Comfortably ahead at half time, the coach replaces Eoin and Rory and leaves Dylan to lead the second half. Unfortunately, things go

awry and they face defeat. However, Alan's informed interpretation of the replacement rules allows Eoin to return to the field and combine with Dylan to save the game with a last-minute try, all rancour now forgotten.

Mr. McCaffrey has proved himself formidable in defending Eoin and the rest of the team's privacy from the media as they prepare for the final and with Dylan one try away from taking Dixie's long-standing record they face almost overwhelming odds against Rostipp.

Within a whisker of victory and under almost unbearable pressure, Eoin and Dylan create a moment of magic in the dying seconds as Eoin sets Dylan free with the line at his mercy. However Dylan shuns the record and passes to Eoin allowing him to touch down and finish the game as victors to retain the trophy.

With enough tickets for the entire junior squad for the final 6 Nations match against England now transferred to Croke Park, courtesy of a grateful IRFU, Eoin leads his friends to watch Ireland seize an historic win.

After the match Eoin makes an emotional introduction for Neil and Brian and gets the opportunity to add another ghost to his circle of supernatural friends, another Tipperary player like himself, none other than the mighty Michael Hogan

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read pp149-151): Eoin is now at the centre of a media scrum with reporters vying to ask him for comment and take his picture. Do they have the right to be so intrusive? Is it right that they can take his picture without his permission? What rights should Eoin have to protect himself from unwanted attention? Do the public have a right to hear his story?
- (Read p156): Dixie explains that he helped to finance Eoin's education because Castlerock is a fee-paying school. Is it fair that schools ask for fees when teachers' wages are paid by the Dept. of Education from our taxes and each student will sit the same exam? Do fee-paying schools create divisions in society? Should schools be free and open to all students?
- (Read p160): Eoin is teased about being a hero, however the attention is beginning to overwhelm him. Why do some people seem to need heroes and celebrities or have to be interested in what they do, say, wear or eat? Does following someone on Twitter encourage people not to think

for themselves? Are people who follow celebrities simply trying to live a more exciting life through others?

- (Read pp161&170): Neil reveals that he studied the incidence of fatal injuries in rugby as part of his course. In addition, Joe Memery has to come off with suspected concussion after he receives a fierce tackle. In spite of all the precautions in the modern game, is rugby still too dangerous to allow school children to play? Can any changes make it safer?

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Treasure (Read p147)

When Alan produces his hand-written copy of the final rankings, Eoin has an idea.

He asks each of the squad members and the coach to write a memory or reflection of their best moment from the campaign, either on or off the pitch on the back of the sheet, explaining that he will make copies of it for everyone as a memento.

Create the sheet of contributions that they made. Some of the team added illustrations as well.

#### 2. In my Family (Read pp161-162)

Neil explains that Brian is his great great-uncle and the reason why he decided to study sport science.

Research an interesting member of your own family ancestry and explain who they were and why you think they are fascinating. If you ever had the opportunity to meet them, describe what you would say and what they might reply.

#### 3. Dodder View (Read pp167-172)

After the match, Oisín Deegan and Marcus McCord have an animated discussion about how the match slipped from their grasp.

How do they explain what happened and where do they lay any blame. Do both of them accept what has happened?

Work in small groups to create the dialogue they might have had.

#### 4. Tipperary Sound Wall (Read p174)

As Eoin walks around the ground he is bombarded by a deluge of encouragement and some light-hearted teasing from the Tipperary supporters.

Work in small groups to record a 15-second sound clip of some of the calls, comments

and background cheers to create the type of lively sound wall he might have experienced.

### 5. Rugby v Gaelic (Read pp194 & 199)

Brian and his friend Michael are running up and down the touchline, invisible to everyone except Eoin and his friends.

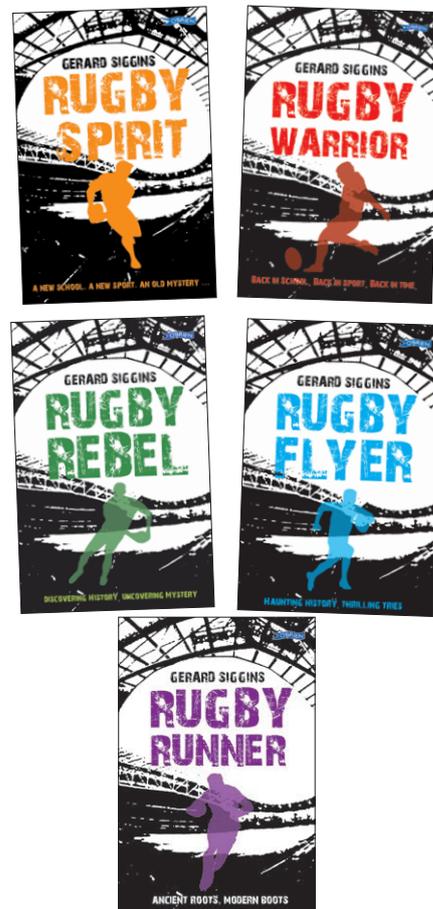
They are enjoying the game and are enthralled at the ebb and flow of the plays that both teams are using.

Brian and Michael are both very knowledgeable about their own sports, Brian with rugby and Michael with Gaelic.

Each of them argue that their sport is much superior to the other.

Create and record the dialogue they might have had.

### Have you read all the other books in the Eoin Madden rugby series?



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gerard Siggins was born in Dublin in 1962. Initially a sports journalist, he worked for many years in the *Sunday Tribune*, where he became assistant editor. He has written several books about cricket and rugby and regularly visits schools to talk about his books. For more information about Gerard and his books, see [www.obrien.ie](http://www.obrien.ie).