

Overview

Ricky is trying out for the rep team, but a new player, Aaron, is challenging his place. In brief, first-person episodes, we learn more about Ricky than he's letting on. He has a problem with his temper, and it costs him his position on the team, but through small clues, we slowly work out that a tragedy at home (the loss of his mother) could be behind his anger. By the last episode, Ricky is back on track and has become good mates with Aaron.

Readers need to infer and integrate meaning to understand the reason for Ricky's behaviour.

The story provides opportunities to discuss ways of addressing and overcoming personal problems and supports the key competency of relating to others.

Texts related by theme "White Shoes" SJ 4.2.10 | "Drought" SJ 3.2.10

Text characteristics from the year 8 reading standard

Sentences that vary in length, including long, complicated sentences that contain a lot of information

Academic and content-specific vocabulary

Complex layers of meaning, and/or information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, competing information), requiring students to infer meanings or make judgments

Rep training. Our group is doing drills around the park, the shiny fence stopping the ball from being swallowed up by the cars zooming by. We've come from all over the region. Our new bags and tracksuits sit next to the stand.

"Hard luck in the finals," says Aaron during the drinks break. "You scored some freaky tries. Our team calls you Lightning Boots."

"No way you're getting my spot," I say. *And no way you're being my friend.*

We work through more drills until the coach calls us in.

"OK, boys. I've got the match day squad here – and the starting fifteen." I'm not surprised when he calls my name. **Right wing.**

Next game, I'm a reserve. I sit in the stand, thinking about the meeting we had with the coach.

"Counselling!" Dad had said, shuffling in his chair.

"Yes," said Coach Thomas firmly. "Counselling. Your son is getting a rep ... and it's not a good one. His temper is a real problem."

Dad twisted his wedding ring round and round his finger.

"Ricky," said Coach, "you have great skills ... remarkable skills ... on the field. Are you listening?"

I can't look at him – but here it comes. "I know you've had a tough year at home," he continues. "But if you don't learn to control yourself, you'll find it impossible to get up there among the best."

On the wall is a poster with a man climbing a mountain. I've seen it before. He has only one leg.

"I think this will be good for Ricky," the coach adds, filling the silence.

Dad looks at me, and I look at the poster: at the man and the mountain glistening in the sun.

It's been a few months since the end of the season – and since I last saw Aaron. We've mostly talked on the phone. We're pretty good mates now. Coach switched him to left wing when I made the team again. Aaron didn't even complain. He's pretty good like that.

"So are you coming to Raglan for the holidays?" he asks.

"Yeah, man!" I can't wait to teach him a lesson in beach rugby and cricket and surfing.

"Just try not to get angry when I waste you at everything," he laughs.

"Nah, all good," I laugh back. "I'm super polite now."

"Polite, eh? So if I say pretty please, then I can have your wing spot if we make the reps next season?"

"You've already got the left wing, Wheels," I tell him. "Don't be greedy."

"True. So maybe I'll take your try-scoring record and Player of the Season trophy instead."

"Good luck," I say. "You'll need it because **I've got a rep to protect.**"

Game day. Ten minutes until kick-off. I don't usually get nervous, but I can't find my mouthguard. I know it was in my bag. Dad is in the changing shed, helping to tie laces. Will is playing outside.

I bet he's ...

Sure enough, I see my mouthguard in his hand. "Give it, Will!"

He runs, laughing. But he can't escape. And even though he's crying, I can't stop yelling at him.

"Ricky!" I hear someone call.

It's Coach Thomas, his eyes wide. "Get changed. Aaron, you're on the right wing."

My face is frozen, but my eyes still water up.

"Sorry, Ricky," says Aaron.

Illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs containing main ideas that relate to the text's content

Elements that require interpretation, such as complex plots, sophisticated themes, and abstract ideas

Words and phrases with multiple meanings that require students to know and use effective word-solving strategies to retain their focus on meaning

Possible curriculum contexts

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

(Relationships with Other People)

LEVEL 4 – Relationships: Identify the effects of changing situations, roles, and responsibilities on relationships and describe appropriate responses.

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 4 – Language features: Show an increasing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 4 – Language features: Use a range of language features appropriately, showing an increasing understanding of their effects.

Possible reading purposes

- To understand and relate to another person's challenging experiences and emotions through a story
- To explore ways in which changes in personal circumstances can affect a person's behaviour
- To identify how a writer can "show" rather than "tell" important information.

Possible writing purposes

- To use the text as a model for giving readers information indirectly (to "show" rather than "tell")
- To use language to build mood or atmosphere
- To describe how a person (real or imaginary) dealt with a major change in their life.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including "tied", "tournament", "selectors", "sideline", "ignores", "overlap", "defenders", "scrambling", "burn", "striding", "dribbles", "ref", "ploughing", "position", "hustling", "the boot", "frisbee", "drills", "swallowed", "region", "tracksuits", "mouthguard", "reserve", "Counselling", "shuffling", "remarkable", "glistening", "trophy"
- Colloquial expressions, including "take it out", "I want the ball ... bad", "easy as", "Whatever", "spot on", and many others
- Use of sarcasm: "About time", "Whatever", "Come on, losers."
- The rugby terms and expressions, including "feed into the scrum", "tries", "on the right wing", "halfback", "down the blind", "a bullet pass", "try line", "grounded it", "Penalty", "kicking for touch", and many others
- Figurative language: "a bullet pass", "in the bread basket", "off like a rocket", "every blade of grass is against me", "little green fish-hooks", "legs are burning", "My face is frozen"
- The double meaning of "rep" (representative, reputation).

Possible supporting strategies

For students who are not familiar with rugby or with the colloquial language, this text provides a very challenging vocabulary load. Use illustrations, diagrams, and/or audio and video recordings to introduce the technical language of rugby, as well as the background knowledge. Co-construct a vocabulary list that is organised into categories, such as people, equipment, rules, and moves.

For students who are unfamiliar with the colloquial expressions, focus on some examples before reading. Give pairs or individuals a couple of the expressions along with one or two example sentences. Have them write what they think the expressions mean, then share with the rest of the group. Record these suggested meanings in a table under the heading "What we thought it meant before reading". As the whole group comes across each expression, discuss the correct meaning and write it into the table under "What we think it means after reading".

The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Some knowledge of rugby
- Some knowledge of competing for a place in a team
- An understanding of how family circumstances can affect behaviour.

Possible supporting strategies

Provide opportunities for students to share their experiences of playing for a team or striving to achieve a goal.

After reading, ask the students to imagine something (such as a major change in their lives) that might have a negative impact on them. Encourage students to talk about the ways people respond to difficult situations.

Leave discussion of the family relationships and changes in this story until the students have read and evaluated it.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- A fictional narrative, told in the first person
- The use of the present tense
- The division of the text into six different episodes, marked by words that indicate the passage of time and changes of setting
- Time markers: "Five minutes left on the clock", "It's 8 o'clock by the time", "Rep training", "Game day", "Next game", "It's been a few months since"
- The flashback on page 32 that supports inferences about Ricky's behaviour
- The large amount of implied information: the need to read between the lines to understand the subtext (for example, the loss of Ricky's mother).

Possible supporting strategies

Using the illustration as a support, ask the students to explain the meaning of the title. Prompt them to come up with two words "rep" could be short for.

Set a purpose for reading without giving away the underlying story.

As the students start reading, support them to identify the setting, the situation, and the narrator. If necessary, work with the students to identify the time markers, then draw a timeline to identify what happens within each time segment.

Instructional focus – Reading

Health and Physical Education (Relationships with Other People, level 4 – Relationships: Identify the effects of changing situations, roles, and responsibilities on relationships and describe appropriate responses.)

English (Level 4 – Language features: Show an increasing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.)

Text excerpts from “Rep”

“Manase,” I call. “Manase!”
He ignores me.
Useless.

I argue with the ref again, and he blows his whistle, totally ignoring me.
Whatever.

Come on, losers.

I drop my shoulder and take him out.
The whistle blows. “Penalty!”
“Aww, what!” I shout.

It’s 7 o’clock by the time we pull up by the lake. Usually, about now, Dad would be hustling Will into bed, but home is still an hour away.

I can’t stop thinking about Aaron getting the Man of the Match award. I’ve been in the reps three years running, and he’s just blown in from nowhere.

So I tell him what I think of him, and now he’s crying. He’s always crying. Crying for attention. Crying for his mother.

Dad twisted his wedding ring round and round his finger.

“I know you’ve had a tough year at home,” he continues, “But if you don’t learn to control yourself, you’ll find it impossible to get up there among the best.”

Dad looks at me, and I look at the poster: at the man and the mountain glistening in the sun.

Students (what they might do)

The students make connections between the text and their knowledge of a team game to understand the action. From this, they infer that Ricky is a good player. They identify his reactions and integrate information across the text to infer that, as well as being skilled, he is aggressive and impatient. They ask questions and form hypotheses (based on their inferences) about what might happen next.

The students make connections with their experiences of family outings and integrate information across the text to understand how everyone feels. They synthesise the information to hypothesise that the mother is no longer with the family. They may further hypothesise that this is the reason for Ricky’s behaviour.

The students locate and integrate clues to confirm or revise their hypotheses about the family and about Ricky.

They synthesise information with their own experiences of change to make hypotheses about the possible outcome of the story.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

ASK the students to read pages 28 and 29, then discuss with a partner or group.

- What have you learned about Ricky so far? What do you think of his behaviour?
- Identify the parts of the text that led you to think that. How do these extracts show his character?

EXPLAIN (if necessary) that skilled readers integrate information across a text, think about the information, and draw conclusions. This is one way of inferring information.

- Given the inferences you’ve made, what questions are you asking as you read on? What might happen?

You could expand the timeline created earlier into a graphic organiser, with columns for how Ricky is feeling and the evidence for this. After charting the time and the basic events, model filling in these two columns, supporting students to make inferences about Ricky’s feelings from what he says and does. Have the students fill in the rest of the graphic organiser and share their ideas in pairs. Then go through it as a class, agreeing on the entries for each section.

PROMPT the students to locate the clues that help them to infer information. Ask them to think, pair, and share as they respond to questions such as:

- What clues help you to infer how each family member is feeling?
- Why do you think Ricky is behaving the way he is?

As the students share their ideas, encourage them to synthesise the information, using their own thinking to form hypotheses about the family and about Ricky’s behaviour.

ASK the students to visualise the movement Dad is making and suggest what he is feeling.

PROMPT the students to attend to small details.

- Writers of short fiction do not usually include details that are not relevant.
- Examine this part of the story with a partner and locate details that might not seem important. Discuss the author’s purpose and come up with an explanation for the use of these details. Share this with the group.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You used Ricky’s description of himself and your knowledge of boys like him to infer that he was pretty cocky and sure of himself. That’s probably just what the author wanted you to infer.

METACOGNITION

- Show me where in the text Ricky’s temper flares up. Have you known people like that? How did this knowledge help you predict what would happen next?
- What helped you to understand the coach’s attitude to Ricky? What clues did you use?
- Tell me how you worked out what has happened at the end. How come Ricky and Aaron end up as friends?

Reading standard: by the end of year 8

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Health and Physical Education (Relationships with Other People, level 4: – Relationships: Identify the effects of changing situations, roles, and responsibilities on relationships and describe appropriate responses.)

English (Level 4 – Language features: Use a range of language features appropriately, showing an increasing understanding of their effects.)

Text excerpts from “Rep”

It’s tied, 24 all.

Five minutes left on the clock, and whoever scores next will probably take it out, the whole tournament. The selectors for the reps are watching from the sideline; there’s the coach beside them. It’s our team’s feed into the scrum.

The blue’s lineout throw is spot on; the skinny lock reaches high. Running around the ruck, they’re sharp, ploughing their way up the field, well inside our half now, through their backs to my side of the field.

Every cheer and hoot from the sideline is ringing in my ears. Every blade of grass is against me, little green fish-hooks digging into my boots, holding me back.

“Polite, eh? So if I say pretty please, then I can have your wing spot if we make the reps next season?”

“You’ve already got the left wing, Wheels,” I tell him. “Don’t be greedy.”

METACOGNITION

- How did you get the register right for your audience and topic?
- Tell me how you decided what to explain and what to show indirectly. What did your writing buddy think of this?
- Describe what you did to give your readers clues about what was going to happen.

Students (what they might do)

REGISTER

The register refers to “the language features associated with a particular kind of audience or occasion, including an awareness of the specialist vocabulary associated with specific audiences, topics, or text forms”

Reading and Writing Standards, page 16

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

A writer can communicate a mood, feelings, or physical sensations through using language features such as simile and metaphor. The repetition of a word or phrase intensifies the feeling so the reader can visualise the experience.

DIALOGUE

Dialogue enables a writer to show characters and their thoughts quickly. It can also convey information and move a story along without lengthy narrative.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

MODEL the use of vocabulary to establish the register.

- In the first extract, the vocabulary tells me that the story is about a team game. It could be any number of sports. The fourth sentence has the clue: scrums are in rugby.
- I also notice the way the narrator “talks”: he uses colloquial language and doesn’t always use complete sentences. In the second extract, the sentences give me the feeling of watching the action.
- The register used by the author includes the vocabulary of rugby and an action-packed, informal style that suits a story about rugby.

PROMPT the students to consider the register they will use in their writing and to explain their language choices to their writing partner.

Some students may need support to identify a register and its features. Use examples from other texts they’ve read. You may want to co-construct lists of features. These students may also need support with identifying which language is suitable for a register. Explicitly note the register of any new vocabulary.

DIRECT the students to identify where in their writing they could use simile or metaphor to add drama or interest and help the reader to visualise.


- The author has used language that helps us to visualise what Ricky heard and felt. This increases my understanding of how bad he’s feeling about the way his game is going.
- Reread your own writing and look for a place where including figurative language will help your reader visualise the character’s thoughts or feelings. Talk about it with your writing partner.

DISCUSS with students how dialogue can bring a story to life and move the action along.

- In this extract, the author tells us a lot about Aaron and Ricky.
- Help each other to review the ways you have used dialogue to convey information quickly and effectively.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- The words and style you’ve used are just right. Your audience will be able to connect with your story.
- Adding that simile has helped me to imagine how Charlene felt. It’s made it much easier for me to understand why she acted so badly.
- Putting Henry’s thoughts in italics alongside his spoken words shows me how two-faced he is. He sounds polite, but you’ve shown that he’s thinking quite different thoughts underneath.

 Reading standard: by the end of year 8

 The Literacy Learning Progressions