

# Rugby under Wraps

by Bronwen Wall

School Journal  
Part 3 Number 2 2011  
Noun frequency level: 10–12  
Year 6



## Overview

“Rugby under Wraps” describes an unusual development in rugby – its popularity with women in Iran. Despite severe restrictions on the dress of the players and on the times and places they can play, the sport continues to grow in popularity. The article includes comments from Iranian players and coaches and from a former Black Fern who coached the first Iranian national women’s rugby team in 2008.

This article provides opportunities for students: to make interesting connections, not only with sport but also with broader issues such as women’s rights and international comparisons; to think critically about the perspective of the writer and how the writer positions the

readers and the subjects of the report; and to build on the key competencies of relating to others and thinking.

The teacher needs to be very sensitive to students’ feelings when using this text. For example, students who wear some form of hijab may not enjoy being the centre of discussion – or they may want to discuss it. Students who wear hijab, who are Muslim, or who are from Iran, may have very strong feelings about identity and simplistic and discriminatory attitudes towards them.

Texts related by theme “A Country Like Mine” SJ 3.1.08 | “Farah Palmer: In the Front Row” SJ 3.2.011

## Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

some information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, some competing information), which students need to identify and reject as they integrate pieces of information in order to answer questions

abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students’ understanding

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs that clarify or extend the text and may require some interpretation



### Rugby under Wraps by Bronwen Wall

Think rugby, and you’ll probably imagine men – maybe the All Blacks – running across a field in front of a packed stadium. But what if those men are women ... and the women are from Iran? You’ll probably need to think again. For a start, you’ll need to imagine long-sleeved tops and leggings, even in the middle of summer. You will also need to add special head coverings called hijabs held carefully in place.

22



23

Iran is the home of polo and a form of wrestling called Vazresh-e Pahlavani (the sport of heroes). Less traditional games like football, basketball, and handball are also popular. Although rugby was first played around the same time as these newer sports, it’s taken longer to catch on. In Iran, a rugby ball can still receive a lot of attention. “People are curious about the ball’s shape, so they stop to watch us,” says Azadeh, a player for the women’s rugby team in Shirvan. Some Iranians joke that a rugby ball is a melon or perhaps a dinosaur’s egg. Others, who know a little more about rugby, are still uncertain about the sport because they think it’s too physical. Luckily, not everyone has been put off. Iran has some keen rugby players – and some of the keenest are women. One coach from Iran’s Rugby Federation tried to teach men and women touch rugby, but he quickly learnt this was the wrong move. “I was concerned for the ladies’ safety, so I started with touch rugby,” he says. “One day, I took them to see the men training. Once they saw the real thing, they refused to play touch.”



a significant amount of vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the students (including academic and content-specific words and phrases), which is generally explained in the text by words or illustrations

sentences that vary in length and in structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)

some ideas and information that are conveyed indirectly and require students to infer by drawing on several related pieces of information in the text

Reading standard: by the end of year 6

# Possible curriculum contexts

## HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

### (Healthy Communities and Environments)

LEVEL 3 – Societal attitudes and values:  
Identify how health care and physical activity practices are influenced by community and environmental factors.

## ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

## ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

## Possible reading purposes

- To explore how and why women in Iran have taken up the sport of rugby
- To compare women's rugby in Iran and New Zealand
- To identify the factors that support or limit the access to sport in different communities.

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

## Possible writing purposes

- To research and describe the state of women's rugby in New Zealand or another country
- To report on my sports team and the things that affect how it operates
- To describe the views of different community groups to involvement with a sport.

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

# Text and language challenges

## VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and concepts, including “leggings”, “head coverings”, “hijabs”, “polo”, “wrestling”, “traditional”, “physical”, “keen”, “keenest”, “Federation”, “touch rugby”, “concerned”, “refused”, “Sportswomen”, “invited”, “the basics”, “encouraged”, “commitment”, “eager”, “impressed”, “volleyball”, “gymnastics”, “martial arts”, “tackling”, “excitement”, “dress code”, “authorities”, “Chinese Taipei”, “tackle”, “scored a try”, “hooded tops”, “tournament”, “Laos”, “matches”, “stand-out”, “participants”, “organise”, “roof beams”, “restrictions”, “overcome”, “challenges”, “positive”
- The names of people and places in Iran
- The colloquial words and expressions: “packed stadium”, “to catch on”, “put off”, “the wrong move”, “spread the news”, “There’s no doubt about”
- The metaphor “hasn’t looked back”.

## Possible supporting strategies

Identify the vocabulary your students will need support with, particularly students with little experience of rugby. Use strategies to preview the vocabulary before reading, such as having students describe what they see in the illustrations or talk about attitudes to sports. As the students describe pictures or discuss topics, create vocabulary lists (which could be organised in categories or word maps). Highlight vocabulary the students use, but also prompt them to use the more specific or technical vocabulary that is in the text. Recast what the students say, using this more specific or technical vocabulary, and make links between what they have said and the way you’ve recast it.

Select any specific areas where students may need support, such as the vocabulary associated with competitions, such as “tournament”, “participants”, and “matches”.

Identify new vocabulary that students should prioritise for learning. Have them record this vocabulary. Plan for ways to ensure that they have opportunities to encounter this vocabulary, often and in many contexts.

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

## SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Knowledge of rugby, including women's rugby and touch rugby
- Understanding that different countries and/or communities have different rules and practices that can affect participation in sports
- Knowledge of different forms of women's dress around the world and the reasons behind them and of the prejudices people have about women according to what they look like.

## Possible supporting strategies

Support students to access and/or build their knowledge of rugby and other sports, especially those played by women.

Read the introduction aloud and ask the students to consider the thinking suggested by the author. Ask if any students know about the clothing worn by women in other countries and cultures. Discuss the reasons for differences and the benefits or limitations of some clothes in relation to playing sport. Some students may wish to research the history of women's sports clothes, for example, of swimming or tennis costumes.

## TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- The introduction, which is directed to the reader and sets the scene (and assumes that the reader is not of Iranian descent and does not wear a hijab)
- Information of a general as well as particular nature, for example, Iran's dress code for women (general) and how it applies in sports (particular)
- Comparisons or contrasts: “Although”, “Others”, “even though”
- Time and sequence markers: “In 2004”, “Once”, “Afterwards”, “During”, “Recently”, “In the meantime”
- The concluding open question.

## Possible supporting strategies

Review what the students know about the different ways that factual articles may be written. Point out that this article has no headings, and during reading, prompt them to identify how changes in time, place, or topic are signalled.

Before reading, students could work in pairs to read the first sentence of each paragraph and map the text (write the topic for each paragraph). For students who need more support, you could provide a graphic organiser with some of the topics filled in or you could read the sentences together and then write the topic. During reading, you could look at how the rest of the paragraph provides detail about the topic.

# Instructional focus – Reading

**Health and Physical Education** (Healthy Communities and Enviroments, level 3 – Societal attitudes and values: Identify how health care and physical activity practices are influenced by community and environmental factors.)

**English** (Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.)

## Text excerpts from “Rugby under Wraps ”

*Think rugby, and you'll probably imagine men – maybe the All Blacks – running across a field in front of a packed stadium. But what if those men are women ... and the women are from Iran? You'll probably need to think again. For a start, you'll need to imagine long-sleeved tops and leggings, even in the middle of summer. You will also need to add special head coverings called hijabs, held carefully in place.*

In Iran, there are many rules about how women must dress, especially when they go out, and these rules are enforced by the authorities. Women are very careful to keep their body fully covered, including their head and hair, and they wear long, loose clothing and a hijab.

Helen agrees that Iranian women have to overcome many challenges to play rugby. “But they do it,” she says, “because they love the game.” She’s also very positive about the future of rugby in Iran. “Some of the women from the national team are now coaching rugby in their home towns. The number of new players in Iran is definitely growing.”

## Students (what they might do)

*Students identify the use of italics to indicate that this is an introduction. They use the dashes and ellipsis to infer the author's tone, and they use the statements addressed to “you” to infer that the author's purpose is to prepare the reader for the article. Students also understand that the expected reader (the “you”) is a New Zealander who is not from Iran and doesn't wear a hijab (and is also unaware of women's rugby in New Zealand). The students think critically about why the author makes these assumptions and how it could have been written differently for a different audience.*

*They identify the main idea (women from Iran who play rugby) and make connections between the text, the photographs, and their knowledge of rugby to visualise the players. Students ask and answer questions about the kind of article this will be.*

*Students make connections within the text to locate the impact of these rules. They make connections with their own experiences to compare their lives with those of the women in Iran. They ask and answer questions to build on the concept of a dress code and infer the possible religious and/or cultural reasons.*

*Students make connections within the text to locate the challenges discussed earlier. They integrate this information with their own knowledge and experiences to evaluate the idea Helen expresses.*

### METACOGNITION

- How did you use your knowledge of rugby to help you to understand or question the ideas in this story?
- The article didn't use headings for different big ideas. What effect did the structure of the text have on the way you read and understood it?
- What kinds of questions did you ask yourself as you read? Were they questions with simple answers or questions about big issues, such as women's rights or gender equality in sport? How could you find answers to any unanswered questions the article has raised?

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

**ASK QUESTIONS** to support students to identify the author's purpose.

- Why is this section in italics?
- The author asks the reader to think and imagine things. Did you think and imagine those things as you read the text?
- What do these first sentences tell us about who the writer thinks the audience is? How might the first sentences be different for a different audience?
- Why do you think the author is addressing the reader in this way? What is her purpose?

**MODEL** use of the punctuation.

Discuss the use of the dashes and the ellipsis, modelling the effect they have by reading the passage aloud with appropriate expression. Point out that the punctuation helps make the text “sound” like natural speech and adds to the sense that the author is speaking directly to the reader.

**PROMPT** students to make connections with their prior knowledge to ask questions about the kind of article this will be.

- From the introduction, we know that this article is going to be about women from Iran who play rugby.
- What do you know about why they wear the clothes they do?
- Think about the differences in woman's rugby in Iran and New Zealand

**PROMPT** the students to make connections and comparisons.

- Think about the “rules” around what you wear. Even if you dress casually, there will be some unspoken rules that help you decide what to wear.
- Turn to a partner and identify the connections and comparisons you can make with the dress codes you are used to.

**ASK QUESTIONS**

- How did making comparisons help you to understand the text?
- Why do you think the author goes into so much detail about the dress code?

**PROMPT** students to think, pair, and share factors that might be a challenge for people engaging in a sport or other activity in New Zealand.

**GIVE FEEDBACK**

- Making connections to your own experiences of playing football allowed you to develop a more in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by women in Iran.
- I noticed you brought together several different pieces of information in the text to respond to the ideas in the article. Integrating information across a text is often what is needed to fully understand an author's point of view.

Reading standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

# Instructional focus – Writing

**Health and Physical Education** (Healthy Communities and Environments, level 3 – Societal attitudes and values: Identify how health care and physical activity practices are influenced by community and environmental factors.)

**English** (Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.)

## Text excerpts from “Rugby under Wraps”

In 2004, Iran’s Rugby Federation started the first women’s rugby classes.

Keeping a head covering in place is sometimes tricky, and the extra clothing can make the women hot. “Imagine training under the sun, fully covered,” says Kolahi, who plays for the women’s rugby team in Shiraz.

Winning was great, but playing women from other countries was also a thrill – an experience players like Kolahi would love to have one day.

For many local teams, finding the chance to play games – and to train – is difficult.

## Students (what they might do)

### TOPIC SENTENCES

*Topic sentences show the reader the main idea that will be covered in the paragraph or section. These help the reader to look for further information in the rest of the section and in any supporting images, photographs, or diagrams.*

### DIRECT QUOTES

*Authors use direct quotes from interviewees to express ideas or opinions in their own words. This adds interest and gives an article authenticity.*

### USE OF THE DASH

*A dash is a punctuation mark that indicates a pause longer than a comma but not quite as long as a full stop. It is often used to add a comment on or summary of an idea. It can also be used to add a detail or to give emphasis.*

### METACOGNITION

- How did your writing buddy help you to revise your writing? How useful was this for you?
- Why have you chosen this way to structure your writing? How will it help your readers get your message?
- How does reading help your writing? What features of “Rugby under Wraps” helped you with your piece of writing?

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

**ASK QUESTIONS** to help students clarify their writing choices.

- Given your purpose for writing, what overall structure will help your readers to understand the topic?
- What ideas will you include? How will you introduce each new idea?
- How many paragraphs will you need to cover your topic?
- Where will you find information?

Refer to the models of topic sentences and detail that you discussed when you were reading. Remind the students of the features of effective topic sentences.

**PROMPT** students to provide opinions from direct sources.

- In this extract, the author provides the actual words of a player to express the frustrations caused by the dress code.
- Which would make your writing more reliable: your words or the words of a person directly involved in an issue?
- Look over the information you want to convey. Where could you use a direct quote to give your writing more authenticity? How could you get quotes for your article?

**MODEL** uses of the dash.

- In the first example, the dash indicates the relationship between two ideas. When I read the sentence, I pause at the dash then read on to learn what players would think of the idea.
- In the second example, the dashes are used like parentheses. They separate off a phrase that adds to the main idea. If dashes were not used, this is how I’d read the sentence: *For many local teams, finding the chance to play games and to train is difficult.* That doesn’t feel as strong to me. The dashes emphasise the importance of training as well as playing.
- Don’t overuse dashes. Always check to see if they improve a sentence or if it would be better to use a comma or a full stop. Reading your work aloud helps you decide which punctuation is best.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- You’ve added a topic sentence here. That’s good because it has helped me to know what this section will be about.
- I see you found someone who gave you first-hand quotes about playing cricket. That’s great – his experiences gave a more in-depth understanding.