



Overview

“When Farah Palmer was growing up, girls didn’t play rugby.” So begins this article about the former Black Ferns captain who led the New Zealand women’s rugby team to World Cup victory three times in a row. Farah’s story shows the dedication, hard work, and self-belief required to succeed, especially in a sport that gets little public attention. The article includes direct and indirect quotes from Farah, and tells how after first playing women’s rugby at seventeen, she never looked back.

Farah’s story is an excellent springboard for examining the theme of working hard to succeed in a chosen endeavour. The text offers opportunities for students to build on the key competencies of managing self and relating to others.

Texts related by theme

“The Big Game” SJ 3.1.07 | “A Tour like No Other” SJ 4.2.11 | “Game Over!” SJ 4.2.11

Text characteristics from the year 5 reading standard

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 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

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

“Now we just have to make sure that the Black Ferns stay the best in the world!”

Farah’s first World Cup was in the Netherlands in 1998. She remembers it as her favourite because her father was there watching. Her last World Cup in Canada in 2006 was also special. Both her parents were there – and in the final, the Black Ferns beat England, who were a very strong team.

Meeting and playing women from other countries has always been a highlight for Farah. “Playing Germany in 2002 was really funny. The German girls all wore kneepads and elbow pads, and they were really excited to be playing us. We beat them by over a hundred points.” Meeting the team from Kazakhstan in 2006 is another highlight. “The players had little support and hardly any gear. It really made us appreciate what we had. The Kazakhs have gone on to become the strongest team in Asia.”

Farah says the Black Ferns’ success in the last fifteen years has been good in all kinds of ways. “It’s given the players the chance to travel – and to spread the game of rugby.” One of the best things has been helping women in other countries to improve their game. “A team-mate from the Black Ferns has been coaching women in Iran. It makes you realise that women’s rugby really is going places,” says Farah. “It’s no longer a novelty – and the competition is getting better all the time. Now we just have to make sure that the Black Ferns stay the best in the world!”

Farah Palmer’s Tips to Improve Your Rugby

1. Carry a rugby ball around whenever you can. Throw it up in the air, against a wall, or to a friend. Kick it along the ground or at a target. You’ll soon figure out how that oval ball behaves when it’s handled in different ways.
2. Practise side-stepping and running around whatever’s there: furniture, trees, the cat in the backyard. When you get good, carry a ball at the same time. Then set up a circuit so that you can dodge obstacles. Finally, try a chip kick to pass to a target as you dodge.
3. Play all kinds of ball sports to develop your hand-eye co-ordination, foot-eye-ball co-ordination, and peripheral vision. You’ll also learn about passing a ball, being evasive, creating space, and being part of a team.
4. Go for runs, mixing short sprints with jogging. When you’re fit, it’s much easier to play rugby.
5. Learn to tackle properly by asking someone who is experienced to teach you the safety points and basics of tackling – and then practise, practise, practise.
6. Learn to communicate, which doesn’t mean yelling at your team-mates! But they do need to know where you are and what you’re going to do. This will help them to play alongside you as part of a team. And don’t forget that communication is also about listening, both to the coach and to your team-mates.
7. Be committed: put in the effort, practise, learn from your mistakes, and keep going. It’ll be worth it in the end!

figurative and/or ambiguous language that the context helps the students to understand

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

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

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

(Personal Health and Physical Development)

LEVEL 3 – Personal identity: Describe how their own feelings, beliefs, and actions, and those of other people, contribute to their personal sense of self-worth.

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 3 – Structure: Show a developing understanding of text structures.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 3 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

Possible reading purposes

- To find out about the woman who has led New Zealand's world-beating women's rugby team
- To understand how skills and confidence can be built up through sport
- To learn some tips for playing rugby.

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

Possible writing purposes

- To write an article about someone who has done well in local or national sports
- To describe your feelings about participating in a sport or similar activity.

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

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words or phrases, including “option”, “jerseys”, “all-rounder”, “unco-ordinated”, “accurate”, “university”, “progress”, “netball”, “communication”, “teamwork”, “court”, “positions”, “suited”, “team-mates”, “respect”, “concerned”, “celebrate”, “Netherlands”, “highlight”, “Kazakhstan”, “appreciate”, “Kazhaks”, “improve”, “novelty”, “competition”, “circuit”, “dodge”, “obstacles”, “peripheral vision”, “evasive”, “sprints”, “jogging”, “experienced”, “committed”
- The use of rugby and netball terms, including “Black Ferns”, “space”, “defence”, “forward”, “prop”, “hooker”, “kneepads”, “elbow pads”, “chip kick”
- The use of colloquial and informal language, including “for a laugh”, “go for it”, “Man!”, “decent”, “give it a go”, “reckons”, “just herself”, “awesome”, “going places”
- The double meaning of “in the front row”
- The metaphor “look up to you”.

Possible supporting strategies

Identify vocabulary, concepts, and colloquial language that may be challenging for your students.

Encourage students to notice their own and others' use of colloquial language and support them to differentiate between colloquial and formal language. With students who share a first language other than English, provide opportunities for them to discuss colloquial and formal features in this language and to make comparisons with English.

Start a rugby word list, asking students to identify words from this and other articles to add to the list. Extend students by comparing the general as well as specialised meanings of words such as “defence” or “evasive”.

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 and use 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, especially rugby in New Zealand – as a player, a spectator, or a casual observer
- Specific knowledge of women's rugby
- Experience of playing a team sport
- Knowledge of world competitions and the places where they may take place.

Possible supporting strategies

So that most students can participate and connect to their prior knowledge, you could ask them to make notes about the questions below, then discuss them in pairs:

- What team sports do you know, like, or dislike, and why?
- What qualities and abilities do you need to play team sports?

Have the pairs share their ideas with the group, then make a shared list.

Look at the photos on page 3 as a group. Identify the sport and start a rugby word list, categorising the items under headings such as Important qualities and abilities, Equipment, People, Actions, and so on. Discuss new terms and concepts as you create this list. Ask students with knowledge of rugby to act as a resource for those who know little about the game. Refer to and add to the list as you read.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- A factual article that focuses on one person's story to convey a wider story
- An introduction that provides background
- Direct and indirect quotes from Farah Palmer and others
- The mainly chronological sequence of events in Farah's life with some mixed time periods (for example, on page 3, the time moves forward to her becoming captain and then jumps back to when she was a child, and on page 4, it jumps back to her playing netball in school)
- Time and sequencing language.

Possible supporting strategies

Create a timeline to support students to identify the sequence of events in Farah's life. You could do this in the shape of a table with spaces for the stages of her life, the time and sequencing language (where appropriate), and the events. There are some mixed time periods, so students may need support to identify the time and/or sequencing language and map the events on the timeline. Direct the students to include the main events only and support them to do this. Tell them that chunks of the text are descriptive and don't include events (for example, most of page 5).

Instructional focus – Reading

Health and PE (Personal Health and Physical Development, level 3 – Personal identity: Describe how their own feelings, beliefs, and actions, and those of other people, contribute to their personal sense of self-worth.)

English (Level 3 – Structure: Show a developing understanding of text structures.)

Text excerpts from “Farah Palmer”

Although it’s hard to believe, Farah says she’s never been an all-rounder on the sports field. “I was one of those kids who really enjoy being active. I gave everything a go. But actually, I’m a bit unco-ordinated. So I loved the idea of running at people on the rugby field and not having to be accurate.”

Farah began her rugby career as a prop. Then she became a hooker. But she didn’t choose these positions. “I didn’t know anything! None of the players did. At our first practice, the coach said, ‘Right, we need a prop. Farah, that’s you!’ Luckily, the position suited me – and I really enjoyed being in the front row.”

Farah’s first World Cup was in the Netherlands in 1998. She remembers it as her favourite because her father was there watching. Her last World Cup in Canada in 2006 was also special. Both her parents were there – and in the final, the Black Ferns beat England, who were a very strong team.

Students (what they might do)

Students **integrate** information from the text and the photos, and **make connections** with their own sporting experience, to understand that Farah didn’t see herself as a skilled athlete. They use **visualising** based on their experiences of sport to understand what Farah means.

Students draw on their word knowledge to understand the topic-specific vocabulary and multiple meanings. They also use word knowledge and knowledge of rugby to understand the meaning of “front row”.

They **ask and answer questions** about Farah’s experience and attitude to **infer** that Farah was able to learn quickly.

Students **make connections** with their world knowledge to locate the countries, **visualising** the distances and travel involved in playing around the world.

They **make connections** with their own experiences of family support and **integrate** this with what they have learned about Farah (“because her father was there” and “Both her parents were there”) to understand the importance of support to her.

Students use the dates to work out that Farah played World Cup rugby for at least eight years.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

ASK QUESTIONS to support students to integrate information.

- From the preceding text, the photos on pages 1 and 2, and what you know about top sportspeople, what could you say about Farah’s athletic abilities?
- Why do you think she says she was never an “all-rounder”? What does that word mean?
- What does the combination of this information tell you about Farah’s opinion of her skills and abilities.

EXPLAIN that visualising is a useful way to understand what people do and say.

- Think about the physical feelings of “being active” and running around. Use your own experiences to imagine what Farah feels and enjoys about rugby.

Refer to the students’ earlier discussions and notes about the qualities and abilities needed for team sports. Ask the students to start listing qualities and abilities they notice about Farah and to compare them with their earlier list.

DIRECT students to share their knowledge of rugby terms in pairs or groups. Ask them to identify words and expressions that have more than one meaning (avoiding hooker!) and to look for links between general and specific meanings.

- What is the non-rugby meaning of “prop”? How does knowing this help you understand what a prop does in rugby?

Refer to your rugby word list and add to it.

MODEL asking questions.

- Why did the coach choose that position for Farah to play?
- What does she mean by “the position suited me”? Does she mean physically? Mentally?
- How do you think this affected her enjoyment of and commitment to the game?

Support the students to ask questions about the ideas and information as they read.

Ask the students to work in small groups to discuss the role of family and other support in sport.

- Share your own experiences and what you know about successful sportspeople.
- What kind of support do they have?
- How important is support for developing confidence and a sense of self-worth?
- How would it feel to be playing for your country a long way from home?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- The comparison you made with your music competitions is a useful way to visualise how good it must feel to do well in something you love.
- Thinking about colloquial and formal words in your first language has helped you to understand when it’s appropriate to use some examples of colloquial or formal words in English.

METACOGNITION

- Tell me more about how you were able to identify with Farah. How did that help you understand the text?
- How much did you already know about this topic? How did your prior knowledge help you to understand the article?
- How did you use the structure of the article to keep track of events in Farah’s life? How did the time and sequencing language help you?

Reading standard: by the end of year 5

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Health and PE (Personal Health and Physical Development, level 3 – Personal identity: Describe how their own feelings, beliefs, and actions, and those of other people, contribute to their personal sense of self-worth.)

English (Level 3 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.)

Text excerpts from “Farah Palmer”

When Farah Palmer was growing up, girls didn't play rugby. “It just wasn't an option,” she says. “Rugby for girls didn't exist.” Instead, she played netball. Then, one day – for a laugh – someone organised a game of women's rugby in Farah's home town of Piopio. “We were given two sets of jerseys and five minutes of coaching and then told to go for it.” They did.

Other Black Ferns remember Farah as a great captain. Anna Richards says, “Farah was an awesome captain because she was a great player – and she trained the hardest. She always wanted us to win, and she showed us how to do it. And she was always concerned about the feelings of other players.”

Mostly, when she was captain, she was “just herself”, although she has some ideas about being a good leader. “Your teammates look up to you, and this means you always have to do your best. You have to be someone people can respect.”

Students (what they might do)

STRONG INTRODUCTIONS

Starting an article with a dramatic statement is a good way to engage the reader's attention.

DASHES

Dashes can add interest to writing but should not be overused.

A pair of dashes can be used to set off a piece of additional information, such as extra details or a comment.

A single dash is used for dramatic effect, for example, to show a break in thought, a summary, or a contrasting idea.

QUOTATIONS

Non-fiction writing can be enhanced by direct quotations. They show the reader exactly what a person said, wrote, or thought. Quotations can add authenticity and credibility to a factual text.

Students need to be careful to use quotations accurately, for example, by using the right tenses and pronouns in indirect speech.

METACOGNITION

- What is the main purpose of your writing? Have you achieved it? How can you tell?
- How has your use of direct speech impacted on your article? Why didn't you use indirect speech?

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

PROMPT students to consider their writing intentions.

- How are you making your decisions about topic, purpose, and audience?
- What structure will best suit your topic and purpose? How will you organise the information you want to convey?
- How will you engage your reader?

EXPLAIN the use of dashes.

- Dashes are like salt – a little is more effective than a lot! A dash makes your reader take notice of something. Dashes can emphasise details, a comment about the main idea, a different angle, or a summary of what went before.
- In the first extract, the pair of dashes emphasise an extra detail about the game in Piopio. The detail lets us know that the game was not serious. This contrasts with the serious business that rugby later became for Farah.
- In the second extract, the dash adds emphasis to an important piece of information about Farah.
- Dashes work like commas, but they make a stronger impact, so they need to be used sparingly.

PROMPT the students to use direct or indirect speech accurately.

- Remember the conventions for using the exact words a person said. Use their name and put quotation marks around their words. This is *direct speech*.
- If you're reporting what a person said, but not using the exact words, you don't need quotation marks. You do need to say whose words they are.

Note that reported (indirect) speech is grammatically complex. If the reporting verb is in the past, students will usually need to shift all the verb forms back in time and change time references and pronouns. Some students will need to work through and co-construct several examples with you before they can begin to practise simple examples independently. Some students may initially need to focus on using direct speech. Students also need to discuss the purpose of direct and indirect speech and make choices about when to use them.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Using a dramatic statistic grabbed my attention. That is a powerful way to start your article.
- Replacing that comma with a dash gave the words after it much stronger emphasis.
- Your use of the quotes from her coach helped me to understand more about ... They have more impact than if you'd just given your own opinion.