



## Unit 8

# The write track

### Cross-curricular – Literature

- 1 Have you read a book or seen a film that was set in a sporting environment? What did you think about it?

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- 2 Three famous authors write about their favourite sporting books. Read the text and say which author(s) write about:

• one book ..... • three books ..... • two books .....

- 3 Read the recommendations again and say which author(s):

- 1 mention the same book? .....
- 2 refers to specific events in a book? .....
- 3 talks about a book whose content is pleasantly surprising? .....
- 4 has a favourite sporting book that is popular in more than one country? .....
- 5 is not impressed by recent developments in sport? .....
- 6 has changed his/her opinions because of a book? .....
- 7 refers to a book that includes information about more than one sport? .....

### WORD BOOSTER

#### Match the words and definitions.

- |              |                        |
|--------------|------------------------|
| 1 fixture    | a powerful             |
| 2 precisely  | b thoroughly enjoy     |
| 3 devoured   | c sporting competition |
| 4 relish     | d treated as inferior  |
| 5 patronised | e accurately           |
| 6 potent     | f eagerly read         |

- 4 Use the context to match the items with what they refer to.

- |                      |                                  |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 fours and sixes    | a a UK stadium                   |
| 2 a jockey           | b a horse                        |
| 3 Balliol            | c terms in cricket               |
| 4 The Pie            | d a sports team                  |
| 5 the Slade          | e a person who rides horses      |
| 6 the Oakland As     | f a university college in the UK |
| 7 the Reebok, Bolton | g a London art school            |

- 5 Which of the books mentioned would you most like to read? Why?

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### Authors recommend their favourite sporting books

#### A AS Byatt

My favourite sporting moment in fiction is the cricket match in *Murder Must Advertise* by Dorothy L Sayers. Lord Peter Wimsey, disguised as Mr de'Ath, is investigating a crime in an advertising agency, and takes part in an annual inter-firm cricket fixture. He plays cautiously and in character at first, but is overtaken by the game and begins to hit fours and sixes as only Wimsey of Balliol could hit them, thus revealing himself. The cricket also reveals the murderer. The tension is brilliant. Or perhaps it is the wonderful scene at the end of *National Velvet* by Enid Bagnold, where Velvet, disguised as a male jockey, looms out of the mist on The Pie, and wins the Grand National, before falling off in a dead faint. Bagnold is wonderful at sporting detail – Velvet's mother's achievements as a cross-channel swimmer, covered in grease, are just as precisely done as the horsemanship. And I loved David Storey's *This Sporting Life*, his first novel, based on his own time supporting himself as an art student at the Slade by playing professional rugby. He is good on roaring crowds, and being part of a team, neither of which, as a young woman, I understood or liked before reading this book.



#### B Nick Hornby

In the past five years, Michael Lewis has written two of the best books about sport I've ever read. The first, *Moneyball*, deals with baseball, and is much more interesting than the title suggests: it's not, as one fears, about how greed has corrupted a once great sport, and so on. Rather it's a rich and involving analysis of how a baseball manager, Billy Beane of the Oakland As, completely rethought the game's way of judging players, and in doing so turned his scrappy little team into a force. *Moneyball* has, apparently, been influential even on this side of the Atlantic, devoured by coaches who think that Lewis and Beane might have something to teach them about away games at the Reebok, Bolton, rather than Yankee Stadium, New York. *The Blind Side* is every bit as compelling, a brilliant analysis of the evolution of American football underpinning the extraordinary story of a freakish African-American kid called Michael Oher, who is 1.95m tall, weighs 150kg and runs like a sprinter. Lewis takes sport seriously, but this doesn't mean he moralises, or forces meanings into it that won't fit; rather, he recognises that it's a complicated, funny, sad business, full of narratives that any storyteller would relish.



#### C Caryl Phillips

David Storey's *This Sporting Life* (1960) reminds us of the days when our sporting idols were produced by, and remained a part of, the local community. After the game they would take a quick bath and then line up with the rest of us and take the same bus back to the town centre. Storey was a professional rugby player, and only a man who knew what it was like to be raked and stamped on by opponents, and then patronised by the chairman in the boardroom, could have written such a fiercely authentic account of the hypocrisies of British sporting life. *This Sporting Life* is a potent reminder of the ruthlessly exploitative dynamics of the past, but also suggests that we may well have lost something in this brave new world in which we are encouraged to view sportsmen as celebrity entertainers and local teams as little more than franchises.

