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BENEATH THE SURFACE TEACHERS' GUIDE

In Union Raewyn Caisley

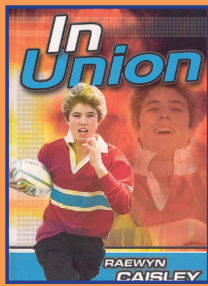
Christian Phillips and his dad are keen Rugby Union supporters and they like nothing more than going to a game and letting off steam barracking for their side.

One day, uncharacteristically, Christian says he is thinking of playing instead of just being a spectator. He is a mild-mannered boy and slight of build, but nevertheless he goes along to the try-outs for the Junior team at school. When he gets the ball he makes an impressive dash for the line, acting mainly out of instinct and fear. When the team is announced, Christian is surprised but thrilled to see his name there in the last spot on the list, as though his inclusion was a last-minute decision. He finds when he goes to practice on Tuesday nights that Honsey, the Phys. Ed. teacher who coaches his team, doesn't have many clues about the game or teamwork. The whole school looks up to those who have made the sporting teams and the Head is adamant about rugby being played in a tough manner. He coaches the First XV himself.

Christian trains hard and gets fit, but he spends his time during games running up and down on the side as no one will pass him the ball. The team is getting beaten and Christian dares to make some suggestions about new tactics that might work. His suggestions are finally adopted during a game against Scots when they are being thrashed, and although they don't win, they play as a team and everyone feels good and proud of what they have achieved.

Reading

- Who is telling the story?
- From what stance is the story being told?
- What is Christian's rationale for the way he and his father behave at a rugby game? (9)
I could tell straight away that their game was heaps better than the one Dad was watching (12).
- What makes Christian say this?
- What made Christian want to actually play rugby? (Chapter 2)
- What was his dad's reaction to this announcement?
- Who came up with the classic phrase *grounding the Gilbert*?
- What does it mean and what is its significance? (14)
- How do you know it's a big step for Christian to decide to want to play rugby?
- How are kids who play sport regarded at his school?
- How did Christian get boots to wear to the trials? (24-25)
- Find an incident that made you smile.
- *I live in a world of perpetual embarrassment (27).* Give an example of something that happens to embarrass Christian and how he handles the situation.
- What was the school's reputation on the field?
- To what was this attributed?
- How would it have come about? (39)
- Find places where Christian has second thoughts about playing rugby.
- The author often indicates that there is a difference between what goes on and what is supposed to be happening. Look for instances of this.
- Describe how Christian felt when he actually got the ball and what happened subsequently. (41- 42)
- What does Christian attribute his inclusion in the team to? (49)
- Outline his feelings on making the team.
- Find instances where Christian oscillates between pride and panic and what causes this.
- What happens that alters the game against Scots?



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Vocabulary

- From the text, find and make a list of expressions and words that you can identify with. On page 49 there is a comment Christen refers to as: *A whole truck load of sarcasm.*
- What is sarcasm?
- What is its purpose?
- What is a *grudge match*? (69)

References

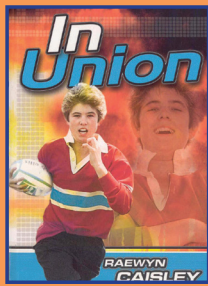
- Explain the following references and what they convey:
 - *...I felt like a god standing on top of Mount Olympus* (45)
 - *It was like that 'running of the bulls' thing they do in Spain ...*(62)
 - Referring to his Grandmother, Christian says *but there's no changing her spots* (70).

Characters

- Write a character study of the narrator, covering as much as you can about him and outlining the manner in which he approaches things and the way he sees things.
- Do a profile of Honsey, stating his position, what he is like and how he behaves.

Speaking/Listening

- Examine crowd behaviour and talk about how fans behave and why.
- Spectators are *nuts about the game*.
- What is acceptable behaviour at a game that would be out of place elsewhere?
- Discuss family behaviour and look at outings, sayings and memories.
- What sort of “types” are in a rugby team?
- Talk about:
 - teamwork
 - feelings
 - confidence
 - pride
 - ego
 - pressure
 - good advice
 - dreams
 - reality and how you would like it to be
 - the culture of rugby
 - the way in which people live on and are remembered
 - the importance of playing as a team
 - the attributes of a leader
- Christian says on page 65: *Things are always more complicated than they seem on the surface.* Discuss.
- Discuss the way Christian changes and behaves uncharacteristically.
- Try to explain why this happened.
- Find some places where his mother or father utter some wise words.
- Talk about Christian’s “crisis”.
- Look at the way the team behaves and how and why it all goes incredibly wrong. (Chapter 9).
- Find examples when Christian finds himself in a dilemma, humiliated, frustrated, angry.
- Outline some of the differences between watching and playing a game.
- Talk about some of the things Christian and the members of his team learned.
- There are many instances of philosophy in this story. Find some and examine them.



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Writing

- Do a snapshot of Christian's family and the way they live and interact.
- Describe the Junior Team try-outs.
- As Christian:
 - Write in your diary how the first training session for the Junior Rugby Team went.
 - Give an account of Scots school, their team and the game you played.
- Write a review of *In Union* by Raewyn Caisley for your local newspaper, explaining how the book gets its title.

The Craft of Writing

Read the opening of *In Union* and ascertain the ingredients the author has used to establish the atmosphere and excitement of the game.

There are many places where we know what is going on in Christian's head or imagination.

- Find some instances and see how the author uses this strategy to inform the reader.
- To establish a picture of a real place, Raewyn Caisley uses sights, sounds and smells: look at pages 17-18 for examples. Find other places where the senses are used to establish atmosphere or surroundings and emulate the use of them in your own writing

The author gives many details of what people do in their normal lives.

- Find one such portion from the story and see what it consists of.

There are several places in the text where looks and mannerisms are described that are a form of communication as they indicate feelings between characters who know each other well.

- Find some of these and examine them and their effect.
- Raewyn Caisley uses similes to make her story come alive: *I felt like a meerkat in a rhino enclosure* (31). ... *when I got there I stood shivering, as cold as a lemonade iceblock* (37).
- Find more similes from the text and use such images in your own writing.

There are places where Christian pretends to know what's going on when he really doesn't.

- Find instances and assess why people do this.

The author often makes analogies with battles when describing a rugby match.

- Find some examples and discuss their effect.

About the author

Raewyn Caisley was born in New Zealand but now lives in Fremantle with her husband Terry and little boy Jack. She has lived in Australia for eighteen years and is the author of fifteen books for children.

Teachers' notes written by Nancy Mortimer.