

EdRugby Online Educational Resource

LESSON: The Ella brothers Rugby legends

LEVEL

Upper primary

THEME: Rugby heritage

DESCRIPTION:

Students are introduced to the purpose and form of a biography. They read a biography of the Ella brothers, list main events and examine and identify language features that describe things.

OUTCOMES

This lesson contributes to the achievement of the following unit outcomes:

English

- With teacher guidance, identifies and discusses how linguistic structures and features work to shape readers' and viewers' understanding of texts.
- Draws on knowledge and linguistic structures and features to explain how texts are constructed.

SUGGESTED TIME:

40 minutes

WHAT YOU NEED:

- photos of famous people
- magazines featuring biographical articles
- a range of biographies (your librarian may have some helpful suggestions)
- map of Sydney, NSW (or street directory featuring the suburb of La Perouse)
- class copies of Student handout – The Ella brothers (at the end of this lesson plan)

PART 1 COLLECTING IDEAS

Note: You may decide to skip this part if your class is familiar with the ideas related to a biography.

- a. Work with the whole class to collect a list of names of well-known sporting heroes both past and present, for example Don Bradman, Cathy Freeman, Ian Thorpe and John Eales.

Show the class published biographies about some of these people. You may have additional source material such as magazines containing biographical articles or biographical videos. Ask the class some questions about biographies. Prompt questions may include:

- What is a biography?
- What forms do biographies come in?
- What information do biographies contain?

- b. Choose a Rugby player the students are likely to know about, for example John Eales or George Gregan.

Ask the class the question:

What information do you find in a biography?

Work with the whole class to collect a list of things that may be found in an article about the selected Rugby player.

The image contains six ovals arranged in two rows of three. Each oval contains a prompt for a class discussion about biographies. The prompts are:

- where they grew up
- where they were born
- other events they were involved in
- where they went to school
- their sporting achievements
- significant matches they played
- other events they were involved in.

- c. Ask the class the question:
Why do people write biographies?

Possible responses may include to:

- remember people
- inspire readers to meet challenges in life
- get a new perspective on a person’s life
- tell a story
- reveal the truth

Discuss why people write biographies about people like John Eales and the other sporting heroes listed. Explain that the Ella brothers are significant people in the history of Rugby and that you and the class are going to learn more by reading a biographical recount about them.

PART 2 THE BIOGRAPHY

- a. Discuss the years of 1959 and 1960. Students may be able to relate this to the age of their own relatives. Show students a map of Sydney and locate the suburb of La Perouse.

Read out the title of the text and ask students to predict what types of things they may learn about the Ella brothers.

Ask the class some questions about the biography:

What information would you expect to find in this biography?

Why would someone write this biography?

- b. Hand out a copy of the text to each student. Alternatively, project an OHT version of the text using an overhead projector.

Read the first paragraph aloud to the students. Discuss the purpose of this stage of the text, establishing its role as background.

- c. Read the rest of the text aloud. Ask students to signal when a new period of his life starts (childhood, teenage, adulthood), correlating the paragraph, year, his age and the main events that occurred. Make a record of student responses in a summary table similar to that shown below:

<i>Period of life</i>	<i>Paragraph</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Main events</i>
<i>birth</i>	3	<i>June 5, 1959</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>Mark and Glen are born</i>
<i>birth</i>	3	<i>July 23, 1960.</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>Gary is born</i>

Alternatively, complete this activity by organising students into small groups assigned to a single period of life or paragraph. Re-group and jointly construct the table.

PART 3 LANGUAGE FEATURES

A key concept in talking about texts is language features. Language features refer to the actual language choices that are made by the author of the text.

Words and phrases that describe things

a. Read out the following sentence:

'Mark, Glen and Gary come from a large and closely knit family of twelve children who grew up in the Aboriginal community at La Perouse in Sydney.'

Ask the class the question:

Which words or phrases tell you more about the family?

Discuss the use of the words large and closely knit to describe the Ella family. Explain that words that describe something are called adjectives. Introduce and discuss other examples to the class such as red bike, strong team, proud parents and important players.

b. Ask students in groups to read through the passage again and circle the words or phrases that describe things.

As a group, discuss the students' findings, to determine if the selected words or phrases do describe something and the purpose of these words and phrases.

Prompt questions include:

How important are these words in a biography?

What would happen if these words were not used?

PART 4 EXTENSION

- Compare the Ella brothers' contributions with other national heroes.
- Ask students to look through magazines and biographies to find examples of words and phrases that describe things.
- Students can begin to complete their own biographical details in a summary table.
- Discuss the features, purpose and audience of this biography.
- Explore the language used in this biography and compare to biographies from other sources and with different audiences. How might the biography change if it was written for a different purpose?
- Examine a range of biographies in book form and read the text on the back cover. Write a short summary to go on the back cover of a biography for the Ella brothers.
- Research other famous brothers and sisters that have made significant contributions in their field.
- Find out more about adjectives and how they are used in language.

STUDENT HANDOUT THE ELLA BROTHERS

The three Ella brothers – twins Mark and Glen and younger brother Gary – are remarkable Rugby players for many reasons. They are remarkable for their Rugby skills; remarkable for the fact that three brothers represented Australia in Rugby Union at the same time; remarkable that one of them captained Australia. They also happen to be three Aboriginal brothers.

Mark, Glen and Gary come from a large and closely knit family of twelve children who grew up in the Aboriginal community at La Perouse in Sydney. Their parents May and Gordon encouraged all their children to do better at school and sport, teaching them that 'coming second was never good enough if they had the ability to come first'.¹ They also had the support and encouragement of their athletic siblings and an extended family which could boast of many top athletes, including their cousin Steve Ella, a Rugby League International and their uncle Bruce Stewart who played First grade Rugby League for Eastern Suburbs.

Mark and Glen were born on June 5, 1959 and their younger brother Gary on July 23, 1960. From a very early age their elder brother Rodney, a gifted Rugby League player, kicked a football to them although their early games at home and at La Perouse Primary School were Rugby League, not Rugby Union. It was not until they attended Matraville High School that they switched to Rugby Union.

One of the people responsible for persuading the boys to play Rugby Union was the deputy principal Geoff Mould, who had played both codes at school but represented Combined High Schools in Rugby Union. Among other aspects of the game, he was attracted to the then amateur philosophy of Rugby Union. Because of his association with Randwick Rugby Club, Mould came under the influence of some famous ex-Wallabies including the great Cyril Towers who assisted Mould in introducing the school to Randwick's famous running style of play. By the time the Ella boys arrived at Matraville, it had won the prestigious Waratah Shield in which ninety teams across the state competed. In 1976, with the three Ella brothers in the school's First XV, Matraville High won the shield for a second time and was establishing itself as a Rugby 'nursery' for future Wallaby greats, such as the Ella boys, Russell Fairfax before them, and fellow Aboriginal Lloyd Walker. In 1977 the school had a record nine players in the NSW schoolboys team.

While the Ella boys were making their mark in Rugby Union, they were also representing their school in cricket in the First XI and impressing with their leadership skills – Gary became vice-captain of the school and Mark and Glen were prefects.

In 1976 the three boys toured New Zealand with the Combined High Schools team and in 1978 they were again chosen to tour the United Kingdom with the 1977/78 schoolboy team, famous for being undefeated on tour and for playing a style of Rugby that won high praise from Rugby critics.²

Upon leaving school, it was a natural progression for the boys to join Randwick Rugby Club and with the talents they possessed, within three months of leaving school Mark, Glen and Gary were playing First grade Rugby Union for their club

STUDENT HANDOUT	THE ELLA BROTHERS CONT'D
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and would soon embark on their representative careers, which not only gave them the chance to represent their country in their chosen sport but also to travel to many corners of the world, including the United Kingdom, Europe and Argentina.

Individually, in 1979 Mark made his debut for New South Wales playing twenty-six state representative matches. In 1980 he played in his first test for Australia and up to 1984 played a total of twenty-five tests, ten as captain, becoming the first Aboriginal in any sport to captain Australia.³ In the 1984 Wallabies Grand Slam tour of the United Kingdom and Ireland, in which the Australians won all four test matches against each home Union, Mark created a record by scoring a try in every test. Jack Pollard rates Mark as one of the most naturally gifted exponents of Rugby Australia has ever produced, with super-fine anticipation and superb hands. He was named the Young Australian of the Year in 1983 and awarded the Order of Australia in 1984. Mark has been a partner in a sports communications company and assisted the Japanese National Rugby Team in their preparation for the Rugby World Cup 2003.

Glen also made his debut for New South Wales in 1980 and played twenty-five state matches and four tests for Australia between 1982 and 1985. Ex-Wallabies and Waratahs coach Bob Dwyer, in his book *The Winning Way*, describes Glen as 'the most talented runner of the three brothers... I don't think Glen ever appreciated his talent. He never realized how gifted he was.' Jack Pollard described how Glen made some magical tries 'running into the back line to surprise the defence, reversing the ball inside to his brother Mark, and backing up for return passes' – an example of intuitive communication between the two brothers. Glen has been the Australian Wallabies Assistant Coach.

Gary played twenty-six representative matches for New South Wales, making his debut in 1981. He made his debut for Australia in 1982 and, up to 1988, played six international tests. He was the first of the Ella brothers to tour overseas when he went to New Zealand with an under-14 team. He played at centre position and is described as having 'superb footwork and smart hands'. Bob Dwyer described Gary as 'a maestro who underplayed his role without showing the dash and dramatic bursts of his brothers. Gary concentrated on setting up his wingers and they all said he was a dream to play outside, constantly feeding perfect passes to run on to.'⁴ Gary has been Assistant Coach of the New South Wales Waratahs.

Throughout their illustrious careers they had no greater supports than their parents Gordon and May and no greater mentor and family friend than former Wallaby Sir Nicholas Shehadie, the husband of Professor Marie Bashir, who wrote: 'Rugby has given these young men the opportunity to be exposed to the world and no more popular players, whether on or off the field, have represented their country.'

(Footnotes)

1 Harris, Bret, *Ella, Ella, Ella*, Little Hills Press 1984, p 11

2 *Ibid*

3 Pollard, J, 'Rugby Union: The Game and The Players, Ironbark, 1994.

4 *Ibid*