

Teacher's Guide

Bio:

Michael Hyde

Michael Hyde has been writing for over 30 years – mainly for adolescents and young adults. Examples of his work are *MAX*, *Tyger Tyger*, *Hey Joe* and *Surfing Goliath* – all critically acclaimed. *All Along the Watchtower* was his memoir of the sixties in Australia.

After 25 years as an English teacher Michael lectured in Creative Writing, Sports Writing and Children's Literature at Victoria University and conducts writing workshops for students and teachers across Australia.

He also received Victoria University's Arts Faculty *Award for Teaching Excellence* and the Vice Chancellor's *Award for Teaching Excellence*. In 2013 he successfully completed and was awarded a PhD which examined the social and political rebellion of the Sixties in Australia.

More recently he appeared on the award-winning SBS 4 part documentary on ASIO, 'Persons of Interest'.

He has begun work on another YA novel, *Morrison and Mr Moore*, about an unlikely friendship between a soon-to-retire school Principal and a rebellious 17-year-old student.

Also by Michael Hyde:

MAX

Tyger Tyger

Hey Joe (CBC Notable)

Surfing Goliath

Girl Who Married a Fly (ed)

Hunger (ed) (CBC Notable)

Change the Game (Sports Series)

All Along the Watchtower (Literary Memoir of the 60s)

Persons of Interest (Featured in award-winning SBS documentary on ASIO)

Summary

YA novel, *Footy Dreaming*, tells the story of two teenagers with hopes and dreams of playing AFL football at the highest level. Ben is white and Noah is indigenous, both living in the footy mad regional

town of Marshall. In the beginning they hardly know each other and play for two different teams in the town. Both are 'gun players' with the reputation of having the best chance of making it in the AFL, the big time, the first step being selected by the Murray Valley Bushrangers. But racism and small town politics make their journey difficult and fraught. Both Noah and Ben's families have virtually nothing to do with each other with Ben's single father, Joe still trapped in racism compared with Noah's nuclear family grounded by their culture. Slowly and tentatively the two teenagers get to know each other, becoming closer despite their own doubts and fears while battling on-field racial vilification, one prejudiced coach and his vicious son and a town's fanatical expectations.

The story is set against a backdrop of small town politics, classroom confrontations, emotional turmoil, loyalty and grief. An array of salt-of-the-earth and eccentric characters adds to the humour and depth of this story.

Will Noah and Ben survive and make it through with their humanity and dreams intact?

Thinking, Speaking and Writing about Footy Dreaming

(The exercises below can be done through discussion as well.)

Your own summary

The above summary might help you but everybody remembers a book or film in their own way.

- Write a paragraph (approx 10 lines) that gives *your* account of *Footy Dreaming*.

This exercise is probably a lot harder than it sounds but have a go.

Your Feelings about *Footy Dreaming*

A well-known Australian author, Rodney Hall, once said that after reading a novel, the most important question you could ask yourself and others was, '**How did it make you feel?**'

Hall is an award-winning author. He's won the Miles Franklin Award (Australia's biggest literary prize) and been nominated a number of times for the Booker Prize (the world's biggest literary prize) plus many other awards. So his question about our feelings comes from many years of experience.

- After reading *Footy Dreaming* how did the story make you feel? (Angry, happy, sad, thoughtful, nothing etc.) Try to be specific in your answer. Try and find something that happened in the book that explains what you're saying.

E.g. 'It made me so angry that I wanted to go and yell at racists.'

'It had no effect on me, it's a story and that's it.'

'It reminded me of people I know.'

'It made me think about footy and other sports.'

'It has a good ending but it still made me wonder why this kind of thing goes on.'

'I feel a bit confused about the things the story dealt with.' And so on.

Like and Hate

- * Describe one aspect of the novel that you loved. Give an example and try and explain why.
- * Describe one aspect of the novel that you hated. Give an example and try and explain why.
- * Describe one aspect of the novel where you felt confused. Give an example and try and explain why.

Characters

Main Characters: Noah Davis; Ben Meredith; Paul and Cheryl Davis; Joe Meredith; HOG.

Minor Characters: Chris Davis; Grandma Davis; Emma Meredith; Mark Elliot; Mr Elliot; Millie; Ms Gilmarten; Mr Garner; Marcus White; Little Tony.

There are of course many other characters (Rebecca Prichard; Brett Tallarico; numerous footy players) but the above major and minor characters are in the story quite a bit.

- Choose two of them (major or minor) – one you liked and one you didn't – and describe what they are like (personality and physical appearance).
- Then find information from the novel that helped you with your descriptions and copy out those passages as quotes.

(Sometimes we receive some information about characters from the actual novel but then our imagination often does the rest of the job.)

- Did any of the characters remind you of anybody in your life? How come?

(Sometimes a character or a place reminds us of someone in our life and then that person comes to life in the story. Strange, eh?)

Settings and Places

Stories happen in different places. In *Footy Dreaming* there are many settings where things take place: footy grounds; change rooms; school; homes; halls; country roads; the bush; Marshall; buses; cars; and so on.

- Choose one or two of the places where important things happened. Write a description of the settings and what went on. Explain why the event (action, talking, fighting etc) is important in the story.
- Does *where* the event happened help to add tension, humour, emotion etc to the event?

(E.g. The fights on the footy field; Paul and Noah's conversation next to grandma's grave; Noah and Ben's conversations running on the track; arguments in the classroom.)

- Do any of the settings remind you of important places in your life? If so, describe them and why they are important to you.
- While attending Noah's grandma's funeral, his mother talks about Gunditjmara country, the country of Grandma and the Davis' family: *'Do you fellas ever listen to anything me and your father say? Honestly. That's where the stone huts are. And the eel ponds. Your country boys. Your grandma's country. Your mob.'*

Chris and Noah said nothing. They'd heard about their ancestors who'd lived in the stone huts, who fished the ponds and smoked the eels they caught.

This part of the novel was based on the Indigenous land near Heywood in Western Victoria. Search '**Gunditjmara**' and explore their history and the amazing eel and fishponds that sustained thousands of people who lived in stone huts. Prepare a **digital project** based on what you discover.

Action

There is lots of action in *Footy Dreaming* – footy; running; fights; arguments; confrontations; pie-eating contests etc.

But action is fairly hard to capture in words. Writing, 'He marked the ball and kicked the goal' doesn't really capture what happened and the feeling you want the reader to get.

Below is an article I wrote for *The Age* some years ago about how to write good action.

Action Tips –*The Age*

Remember when you wrote about some exciting experience in your life but it didn't come out on the page the way you remembered it? Like a sports game where you were down on the scoreboard with only seconds to play and somehow you had the ball in your hands and managed to score the winning goal? It was crystal clear in your head but your written words somehow didn't capture the event. In fact, it might've sounded really boring.

I've written heaps of action in my stories: footy, soccer, basketball, skating, motorbike riding, running, surfing, shark fishing, fights, white-water kayaking, graffiti artists being chased, political demonstrations, nightmares, pie-eating contests, dangerous train rides . . .

But the main thing I always had to remember when writing about action was *show me, don't tell me*.

What this means is *don't keep on telling* the reader what it was like – 'The wave was really huge and dangerous and I was scared'. Instead let the reader *see it* through your careful description. *Show the reader* the danger and excitement, what's actually happening – 'The dark green wave rose like a mountain, curled, then broke with a roar, tossing me around like a rag doll'.

The following are other good tips on how to get the picture out of your head and onto the page so your reader goes, 'Wow! That's cool!!' (or 'terrifying, exciting, scary'...)

1. Always check the 5 senses involved in the activity and don't forget the sixth sense (a feeling, a hunch, intuition). Pay attention to detail. Use 'imagery' (painting pictures with words) but don't over-do it.
2. Slice your action into thin slivers. Even if what you are describing only took 30 seconds, break it down into tiny steps and capture that moment in extreme detail – like the basketball/soccer movie where the last shot of the game goes into slo-mo.
3. Include what surrounds your action which helps develop the atmosphere.

For example: people at the game ('My grandfather barracked like crazy'); what was said ('Get out of my face'); the weather ('the rain began to pour'); thoughts in your head ('The kid I was playing on was as big as a house'); and afterwards ('riding home I couldn't stop smiling').

4. Ask an expert. If you're not sure about what really goes on in any type of action, ask someone who does it (surfers, bike riders, skaters, boxers). If they only give you unhelpful, general answers, ask for more detail ('When you catch a big wave, what's the first move you make?') It might be the first time they have reflected on their passion but once they get going, they'll be hard to stop.

Michael Hyde

I have many good examples of what I'm talking about – below is one. Other examples are in my novel *Tyger Tyger* (nightmares, footy); *MAX* (running from the police, kayaking); in my sports series, *Change the Game* (footy, soccer, basketball).

Extract from *Surfing Goliath*, by Michael Hyde

The waves started to come again. Seal paddled out to meet them and scaled their dizzy heights. Seagulls screeched overhead. He rose and fell, watching for the shark and watching for a wave that could save him. Seal swooped up and over each towering mountain of water. Up and over.

Then he saw him. Goliath. Cutting through the water, his muscly body silhouetted in the last wave. Seal had no other choice but to hold his nerve and go for it. He was a hundred metres out when he began to churn through the water, trying to match its power, working his way onto the wave as it jacked up and began to curl and break. And then he was on, riding the wave that dropped him into thin air then slammed him into the bottom where he curved back and up to the shoulder where the only way was down.

Seal tucked his left arm into his body, left hand up front, his right arm on the rail and dropped down the glassy face, searching for the middle. He pushed his bodyboard into the wave, getting the acceleration he needed to go deep inside. Seal had little or no time to make a decision about anything as everything around him threatened to devour him – he was riding on instinct. A curtain of water folded over him as he thundered into the tube. Seal rode that barrel as Goliath bellowed and roared.

- Take one piece of action from *Footy Dreaming* that you thought worked well. Then rewrite it to make it as *boring as possible* – in other words go against every tip I gave you in the article above.
- Choose some piece of action in your life (fishing, dancing, running, netball, hiking, yoga, motorbike riding, etc) and using the tips above to describe it.

Themes

Footy Dreaming has a number of themes. Themes are currents that run through a novel that aren't often directly spoken about in the novel but they are there somewhere in the story. The story makes us think about them.

There are three main themes in the novel (there are probably more but these are the most obvious):

Racism

Friendship

Dreams

- Choose one of these and prepare a talk (by yourself or in a small group) about how the theme is brought up in the book and what it made you think of. A talk doesn't have to be sugary sweet, it can be quite confronting if you like. Just be sure to use examples (incidents, speech, descriptions) that make clear what you are saying. You could also use examples from what goes on in our society and your life as well.

Dreams

Looking off into the distance, Paul put an arm around his son. 'Y'know, your grandma, my mum, she was so proud of you. I mean, she was proud of us all but she always talked about you.'

'About footy and that?'

'Oh yeah, of course, footy. But more. It was because you had a dream – and you wanted it so much. She liked that.' Paul laughed. 'She prayed for you as well. But she never stopped keeping the old ways, like the family said in the church. She was about God as much as she was about how us mob are connected to the land.'

'What dreams did Grandma have? Like what she wanted to be? Or . . .'

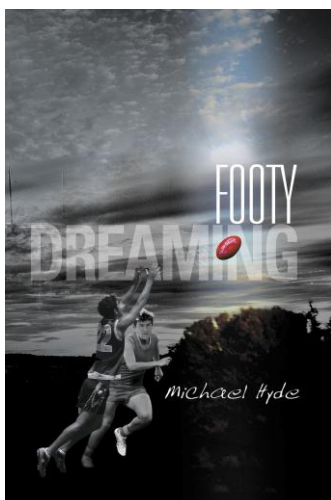
Paul took a deep breath. 'The only dream my mum had was that us blackfellas – everything that makes us what we are – would be respected.' Paul looked at Noah like he'd seen him for the first time. 'So, Noah, maybe better get you back by Saturday. If you don't play, Grandma will be very upset!' Paul smiled. 'And the last thing we need is my mum angry.'

What dreams do you have for your life or even for the world? Are your dreams about sport, jobs, family, passions? Are they small or big dreams? Are they just personal or altruistic? (unselfish; humane; self-sacrificing)

Write about your secret/public dreams with plenty of detail. Don't use boring generalisations.

Write using any form you like: poem; rap; short story; lyrics; haiku; play; personal essay; journal. Choose the form that best fits your dream.

The Cover of *Footy Dreaming*



I'll be very honest here. I LOVE the cover. It's one of the best covers my books have ever had. Covers are more important than you think. My novel *Tyger Tyger* sold heaps of copies in schools but not many in bookshops. It was about footy, dreams/nightmares, fathers and sons. The first cover was dark and mysterious with a hard-to-see image of a dark beast. The publisher decided to change the cover when it was reprinted. The cover became kind-of yellow, with a clear image of a young man taking a mark.

Guess what? The reprint kept selling well in schools but suddenly within about five months it sold about 400 in bookshops.

So covers, blurbs and the spines of books do matter.

- Look at the cover of *Footy Dreaming*.
Explain whether you like it or not and what effect it has on you.
What effect might it have on an adult in a bookshop if they're looking for a book for a son/daughter of a friend?
What effect might it have on school students when they're asked to read and study it?
- Design a new cover for *Footy Dreaming* that captures what goes on in the story.
- Write a new blurb for the back cover that will encourage others to read it.
- Write a new blurb for the back cover that will discourage others to read it.

The Dreaded Essay (Personal. Political. Social.)

- Racism is depicted in *Footy Dreaming* as something we should stand up against. Is this the best course of action to get rid of racism?
- Stereotypes of different cultures often get in the way of understanding each other. How is this shown in *Footy Dreaming*?
- Racism in sport has been in the news for a number of years now. Do novels like *Footy Dreaming* help our understanding of racism in sport?
- *Noah* over-reacted to sledging. He should have just got on with playing footy and forgot about it.
- *Joe Meredith* passed on some of his dislike for Indigenous people to his children. Do we get most of our views from our parents?
- Is the friendship between *Noah* and *Ben* realistic? Does it/ could it happen in real life?
- Are there people in your life who you didn't know because your backgrounds/culture were different. However, you slowly became friends with them. How did this happen?

AND . . . What Happens Next?

- *Ben* and *Noah* are now 18 and the national draft is coming up. How do they react? How do others react? What chances do they have? Are they both selected? Where do they want to play?
- *Mark Elliot* plots revenge!
- *Ben* and *Noah*'s friendship develops. What obstacles do they face? What do they learn about each other and each other's culture?
- *Noah*'s family joins the land rights campaign for land on the outskirts of *Marshall*.
- Romance blossoms. (*Millie* and *Noah/Ben*. *Joe Meredith* and *Julie* (Nathan's mum))

SPECIAL QUESTION

- There are many famous Australian authors (old and recent), some whose surnames have been used throughout *Footy Dreaming*. Try and discover how many there are, what they wrote and maybe read some of their stories. Sounds like a *Google* search to me.

(Hint: **Archie Lawson** (mate of Noah's) is named after **Henry Lawson**)