

Overview

The Wheel Blacks play fast and furious rugby – in their wheelchairs. This article explains what quadriplegia is and how wheelchair rugby allows people with quadriplegia to enjoy competitive sport. Using words, diagrams, and photographs, the report explains complex terms and helps dispel the idea that people who are paralysed are unable to play sport.

Students may need additional sources of information to understand the technical explanation of quadriplegia. The article provides an opportunity for discussing safety rules in sport

and ways to include students with disabilities in all school activities. It also provides great opportunities for discussing the key competency of participating and contributing, and for reading and writing about ideas that challenge many people’s concepts about physical activities.

Texts related by theme “Mrs Wilding’s Potatoes” SJ 2.2.11 | “The Real Ritchie McCaw” SJ 2.2.11 | “From Kick-off to Cup” SJ 2.2.11

Text characteristics from the year 5 reading standard

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

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs that clarify or extend the text and may require some interpretation

mixed text types (for example, a complex explanation may be included as part of a report)

So What Is Wheelchair Rugby?

Wheelchair rugby is an exciting, fast-paced game that borrows from lots of different sports. The aim is to carry the ball across the other team’s goal line, just as in rugby. The game is played on an indoor court, just as in basketball, but players use a volleyball instead of a basketball because a volleyball is smaller and easier to hold. The one thing that is totally different from other sports is that only people with quadriplegia can play wheelchair rugby.

Quadruplegia

A person with quadriplegia is someone who is paralysed to some extent in at least three of their four limbs. Many people think that a person with quadriplegia can’t move at all, but that’s not always the case. A person with quadriplegia won’t be able to move their legs, but often, they have some movement in their arms and in their hands or fingers. Some of the people who play wheelchair rugby were paralysed because of an illness, but most were in accidents where their necks were broken. The higher a person’s neck has been broken, the less movement they will have. Some wheelchair rugby players have broken their necks playing rugby. Changes have been made to the game of rugby to make it safe – especially the rules around scrummaging. An injury to this part of the spine can cause quadriplegia.

sentences that vary in length and structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)

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

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

Possible curriculum contexts

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION (Healthy communities and environments)

LEVEL 3 – Societal attitudes and values: Identify how health care and physical activity practices are influenced by community and environmental factors.

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 3 – Ideas: Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

Possible reading purposes

- To learn more about the game of wheelchair rugby
- To understand how a group of people overcame challenges to compete in a game of wheelchair rugby
- To explore how people with disabilities can participate in sports.

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

Possible writing purposes

- To describe how a person or group participates in a sport
- To compare and contrast the different views people hold about disability
- To research and report on the ways that technology helps people to overcome specific challenges.

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

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and concepts, including “wheelchair rugby”, “basketball”, “volleyball”, “quadriplegia”, “paralysed”, “scrummaging”, “standard”, “stable”, “bumper”, “designed”, “anti-tip castors”, “classified”, “quarters”, “swap out”, “Paralympics”
- Language that signals comparisons: “just as in ...”, “smaller”, “easier”, “is totally different from”, “safer”, “is a different shape from”, “different amounts of”, “like we do”, “one of the best”.

Possible supporting strategies

Review with the students words associated with rugby and other similar sports. Introduce key vocabulary before reading or during reading.

Use the title and then some of the photos as prompts for discussing the topic, making predictions about the text, and previewing the vocabulary. 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 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:

- Understanding of rugby and other team field games
- Experience of people using wheelchairs
- Knowledge of the spine and its function
- Knowledge of maths
- Understanding of some ways in which technology can be used.

Possible supporting strategies

Before beginning the whole book, ask the students (in pairs or small groups) to brainstorm sports that are important to them and/or their communities. They could produce a picture or mind map and prepare to tell the others about their sport and why it is important. This enables students to make connections to their prior knowledge and to be “experts”, telling the rest of the class what they know about. (If possible, provide opportunities for students who share knowledge of a language other than English to discuss the topic and concepts in this language.) You could then tell them you are going to read about wheelchair rugby.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- A report that includes headings, descriptions, and explanations
- The dramatic present-tense introduction that sets the scene
- The use of comparisons
- Technical information, supported by diagrams and examples
- The diagram of a court with dimensions
- The colour-coded diagram of the spine and silhouettes
- The need to infer information from the spine diagram
- The labelled photograph of a rugby wheelchair
- The need to use numeric knowledge and make inferences based on this.

Possible supporting strategies

With the students, skim the article before reading to notice the features, such as headings, photos, and diagrams.

Through discussion, start to draw out comparisons between wheelchair rugby and other sports. During reading, support the students to notice the language used to make these comparisons. You could use a graphic organiser to list the similarities and differences between the sports and the evidence from the text (the language used to make the comparison). Start a collection of examples of the language used to signal comparisons.

Support students to interpret the diagrams and photographs. Model the ways you can bring together words in the text, a diagram, and your own knowledge to understand and interpret meaning.

Check that students are able to make connections between the text, other articles they have read, and their own knowledge of rugby, wheelchair use, maths, and the skills and dedication needed to excel in a sport.

Instructional focus – Reading

Health and Physical Education (Healthy Communities and Environments, level 3 – Societal attitudes and values: Identify how health care and physical activity practices are influenced by community and environmental factors.)

English (Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.)

Text excerpts from “Get Ready to Roll!”

Students (what they might do)

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Wheelchair rugby is an exciting, fast-paced game that borrows from lots of different sports. The aim is to carry the ball across the other team’s goal line, just as in rugby. The game is played on an indoor court, just as in basketball, but ...

The one thing that is totally different from other sports is that only people with quadriplegia can play wheelchair rugby.

The higher a person’s neck has been broken, the less movement they will have.

Some wheelchair rugby players have broken their necks playing rugby.

Changes have been made to the game of rugby to make it safer – especially the rules around scrummaging.

People with quadriplegia have different amounts of movement in their arms and hands. The wheelchair rugby players are tested to see how much arm movement they have. They are given a number from 0.5 to 3.5, depending on how much they can move.

... each team is allowed four players on the court at one time. The classification numbers given to each of those players can’t add up to more than eight.

Students use their vocabulary knowledge to understand the way “borrows” is used.

Students make connections between their knowledge of sport and the text to understand the comparisons. They identify the pattern “just as in” that shows what is similar, and they infer the differences. Students draw on their knowledge of sport to understand the reasons why wheelchair rugby differs from the sports mentioned.

Students make connections with their knowledge of anatomy and use the diagram to infer that a player with a broken neck would have very little movement in most of his limbs.

They ask and answer questions about how rugby players break their necks and infer that neck breaks most often happen in scrums.

Students integrate information from across the text (including the diagrams and the explanation) to build on the main idea that the place of the break affects the amount of movement a person has. They infer that players with more arm movement have advantages over players with less arm movement. They use this inference to understand the system used to make the game fair.

PROMPT students to help them identify the key features of wheelchair rugby.

- How is it the same as other sports? How is it different?
- Why do you think these differences are important?
- Why would wheelchair rugby be limited to players with quadriplegia only?

Some students may need support with identifying the “just as in” structure used to make comparisons. Help them to identify what is similar, what is different, and what is “totally different”. It may help to chart the sports and their similarities and differences.

EXPLAIN that a useful reading strategy is to ask questions in your head as you read. The questions you ask help you to find information.

MODEL some possible questions.

- What moves in rugby are most likely to result in a broken neck? How could rule changes make it safer?
- Why would someone who has already broken their neck want to keep on playing rugby?

Ask the students to pose some questions of their own.

ASK QUESTIONS to support students to clarify their understanding.

- Refer back to page 29. Which players would have most movement?
- Why is arm movement tested? Why do you think arm movement is so important?
- Would a player with a high neck break be able to do more or less than someone with a lower break?

MODEL the way the numbers are used.

- Imagine I’m the coach and I can only have four players on at once. I’ve got twelve guys to choose from, but a lot of them are 3s or lower. I could have four players who are 2s, or I could have a 3, two 2s and a 1.
- What are some other combinations I could have?

DIRECT the students to work with a partner for a few minutes to understand the decisions the coaches need to make. Tell them to assume that the numbers they can use are .5, 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, 3, and 3.5. Illustrate this diagrammatically as well as explaining it.

EXPLAIN that this system is called “handicapping”.

- It’s used in many sports and games to give less experienced players an advantage – this makes the teams more even. It’s done in chess, golf, and some track and field events.
- What is your opinion about handicapping? Is this a good way to make a sport or a game fairer? Why do you think that?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I noticed you integrated information about ... with information about ... to infer just how tough this sport is. Integrating information is important for understanding what an author is telling you.
- You made a connection between the article and your sister’s Special Olympics activities and used that to help you understand the main idea – that everyone can play a sport if they want to!

METACOGNITION

- How did you work out what Curtis means when he says, “No other team trains like we do”? How did you know that? What helped you?
- What helped you work out the safety features of the wheelchair? What clues in the text and the diagram did you use?
- How did making connections with your own knowledge of playing or supporting a sport help you understand the text? How did it help you to understand the attitude of players like Curtis?

Reading standard: by the end of year 5

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Health and Physical Education (Healthy Communities and Environments, level 3 – Societal attitudes and values: Identify how health care and physical activity practices are influenced by community and environmental factors.)

English (Level 3 – Ideas: Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.)

Text excerpts from “Get Ready to Roll!”

The aim is to carry the ball across the other team’s goal line, just as in rugby. The game is played on an indoor court, just as in basketball, but players use a volleyball instead of a basketball because a volleyball is smaller and easier to hold.

The sloped wheels make the wheelchair very stable; it is easy to turn quickly in small spaces, and the player’s hands won’t be squashed against other wheelchairs when they crash into each other. Every chair has a front bumper to protect the player’s feet. These wheelchairs are designed to handle all kinds of knocks and crashes.

The Wheel Blacks

The Wheel Blacks train hard. “We have thirty hours a week of training, and it’s hard work. No other team trains like we do,” says Curtis Palmer. Curtis is a Wheel Black. He wants to be one of the best wheelchair rugby players in the world.

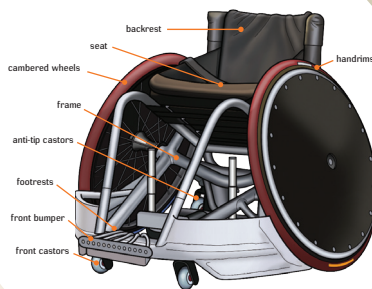
Examples of text characteristics

COMPARISONS

Writers support readers to understand new ideas by allowing them to make comparisons with familiar ideas. They can do this directly or indirectly.

LABELLED DIAGRAMS

Visual features such as a labelled photo or diagram can help readers understand a complex explanation or description. The labels show the parts, and the text explains what they are, how they work, or why they are important.



JUSTIFICATION

For a reader to believe the writer, the writer needs to supply details or evidence that justifies their statements. Also, students need to learn how to justify their opinions in their writing if this fits their purpose.

METACOGNITION

- Why did you choose this topic? What does it mean for you? How will you help your audience to understand this?
- What other opinions do people have on this topic? How have you shown your readers that there are different ways of looking at this issue?
- How will you know that your writing has made readers think about their attitudes and actions?

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

EXPLAIN the need to support readers.

- When you’re reading, you make connections and comparisons with things you already know. As a writer, you can help your readers make connections. You can do this by making direct comparisons (for example, showing how a sport compares with others) or by using descriptions and details that readers can connect to things they know.

Some students will benefit from looking closely at language that can be used for comparing. If you used a graphic organiser to record the comparisons and the language used, refer the students to this. If not, go through one example and then ask the students to find others in the text. Analyse each example, recording notes on the meaning, form, sentence, and structure. Provide students with opportunities to co-construct sentences using this language (for example, by using a writing frame or cloze) and use the language orally before using it in their writing.

MODEL the use of a labelled photo to support a description.

- If I read the text without the photo, I’d have trouble understanding what cambered wheels actually look like. The labels on the photo show me parts that are not described in the text, so I get a better idea of how the chair protects the player – and how it helps the player to move very quickly.

You may need to help students decide which features to describe in words and which need an illustration to help the reader understand. Use examples from other *School Journal* articles to model different ways of using diagrams.

TELL the students to justify their statements (and opinions).

- The extract says “The Wheel Blacks train hard”. This statement is supported (justified) by the words of Curtis Palmer and by the evidence in the article about the success of the team.
- If you want your readers to believe what you have written, you will need to add details to back up (justify) your statements.

GIVE FEEDBACK to affirm students’ choices of how to convey information and build mood in their stories.

- You’ve added a powerful simile here – it gives me a much better understanding of how the characters are feeling.
- Instead of telling me directly that Harry was angry, you’ve shown it by the way you described his actions. This gives your writing more depth and impact.

 Writing standard: by the end of year 5

 The Literacy Learning Progressions