



# Teachers' Notes HALF THE BATTLE

Don Henderson

Teachers' Notes by Don Henderson

## OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	Fiction
Title	Half the Battle
Author	Don Henderson
Extent	192 pp
Age	13+
Australian RRP	\$16.95
Binding	Paperback
Printing	Mono
ISBN	978 1 86291 677 7
Format	198 x 128

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## INTRODUCTION

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*We ran on to the ground to the screams of 'Down the guts, boys!' from Clacker and his mates. The Barton Lakes players were already in their positions, waiting impatiently.*

*'You should have started already, fellas. Give yerselves a chance!' yelled Donger, sitting himself down confidently alongside Clacker and the other members of the Port Road brains trust. I remember what followed as clearly as the Apollo astronauts must remember the day they landed on the moon.*

The narrator, Sean Watson, has moved from the country to become a student at Port Road High School, a tough multicultural school in a poor industrial part of the city. He lives with his father, who went bankrupt and had to sell the farm, while his mother and baby sister remain in the country. Sean resents the loss of the farm and focuses his anger on his dad, whom he blames for the disintegration of their once happy family. When Port Road High decides to take part in a Year Nine school football competition, things start to change, both for Sean and for the boys in his class. Their team (the Battlers) is largely composed of misfits and is constantly and humiliatingly thrashed. Ultimately the coach, a frothing psychopath named Clacker, is taken off the job, and the boys are coached by Merlin, an ex-AFL great. Slowly the Battlers' fortunes begin to improve.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**Don Henderson** originally from Minlaton, South Australia, lives in Adelaide with his family. As an English teacher for many years – and a football coach – Don has long felt that there was a need for high interest books for boys. Don is inspired by his favourite author, Charles Dickens.

## WRITING STYLE

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Don's stories reflect brilliantly his observations of young people – his characters, often from working class backgrounds, are warm, funny and real. *Half the Battle* delves into themes of adolescence, relationships and multiculturalism.

## **TEXT RESPONSE**

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### **1) SETTING**

- a) Draw a map (as best you can with the information available) to show the area where the novel is set. As you read and gather new information add these details to your map.

### **2) CHARACTERS**

- a) Collect six pictures of people who you believe could play the roles of particular characters in the novel. Write a couple of sentences about each one justifying their selection.
- b) List in order the four characters you related to the most. Write a couple of sentences saying why in each case. Do the same with the characters you didn't relate to.
- c) Place the various characters from the novel into groups. Name the groups and describe the key characteristics of each group.
- d) Different characters emerge as leaders at different times. Comment on the leadership qualities of the following characters:
  - Sean
  - Clacker
  - Plugger
  - Merlin

### **3) PLOT**

- a) Write one or two sentence plot summaries for each of the chapters.
- b) Describe the plot briefly for the purpose of a back cover blurb.

### **4) THEMES**

- a) Summarize what you consider to be the key themes of the novel.

- b) Produce a poster that highlights aspects of one of the novel's key themes.
- c) Select one of the novel's key themes and, using a spiked-bubble concept diagram, break this theme up into the various incidents related to it.
- d) Write a short essay describing the most humorous moments in the novel and explain why these moments were funny. Conclude by describing what you believe are the key ingredients of good comedy.
- e) Draw up a table to describe the main differences between Port Road High and St Gracious High in terms of facilities, organisation, students, parents and any other categories you think are relevant.

## **5) LANGUAGE**

- a) Parody is when someone's style is copied for comic effect. An example of this is when Tubbs writes his imitation of the William Blake poem 'Tyger'. Select a relatively short famous poem and change the words (not the meter) to produce a humorous version.
- b) Figurative language can be funny because of the images it creates. E.g. 'Rolled off the tongue like a dead budgie off a perch.' Describe a scene using figurative language to produce comic effect.

## **CREATIVE ACTIVITIES**

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- 1) The school counselor, Mr. Belcher, likes to have little chats with the students at Port Road High. Write a page transcript of a conversation between Mr. Belcher and one (or two) of the members of the Port Road Power.
- 2) Situation comedy is created when different parts of a situation converge to create a funny moment. An example of this is when Sean is caught wearing Batty's Batman jocks by Rosita. Produce a short piece of writing that culminates in a funny situation.
- 3) Gross situations are often very funny. An example of this is the exploding football at the first training session. Describe a gross situation in a way that creates the maximum comic effect.

- 4) The way characters are described is often humorous. An example of this is the description of Clacker's nose: 'That looked more like a deformed potato transplanted onto his face.' Write one in-depth description of a comic character. Look in magazines or study the people around you for inspiration.
- 5) Any situation can be seen in a humorous way if the right twist is given to things. Select and cut out pictures from newspapers or magazines and write humorous captions for them.
- 6) Produce a cartoon to show one of the humorous incidents described in the novel.
- 7) Write an account of a humorous incident related to a sport or pastime.
- 8) Noggin Ball is a game invented by the students at Port Road High. Invent your own game. You may use only standard sports equipment.
- 9) Write Strip's article on the Grand Final entitled *Battlers Slay Dragons*.
- 10) Write Clacker's letter of resignation to Principal Sterne.
- 11) Sean has gone to return Rosita's footy socks. Record their dialogue.
- 12) Enrolments at Port Road High have been declining. Design a newspaper advertisement to encourage more enrolments.
- 13) Write a *Where Are They Now?* article in which you reveal what has happened to the members of the Port Road Power ten years down the track.
- 14) Football Budgets/Records (sold on game days) often contain player profiles. Write a player profile for one or more of the members of the Port Road Power.
- 15) Write one of the following letters:
  - From Sean's mum to his dad after the Grand Final
  - From Tubbs to Sean, reporting on their trip around Australia
  - From Plugger's dad to Sean's dad
  - From Principal Sterne to Merlin, thanking him for coaching the team

## **AFTER READING THE TEXT**

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- 1) Use the novel as material to help you write an argumentative essay entitled *In Defence of Sport*. You may also refer to examples outside the novel.
- 2) Write an essay describing the difference in the coaching styles of Clacker and Merlin. Refer to your own experiences with coaches and conclude your essay by saying what you think makes a good coach.
- 3) Nicknames are often used in texts to highlight comic aspects of some characters. Research friends and family to find six humorous or unusual nicknames and record their meanings or origins.
- 4) Explain and comment on the parental situation of the following characters:
  - Sean
  - Tubbs
  - Plugger
  - Rosita
- 5) The footballers at Port Road High form a distinct group within the school. Other groups include the smokers at the back of the oval and the 'superbabes'. Describe the different groups that exist at your school.
- 6) Start in pairs. Strip Carmody has developed his own style as a sports writer. His material features hard-hitting writing and the use of interesting words. Search the dictionary and find six unusual words (choose words you've never heard of). Now, pass on these six words to your partner. They will pass on their six words to you. Your task is to write a sports report that uses these six words.
- 7) Tubbs looks to sporting heroes for inspiration. Write a paragraph in which you consider whether sporting heroes are good role models.

## **EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

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- 1) Choose one of the following questions to write an essay on.
  - a) Describe Sean's experiences in the novel. What does he learn from these experiences?

- b) Even if they had lost the grand final, it would have been a successful year for the Port Road Power. Discuss this statement and conclude with your opinion on whether or not it is true.
  - c) Describe the teachers at Port Road High. What are the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching styles? What makes a good teacher?
  - d) Some characters in the novel have to come to grips with bad things that have happened. Describe examples of this and comment on the failures and successes of characters in this regard.
  - e) Sean and his friends are going through what is often described as the best years of your life. Using examples from the text and your own experience, evaluate the truth of this assessment.
- 2) What is the significance of the novel's title?
  - 3) Sean and Batty like to pick their own All Star teams. Select your own All Star team (in any sport) and write a sentence or two afterwards to justify each selection.
  - 4) Write (and record if possible) a commentary for the final minutes of the grand final.
  - 5) You are a talent scout for an AFL club. Write a report based on the grand final detailing the top six players' potential. Rank and rate these players and write a brief paragraph on each that summarizes their strengths and weaknesses.

## **FURTHER READING**

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If you enjoyed *Half the Battle*, you might like Don Henderson's latest novel *Keepinitreal*.

Below is a list of suggested reading for those who like fiction about sports.

Jasper Zammit series	Deborah Abela & Johnny Warren
<i>Not Cricket</i>	Raewyn Caisley
<i>Boots and All</i>	Sherryl Clark
<i>The Mal Rider</i>	Pat Flynn
<i>Across the Line</i>	Penny Garnsworthy
<i>Against the Spin</i>	Michael Panckridge
<i>Chasing the Break</i>	Michael Panckridge
<i>Nips XI</i>	Ruth Starke
<i>The Drop Kick</i>	Annette Wickes
All Stars netball series	

