

## SUPPORT SHEETS

# New Windmills 2002

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**The following pages consist of teacher's notes and classroom sheets for *Billy Elliot* by Melvin Burgess. These can be downloaded and printed out as required.**

**SUPPORT  
SHEETS**

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# Billy Elliot

## by Melvin Burgess and Lee Hall

### Synopsis

*'Listen. I boxed. Me dad boxed. You box.'*

Billy Elliot is not much of a fighter. He seems to be made of different stuff; which is why his father despairs over him and his brother hates him. This is the 1980s in Thatcher's Britain when mines are being closed down. As the youngest son in a family of striking miners, he knows that sticking up for the pits and for the traditions of the past ought to be an all-conquering passion. Every day heads are being broken on the picket lines to preserve just that, yet for Billy it doesn't seem to be enough.

When he discovers hidden talents, it's not the boxing ring that brings them out. A chance introduction to the world of ballet ignites the electricity in Billy's spirit. He learns that he was born to dance. As the final weeks of the last national miners' strike are played out, Billy develops his skills in secret. He knows that when his poverty-stricken family find out what he's been spending his boxing fees on, he'll be for it. But he just can't stop himself.

When the chance to audition for the Royal Ballet School comes along, it's a once in a lifetime opportunity for Billy. His dad's just burnt his mum's piano to keep the house warm; how can Billy ask for support so that he can live out his dream? What would be the reaction if he did?

### Prior learning

It would be useful to learn something of the political background of Thatcher's Britain in the 1980s.

### Study areas

Teachers may wish to consider using the text as an opportunity to consolidate and extend a wide variety of skills in advance of year 9 SAT exams in English. In addition to looking at the **understanding the author's craft** objectives, pupils could be offered the chance to carry out a variety of **writing** tasks based upon the text (see suggested activities on Support Sheets 1 and 2).

Possible themes include:

- Gender stereotypes – boxing versus ballet – aspects of masculinity (R11 'Author's standpoint', S&L9 'Considered viewpoint')
- Portrayal of violence in highly charged situations (R6 'Authorial perspective')
- Features of Northern dialect used (S10 'Attitudes to standard English')
- Use of multiple narrative in a novel and its effect (R12 'Rhetorical devices')
- Comparison of prose version and film interpretation of same text (R10 'Interpretations of text')

- Comparison of Billy Elliot and Billy Casper (**R9 'Compare writers from different times'**)
- Variations in sentence structure (**S1 'Complex sentences'**)
- Writing to inform, explain, describe, persuade, argue, advise, analyse, review, comment.

(Based on the National Literacy Strategy Framework objectives for Year 9: W = Word level; S = Sentence level; R = Reading; Wr = Writing; S&L = Speaking and Listening)

## Teacher guidance

### *Support sheet 1*

This support sheet considers the impact that the choice of grammatical tense makes on writing. It allows pupils the chance to experiment with their own writing.

### *Support sheet 2*

This support sheet offers opportunities for pupils to develop writing skills through experimentation with different forms.

### *Support sheet 3*

This support sheet allows speaking and listening skills to be developed in a whole class forum. Pupils are encouraged to take on allocated roles and participate as speakers at a public meeting.

## 1

## Sentence variation

- 1 a Read the extract (from page 4) below carefully.

‘I was picking out the tune of ‘Cosmic Boogie’ on the piano and thinking about Mam. Tony was running about the kitchen slapping slices of bread and marge down his throat and fondling his placards, ‘No surrender!’ ‘Thatcher out!’ ‘SCAB! SCAB! SCAB!’ Dad was fussing – doing the dishes, trying to wipe the floor, putting the cups back in the cupboard. Susan from down the road – Susan Spanners we call her, because of her face – she comes in and does a bit of housework from time to time. Nan was sitting on her bed in her room next door, singing along. Singing something, anyhow, but I don’t think it was what I was playing.’

By using sentences such as ‘I was picking... Tony was running’, the narrator combines the past tense ‘was’ with the continuous tense ‘picking’, ‘running’. This mixture of the past and the present tense is called the **past continuous tense**.

- b Imagine the author had written in the past tense: ‘I picked...Tony ran’. Why do you think he chose not to? What effect does the past continuous tense have?

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- 2 a Read the following words, all of which are in the **continuous** tense.

Jumping	spitting	crunching	slamming	thrashing	stroking
forcing	breaking	Smirking	pounding	pelting	bellowing
stretching	puking	squeezing	sheltering	Gasping	soaring
juddering	sulking	prancing	tugging	stalking	taunting
Gawping	spluttering	floating	plunging	roasting	quivering
ripping	heaving	Bubbling	whining	spiralling	slopping
punching	wiping	crushing	weeping		

- b** Using some of the words from the box above, your task is to write three brief sentences describing Billy Elliot dancing in *Swan Lake* (described on p.134). Choose whether you are going to write it from the point of view of: a) Michael Caffrey or b) Tony.

You should make your sentences as varied as possible so that the reader is kept interested. Below are some tips to help you.

**Tips:**

- Experiment with placing '*ing*' words at the start of sentences for effect: e.g.  
'*Wiping* the blood from his nose, he picked himself up from the floor';  
'*Slamming* the stick into the ground, he vaulted across the river'.
- Try placing an adverb (a word that gives more information about a verb) alongside the verb (a word that shows what a person or thing is doing, thinking, or feeling): e.g.  
'Juddering violently – punching wearily – plunging rapidly'.  

↑  
verb

↑  
adverb

↑  
verb

↑  
adverb

↑  
verb

↑  
adverb

- c** Write your sentences in the boxes below. In each case, draw arrows and notes to explain any special features you have used and why you have chosen to use them.

## 2

## Reporting

Re-read pages 71–75 describing the day that Tony Elliot was arrested for setting fire to a horse's tail. Your task is to produce a report for a national newspaper about the day's events outside the pit, during the strike. You should include details from the relevant pages.

- 1 Follow the guidelines below before using the grid to help you draft your article.
  - a Think of a headline that will make people want to read on.
  - b Begin your report with a sentence that sums up the key points covered in the article: who, what, when, where, why.
  - c Start by describing the main events before moving on to shorter paragraphs. These should contain specific details including eyewitness comments.
  - d Remember that it is not only the structure you use that will make your writing sound like a real article, but also the style. Newspapers often contain the following:
    - adverbials of time and place: e.g. *yesterday*, *later*
    - passive voice: e.g. *it has been decided*
    - proper nouns: e.g. *Elliot*
    - abstract nouns: e.g. *anger*, *chaos*.

	Notes: (use this chart to make a note of any key points/ quotes you would like to use).
<b>Headline</b>	
<b>Paragraph 1</b>	
<b>Paragraph 2</b>	
<b>Paragraph 3</b>	
<b>Paragraph 4</b>	

- 2** Write up your final article in the space below.



- 3** Working with a partner, imagine that you have been asked to give a live report on the day's strike action for a local radio station. In what ways do you think the language of a verbal report would differ from the type of language used in a written report? Discuss in pairs before feeding back as a class.

**3****Say what you think**

As part of its government-funded provision for Sport and Leisure, Billy's local council has been given £1000 to spend on upgrading an important community sports venue. A meeting is to take place in the Town Hall on Wednesday night to consider the spending options. The Lord Mayor will act as Chairman for the occasion. Six interested groups are to be allowed two minutes to state their views. There will then be a vote on the matter. The groups are as follows:

**1 The young boxers**

Greavesy and his friends love throwing punches, they live for the thrill of the fight.

**2 The young dancers**

Debbie Wilkinson and her friends realise that dancing provides release from the squalor of town life: they see it as an escape to a world of romance and heroism, as something athletic and educational.

**3 The community police officers**

Seriously under-funded and under-staffed, the local bobbies need all the help they can get. Vandalism and disorder go hand in hand. The strike has made everything worse. This group realises that sport builds friendship and discipline.

**4 The old people of the town**

These people know about tradition, honesty, respect, decency, morality. They don't like what they've recently seen on the streets. Some of them fought in the Great War to preserve freedom; now youngsters show them no respect.

**5 The Mothers' Union**

This group knows how hard it will be to get life back on track for young people with no real future. They want all of their children to have the opportunities that they never got. They know how important it is that young people have somewhere to go and something to do.

**6 The National Union of Mineworkers**

This group has suffered financially from the strike. They have lost their jobs, their savings and their hopes for the future. They want to restore the pride and dignity that the community seems to have lost. They see this decision as being an important starting point on the road to recovery.



You are invited to take part in this debate as members of one of the groups above. Your teacher will allocate roles. Your job will be to decide what your group would like to do with the money and how you will argue your points. Each group will have just two minutes to put forward an argument. Working with the other members of your group, use the frame below to help you make notes for the debate.

Key points	Supporting arguments