



## ***Flying Feet***

James McCann

Reading level: 3.8

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### **Book Summary**

After losing yet another tae kwon do tournament, Jinho gives in to his anger and breaks his opponent's fingers. While this gets him barred from competing at his dojang, it also gets him scouted by Austin, a trainer for an underground mixed martial arts club. At first the prospect of fighting without boundaries appeals to Jinho, but the more involved he gets, the more disturbing he finds it and the harder it is to find a way out. Unlike legal MMA, which has rules and regulations, underground MMA is a free-for-all: there are no weight classes and no referees to stop the fight should it go too far. When Jinho is set up to fight a guy known as The Ripper, he realizes that he doesn't belong in this world. The only thing that can save him is the ancient code of tae kwon do.

### **Prereading Ideas**

- What do you know about mixed martial arts (MMA)? Do you watch it on TV? Do you think it's exciting, or just plain crazy? Does it represent "true" martial arts to you?
- Have you ever wanted to ditch tradition and do things your own way? How did it turn out? For what reasons do we have traditions?
- Is there a sport that you excel at or that you would like to learn? What is it?
- WWE turned itself into a show with villains and heroes, and now is rife with rumors that all the fights are staged. Do you see MMA heading in that direction, or is it there already?
- When you get in over your head, do you reach out for help or do you try to figure stuff out on your own? Does it depend on the circumstances?

## Connecting to the Text

### *Plot*

- Teach students about *plot elements* (see web link in *Resources*, below). These include exposition, rising action, conflicts, climax, falling action and resolution. Working in pairs, have students map out the plot using these elements to guide their writing. Have each pair create a poster showing the plot elements of *Flying Feet*.

### *Theme*

- In chapter 13, Jinho admits to his conflicted feelings. On one hand, he feels badly about lying to his mother and skipping school to train, but on the other hand he's exhilarated to be part of Austin's fast, dangerous world. This struggle between the good/the expected and the bad/the forbidden is not new. In fact, it's a common theme for authors. Ask students to brainstorm a list of other books and movies where they have encountered the same kind of conflict. Where do they see examples of it in their own lives?
- Another theme in *Flying Feet* is power. Jinho wants it but doesn't think he has it. He is impressed by other people who seem to possess power. Ask students to explain how Jinho's struggles eventually show him that he already has all the power he'll ever need inside of him.
- What is the "big idea" in *Flying Feet*?

### *Character*

- Part of making your characters believable is writing realistic dialogue for them. If a character says things that you know nobody would say in the real world, then the story just won't work. Have students read the fight scene at the end of chapter 14, where Jinho and Craig go at it on the basketball court. This is Jinho's breakout moment—the moment where he realizes he's not afraid of Craig anymore. The action and dialogue at the end of the chapter serve to quicken the pace of the story and show Jinho's victory over Craig. Divide students into pairs and have them search through the text for several other instances of realistic dialogue. Can they find any examples of words that a teenager or his trainer perhaps *wouldn't* use in real life?
- Have students create a scene where Jinho talks about his last fight with Sara. What would they say to each other?
- Jinho is an interesting, layered character. Have students draw a character map of Jinho that details his personality characteristics, his fears, his weaknesses, his physical traits and his beliefs. Use this as a springboard to teach students how to write a full character analysis (see web link in *Resources*, below).

***Point of View***

- *Flying Feet* is told from Jinho's point of view. Have students write a scene from the story from the point of view of a different character. Try writing as Dragon from the first fight in the book; Ripper during the last fight; or as Austin when he's going head to head with the biker.
- Ask students to consider how the story would be different if it was told in the third person point of view. What are the advantages or disadvantages to using the first person? Third person?

***Vocabulary***

- Mixed martial arts shares a lot of words with other fighting sports. Have students find and record definitions for the following words. Where else have they seen these words used? Assign students to choose a number of words and use them in a sentence. Can they use five of the following terms in a short paragraph about fighting?

dojang

knockdown

rookie

submit

execute

lunge

scout

tap out

face off

pivot

spin kick

- The following words are part of the code of tae kwon do. What do they mean?

courtesy

integrity

perseverance

self control

indomitable spirit

## Connecting to the Curriculum

### *English*

- Good writers use strong verbs. Strong verbs excite the reader and keep the story moving forward. Here are some examples of how James McCann uses strong verbs to enhance his story:

- ◆ The stranger leaves the ring but keeps his eyes locked on me.
- ◆ I see Dragon's hips twist, and I know he's going for another spin kick.
- ◆ I yank myself away, throw off the padding and try to remain calm.

Have students go through one chapter of the book and find as many examples of strong verbs as they can. Discuss as a class how verbs can change the feel of a passage and how they can be effective at showing the characters' emotions. Select a passage to rewrite using plain, run-of-the-mill verbs. See who can come up with the most boring, flat passage!

- A *simile* is a comparison using the words *like* or *as*. A good simile conjures an image in the reader's mind. Here are examples of two similes from *Flying Feet*:

- ◆ "I mean to slam [the car door] to get the biker's attention, so that I'll appear unafraid, but I wind up closing it so silently that it is almost like an apology."
- ◆ Philip stares at me as though I just insulted his girlfriend.

Why are these similes effective? Have students create five similes of their own. Can they come up with a funny one?

- Assign students to imagine that they are Jinho. Write a series of blog posts as Jinho describing what's going on in his life.
- Put students into groups of three or four. Give them 15 minutes to figure out a few Big Questions from *Flying Feet*. Model effective discussion moderation for the students, then invite each group to lead a class discussion about one of their Big Questions.
- Have students imagine that they are Jinho. Write a letter or email to his tutor or his master, explaining what's been going on, and what Jinho plans to do differently in the future. In his note, Jinho should address the fact that he has let his tutor/master down and that he has been dishonest.

***Social Studies***

- Tae kwon do has a code, as Jinho shows us. What other martial arts have codes? From which countries do they hail? Divide students into groups and assign each group to learn about a different martial art and its importance to its native culture. Judo, karate, aikido, tae kwon do, hapkido and tai chi are just a few—but there are other fighting arts from places like West Africa, India and Brazil.
- Jinho didn't want to get kicked out of Canada. In groups, in pairs or individually, have students investigate visa and immigration processes in Canada. Why do some people want to come to Canada? How do people from abroad gain access to this country? How long does it take to become a resident? A citizen?
- Mixed martial arts has gotten off to a rocky start in Vancouver. Have students comb through Google News to find a selection of articles that provide details about the progress of MMA's acceptance into legitimate sport. Have them summarize the status of this news item in a well-written paragraph. This is a good opportunity for you to teach students how to assess the reliability of news sources. Google News offers up news items from established sources, such as *The Globe and Mail* and *The Vancouver Sun*, as well as from smaller or less known publications. Discuss with students the importance of reading with a critical eye and selecting pieces that come from reputable sources. Discuss the usefulness of Google News as a fairly basic tool to weed out websites that may present biased or incorrect information.
- Have students research the bylaws in your area. Do they outlaw prize fighting, or is there a provision to allow organized fighting sports? Debate the pros and cons of having such laws.
- Have students debate whether mixed martial arts is a sport or just senseless violence. Consider: MMA's effects on community (perceived increase in violence and gambling); its usefulness as a way to reach out to kids who are prone to anger (gyms taking in at risk youth to give them structure), etc.

***Health/Personal Planning***

- Craig is a bully, and other kids are afraid of him. Even teachers, like Mr. Kelly, are intimidated by this kid. In chapter 3, Craig harasses Jinho in math class, but Mr. Kelly pretends not to see. For what reasons do you think the teacher turns a blind eye? Do you think sometimes teachers do this for real? Under what conditions would it be better for teachers to intervene? When might it be worse?
- Jinho is frustrated by the disconnect between what he learns at the dojang and how he behaves in real life. He doesn't feel confidence and spirit. Instead, he feels timid, and afraid of Craig. Discuss the word *ideals*. What are they? What are the ideals expressed in the code of tae kwon do? Why do we have ideals? Why is it so hard to live up to our ideals? Have students discuss instances where they, too, have had difficulty applying themselves to what they know to be the right path in life.
- In chapter 15, Jinho puts on Austin's black cotton robe before entering the cage. As soon as he puts the robe on, he feels something change inside him. He feels like a fighter. Discuss with students how what we wear and how we present ourselves to the outside world affects the way we think about and therefore conduct ourselves. Can they think of examples that relate to their own lives? How do they feel when they get dressed up for a performance or a special event? When they're bumming around in dirty sweats? When they're geared up for a major competition in their sports uniform?

***Film Studies***

Choose from the following selection of films to enhance your students' experience of reading *Flying Feet*. Leave plenty of room for discussion!

*Karate Kid*—Teenager moves from quiet town to California, where his training in karate winds up gaining him respect from the local bullies.

*Fight Club*—A dual-personality man who is feeling emasculated by society creates a special club where men fight each other to regain a sense of manhood.

*Blood Sport*—Based on the true story of Frank Dux, who competed in a secret, underground mixed martial arts competition. Lots of controversy if this was a true story.

*Never Back Down*—Very similar to the *Karate Kid*, except that the "kid" in this movie is in trouble with the law and is seeking revenge.

**Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions**

1. Jinho has quite a temper. Sometimes, like when he kicks out at his opponent and breaks the guy's fingers, his temper gets the better of him. What are the risks of having a temper and acting on impulse? Why is it almost always a better idea to wait?
2. In chapter 3, Jinho's friends dare him to call Austin to prove that the older man actually did invite Jinho to train with him. Even though he doesn't want anything to do with Austin, Jinho feels like he has something to prove to his friends. Have you ever been in a situation where you did something you weren't ready to do because you wanted to prove something to your friends? Discuss.
3. In chapter 5, Austin counsels Jinho about what it really means to fight and be a winner. "Walk away from a fight," says Austin, "and that kind of shame lives with you the rest of your life." Do you agree with his statement? Why or why not? Do you think, at the end of the story, that Jinho agrees with it?
4. Have you ever respected someone simply because you feared them? How else do people get your respect? Is there someone in your life whom you respect deeply, but for whom you feel no fear?
5. Have you ever found one of your rivals to be the perfect ally?
6. What bugs you most about Jinho? What bugs you most about Austin? What about Craig? Explain your reasoning.
7. What are some of the qualities of Jinho that you admire?
8. In chapter 12, Philip is starting to figure out that Jinho is involved in MMA. He leads Jinho in a meditation session, with a focus on integrity. What does the word *integrity* mean? Why does Jinho not care about it right now? Who's right—Philip or Jinho?

**Author's Note**

Dear Reader,

At the time this book was written, there was a big controversy over whether or not MMA should be made legal in Vancouver. Technically, all martial arts tournaments are illegal under the prize-fighting law—only boxing is exempt. I wanted to write a book that shed some light on the fact that by not regulating the sport, we are allowing it to flourish underground.

In legalized MMA tournaments, there are rules against dangerous moves, a doctor must be present and fighters are held accountable to a licensing board. Underground, fighters can break the rules with little consequence, and doctors may or may not be present. The discussion of whether or not to allow MMA in our community should be less about the morality of violent sport, and more about how we can make the sport less about violence and more about talent.

James McCann

## **Resources**

### ***Tae Kwon Do***

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taekwondo>  
[www.barrel.net](http://www.barrel.net)  
[www.wtfcanada.com/home\\_e.html](http://www.wtfcanada.com/home_e.html)  
[www.wtf.org/wtf\\_eng/main/main\\_eng.html](http://www.wtf.org/wtf_eng/main/main_eng.html)

### ***Martial Arts***

[www.itatkd.com](http://www.itatkd.com)  
[www.warriorpages.com/terminology/MixedMartialArts/index.html](http://www.warriorpages.com/terminology/MixedMartialArts/index.html)

### ***Mixed Martial Arts***

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martial\\_arts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martial_arts)  
[www.sportsnet.ca/mma](http://www.sportsnet.ca/mma)  
[www.grapplearts.com/Mixed-Martial-Arts-1.htm](http://www.grapplearts.com/Mixed-Martial-Arts-1.htm)  
<http://twitter.com/SunMMA>  
[www.vancouver.sun.com/mma](http://www.vancouver.sun.com/mma)

### ***Character Analysis***

[http://high-school-lesson-plans.suite101.com/article.cfm/teach\\_the\\_character\\_analysis\\_essay](http://high-school-lesson-plans.suite101.com/article.cfm/teach_the_character_analysis_essay)

### ***Plot Elements***

[http://middle-school-lesson-plans.suite101.com/article.cfm/plot\\_element\\_lesson](http://middle-school-lesson-plans.suite101.com/article.cfm/plot_element_lesson)

## **Author Biography**

James McCann grew up on the icy plains of Manitoba, where he spent most of his teenage years reading comics and training in tae kwon do. In 2002 he came to the West Coast, where he's worked as a bookseller and a workshop leader, mentoring youth in creative writing. When he isn't writing books for teens, McCann is practicing tae kwon do or going on hikes with his shih tzu, Conan. James lives in Coquitlam, British Columbia.

James is a member of CWILL BC, The Federation of BC Writers and the Writer's Union of Canada.

## **Author Website**

[www.jamesmccann.info](http://www.jamesmccann.info)