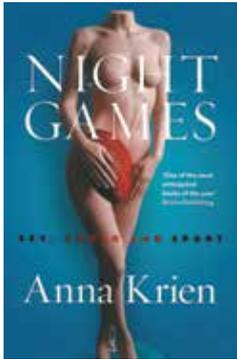


Notes on *Night Games*

SHORTLISTED FOR THE 2014 STELLA PRIZE



Where does this sense of entitlement start? I remember something a footballer told me when he briefly tried out as a rookie in an AFL team ... when he wore his new uniform home, he stopped to grab a burger and chips. To his unease, the shopkeeper wouldn't let him pay. It was nothing really, he told me, six bucks or something, but still it played on his mind. It was as if the old boundaries and rules were disappearing.

Anna Krien, *Night Games*

CONTENT ADVICE

Night Games is a work of nonfiction and its investigation of footy culture, the media and attitudes towards women is well worth studying. However, given the subject matter, there are scenes in the book that some schools may decide are inappropriate for students. If this is the case, these notes can still be used to study themes relevant to students alongside portions of the text selected by the school.

SYNOPSIS

In this riveting work of nonfiction, Anna Krien takes readers on a fascinating and often disturbing journey into the darkest corners of Australian football culture.

Night Games follows a young footballer who, only shortly after moving to Melbourne and joining the Coburg Tigers, becomes the accused in a rape trial. What begins as an accusation of a pack rape, involving high-profile players from the Collingwood Football Club, soon sees Justin (whose name has been changed for privacy reasons) left hanging. He is dropped by his famous friends, their well-known lawyers and his club, left wondering how things had gone so horribly wrong.

Despite not being able to speak directly with the complainant in the rape case, Krien presents a multi-faceted view of the night itself. In the first part of the book, Krien introduces the trial and the people involved, and sheds some light on the legal process itself. She examines the language used to describe the events, and details the initial legal process – which involved three accused, represented by a high-profile lawyer engaged by the Collingwood Football Club – and the discussions between lawyers and the judge as the two Collingwood players are separated from

the action and therefore the case itself. She watches and questions the ethics of separating one part of the incident in question from the next, and of feeding the jury only some of the available information.

From there, Krien casts a wider net, looking at the definition of rape, along with the grey areas of consent and the resulting legal ramifications. She examines the attitudes towards women within football culture that lead to the too-frequent occurrence of these incidents. No stone is left unturned as she investigates attitudes towards players' girlfriends, wives and one-night stands as well as to women involved in the culture in other ways – as media reporters and as club board members. She notes those who are trying to change the culture from within, and that some small steps forward have undoubtedly been made. This is by no means an anti-male book, or even an anti-football book. Krien points out that many of these objectionable attitudes are shared by women too, and that those who report rape are often criticised by their female counterparts as much as by males.

The media is scrutinised, including the demeaning and obnoxious treatment of women and use of female

effigies by high-profile media personalities such as Sam Newman on *The Footy Show*. In addition, the issue of trial by media is raised, particularly when, partway through the trial, a *Herald Sun* article publishes misinformation about Justin with the potential to taint the jury and negatively impact the entire trial. Underlying this media circus is the personal drama, the way the trial and its implications affect not only Justin but also his family, who are dealing with a relative's terminal illness during the trial.

The reader knows the trial's conclusion from the outset. However, many of the questions that it raises are left open, put out not necessarily to provide a set of answers but to start a vital discussion around the ethics and attitudes within Australian elite sports and the associated media.

AUTHOR BACKGROUND



ANNA KRIEN is the author of *Night Games: Sex, Power and Sport*, *Into the Woods: The Battle for Tasmania's Forests* and *Quarterly Essay 45, Us and Them: On the Importance of Animals*.

Anna's work has been published in *The Monthly*, *The Age*, *The Big Issue*, *The Best Australian Essays*, *The Best Australian Stories*, *Griffith Review*, *Voiceworks*, *Going Down Swinging*, *Colors*, *Frankie* and *Dazed & Confused*.

www.thestellaprizel.com.au/2014/04/the-stella-interview-anna-krien/

THEMES

Identity
Rape
Footy culture
Media bias
Legal procedures
Women in sport
Truth
Sex and consent
Fame
Power

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Night Games is a challenging and confronting book to read, and one that not all schools will decide is suitable for students. For those who do decide to study the book, or select sections thereof, there is a great deal for discussion. In the context of **ethical understanding**, the book encourages readers to analyse group behaviour and its relation to individuals' attitudes and personal responsibility. Within the **personal and social capability**, students are asked to 'empathise with and appreciate the perspectives of others', and to do this via 'analysis, research and the expression of viewpoints and arguments'. A text such as *Night Games*, which presents multiple perspectives and encompasses a whole range of issues – around the culture of football, media representation, rape and the treatment of women – will challenge and develop these skills and assist students to articulate their thoughts on complex and/or controversial topics.

READING QUESTIONS

- ◆ What do the words 'power' and 'disempower' mean to you?
- ◆ Which issues within the book do you think fall within 'grey areas'?
- ◆ What is meant by entitlement? What attitudes does it encourage?
- ◆ Who else (aside from the players themselves) participates in the creation of 'jock culture'?
- ◆ Is this sense of mateship in sports a bad thing?
- ◆ How does the author present the court case?
- ◆ Do you feel that the book is biased because the author is unable to present the complainant's evidence? How does she attempt to get around this issue? Does she succeed in doing so?
- ◆ How is Justin presented as a character?
- ◆ How much of the author do you sense in the book? (Think about moments where she inserts her opinion or where language implies her attitude towards something.) Is it a bad thing that

this book is told by an ‘I’ rather than an invisible narrator?

- ◆ Who holds the power in this situation? Is it Justin? Sarah? Is it one individual or a group?
- ◆ What different types of media are shown in the book? How is each of these portrayed?
- ◆ What roles do you see women taking throughout the book? What are their attitudes? (Consider their attitudes to men, to themselves and to each other.)
- ◆ What are your thoughts on parts of the night being withheld from the trial? Is it fair?
- ◆ Discuss the difference between ‘fair’ and ‘legal’. How does withholding these scenes impact the people involved in the trial?
- ◆ How is Justin treated by his friends and family?
- ◆ Where can you see attitudes changing or efforts being made to change attitudes throughout the book? What attitudes are they? Who is perpetuating them? What are the responses to change?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Language is an important element of the book. Find examples in the text where language is used in each of the following ways. Discuss its importance, how it can be manipulated, and what it tells us about both the speaker and who is being spoken about.

- ◆ Definition
- ◆ Derogatory
- ◆ Lies
- ◆ Misunderstanding
- ◆ Jokes
- ◆ Stereotyping
- ◆ Demeaning
- ◆ Intimidating
- ◆ Legal

2. What is meant by ‘trial by media’? How is a trial by media similar to gossip? Discuss the ways that gossip can affect an individual.

In gossip, and in trial by media, where does the truth fit? Does it matter?

Write a short journal, blog or vlog about a time when you have been the victim of gossip, or when you have participated in gossip about someone else.

(The film *Gossip* [2000] would be a good tie-in for this activity.)

3. One of the big issues in the book is media bias. Readers are encouraged to question what they are told by mainstream media, particularly in cases where popular sentiment can easily overwhelm the truth. Look through newspapers and online news sites for several articles written by different people about the same issue. See if you can find any firsthand information about the issue. Try to write your own interpretation of events based on this. Write a passage critically examining the way the information is being presented to you. Consider the following when doing this.

- ◆ What is the issue?
- ◆ Who is involved?
- ◆ Who is reporting on it?
- ◆ Who are they reporting for?
- ◆ Does the individual/organisation have any connection to the issue outside of journalism?
- ◆ Is there any public pressure towards a particular opinion?

REFERENCES

Reviews

The Monthly

www.themonthly.com.au/book-club/2013/june

Readings

www.readings.com.au/review/night-games-by-anna-krien

The Sydney Morning Herald

www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/foul-play-off-the-field-20130517-2jrt1.html

Sydney Review of Books

www.sydneyreviewofbooks.com/the-grey-zone/

Media bias

How to detect bias in new media

www.fair.org/take-action-now/media-activism-kit/how-to-detect-bias-in-news-media/

Types of media bias

www.studentnewsdaily.com/types-of-media-bias/

Sexual assault

Changes proposed to laws on rape

www.theage.com.au/victoria/changes-proposed-to-laws-on-rape-20131024-2w4f3.html

Sexual assault laws in Australia

www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/sheets/rs1/

Women in football

Survey of women working in football

www.theguardian.com/football/2014/mar/07/women-football-survey-karren-brady

Women and sport

[www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/Women and Sport.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/Women%20and%20Sport.pdf)