Kick is the stunning debut novel from author Mitch Johnson. Taking a glance at the cover, one might write it off as just another football book designed to hook in boys, but this is a story that goes much deeper than that. It focuses around young boy Budi who lives in Jakarta, Indonesia with his family. His family is very poor, so instead of going to school he has to work at the local factory making football boots in order to get by. Budi escapes his harsh reality by playing football with his best friends and dreaming of one day playing for Real Madrid alongside the mighty Kieran Wakefield. However, one day a poorly placed kick lands Budi in trouble; now he owes local gangster The Dragon a favour – one that could turn Budi’s life upside down, or worse, get him killed.

Johnson has created a very special book here: he starkly portrays poverty, child labour and crime, while maintaining an undertone of humour, hope and bravery. It’s both uplifting and hard-hitting, making it a truly special book for Upper KS2 classrooms (particularly Y6). The opportunities for learning and discussion are vast and this book will have even the most reluctant reader in your class – boy or girl – hooked from the beginning.
Practical activities

Match day commentary
Throughout the novel, football is a running theme. I’m not a fan of picking football books to appease ‘reluctant’ boy readers, as quite often the football comes at the expense of a proper storyline or any real depth within the text. Luckily, Kick is a rare exception to that rule. Football anchors the text without ever being a main focus. One of the larger elements of this is Budi’s obsession with Real Madrid and his idol, Kieran Wakefield.

There’s a good opportunity here for two tasks. Firstly, create your own footballer. What is their name? Where do they come from? Are they male or female? What team do they play for? Are they based on the pupil creating them? When this is done, there’s a great chance to write some football commentary. This will be a genre that children will probably not be very used to but will be easy for them to be imaginative with. There’s scope for exclamatory sentences, rhetorical questions, modal verbs, hyperbolic adjectives and similes – and that’s just to start with.

Can they include some twists and turns? How exciting can they make it? For those who may achieve greater depth writing, can they switch from exciting moments to dull moments? Can they alter the formality based on how excited the commentator is? There’s also a great opportunity here to use a tool like Garageband or Seesaw to record the commentary first, which will help those who are less fluent writers.

Comparing lives
There is an opportunity for some superb geography alongside this book. Budi and his family live in Jakarta, Indonesia, and the crime and poverty that are prevalent there are well documented throughout the story. Children can compare Jakarta to where they live. Can they locate it on atlases, globes and digital maps? What makes it different?

Ask the children to look at natural features such as the weather, terrain, oceans, rivers and what type of food grows there. You can also look at human geography, such as population, crime rates and modes of transport. Children can then create a poster, leaflet, Powerpoint presentation or movie documenting the main differences between Jakarta and where they live, before presenting it to the rest of the class.

Creating a villain
Creating a ‘baddie’ is a really great way of getting students’ creative juices flowing. In Kick, the villain is the nasty gangster The Dragon who preys on poor families and the vulnerability of children. The Dragon is a grotesque man, covered in jewellery and reeking of alcohol.

Does The Dragon need to look like this? What images does his nickname make you think of?

Take it further

HAVE A FEAST
Throughout Kick, food is referred to. Mostly, the family eat the dish rendang, but on Budi’s birthday they also share other snacks that are native to the area. Help the class to research Indonesian food and have a go at cooking some. What is rendang? What varieties of it are there? Create a menu and invite in parents, staff or other children to taste your delicious delights. There’s also great scope for comparing the food to traditional dishes from the area in which you teach.

WHOSE SHOES: PART TWO
As mentioned earlier, designing and creating football boots is an excellent design technology lesson. Take this one step further by having the children create an advertising campaign for the boots they have created. This could be in the form of a poster, a letter to a famous football club like Real Madrid or even a TV advert if technology allows. There are some great opportunities here to use a green screen. How will children use persuasive features to sell their football boots?

FOOTBALL POETRY
The nature of football commentary allows for a great lesson on poetry. I recommend looking at Booked by Kwame Alexander which is a novel about football.
conjure up for your children? Ask pupils to reinvent and redesign The Dragon so that he fits their vision. More able children might be able to tap into the subtle nuance of having a villain that doesn’t look like a stereotypical bad guy.

When children have created their new version of The Dragon they can draw him. Revisit the part of the story where he is introduced in person to Budi for the first time. Now use your creativity to rewrite this segment to include your new, reimagined vision of The Dragon. Children should consider how they will make The Dragon scary – after all, Budi still needs to be intimidated by his presence.

**Whose shoes?**

I love finding things in books that I can link to art or design technology. It can be quite difficult to dream up such opportunities, so I was thrilled when Kick presented the perfect idea – football boots. In the story, Budi works in a factory to create football boots for famous footballers, including his idol Kieran Wakefield.

But what makes a good football boot? We know that leather is the main material – but what else could work? Collect a variety of materials and have children predict which would make good football boots: cardboard, tin foil, cling film, fabric, bubble wrap. Children can test the different fabrics and then design and create their footwear. After this, ask the class to devise a fair test to see whose shoes are durable, wearable and good for kicking a ball. I can guarantee that the children will be deeply engaged and the results will be potentially hilarious, while deepening understanding of materials. If you’re worried about little feet, design shoes for Subbuteo players!

**Become a reporter**

Another running theme throughout Kick is the stories that Budi’s grandmother tells him. He often nestles down beside her to hear a tale from her childhood, or a fable or old story that she knows from years past. One of the best of these is a story where a boy climbs a huge palm tree, in the belief that doing so will allow him to reach a coconut at the top that will give him special powers if he drinks from it. Without giving too much away, the boy is successful.

Ask the children to imagine they are at the scene and write a gripping, eyewitness newspaper report about the events that take place. The story has a lot of scope for including humour, which will elevate the writing of those looking to achieve greater depth. Newspaper reports have a plethora of brilliant writing features that can be taught, including modal verbs, speech, the subtle differences between formality and informality within speech, dashes for parenthesis and subjunctive mood, to name but a few.

**Hold a match**

This one is obvious: you can’t read a book like Kick and not play football. It would be such a shame not to give the children the chance to go out and kick a ball about, but take it a step further and really embed the rules. What is fouling? What is the offside rule? What is the best way to work as a team? Rotate captains and hold a miniature World Cup.

**Get writing**

Two of the easiest genres to knock on the head when studying a novel are letter and diary writing, but you can visit and revisit them so often throughout a novel that by the time you’re finished you should be seeing some truly excellent pieces of writing. One nice idea would be for Budi to write a letter to his idol, Kieran Wakefield, telling him all about where he lives, who he lives with, who his friends and what his ultimate dream is. How will your young writers convey the emotions of Budi? How will they effectively represent his life?

For a spot of diary writing, it’s easy to embody the character of Budi. Encourage one or two attempts at this as it’s a great summative tool for writing. To really deepen understanding of the story, it’s really powerful to have children write diary entries from other characters who were in certain scenes. For example, children can write diary entries from the point of view of Rochy, grandma or The Dragon. These give children the opportunity to rewrite the story from another perspective (a real ‘mastery’ task) while allowing you the easy opportunity to assess how much they’ve understood the story.