

# Deadly Hits

After suffering a devastating brain injury, one teen and his family are working to make youth sports safer for everyone.

## About the Story

**Lexile:** 1010L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

## Learning Objectives:

to read a challenging story about concussions in youth sports and to create a PSA about how kids can stay safe

## Key Skills:

author's craft, imagery, figurative language, key ideas, text structure, interpreting text, tone, synthesis

## Essential Questions:

- How and why do sports evolve over time?
- What role do sports play in our lives?
- What is grit?

## Standards:

This article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards:

**R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.7, W.2, SL.1, L.4, L.5, L.6**

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



## Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of materials at [scope.scholastic.com](http://scope.scholastic.com).

### Audio:

- The article
- Vocabulary

### Differentiated articles:

- Lower-Lexile version (printable)
- Spanish version (printable)

**Literature Connections:** ideas for connecting to curricular texts

### Skill Builders to print or project:

- Vocabulary
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Preparing to Write: Brain Injury PSA
- **Core Skills Workout:** Summarizing\*, Text Features, Text Structure, Central Ideas and Details\*, Tone
- Quiz\*
- Nonfiction Elements\*
- Contest Entry Form

\*Available on two levels

# Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

## Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

### 1 Preparing to Read

#### Preview vocabulary.

(8 minutes, activity sheet online)

Project or distribute the **Vocabulary Words and Definitions**. (Optionally, assign the practice activity for homework.) Highlighted words: *coma, feverishly, frantic, glamorized, implemented, initial, scrutiny, sustain, traumatic*

### 2 Reading and Discussing

#### Read and discuss the article.

(45 minutes, activity sheets online)

- Have a volunteer read aloud the As You Read box on page 5.
- Play the audio at Scope Online while students follow along in their printed magazines.
- Have students work in groups to discuss the following close-reading questions.

#### Close-Reading Questions

**In the introduction, how does author**

**Lauren Tarshis help you understand that a concussion is a serious injury?** (author's craft, imagery) *Tarshis helps readers understand that a concussion is a serious injury by using vivid—even violent—imagery to describe what happens to the brain. She writes that when Zack suffered a concussion, "his brain shook violently against the inside of his skull." Tarshis goes on to explain that when Zack hit his head, "billions of cells in his brain had been injured." This tells you that a concussion is a serious injury.*

**On page 6, Tarshis describes Zack's brain as a "ticking time bomb." What kind of figurative language is she using? What purpose does it serve?** (figurative language) *Tarshis is using a metaphor to compare Zack's*

*concussed brain to a bomb that is about to explode. This comparison helps the reader understand how dangerous it is to continue playing a sport when you have a concussion.*

**Why did Zack's coach allow Zack to re-enter the game after he hit his head the first**

**time?** (key ideas) *Zack's coach allowed Zack to continue playing because he had not been trained to recognize or test for signs of a concussion. Because Zack seemed OK on the outside, his coach did not think he was putting Zack at risk by letting him back on the field.*

**In the section "What If?," Tarshis asks a series of questions. What purpose do**

**these questions serve?** (author's craft, text structure) *These questions emphasize the idea that Zack's head trauma was preventable. They also help the reader understand the things that could have been done to prevent Zack's injury, as well as what can be done to prevent similar injuries from occurring in the future.*

**On page 7, while explaining how a new version of the video game *Madden NFL* was created, Tarshis writes, "No longer are injured players glamorized." What does she mean?** (interpreting text) *To glamorize something is to make it look appealing and exciting. Tarshis means that when Madden NFL showed injured players staggering around the field, the game was sending the message that playing a sport while injured was not just OK but even tough, cool, or heroic. By removing this feature, the game makers are no longer glorifying playing sports while injured.*

**What is Tarshis's attitude toward Zack, his coach, and his parents? Do you think she blames any of them for Zack's injury?**

**Explain.** (tone) *Students will likely say that Tarshis's attitude toward Zack, his coach, and his family is sympathetic and that she does not place blame on them for Zack's injury. Throughout the article, Tarshis makes it clear that if they had been informed about concussions, they would have acted differently.*

- Reconvene as a class to discuss the following critical-thinking questions.

### Critical-Thinking Questions

**Drawing on information from the article and your own ideas, explain why young athletes today might choose to play football despite the fact that the game can be dangerous.** *In the article, Tarshis lists several benefits of playing football, including that the game can build discipline and character. She also writes that for many young people, football offers a way to pay for college and get a good education. Students may say that young athletes might find these benefits to be worth the risk of serious injury that football brings.*

**On page 6, Tarshis writes, “Sportscasters ran highlight reels that celebrated the most brutal hits of the week in college and professional football.” Why do you think sportscasters stopped doing this?** *Answers will vary. Students may say that sportscasters stopped highlighting the most brutal hits on television because doing so glorified violence in football and sent the message that dangerous hits deserve admiration. Students may also say that by celebrating brutal hits, sportscasters were encouraging players to behave irresponsibly.*

### 3 Skill Building and Writing

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

Have students complete **Preparing to Write: Brain Injury PSA**. This activity will prepare them for the writing prompt on page 8. For alternate culminating tasks, see the box below.

## Differentiate and Customize

#### For Struggling Readers

In a well-organized paragraph, explain why it is important to educate athletes, coaches, and parents about concussions. Use details from “Deadly Hits” to support your ideas.

#### For Advanced Readers

Create a public service announcement (PSA) about concussions, drawing on information in the article and your own research. Your PSA may be in the form of a poster or a video (less than 2 minutes long). In addition, create a document that explains who your target audience is, where your PSA should be shown or displayed, and why your PSA will be effective.

#### For Documentarians

Interview coaches and players on local youth sports teams about concussions and create a short documentary. (Make sure a variety of sports are represented.) Your questions might include what they know about concussions, how much they think about concussions, and what they are doing to prevent serious brain injuries.

#### For Opinion Writers

Research the history of concussion protocol in the NFL. How have the league's safety rules changed in regard to protecting players from concussions? Are the new rules effective? Do they go far enough? Write an essay expressing your opinion.