

1. Psychologists and cognitive scientists have observed the phenomenon of athletes involved in intense sports hitting their “swing,” “flow,” or “zone”—a place where effort becomes effortless and the activity seems to transcend the material constraints of the body. Have you had this kind of experience where you were only conscious of the present, having given yourself over to an activity that transcends ordinary consciousness? Have you ever felt part of something larger than yourself?
2. Sports and nationalism have a long and interesting history. How do sports teams represent national pride, national interests, and even ideological perspectives of the State? Think about the Olympics and the kinds of myths that circulate around participation in that event. In 1936, Hitler hosted the Olympics to showcase his perceived “superiority” of the Aryan race. Though evidence of the persecution of Jews and others was apparent, the media and the world chose to focus on the grandeur of the games, instead of the political and military situation in Germany, providing Hitler with the compliant audience he was hoping to receive, and doing little to intervene in the wholesale massacre of the Jews that was to follow. Is it possible to critique and resist the ways that sports and nationalism have historically been wed to one another?
3. Brown details the story of Joe Rantz in *The Boys in the Boat* and describes his feeling of not belonging at a university. As a country boy, coming out of poverty and homelessness, from a family that is not college educated, Joe doesn’t feel he belongs in college. The students from wealthy families look and talk differently and make fun of his clothes and his taste in music. What do you think is at stake for students who don’t feel they belong at a university, and if you had to give them your best advice about how to connect with others, what would it be? What are some early moments when you felt a part of Western?
4. Part of the story that Brown tells is how the sons of bankers and lawyers on the East coast looked down upon their West coast competitors who hailed from dairy farms, logging families, and fishing communities. How might class divisions affect rivalry in sports, and do you see examples of this prejudice today?
5. One of the chief characters in *The Boys in the Boat* is George Pocock, the boat builder extraordinaire who describes his woodworking in transcendent terms. Similarly, the boys in the boat describe what it feels like to “hit their swing,” and it sounds like they’re describing a spiritual experience. Many characters, in fact, demonstrate the power that comes from deeply connecting with a passion you have for your work or sport. Do you think it is important for students to follow their hearts and their passion, when choosing academic or vocational careers?