

LEVELED Book • Z

# Cricket



Written by Michael Bagnulo

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## Focus Question

What makes cricket different from other popular sports?

## Words to Know

adaptable  
aggressive  
dispute  
fields  
incorporated  
innovations

lobby  
officials  
phenomenon  
spectators  
sportsmanship  
techniques

Front cover: An Australian batter plays at a charity event in Sydney in 2009.

Back cover: A crowd watches a cricket match.

Title page: A cricket ball

Page 3: Fans wave the national flag of India during a brief rain delay at a match in Mumbai, India.

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### Correlation

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In cricket, a batter hits a ball with a large flat bat. The ball is about the same size as a baseball.

## Cricket Conquers the World!

Cricket is one of the top five most popular sports in the world. One source estimates that there are between two and three billion cricket fans worldwide. How did a children's game from the sixteenth century become one of the world's favorite sports? The story begins in England, the birthplace of cricket.

## The History of Cricket

The earliest written reference to a cricket game comes from 1598. A mention of “creckett” appears in a legal document concerning a land ownership **dispute**. A witness in the case described how he and his classmates used to play cricket in the disputed plot. We learn from this document that children played cricket. Other documentation shows that adult matches were played between rival villages and towns.

By the early 1700s, rich patrons began organizing the first professional cricket teams to play against the teams of other wealthy men; these teams were the forerunners of modern cricket teams. The rules of play often varied from one team to the next. This led to the creation of the “Laws of Cricket,” written in 1788 by a group of noblemen called the Marylebone Cricket Club. These rules are still in use hundreds of years later, though they’ve been revised by **officials** over the years.





Men's teams play cricket before an elite crowd in England in 1900.

During the nineteenth century—known as “the Golden Age of Cricket”—the sport started to take its modern form. In 1864, the laws of cricket were amended from allowing only underarm bowling

(pitching to the batter) to allowing overarm bowling, giving the ball more speed and spin, and batters invented complex new batting **techniques**. During that period, the British Empire spread cricket all over the world, with teams springing up in the United States, Canada, Australia, India, South Africa, New Zealand, and throughout the Caribbean. In 1877, teams played the first long, multiday matches between professional teams, called Test-level matches. These long matches determine important championships. Tests still represent the highest level of competition in international cricket.

In the twentieth century, international teams were credited with many of most recent **innovations** in cricket, such as the modern **aggressive** style of bowling created by West Indian players.

## Cricket Today

Today, cricket is played around the world, although it remains most popular in the United Kingdom and countries that were formerly under British rule. To compete at the highest level, a national team must achieve Test status. In 2015, ten national teams qualified to play in Test matches.

Outside the Test level, there are numerous levels of play, from informal community matches to professional contests. Women's teams play at the national and international Test levels. There are also leagues and special matches that follow special rules. Cricket was an event in the second Olympic Games in 1900. It has never been included since, but supporters regularly **lobby** to have it reintroduced to the Summer Games.



Upon first glance, cricket might appear to be similar to baseball, which was derived from early forms of cricket. The games, however, including the playing fields, are different. For example, unlike baseball, cricket is played on an oval field, with a small rectangular clearing called the pitch.

Two teams, each with eleven players, take turns batting and bowling, or throwing, the ball. The batting team tries to score runs by hitting the ball and running back and forth on the pitch. The bowling team tries to get each batter out by striking three posts with the ball. Once a batting team is *all out*—ten of the eleven batters are out—their *inning* is over and the teams switch. The bowling team takes a turn at bat and the batting team bowls and fields.

### Talking Cricket

Some cricket terms have become part of our everyday language.

- To say that something is “not cricket” is to say that it is unfair or an example of bad manners.
- When the playing field is wet or muddy, it is referred to as a “sticky wicket.” In general usage, a sticky wicket is a tough situation.



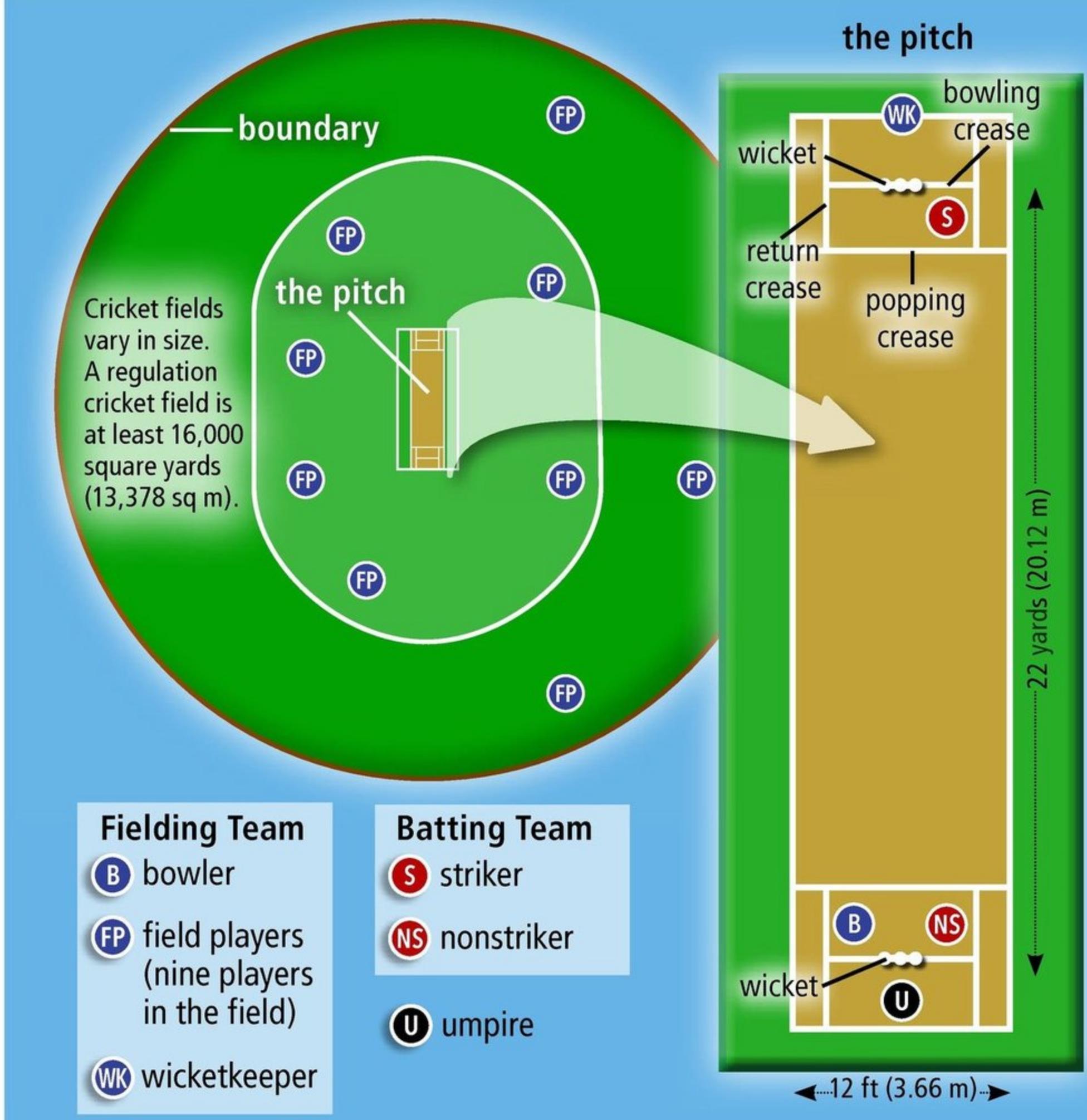
An Australian player drops to one knee to try to hit the ball at a better angle.



## How to Play Cricket

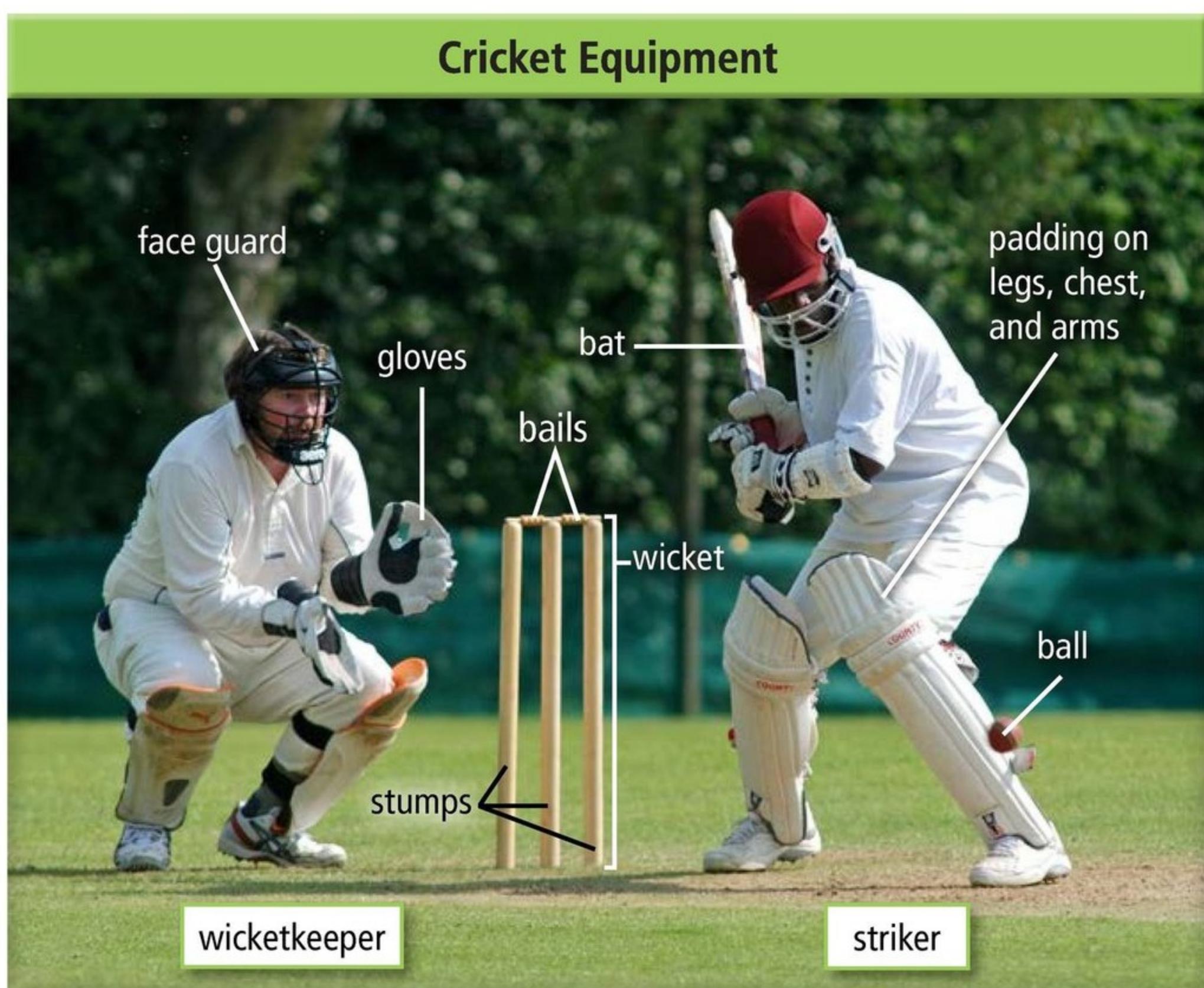
Just as baseball games have pitchers and catchers, cricket games have bowlers and wicketkeepers. The wicket consists of three short posts in the ground, called *stumps*, and two small horizontal pieces of wood that rest on top of the stumps, called *bails*. On the bowling team, one player takes the position of the *bowler* (pitcher or thrower) and another takes the position of the *wicketkeeper* (fielding behind the wicket). The other nine players stand in the field where their team captain tells them. Two batters from the batting team take the field and stand on opposite ends of the pitch. The first player to bat is called the *striker*, and the other batter is called the *nonstriker*. The bowler tries to get the striker out by bowling (throwing) the ball at the wicket. A fair overhand bowl must be done without bending the elbow. If the bowler can knock the bails off the stumps, then the striker is out and another player bats.

## Cricket Field



The striker must protect the wicket by hitting the ball away with his or her bat, while at the same time trying to hit the ball hard enough to score runs. After the striker hits the ball, both batters start running to the opposite ends of the pitch, passing each other in the middle of the pitch. If the runners pass a line in front of the wicket called the *popping crease* and swap places, they've scored a run.

The batters run back and forth again and again, trying to score as many runs as possible. However, while they are running, the fielding team will try to “run out” the striker, or get the striker out. If the striker is not safe behind the popping crease, and a fielder knocks the bails off the wicket stumps with the ball, then the striker is out. A striker can also be “caught” out if a player on the fielding team catches a hit ball before it bounces on the ground. If the striker is not run out when the striker and nonstriker finish running, whoever is standing in the striker’s original position is now the striker.



Why are there two wickets if there is only one striker? If a bowler bowls the ball six times and there are no hits or outs, the bowler changes places with one of his or her teammates. The new bowler throws to the new striker (former nonstriker).

The striker can also score runs by getting “extras.” For example, if the striker hits a ball that then passes the boundary without ever bouncing, the batters stop running and the striker gets six runs. The striker can also score a run on a bowl that the wicketkeeper fumbles.

A regular cricket match lasts two innings, with each team taking a turn bowling and batting, or until the day ends. The team with more runs wins. If the day ends without both teams finishing their inning, the game is a tie, or draw. A winning team might voluntarily end their inning to avoid a draw. In Test matches, teams play for four innings, a contest of endurance that can last up to five days with about six hours of play each day.

Cricket values the idea of good **sportsmanship**. Some rules in cricket come into play only if the opposing teams cannot come to an agreement. For example, if a bowl was blocked by a batter’s body instead of his or her bat, the umpire makes a ruling only if the two competing teams cannot agree on whether the ball would have hit the wicket.

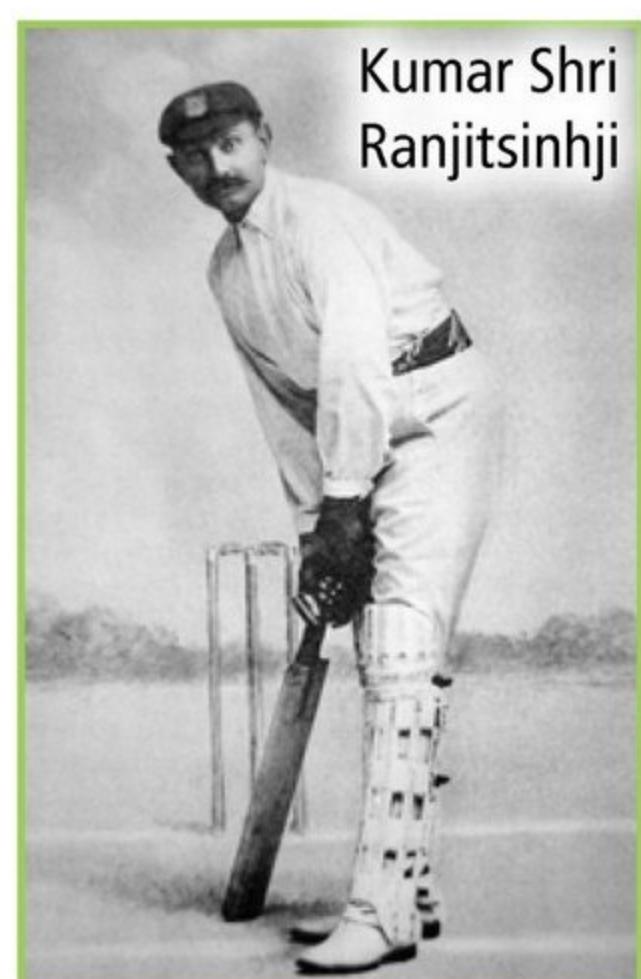
## Heroes of the Oval

W. G. Grace (1848–1915) was a practicing doctor and was considered an amateur

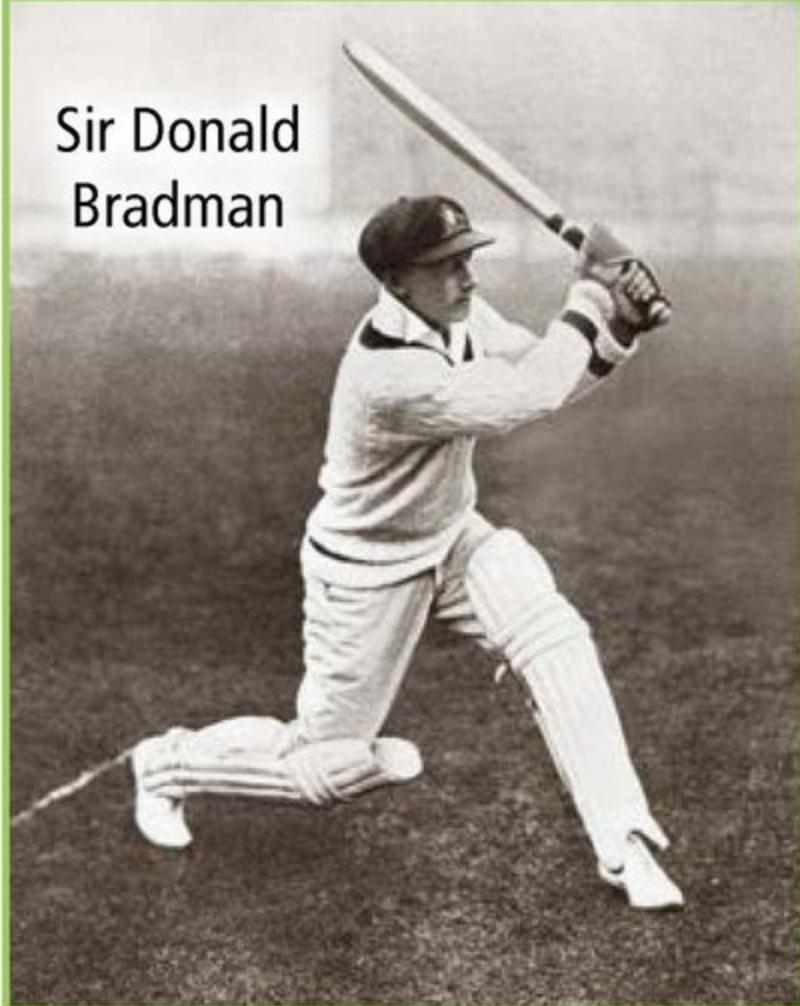


cricket player. Regardless, he revolutionized the sport and is one of the greatest players the sport has ever seen. Grace's contribution to the game was the invention of an **adaptable** batting style that could be applied from multiple stances and that **incorporated** a variety of strokes.

Kumar Shri Ranjitsinhji (koo-MAR SHREE rahn-JEET-seeng-jee), known as "Ranji" (1872–1933), was one of the most fascinating figures of "the Golden Age of Cricket." Ranji was the ruler of Nawanagar, a region of India under the rule of the British. Considered one of the sport's best batters, he became an icon in his home country of India, and the Ranji Trophy, the Indian national championship, is named after him. Ranji was also an important political figure. He represented India in the League of Nations, the predecessor of the modern United Nations.



Sir Donald Bradman



Sir Donald Bradman (1908-2001) was a legendary Australian cricketer known as the best Test batter of all time. Bradman had a Test batting average of 99.94, meaning he almost never missed. To put that in perspective, the next best cricket batter ever has an average of 60.97. After World War II, Bradman served as captain of an Australian team nicknamed “the Invincibles.” The Invincibles went on a record-breaking tour of England, playing an undefeated series of thirty-four matches (playing 112 days of a 144-day tour).

Since 1889, each year five cricket players are named as Cricketers of the Year by *Wisden*, a cricket publication. In 2009, Claire Taylor (1975–) became the first woman to win the honor. In college, Taylor played on the men’s cricket team, developing a batting style that was more typical of the men’s game than the women’s. She made the leap to professional women’s cricket and became one of the finest batters the game has seen.



## Nice Match!

So just how did cricket become an international **phenomenon**? The history of the British Empire and ongoing development of new and exciting playing styles certainly played an important part, but perhaps the answer lies in cricket's two most compelling features. When a cricket player is at bat, it does not matter who that player is or where he or she came from; all players compete as equals on the field. Furthermore, by cricket tradition, every player deserves the same level of respect. It could be that cricket became popular with players and **spectators** around the world because its values—equality and respect—are values everybody can share.



With a bat, a ball, and a wicket, young players can hone their skills. These boys strike up a game in Asia.

## Glossary

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>adaptable</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )   | able to change to fit a new or specific situation or environment (p. 13)   |
| <b>aggressive</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )  | ready or likely to attack or argue; excessively forceful (p. 6)  |
| <b>dispute</b> ( <i>n.</i> )       | an argument or disagreement (p. 5)   |
| <b>fields</b> ( <i>v.</i> )        | catches and throws a ball in baseball or cricket (p. 8)  |
| <b>incorporated</b> ( <i>v.</i> )  | united with or included as part of something else; blended or combined into one whole (p. 13)  |
| <b>innovations</b> ( <i>n.</i> )   | a new idea, product, or way of doing something (p. 6)  |
| <b>lobby</b> ( <i>v.</i> )         | to petition or influence decision-makers to get what you want (p. 7)   |
| <b>officials</b> ( <i>n.</i> )     | people who have special duties, responsibilities, or authority (p. 5)  |
| <b>phenomenon</b> ( <i>n.</i> )    | a remarkable event or occurrence; someone or something that is very impressive or popular because of an unusual ability or quality (p. 15) |
| <b>spectators</b> ( <i>n.</i> )    | people who watch an event without taking part (p. 15)  |
| <b>sportsmanship</b> ( <i>n.</i> ) | qualities of good conduct in sports that include fair play, respect for others, and observance of rules (p. 12)                            |
| <b>techniques</b> ( <i>n.</i> )    | skillful ways of performing or doing something (p. 6)  |

# Cricket

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Word Count: 1,620

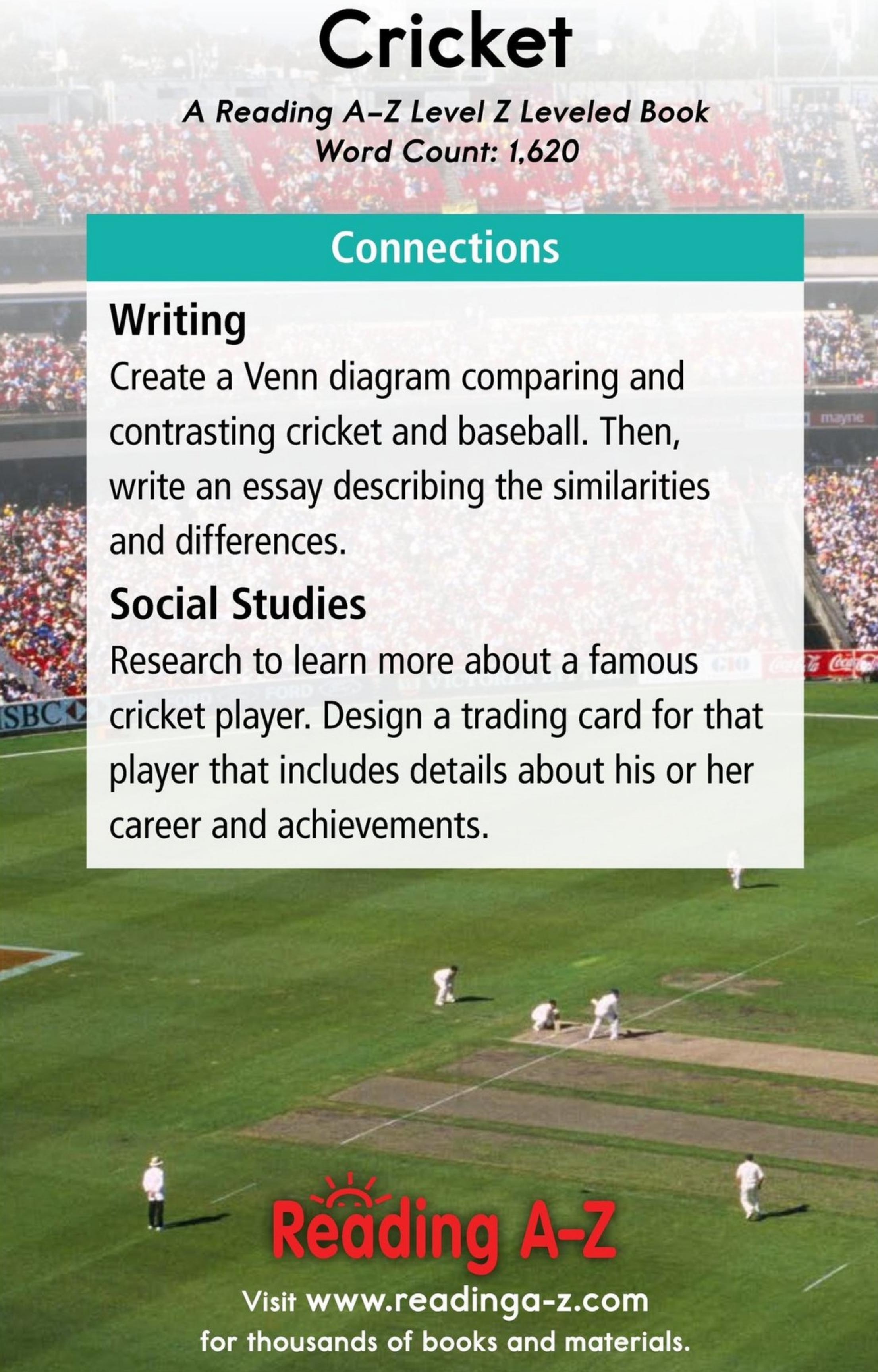
## Connections

### Writing

Create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting cricket and baseball. Then, write an essay describing the similarities and differences.

### Social Studies

Research to learn more about a famous cricket player. Design a trading card for that player that includes details about his or her career and achievements.



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