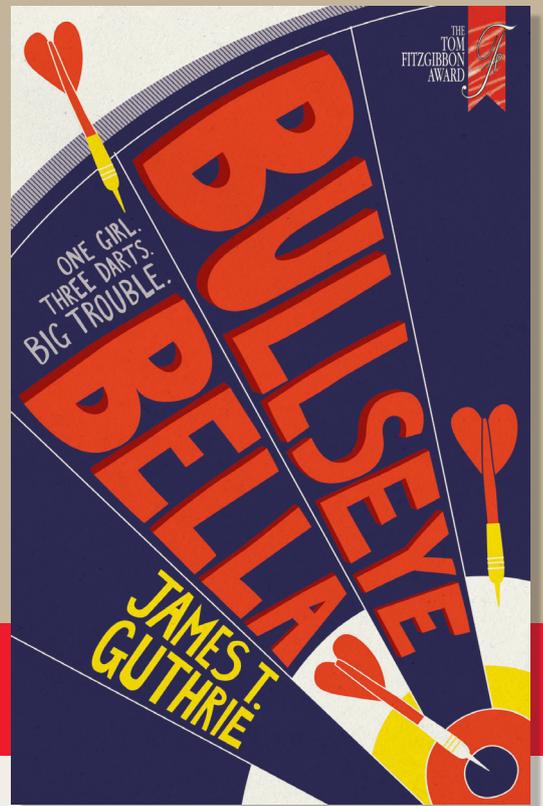


Bullseye Bella

By James T. Guthrie

- Reading • Writing •
- Social Studies • Art •



Synopsis

Twelve-year-old Bella Kerr is a darts prodigy. And when she finds out that her little brother's special schooling is at risk because of lack of money, Bella secretly enters a darts competition at the local pub. The old boys' network of darts players are not happy – none more than Carver, the local champion, and the gold-suited charmer, Frankie 'Goldfinger' Phillips, a five-time national champion. Bella loses her first two tournaments but because she is a semi-finalist still qualifies for the National Tournament. However, someone has been playing dirty tricks and reported Bella's mother Jane to Family Services. As a result of being held up in a meeting with the Family Services woman, Bella doesn't have time to hand in her enrolment form and decides to give up darts forever until her mother encourages her to not give up. A surprise adversary gives up his place in the competition in order to let Bella into the competition. Frankie protests and reveals his true feelings about Bella being in the tournament. During a break, he tries to put Bella off her game and nearly succeeds. For a chance to win, Bella must find courage and nerves of steel inside herself. She focuses on her moves and her breathing, and ignores Frankie's taunts to break even and then win the final. Bella's life changes in many small ways after the tournament and her future looks promising.

About the Author

James Guthrie lives in Island Bay, Wellington, NZ. He has played bass guitar in rock bands, been a librarian, hosted a NZ music radio show, created computer graphics for children's TV, produced a rugby podcast, and wrote the award-winning blog of his online alter-ego Natalie Biz (bizgirl.blogspot.com). These days he creates websites and edits Wellingtonista.com (a website dedicated to chronicling cultural happenings in the nation's capital city).

Writing Style

Bullseye Bella is a humorous story, chock-full of nail-biting drama. Themes include 'girl power', Asperger's syndrome, and discrimination. The story is set at the main character's home where she practises throwing darts in the garage, at the Gnome and Ferret pub where the first two dart tournaments are held, Bella's school, and then the National Tournament. The author has used imagery to describe characters' appearances and actions. The text is in the third person past tense. The author has used a range of short sentences to build up the tension in the story and long sentences to slow the pace down. *Bullseye Bella* has been written for the 9–12-year-old age group, but younger or older audiences will also enjoy this laugh-out-loud story being read aloud to them in the classroom.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover. When and where is this story set? Can you tell? Who or what do you think this story might be about? Why do you think that?
- Why do you think the author has included a dartboard and 'Useful stuff to know ...' at the beginning of the book? Did you learn something new from this information? Will it be helpful while reading the story? (pp.2-3)
- Who is Blackbeard and why has he called himself a pirate name? What's his technique at playing the game? What has Bella promised Blackbeard if he wins a game? What do you think are his chances? Blackbeard speaks in a special way – what language would you call it? (pp.7-11)
- Why does Bella do most of the caregiving for her younger brother? How would you describe Bella's personality? And why do you think she is like that? (pp.13-16)
- Why does Bella decide to enter the darts tournament? Where do the children get the money to enter the competition, and where was it hidden? (pp.17-22)
- Why does Carver not want Bella to enter the tournament? How is he proven wrong? And what did Alice have to do to convince him? (pp.27-29)
- What alliteration does the author use to describe Fred Plumbuffer? What does Bella need for the competition but hadn't thought to bring? (pp.31-33)
- What does 'diddle for the middle' mean? And how does Bella fare? What has caused Bella to play worse than she normally plays? Do you think this has resulted in the men underestimating her and has it affected her self-esteem? Why? (pp.35-39)
- What does the author mean by 'Blackbeard had seemed unperturbed by his abandonment'? How did he blackmail Bella? (pp.40-41)
- How does Bella practise before and on the day for the National Tournament? (pp.43-47)
- What does Bella's mother do at work, where does she work, and what is her job called? (p.51)
- What puts Bella off her game in the second tournament? How does this affect her body? What does she do to help her nerves and stay focused? Does it help? How do the audience react? How does Bella feel about Carver's comments? (pp.55-58)
- What is Bella's game plan for the third game? How does it help improve her score? (pp.59-61)
- Whose side do you think the crowd are on? Why do you think their attitude changes? Why is Bella stunned when the audience erupts after her win? How did it make her feel? (pp.65-68)
- How many more games did Bella have to play? Who is she going to play against in the final? How does Blackbeard feel about that? (p.69)
- What is Bella's moniker? Who gave her that name? How popular is it with the crowd? (pp.74-75)
- Would you consider Carver to be a good sport or a bad sport? How can you tell? What is Tom's advice to Bella to avoid being angry over Carver's comments? Does it help her? Could you use that strategy for other times; for example, if being taunted at school? (pp.76-79)
- What unsettles Bella for the last game? What is the score she needs to get and how does she miscalculate? (pp.84-87)
- What do you think of Frankie's character? What do you think he is hiding? (pp.90-91)
- What did the newspaper say she was the youngest player to ever achieve? And how does she feel about that? Why does she rip the article out of the paper and why does Blackbeard think that isn't a good idea? (pp.94-97)
- How do the school children react to Bella being in the newspaper? How does it make Bella feel? What does the principal set up in her honour at the school? (pp.99-101)
- What is the name of the teacher who plays a game against Bella? Do you think he thought he could beat her? Why? What does Mr Finch say to Bella that gives her hope about winning money to help pay her brother's school fees? (pp.106-108)
- What surprise does Alice bring around to Bella's place? What is the prize pool for the National Tournament? How does Bella react to that news? (pp.112-113)
- Why does Bella have to go the Principal's office? How would you describe the attitude of the principle, Jane and Miss Peacock during the meeting? (pp.122-125) What label does Miss Peacock give Blackbeard/Max and what does she threaten to do with him? What is Bella, Blackbeard/Max and Jane's response? (pp.122-131)
- What deadline does Bella miss? How has the meeting compounded Bella's problem? What does her mother now have to pay for? What does Bella resolve to do? (pp.134-139)
- What does Bella's mother find in the bin and what does she suggest to Bella? What lengths do they go to, to get Bella enrolled for the tournament? (pp.141-150)
- What do you think Bella wants to spend her prize money on? Why? And who do you think it is for? (p.161)
- Why does Carver visit Bella? Why does he want to give up his position? (p.166-168)



- Why did Frankie say it was sexist to include Bella in the competition? What does sexist mean? Do you agree with him or Liz Wong? What is a 'walk-on girl' and what is her role? Do you think this is another example of sexism? Why? And why does Bella's opinion of Mandy change? (pp.175-188)
- How do Bella's nerves unsettle her before and during her games and what does she do to try and overcome them? What causes her to faint? (pp.190-195)
- Why do you think Frankie comes into the Green Room to give Bella advice? How does it affect Bella's play? What advice does Carver give to help her? (pp. 202-208)
- Why is Frankie so outraged that the media are more interested in Bella rather than him? Why does he threaten the press and how does that back-fire on him? (pp.214-216)
- Why is Bella's mother reluctant for her to give paid interviews and photoshoots? Do you think this is good advice or not? State your reasons why? How do they compromise in the end about the media interviews? (pp.222-225)
- When Jane tells Bella that they don't need the prize money after all, Bella feels a huge weight fall from her shoulders? What does that mean? Why don't they need the money so much now? How does it affect Bella's body when she doesn't feel so stressed? (pp.228-230)
- What is it about Frankie's behavior that rubs people up the wrong way? What does it mean when someone says they'd like to see a person 'taken down a notch or two'? Who do you predict will win the final match? Why? (pp.236-238)
- Why is makeup lady Dawn's advice so helpful? Is it important to focus on a win, or to try and do the best you can? What advice would you give Bella? (p.239)
- What does Frankie do to try and upset Bella before the match? Why is he acting that way? How does it affect Bella? (pp.240-249)
- Bella has a realisation – what is it? What does she do to keep calm in the eighth game? Predict the score. How do you think she will feel at the result? (pp.258-260)
- What are the three firsts Bella has achieved at the end of the competition? And what are the last two surprises (not including the romance between Jane and Finnigan)? What does Bella learn from Max's new approach to life? (pp.269-281)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: BULLSEYE BELLA ON TARGET!

Bella becomes famous after several articles are published about her darts playing. Write your own article about Bella, giving it a snappy title. Titles are sometimes a play on words, so think of words that have two meanings but one of them relates to darts (eg 'Bullseye Bella on Target!').

When writing an article, start off with a catchy lead sentence where you say what happened, where it happened and who it happened to. In the next paragraph, give some background about Bella, the tournaments, etc. In the final paragraph, relate back to the winning tournament. Write a draft first, read it aloud to your partner and listen to their editorial advice, and then type a good copy for the classroom magazine/display.

ACTIVITY 2: GOAL SETTING THINK – PAIR – SHARE

Discuss with the class Max's small steps to achieving his goal of becoming an astronaut one day. Talk about short-term goals (ie what may happen this week or by the end of the month), mid-term goals (by the end of the term or year), or long-term goals (in five years' time or when you are grown up).

THINK about what you would like to achieve one day and how you could achieve it. Consider whether it is a short, mid or long-term goal.

In PAIRS share what your goal is and break it down into smaller steps. Help each other with ideas.

Lastly, as a class, SHARE your goals and dreams and how you want to achieve it. Write them down and display them on a wall.

ACTIVITY 3: CHANGING CHARACTERS

Ask the students who were their favourite characters in the story. Ask why they were their favourite. Discuss how some of the characters changed during the story. What was the character's personality like at the beginning of the story, and what was their character like at the end of the story? How did the character change over the course of the story, and why? Ask the students to answer those questions in the following table, providing evidence from the story to support their conclusions. (Students can work in pairs/groups):



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

HOW AND WHY CHARACTERS CHANGE

Name	At the beginning	At the end	How they changed?	Why they changed?
Bella				
Max				
Jane				
Carver				
Frankie				

Teaching Notes written by Maria Gill.