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Teachers' Notes



The First Tackle

Rikki-Lee Arnold

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Reading level: 9-11

Book Summary

Daniella Murphy is on a mission. All she has ever wanted to do is play rugby league, just like her three brothers. However, her grandma says no, her dad stays silent and the school bully just laughs in her face. Their message is clear - girls don't play footy. With the help of an old ally and a newfound hero, she tries to show everybody that they're wrong, but when a scary accident threatens to derail her dreams altogether, even Dani is ready to admit defeat. Will she ever be able to prove that she can do exactly what the boys can do?

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Reasons For Studying This Book

Themes

The pursuit of dreams Determination Courage Belonging and sense of
identity Gender equality Overcoming bullying Importance of family and friends

About the Author:



Rikki-Lee Arnold has been writing books since the age of seven, when she would spend her Saturday mornings creating worlds and characters while watching *Rage* and *Video Hits*. These days she is also a sports journalist and has worked through her decade-long career at *The Courier-Mail* and *Sunday Mail* covering NRL, women's league, tennis, AFLW, cricket and more. Her combined love of writing and sports – particularly women's sport – has led to her debut novel, *The First Tackle*. Rikki-Lee lives in Brisbane with her supportive husband and her two cheeky sons.

Author Note:

I was inspired to write *The First Tackle* in 2019, after three years of covering women's rugby league with *The Courier-Mail* and *Sunday Mail* newspapers. Over these three years, female league had experienced major growth and, through my job as a sports journalist, I witnessed firsthand just how tough, courageous, determined and impressive these athletes were. They had to overcome great obstacles to be rugby league players and were now making history through the NRLW, State of Origin and at the international level. They were smashing ceilings and breaking ground and not only did I want to celebrate this further, but I wanted to ensure the next generation could enjoy women's sport in many ways, including through the joy of reading. Men's sport has been represented in novels for years on end and women and girls deserved the same. *The First Tackle* aims to do just that – through the story of Daniella, I hope to show young people everywhere that there are no limits to what you can do and if you're a young girl who wants to play sport (in this case, rugby league) then you should do so.

Key Curriculum Areas:

CURRICULUM AREAS AND KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

Year Four

English, Humanities and Social Science, Health and Physical Education

ACELA1488	ACELT1603	ACELY1687	ACELY 1692
ACELY1675			
ACHASSI077	ACHASSI081	ACHASSK072	
ACPPSO33	ACPPSO37	ACPPSO38	

Year Five

English, Humanities and Social Science, Health and Physical Education

ACELT1608	ACELT1609	ACELT1610	ACELA1525
ACHASSI094	ACHASSI099		
ACPPSO51	ACPPSO60	ACPPSO57	

Year Six

English, Humanities and Social Science, Health and Physical Education

ACELT1613	ACELY1709	ACELY1801	
ACHASSI127			
ACPPSO51	ACPPSO57	ACPPSO60	

Teaching Points and Activities

This book may be used in whole class, small group or independent learning activities in schools.

Please note, the following suggestions and activities are suited to a variety of year levels spanning Foundation to Year 6 primary aged children. Some activities may be applicable to early secondary school students, as well.

Knowledge and Literal Understanding

Pre-reading Questions

1. Show the cover to the class and ask the students what they think the book might be about.
2. Read the back cover blurb. Does this give them more of an idea of what the book could be about?
3. Ask students if they can recognize the setting of this story from the cover image.

After-reading Questions

4. Ask students if Daniella reminds them of anyone they know: a friend, a sibling, themselves perhaps.
5. What is their first impression of Daniella?
6. How does Daniella change over the course of the story?
7. Ask students how they perceive Daniella's situation. Does she come through in the end?

Discussion Questions

The pursuit of dreams

- What does having a dream mean to you?
- Ask students to share their dreams and goals – something they want to achieve.
- Daniella has a lot of help in chasing her dream of playing rugby league. What do you think are the best ways to help someone when they have a goal they want to achieve?
- Daniella may have had a lot of help to achieve her goals but in her major training session towards the end of the book she has a moment of realisation. “I have to take this chance for myself. No one else can save me now.” What does this moment represent in Dani’s journey?
- Students could do an activity on goal-setting and the steps required to achieve a goal.

Determination/not giving up

- Ask students to reflect on a time when they have been tested and had to show determination to achieve a goal/outcome.
- What do you think you would have done in Daniella’s shoes if you were being told you couldn’t do something that was important to you?

Courage

- In what ways did Daniella show courage throughout the book? Provide examples.
- What supporting characters also showed moments of bravery? Share one example.
- “Walk tall, stand proud, Murphy.” This was said a lot by Jimmy to his little sister. What does this phrase mean to you?

Belonging and sense of identity

- Group discussion: Daniella was a big rugby league fan but excluded from being a player. How do you think it feels to be excluded from a group?
- Can you explain how the final chapter illustrates that Dani now “belongs” as a rugby league player?
- How would you describe Daniella at the start of the book?
- ‘I think I’m just finding my voice.’ In what ways do you think Daniella found her voice throughout the book?

Discussion Questions

- How would you describe Daniella by the end of the book?
- Wanting to be a rugby league player is a major part of Daniella's identity. But what else did you learn about who Daniella is throughout the book – what are her interests, who are her friends, etc.?

Gender equality/equality

- What is your understanding of the popular phrase “you can't be what you can't see”, as repeated by Steph within this book?
- Group discussion on “what does equality mean to you?”
- Ask students to reflect on whether they have ever faced a time in their life where someone has told them they cannot do something because of who they are.

Overcoming bullying

- What were your first impressions of Mitch?
- What did you think of Mitch after he served detention with Dani?
- Do you think it was fair for Dani to forgive him for all his bullying after he shared his story? Why/why not?

Importance of family and friends

- Daniella has a number of allies throughout the book. Pick one ally – whether it's a character who was there for her from the start or someone who supported her later – and share your view with/present to the class on how this person helped her. It could have been in a big way or in a small way. Provide examples. (Suggestions include Jimmy, Amina, Steph, Bethany and Tyrone.)
- Who was your favourite character outside of Daniella and why?
- Dani's mother died when she was young. What impact do you think this had on the family?

Activities

Your own rugby team

- If you could have your own rugby team what would their name be? And what would their jerseys look like? Draw their jerseys.

Write a letter or a diary entry.

- Write a letter from Daniella to one of her allies (e.g. from Dani to Jimmy)
- Write a diary entry from Daniella about the events of the book or maybe set after the end of the book.

Sportswomen

- Think of some famous sportswomen, they can be from any sport - rugby, cricket, netball, volleyball, basketball, soccer, tennis - and come up with some adjectives to describe them.
- Now think of some famous sportsmen from any sport. Think of some adjectives to describe them.
- Compare the adjectives. Are there any differences in how you think about men and women in sport? Why would that be? Is it fair to think of them differently when they do the same job?



Rikki-Lee Arnold is available for author talks and workshops. Contact Wombat Books for more information.

The First Tackle Teachers' Notes can be used in schools (independent learning, small groups, and whole classes); at home with caregivers; and as part of mental health support programs facilitated by counsellors, psychologists, children's charities, etc.

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