



GAME AS NED

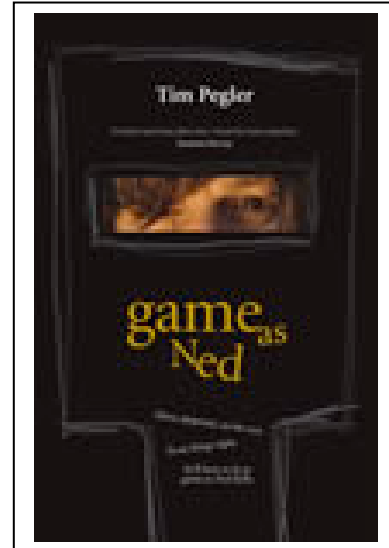
By Tim Pegler

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Teaching Notes

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About the book

Ned is a teenager with an encyclopaedic knowledge of Australian bushrangers. He is also autistic.

Erin is a sixteen-year-old trouble-magnet trying to make a fresh start in a new town.

Ned never speaks. Erin rarely stops – and when she stands up to a bully the consequences are catastrophic.

Now Ned's on the run, branded 'disturbed and dangerous' by police. To set things right, he'll need to be as game as Ned Kelly...

About the author

Tim Pegler is an award-winning journalist and author. During a decade at newspapers including *The Age*, *The Herald Sun* and the *Australian*, he received media prizes from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and United Nations Association of Australia. Tim is now a freelance website editor.

Before reading

Discuss the significance of the title and cover illustration and consider how they might inform the story's themes and characters.

How to use these notes

The questions and activities in these notes can be approached in a number of different ways; some could be addressed to the whole class as part of a group discussion or students could work in small groups to answer a range of the questions and then share their responses with their peers; alternatively, students could be asked to write responses to some of the questions individually or in pairs before sharing.

Themes

Vulnerability, difference, bullying, autism, justice, friendship and empathy.

- Choose one of these themes and give examples of how a character's actions or response to incidents illustrate the theme. For example, explain how Erin's and Mick's ways of communicating with Ned show empathy and understanding.

Writing style

First-person narrative

- How does this narrative style affect the way the reader interprets or responds to the characters?
- Ned and Erin's individual stories are established separately before their lives intersect. Once they meet, we are presented with their differing interpretation of events. Give an opinion on the effectiveness of this style and discuss how it benefits the reader.
- Discuss alternative writing styles and their potential to improve or inhibit this particular story. Give examples for your answer.

Character questions

- Describe what you know about one of the main characters by writing a brief profile. Share the profiles with the class, students reading their work and asking their peers to guess whom the reader is describing.
- Choose a section of the text narrated by either Ned or Erin. Explain how what they say reveals their feelings or experience of the events.
- Who were the important people in Ned and Erin's lives? Explain how these people affected the lives of our central characters.
- List the similarities between Ned and Mick or Ned and Erin and discuss the disadvantages they each face and the ways in which they seek to deal with or overcome their personal hurdles.
- Describe the characteristics that define the relationship between Ned and Grandpa.
- Read the following quote and describe what it reveals about Ned, particularly his feelings. Pg. 33: "*Don't think I haven't tried to speak. I've had moments when*

the need to blurt out words has been so intense. So intense, so all-powerful, that the voice inside screams... I've been desperate to tell Grandpa that I love him. That I miss Gran. To thank him. To let him know how much it means that he ignored the doctors' labels and let me be. I can't even give him a smile. I've wished I could yell back at people who reckon I'm stupid. Inform them that silence doesn't mean I'm deaf, dumb or ignorant. I've hungered for a way to say no to people. Stop. Leave me alone. I've never succeeded."

- Why did Mick make Ned his assistant and confidante and how did this affect Ned's experience of life at the workshop?

Additional questions and discussion points

Part 1

- What do we learn about Ned in the first few chapters of the novel?
- What judgements might be drawn about Ned's future prospects in view of his life situation?
- Ned is curious about his mum and believes he's a good judge of character. Discuss.
- How did Ned create a safe environment for himself?
- Discuss Ned's unusual school life. What was the most memorable aspect of his time at Lawler Street Primary School?
- At school, how did Miss Kendall demonstrate understanding or empathy for Ned?
- Why do you think Ned was captivated by tales of bushrangers and their courage and why Ned Kelly specifically?
- Discuss the significance of Miss Kendall's report when Ned finally left primary school.
- How did Ned feel when Grandpa delivered the news that he would be going to a new place?
- What were Ned's first impressions of The Silver City?
- What softened Ned's transition to the workshop and made his experience less intimidating?
- Which incident occurred at Mick's cottage while he was away and how did it affect Ned? How did Ned try to make sense of the encounter?

Part 2

- How are we first introduced to Erin?
- In what ways is she different from Ned?
- Erin gave two reasons for being such a chatterbox – list them and discuss her reasoning.
- Describe Erin’s family life and the effect of the family's nomadic lifestyle. According to Erin, there were positives and negatives. Discuss.
- How did the miscarriage of justice over the incident with Lachlan impact upon Erin and her family?
- What other factors forced Erin’s family to move? Analyse those factors.
- What words could describe the way in which the McMaster family manipulated the facts to their own advantage and what was the response of the townspeople? Why were the McMasters able to do this?
- Discuss Erin’s mixed feelings towards her dad after he interfered with Mr McMaster’s ram.
- Describe how it might feel to be forced to leave school and find work due to certain family circumstances.
- After her father’s imprisonment, where did Erin and her mother go and what was their reception when they got there?
- When Erin had her interview at The Silver City, what cemented Mick’s decision to employ her?

Part 3

- Discuss Mick's description of Ned on Pg. 102. What level of understanding and empathy does this convey?
- What was Mick’s reaction to Janine’s departure from his life?
- How did Erin’s one-way conversations with Ned on their walks to and from work help to develop their friendship?
- What did Erin notice about Ned’s disposition after she told him about Lachlan McMaster?
- When Erin delivered some homemade scones to Ned and his Grandpa, what did she notice about Ned's demeanour when he was chopping wood? How did this differ from his usual downcast stance at work?
- Compare Ned’s initial and later reactions to Erin surprising him in the backyard.
- Compare Erin’s confusion about her visit to Ned's house with Ned’s reaction.

- Why did Ned believe that he and Erin were similar? (Refer Pg. 114).
- What led to the attack in which Nigel Collier assaulted Erin?
- Describe Erin's feelings after the attack.
- Why did Erin initially remain quiet about the incident?
- What questions worried Erin following the assault?
- Discuss Erin's confusion regarding Ned's inability to intervene during Collier's attack on her.
- What incidents led to the final confrontation between Ned and Collier and how might this clash have been avoided?
- Why did Ned go into hiding?
- Describe the significance of the two dead baby birds Ned saw during his temporary escape from hiding while in search of food. In what way did Ned interpret the image as a sign for his future?
- How did Ned seek to gain understanding about the injustices he was subjected to? How did this insight propel him forward, ensuring that he would be heard?
- When Erin revealed the truth about her assault to her dad, Mick, and Ned's Grandpa, what did she say she should have done before Collier's bullying escalated?
- How did Ned feel when he had all his thoughts down on paper? Describe his resolve.
- What was Ned's response once he learnt that Collier was still alive?
- At what point did Ned realise that his feelings for Erin went beyond friendship? (Refer Pg. 180).
- Discuss the way in which Ned prepared to defend his reputation.
- Describe the circumstances under which Ned and Erin were reunited in Mick's shed.
- What bad news did police officer Barbara Spencer bring when she arrived at the workshop during the siege?
- How did the contents of Ned's books influence the final outcome for Ned, Erin and Collier?
- In hospital, how did Erin make Ned smile?
- Why did Ned finally find the courage to speak during the trial?
- Describe your interpretation of the last chapter of the novel.

Activities

- Discuss the parallels between Erin's father's illegal activities and her mother's ill health, and Ned's family circumstances.
- Look at some photographs and art works of Ned Kelly and choose a medium and style in which to illustrate or paint a portrait of the bushranger or Ned dressed in his home-made armour.
- List the ways in which Ned believed he and Ned Kelly were alike.
- If the story were to continue, what do you imagine might occur?
- State three opinions about the book ... things you liked or disliked, giving your reasons.
- Discuss how each of the following quotes illustrate the feelings of the speaker:
Pg. 28 Ned says: *"Like Grandpa and Miss Kendall, Mick Hartnett doesn't mind that I don't speak. Doesn't seem to, anyway."*

Pg. 32 Mick says to Ned: *"It's a terrible thing, fear. Crippling. I'd hazard a guess that you and I have a bit in common."*

Pg. 115 Ned about Erin: *"What would Ned Kelly do? Ride into town, make a statement – tie his horse to the railing outside her place. Spin her around the centre of the dance floor? Let everyone in town know he's with her. Wish I could be like that. Game as Ned Kelly. Bold."*

Pg. 127 Erin to Ned: *"We're the same, you and I... More exposed than we want to be. Always on the run. I'm ... I'm real glad we're friends."*

Pg. 131 Erin after the assault: *"I felt like I was breaking apart, each atom rejecting its neighbour. Breaking apart and dissolving, vanishing in an acid stew of fury, loneliness, grief, terror, humiliation, desolation, disgust."*

Pg. 133 Erin after lying to Mick: *"I feel genuine affection for Mick and shame at lying to him. He gave me a chance, helped me start fresh. Helped me pretend I could live a normal trouble-free life. Ha! Who was I kidding? Yeah – myself."*

Pg. 159 Ned after reading the Jerilderie letter: "*The power of Kelly's word reached out to me from the page ... and now, almost more than a century after the letter exploded from his lips, the ink rages through my veins. For I too, am a widow's son outlawed.*"

Pg. 197 Ned's final attempt to explain the motivation behind his actions: "*Had to let them know that simple, 'disturbed' Ned could be as game as Kelly and help the truth come out.*"

Further reading about autism

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon (2003)

Christopher is 15 and lives in Swindon with his father. He has Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism. He is obsessed with maths, science and Sherlock Holmes, but finds it hard to understand other people. When he discovers a dead dog on a neighbour's lawn he decides to solve the mystery and write a detective thriller about it. As in all good detective stories, however, the more he unearths, the deeper the mystery gets - for both Christopher and the rest of his family.

Blue bottle mystery: an Asperger adventure by Kathy Hoopmann [2001]

Ben finds an unusual old bottle buried in the school yard, and in a roundabout way it helps Ben and his family find out what is causing some of the persistent problems he has both at home and at school.

Of mice and aliens: an Asperger adventure by Kathy Hoopmann [2001]

The sequel to Blue Bottle Mystery, this is a science fiction novel for kids, with a difference. Ben's attempt to cope with his newly diagnosed Asperger Syndrome is complicated by the crash landing in his back yard of an alien who knows nothing about Earth's rules and norms.

Daniel isn't talking: a novel by Marti Leimbach [2006]

A novel that looks closely at the experience of having a child newly diagnosed with autism. *Daniel Isn't Talking* gives a rare insight into the mystifying and frightening implications of autism, while at the same time somehow making the reader laugh out loud at the novel's heroine, Melanie Marsh, who, despite appearing at times to be

coming unglued, manages to make all the right decisions.

Dolphins dance by Jutta Goetze [2000]

About a girl whose younger brother has autism. The story shows how she deals with living with him and the taunts she receives at school because of him. Things become harder for her when her brother starts at her school and she feels she has to protect him.

Looking after Louis by Lesley Ely [2004]

When a new boy with autism joins their classroom, the children try to understand his world and to include him in theirs.

More autism fiction resources

<http://www.autism-resources.com/childrengenres/fiction.html>

Bushranger resources

Black Snake: The Daring of Ned Kelly by Carole Wilkinson Ned Kelly was a bushranger in Australia in the 1870s. He robbed banks, stole horses and cattle but is regarded by many as a folk hero a bit like Robin Hood. To others he was a murderer who deserved the death sentence for his crimes. Here Ned Kelly's life is described factually but is interspersed by short fictional personal accounts by various people who knew Ned Kelly or who were there at the scene of his crimes. (8 - 12 years)

Riding With Thunderbolt - The Diary of Ben Cross by Allan Baille - part of Scholastic's My Story series.

Ben Cross was looking for adventure when he ran away from his brutal uncle. But he found much more when he joined the bushranger Thunderbolt. He becomes the "cockatoo" - the lookout - for the bushranger's gang as they raid cattle stations, inns, stores and mail coaches. But at the end of a year of dramatic rescue, running, hiding and desperate shootouts, both Ben and Thunderbolt know that they must give up the bushranging life. If they can.

Awards: SA Kanga short-listed. Won the 2005 NSW Premier's Young People's History Prize

Relevant websites

Autism

<http://www.autismvictoria.org.au/home/>

<http://www.aspect.org.au/>

<http://www.donnawilliams.net/>

<http://www.templegrandin.com/>

Bushrangers

<http://www.ironoutlaw.com/>

<http://www.nedkellysworld.com.au/>

<http://scs.une.edu.au/Bushrangers/HOME.HTM>

Artworks depicting Ned Kelly

Sydney Nolan's Ned Kelly collection plus many others can be found on the following two websites

<http://www.ironoutlaw.com/html/gallery.html>

<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/nedkelly/>

Ned Kelly's Jerilderie letter

<http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/collections/treasures/jerilderieletter1.html>

http://www.nla.gov.au/worldtreasures/html/theme-people-5-ned_kelly.html

Follow the link below to read the contents of the Jerilderie letter.

<http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/collections/treasures/jerilderieletter/index.html>

Bullying

<http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/>

<http://www.ncab.org.au/>