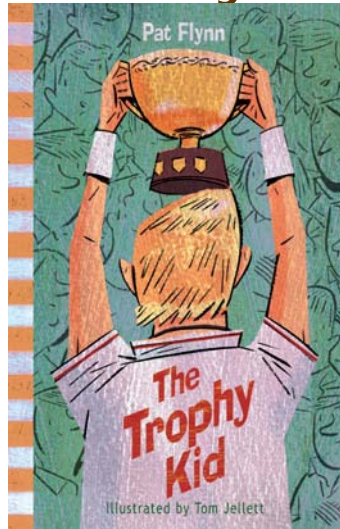


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THE TROPHY KID

Pat Flynn



Teachers' Notes

Written by Pat Flynn and
a practising primary school teacher

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Synopsis	2
Themes	2
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	2
Winning and Losing	2
Peer Support	3
Death	3
Author Motivation	3
Study Notes	4
About the Author	10
About the Illustrator	10

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SYNOPSIS

Marcus Wright is a teenage tennis star. He has a reliable forehand and a strong backhand, but his biggest asset is his mind. It can picture great shots like a movie screen and will him to victory, even when he's losing. But a series of events cause his mind to start playing tricks on him. Suddenly Marcus himself, and his niggling thoughts, become his toughest opponents.

Battling physical and mental pressures, worrying about his granddad's failing health, trying as hard as he can to make his dad proud – something's got to give. When Marcus is compelled to perform time-consuming rituals in order to help him win at tennis, he feels like he's going crazy. With the support of his 'tuckshop expert' buddy Matthew and potential girlfriend Kayla, Marcus wills himself towards the next state title; but will it be enough? Will victory be his again?

A companion novel to *The Tuckshop Kid* and *The Toilet Kid*, *The Trophy Kid* is written in Pat Flynn's inimitable style, with his unique ability to craft a funny and engaging story around an important message; in this case learning how to deal with the pressures we place on ourselves.

THEMES**Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) affects around 3 percent of the population. Unlike other anxiety disorders, the ratio of boys to girls with OCD is 2:1. It's estimated that less than 10 percent of all sufferers are currently in treatment. It consists of an obsession (in Marcus' case the thought that his grandfather will die if he doesn't win the next state title) and compulsions (for Marcus, trophy touching and other rituals that revolve around the number 6). To be officially diagnosed with OCD these compulsions take over an hour a day. Sufferers with OCD aren't deluded, they know what they are doing doesn't make sense. However, they are drawn to the compulsions as a way of relieving the obsession. It's an overactive, negative imagination. Although most young people don't have OCD, readers will relate to the way that irrational fears can sometimes influence behaviour and quality of life. The story encourages young people to confront their fears by seeking help.

http://www.aboutourkids.org/families/disorders_treatments/az_disorder_guide/obsessive_compulsive_disorder/children_risk

Winning and Losing

Marcus says that for the past two years he's been defined by two words: State Champion (p.11). Although this makes him feel good, the flip side is the pressure to stay on top. *When you're ranked number one it seems like there's*

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only one way to go. And it's not up (p.53). It can be hard for young people to separate their self-esteem from how successful they are at things like sport, school etc. Even though Marcus is a very good tennis player and a talented student, he becomes anxious and unhappy. Young people have to learn how to handle success and failure, and it is often how one responds to failure that dictates how resilient and ultimately successful they will be.

Peer Support

On page 82, Kayla says that she only begins to recover from her eating disorder once she talks to a fellow sufferer. This scene was based on a real girl who spoke to the author about her disease. Tapping into a network of people who understand their challenges and problems is so important to young people. At the same time, young people are worried about how they are perceived by their peers, which is why many mental health problems go undiagnosed. Over the past few years there has been an increased focus on bringing youth mental health problems into the open. Groups such as Youth Beyond Blue <http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/> have run advertising campaigns with a motto of Look, Listen, Talk, Seek Help.

Death

Marcus becomes terrified of his grandfather dying. On p.34, he says, *If anything bad happened to Granddad, I think I'd die*. After his grandmother died, Marcus bottled up many of his worries and fears. It is worth exploring how people deal with grief and discuss some healthy and unhealthy outlets when it comes to expressing loss.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

This is what Pat Flynn says about his motivation for writing *The Trophy Kid*:

When I was young, tennis was a very important part of my life. When I won my first state age title at 12, while waiting for the presentation, my Dad bought me my favourite ice-block. Because of the nerves in my stomach it tasted like metal. This is my first book about tennis and I wanted to convey the love/hate relationship that elite junior athletes often have with their sport. There are highs and lows that can be difficult to handle. You have many friends when you win, many less when you lose. But if you can learn to play for the right reasons, it can be a fun, challenging and rewarding game. In a similar way, if you learn to live for the right reasons, life can be fun, challenging and rewarding. The Trophy Kid is the third in the 'kid' series, which all examine addiction in some form. For Matthew and Kayla, food is their daily struggle. For Marcus it is the compulsions he develops around the fear of bad things happening to those close to him. As an athlete I was constantly battling the unwanted, negative thoughts running

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through my head. I had to learn how to slow my mind down and think less. I am interested in the battle that often goes on in our mind in stressful situations. In many ways, our fear is the toughest opponent of all to overcome.

STUDY NOTES

- Listening Comprehension Quiz for Chapter 1
 1. Marcus' opponent in the final of the state title is:
 - a) Jett Smith, **b) Jett Scott**, c) Jett Wright, d) Jett Lee
 2. Chapter 1 is all about one point in the match. That point is:
 - a) Deuce, b) Match point to Jett, **c) Match point to Marcus**, d) The first point of the match
 3. How old is Marcus?
 - a) 11, b) 12, **c) 13**, d) 14
 4. To calm himself down during the match, Marcus starts:
 - a) Counting**, b) Reading, c) Jumping up and down on the spot, d) Eating
 5. What size tennis shoe does Marcus wear?
 - a) 6, b) 7, c) 8, **d) 9**

- The issues of anxiety and the need to win or be the best are prevalent in the lives of many young people.
 - Have students think about a time when they put pressure on themselves to be the best. Examples may include a sporting match, a test or assignment at school etc. Discuss the fine line between having challenging aspirations and setting unrealistic goals:
 - Did this pressure help or impede your performance? Discuss.
 - Were your goals realistic or unattainable?
 - What did you learn about yourself during this process?
 - How do you decide upon goals? Do these aims come from within yourself or are they driven by peer pressure?
 - Write a recount about one such time in your life. It may have had a positive or disappointing outcome.

- Have students set a goal for the coming term.
 - Emphasise the importance of this goal being achievable yet challenging.
 - Model with students how to scaffold a goal, i.e. think of practical, tangible steps to take in order to reach the ultimate goal.
 - Monitor these steps during the term, asking students to reflect on their progress as the term progresses, perhaps in a journal similar to those kept by Marcus in *The Trophy Kid*.
 - Once a student reaches their goal, celebrate this achievement, for instance:
 - Give them a 'Student of the Week' award.

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- Ask the school principal to meet with the child to congratulate him/her.
- Write a note/letter/email home to the child's parents to explain this achievement.
- While tennis features strongly in *The Trophy Kid*, the students in your class will have a variety of hobbies and passions. Survey the class about their sporting and recreational interests.
 - Graph these results.
 - Have students research a famous person who has excelled in one of their personal fields of interest:
 - What obstacles has this person faced and overcome in the pursuit of excellence?
 - What strategies did they use to guide their successes?
 - How did they use failure to help ensure future achievements?
 - This information could be presented in a variety of ways, for example:
 - A PowerPoint presentation.
 - A class blog.
 - A poster (such as an interactive Glogster poster www.glogster.com).
 - An oral presentation.
- Invite a local tennis club to run a training session with your class or ask the PE teacher whether this would be possible during a PE lesson.
 - Watch some highlights of famous tennis matches on YouTube.
 - Record post-match interviews during a Grand Slam tournament. Have students reflect on the way the players handle themselves, both after wins and losses.
 - Use extracts from biographies of famous tennis players to examine mental strategies employed during a match. What pressures and challenges are involved in staying 'at the top'?
 - Study the rules of tennis and investigate the origins of the scoring system.
 - Imagine you are in the final of a grand slam tournament such as The Australian Open or Wimbledon. Write your own action scene, similar to the opening two chapters of *The Trophy Kid*.
 - If possible, set up a Wii/TV in the classroom, challenging 'Marcus' using the tennis game in Wii Sports.
- Take the class for some short, early morning fitness sessions. Teach students to take their pulse before and after some fitness routines. Include

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stretching/warming up activities (e.g. skipping and jogging, star jumps, push-ups and burpies).

- Investigate the link between exercise and performance in the classroom.
 - For older students, study the chemical changes that take place in the brain during exercise and how this helps to address stress, depression and anxiety.
- Visit the Tennis Australia website, as well as those of local tennis clubs. Evaluate one of these websites:
 - Is it user friendly?
 - Is it possible to talk to someone from this club? Investigate the 'Contact Us' link.
 - Is there information about the rules of tennis?
 - Is there information about joining/learning to play tennis?
 - Is there information about rankings?
 - Can you see how recently the information on the website was updated?
 - What rating would you give this website?
 - As the novel is read, compile a list of good quality verbs that help to describe the action scenes from *The Trophy Kid*.
 - Photocopy these scenes, asking students to highlight appropriate 'action words' that help to bring the scenes alive.
 - Compile a 'super list' of these verbs and display around the classroom.
 - The reporting of sport in the media is a major component of many sports.
 - Read or view examples of sports journalism/reports, investigating the language conventions and sequence of a sports report.
 - Invite a sports journalist from a local community newspaper to speak with the class about their job of sports reporting.
 - With older students, examine the metaphors often associated with sports reporting, e.g. State of Origin Rugby League matches or AFL grand finals are often heavily laden with metaphors of war.
 - View the sports section of a news broadcast. Analyse the figurative language used in some of these reports. Discuss whether these comparisons embellish or deplete the report.
 - Have students choose a sporting match on which to report. This could be a televised game or one played at school. This could take the form of:
 - a videoed interview or report as seen on the news.
 - a written article e.g. newspaper/Internet article.
 - a feature article in a sports magazine.
 - an interview with the president of the local sporting club.

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- an article for the school newsletter reporting on an inter-school game.
- We all need strategies at different times to help us stay calm and focused. Investigate the various strategies used by elite sportspeople to maintain calm and focus such as listening to their favourite music, playing certain video games, and visualising.
- Complete a Concentration Grid Activity:
 - This is a fun activity that elite athletes often practice. The concentration grid consists of 1-99 numbers randomly assigned on a ½ page grid. Students need to find the number you call out, cross it out, then find each number in sequence for the next two minutes. (Pre-made grids are available online <http://www.morris.umn.edu/~devriesc/2402/concentration%20grid.pdf>)
 - Chart the results on the board (0-5 numbers found, 6-10, 11-15 etc)
 - Read aloud from *The Trophy Kid* for 10-20 minutes, before trying the grid again.
 - Explain to students that reading relaxes the mind, which is one of the key components of concentration.
 - Advise students not to get frustrated if they can't find the number they are looking for but to stay calm and let their eyes continually scan the grid until they find it.
 - Chart the results again, noting improvement.
- The relationship between Marcus and his grandfather is a very important one. Marcus' Granddad is his mentor.
 - What is a mentor? What do they do?
 - Do you have a mentor? If so, who is this? Write a letter or email to this person, explaining why they are special to you.
 - Explain the role that Marcus' grandfather plays in *The Trophy Kid*.
 - How is Marcus' grandfather different from his father?
 - How does Marcus' father contribute to the anxiety and pressure that Marcus feels?
- Granddad makes a point of discussing the quote written on the wall at Wimbledon :
 - "If you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two imposters just the same" (p22).
 - Discuss what this quote means.

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- How does this quote relate to Marcus?
 - Read the whole poem 'If' by Rudyard Kipling from which this quote is taken.
 - View Roger Federer reciting 'If' on YouTube
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFcJPecO568&NR=1>
 - View Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal reciting 'If' on YouTube
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=is-JCJCUy18&feature=related>
 - Use Movie Maker or Photostory 3 to create your own clip using 'If' as the central theme.
- What does Granddad mean when he says, "The best match I ever played, I lost" (p89).
 - Why does he wait until this part of the book before talking with Marcus about this?
 - Why does Marcus forfeit the match against Jett?
 - People often use inspirational quotes to help guide them through important times in their lives.
 - Choose a famous inspirational quote, either from the Internet or from a book of quotations:
 - Research the person who created this quote.
 - Investigate the circumstances that led to this quote being created?
 - What happened before and after the quote was said?
 - How might you apply this quote to your own life?
 - Re-write this quote in your own words.
 - Display these quotes around the classroom. Discuss what they mean.
 - Try to create your own inspirational quote.
 - Marcus begins to have some unusual thoughts that leads to his obsession:
 - *If you don't touch me six times, you will lose the next state title* (p.57).
 - Explain how these thoughts escalate to become an overwhelming aspect of Marcus' everyday routines.
 - Have you ever had some thoughts that you know are irrational but that still persist?
 - What's the difference between superstitions and obsessions?
 - Discuss the notion of catching or stopping unhelpful thoughts before they become a problem.
 - Initiate a discussion about unwanted thoughts. What are they? Brainstorm ways of getting rid of them. Answers can include: immediately thinking about something else; distracting yourself with a fun activity such as exercise, reading or playing a game; visualising yourself 'shooting' the thought down.

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- Research the following tennis players who have struggled with relationships with their fathers, all who coached them:
 - Jennifer Capriati
 - Andre Agassi
 - Jelena Dokic
 - Debate the following topic: Should parents coach their own children?
- Many of Marcus' issues revolve around grief. Everyone experiences grief at some point. It could be the loss of a significant person or object, or losing friends through moving house or going to a new school. Brainstorm some of the important ways of being a supportive person to someone dealing with grief, including:
 - Accepting their feelings no matter what they are or how unusual they appear.
 - Accepting silences without filling them with words.
 - Using physical touch if acceptable when words seem inappropriate.
 - Encouraging expression of emotion.
 - Refraining from giving advice, telling them what to feel, telling them what to think, insisting the person talk about their loss.
 - Being there and listening.
 - Visit www.mindmatters.com.au
 - Read a range of picture books that deal with the themes of death and gradually overcoming grief:
 - *Old Pig* by Margaret Wild.
 - *Lucy's Bay* by Gary Crew.
 - *Schumann the Shoeman* by John and Stella Danalis.
- Discuss the following quote on p53: "*But what I don't love is going to bed the night before a big match and not being able to sleep, knowing the next day I'll either feel great if I win or terrible if I lose.*"
 - How important is winning? Can you lose and still have a good time playing sport? What can we learn from losing?
 - Draw a picture of someone who has just lost an important match and use a thought bubble to show something negative that they could be feeling. Now draw a different thought bubble that shows the loser thinking something positive.
- Choose an image (such as an avalanche) that for you represents what it would feel like to lose something important. Now choose an image (such as a car being fixed) that indicates healing.
- Mental Health for Youth is an important theme of *The Trophy Kid*

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- Visit the website <http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/> .
- Watch the advertisements and discuss how mental health problems need to be less stigmatised and brought out into the open.
- Students can create their own advertisement promoting Youth Mental Health.
- Working in small groups, students could generate an ad idea and act it out as a freeze-frame with one member of the group explaining the idea behind it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pat Flynn grew up on an old dairy farm in Jimboomba, Queensland, before moving to the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra on a tennis scholarship. Flynn earned a Bachelor of Journalism with Honours before playing and coaching on the professional tennis circuit and writing articles for sports magazines.

After becoming a teacher, Flynn's observations of young people – their interests and stories – led to the *Alex Jackson* series. He has now written 16 books and gives regular presentations and writing workshops for students and adults. *The Tuckshop Kid* was a CBCA Honour Book for Younger Readers in 2007, and has been shortlisted in 2010 for the REAL Awards – Australia's biggest children's choice book awards.

Pat likes to start the day with a surf and end it walking along the beach with his wife and son. He also plays the occasional tennis tournament in his spare time.

Website: www.patflynnwriter.com

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:

Tom Jellett was born in Manly, New South Wales, and lived in Brisbane before his family moved to Adelaide. After graduating from the University of South Australia in 1995 with a Bachelor of Design (Illustration) he worked as a freelance illustrator. He also illustrated *The Tuckshop Kid* and *The Toilet Kid*.