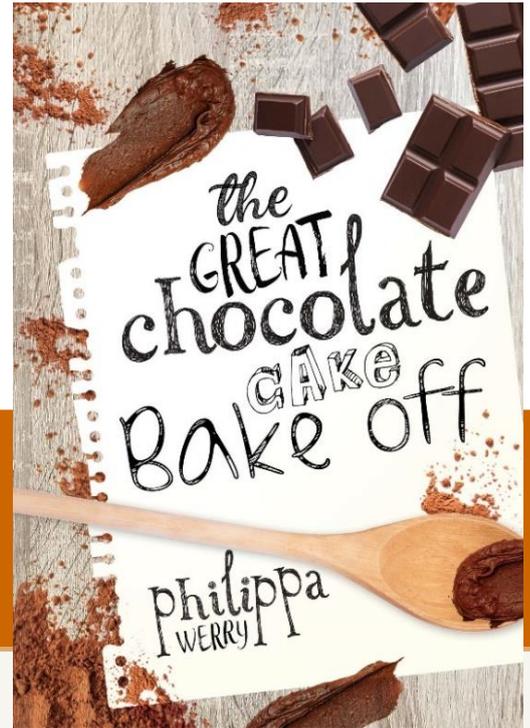


The Great Chocolate Cake Bake Off

By Philippa Werry



Curriculum strands:

Reading / writing / social studies / art

Synopsis

Nicholas wants to find one thing that he's really good at. His friends are all good at something. His annoying next-door neighbour Ruby claims to be good at lots of things. And then there's Oliver Billington, who always wins everything.

Perhaps he's good at baking. Nicholas discovers he can bake delicious and impressive cakes. But are they delicious and impressive enough for The Great Chocolate Cake Bake-Off?

He's got his Top Secret Ingredient. That might help. But what if it runs out...

About the Author

Philippa Werry was born in Christchurch and grew up in Wellington, Auckland and New Plymouth. From age six, she wrote stories and poems for the Children's Page that appeared every Saturday in the Evening Post newspaper. She now writes fiction, non-fiction and plays for children and young adults on many different topics. Her interest in history has led to titles such as *The Telegram*, *Anzac Day*, *Lighthouse Family*, *Armistice Day*, *The New Zealand Wars*, *Antarctic Journeys* and *Our Incredible Dogs*, but she also enjoys writing with warmth and humour about family and friendships. Philippa lives in Wellington with her husband and children. For more information about her writing, see her website:

<http://www.philippawerry.co.nz/>

Writing Style

The Great Chocolate Cake Bake Off is written in the first-person past tense. The main character is 12-year-old Nicholas, and other significant characters include his father, Adam (a sculptor), little brother Zac, close friends Rajiv, Mike and Amy, his teacher Miss Winsome, the Billington siblings Oliver and Ffyona, his neighbour Ruby and her mother Bella, and other friends, classmates and neighbours.

The Great Chocolate Cake Bake Off is written for the 10-12+ age group. It is 296 pages long and will appeal to both boys and girls. It would also make a good choice for reading to a classroom.

Themes

Courage

Friendship

Resilience

Family

Being yourself

School life

The Story behind the Book

The initial idea behind *The Great Chocolate Cake Bake Off* came from our family experiences of competitions. Our children often entered (and sometimes won) competitions, including a name-the-tiger competition at Wellington Zoo and a colouring competition for Life Flight. The prize for that was a flight to school in a helicopter.

I was also interested in the idea of finding what you are good at. Some people know this from an early age. They are good at ballet or gymnastics or sport or music or art or maths or writing. Other people take longer to find what it is that they shine at.

When I combined those two ideas with the idea of baking – another popular activity in our house – *The Great Chocolate Cake Bake Off* was born. First published by Scholastic in 2007, it's one of my most popular novels, and I'm glad to be able to introduce it to a new generation of readers. It's a fun and engaging story about families, friends, neighbours, school, friendship, loyalty, resilience, finding your own path in life, being brave enough to try new things, not giving up hope – and chocolate cake, of course!

For Class Discussion

- Look at the front and back covers. What do the images on the front suggest to you? What do you learn from the text on the back?
- Based on the title and the information on the covers, what do you think this story is about? Who is the main character?
- Are there any clues in the first chapter that help you work out when the story is set? Do you know exactly when it is set? (pp. 5-17)
- What do you learn about Nicholas's family from the first chapter? What do you learn about Ruby's family and/or Oliver and Ffiona Billington's family? (pp.5-17)

- Who does Nicholas hope will move into the next-door house, and why? Who actually moves in? (pp.8-9, 10-13)
- Why does Nicholas have a feeling that “things were going to be different from now on”? (p.17)
- Why does Nicholas’s father suggest that Ruby could come over to their place after school? Does Nicholas agree with his suggestion? Why or why not? (pp. 24-26)
- Who was Maddy Morrison and why was she famous at Nicholas’s school? (p.28)
- What does Nicholas cook for dinner when Ruby first arrives? (pp.45-57) What does he cook a few nights later? What problems does he face each time? What does he find easy or hard about cooking dinner? (pp. 60-72)
- What are Nicholas’s friends Rajiv and Amy good at? What do they think Nicholas is good at? (pp.29, 78, 86-87)
- Why does Ruby say “We all know you’re a lousy cook. But maybe you can bake.” (p.103) What does Nicholas like about baking muffins? (p. 104)
- When Nicholas searches for recipe books on the library computer, he finds them “all at numbers like 641.” (p. 108) What does “641” mean in a library setting?
- Why is Nicholas taken aback to find that Ted is the librarian? (pp. 108-110)
- When did Nicholas realise that “not all chocolate cakes were alike”? What are some ingredients that might go into a chocolate cake (p. 117)?
- Where does the title of the book come from? (p. 132)
- What are the prizes in the competition? What does “terms and conditions” mean? (p. 135)
- Where and when does Nicholas find his Top-Secret Special Ingredient? (pp. 142-144) What do you think it might be?
- Why is Nicholas surprised to see Ruby walking to school with Oliver Billington? (p. 163-165)
- Who are the three judges for the regional final? Has Nicholas ever met them before? Does he know who they are? (pp.186-187) Why does Nicholas think that he has “blown it”? (p. 189) Who goes through to the national finals? (p.194)
- What does Nicholas like about being a “celebrity”? What doesn’t he like about being one? (pp. 197-205) How does he feel as the national final gets closer? (p. 214)
- Why is Nicholas confused about whether or not to feel sorry for Ffiona Billington? (pp. 214-216)
- Why is Nicholas worried that the national final is going to take place on a Friday? (p. 223) What does he pack in the plastic box to take with him? (pp. 232-233) What seems like a “good omen” at the hotel? (p. 238)
- Why does Nicholas’s stomach feel like it has “plummeted right down to the ground-floor entrance of the hotel”? (p.257) What is missing from the plastic box? What do you think happened to it?
- Who are the people Nicholas thinks about when he remembers everyone who has helped, encouraged and supported him? (p. 273) What does Ruby’s note mean? (pp. 273-274)
- How does Nicholas feel at the end of the book? How does Oliver feel? (p. 293-296)

Activities

ACTIVITY ONE: COMPETITIONS

Make up your own competition and design a poster and entry form for it. What are the rules of your competition? Who can enter? What are the prizes? Write a newspaper or school newsletter article encouraging people to enter the competition or profiling your imaginary winners.

ACTIVITY TWO: INTERVIEW A CHARACTER

Choose any character from the book and write down what you know about them. Draw up a list of questions that you would like to ask them. Exchange lists with another class member and try to answer some of the questions.

ACTIVITY THREE: COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Draw 2 columns on a piece of A4 paper. Write “Nicholas” at the top of one column and your own name at the top of the other column. Write down in the first column things that you know about Nicholas’s class and school, and compare them with your own class and school.

ACTIVITY FOUR: CHEMISTRY

Choose one of the experiments that Nicholas carries out. (See e.g. pp. 33, 59-60, 94-95, 116-117) Draw a series of diagrams to explain each step of the procedure. OR Make a list of all the things that Nicholas learns to cook. Choose one of them and carry out an investigation as to what steps are involved and why they work to create the finished product.

ACTIVITY FIVE: BOOK REVIEW

Write a book review for *The Great Chocolate Cake Bake Off*. Include information about what kind of book it is and what it is about. Describe the setting of the story and explain why it is important. Write about Nicholas, Zac and Ruby and the challenges that they face. Remember to include your personal opinion about the novel.

ACTIVITY SIX: POSTER OR STATIC IMAGE

Design a poster or static image advertising the novel for your school library. Remember to combine verbal and visual features to convey your ideas. Look online for copyright-free illustrations and images that might make your poster more appealing and encourage others to read the book.

ACTIVITY SEVEN: MENU PREPARATION

Draw up a menu for a dinner you would like to cook. If you need a recipe, look one up in a recipe book or online. Make a list of the ingredients you would need. Make a timetable to show what you would do and how long it might take to prepare the meal.

ACTIVITY EIGHT: RECIPES

Look at some recipe books in the library or at home. How are recipe books arranged? How are recipes usually set out? Make a list of ways in which recipe books are different from others sorts of books, like novels or textbooks or non-fiction books.

ACTIVITY NINE: RECYCLE

- a) Make a list of all the different materials that Nicholas's father uses in his recycled sculptures. (See e.g. pp. 8, 10, 27, 171-172, 238)
- b) Make a list of any materials around your house, school or neighbourhood that you might be able to use to make a recycled sculpture.
- c) Design and/or create a recycled sculpture of your own, using some of those materials.