



Rocky & Me

Teaching Toolkit



AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S
TELEVISION FOUNDATION

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Using This Resource

Rocky & Me follows the story of Stella, an 11-year old girl living with cerebral palsy. When Stella gets her first wheelchair, she also gains independence and confidence.

The Rocky & Me Teaching Toolkit will support Year 5 and 6 teachers and students to explore themes from the short film, with learning tasks related to disability, inclusivity,

friendships, puberty, wellbeing and media representation. Tasks are mapped to the Australian Curriculum, linking to English, Health and Physical Education, Critical and Creative Thinking, and Personal and Social Capability. The resource and film could also be incorporated into Respectful Relationships education for upper primary students.



Synopsis

Rocky & Me follows the story of Stella, an 11-year old girl living with cerebral palsy. When Stella gets her first wheelchair, she also gains her independence.

Stella hates change. At first, she rejects the new wheelchair – the other kids judge her enough as it is. After a humiliating experience at school, where Stella is painfully slow to collect a merit certificate, she begins to wonder if her new wheelchair might make her faster... With some clever persuasion from her neighbour Dylan, Stella agrees to give the wheelchair a spin. Stella can't believe how speedy she is! She embraces her wheelchair and names it 'Rocky'.

Rocky gives Stella a sense of freedom and confidence she's never experienced before. Stella's best friend Josipa slowly becomes jealous of Stella's new wheels, feeling left out. When Josipa begs Stella to help her cheat on their maths exam, Stella is torn. Stella's newfound confidence gives her the courage to stand up to her best friend. This action challenges their friendship as Josipa feels she is being replaced by Rocky. Josipa is upset and seeks revenge, posting Stella's private diary around school.

Unfazed by her friend's jealousy, Stella begins to embrace her individuality. She breaks into the local pool after hours to swim in secret because she hates people looking at her. Stella loves being in the water;

it gives her the sensation of walking. The new lifeguard, Busy, discovers Stella in the pool. Impressed by Stella's sass and attitude, Busy offers to train her privately – specifically, to correct Stella's uncoordinated stroke technique.

Believing that Stella is ready to show everyone what she's made of, Busy signs her up to compete at the local Swim Meet. Stella is nervous before her big race, but she has the support of her dad, her neighbour Dylan and her best friend Josipa (who apologises, explaining she felt replaced by Rocky).

Time for the big race! With her dad's unwavering love cheering her on from the sidelines, Stella wins the Swim Meet. She proves that when you believe in yourself anything is possible!

This is a story about learning how to be comfortable in your own skin, getting out of your comfort zone, and discovering what you are really capable of.

Come on the ride of a lifetime with Stella and Rocky!



Learning Tasks

Task 1: Cerebral palsy

Clip: 00:00 – 01:55



Stella, the main character in *Rocky & Me*, is an 11-year old girl living with cerebral palsy. Learning more about this condition will provide context and help students to better understand Stella's perspective.

Cerebral palsy is a group of disorders that affect a person's ability to move. It is caused when a person's brain is injured early in life, either before birth or as a young baby. This damage means that messages being sent from a person's brain to their muscles are affected, impacting their movement, balance and posture. According to the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, cerebral palsy is the most common physical disability in childhood.

The opening scenes of *Rocky & Me* show Stella swimming in a pool; this is where she feels 'free'. Out of the water, she uses orthotics and a walking frame to help her walk. Stella rejects her new wheelchair because she is worried that people will stare at her. But her dad maintains that the wheelchair will make life easier by improving her mobility, assuring Stella that: 'Your cerebral palsy is one of the things that

makes you who you are; it's something to be proud of.'

After viewing this scene, ask students to independently respond to the following 3-2-1 prompt in their writing journals.

- Three things you know about disabilities.
- Two questions you have about cerebral palsy.
- One observation about Stella's experience of cerebral palsy.

Students' responses could be shared in a class discussion or reviewed at a later point. These responses could guide further teaching on cerebral palsy, disabilities and inclusion, and allow teachers to address possible misconceptions or stereotypes with the class.

Curriculum Links

	Year 5	Year 6
Critical and Creative Thinking	Identify and clarify relevant information and prioritise ideas	
English	Use comprehension strategies to analyse information, integrating and linking ideas from a variety of print and digital sources (ACELY1703)	Use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse information and ideas, comparing content from a variety of textual sources including media and digital texts (ACELY1713)
Health and Physical Education	Recognise how media and important people in the community influence personal attitudes, beliefs, decisions and behaviours (ACPPS057)	

Task 2: Inclusive Classrooms

Clip: 02:03 – 03:33

Just before lunch, Ms. Bassiouni announces that Stella has won a merit award for achievement in maths. Stella slowly walks towards her teacher to collect the award, but the lunchtime bell suddenly rings, sending her classmates jostling for the door. Stella's neighbour Dylan remains seated and is the only person to see her accept the award.

As a class, discuss why the students' behaviour in this scene was problematic. How do you think Stella felt in this moment? What could her peers have done differently to demonstrate respect, empathy and inclusivity? Should Ms. Bassiouni have done anything differently? Which shared values or expectations guide inclusive and respectful behaviours in your own school?

In a think-pair-share task, have students individually write their definition of an inclusive classroom. Ask students to share their responses with a partner and then rewrite a mutually agreed upon definition after discussion. Bringing students back together, ask pairs to summarise the revisions they made and share their jointly constructed definitions. These definitions could form the basis of a class agreement on inclusivity or be recorded on an anchor chart titled 'What inclusion means to us'.

Curriculum Links

	Year 5	Year 6
Critical and Creative Thinking	Combine ideas in a variety of ways and from a range of sources to create new possibilities	
English	Re-read and edit student's own and others' work using agreed criteria for text structures and language features (ACELY1705)	Re-read and edit students' own and others' work using agreed criteria and explaining editing choices (ACELY1715)
Health and Physical Education	Identify how valuing diversity positively influences the wellbeing of the community (ACPPS060)	





Task 3: Positive friendships

Clip: 03:35 – 05:19

Positive friendships help us to have fun, reduce stress, develop social skills, and build confidence and self-esteem. They also enable us to learn about ourselves and develop our personal identities. Stella and Dylan’s friendship in Rocky & Me is an example of such a relationship.

In this clip, Dylan convinces an initially reluctant Stella to try out her new wheelchair. Once Stella gets the hang of steering ‘Rocky’, she experiences a sense of freedom and confidence that she has never felt before.

How does Dylan encourage his friend and support her in making this positive change?

Before viewing, ask students to focus on Dylan’s actions and dialogue to identify specific examples. For instance, he challenges Stella, encourages her, ‘documents the moment’, participates alongside her, jokes with her, and then celebrates her achievement.

After discussing their observations and further thoughts on positive friendships, ask students

to individually record their understandings using a Frayer model. Model the use of this graphic organiser if required, then have students write a definition, characteristics, examples and non-examples for positive friendships. Discussing similarities and differences in students’ work – and the possible reasons for this – may deepen their understandings about positive friendships.

Curriculum Links

	Year 5	Year 6
Personal and Social Capability	Identify the differences between positive and negative relationships and ways of managing these	
English	Clarify understanding of content as it unfolds in formal and informal situations, connecting ideas to students’ own experiences and present and justify a point of view (ACELY1699)	Participate in and contribute to discussions, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions (ACELY1709)
Health and Physical Education	Examine how identities are influenced by people and places (ACPPS051) Practise skills to establish and manage relationships (ACPPS055)	

Task 4: Puberty

Clip: 06:04 – 07:22

Acknowledging that Stella is growing up, her dad prepares a practical 'period pack' for her. He wants Stella to have everything she needs if her first period starts unexpectedly at school (as happens with Josipa later in the film).

Despite some initial awkwardness, Stella's dad is comfortable helping his daughter through this transition. Unfortunately – and for varying reasons – not all students have

the same level of parental support in navigating the changes related to puberty. In pairs, ask students to brainstorm people, resources and organisations that could assist peers who need extra support or advice during puberty. This might include friends, siblings or extended family, a homeroom teacher or school nurse, books or quality online resources, a family doctor, or organisations such as Kids Helpline. Findings could be shared during a whole-

class reflection, compiled in a class book, or provided as a take-home resource for students.

Curriculum Links

	Year 5	Year 6
Personal and Social Capability	Identify a community need or problem and consider ways to take action to address it	
English	Use interaction skills, for example paraphrasing, questioning and interpreting non-verbal cues and choose vocabulary and vocal effects appropriate for different audiences and purposes (ACELY1796)	Use interaction skills, varying conventions of spoken interactions such as voice volume, tone, pitch and pace, according to group size, formality of interaction and needs and expertise of the audience (ACELY1816)
Health and Physical Education	Investigate resources and strategies to manage changes and transitions associated with puberty (ACPPS052)	



Task 5: Managing Conflict

Clip: 09:17 – 10:19

Josipa begs maths whiz Stella to sit next to her during the maths exam; she wants to copy Stella's answers in order to pass the exam. Drawing on her newfound confidence, Stella stands up to her best friend and says she will not let her copy. Josipa dismisses Stella, arguing that Stella owes her for the many times she has 'helped' her.

Josipa is jealous of Stella's new wheelchair and perhaps uneasy about the shifting power balance in their relationship. However, this is no excuse to make such a demand or to treat Stella in this way.

In groups, ask students to discuss the following questions and then share with the class.

1. What could Stella do next to resolve or diffuse the situation?
2. What might stop her from taking these steps?
3. What would you do in a similar situation?

Curriculum Links

	Year 5	Year 6
Personal and Social Capability	Identify causes and effects of conflict, and practise different strategies to diffuse or resolve conflict situations. Identify the differences between positive and negative relationships and ways of managing these	
English	Present a point of view about particular literary texts using appropriate metalanguage, and reflecting on the viewpoints of others (ACELT1609)	Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1613)
Health and Physical Education	Practise skills to establish and manage relationships (ACPPS055) Examine the influence of emotional responses on behaviour and relationships (ACPPS056)	

Task 6: Negative relationships

Clip: 11:27 – 12:41

Both positive and negative relationships are portrayed in *Rocky & Me*, encouraging students to reflect on and discuss what it means to be a good friend. In this clip, Josipa seeks ‘revenge’ after Stella intentionally misleads her in their maths exam. She takes Stella’s private diary and deliberately shares it around the school without consent. Ms. Bassiouni catches this callous behaviour and calls Josipa into her office.

write a diary entry about this incident from Josipa’s perspective. This fictional reflection could include Josipa’s motivations, what Ms. Bassiouni said to her, and whether she learnt anything about herself or her friendships. Challenge students to incorporate dialogue, settings, their inferences about characters, and other aspects of the film in their writing.

As an independent creative writing task, have students

Curriculum Links

	Year 5	Year 6
Personal and Social Capability	Explain the influence of emotions on behaviour, learning and relationships. Identify the differences between positive and negative relationships and ways of managing these	
English	Create literary texts using realistic and fantasy settings and characters that draw on the worlds represented in texts students have experienced (ACELT1612)	Create literary texts that adapt or combine aspects of texts students have experienced in innovative ways (ACELT1618)
Health and Physical Education	Examine the influence of emotional responses on behaviour and relationships (ACPPS056)	

Task 7: Health and wellbeing

Clip: 13:27 – 15:59

Despite being a passionate swimmer, Stella only ever swims in secret. For months she has been sneaking into the local pool after hours to avoid people staring at her. With her growing confidence however, Stella commits to regular coaching with the new lifeguard, Busy. She improves both her technique and determination and agrees to participate in a local swimming competition – in front of an audience.

In this scene, Stella has found the courage to set healthy boundaries with

her friend Josipa. She is friendly towards Josipa but maintains that she is not ready to forgive her recent betrayals. After embracing her new wheelchair and developing her swim stroke, Stella has overcome her fear of judgement. She confidently announces: 'Swimming is my thing. Win or lose, I'm proud!'

As a class, jointly construct a mind map about the ways that swimming improves Stella's health and wellbeing. Consider the physical, social and emotional benefits the

activity provides. Next, have students repeat this exercise independently, focussing on a physical activity that improves their own health and wellbeing.

Curriculum Links

	Year 5	Year 6
Critical and Creative Thinking	Apply knowledge gained from one context to another unrelated context and identify new meaning	
English	Use comprehension strategies to analyse information, integrating and linking ideas from a variety of print and digital sources (ACELY1703)	Use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse information and ideas, comparing content from a variety of textual sources including media and digital texts (ACELY1713)
Health and Physical Education	Explore how participation in outdoor activities supports personal and community health and wellbeing and creates connections to natural and built environments (ACPPS059) Examine how identities are influenced by people and places (ACPPS051)	



Task 8: Generating questions

Clip: 16:00 – 19:23

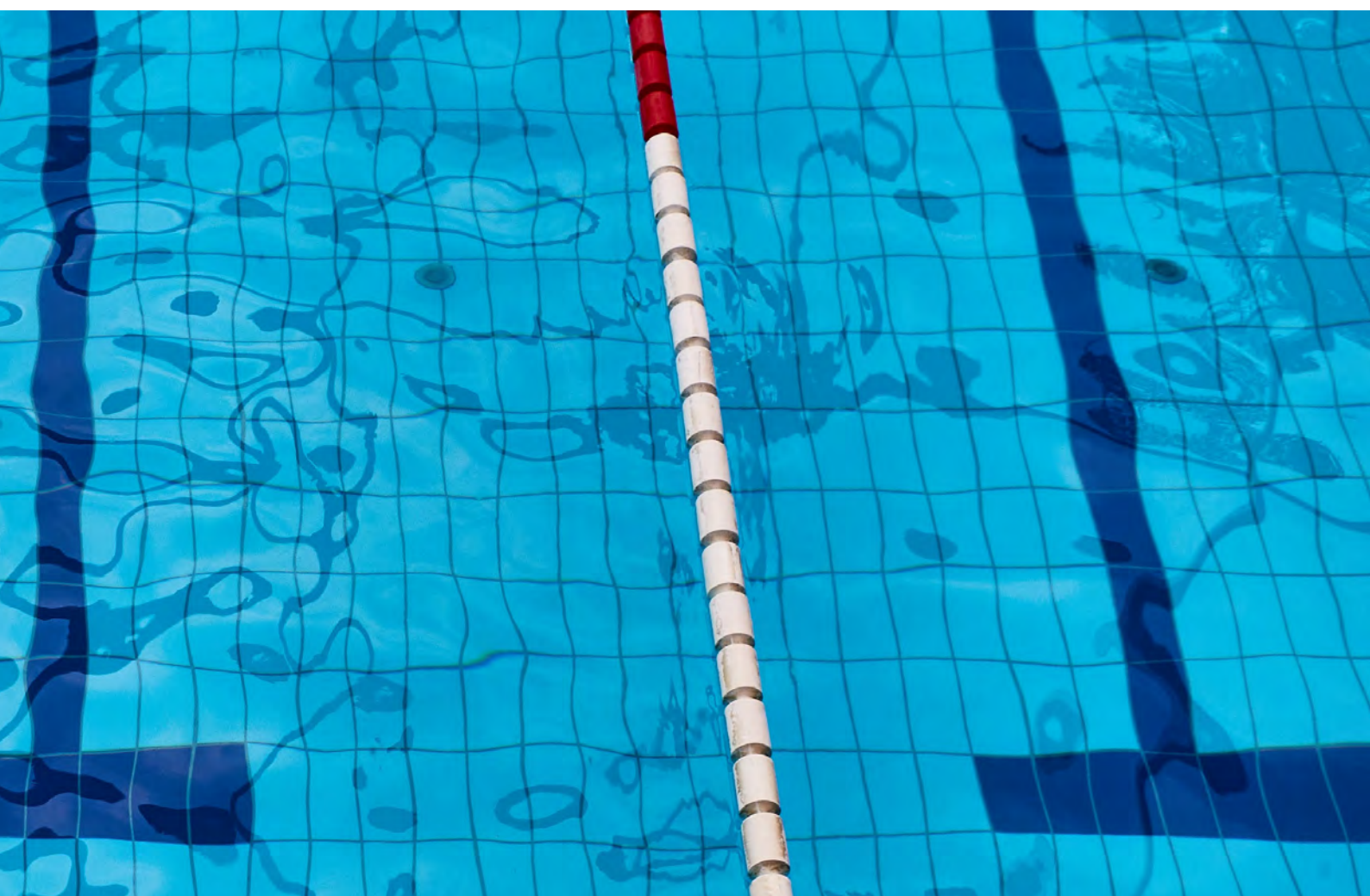
After correcting Stella's stroke technique through private swimming lessons, coach Busy signs her up to compete at the local Swim Meet. Stella is nervous before the big race, but she has the support of her dad, neighbour Dylan and her apologetic friend Josipa. Stella goes on to win her race, setting a new Swim Meet record in the process. She proves that when you believe in yourself, anything is possible.

Have students assume the role of a reporter covering the Swim Meet for the local newspaper. They need to generate three interesting questions for an exciting post-race interview. Students should consider the interests of the newspaper's largely adult audience, and the potential for sharing positive messages about diversity and participation in sport.

Give students three slips of paper. On each slip of paper, have students write a question

they would direct to either Stella, her dad, coach Busy or Josipa. Students can draw on their prior knowledge of the characters in this task.

Finish the lesson with a whole class discussion on the types of questions asked and which might elicit the most interesting responses. Students' questions could also be used as creative writing prompts in a subsequent lesson.



Curriculum Links

	Year 5	Year 6
Critical and Creative Thinking	Pose questions to clarify and interpret information and probe for causes and consequences	
English	Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive print and multimodal texts, choosing text structures, language features, images and sound appropriate to purpose and audience (ACELY1704)	Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, choosing and experimenting with text structures, language features, images and digital resources appropriate to purpose and audience (ACELY1714)
Health and Physical Education	Recognise how media and important people in the community influence personal attitudes, beliefs, decisions and behaviours (ACPPS057)	

Task 9: Themes



Curriculum Links

	Year 5	Year 6
Critical and Creative Thinking	Identify and justify the thinking behind choices they have made. Assess whether there is adequate reasoning and evidence to justify a claim, conclusion or outcome	
English	Navigate and read texts for specific purposes applying appropriate text processing strategies, for example predicting and confirming, monitoring meaning, skimming and scanning (ACELY1702)	Select, navigate and read texts for a range of purposes, applying appropriate text processing strategies and interpreting structural features, for example table of contents, glossary, chapters, headings and subheadings (ACELY1712)
Health and Physical Education	Identify preferred learning styles and work habits. Contribute to groups and teams, suggesting improvements in methods used for group investigations and projects	

After viewing *Rocky & Me* in its entirety, split students into small groups to discuss and identify themes from the film. Have groups report back to the class and explain the choices they made. Discuss the merits of different suggestions to mutually agree upon five key themes to examine. These might include independence, friendship, disability, the benefits of sport, or growing up.

Divide students into five groups for a jigsaw activity, allocating one theme to each group. Challenge each group to recall three examples of this theme being explored in the film. The group then devises one question related to their theme, and each member jots this down ahead of the next step.

Rearrange the groups so that the new groups have at least one person from each of the first groups. With this arrangement,

members in the new groups will have all discussed different themes, and all have a thematic question to share. As in a traditional jigsaw activity, each group member becomes an 'expert' and must teach their peers what was discovered in the previous grouping. The groups try and answer each thematic question together.

To conclude the lesson, have students share their learning about the themes of the film. Students could also reflect on the benefits (and possible drawbacks) of learning collaboratively through the jigsaw strategy.



Task 10: Representation

Rocky & Me was one of three short children's films commissioned to premiere in the DisRupted series on the 2019 International Day of People with Disability. The three films were led by emerging Australian creatives with disability. *Rocky & Me* creators Johanna Garvin and Holly Lyons set out to represent people living with a disability both on and off the screen, with Stella's story partly based on Johanna's own experience of disability.

After viewing *Rocky & Me*, have students consider and discuss the importance of diverse representation in our media – for both creators and audiences. Did the creators of *Rocky & Me* achieve their purpose? As the audience, how did you engage with, respond to, and understand the story? One or more of the following statements could be explored in class discussions, a research project, or incorporated into a film review.

- Seeing relatable characters on screen is affirming and empowering for all people.
- Disability is under-represented on screen when compared to the Australian population.
- The media can influence personal attitudes, beliefs, decisions and behaviours.
- By representing disability as a part of everyday life, the media can play a role in dispelling negative stereotypes and misconceptions.
- Filmmakers with a disability bring unique and authentic perspectives to their storytelling.

Curriculum Links

	Year 5	Year 6
Personal and Social Capability	Explain how means of communication differ within and between communities and identify the role these play in helping or hindering understanding of others	
English	Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts (ACELT1608)	Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1613)
Health and Physical Education	Recognise how media and important people in the community influence personal attitudes, beliefs, decisions and behaviours (ACPPS057) Identify how valuing diversity positively influences the wellbeing of the community (ACPPS060)	



Additional Resources

The following resources and organisations can provide teachers and students with further information and/or support.

International Day of People with a Disability:

<https://www.idpwd.com.au>

Kids Helpline:

<https://kidshelpline.com.au>

Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne:

https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Cerebral_palsy

Student Wellbeing Hub:

<https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au>

United Nations on Disability and the Media:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/disability-and-the-media.html>

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