

Teachers Notes

by Lindsay Williams

Darius Bell and the Glitter Pool

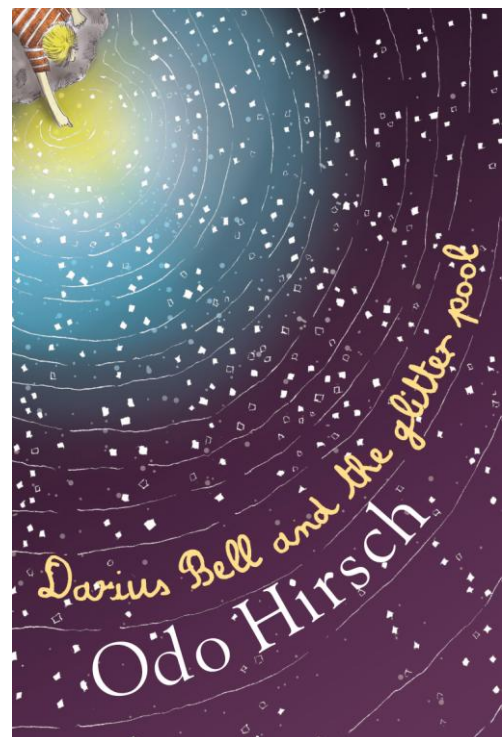
by
Odo Hirsch

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Recommended for ages 12-15+ yrs

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INTRODUCTION

PLOT SUMMARY

Darius Bell lives in a huge house on a large estate with his loving mother (Micheline) his proud and stubborn father (Hector) and his older, cynical brother (Cyrus). His family is an old and distinguished one: 'The Bells – or the Arbuthnot-Huntington-Castleton-Bells to give them their full name – as a rule, didn't get jobs. They didn't work in business, or practise law, or carry out any other activities of a commercial or industrial nature. Traditionally, they had been statesmen and generals.' As a result, the family had been showered with honours, rewards and gifts – including the land *on* which and house *in* which Darius and his family live.

However, there hasn't been anyone famous in the family for years, the money is running out and the Bells have fallen on hard times. The lack of money creates a problem when the Bells are required to make a once in twenty-five year gift to the local town council; if an appropriate gift is not presented, the Bell family name will be tarnished and the house and land will be taken from them by the hostile mayor, Mr Podcock.

Desperate to help, Darius does everything he can to come up with an idea to save the family home. And then, after a small earthquake, Darius and his friends (Oliver Roberts and Paul Klasky) find a beautiful cave full of what appears to be rubies and gold. Will this be the answer to the Bells' problems? Or is the old saying true: all that glitters is not gold?

A well-paced story full of twists and turns, and interesting characters, *Darius Bell and the glitter pool* explores issues such as responsibility, independence, pride, honour, friendship and the meaning of family.

ENGLISH

IMMEDIATE RESPONSES

Journal writing

As students read *Darius Bell and the glitter pool*, they could keep a reading journal. This could contain:

- brief summaries of what is happening and to whom
- reactions to the characters and events (using appropriate emoticons, perhaps)
- predictions and questions.

Alternatively, older students could imagine that the book will be converted to a movie. As they read, they should make notes about:

- what events and characters would be included/left out/added
- names of actors who could play some of the characters; sketches of characters and costumes could be made
- settings and real places that could be used for filming; sketches could be made of the sets and props required
- possible music that could be used on the soundtrack.

Simile poem

When finished the novel, students create a simile poem which expresses their reaction to the book:

Darius Bell and the glitter pool looks like...

sounds like...

feels like...

tastes like...

smells like....

Share students' responses and discuss why they may have varied or been very similar.

CHARACTERS

Sociogram

Make a sociogram to show the:

- major characters in the novel
- how characters are related and how they feel towards each other.

The beginnings of a sociogram can be found in Blackline Master 1 at the end of these notes. Start the sociogram once students are three or four chapters into the novel.

Return to it at the end of the book. What changes, if any, have occurred to the relationships? Why?

Literary Hall of Fame

Students profile one character using Blackline Master 2: Literary Hall of Fame Nomination Form. They imagine that an annual award is given to a memorable character from a novel who is entered in the Literary Hall of Fame. This is their opportunity to nominate a character from *Darius Bell and the glitter pool*. After students have completed their entry, compare nominations and discuss reasons for similarities and differences. Debate the nominations and vote for the final winner. Hold an awards ceremony where the winner is announced.

Hot seat role-play

In groups of three to five, ask students to write five questions that they would like to ask one of the characters from the novel; initially, each group should write questions for the same character. Then one student is invited to sit in the hot seat – a chair at the front of the room. In the hot seat, they will answer questions in the role as the nominated character. As an extension, this could be turned into a panel discussion with different students taking on the role of different characters. Students in role as these characters could then ask each other questions and reinforce or challenge each others' answers.

Family tree

Create a family tree for the Bell Family.

What is it with trios?

In *Darius Bell and the glitter pool*, Darius has two friends – Paul Klasky and Oliver Roberts. The idea of three friends working together to solve a problem is quite common in stories. What other stories can students think of where this occurs? Why is three such a common number? What does Odo Hirsch do to make the characters quite distinctive, so that readers won't be confused?

Construction of characters

Characters in books are not real; they are created by authors using the tools at their disposal: a name; what characters do; what they say; what others say about them; and how they are described. Take a closer look at how the characters are constructed by Odo Hirsch. Draw up a table along the lines of the one below:

| Character's name: | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|--|
| What the character does <i>Hint: Find the action verbs associated with the character</i> | What the character says | What other characters say about the character | How does Odo Hirsch describe the character? <i>Hint: Find adjectives and adjectival clauses</i> |
| | | | |

If different students complete the table for different characters, they can then discuss Hirsch's techniques for encouraging readers to like or dislike particular characters. How are they made different from each other? A table such as this can also be used as a jumping off point for completing the Literary Hall of Fame nomination or the hot seat role-plays.

Extension: create a new character for a Darius Bell sequel.

PLOT

Literary 'lie'

Students can test their classmates on their knowledge of the novel. Working in groups, they write a brief summary of the novel. Then, they change the summary so that it contains 5 to 10 errors (or 'literary lies'). These are swapped with another group to see if they can identify and correct the 'literary lies'.

Story openings

These are very important: they must capture the reader's interest and get the story moving. How does the opening of *Darius Bell and the glitter pool* succeed in fulfilling these functions? How does Odo Hirsch try to capture the reader's attention? What does the reader learn in the opening chapter of the novel? How are the Bells's financial situation and the complication foreshadowed (see pages 11 and 17, for example)? Do the opening chapters successfully orient readers to the plot, characters and setting? How does the opening compare to other novels students have read?

Extension: Try writing alternative openings. Compare and discuss their relative merits: what is gained and lost?

Story structure

Commonly, we identify stories as having: an orientation; problem/complication; events and further complications; a resolution and coda. Students could be asked to identify these stages in *Darius Bell and the glitter pool*. Alternatively, it has been suggested that most stories involve the hero on a quest to win some prize (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monomyth> for more details). Have students think about the Hirsch novel: Whom would they identify as the 'hero' and why? What 'prize' is he trying to win? Is the prize he sets out to win and the one he actually wins the same thing? Explain. Test whether or not *Darius Bell and the glitter pool* could be regarded as a quest story by completing the table contained in Blackline Master 3. Compare the structure of Hirsch's novel to other popular stories they have read or seen.

THEMES

The importance of names

On pages 26-31, there is a reflection about the importance of names and family honour. How do these ideas come out in the novel? Have attitudes changed by the end of the novel? If so, how?

Extension: Naming is an important feature of many stories. Have students think about other books or movies where this issue plays a part (e.g. the *Harry Potter*, *Spiderwick* and *Inheritance* series). What do these novels teach us about the importance of names and naming? Are they similar to or different from the Darius Bell book?

Three Level Guide

Individually, students complete the Three Level Guide contained in Blackline Master 4 at the end of these notes. Then, in small groups, they discuss their answers. The main point of this activity is to delve deeply into a significant part of the novel; the discussion students have and ability to justify positions is of utmost importance – rather than coming up with a single correct answer to every question (especially in sections two and three).

THINKING CRITICALLY

Darius's mother

During the course of *Darius Bell and the glitter pool*, readers discover very little about Micheline Bell, Darius's mother. Discuss why this might be the case. To compensate, students can create a back story for her, filling in the gaps. They could write her biography or create Micheline's *FaceBook* page.

Extension: Fill in the background for other minor characters in the novel.

Mayor Podcock

He is constructed as a negative character in the novel. How does Hirsch encourage readers to view him in this way? They can also try to provide balance by re-telling aspects of the story from Podcock's perspective, encouraging readers to feel greater sympathy for him. This could be done by writing his diary entries or recording an interview with him (that could be turned into a podcast).

Feudalism extension

Research the concept of feudalism. Compare traditional feudalism to the community that has been established on the Bell estate. What are the similarities and differences? Is the Bell estate simply a form of feudalism that reinforces the idea of hereditary wealth and privilege?

Gender

On page 85, there is confusion about Professor Heggarty's gender. Why does this occur? What gender stereotypes exist in our society? What problems arise because of this (for example, find out when Australian women obtained the right to vote, or discover whether women's pay is the same as men in Australia)? Does Odo Hirsch do a good job of avoiding stereotypes? Is there anything you might change about the novel?

Authorial Style

Carlyle, Rae. 'Looking at authorial style' in *The Literature Base* Vol 23, Issue 1, February 2012. Includes suggested teaching activities and list of applicable teaching objectives in the *Draft Australian Curriculum: English*. This book is cited in the discussion of Odo Hirsch's style on p.25.

OTHER TASKS

Students could undertake one or more of the following tasks.

(a) Create a computer, board or simulation game based on *Darius Bell and the glitter pool*.

(b) Write another story based on the characters in *Darius Bell and the glitter pool*. For example, write a: a sequel starring Darius in another adventure; a story based on one of the other families living on the Bell estate; recount of Hector and Micheline's early years and how they met; story based on Cyrus's adventures at University or, perhaps, building a great structure such as a bridge. Students should use what they have learnt about story structure and character construction to help them.

(c) Imagine *Darius Bell and the glitter pool* will be made into a movie. Develop a 'pitch' to be delivered to studio bosses in order to get money to make the movie. This could include a script for some key scenes and models of key sets. Alternatively, convert the novel to a play and perform key scenes for other students with the intention of getting them to read the book.

(d) Set up a library display about Odo Hirsch, featuring his latest novel, *Darius Bell and the glitter pool*.

(e) Write a review of *Darius Bell and the glitter pool*. Post a copy on your school website, classroom noticeboard or other appropriate place. Get help from:
<http://www.timeforkids.com/TFK/kids/hh/writeideas/articles/0,28372,634427,00.html> or
<http://www.teachersnetwork.org/readyssettech/torres/torres.htm>.

LEARNING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

SCIENCE

Earthquakes

The discovery of the Glitter Cave occurs as the result of an earthquake. Research the cause of earthquakes and what happens during an earthquake. Also research how earthquakes are measured and, based on evidence from the novel, try to work out how strong the earthquake was on the Richter scale. Evaluate the scientific accuracy of Hirsch's description of an earthquake.

Crystal formation

Research how crystals are formed. Try making your own crystals. You can buy kits from stores, or use the instructions from one of these websites:

<http://chemistry.about.com/cs/growingcrystals/a/aa012604.htm>;

http://www.sciencekidsathome.com/science_experiments/sugar_crystals.html.

Note: Always follow appropriate work place health and safety procedures when performing experiments.

Find out whether the crystals Professor Heggarty identifies are real: wulfenite, limonite and quartz. Set up a display about these and other crystals.

Caves

Research the different way that caves can be formed. What is the most likely way that the glitter cave was formed? Build a model of the cave.

Extension: Create a display about caves in Australia: types; location; formation; how they were discovered; uses. Are they all open to the public? What is speleology?

Gold

Discover: What is the difference between gold and fool's gold? Where can you find fool's gold? Where can gold be found in Australia? How is it extracted? Share stories about any experiences panning for gold.

Students can bring in samples they might have of fool's gold. What tests can be carried out to show whether gold is real or not? What tests can be used for other gems and metals, e.g. iron ore, diamonds or rubies?

HISTORY

Readers are told that Darius's ancestors have been involved in a number of important moments in history, including the:

- battle of Waterloo
- Mexican revolution
- Treaty of Anchorage
- Surrender of Queenstown.

Research each of these events and create a multi-modal display – this could be in the form of a poster, a slide show or completed using a free program such as PhotoStory 3.

SOSE

Using public transport

In order to get to the University to visit Professor Heggarty, Darius and his friends must catch a bus. Using on-line trip planning tools, plan a trip by public transport to somewhere in your city or town. Alternatively, plan a trip to a significant place (e.g. a tourist attraction, library) near your town. Also think about the budget you would require and any other aspects of the trip you might need to take into account (e.g. safety issues, stranger danger strategies and so on).

Village living

The way the Bells live is quite different from most other people. Rather than living on a block of land by themselves, they share their land with others and trade goods and services. Re-read Chapter One to find out more. What are the advantages, disadvantages and interesting aspects of this way of life? Would you like to live like this? Why or why not? Do some research into other forms of communal living, e.g. the kibbutz in Israel, hippie communes in northern New South Wales.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Favourite/safe places

On pages 20 and 129, readers learn about one of Darius's favourite spots, the clock tower. Re-read the descriptions of this place. Why is it so special for Darius? Why doesn't he take his friends to the clock tower? Where else is special to Darius and his friends? Why?

Students can describe or draw their own favourite places and discuss why they feel safe or comfortable in that place. Why is having a 'safe' place important for everyone? Make a class display of favourite places. As an extension, find out about the safe house programme in Australia, or research where children and teenagers can seek help if they need it (e.g. Kids Helpline).

Getting along with siblings

At the beginning of the book, Darius and his brother Cyrus do not get along that well. Why? What happens to their relationship as the story progresses? What other sibling relationships are represented in other stories that students have read, heard or seen?

Based on these other stories and their own experiences, students can produce their own guide to surviving an older/younger sibling. This could be in the form of a newspaper column, a blog, a podcast etc. If students do not have a sibling, they could create an image of the perfect brother or sister.

Conflict resolution

Re-read the argument on the bus (page 79). Were good conflict resolution strategies used here? What could have been done? Role-play the scene, trying out different ways of resolving the conflict. See

<http://www.cyh.sa.gov.au/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=287&id=1521> for some ideas.

OVERALL

Create a trivia game based on factual information contained in *Darius Bell and the glitter pool*. This could be a board game or on-line game.

FURTHER READING

INFORMATION ABOUT ODO HIRSCH

<http://www.allenandunwin.com/default.aspx?page=311&author=191>

[The official Allen and Unwin website with an interview with Odo Hirsch and information about his books.]

<http://www.austlit.edu.au/run?ex=ShowAgent&agentId=A-!@>

[You need to subscribe to AusLit to see full details – most education departments and public libraries should have access.]

http://www.insideadog.com.au/residence/interviews/odo_hirsch.html

[A short interview with Hirsch.]

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odo_Hirsch

OTHER BOOKS BY ODO HIRSCH

If you enjoyed *Darius Bell and the glitter pool*, you will also love the following Odo Hirsch books:

Amelia Dee and the Peacock Lamp (2007) - Honour Book, Book of the Year Younger Readers, Children's Book Council Book of the Year Awards 2007

Antonio S and the Mystery of Theodore Guzman (1997) - Winner, Patricia Wrightson Prize for children's literature, New South Wales Premier's Awards 1999 and Honour Book, Book of the Year Younger Readers, Children's Book Council Book of the Year Awards 1998

The Book of Changing Things and other oddibosities (2006)

The Hazel Green books:

Hazel Green (1999)

Something's Fishy, Hazel Green! (2000)

Have Courage, Hazel Green! (2001)

Think Smart, Hazel Green (2003)

The Bartlett books:

Bartlett and the Ice Voyage (1998)

Bartlett and the City of Flames (1999)

Bartlett and the Forest of Plenty (2001)

Bartlett and the Island of Kings (2003)

Younger children will enjoy:

Frankel Mouse (2000)

Frankel Mouse and the Bestish Lair (2002)

ON-LINE ACTIVITIES

Free, on-line tools for exploring literature can be found at the excellent ReadWriteThink website, jointly managed by the National Council for Teachers of English and the International Reading Association:

http://www.readwritethink.org/student_mat/index.asp.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

ODO HIRSCH

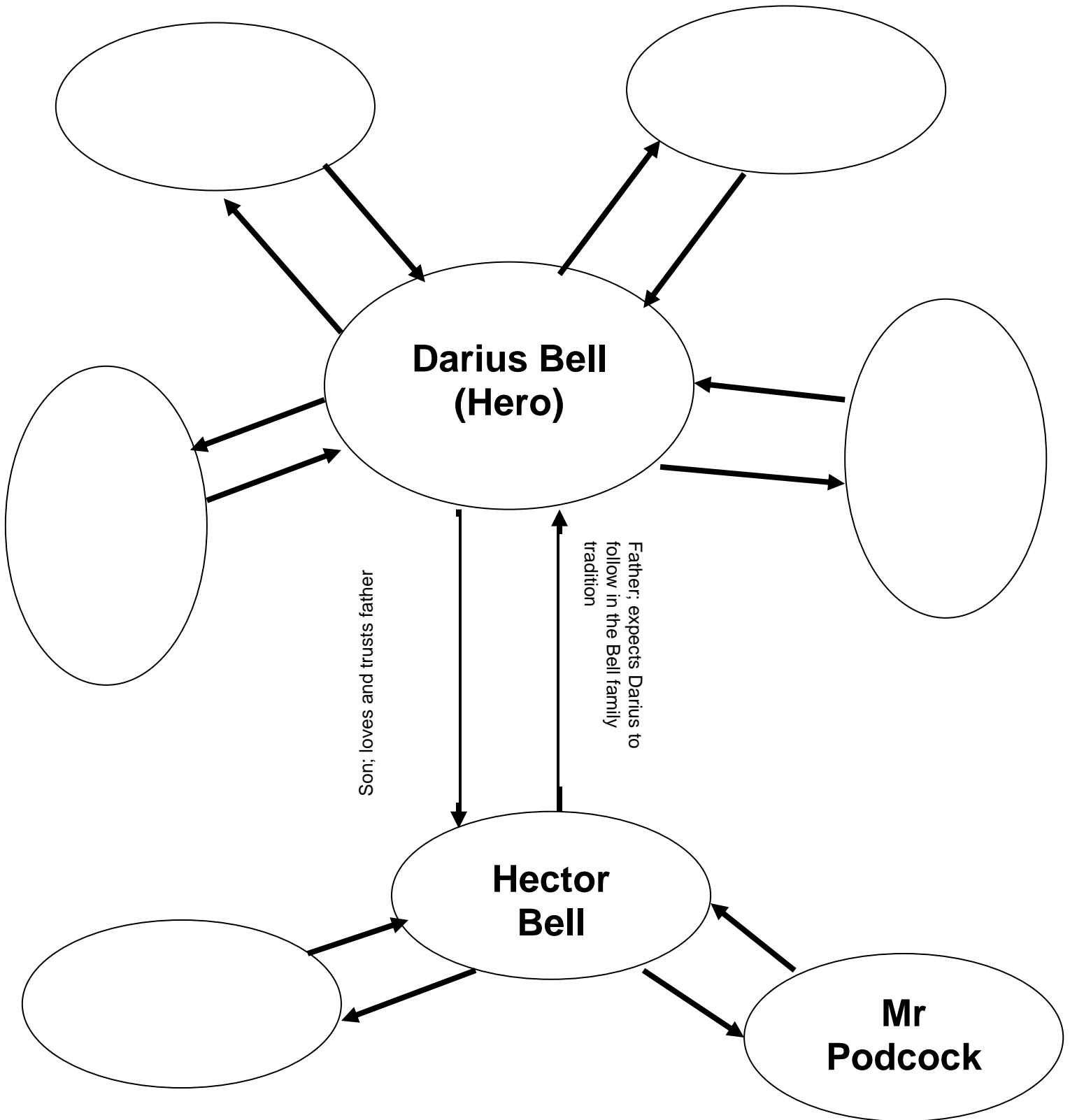
Odo Hirsch was born in Australia where he studied medicine and worked as a doctor. He is now based in London. His books for children are favourites with young and old and have been translated into several languages. Check out his profile on the Children's Authors pages at: <http://www.allenandunwin.com>

LINDSAY WILLIAMS

Lindsay Williams taught in state and private schools for 25 years, has lectured pre-service English teachers at Griffith University and has an educational consultancy business. He wrote *The Red Shoe* activities for the National Reading Day website in 2007, on-line resources for Screen Australia's digital learning site and the curriculum package for the ACTF's *Lockie Leonard* series. Lindsay has been a member of a number of committees advising on state and national curriculum and is currently on the Management Committee of the English Teachers Association of Queensland (ETAQ). In 2003, ETAQ presented him with The Peter Botsman Memorial Award for contributions to quality English education in Queensland.

Sociogram: *Darius Bell and the Glitter Pool*

Add further circles and arrows as required.



Literary Hall of Fame ~ Nomination Form 'Best Character in a Novel'

Name of character: _____

Novel: *Darius Bell and the Glitter Pool*

| Basic Facts | |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Gender: Male/Female | Current age: |
| Date of birth: | Weight: |
| Hair colour: | Height: |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Brief personal history (e.g. family details and history, problems)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Distinguishing characteristics (What makes the character stand out?)</p> |
|--|--|

| Personality: To what extent does this character display the characteristics listed below? Tick a column for each characteristic and provide evidence from the novel. | | | | |
|---|------|--------|-----|----------|
| Characteristics | High | Medium | Low | Evidence |
| friendly | | | | |
| gregarious | | | | |
| lonely | | | | |
| courageous | | | | |
| intelligent | | | | |
| caring | | | | |
| happy | | | | |
| loyal | | | | |
| innocent | | | | |
| masculine/feminine (as appropriate) | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

| |
|---|
| Achievements: |
| Failures: |
| Loves: |
| Hates: |
| In summary, why should the character be admitted to the Hall of Fame? <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div> |

The Quest Story

Complete the following table for *Darius Bell and the Glitter Pool*.

| Stage | Events and characters in <i>Darius Bell and the glitter pool</i> |
|--|--|
| The hero in his ordinary world | |
| The call to adventure and entry to the extraordinary world | |
| Meeting allies (friends), mentors and enemies | |
| Inmost cave (the darkest moment for the hero) | |
| Escape from the cave | |
| Return to the ordinary world with the prize (Is the prize what the hero expected? Is the 'ordinary world' the same as it was before the quest?) | |

Three Level Guide **based on *Darius Bell and the glitter pool***

Read carefully the extract from Chapter 23 of Odo Hirsch's *Darius Bell and the glitter pool*, from page 190 ('Well, Mr Bell, in this chamber...') to the end of the chapter. Then decide with which of the following statements you agree and disagree. Write a "T" next to those statements below that you believe are true and an "F" next to those statements which you believe are false. **For all statements, write down a brief reason for your decision.** Please note: The statements below are meant to be controversial; there are not necessarily right or wrong answers.

LEVEL 1: LITERAL

Which of the following statements are actually made in the extract? The wording may be a little different.

- Mayor Podcock thanks Hector for a radish, cabbage, broccoli, tomatoes and lettuce.
- Darius's father stands with his head held high.
- Hector tells Podcock that he is glad the mayor likes the gift.
- There was a gasp in the council chamber.
- Hector wishes he could give a gift that would last forever.
- Hector says there is no wealth in his house.
- As he leaves the council chamber, Hector Bell stares Podcock in the eye one last time.
- The townspeople avoid Darius's eyes as he walks out of the chamber.
- Darius realizes that they must gift the glitter pool to the town in order to save the family dignity.

LEVEL 2: INFERRING

What did Odo Hirsch mean?

- Podcock is being sarcastic; he doesn't mean what he says.
- Hector is proud of his gift.
- Podcock is obviously a better person than Hector Bell.
- The townspeople are shocked at how Podcock has treated Hector.
- Hector wishes he could give a gift just like his ancestors.
- Hector is completely humiliated in front of the entire town.
- Darius is glad to be a Bell.

LEVEL 3: APPLIED

In your opinion, which of the following statements are the 'lessons' for real life to be learnt from this extract? What are readers invited to accept as true? Blank spaces have been left for you to add your own ideas as well.

- Money can't buy happiness.
- Always be true to yourself.
- Pride makes us behave falsely; humility makes us real.
-
-