

When No One Was Looking Short Guide

When No One Was Looking by Rosemary Wells

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

When No One Was Looking Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	3
About the Author.....	4
Setting.....	5
Social Sensitivity.....	6
Literary Qualities.....	7
Themes and Characters.....	8
Topics for Discussion.....	10
Ideas for Reports and Papers.....	11
For Further Reference.....	12
Related Titles.....	13
Copyright Information.....	14



Overview

Kathy Bardy's natural talent for tennis is discovered by a tennis coach who is determined to turn Kathy into a championship player. Winning means everything to the coach, who drives Kathy mercilessly through training.

Kathy dreams of Wimbledon and practices rigorously with this goal in mind.

She does well in competition and is ranked number twelve in the fourteen and under age group, but competing places a strain on her family and their finances, as well as on Kathy. The mysterious drowning death of one of Kathy's opponents forces Kathy to examine the cost of winning when she realizes that she, her family, and everyone who cares about her are under investigation for murder. A surprise ending leaves the reader wanting more.

About the Author

Rosemary Wells was born in New York City in 1943, but spent most of her childhood years in her parents' home near Red Bank, New Jersey or at her grandmother's home on the Jersey Shore. Her father was English/Australian and their home was filled with books and nineteenth-century music.

Wells says she was a poor student at Red Bank High School; however, her artistic ability gained her entrance into the prestigious Museum School in Boston where she studied art. She left the Museum School at age nineteen to marry and worked as a textbook designer in Boston for two years. When her husband entered the Columbia University School of Architecture they moved to New York and she worked as a designer for another publisher. She and her husband currently live in Briarcliff Manor, New York with their two daughters. They like to end each day by reading aloud to each other.

Wells began illustrating picture books for young children in 1968 and wrote and illustrated her first picture book a year later. Since then she has written and illustrated over two dozen books for young children, many of which have received critical acclaim and awards and have been placed on lists of books recommended for young children. She has received the American Library Association Notable Books for Children Award six times, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award five times, and the School Library Journal Best Books of the Year Award six times.

Max's Breakfast (1985) and Max's Christmas (1986) earned all three of these awards. Hazel's Amazing Mother (1985) received the New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Books award.

Wells is one of few authors who writes equally well for young children and for adolescents. She wrote her first book for adolescents, *The Fog Comes on Little Pig Feet*, in 1972, and she has written five more since then. *Leave Well Enough Alone* and *When No One Was Looking* were both named by School Library Journal as Best Books of the Year. *Through the Hidden Door* was named Children's Editors' Choice by Booklist and one of the American Library Association's Best Books for Young Adults. She was awarded the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allan Poe Award for *When No One Was Looking* and for *Through the Hidden Door*. She is currently working on an historical novel set in the Shenandoah Valley during the Civil War.

Memories, both good and bad, of Wells's years growing up in New Jersey are incorporated into her books, as are incidents involving her two daughters, Victoria and Beezoo. Wells claims to be an "accomplished eavesdropper" in restaurants, train stations, and any other place where people gather. She combines ideas gathered from these overheard conversations with real events to create stories. Wells enjoys mysteries and says that someday she would like to work for the FBI.

Setting

The story takes place primarily in a Boston suburb and in an ocean-front swim and tennis club there or at the site of various tennis competitions.

Although the book was written in 1980 and contains references to tennis and baseball players of that time, the book is still contemporary—the tennis players mentioned are still active in the sport.

Social Sensitivity

Readers should find little, if anything, that is offensive in this book.

Kathy occasionally says, "Oh, for God's sake" during a temper flare-up on the courts, but is chastised for swearing either by her opponent or an official.



Literary Qualities

Wells uses similes effectively. For example, she describes the discovery of Kathy's tennis talent as, "Tennis had come suddenly to Kathy, like the unexpected winning of a state lottery. And like those gleeful lottery winners pictured in the papers grinning among the signals of poverty that were theirs moments before, Kathy cherished tennis, and outwardly reveled in it." To describe people who find fault with others, Wells writes, "Why did they always spot her dreadful little flaws, save them up like money and present her with them, cooked and flavored like a perfect chowder of inconsistency, temper losing, and vile habits?"

Although an important clue is mentioned on the first page of the book, there is no hint of any foul play or mystery until well past the middle of the book. Even then Kathy (and the reader) are sheltered from the truth for fear it will interfere with her tennis playing at an important competition.

Prior to that the book focuses on the effects of competition on the lives of Kathy and her family. Wells leaves few real clues and many false ones from that point to the end of the book. Only the inquisitive reader will consider this a mystery; others will still enjoy the story.



Themes and Characters

Kathy Bardy and Julia Redmond have been best friends since first grade in spite of vast differences in their backgrounds and talents. Julia is wealthy, beautiful, and an only child who does well in school without trying hard. Kathy's middle-class parents both work in the family business; she has a younger brother and sister, and she struggles through school. When the book opens they are ending their freshman year in a public high school.

Kathy had never played tennis until her talent was discovered at a tennis clinic. An eccentric tennis coach encourages her, takes her on for private lessons, and arranges for her to work at the club to pay for her membership.

Kathy trains for at least twenty hours a week and works long hours at the club.

With the exception of outbursts of temper that come quickly and uncontrollably when angered, Kathy finds it difficult to talk about her emotions. Kathy finds school difficult, especially algebra (a course the author failed three years in a row). Although she would never cheat in tennis, Kathy cheats in order to pass the algebra exam. She is caught and must spend the summer being tutored by the algebra teacher and must retake the exam. At the retake of the exam, Kathy struggles with the temptation to cheat again. She receives conflicting messages from adults in her life about the relative importance of school and tennis. Kathy's serious self-examination of the role of competition in her life permeates the book.

Julia's life has been easy. She does not know what it is like to work for something; even good grades come effortlessly. She is not jealous of Kathy's success and she is the only person with whom Kathy can let her guard down and talk about the pressures and frustrations of competition.

Julia senses what Kathy needs, and Kathy runs to her whenever things go wrong.

Marty, the tennis coach, describes herself as mean, as someone no one likes. Tennis appears to be her entire life. At only one place in the book does she appear in anything other than tennis whites. She is a critical taskmaster who demands more and more of Kathy.

She is never satisfied and never offers praise. Winning is very important to her, but so is good sportsmanship. She says, "Cheating is stupid."

Jody, Kathy's younger sister, resents the family sacrifices necessary for Kathy to pursue tennis. She accuses her sister of being "lethally competitive."

Nevertheless, she does her part and is loyal to Kathy when it really matters.

Another important figure is Oliver English, a skinny seventeen-year-old student at Yale, who becomes an instant friend of Kathy's. He speaks to Kathy honestly and causes her



to think about the role of tennis in her life. A key figure is Ruth Gumm, a tall, awkward girl whose main talent in tennis is her strength. She surprises Kathy by defeating her and becomes Kathy's nemesis. Her drowning fills Kathy with guilt over her treatment of Ruth, then fear that others will think she was responsible for Ruth's death.

Competitiveness is the central theme of the book. A realistic view is provided of the time commitment necessary to compete successfully in tennis and of the financial burden. The emotional effects of competing are described throughout the book. The cost of winning is examined from Kathy's perspective and also from the perspectives of her sister and her friends.

Although this novel is technically a mystery, solving the puzzle of Ruth's drowning is secondary to the theme of competitiveness. Kathy wants to clear her name even after officials have ruled the death accidental. She is more concerned with establishing an alibi than in discovering who, if anyone, is responsible for the death.



Topics for Discussion

1. The end of the book leaves the reader with the unanswered question of what will Kathy do about Julia?

Why did Wells end the book this way?

What do you think Kathy would do if another chapter were added to the book?

2. At the beginning of the book Kathy is ranked number twelve in the fourteen and under category. She is fourteen and competes with players her own age or younger. What do you think will happen when she turns fifteen and must compete with older, more experienced players?

3. This book won the Mystery Writers of America Edgar Allan Poe Award.

Do you consider this a good mystery story? Why or why not?

4. Kathy is told by her tennis coach that she will never be much of a student. Her parents seem to have the same view of her academic talents.

How much do you think these attitudes affect Kathy's performance in school?

5. Contrast the attitudes of Kathy and Marty about the doubles match against the two older ladies in the club tournaments.

6. Contrast gamesmanship with cheating. Why are certain strategies considered gamesmanship and other cheating, when both are often used to make up for lack of skill or talent?

7. Debate the value of special courses of study for athletes who need extra time for practice.

8. Analyze the actions of adults in the book, such as Marty, Kathy's parents, the algebra teacher, and the school superintendent. Which ones acted with Kathy's best interest in mind?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Write an epilogue to the book in which you state what happens to Kathy and to Julia.

2. Investigate the ranking in tennis.

How are top seed players determined?

What type of competitions would a player have to win in order to make it to Wimbledon?

3. Interview an amateur tennis player or a competitor in another individualistic sport. What are his or her goals in the sport, how does he or she train, and what effect has competition had on his or her life?

4. There are people who think that young adolescents should not be involved in competitive sports, while others believe that the earlier a talent is discovered and nurtured, the better.

Investigate the rationale for both points of view, then argue for one of them.

Support your argument and use your understanding of the other point of view to counter opposition to your ideas.

5. Select a talent you have (or wish you had) in athletics, art, music, or an academic field and imagine that you are the best in the world at what you do. Write about what it took to become the best, what sacrifices you made, and what it is like to be the best.

6. Kathy's secret dream is to be the first female shortstop for the Boston Red Sox. Describe your own secret dream and what it might take to achieve it.

7. Investigate the availability of financial support for amateur athletes, such as tennis players or Olympic hopefuls.

For Further Reference

Kirkpatrick, D. L., ed. *Twentieth Century Children's Writers*. 2nd ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983: 810-811. This book contains a brief biography of Wells and critiques her work.

Sutton, Roger. "A Second Look: None of the Above." *Horn Book* 63,3 (1987): 368-371. This article examines Wells's book *None of the Above*.

Wells, Rosemary. "The Artist at Work: The Writer at Work." *Horn Book* 63,2, (1987): 163-170. Wells describes her career as an author and illustrator and tells where she gets her inspiration and ideas.



Related Titles

Other mysteries by Wells are *Leave Well Enough Alone* in which a glamorous summer job as a mother's helper for a wealthy family turns into a Gothic mystery and forces a young girl to make difficult decisions; *The Man in the Woods*, a mystery full of suspense in which two high school freshmen put themselves in dangerous situations in order to discover who is responsible for throwing huge boulders off a highway bridge onto cars; and *Through the Hidden Door*, in which two teen-age boys discover relics of the past in a secret cave.

A young girl's world and lifestyle are challenged when her widowed father remarries in *None of the Above*. Using a diary format *The Fog Comes on Little Pig Feet* examines life in a boarding school and adult questions faced by a thirteen-year-old.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

Copyright ©, 1996, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing Corp., P.O. Box 830, Osprey, FL 34229-0830

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996