

STORY 59

words we know

| | | |
|----------|------------|-------------|
| final | triumph | behind |
| stomach | rumour | trophy |
| country | trouble | touching |
| pressure | mission | session |
| achieve | achieving | achievement |
| treasure | pleasure | measure |
| fair | fairly | fairness |
| metre | kilometre | millimetre |
| silence | sentence | experience |
| shielded | fielded | yielded |
| suit | tracksuit | suitable |
| straight | straighter | straighten |

STORY 59

new sound

O as in WON

one none done worry
won son other mother brother
love above cover even dozen
month once another wonderful
honey money monkey Monday

Find some words in the story with **O as in WON**.

special words

official collision vaguely
knowledge circumstances
unison dumbfounded echoed
region champion mischievous

Before attempting to read the story,
learn how to say each special word. If necessary, check its
meaning. Make up a sentence using each special word.

FITZROY READERS STORY NUMBER 59

Lost and Won

Dedicated to our daughter Mary F.L.B. & P.O.C.



Created by Faye Berryman & Philip O'Carroll
Illustrated by Elise Fowler

“I hate this part — the waiting before the race,” said Mary, feeling butterflies in her stomach as she and sixty-five other girls waited for their three thousand metre cross-country race.

“But Mary, you’re sure to win!” said her best friend Zoey.



Mary was feeling the pressure of everyone’s expectations. Her friends, her family, her school and her coaches all thought she would win the zone final. She dreaded the thought of letting them all down.

Finally the call came, “Under-thirteen girls to the starting line, please.”



A month before all this, Mary had finished her district race two hundred metres ahead of her nearest rival! She was the fastest runner in the Carlton district – which consisted of twelve local schools. Today’s race would be much tougher. Top runners from every district were vying to be zone champion, the fastest girl in the whole region – an area comprising hundreds of schools.

Mary was flushed with excitement that it was finally happening. She peeled off her tracksuit. Her four older brothers, Tom, Nathan, Jamie and Stephen, each delivered their final instructions. They had all taken turns to coach her during the weeks of training since the district race, running with her each night around the park opposite their home.



“Keep calm, get into a rhythm, don’t rush at the start, don’t get too far behind,” Mary muttered to herself as she stood shoulder to shoulder with the horde of girls at the starting line.

The starter’s gunshot echoed across the park, and they were off! Some bolted ahead. Some got blocked. But most moved in unison like a flock of birds. About five hundred metres into the race, the running track went into a long ascent. Mary looked forward to this part. She was strong. She knew she was good on hills.

Halfway up the hill, Mary took the lead. She felt like she was flying. She felt certain, even at this early stage, that the race would be hers. Her breathing was regular, her style was smooth – nothing could stop her now. The hill peaked at the one-point-five kilometre mark. Mary was twenty metres ahead, and striding confidently down the other side into an ever-greater lead.



Her brothers, her friends, her parents, and her mates from school were all elated, waving and cheering – especially when they thought Mary could see them. With a third of the race left to run – only one kilometre – Mary’s supporters were already congratulating each other.

The last leg of the race went up a bush-covered slope, turned at a flag amidst the trees and came down into a clear final straight, ending at the finish line. Mary entered the trees alone – no supporters, no other runners, just an adult standing in the distance next to a flag. When Mary got close, the woman in charge of the turn pointed in the direction Mary was to run past the flag. Mary whooshed past, all go, go, go!



Then it happened. A voice broke Mary's concentration. The woman was calling, "Wrong side, wrong side!" Mary quickly looked back and saw no other runners.

"The flag lady is talking to me," she said to herself dumbfounded, "even though I'm way past her."

"You must pass this side of the flag!" yelled the woman, pointing to the uphill side of the flag.

Mary was still half-running, already twenty metres past the flag when she realised she was being told to go all the way back and pass the same flag on the other side – only a metre from where she passed it the first time!



“Never argue with the officials.” Mary had this drilled into her by all the coaches she’d ever had. She promptly started back towards the all-powerful flag. Just as she neared it, other runners started passing it on the correct side. She was almost running into them and had to side-step to avoid a collision.

She turned herself around, merged with the next few runners, and came past the flag with them. But she was now about tenth. “Always make the best of whatever circumstances you are in,” she could hear her mother’s often-stated advice. Mary charged in a fury towards the leading runners.

About now the front runners were emerging from the bushy part of the hillside. The spectators looked eagerly through the downhill charge of athletes, but... where was Mary? The brothers, parents and friends looked at each other, muttering half-formed sentences such as “Where... ? What... ? Hey... !”

Then Mary appeared, now seventh in line. She charged through the pack, as fast as ever, overtaking her rivals one by one. Her legs pumped furiously as she cut through the leaders and finally burst across the finish line – in second place!



Mary was red-faced, sweating, nearly collapsing. She'd had to run more desperately than she'd ever thought possible. Supported in her mother's arms and surrounded by her brothers, Mary could not focus clearly on what was going on. It seemed like a dream.

After each brother had asked in different words what had happened on the hillside, Mary finally gasped out an explanation: “She made me go back and run past the flag on the other side.”

“Who made you?” demanded Tom.

“The lady on the hill,” panted Mary.

The four brothers, Zoey, and Mary’s mum and dad all turned to look at the final hill, but could see only trees. Somewhere in there was a flag and an official.

“I ran straight past the flag, but I must have been on the wrong side,” said Mary.



No one was sure what to do next. Or what to say. Zoey said, “You still get a ribbon for second,” but felt rather silly as soon as she said it. Shielded from the cold wind by a sympathetic circle of friends and family, Mary half-crawled into the warmth of her trusty old tracksuit.

Then an arm rested gently on her shoulder, her father's voice saying calmly, "Whatever happened, you know you're the best runner here." He sounded as if he were fully satisfied with that knowledge – as if it did not matter what the rest of the world thought.



But the brothers were not so easily satisfied.

"How far past the flag were you when the lady called you back?" asked Jamie.

"About twenty metres," sighed Mary. The family members looked at each other, horrified.

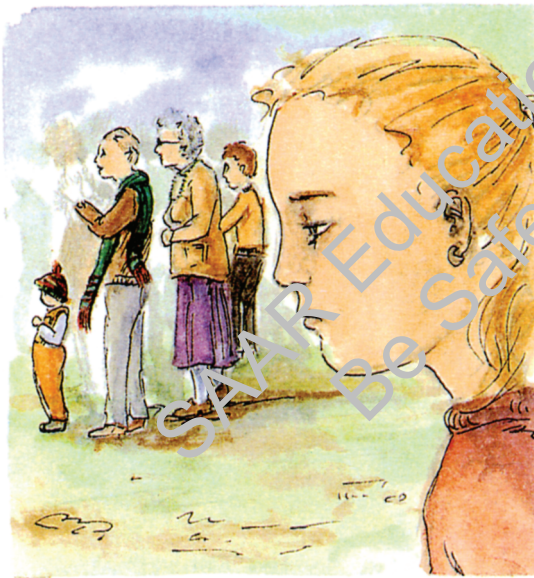
"She's a cheat!" declared Nathan angrily, referring to the official on the hill. "She just wanted her school to win!"

"Perhaps it took her that long to make up her mind," suggested Dad. Then he realised how ghastly it must have felt for Mary to run back into the pack as it surged past her.

"But why doesn't she tell the judges that Mary was way ahead?" asked Mum, sick with disappointment.

"Because she would look stupid," inserted Tom in a disgusted tone.

Mary heard these comments going back and forth, but she didn't know what to think. Minutes before, she felt victorious. Now she felt only confused and, somehow, robbed. The remarks of the brothers and parents faded slowly into the background. It was dawning on Mary that sometimes officials, like all people, could mess things up and get things wrong.



In a daze, Mary vaguely saw and heard the trophy being awarded to another girl. “She is not the fastest girl,” Mary muttered to herself.

The group drove home in silence. In the days that followed, Mary relived the event in her mind. She struggled to come to terms with the fact that the official results of the zone final championship could be so... well, *wrong* was the only word she could think of.

When the judges were handing out the trophy for fastest girl, they looked so sure of themselves. The crowd of parents, teachers and children had clapped as the announcer called out the results. But they too were unaware who the fastest runner really was.



The runners knew she was really the fastest! Yes, they are going along with the official verdict, as people usually do. But if they needed genuine top speed, if they were in fear for their very lives, if for some reason they desperately needed the fastest three-kilometre runner to fetch something urgent – yes, they would want her.

Over the next weeks, Mary mulled over the events of the zone final. The newspaper listed the fastest runners – but it was wrong too. The whole thing was at first confusing, then painful. However, Mary knew it would not help to endlessly complain about “the unfairness of life”.

Mary slowly worked a few things out. Officials can be wrong. What is printed can be wrong. What most people believe can be wrong.



Mary’s father went over the event three times during that first painful week, each time showing his pride that she really was the fastest, and each time convincing Mary a little more that knowing something good is more important than simply having others believe it. Of course it’s even better when you can have both!

This entire experience had an effect on Mary's way of thinking. After this, she was more careful not to believe just anything that was said about people. She became especially careful not to automatically believe gossip about her friends. By being very careful about rumours, Mary saved herself from making some terrible mistakes.



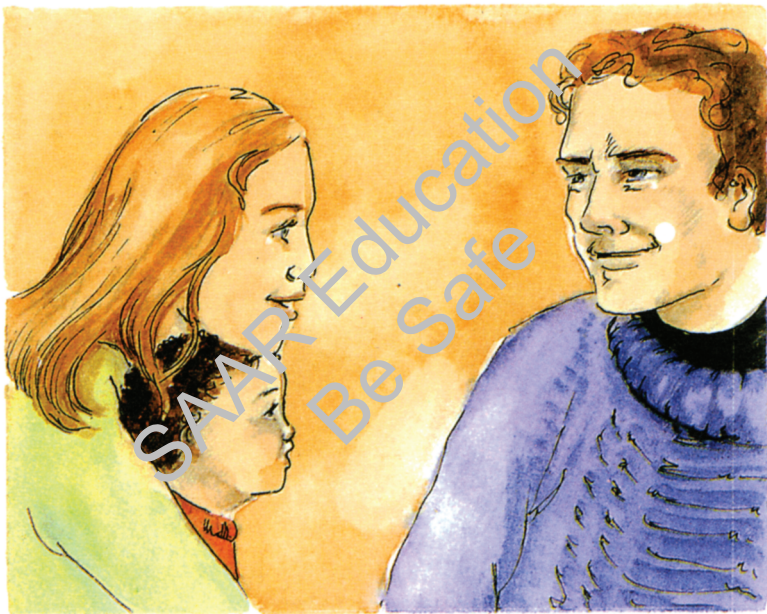
Because of this, her friends came to regard Mary as a very solid and trustworthy friend. In fact, this aspect of Mary's character helped her to enjoy a high quality of friendships throughout her life.

Mary no longer automatically believed everything she saw on the TV or read in the papers and magazines. She came to believe that the most of the news was correct, but not always all of it. She also came to realise that they didn't always say when they should, "We're sorry ladies and gentlemen, the story we brought you yesterday was incorrect." They would only sometimes bother to admit their mistakes!



Mary became careful not to easily let go of important things she believed in. She would not easily be undermined in the things she treasured. When people sometimes tried to take away her pleasure in her achievements, or her pride in herself or in her friends, she had a strong inner knowledge that could not easily be shaken. She wouldn't budge until she had a long careful look at what was being said.

Twelve years after the zone final race, Mary was a young mother with a fine husband and a bonny baby boy. People envied her inner security, and her quiet confidence in her own way of doing things. Her husband felt very secure with her and trusting of her. He saw how loyal she was to him – how hard it was for others to mischievously make Mary think bad things about him.



One evening after dinner, Mary said to her husband, “You know I always used to call that zone final competition *the race I won and lost*. But now, when I realise how much I have learned from the whole thing, I think I will call it *the race I lost and won!*”

THE END

STORY 59

words we've used

| | |
|----------|--------------|
| office | official |
| collide | collision |
| vaguely | vagueness |
| knowing | knowledge |
| dumb | dumbfounded |
| pointed | disappointed |
| graph | trophy |
| region | unison |
| sympathy | trustworthy |
| rumour | humour |

some new words

| | |
|-----------|------------|
| revise | revision |
| benefit | beneficial |
| regional | seasonal |
| colour | flavour |
| colourful | colourless |

STORY 59

read aloud

ENGLISH EXPRESSIONS

WORD – PHRASE – SENTENCE

rumour spread false rumours

Sometimes a jealous person will spread false rumours about the person they hate.

country back in my own country

It is nice after a year to be back in my own country.

mission secret mission

My secret mission was to deliver the message.

measure the full measure

I shall pay him the full measure of what I owe him.

another yet another

After all that food, he offered me yet another