



Carter Bonas has a superpower. We've all dreamed of having one—of being able to fly, teleport, or possess incredible strength. But Carter will tell you he actually has a superpower, though it's not what you might expect. His superpower is his autism.

Autism is a condition that causes challenges with social skills, behaviour, and communication. As Carter explains it, that means, "Not being able to focus, having trouble with eye contact, not paying attention, and not understanding social situations." It's made his life difficult at times. Being different has led to him getting bullied and having a hard time making friends. But after a few rough years, the 11-year-old has leaned into it. His Instagram profile declares, *Autism is my superpower.*

"I have autism, and I think it benefits me," he says. "I'm very nice, and I tend to listen when people are talking. I have a big imagination, and I like to socialize with people." Carter's autism causes him to obsess over things. As he's learned to channel that hyper-focus, he's become an elite golfer. He runs his own clothing business. He gives free golf lessons and motivational speeches, reminding kids and adults, "You can do anything. You just have to believe in yourself and always stay positive."

Carter didn't speak until he was four years old. As he was growing up, learning was difficult. He often coped with uncomfortable situations by giving hugs, which opened him up to teasing from his classmates and confused some of his teachers. His parents, Thelma and Eddie Tennie, tried to find him an activity that would allow him to meet other kids.

"I tried most sports, but I didn't really like them," Carter says. "Some of them there was running around, people pushing you, coaches yelling at you." Eventually, a friend of his mom's suggested golf. "The reason I like golf is because I don't like being touched," Carter says. "It's relaxing. And I love nature, too."

If you watch Carter play, you'll notice that not only does he hit the ball far, but he looks good doing it, too. He wears clothes from his own apparel line, **Spectrum¹** Golf.

"I started my business because I was worried nobody would employ me in the future because I have autism and I had a hard time making friends," Carter explains.

"So I feared that when my mom and dad weren't around anymore, it would be really hard for me to find a job or just make a living. So I wanted to start my own business, so I would never have to worry about that. After a lot of bad business ideas, I eventually came up with golf apparel," Carter says.

He spends a lot of time in the hot sun, and he's still very sensitive about how things feel against his skin. "We were spending lots of money on clothes that were supposed to be comfortable for me, but they weren't because I have a skin sensitivity," Carter says. "I wanted to start my own business so I could get comfy clothes and give comfortable clothes to people who have a skin sensitivity just like me."

He and his parents ordered sample after sample online and eventually found fabrics that worked. He came up with the name Spectrum Golf and a logo—an S and a backwards G. "I was writing the SG, but I wrote the G backwards because I'm dyslexic," he says. "My mom said to fix it, but my dad said it'll look good. And it did."

He also had the chance to meet Ernie Els, the former U.S. Open winner who has a son with autism. Els gave Carter some pointers, and Carter gave Els some swag. Els also invited Carter and his parents to visit his Els Center of Excellence, a facility for autistic people.

"What Carter's done—starting up his own company and carving out a place for himself in society—that's what we're trying to achieve with the kids at our center," says Els. "Carter's story is an inspiration to other kids on the spectrum, so it was wonderful to have him there."

"Carter just does it naturally," says Thelma. "I am amazed and shocked by him every time he gets on stage or in front of students. He lights up; he loves sharing how he overcame his struggles and how he works every day to overcome them."

1. Spectrum: People with autism are said to be on the autism spectrum.

“He’s learning to channel those obsessions into his business, into his golf, where it’s becoming a positive thing,” says his mom. “Most kids might give up, but he does not have that ability to give up on something. He has to get it done, or he’s not gonna be O.K.”

And if there’s one thing Carter has shown, it’s that as long as he has his superpower, he’ll be more than O.K.

Bechtel, M. (2022). Drive to Thrive. *Sports Illustrated Kids*, 34(6), pp. 34-39.

1. How does Carter transform his challenges into positive outcomes?

Use information from the text and your own thinking to support your answer.

Score



My people were bush people, and they never cultivated a horse culture. But there is something about the animals that has always appealed to me. Horses are called Spirit Dogs in some native cultures, and maybe it's their loyalty and good-heartedness that makes them special to me.

I was thirteen when I learned to ride. My adopted family had left for a summer vacation, and I was dropped off to stay with relatives for three weeks. Uncle Wilf and Aunt Peg had a small farm outside of a southwestern Ontario town called Teeswater. I'd only been there a handful of times, and I felt out of place and alone.

But they had animals. It wasn't a large farm, but there was stock, some chickens, a few dogs and a knot of barn cats. Uncle Wilf assigned me barn chores to do every day. Every morning I gathered eggs from the henhouse. I shovelled stalls in the afternoon and helped hay and feed the cattle in the evening. It never felt like work to me. The presence of the animals was comforting, and even the huge Hereford bull in the back stall didn't faze me.

It was the pony that fascinated me most. She was a small Shetland cross. The first time I saw her she was dirty, with a knotted tail and mane. She started when I approached her, shrank to the back of the stall and eyed me nervously. Still, I felt drawn to her.

Aunt Peg told me that the pony's name was Dimples. They'd bought her from a neighbour for their daughter Kathy to ride, but the neighbour hadn't told them that Dimples had been beaten as a colt and so was unrideable. She was bareback broke and halter broke, but the heavy-handedness of her training had made her distrustful of people. They told me not to go near her, except to let her out into the big pen every now and then.

"She'll bite you," Aunt Peg told me, "and she'll kick."

But there was something about Dimples that drew me. I knew nothing of horses or ponies, but at thirteen I understood the feeling of being displaced and lost and frightened. I saw that in her, and I started to visit her.

At first I just stood by the rail of the stall and talked to her. She didn't move, but after a few days of this she seemed to calm. Then I opened the gate and stood there, talking soft and low and gentle. It took another few days for her to get used to this. Eventually I moved a yard or so closer.

The day I touched her for the first time was magical. She shivered, twitched. I kept my voice low, moved slowly and rubbed her flank. I could feel her anxiety, but the more I stroked her the more she calmed and settled. Within days she let me curry comb her mane and tail, all the while talking soft and low.



Uncle Wilf showed me how to put the halter on. He had to demonstrate on a pillow, because Dimples wouldn't allow anyone but me in her stall. When I came back alone, she let me slip the halter on. I led her into the big pen and walked her around it slowly. Everyone was amazed.

I got on her back the next day. I mounted off the fence rail, easing down onto her. She shivered, shifted her feet nervously, but she stood still and let me find my seat. We didn't move. I sat and rubbed her and talked to her for half an hour and did the same the next day. Then I walked her out into the field.

Riding Dimples was pure joy. We walked around that forty-acre field for a couple of days, and she relaxed. Soon, I got courageous enough to push her up to a trot. And one day, after a week of this, she cantered for me. Coming back one evening she broke into a full gallop. It scared me at first, then filled me with glory.

I rode her every day of that vacation, and Dimples learned to love it as much as I did. Finally, she let Kathy ride her. Watching from the stoop of the farmhouse, I felt like an adult for the first time in my life.

My adopted family moved away shortly after that, and I never saw Dimples again. But I still think about her whenever I ride. Riding her was a challenge that I met and won. But it was more than that. It was the first time I'd felt kinship with a creature, a joining that went far beyond mere domestication. It was a union of spirits that transcended earthly things such as loneliness, sadness and hurt. I felt like a healer, even though I didn't have the words for that yet.

We heal each other with kindness, gentleness and respect. Animals teach us that.

Wagamese, R. (2009). A Kindred Spirit. In *One Native Life* (pp. 60-63). Douglas & McIntyre.

2. Explain the valuable lessons the narrator learns from Dimples.

Use information from the text and your own thinking to support your answer.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. A small dark speck is located near the top center of the page. The paper appears to be part of a notebook or a set of loose-leaf papers.

Score





What do you have to say?

Be successful!

- Think about the ideas you want to share.
- Make personal connections.
- Add information and details to support your ideas.
- Make your writing sound like you.

Overcoming Challenges

3. Describe a time when you overcame a challenge.

Your writing could describe your experience or tell a story.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. A few small dark specks are scattered across the surface, likely due to scanning artifacts or dust. The paper appears to be a standard notebook or worksheet page.

Score



End of Part 1

Wait until your teacher tells you to go ahead to the numeracy activity.