Teacher's Notes for *Super Nova*

Synopsis

Nova is a little sister with a secret. Her family thinks she is a sweet, innocent girl, but her brother knows better. He sees the messes she makes and is determined to show her up.

Until he finds out that Nova is really defending Earth from an alien invasion. After witnessing her daring bravery, her brother decides he can be a hero too, and keep his sister's super secret.

The engaging illustrations encourage subsequent readings where students can spot the hidden aliens in each scene and follow Nova's plan for their defeat.

Discussion Points and Themes

Family Dynamics

The universal topic of sibling rivalry is given a twist in *Super Nova*. Readers will recognise themselves and their own family in the characters.

Do the students have a sibling who seems to get away with everything? Maybe they are that sibling? Nova's brother changes his mind about her, when he finds out more about her. How much do we know about our family members? Could our siblings/parents/grandparents be something other than that? Nova is a little sister, but it turns out she is also a super hero too.

Students could interview their own family members and find out what their hidden skills and talents are.

Social Expectations

Super Nova plays with familiar social roles and turns them 180. What kind of person do you expect a super hero to be? In popular culture it's usually an adult male with females relegated to support roles.

Super Nova is a little girl who is a super hero. She is ingenious and fearless and protects the world from aliens. Her brother is initially antagonistic but ends by becoming her supporter. This is another reversal of social norms where boys are often the 'stars' and female characters exist to help them.

Do the students have favourite popular culture characters (eg. Super heroes, Disney)? Can they imagine them as someone different? Can they invent their own characters? What kind of super powers would they have?

Class Activities with Curriculum Links

English - Literature and Context

Discuss how authors create characters using language and images

<u>Alien Creation</u>

-Discuss what words were used in *Super Nova* to describe the aliens.

-How did the illustrator interpret the author's words?

-What other words could be used to describe aliens? (eg. Scaly, fuzzy, furry)

-Draw examples of these words on the board.

-Use the 'Exquisite Corpse' art game to create a collaborative picture of an alien.

-Give each child a piece of paper, which they fold into thirds.

-On the top third they can draw an alien head using the descriptive words and pictures to help guide them.
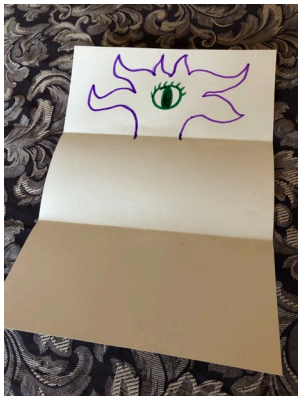
-Fold the top third over and pass on to the next person, leaving some marks on the fold so they can see where to connect the body. On the middle third of the page, draw the body of an alien.

-Fold the body part over and pass it on to the next person. On the bottom third draw the legs/lower half of the alien.
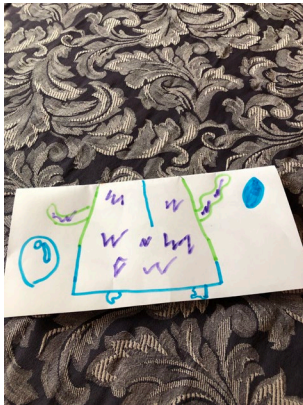
-Open up the picture to reveal a full alien drawn by three different students. (Each student should have a finished alien.)

-Write a description of this alien. Then write a story about this alien.

-Discuss how the character was influenced by the drawing.

Science - Planning and conducting

Participate in guided investigations to explore and answer questions

(Also Physical Sciences – A push or pull affects how an object moves or changes shape.)

Rocket Scientists

-Students make their own paper and straw rockets (demonstration here:

https://www.sciencebuddies.org/teacher-resources/lesson-plans/teach-scientific-method#summary

-Students decide how big they will be and how they will be designed. Students take note of why they made their choices (eg. They think bigger fins will make it go further). Whose do they think will go the furthest? Why?

-Students test their rockets and measure how far they flew.

-Students compare results. Who really went the furthest? What part of the design do they think made a difference?

Super Nova Teacher's Notes: Illustrations

ILLUSTRATOR PROFILE

Name: Rebecca Timmis

Where I live: Gold Coast, Queensland

**Favourite things to draw:** Animals, people, forests, mermaids and dragons

Materials I like to use: Coloured pencils, water-colour pencils and my graphics tablet which lets me draw on the computer.

Illustrating Super Nova

Character Designs

The first step to illustrating *Super Nova* was to create the character designs. I drew lots of different pictures to show what Nova and her big brother might look like, including their hair style, clothes, even the shape of their faces. I tried some realistic looks and some cartoony looks and ended up somewhere in the middle, keeping in mind the tone of the story. The text for *Super Nova* is funny and full of action, so I needed a style that wasn't too serious.
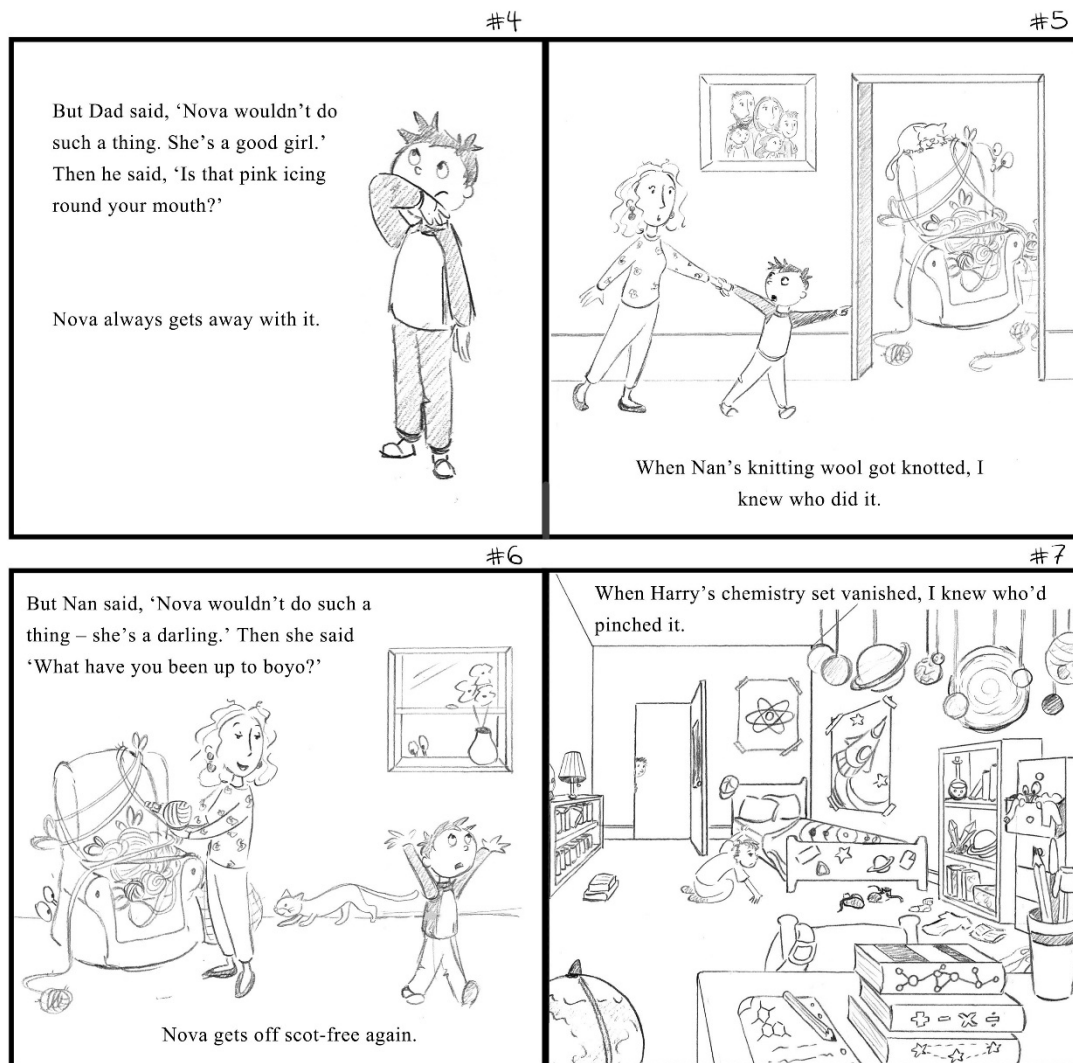
'The Brother' draft character designs:
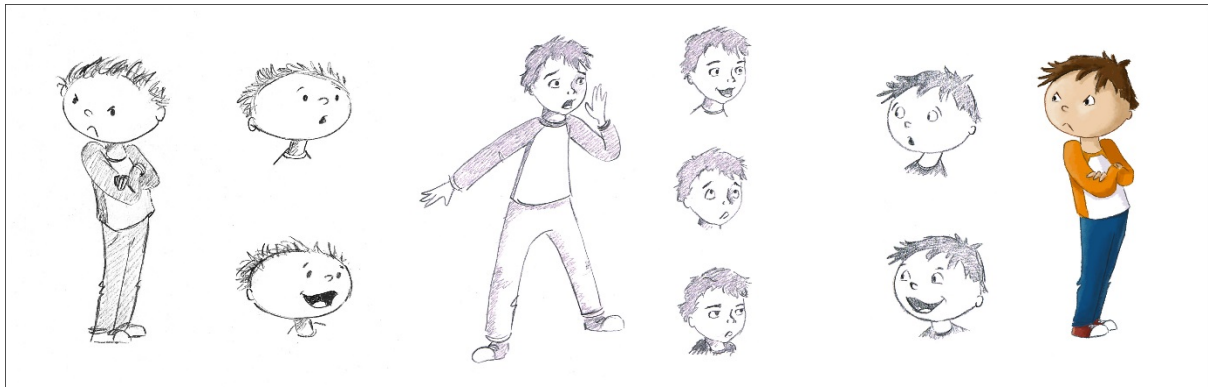
Nova and her brother final designs:

Storyboard

Once I had decided on the look of the characters, I worked closely with the book's editor to create a storyboard. A storyboard is a series of small pictures – sometimes called 'thumbnails' – that show the layout of each page. Storyboard drawings are quick and rough; they only need enough detail to show the character's expression, what the character is doing, and anything important in the background.

Storyboard panels:

#4

But Dad said, 'Nova wouldn't do such a thing. She's a good girl.' Then he said, 'Is that pink icing round your mouth?'

Nova always gets away with it.

#5

When Nan's knitting wool got knotted, I knew who did it.

#6

But Nan said, 'Nova wouldn't do such a thing – she's a darling.' Then she said 'What have you been up to boyo?'

Nova gets off scot-free again.

#7

When Harry's chemistry set vanished, I knew who'd pinched it.

Final Line Art

Once the storyboard was finished I drew each page in full detail in a much larger size – closer to what the final page size would be once the book was printed – and scanned each one into my computer.

Using special image editing software I could alter the image to get it just right, including cutting characters out of the page to move them to a new position, and making different parts of the artwork smaller or larger.

Storyboard panel vs final line art:

When Nan's knitting wool got knotted, I
knew who did it.
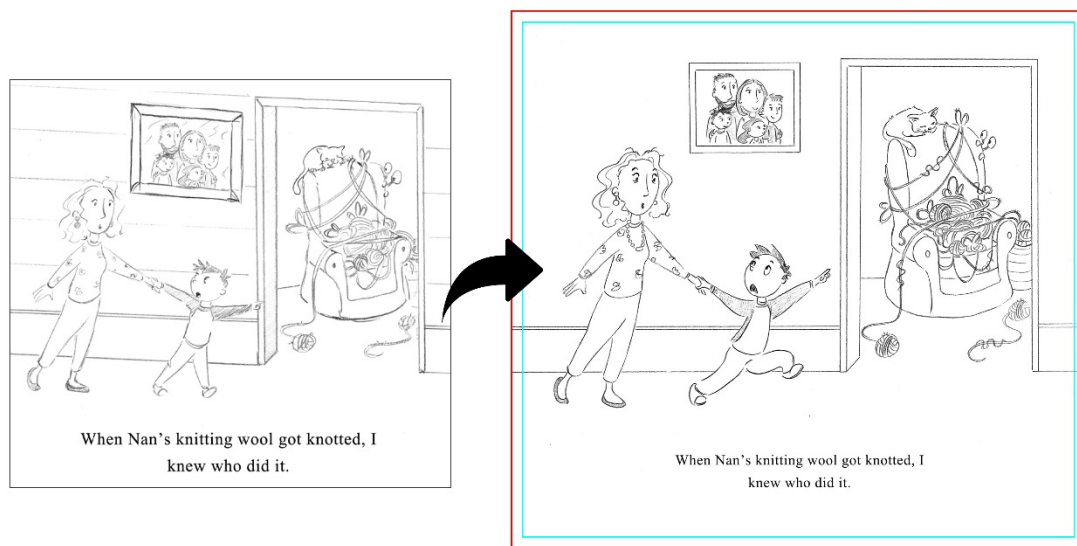
Colour Mock-up

The next step was a lot of fun – adding the colours! This is sometimes called creating a colour mock-up or 'blocking in'. For each page I cut out all the white area, which was originally the paper, so all I had left were the outlines. Then I very quickly painted the whole picture using my graphics tablet. It's rough, messy and LOTS of fun. Using this method I can paint over colours if I don't like them, and none of the paint mixes or turns the wrong colour because it's all digital. This step really helps to create the *focal point* of the image. A focal point is the most important thing in the picture, usually a character or an important object.

Colour mock-up:

Final Colour Art

Super Nova is full of action, so I chose bright colours with lots of shading and highlighting to add drama to each scene - especially the alien scenes! Using the colour mock-up as a guide, I painted each picture with more care, adding in the details and using two different digital brushes to create different textures. Then I used a brush with a crayon-like texture to draw the outlines, to give the illustration a more natural feel. Digital art can look a little flat and cartoony, and I didn't feel that was the right style for the book. I had to try a LOT of different brushes before I found the right ones.

Final artwork:

When I feel a drawing is finished it's important to save it and leave it for a while – at least a day – so that I can open it again and look at it with fresh eyes. This makes it easier to spot any mistakes that need fixing.

About the Illustrator

Super Nova is the second picture book I have illustrated. My first illustration project, *The Growly Bear*, was written by my grandmother Coral O'Donnell and published in 2018. Art was always one of my favourite subjects in high school, and after graduating I studied Animation at the Queensland College of Art for two years. I've also studied professional children's writing and digital design, and hope to illustrate many more children's books in the future.

You can find more of my artwork at rjtimmis.net