

BROBOT

JAMES FOLEY

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YEAR LEVEL: Y2–6

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: Sustainability

ABOUT THE BOOK

Sally is the world's foremost inventor under the age of twelve, and she just knows she can build a better brother than the messy, smelly version she has. Sally's invention – Brobot – is fantastic ... that is until the remote gets broken and Brobot careens out of control! Sally soon realises that maybe there's more to a brother than just his inconveniences.

A hilarious graphic novel for young readers, now in full colour.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Foley is a children's author and illustrator. His books include the S.Tinker graphic novel series, *In the Lion*, *The Amity Kids Adventures*, *The Last Viking*, *The Last Viking Returns* and *My Dead Bunny*.

James is an ambassador for Books in Homes and Room to Read Australia, and the Regional Advisor for SCBWI Australia West. His interests include comics, film, psychology, science, history (anything nerdy and geeky really), as well as yoga and social justice.

He has far too many books in his bedside reading pile.

THEMES

- Imagination
- Invention
- Design and Technology
- Robotics
- Family
- Acceptance
- Forgiveness

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y2–6 English

Y2–6 Maths

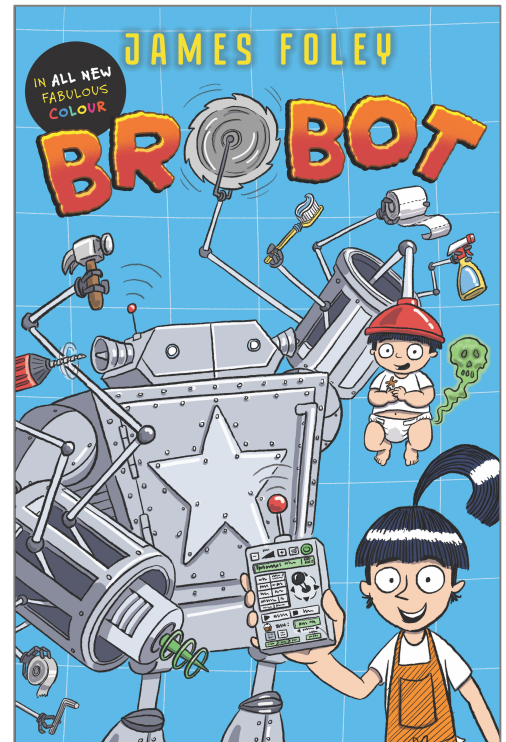
Y2–6 Science

Y2–6 Design and Technologies

Y2–6 Visual Art

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: jamesfoley.com.au
- Author's blog: jamesfoley.com.au/blog



CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion questions

1. What is a graphic novel? How is the structure/layout different to a chapter book? Use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the features of these two unique forms of storytelling. Which do you prefer?
2. What is a robot? What kinds of robots have children encountered in their home, school and wider community? Create a list.
3. Sally describes her little brother, Joe, as 'defective'. What does this word mean?
 - a. What habits do your brothers, sisters or cousins have that you find annoying? What do you think they might find irritating about *you*?
 - b. Why can't Joe be fixed like a machine? What do you think the 'ethics committee' is for?
4. Look carefully at Sally's first diagram, 'Joe – How NOT to Design a Brother'. Are there any words you don't recognise (e.g. toxic; receptacles; insufficient; struts; gyroscopic calibration)? In pairs, use an appropriate online dictionary to find the meaning. What does 'patent-pending' mean?
5. Look carefully at Sally's second diagram, 'Brobot – Just as a Brother Should Be'. Compare and contrast this with the first diagram. Are there any words you don't recognise (e.g. hybrid; optical; matter-compression; synthetic; titanium)? In pairs, use an appropriate online dictionary to find the meaning.
6. What is an 'industrial-strength clean'? What do you think would happen if Brobot did this to Joe? What does 'incinerate' mean?
7. Sally describes The Disaster Detector as a 'quantum computer capable of calculating the conceivability of a calamity occurring in the current location'. What do you think this means?

Creative writing – graphic novels

1. If you could design and build your own robot for any purpose, what would it be? Create a diagram on grid paper (like Sally's) labelling the dimensions, materials and features of your robot.
2. Create an A3 comic book strip about an adventure you have with this new robot. What unforeseen design flaws might it have? What errors could occur?
3. Design your own 'brobot' or 'sisbot' complete with controller just like Sally's. Consider how you will tailor the features to your own sibling, who may be very different from Joe. What extra functions will you include – Sally chose cupcakes, but let your imagination run wild! Create your own graphic novel about your adventures with your sibling and 'sibling-bot'.
4. Sally's joke: 'Why did the robot cross the road? To prevent the resistance soldiers from stopping it enslave the human race.' Use this as inspiration to write a 500-word short story about a world where robots rule the planet. Then, in pairs, see if you can create three new robot-themed jokes.

Sustainable technology – the S.Tinker Inc. challenge

1. Can you design and construct a new invention out of recycled materials? In teams of four, you will need to build, test, evaluate and modify your invention based on your customer (peer) feedback. Who will be the newest employee at S.Tinker Inc.?

Art and visual literacy

1. What style has the illustrator used to draw the characters in *Brobot* – realistic or cartoon? What do you like about the illustrator's style?
2. Where has the illustrator positioned objects on each page? How are the images framed? Are they framed differently on each spread?
3. How does the illustrator convey the characters' thoughts and feelings? Find a page where one of the characters looks: excited; irritated; scared; showy; curious; innocent.
4. You be the illustrator! Choose your favourite scene from *Brobot* and design it anew. Use the cartooning worksheet for primary students available from the author's blog to help you draw facial expressions: jamesfoleyillustrations.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/faces_part_1.pdf

Integrating robotics in the classroom

1. Create functional robots with motors, gears and sensors.
2. Program a Bee-Bot to travel to specific points on a map and much more: bee-bot.us

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

How did you come up with the idea of Brobot?

Brobot is a combination of many ideas over several years. I've had this recurring pair of characters turn up in my sketchbook for a while now: a feisty young girl with a ponytail coming out of the top of her head, and a younger brother with bowl-cut hair. One time I drew the girl as an inventor holding a spanner, and on the same page I drew a few weird inventions and a small robotic brother. The story began there.

I originally tried to make a picture book, but after 50+ attempts it just didn't work. The story kept getting too big for the 32-page limit of a picture book. Eventually I rewrote the story in first-person from the girl's point-of-view, and I tried putting it together as a comic (or graphic novel). Finally it clicked. I'm hoping to rework some of the earlier rejected picture book ideas into future adventures of Sally and Joe.

How long did it take to make the book?

I played around with the rough ideas on-and-off for three years, in between other projects. I completed the final roughs in a month and the final artwork in another month.

What was the best part of illustrating Brobot? What was the hardest?

The best part was seeing the characters finally come to life after so many years of development. The hardest part was the years of development! There are a lot of different versions of *Brobot* in my sketchbooks; Sally took a while to figure out as well. Joe was the easiest character to develop.

One of the talks you give in classrooms is about visual literacy. Why is visual literacy important?

Visual literacy means being able to 'read' a story that is told through images, for example a movie, TV show, cartoon, comic, graphic novel or picture book. If you can understand how you're able to *read* visual stories then you can gain the insight needed to *critically evaluate* them and get better at *creating* your own.

What do you hope readers will take away from the book?

I just hope they enjoy it and have a laugh! It's supposed to be read in one sitting, so I hope readers get caught up in the action and adventure of it. And it's fine if they take away a deeper meaning from it too: as the old saying goes, 'Nobody's perfect, so never try to replace them with an artificially intelligent and potentially dangerous robot.'



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