

The Tweeting Galah



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Illustrations John Field

The Tweeting Galah

A collection of short stories about growing up in the digital age

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Words are, in my not so humble opinion, our most
inexhaustible source of magic, capable of both
influencing injury, and remedying it.

- Albus Dumbledore

The Tale of the Tweeting Galah

“What a day for it!” exclaimed Gabbo as he and all the other students at the Remote Flying Academy for Young Galahs excitedly made their way outdoors towards their bushland classroom.

Up until now, the class had sat through long, boring lessons in the classroom where they learnt about famous flying galahs throughout history, the mathematical equations of their wingspans (yawn!) and the aerodynamics involved in becoming airborne (okay, that was quite interesting). They had all worked so hard to show their old teacher, Wing Commander Grey, that they were ready to start flying. Finally, the day had come!



The sun was shining, there wasn't a cloud in the sky and a light breeze was rustling through the few trees that dotted the academy grounds. Perfect conditions for flying! Gabbo stood next to his two best friends, Ginger and Gudrun, as they waited for Wing Commander Grey to arrive.

"Ahem ..." came a voice.

The excited squawking and rustling of feathers stopped immediately as the young class turned to face their teacher with expectation. Wing Commander Grey stood straight and tall, peering down at them over his spectacles.

"Now, class, today is the day that you will start flying." The class gave a great whoop of excitement. Wing Commander Grey glared at them until they fell quiet again.

"Yes, it may seem exciting but mark my words – flying is not an easy feat! Many a galah has been injured as a result of a wonky take-off or over-speeding. It is very, very important that you remember everything you have been taught in class while you are up in the air."

Wing Commander Grey began counting off instructions on his feathered wing.



“Firstly, all digital devices must be switched off or in flight mode. Secondly, remember to keep left and give way to your right. And finally, no ... erm... monkey business. You are galahs, not ... erm ...” The old galah stopped, trying to remember the word for monkeys and apes.

“Mymates?” Gabbo said helpfully. When the class all chuckled, he looked about, wondering what he’d said.

“It’s primates,” Gudrun said.

“Yes, that’s right,” Wing Commander said. “So, class. Remember to be sensible while you are flying.” He looked at them with fierce eyes. “Am I making myself clear?”

The class nodded with excitement to show they understood.

“Alright then, what are you waiting for?” Wing Commander Grey said gruffly. “Form a straight line and let’s start flying!”

The class didn’t need to be told twice. They quickly hopped into a straight line and, one by one, Wing Commander Grey directed their take off.

“Wow!” Gabbo cried as he flew alongside Ginger and Gudrun.

Together, they swooped and soared, laughing and squawking.

“We look so cool right now!” Ginger said.

“Like superheroes!” cried Gudrun doing a backflip.

“We should take a photo, posing as superheroes!” Gabbo said suddenly.

“Oooh, Gabbo! Remember what Wing Commander Grey said? We aren’t supposed to use our phones while flying!” said Gudrun anxiously.

Gabbo snorted. “He can’t see us from down there. C’mon, guys, I’ll only have my phone out for a moment; it’ll be fine!”

“Yeah, it’ll be fine, Gudrun!” Ginger agreed. “Get the phone out, Gabbo – let’s do this!” Ginger practised his best superhero pose; his right wing streteched way out in front of him.

“Oh, all right, then ... Hey, wait for me!” Gudrun sped over towards them and they all gathered around the phone, pulling the most extravagant superhero poses they could.



"We look awesome!" Gabbo exclaimed, looking at the photos on his phone.

"Let's do flying races now!" said Gudrun. "C'mon, Gabbo!"

"I just need to upload this photo to my profile ..." It took a few moments – the signal was not so strong up there – but then it was done. "Okay, done! Right ... on your marks, get set ... go!"

The rest of the lesson was full of racing, twirling, back-flipping and laughing.

But, as the class came into land at the end of the lesson, Gabbo saw Wing Commander Grey standing there, glaring. He had a phone in his hand.

“Gabbo ...”

Gabbo swallowed hard. “Y-yes, sir?”

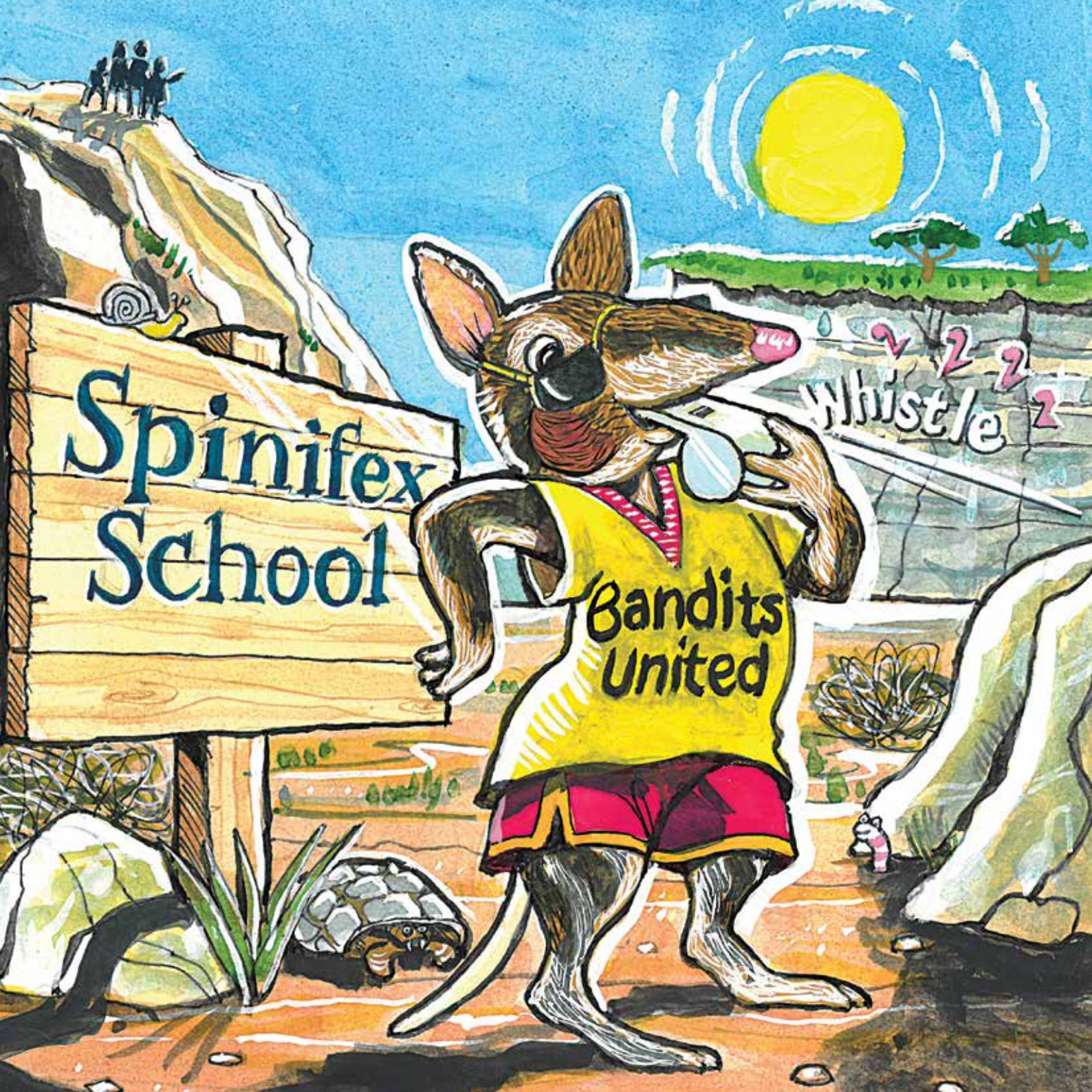
“You come over here right this instant! I have just seen your photo online. You are in big trouble, young galah.”

Gabbo swallowed hard again. He had forgotten that when he posted something online, anyone could see it!



Reflection

1. Which flying rule(s) did Gabbo break?
2. Explain why Gabbo's actions were potentially dangerous.
3. If you were in the sky with Gabbo, what would you have told him to do?
4. What type of punishment do you think Gabbo deserves for his actions?
5. Think of your own online profiles. Would you be happy if your teacher or parent could see everything you had posted?
6. Why do you think Gabbo took the selfie and put it online, when he knew it was breaking the rules?



The Sensational Saga of the Bumbling Bilby

Poooooooooot!

The whistle blew sharply.

Balbina turned quickly in the direction of its sound. There stood the large figure of Coach Coot, the PE teacher at the Spinifex State High School.

"Right, class. Today you will be completing the obstacle course. You'll do it one by one while I time you. On my whistle ... Ready, Scooter?"

Poooooooooooooot!

Scooter, a hopping mouse who also happened to be Balbina's best friend, sprang forward. Without a second thought, she began the course. She bounced over the spinifex grass with ease, scurried through the underground burrow in no time at all and was soon bounding her way over the pile of rocks. She jumped neatly around the muddy pool and came to a skidding halt, right next to Coach Coot. A huge grin was plastered on her furry face.

Pooooooooot!

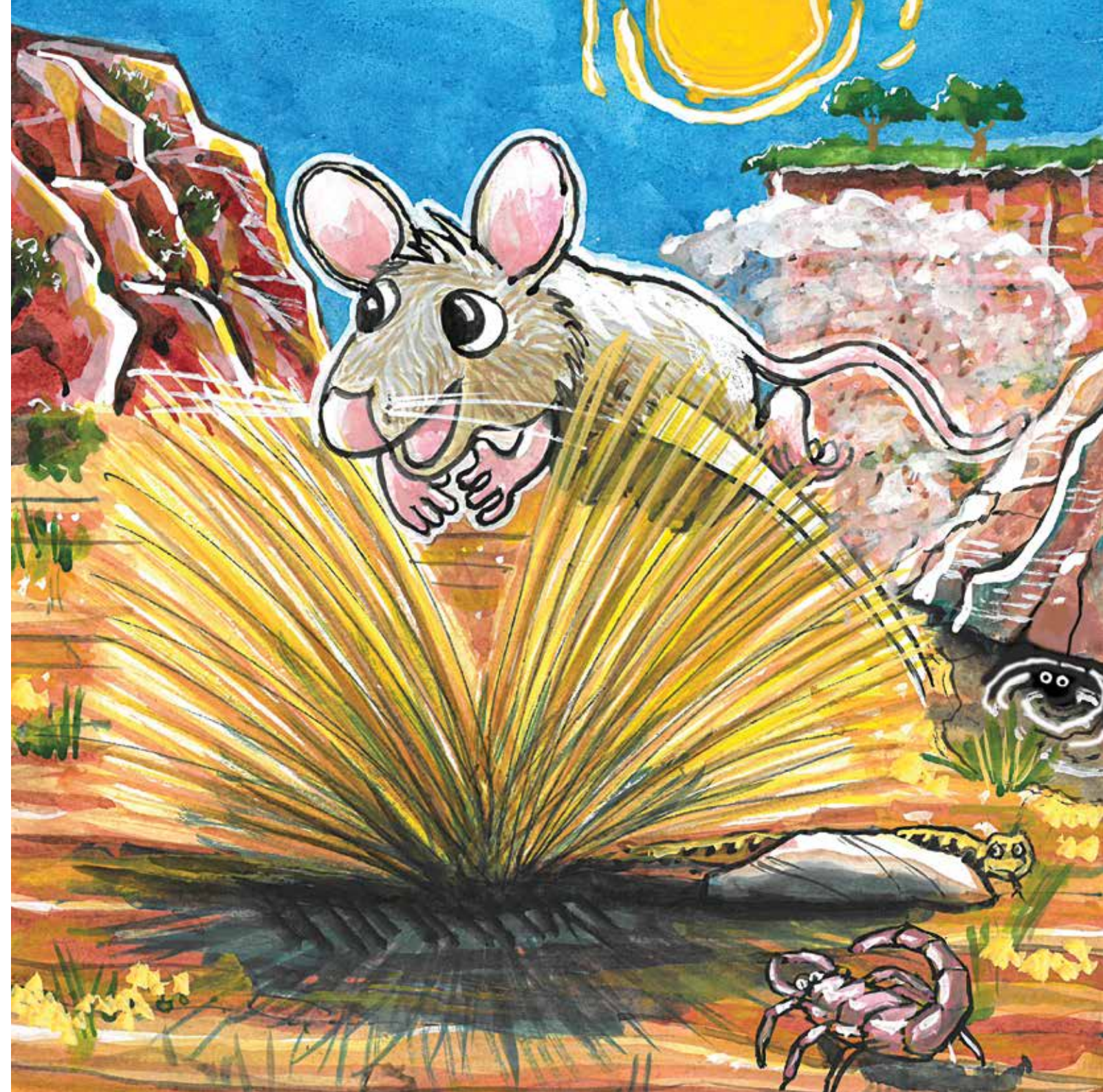
"Well done, Scooter. Sixteen seconds."

The class, who had been sitting on the sidelines watching, applauded loudly.

Coach Coot blasted his whistle again and Bo, another hopping mouse, sprang forward to complete the course. And then another one completed it. And another ... all while Balbina waited nervously. Being a bilby meant that she was a lot bigger than most of her classmates - and also a lot more clumsy! She wasn't sure she would be able to complete the course as well as her classmates.

"Balbina, you're up."

Poooooooooot!



The class cheered her on as she approached the starting line. Here goes! she thought.

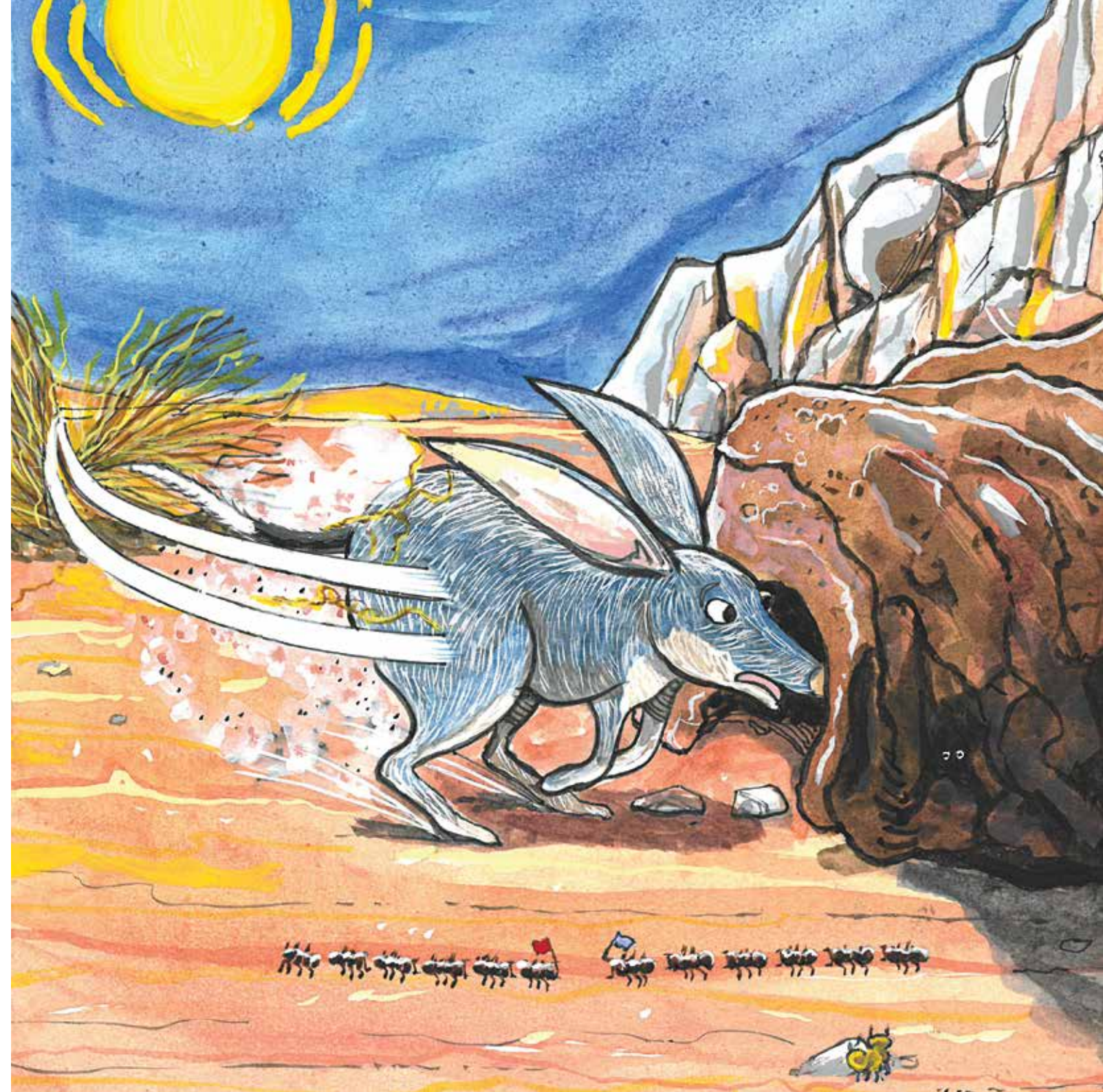
She bounced out over the spinifex grass, but her back legs got caught in the prongs, which caused her to tumble forward. With a couple of prongs still stuck in her behind, Balbina tried to scurry through the underground burrow, but her ears were too big and she got stuck. Squirming and pushing, she finally made her way out the other end – covered head to toe in dirt! She tried to bound up the rocks, only to slip and end up sliding all the way down the other side and landing face first in the muddy pool next to Coach Coot.

He smiled encouragingly at her while the class erupted into laughter. Balbina tried to smile good-naturedly back at them, but she was mortified!

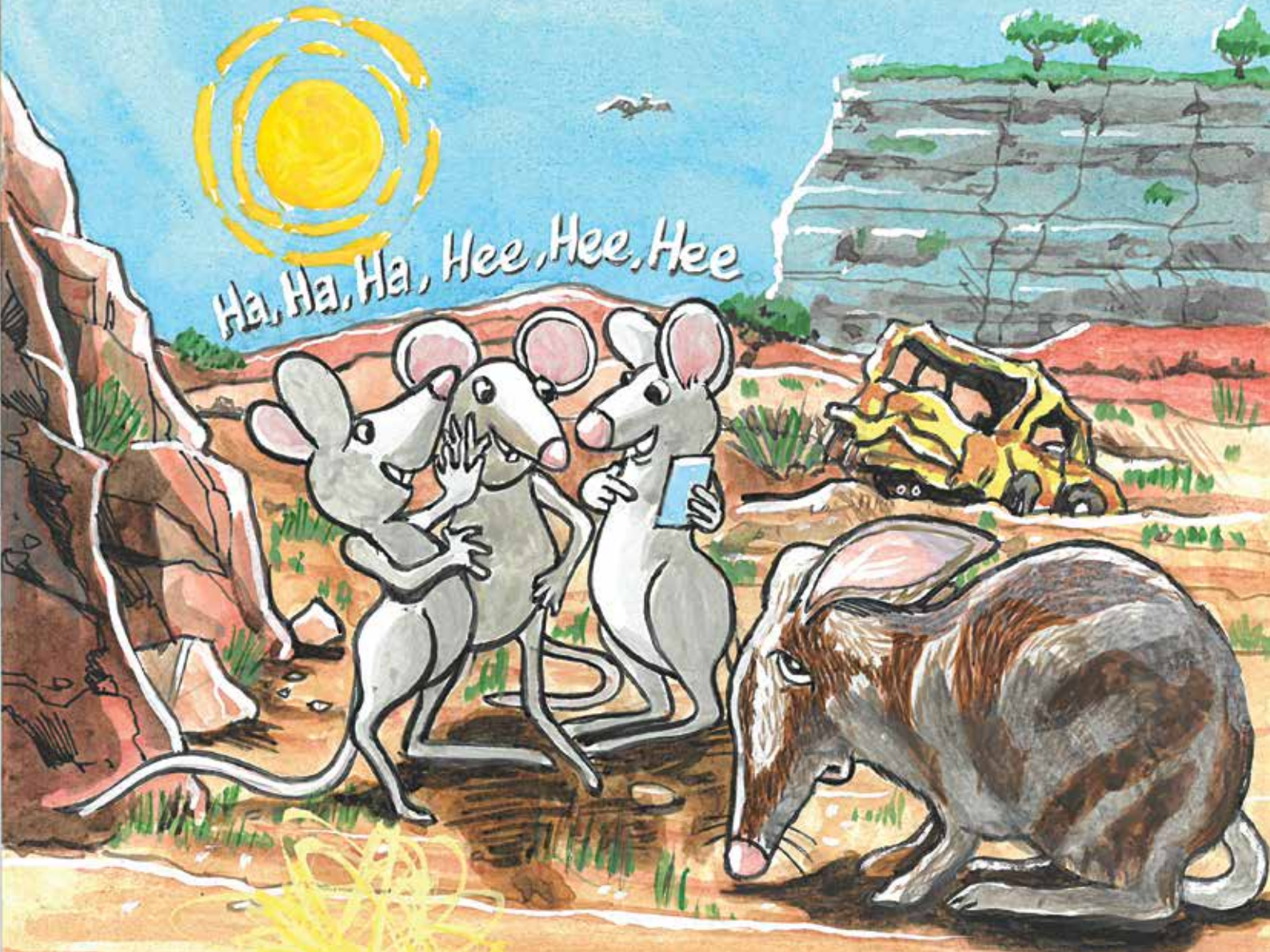
When Balbina arrived at school the next day, she noticed her classmates gathered around Bo's phone, laughing at something on the screen. When they saw Balbina coming towards them, Bo waved her over.

"You're an internet sensation, Balbina!" he cried excitedly. "We uploaded a video of you from the obstacle course yesterday and everyone loves it!! So many people have seen it and think it's hilarious. You're famous!"

Balbina stood there, shocked. Sure enough, there on the screen in front of her was a video replaying the embarrassing moments from yesterday's class. THOUSANDS of people had liked and commented on the video. Balbina saw lots of laughing emojis and LOLs. Even one from her best friend, Scooter!



Balbina hadn't realised she had been videoed in class yesterday, and she couldn't believe no one had asked her before putting the video up online! She felt so embarrassed knowing everyone - including her friends - had been laughing at her behind her back. She knew she needed to say something to them, she only hoped they would understand.



Reflection

1. Why was Balbina embarrassed after completing the obstacle course?
2. How do you think Balbina should explain her feelings about the video to her friends?
3. What are some of the different ways the hopping mice could respond to Balbina after she speaks to them about the video?
4. The hopping mice are friends with Balbina. What do you think motivated them to put the video online and/or to like, comment and share it?
5. If you were there when Balbina's classmates were filming her race course attempt, what would you say to them?
6. In your opinion, were the hopping mice cyberbullying Balbina? Why/why not?

The Strange Story of the Singing Clownfish



Callie couldn't wait for the sleepover tonight!

One by one, her friends Catalina, Blanche and Marigold swam into her bedroom, with their seaweed sleeping bags hanging over their fins.

They giggled and gossiped and munched on algae chips for hours until Marigold said, "Ok. What should we do now?"

"We could watch a movie?" Blanche suggested.

"Or listen to some music?" said Callie.

"Hey, I know what would be even better!" Catalina exclaimed. "Let's make our own music video clip! We can then post it online - my mum let me install an app for doing just this last week."

"Wow, you are so lucky," said Callie. She and the other clownfish all looked deeply impressed. Catalina smiled proudly.

"I know! C'mon, what are you waiting for! Let's start performing."

The rest of the evening was spent splashing, singing, dancing and diving around Callie's bedroom as they recorded and uploaded all their favourite songs.

“Callie, you should ask your Mum for an account,” Catalina said as she left Callie’s anemone the next morning. “It would be so much fun to share music videos with each other!”

Callie agreed. As soon as all her friends were gone, she went straight to her mum and begged her for the app. She could barely believe her gills when her mum said yes! She raced back to her bedroom, downloaded the app onto her phone and recorded her first performance with great gusto.

It wasn’t long after uploading the video to her new account, that Callie received her first ‘like’! Only, it wasn’t from Catalina it was from another clownfish she had never heard of before, FunnyFishGal.

A moment later, Callie received a private message.

@FunnyFishGal: Great clip!

@Callista_the_Clown: Thanks!! I’ve only just set up my account but that song was my favourite! :-)

@FunnyFishGal: It’s my favourite as well! I think you did a great first performance, Callista :-)

@Callista_the_Clown: Just call me Callie!



Callie couldn't believe how much she and her new clownfish friend had in common. They spent the next hour messaging back and forth about all their favourite songs. The next day, they chatted about their favourite movies, and the day after, it was favourite books.

After a week of private messaging, @FunnyFishGal said:

@FunnyFishGal: We should totally catch up sometime and make music videos together! :-)

@Callista_the_Clown: Omg that would be so much fun!

@FunnyFishGal: Yes, so much fun! Do you want to come over after school tomorrow?

@Callista_the_Clown: Yes! I think I'm free. I just need to check with my mum. Hold on...

Callie swam out of her room and found her mum preparing dinner in the kitchen. "Hey, Mum. Can I meet up with a new friend after school tomorrow?"

"A new friend, how lovely! What's her name?"

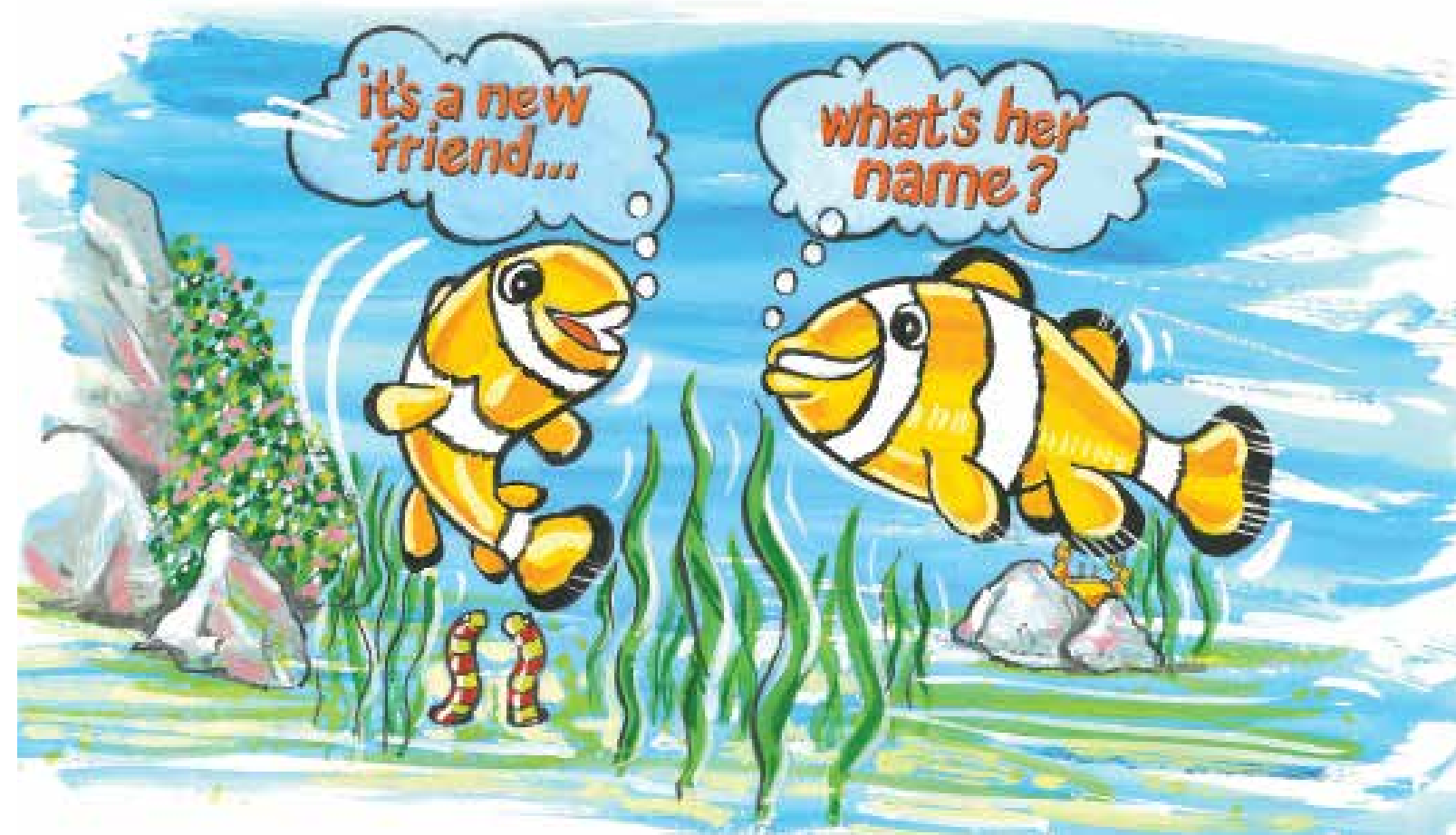
Callie paused. "Erm ... Well, actually ... I'm not sure what her name is. Her real name anyway."

When her mum looked at her, confused, Callie continued, "You see, she's a friend I've met on that app I downloaded the other day. So she uses a screen name. We have so much in common! She's invited me over to record music clips together."

"Hmmm. Where does she go to school?"

Callie thought for a moment. "Actually, I'm not sure. She's never told me."

Her mum looked worried. "Let's have a closer look at her account then, shall we? And see what we can find out."



Callie brought her phone to her mum and together they started looking through @FunnyFishGal's previous posts. As they scrolled through her many videos, Callie gasped in horror.

"Why, she's no clownfish at all! She is a he, and he is a CATFISH!"



Reflection

1. What did @FunnyFishGal's profile reveal about "her" identity?
2. Explain how @FunnyFishGal was able to begin a friendship with Callie.
3. What do you think made Callie believe that @FunnyFishGal was just another young female clownfish like her?
4. What do you think made Callie's mum suspicious of her new friend?
5. Imagine you were approached by a stranger online. How could you respond safely?
6. What do you think Callie should do now she knows the real identity of @FunnyFishGal?

The Curious Case of the Overly Playful Platypus

Presley's cry of joy was so loud that every creature living by the muddy banks of the river heard it.

"Wow! An iPad! Thank you, thank you, thank you!" Presley cried, giving his mum and dad a big hug.

His parents beamed down at him.

"Well, Presley, you've been a hard-working platypus this semester at school and achieved such high grades that we felt you earned it. Enjoy!"



Presley couldn't believe it. He had always wanted an iPad and now he finally had one. He quickly ripped it out of the box and turned it on. What game would he play first? Which funny video should he watch? There were so many choices he barely knew where to begin!

For the rest of the day, Presley did nothing but play games and watch funny videos on his iPad. He surfaced from his room once for lunch and once for dinner – gulping down his mosquito soup before scurrying straight back to his waiting device. He had just reached 'Level 49' of his favourite game, when he noticed the time – 2 a.m.!!! He placed the iPad down and got into bed, but his mind was still whirling and thinking about his game so it was at least another hour before he fell asleep.

When he woke up, the first thing he did was to reach over for his iPad and continue playing his game.

This routine continued for the rest of the weekend, and by the time he got to school on Monday morning, Presley could barely keep his eyes open!





His teacher, Mrs Webb, was introducing them to multiplication strategies, but Presley didn't hear any of it. Well, you wouldn't if you were too busy snoozing at your desk!

When Presley got home, he headed to his bedroom, knowing he needed to do some multiplication homework in preparation for their test later that week. But sitting there on his desk was the glowing iPad. A notification had popped up on the screen, 'Play now and double your score!' it read.

Surely one round of the game couldn't hurt, then, he would get on with his homework.

"Presley! Dinner time!"

Presley jumped. Dinner time? He couldn't believe it – it was already dinner time and he hadn't even started his homework. During dinner, his parents asked him about his day and whether he had any homework.

"No, not really," Presley said. "Just a bit of maths homework. I have a multiplication test on Friday."

"Well, off you go and do your study then, Presley," his dad said as he began clearing away their dinner plates.

But when Presley got back to his room, the temptation was too much. He picked up his iPad and before he knew it, he had doubled his score. And it was midnight.

By the time Friday rolled around, Presley was exhausted! He was also feeling very nervous and guilty. He had not done any preparation for his multiplication test. The questions swum about on the page in front of him - he had no idea what the answers were!

On Monday, Mrs Webb returned the test. She shook her head at Presley as she returned his. "Not your best effort, Presley." she said in a severe tone.

His parents were waiting for him when he got home from school.

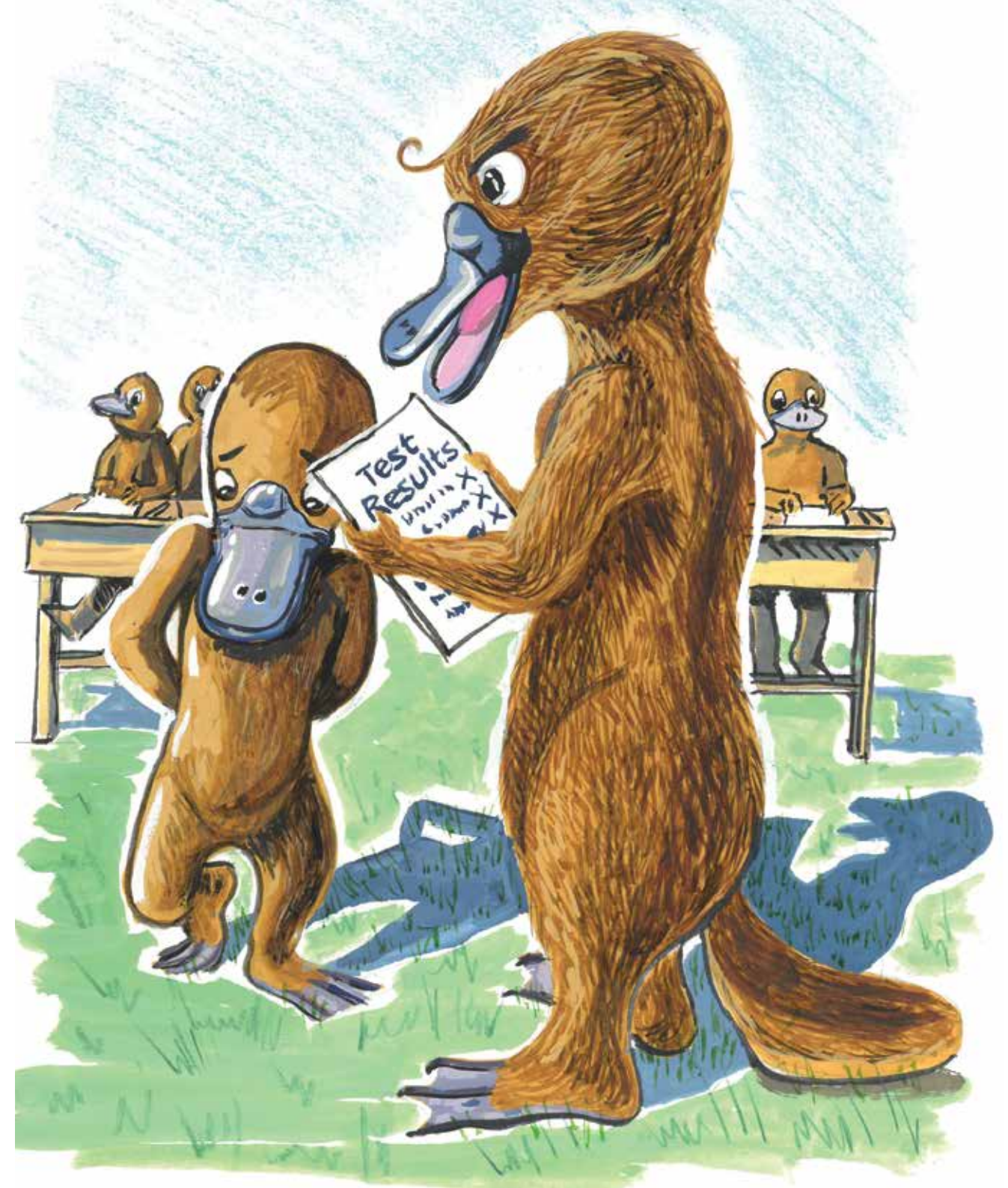
"We had a call from your teacher today," his dad said. "She said you failed your maths test! What happened, Presley? You've always been so good at maths. And you've spent each night this week studying."

Presley shook his head, feeling very ashamed.

"Well, I meant to. But ... well, I guess I kept getting distracted by games on my iPad! I've been staying up late playing. Then afterwards, I couldn't get to sleep. I'm sorry! I was just so excited about having an iPad and the games were so much fun, I couldn't put it down."

His parents looked at each other and then back at Presley.

"We understand having an iPad is new and exciting," his mum said gently, "but it can't replace study or sleep! It's not good for your health or your studies. I think your dad and I may have made a mistake in giving you the iPad without putting in place any time limits."



"I agree." his Dad added. "After dinner, let's create a family digital device contract - this will help us put in place some guidelines for using technology in a safe and healthy way."



Reflection

1. How did the iPad contribute to Presley failing his maths test?
2. Why do you think Presley found it hard to fall asleep after using the iPad?
3. Apart from failing his maths test, what are some other negative outcomes Presley could have experienced as a result of too much screen time?
4. What are some rules you believe Presley and his parents should include in his digital device contract?
5. Have you ever spent too much time in front of a screen? Explain how you felt afterwards.
6. There are many fun things to do besides using a digital device. Outline some ways you could encourage Presley to spend less time on his iPad.

About the Creators



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Dr Kim Maslin is a digital technologies educator, researcher, and author. She has taught in early years, primary and secondary school contexts, and is the author of The Tweeting Galah series. Kim's research focuses on children's creativity with digital technologies.

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Learn more at:
www.kimmaslin.com



A collection of short stories about growing up in the digital age.

Being a pre-teen in the 21st century isn't always easy!

Learn from the mistakes of cheeky Gabbo, the Galah from Esperance Western Australia, and his friends as they navigate their way through the world of social networking, online gaming and digital devices.

A must-read for all pre-teens (and their parents).



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