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CHICKENSAURUS

JAMES FOLEY
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YEAR LEVEL: Y2–6
CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: Sustainability

ABOUT THE BOOK

Sally Tinker – the world's foremost inventor under the age of twelve – is back. And this time, her rival, Dexter Maelstrom, has a new creation he's sure will win the next World Inventing Championships. It's a De-Evolving Ray capable of zapping any species back to its more primitive form! But when he demonstrates how chickens evolved from dinosaurs, a vast array of chickensaurs, from velociroosters to pteroducktyls, soon overwhelms Maelstrom Manor – can Sally and her friends save the day?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Foley writes and illustrates picture books, middle-grade novels and comics for kids. He's the author/illustrator of the S.Tinker Inc. graphic novel series for middle primary readers; *Brobot*, *Dungzilla* and *Gastronauts* also star Sally, along with Joe, her stinky baby brother.

James also illustrated *Total Quack Up!*, an anthology of funny short stories written by authors such as Paul Jennings and Jacqueline Harvey, with proceeds going to charity. James's earlier books *My Dead Bunny*, *In the Lion*, *The Last Viking* and *The Last Viking Returns* have all scored several honours, including children's choice awards, shortlistings in the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Awards, and selection to the International Youth Library's White Ravens list.

James is an ambassador for Books in Homes and Room to Read Australia. He is a massive Marvel movie nerd. He comes from a long line of queuing enthusiasts.

THEMES

- Invention
- Design and technology
- Evolution
- Dinosaurs
- Family
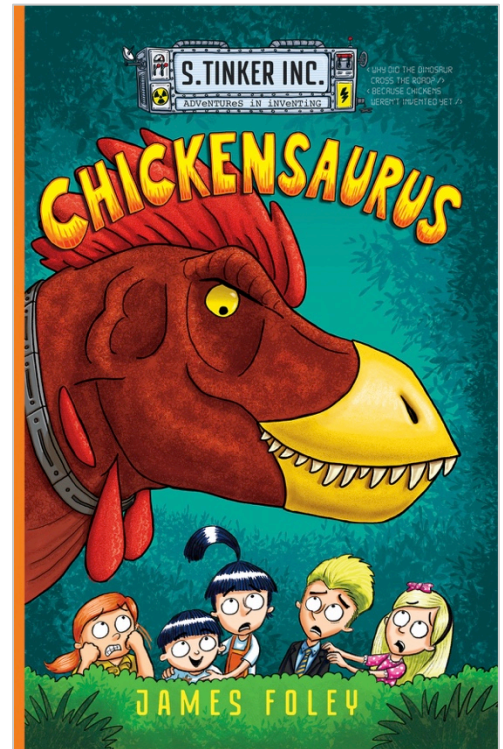- Friendship

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y2–6 English
Y2–6 Visual Art
Y2–6 Biological Sciences
Y2–6 Design and Technologies

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: https://jamesfoley.com.au
- Author's Twitter: https://twitter.com/jamesfoleybooks
- Author's Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/jamesfoleybooks
- Author's Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/jamesfoleybooks
- Author's YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/jamesfoleybooks

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 and why? What do you think some of the challenges might be in creating a graphic novel?
2. Sally introduces her friend Charli as a biologist. What do biologists study?
3. View Dexter's diagram of the De-Evolving Ray: *Zap any living thing with this, and it will morph into one of its primitive ancestors.* What do the words *morph*, *primitive* and *ancestor* mean? Are there any other words you don't recognise on this diagram? Are there more words throughout the story that you are unsure of? In pairs, use an appropriate online dictionary to learn their meaning.
4. What is a crest? The Maelstrom family crest states, *Only men may lead*. Do you think this is fair? Why or why not? How would you feel if you were Lyssa?
5. Look closely at your school crest – what symbols are used to reflect your school's values? Does your school have a motto?
6. Can you design a unique crest and motto for your own family?
7. How are the themes of gender equality, responsible science and jealousy shown in this story?
8. How does the author use humour to engage the reader? Find an example that made you laugh!

Creative writing

1. Sally jokes that they are visiting Dexter's manor *to see one of Maelstrom's inventions blow up in his face.* Charli then asks, *Do you mean that metaphorically or literally?*
   a. What is the difference between meaning something metaphorically and literally?
   b. What other metaphorical phrases can you find in the book (e.g. *Making a killing*; *Leaving me for dead*; *The jaws of defeat*)? Can you think of any other common metaphorical phrases?
2. Find examples of metaphorical wordplay in the book that link to the theme of chickens (e.g. *so focused on feathering your nest, that you missed the fox in the henhouse*; *you put all your eggs in one basket, and now the yolk's on you*; *I got so sick of walking on eggshells around Father*; *On the inside I was hard-boiled, but to the world I was always sunny side up*). Are these sentences meant to be taken literally? How do you know? What is the meaning behind each of these sayings?
3. Find examples of alliteration in the story (e.g. **P**ongy **P**ercy; **B**umbling **B**eryl; **p**lethora of **p**riceless **p**aintings; **e**xcess of **e**xtinct **e**xotics). What effect does this literary device create when reading aloud?
4. Sally says, *Enough of your fowl play, Maelstrom.* What is a pun? How can puns add humour to a story?
5. If you had a telepathic headband like Lyssa's that sent commands to control collars, what would you use it for? Use this as a prompt to write a short story.

Visual art

Answer the following questions to create your own graphic novel.

1. If you could design and build your own technology for any purpose, what would it be? Create a diagram on grid paper (like Dexter's) labelling the dimensions, materials and features of your invention. Then create an A3 comic strip or graphic novel about your first day using this new creation. What unforeseen design flaws might it have?
2. What style has James Foley used to illustrate *Chickensaurus* – realistic or cartoon? What do you like about his style? How does he convey the characters' thoughts and feelings? Use the cartooning worksheet for primary school students available from the author's blog to help you draw facial expressions for your own characters.
3. How are the images on each page framed? Graphic novels use panels (frames) and each contains a segment of action. A page can have one or multiple panels, which are usually surrounded by a border. The size, shape and positioning of the panels is up to the illustrator. When planning your own graphic novel, use panels to break up the action and create a sequence of events that is easy for the reader to follow. (Fun fact: Did you know that the space between the panels is called the *gutter*?)

Biological sciences

1. Charli says, *The latest fossils show that many dinosaurs had bird-like features. Their skeletons and eggs were similar, and some dinosaurs even had feathers. All the current evidence shows that dinosaurs evolved into modern birds – in fact, birds are classified as living dinosaurs.*

   a. What is a dinosaur? When did they roam the Earth? How many different species were there? Why did many become extinct?

   b. What is a fossil? What can fossils teach us about how dinosaurs lived?

   c. What does *evolve* mean? (CHALLENGE: What are some of the theories to explain human evolution? Why does Dexter become a primitive ape when zapped with the De-Evolving Ray?)

2. Draw a line to match these chickensaurs to the dinosaur they evolved from – they're all mixed up!

Chickensaur	Dinosaur
Trifeathertops	Stegosaurus
Eggosaurus	Tyrannosaurus rex
Pteroducktyl	Triceratops
Chickensaurus Rex	Pterodactyl

   (CHALLENGE: Can you come up with a new chickensaur based on another species of dinosaur?)

3. Create a 'Dino Fact Sheet'. Include a labelled diagram of a dinosaur species of your choice (it does not have to be one of the above). Use these subheadings to create a fact sheet: scientific name, era it existed in, diet, habitat, life cycle, interesting facts, modern descendant/s, reason for extinction.

Design and technologies

1. Sally has won the World Inventing Championships six years in a row. Consider participating in the annual littleBIGidea competition that invites young Australians to enter an idea that could change the world! Three winners are selected to receive an all-expenses-paid trip to the USA with a parent, including a visit to NASA's Kennedy Space Center. The competition is open to students Australia-wide in three categories: years 3 and 4, years 5 and 6, and years 7 and 8.

2. Can you design and construct a new invention using *only* recycled materials? In pairs, you will need to build, test, evaluate and modify your invention based on your customer (peer) feedback. Design a name and logo for your company – look closely at the S.Tinker Inc. logo for inspiration!

3. List three Australian inventions and research the stories of how they came about.

4. Research a famous inventor from history and write a short biography of their achievements (e.g. Thomas Edison, Katharine Burr Blodgett, Alexander Graham Bell, Grace Hopper).

5. List five inventions that were created in the last twenty years.

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

How much do you really know about dinosaurs and chickens? Has a lot of research gone into the book?

I did *some* research on chickens and dinosaurs and evolution – enough so that I could get the basic science right and be able to make a funny story out of it. I found articles about scientists experimenting with the DNA of chicken embryos (still in the egg), and they were able to make the chickens grow teeth on their beaks ... they think they might be able to make a chickensaur for real one day. Other scientists strapped long tails onto the bottoms of chickens and watched as they started walking differently to balance themselves out – all of a sudden they walked more like we would expect dinosaurs to walk. Articles like these made me laugh but also made me wonder, what would it be like to actually make a real chickensaur?

Where did the idea for a De-Evolving Ray come from?

I needed a way for Dexter to create a chicken dinosaur. That's it! The idea for the chickensaurs came first, and I just needed a way for Dexter and Lyssa to make them. Then once I figured out about the ray, I realised I could do other fun stuff with it, like turn one of the human characters into a primitive ape. And the one who deserved that fate the most was definitely Dexter. I already had the idea of Joe wearing a suit of armour ... that's based on a character in my sketchbooks from about 15 years ago. Then I realised the beam of the ray could be reflected off his shiny armour ... the different ideas all clicked together and fell into place. That's often how it happens – stories are made up of a whole bunch of different stories all coming together.

Why have you introduced the character of Dexter Maelstrom?

He was actually mentioned in passing in the previous book of this series – *Gastronauts*. I knew I wanted Sally to have a nemesis at some point; it can't just be Sally and Charli and Joe all the time, we need some new characters to keep things fresh (and challenging for me). Sally keeps talking about being the world's foremost inventor under the age of twelve, but how is that decided? There must be some sort of competition ... and what would the other contestants think about Sally? If Sally always comes first, does someone else always come second? How would that person feel? I was also thinking about gender equality, and how there are still some people in the world, mostly boys and men, who think that girls and women are weaker or less important than boys ... which I just don't understand. There's no evidence for that, of course. It's just nasty, it's completely uncalled for. Sally is such a smart, strong person – and her best friend is a girl, too – so I figured her nemesis could be a boy – and I wanted to pit her against the worst kind of boy, one who is arrogant, entitled, spoiled and only thinks about themselves. Fun fact: Dexter's personality may or may not be based on a prominent world leader (though with the way things are at the moment, you'd be forgiven for not being able to decide which one).

Tell us about your process. Does the story come first or do the illustrations?

A bit of both. Story ideas can take a while to settle – most of the time they're a mishmash of lots of little ideas. So with chickensaurs, it all started with a 'lizard-chicken' animal character that's been running around in my sketchbooks for a fair few years now; that connected up with some science articles I read about studying dinosaur evolution by experimenting with chickens; it also connected with my favourite movie of all time, *Jurassic Park*; and a story idea I'd had where Sally attends the World Inventing Championships and has to find out who is sabotaging the inventions. Dexter and Lyssa were characters in that original story idea – they're siblings in *Chickensaurus* but that wasn't the case originally. Lyssa's surname was still Maelstrom, but Dexter's surname was De Vios. The idea was that Dexter was Sally's nemesis and he was the obvious culprit behind the spate of sabotages, but it turned out it was actually the supposedly sweet Lyssa. Gender equality was a theme of that idea too. I combined that story idea with the chickensaur idea and it became *Chickensaurus*.

Then when I settle on the actual story I write a script. No pictures, just dialogue and action. Once that's finished and edited, I start on little thumbnail sketches for every page, then bigger rough drawings. I often rewrite the story as I go through this stage – I pare down the dialogue and simplify the action to suit the page. Then I do the final artwork. I use a big graphics tablet to do the artwork and layout completely digitally.

Fun fact: Lyssa is the name of the Ancient Greek goddess of rage, fury and rabies. It's also almost an anagram of Sally. A maelstrom is a name for a powerful whirlpool out at sea.

Tell us about Books in Homes and Room to Read. What does it mean to be an ambassador?

They're both fantastic charities and it's an honour to work with them. Both charities get books into the hands of kids who wouldn't otherwise have access to them. That's an important thing to me. If you can read, it doesn't just give you pleasure, it also gives you the chance to have a better life – you can study, you can access health care, you can educate yourself and others. Reading improves lives.

Parents can be a bit anxious about buying their kids books 'just for fun' but graphic novels are flying off the shelves. As a parent yourself, what do you say to other mums and dads who worry that graphic novels aren't educational enough?

Firstly, the question presents a false choice; it implies that something that is fun or humorous cannot also be educational. That's not true.

Secondly, I would argue that the main point of reading is not necessarily to learn things, but to read for the joy of it. Educational studies show that if kids read for pleasure, and are encouraged to do so, it improves all their other educational outcomes; they do better at reading and writing tasks – they even do better at maths tasks – and they become more self-motivated learners. So if a parent's main concern is that their child gets a good education, there's no better thing they can do than give their child a choice of which books to read, and to encourage them to read 'just for fun'.

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You come from a family of health professionals but you went in an entirely different direction careerwise. What happened?

I studied a little bit of journalism, graphic design and also primary teaching. I learned a lot from each course and still use a lot of what I learned in my job now. I also completed a degree in behavioural science at Notre Dame – it's basically community psychology. I had a day job for a while with the WA Health Department ... so I still ended up in health. But eventually I gave that up to focus on making children's books. I think this is what I was always meant to do – and luckily my family has always been super supportive.

What would you advise kids who want to become graphic novelists too?

First I would say, awesome! The world needs more comics and more stories.

I've written a blog post about this – you can find it here: https://www.fremantlepress.com.au/c/news/8409-are-you-a-budding-graphic-novelist-check-out-these-10-top-tips-from-james-foley

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