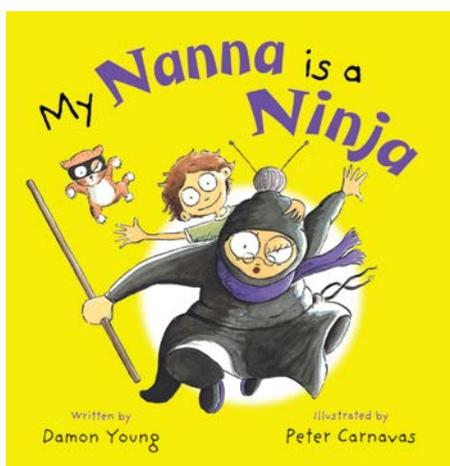


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MY NANNA IS A NINJA

Damon Young & Peter Carnavas



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising Teacher Librarian in context with
the Australian Curriculum

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SYNOPSIS

Meet a nanna with a difference! She dresses in black, tiptoes through the night and juggles ninja stars. Why? Because she's a ninja, of course! *My Nanna is a Ninja* is a fun, poetic picture book that portrays the many different guises, faces and personalities that nannas can have and demonstrates the significance of their role in the modern family.

THEMES

Grandmothers:

- The nannas in this text defy stereotypical grandmothers.

Relationships:

- Nannas share special relationships with their grandchildren.

Poetry:

- The text is written using poetic devices such as rhythm and rhyme.

Ninjas:

- The stealth and covert nature of ninjas features in the text.

WRITING STYLE

My Nanna is a Ninja is written with a whimsical and rhythmic style. The illustrations add meaning to the poetic narrative that traces the lives of four very active and unique nannas, in particular the ninja nanna.

STUDY NOTES

- Read the text aloud in its entirety, allowing students to enjoy the illustrations and the poetic nature of the narrative. Discuss the use of rhyme and rhythm. How does it add to the mood and pace of the story?
- *My Nanna is a Ninja* allows for excellent visual literacy. Examine the illustrations carefully. What are they telling us in addition to the text?
- In *My Nanna is a Ninja*, we meet four nannas. Create a character profile of each nanna:
 - How do they dress?
 - What are their jobs?
 - What are their hobbies?
 - What/how do they eat?
 - What are their pastimes?
 - How do they say goodnight to their grandchildren?
- If your nanna was in this story, what would her character profile be?
- Discuss how *My Nanna is a Ninja* breaks the stereotype of the typical grandmother. How do the illustrations and text work together to break this stereotype?
- How has humour been used in both the text and the illustrations to represent each grandmother?

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- Choose one of the nannas from *My Nanna is a Ninja* and write a story that includes this nanna as one of the main characters.
- Imagine you are one of the nannas. Write a postcard or an email to your grandchild telling them about your adventures.
- When we learn about the ninja nanna, we see sepia vignettes. Discuss these illustrations. What are we being told via these vignettes? How do these help us to gain a better understanding of the ninja nanna?
- Each nanna has a 'sidekick' in the form of an animal. Discuss heroes and their sidekicks (e.g. Batman and Robin; Harry Potter and Ron Weasley). Look carefully at the illustrations of these sidekicks, in particular, the end papers of the ninja nanna and her cat. What role do sidekicks play?
- Write a piece of prose in the role of one of the nannas using ideas from *My Nanna is a Ninja*.
- Examine and discuss the illustrations of the nannas saying goodnight to their grandchildren. What does this tell us about the bond between these characters?
- Write a list of interview questions for one of the nannas in *My Nanna is a Ninja*. Reverse roles and answer these questions in the role of one of the nannas. Alternatively, conduct an author's chair session in which students imagine they are one of the nannas answering questions from the rest of the class.
- Write a reflection of the relationship that you share with a grandparent.
- Write your own poem about your grandparent.
- Using *My Nanna is a Ninja* as inspiration, create a picture book about your grandfather – *My Poppy is a ...*
- What is a ninja? Research ninjas. Re-read *My Nanna is a Ninja*. What clues do the illustrations give us that this nanna is a ninja?
- The grandchildren in *My Nanna is a Ninja* share a special relationship with their grandmothers. How has a grandparent influenced you?
- Create a Cloze Activity using the text of *My Nanna is a Ninja*. Review the use of rhyme in the text.
- Experiment with drawing characters in a style similar to Peter Carnavas's.
- Using software or an appropriate app such as 'Comic Book', create a comic strip of the ninja nanna.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Damon Young is a Melbourne philosopher and author, who lives with two monsters. They call him 'Dad'. Alongside his achievements in Lego, Damon has written two non-fiction books – *Distraction* and *Philosophy in the Garden* – and is a weekly contributor to the newspapers. He has also published short fiction and poetry, and speaks regularly on radio.

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AUTHOR MOTIVATION

The inspiration for *My Nanna is a Ninja* came at my son's kindergarten. The teacher was reading aloud from a book about grandparents. I was struck by how conventional the descriptions of the nannas and grandmas were: knitting, cooking, watching television. The four-year-old inside me said, 'Well, *my nanna is a ninja*'. I started writing the book right then and there, sitting on a wet bench, notebook on my knee.

Why a ninja? I grew up watching silly ninja films and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and have an ongoing interest in the martial arts. Ninjas are the stuff of mystery and fantasy, but they also inspire kids to get physical. I loved the idea of combining this with a grandmother's tenderness and care.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Peter Carnavas writes and illustrates picture books for children and grown-ups to enjoy. His books include *Jessica's Box*, *The Children Who Loved Books*, *The Boy on the Page* and *My Totally Awesome Story*, a collaboration with Pat Flynn. He has presented at many schools and festivals across Australia and his books have been translated into many languages, including German, Portuguese, Italian and Dutch.

ILLUSTRATOR MOTIVATION

My Nanna is a Ninja immediately struck me as a very funny, clever book and, most importantly, something I would never have thought of myself (although I wish I had!). My first step in the illustrative process was to develop the main nanna character. I came up with a traditional type of nanna – a bit cuddly, wore slippers and a scarf, drank tea and stuck knitting needles in her hair. That's when the fun began – I had to turn her into a ninja. So while she had all of the traditional nanna characteristics, I also dressed her up in black ninja gear, gave her some weapons and added a cheeky but slightly sinister expression to her face, particularly the eyes.

There was no mention in the text of a pet but I thought it would be fun to give the nanna a cat, as a sort of sidekick. I initially drew a black cat, to suit the black ninja gear, but eventually just gave it a ninja mask instead.

The illustrations were done with watercolours and ink. I allowed a lot of white space for the text to swim around and for the nanna's black ninja gear to stand out. I particularly like the sepia panels on the ninja pages, which I added to provide an extra glimpse into each ninja episode and to help fill out the composition of these spreads.