

Not Now, Bernard!

Design For Production Assignment

Word Total: 2774 Words

Not Now Bernard - Monster

The character that I have decided to design is monster. Though there is no direct visual description of him, we get a strong sense of his personality through his actions alone. Bernard immediately identifies him as a monster “There’s a monster in the garden and it’s going to eat me”¹. Monster then eats Bernard, roars at Bernard’s mother, bites Bernard’s father, break’s Bernard’s toys and tells Bernard’s mother that he is a monster. Though to a child, the monster’s primary goal is to be a reckless and evil monster, from an adult’s point of view, Monster’s actions are very similar to that of a child acting out for attention.



Monster, by David McKee, 1980²

Bernard, a young boy is repeatedly ignored and dismissed by his parents “Not now, Bernard!”³, and it is suggested that when he is ‘eaten’ by the Monster, it is a metaphor for Bernard becoming overwhelmed by his neglect and acting out. I think that this could be an interesting concept to explore.

Research

Not Now Bernard was a children’s book written and set in 1980, written by David McKee, who was also the illustrator. Journalist Donna Fergusson described it as a “cautionary tale of the perils of ignoring children”⁴

Though he refused to clearly define the story’s meaning, McKee, stated “If we are ignored or badly treated, there’s something inside of us that starts to rise up and we react. And that’s something we have to control, and it’s not always easy. Bernard realises he’s going to be eaten by a monster – and he is.”⁵ This statement supports the idea of Monster as a manifestation of Bernard’s emotional neglect.

Bernard is being neglected emotionally, not physically, so his symptoms would be manifested in behavioral changes. According to the NSPCC, these symptoms can include becoming “clingy... aggressive, being withdrawn, depressed or anxious, changes in eating habits, [or] displaying obsessive behaviour”⁶

^{1,2,3.} David McKee, *Not Now Bernard*, 1980

^{4,5.} Donna Fergusson, The Guardian, *Not now, Bernard ... I'm on my iPhone: classic children's text reissued for digital era*, 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/10/not-now-bernard-im-on-my-iphone-classic-childrens-text-reissued-for-digital-era>

^{6.} NSPCC, Neglect, <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/neglect/>

The Aims of the Redesign

I have chosen 35–45-year-olds with young children as my target audience. This is because the book is really aimed at them and is a warning against ignoring your children. Additionally, they will have an affinity with the Late 70s/ early 80s setting of the story, as this was when they were growing up. Additionally, it may also be effective to people over fifty, with young grandchildren.

Clear communication is extremely important in my design, and what I am communicating is that monster is not a real monster, although he behaves like one, but simply a suffering child's cry for help. The best way to show this is by taking the character of Bernard, the child of the story, and doing my redesign of monster, based on how the experience of neglect has changed him throughout the course of the story.

It could be argued that Monster and Bernard are really two sides of the same coin, they are intrinsic to one another. This is implied through Bernard's warning of the monster to the reader and his parents, and that Monster consumes Bernard and replaces him in his everyday life. *Not Now Bernard* is a family story, with a message about family, so I will try and incorporate my family relationships into the redesign.

To a child, a monster is an inhuman beast that waits under your bed or in your wardrobe, but to a parent, a monster is something that causes harm to your child. Seeing a monster in your own child is horrifying, because your child is something that you have made, and in Bernard's case, Monster is a result of the neglect that Bernard's parent's have fostered. My final illustration should help my target audience to reflect on their actions and consider how it has affected their own children, before it becomes too late, and the child must resort to acting out, as Monster does when he consumes Bernard.

Bernard and Style Experimentation



To understand Monster and why he is scary, I must understand Bernard. I began my design process by looking at Bernard, to get a sense of his personality, so that the extreme change of his transformation will be shocking to the new audience. At Bernard's core, he is a sweet and curious child. Who enjoys exploring and the company of others. I

kept the basics of Bernard's clothes (jeans, star on his jumper), to allow me to really focus on his personality and emotion.

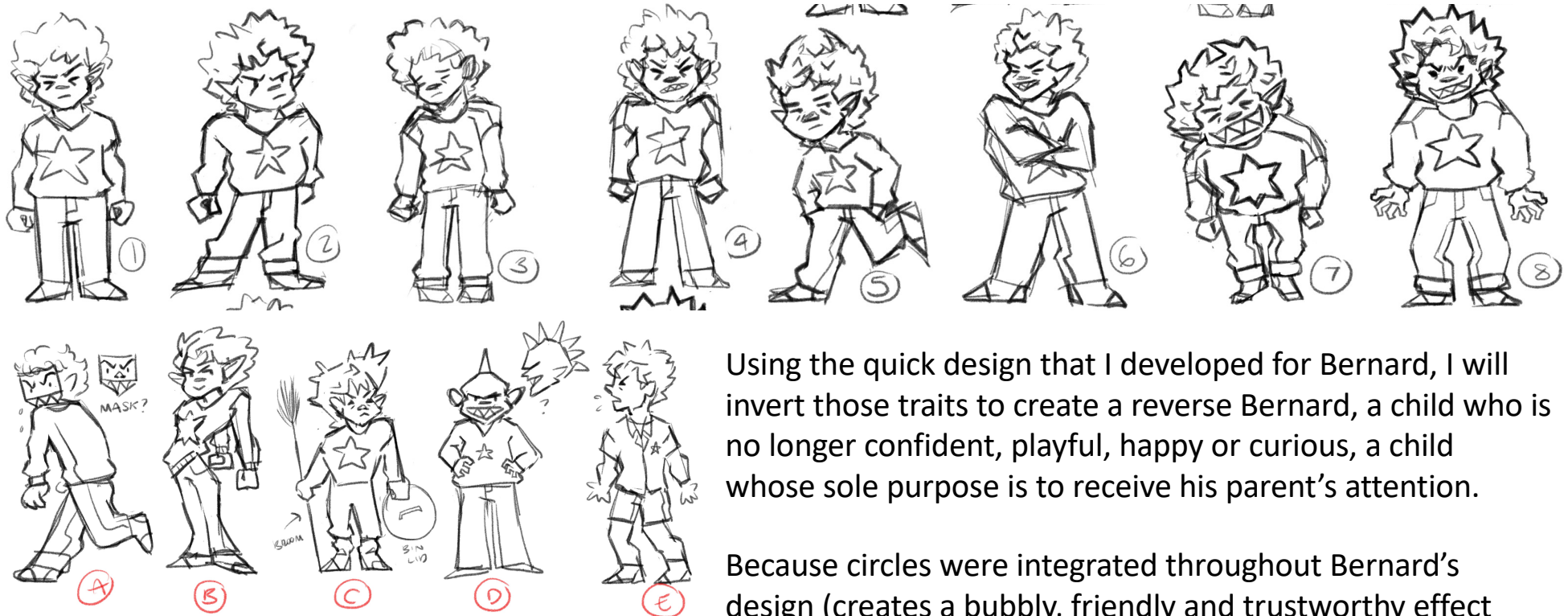
I looked at a range of Saturday morning TV broadcasts between 1975-85⁸ for kids, to understand of which art styles that children at that time were familiar with, as styles that were popular with that age group would at the time will probably still be popular with them today. Hanna-Barbera cartoons, Peanuts, Scooby Doo and Looney Tunes seemed to be the most popular.

The favourite designs of my parents, who are in my target age group, were number one, two, four and six. They liked the stylized eyes of four and six, and the softness two and six. Although I had only asked them about what appealed stylistically, they both responded well to the pose of number six. At this stage, these are designs are for the purpose of finding an effective style.

Using the feedback from my eight Bernard designs, I combined the most effective elements to create the final sketch of Bernard. Throughout this design I thought about the key aspects of Bernard's personality; he is a happy, curious and sweet young boy. Every edge was rounded, and I tried to integrate circles into every aspect of the design (hair, ears, cheeks) to create a playful, energetic and cute element to the design. I noticed that in almost every variation of my sketches, Bernard was looking up, showing his carefree, confident and curious nature.

⁸ MeTV, Saturday Morning Lineups <https://www.metv.com/stories/this-is-what-the-saturday-morning-tv-lineup-looked-like-40-years-ago>

Initial Sketches



Using the quick design that I developed for Bernard, I will invert those traits to create a reverse Bernard, a child who is no longer confident, playful, happy or curious, a child whose sole purpose is to receive his parent's attention.

Because circles were integrated throughout Bernard's design (creates a bubbly, friendly and trustworthy effect according to design theory), I decided to integrate triangles into Monster's design, as it has the reverse effect, creating a sense of danger, evil and mischief. In these designs, I tried to incorporate the NSPCC's behavioral symptoms of emotional neglect, especially behaving aggressively, being withdrawn or depressed.

My parents responded best to number seven and eight, saying that the big, cartoonish grin reflects Monster's mischievous nature the best. They also liked the intense posing of the hands in number eight. Personally, I think that seven and eight have the best personality and potential, and it could be interesting to develop those further. I then developed a few designs which didn't draw from my Bernard designs, to make sure that I wasn't limiting myself, but they seemed cliché or boring, and I couldn't see myself developing any of those designs further. They didn't compare to what I created in my first designs, so I continued with those instead.

Refining the Design

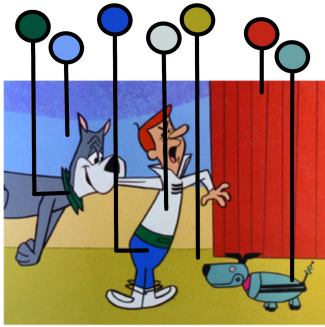


Based on what was effective in the first sketches, I developed more sketches with different poses, line thicknesses and subtle changes in features like eye and eyebrow shape and teeth. The features which were most effective were the pose and open mouth of 5, the eyes of 2 and 3, the hands of 3. In the character design, it would be better to lean into monster's destructive and monstrous actions, than the sadness that Monster, as Bernard feels inside.

Personally, I thought that the thick lines of 1 and 2 worked well, as they added a sketchy, dark and menacing tone to the design, and worked well as the antithesis to Bernard's neat, tidy lines in his final sketch.

In the developed sketches, I moved monster's feet and knees outward to create a more dominant and solid pose and cleaned up the lines. I also attempted to create an unhappy facial expression in Monster's roar, but not only did it not look good, it also interfered with the destructive personality that I am trying to create.

Colour



The Jetsons, Hanna Barbera, 1962⁹



Scooby Doo, Where are You?, Joe Ruby, Ken Spears, 1969¹⁰



Peanuts, Charles M. Schultz, 1966¹¹



To develop a colour palette, I again looked at the Saturday morning lineup of cartoons from 1975-85¹², to get a solid idea of the late 1970s colour palette (as the book is set in 1980). My audience would be familiar with this from their childhood, making it effective in the design. The cartoons which I thought were most prominent were *The Jetsons*, *Scooby Doo, Where are you?*, *Peanuts* and *Looney Tunes*. These aired regularly and for years. I also looked at the emotional connotations of colour; red for anger and danger, blue and purple for sadness, but decided that a green sweatshirt would work best for Bernard's clothes as it is a neutral and earthy colour.

My father liked the colours of one (An almost exact copy of Bernard's colours in the book), and four; a darker version with a paler yellow and brighter red. My mother said that she found number six most appealing. The colours caught her eye first. For number six, I had taken Bernard's colours, and applied a purple overlay, as a more subtle nod to Monster's purple appearance, in the book than I had attempted in two and three. Personally, I liked six the best, as it is vibrant, and imitates the colour palettes of 1970s cartoons the best, while paying homage to Monster's purple.

⁸ Hanna Barbera, *The Jetsons*, 1962 https://hanna-barberawiki.com/wiki/The_Coming_of_Astro

⁹ Joe Ruby, Ken Spears, *Scooby Doo, Where are You!*, 1969 <https://www.cc-pl.org/events/spookapalooza>

¹⁰ Charles M. Schultz, *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown*, 1966 <https://www.techregister.co.uk/heres-where-you-can-watch-its-the-great-pumpkin-charlie-brown-this-year-lifesavvy/>

¹¹ MeTV, Saturday Morning Cartoon Lineups <https://www.metv.com/stories/this-is-what-the-saturday-morning-tv-lineup-looked-like-40-years-ago>

Colour Development



At this stage, I noticed that my parents were finding it difficult to offer any improvements or changes to my design unless I offered examples myself, so for the final stage of my development, I offered them a diverse range of colouring styles, shading styles with a range of slight amendments to the design, and asked for which aspects and techniques they liked, or didn't.

When asked, they were divided on whether they preferred the block or pencil colouring style and between the use of A and B, but they both liked the blush, and the jumper circle on the lineart. I used this feedback to refine my design and combined the colouring style, to create a solid block colouring style, mixed with the childishness of pencil.

Upon reflection, my design still looks too childish. To fix this, I need to research more designs which specifically appeal to older audiences. They tend to look more realistic because they appeal to a smaller group of people, and therefore don't need to relate to a large group of people through simplistic design. I plan to maintain most of the colour, pose and shape research of my design, but refine the design, especially in the face, to make it more realistic.

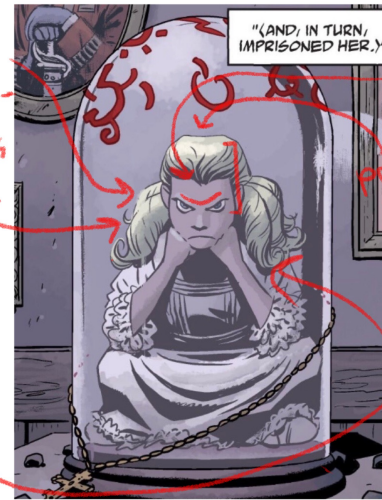
Child Design Research For an Older, Adult Audience

I reviewed Monster's main characteristics; menacing, destructive, and mischievous. Without any context for his behaviour, he may simply seem evil. I then began looking for child characters who share these traits in adult media such as TV, film, games and comics.

Unlike Bernard, Kevin is born a psychopath. He takes pleasure in activities like the destruction of his mother's study, writing on her walls and tormenting her. Though



Kevin Khatchadourian (both ages),
We Need to Talk About Kevin,
2011¹²



Varvara, *Hellboy*,
B.R.P.D., 2013¹⁴



Riley Freeman, *The Boondocks*, 2010¹⁵

he has physically pleasing attributes (a symmetrical face), his eyes express his evil. They are dark and flat, and he often has the bottoms of the whites of his eyes showing, creating a menacing look.

Varvara is a young girl, but a particularly brutal and ruthless character. She enjoys using murder and torture to keep others in line. Like Bernard, she is possessed to behave this way by an 'alternate' entity. She has the appearance of a sweet, young girl and is always depicted in white. Her menacing appearance is revealed only through her pose and facial expressions.

Riley is a young boy who is easily influenced by rap and gangster culture, and often imitates violent behaviours like kidnapping and fighting. He can act in a rude and manipulative way, but only as a result of his idolisation of gangsters and rebellious attitude.

Similar design traits between these characters are: cute appearances with emphasis on facial features like distinctive eyebrows, and cold eyes. The illustrated characters are in a more realistic style than my monster, especially because the facial expressions and eyes are extremely important for creating a menacing tone within the character.

¹² Lynne Ramsay, *We Need To Talk About Kevin*, 2011 <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/190938>

¹³ Mike Mignola, *B.R.P.D.*, 2013 <https://imageshack.com/i/nekdxbi>

¹⁴ LeSean Thomas, *The Boondocks*, 2010 <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/809733207973560244/>

Developing a more Age Appropriate Design



I refined my design further, using the traits I noticed in other evil children in adult media, and constant testing, reflection and review.

I wanted to make monster seem as evil and menacing as you can make a child look.



Final Model Sheet



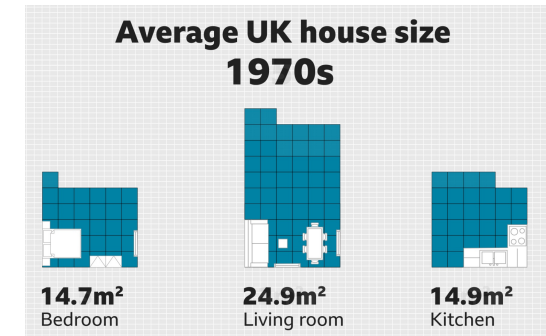
My Environment

Not Now, Bernard is set in Bernard's, home where he and his parents perform a series of mundane tasks such as cooking, reading or cleaning. In the eyes of Bernard's parents (the characters that my audience of parents/carers are expected to connect with in the story), because they are experiencing a normal day, in their normal home, everything is fine. This normality is an important driving force in the story and should encourage my audience to think twice about their family. Just because things *look* normal, it doesn't necessarily mean that they *are* normal.

While Monster's design was intended to cater to what my audience would find threatening and concerning in a child, the environment design should simply appeal to what my audience would recognize and find familiar from their own childhood. Developing this normal and familiar environment juxtaposes Monster's unconventional and destructive nature so greatly that it creates an interesting, entertaining and engaging setup for the entire redesign. The home becomes a playground for Monster's destruction, bringing Monster's almost theatrical level of terror into reality.

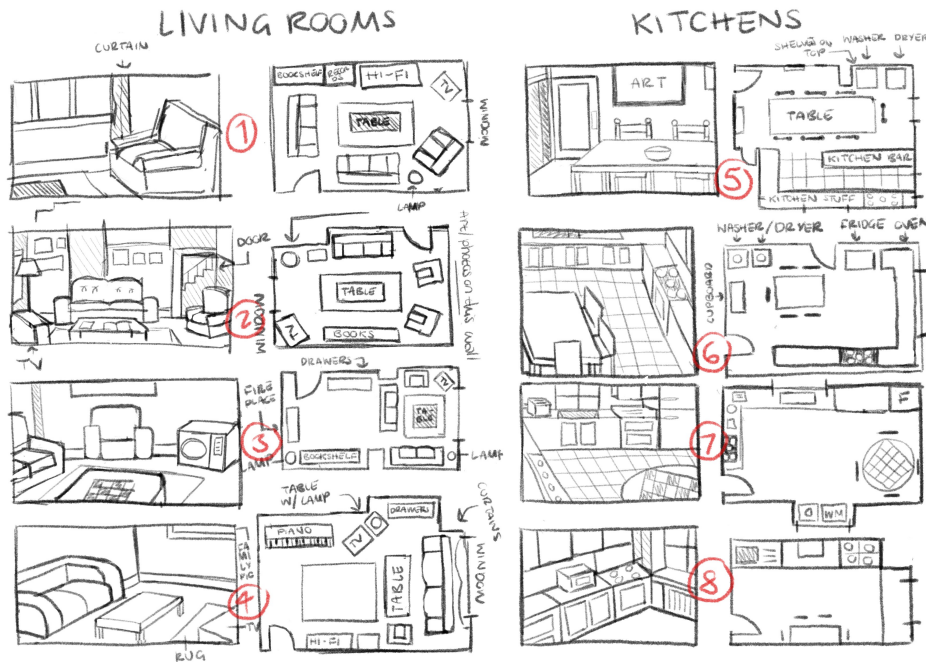


Design Research and Thumbnailing



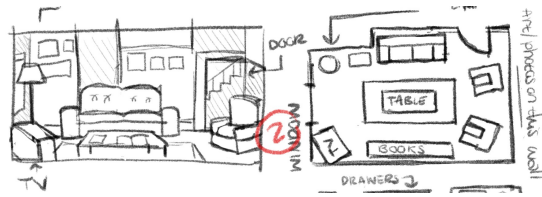
Picture of the average post-war council house, and diagram showing the average size of the bedroom, living room and kitchen in the 1970s, BBC, 2019.¹⁶

- I began this design process by looking through family photo-albums and home-videos from the 1980s to get an accurate and personal understanding of what homes looked like in the early 80s.
- I also researched the average household income in 1979 (£83 per week for men and £50 for women)¹⁷ , which allowed me to research which houses were available, the sizes and which furniture was being used.
- From this research, I found out that in many houses at the time, post-war utility furniture was popular in homes across the country. These were almost always wooden, and mostly appeared in living rooms.
- Using this research and family photos, I designed eight kitchen and living room floorplans, and thumbnails as I think that these are the most communal areas of a house. I want to develop an average working-class home.

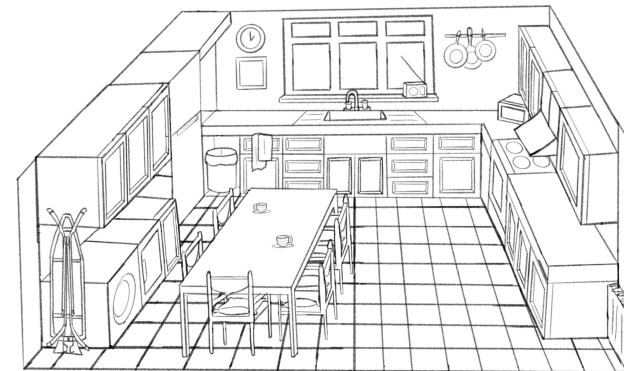
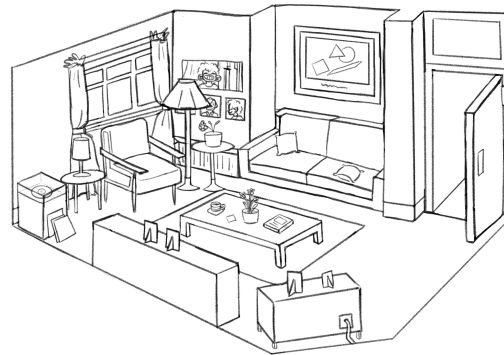
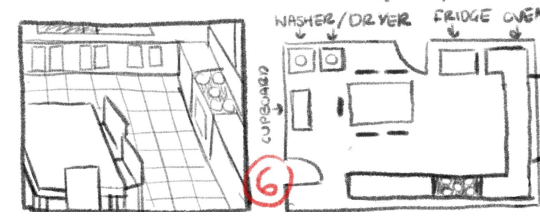


¹⁵. Ashley John-Baptiste, BBC, *When council estates were a dream*, 2019 [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/iZKMPdOwjP/council housing](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/iZKMPdOwjP/council_housing)

¹⁶. Household Income in 1979 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1979-04-03/debates/a2bbe635-766b-47c7-9ed5-1ec2ad6ff487/Wages>



Planning

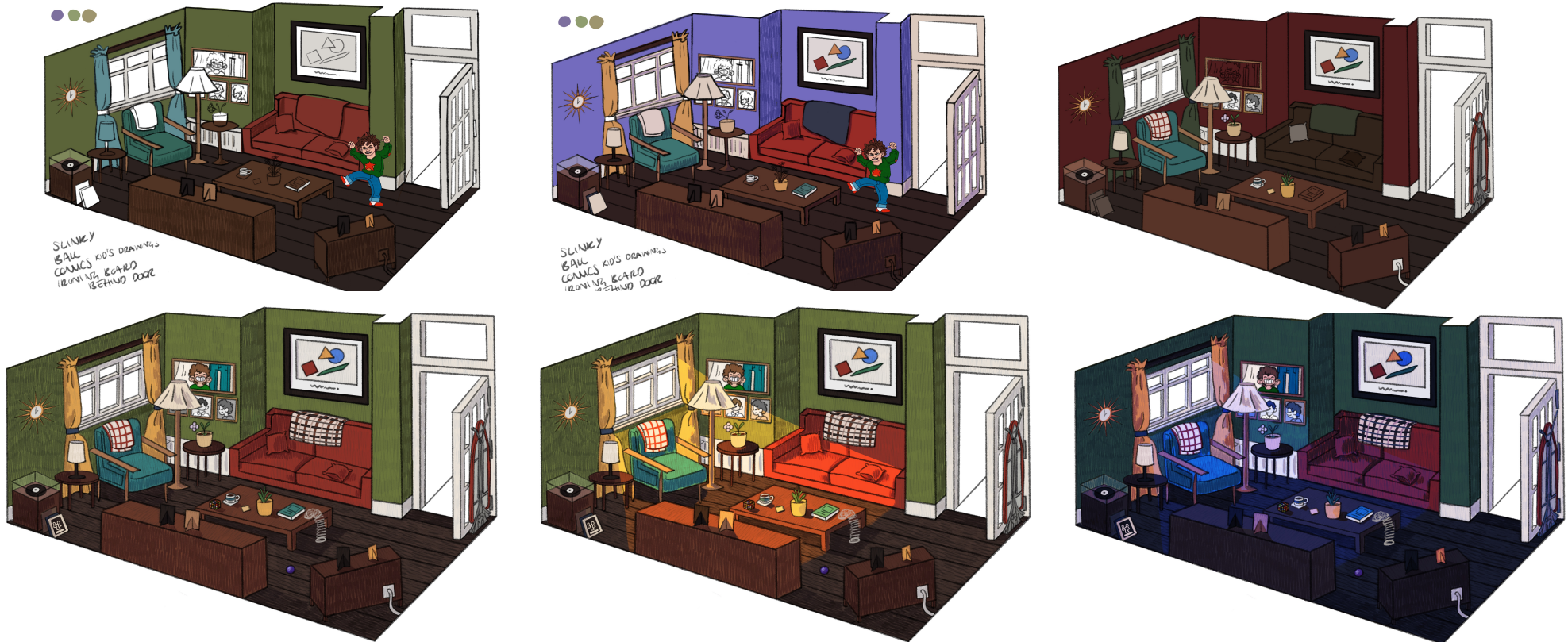


To help me understand the space better, I wanted to physically build my environments in Lego but as I don't have access to any, I decided to build them in Minecraft instead.

My parents liked the look of 2 and 6 the best, as they believed that they looked the most realistic and homely, so I built them, as conjoined rooms. I scaled everything up by two, to allow myself to see these rooms from a child's perspective. This made the environments less intimate and homely. The scale, materials and colours are not perfect, and must be corrected in the next set of sketches, but this is a good starting point to make sure that my angles and perspective are correct.

I drew these layouts, refining the furniture, and adding homely flares like pictures and family photos. The family photos are important to show audience that the message isn't only for people who don't care about their children – even the most loving parents can sometimes make mistakes and forget to check in with their child.

Developed Environments



Of my kitchen and living room designs, I determined that the living room was more homely, and realistic for a family, so I set up three colour options, taking inspiration from my parents' homes from 1980. I tried bright and unusual colours, like red and purple for the walls, but concluded that the green was homelier, more natural and adds a more grounded feeling to the world of the book. It's not an angry, wild or alien environment, it is an average and familiar home. I coloured it using the same block colour and pencil technique, that I used with Monster, to create uniformity in the design.

I then tested two lighting setups, and ultimately decided to go with the night setting, which sets up a menacing environment for Monster's behaviour to flourish, while maintaining the normality of the setting.

Environment Design



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