

5/6 PACKAGE



Differentiated Guided Reading

FOR READING LEVELS 30-60

madly
LEARNING

NOTES TO TEACHERS

Thank you so much for purchasing and downloading these differentiated readings. These were created to support teachers who have students at a variety of levels in their classroom.

To differentiate between the different levels the sentence structure and word choice increase or decrease to meet the needs of each reading level. See the chart on the next page to identify the reading band for each text.

These texts can be used for a variety of purposes.

- Used for guided reading time with the teacher. The teacher plans the lesson once and then can use the same story written at multiple levels. This allows you to teach once and then implement with most of the students in your classroom.
- Used for independent reading. Students can read the version of the text that best matches their independent reading level then complete whatever activity the teachers chooses to meet each classroom learning goals.
- Partner reading to a whole class discussion. Since the stories are the same between the versions. You can have partners with the same level read it together then discuss this as a whole group.

Specific lesson plans are not included in this resource to allow teachers to integrate into their own plans as needed. However these readings form the guided reading component of my Ignited Literacy series. Within that program there are lesson that correspond with each reading along with all of your other activities that may be needed to support your language arts program.

Reading Conversion Chart

For each reading provided there are three versions.
The three versions represent three different levels.
Each text is colour coded and the specific label is identified by both colour and letter

Level A	This level is for students that are in grades 3 and 4. The reading use simpler sentences and less complex words.				
Level B	This level is for students that are reading at a grade 4-5 grade level. These passages have a both simple and complex sentence structure with vocabulary words appropriate for students at this level.				
Level C	This level is for students that are strong readers. The passages contain complex sentence structure and more difficult vocabulary.				
IL Level	AGE	Grade	DRA	F&P	Lexile
A 3.0-4.0	8-9	3-4	30-44	N-Q	550-770
B 4.0-5.5	8-9	4-5	40-50	Q-T	770-850
C 5.0-6.9	10-11	5-6	50-60	U-W	

* There is some overlap in the levels due to the topic of the text and needed complexity of academic vocabulary

* Age range also reflects the maturity level of the student.

How To:

How to structure your guided reading groups

1	Assess students reading level using a standardized reading assessment such as DRA or CASI. You can also informally assess the students reading level by having them read one of the three sample texts and based on their fluency, decoding and comprehension skills.
2	Group students into guided reading groups based on their reading levels. You should aim to have four to five groups with 5-6 students per guided reading group.
3	Create a schedule in your language arts class which groups you will meet with on what days. Schedule yourself time each day to meet with at least one guided reading group. You also may want to give students the guided reading text prior to the guided reading time so they have a chance to pre-read it. This may save time with your group if you need to spend more time focusing on comprehension.
4	<u>Preview the Text - Teacher Planning</u> Read the text prior to the week beginning. Based on your current focus or learning goal in writing or reading determine which comprehension and meaning strategies you want to focus on for this text. Highlight your text and make notes in your blank lesson plan template . Determine questions that assess literal and critical thinking questions. (see chart on next page)
5	<u>Getting Started - Activating Knowledge/Make Predictions</u> Introduce the text and ask students to read the first paragraph to themselves in a whisper voice. Once they are done reading ask them to make a prediction about what they think the rest of the story will be about.
6	<u>Reading Check Ins - Listen to Reading</u> Ask the students to continue to read the text in a whisper voice. Lean into one student and signal to them that you want them to read slightly louder than a whisper voice. Record your observations of their reading skills (fluency, decoding) on the recording page.
7	<u>After Reading - Comprehension</u> Ask student to identify their understanding of the text. Use the learning goals and the questions that you preplanned to ask students. <i>Eg. Main Idea: Who is the main character, what is the problem, what is this story mostly about.</i>
8	<u>Assessment</u> Make notes on each student in relation to their reading behaviour.

Questioning Stems

LEVEL	COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES	QUESTION STEMS
Remember recall of facts and details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> name list definitions order retell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is ____? Where does the story take place? Why did ____? List the ____ in order How did ____ happen? Who said ____? Define the word ____?
Understand explain ideas and concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> main idea classifying comparing Inferring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you describe the main character? What was the main idea? What inference can you make Can you compare ____ to ____? Describe what happens before/after (text event)? Can you paraphrase this paragraph? What facts or ideas support/show ____?
Apply Focus on the parts and how they contribute to the whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connections Compare to real life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What connections can you make? How would you change ____? How would you solve ____? How could you apply what you have learned to ____? Imagine this character in another story what would happen? What questions would you ask the character/author in an interview?
Analyze Look at the whole text and draw conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drawing conclusions Identifying themes Compare and contrast Summarize Point of View 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which events are most important? How does the ____ help you to? How would this event be different if we looked at it from someone else's perspective If you were the character how would you have reacted to this event? How is ____ related to ____? Select the parts of the story that are the saddest/funniest
Evaluate make judgements based on criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify opinion critique using evidence and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How would you improve? What conclusions can you draw about ____? How would you rate this text and why? Which character would you like to be friends with Would it be better if What is your opinion of
Create Take the information and use it in another context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> make produce create perform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How could you use what you have read to create something new? Plan a short lesson to share your knowledge with someone. Could you tell this in a different way What would be a better title for the story/article?

Guided Reading PLAN

Targeted Skills

A - Reading for Meaning	B - Understanding Form and Style	C - Reading with Fluency	D - Reflecting

Guided Reading Guide

Getting Started:

Activating
Knowledge and
Make Predictions

Literal

Comprehension

Do students
understand main
idea and details
of the story

Extending Understanding:

Analyze,
Evaluate or
create

Guided Reading text-based assessment tool

Guided Reading Group

1

2

3

4

5

6

Weekly Guided Reading Text

Targeted Skills

A - Reading for meaning	B - Understanding form and style	C - Reading with fluency	D - Reflecting
<input type="radio"/> Purpose <input type="radio"/> Comprehension strategy <input type="radio"/> Analyzing <input type="radio"/> Responding to texts <input type="radio"/> Point of view	<input type="radio"/> Text forms <input type="radio"/> Text patterns <input type="radio"/> Text features <input type="radio"/> Style	<input type="radio"/> Reading familiar words <input type="radio"/> Reading unfamiliar words <input type="radio"/> Reading fluently	<input type="radio"/> Metacognition <input type="radio"/> Interconnected skills <input type="radio"/> Goal setting

Student: _____ **RL:** _____
 Targets A: _____ B: _____ C: _____ D: _____
 Observations:

 Next Steps: _____

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 Observations:

 Next Steps: _____

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 Targets A: _____ B: _____ C: _____ D: _____
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JANUARY GUIDED READING TEXTS

A - Grade 3 to 4

B - Grade 4 to 5

C - Grade 5 to 6

WEEK #1

Ms. Jade and Mr. Violet

Ms. Jade AND Mr. Violet

Zoe and I have been in the same class every year since preschool, and we were sure it would happen again for third grade. However, my grandma told me that just when you are sure about something, the universe has a way of tricking you. My grandma is always right.

We were playing in the park one day when we heard a far off whistling noise. Zoe pointed to the sky and I saw the strangest beam of colorful light zooming down toward the ground. It landed behind the old fire station with such force that we could feel the earth tremble.

"What was that?" I asked.

"I don't know, Felix, but let's go find out!" Zoe began running. She was always very curious and very brave. I tried to keep up with her, but she was also very fast.

When we got to the fire station, we saw many of the other residents of Turner Grove heading behind the building. I slowed down when I heard some of them shouting about what they had found, but Zoe zoomed right after them.

What we discovered behind the old fire station was a big rock, which doesn't really sound that interesting. However, when I stepped closer to look at it, I saw a pattern of purple and green swirls all over the rock. They seemed to be glowing.

"Cool!" Zoe said. She reached out to touch the rock, which was taller than she was, but Mrs. Peabody pulled her away.

"Don't touch that," Mrs. Peabody warned.

"We don't know what it is."

"Must have been a meteorite," said Mr. Thomas. We all looked up to see if any more meteorites were going to fall down that day, but none did. While we were gazing at the sky, though, Ben and Mila began to climb the



ms. jade AND mr. violet

rock. Ben and Mila were nicknamed The Terror Twins because they always misbehaved,

“Get down from there this minute!” cried Mrs. Peabody. She may have been 80 years old, but she had also raised 10 children, and she knew which tone of voice to use with unruly kids. Ben and Mila jumped down and ran off.

“Um, Zoe?” I asked, tapping her on the shoulder. “Do you see that?”

“See what?” she wanted to know.

“Ben and Mila...”

“Yeah, they’re naughty sometimes,” she said.

I nodded, even though I hadn’t been talking about their naughtiness. I could have sworn that green and purple trails of light had followed them when they ran away from the rock.

That was just the first odd thing to happen after the meteorite fell in Turner Grove. Later that afternoon, I arrived home to find my mother reading a note from my school.

“Felix,” she said, when she saw me. “This says you have Ms. Jade for fourth grade. None of your siblings had her, I don’t think. She must be new.”

“Yeah, I don’t know her,” I said, which was strange, because I knew every teacher at Turner Grove Elementary School. I quickly texted Zoe, to see if she was going to be in Ms. Jade’s class too.

I have Mr. Violet, she typed.

What?

WHAT?

Zoe and I were going to be in a different class? That wasn’t right. It must be a mistake.

Besides, I had never heard of Mr. Violet either, and Turner Grove Elementary rarely got a new teacher, let alone two.

“Mom,” I whined, “you have to call the school.”

“Why?” my mother asked.

“Because they put Zoe and I in different classes for third grade.”

ms. jade AND mr. violet

"Oh, Felix, don't worry," she said. "You'll get to see each other at lunch and at recess. It's about time you two became more independent of each other."

No matter how much I argued, my mother wouldn't listen. I went to bed sick that night and every night for the next week.

Zoe and I lived close to the school, so we walked each morning to get there. On that first day of third grade, we couldn't stop chatting about how we'd been split up.

"I can't believe it," Zoe exclaimed. "But like my dad said, it was bound to happen sometime."

"It's all because of that rock," I said grumpily.

"What?"

"You know that meteorite that fell behind the old fire station? It caused this."

Anyone else would have told me that I was being silly, but not Zoe. She always believed me, no matter what, and I always believed her. That was one of the reasons we were such good friends.

"You are probably right, Felix," she said. "I saw The Terror Twins at the market a couple days ago. They weren't knocking shelves over or throwing groceries around or anything!"

"Yep," I said. "That rock must have had an effect on them."

It hurt my heart when Zoe and I had to go to different classes. Her classroom was far down the hall from mine.

I didn't know where to sit when I got to Ms. Jade's room, since Zoe and I had always picked our seats together, always in the front row. This year, I picked a seat in the back of class next to Mila, in the darkest corner. It fit my mood.

Ms. Jade was a tall woman with big shoulders and long, black hair. She wore a green dress and had a wispy voice. She seemed okay, but I wasn't interested in her, even if she was nice. I was too busy pouting about not being in the same class as Zoe.

We didn't even have recess together!

ms. jade AND mr. violet

I was miserable for many weeks because I missed my best friend. Since I had never been any good at math, Zoe used to help me. Since she wasn't the best at reading, I used to help her. Now we couldn't help each other in class.

One day, Ms. Jade came over to me while I was doing a worksheet on multiplication. She watched me while I wrote in the answers.

"Very impressive, Felix," she said in her wispy voice. "But I wonder..."

"What about?" I asked.

"Have you just memorized your times table, or do you really understand how to do multiplication?" When I didn't answer, because I was still trying to figure out what she meant, Ms. Jade asked me to multiply two numbers that I had never multiplied before.

I couldn't do it.

"I'd like you to stay in for recess today," she told me. "You're not in any trouble or anything. I'd just like to show you something."

I didn't mind staying in for recess because I didn't get to play with Zoe anyway. Mila also had to stay in for recess. I thought this was odd, because this year she had been very well behaved. Hopefully, she and Ben, who was in Mr. Violet's class, were finally starting to grow up.

Ms. Jade had the two of us sit behind her big teacher's desk. Then she brought out some green marbles and put them down. She told Mila to get four marbles and me to get four.

"Now you have two groups of four," she explained. "So, how many do you have all together?"

"Eight," I answered.

"Right, and two times four is..."

"Eight!" Mila said. We both looked at each other with big eyes.

Multiplication suddenly clicked. No one had ever taught me to multiply the number of items in a group by how many groups. I had just been told to memorize the answers. But now I knew what the process of multiplication was.

It turns out that Mila had been having trouble with math, too, which I never knew. Ms. Jade let us play with the green marbles for the rest of

ms. jade AND mr. violet

recess. We got a little carried away and began tossing them too hard at each other.

That's when something amazing happened!

The marbles all floated up in the air, out of our reach. I turned to look at Ms. Jade and she winked as she held her hand out. All the marbles flew right into her hand and she closed her fist.

Mila had seen it, too, and we talked about our magical teacher for the rest of the day.

The next morning, I told Zoe all about it on the way to school.

"That's so cool," Zoe said. "I think Mr. Violet must have magic, too. He moved letters around on the board without touching them to spell different words. It was awesome, and now I understand how vowels can have different sounds." She smiled. "I like how he always wears a purple suit, too."

All day I thought about the new experiences Zoe and I were having with our teachers. Mr. Violet was the right teacher for Zoe and Ms. Jade was the right teacher for me.

We were also making new friends with Mila and Ben, who had gone from The Terror Twins to The Terrific Twins. The four of us had a lot of fun together on the weekends.

The rest of third grade went by quite fast. I became so much better at math with help from Ms. Jade. So did Mila. Zoe became an excellent reader with help from Mr. Violet. So did Ben.

On the last day of school, we had parties in our classes. I thanked Ms. Jade for a great school year and asked if I could visit her next year if I needed help in math. She just winked at me and twirled in her green dress.

After school, Ben, Mila, Zoe, and I went to the fire station. We headed around back and spotted the rock that had fallen from the sky. I clearly remembered how there used to be purple and green swirls around it, but now it just looked like an ordinary gray stone.

"I think this meteorite knew just where to land," Zoe remarked, and I agreed with her. Then the four of us ran off to play.

ms. jade AND mr. violet

I never saw Ms. Jade again after third grade year, or Mr. Violet. Mila says they must have transferred to different schools, but I'm not so sure. I think they went back up into the sky, from where they came.

I think this because on some special nights, I can see flickers of light in the dark sky. The lights are very faint, but they look like they're winking, and they're always purple and green, just like Mr. Violet and Ms. Jade.

Ms. Jade AND Mr. Violet

Zoe and I have been in the same class every year since preschool, and we were sure it would happen again for fourth grade. However, my grandmother told me that just when you are certain about something, the universe has a way of tricking you. My grandmother is always right.

We were playing in the park one day when we heard a far off whistling noise. Zoe pointed to the sky and I glanced up to see the strangest beam of colorful light zooming down toward the ground. It landed behind the old fire station with such force that we could feel the earth tremble.

"What was that?" I asked in awe.

"I don't know, Felix, but let's go find out!" Zoe dashed in the direction of the fire station. She was always quite curious and boldly brave. I tried to keep up with her, but she was also extremely fast.

When we got to the fire station, we witnessed many of the other residents of Turner Grove heading behind the building. I slowed down when I heard some of them shouting about what they had found, but Zoe zoomed right after them.

What we discovered behind the old fire station was a big rock, which doesn't really sound that interesting. However, when I stepped closer to examine it, I saw a striated pattern of purple and green glowing swirls all over the huge stone.

"Amazing!" Zoe said. She reached out to touch the rock, which was taller than she was, but Mrs. Peabody pulled her away.

"Don't touch that," Mrs. Peabody warned.

"We don't know what it is."

"Must have been a meteorite," said Mr. Thomas. We all looked up to see if any more meteorites were going to fall down that day, but none did. While we were gazing at the sky, though, Ben and Mila, who were



ms. jade AND mr. violet

nicknamed The Terror Twins because they always misbehaved, began to climb the rock.

"Get down from there this minute!" exclaimed Mrs. Peabody. She may have been 80 years old, but she had also raised 10 children, and she knew which tone of voice to use with unruly kids. Ben and Mila jumped down and scampered off.

"Um, Zoe?" I asked, tapping my friend on the shoulder. "Do you see that?"

"See what?" she wanted to know.

"Ben and Mila..."

"Yeah, they're terribly naughty sometimes," she said.

I nodded, even though I hadn't been referring to their naughtiness, but the green and purple trails of light that had followed them when they ran away from the rock. I theorized that Zoe must not have seen them like I did. It was possible I had imagined the lights.

That was just the first odd thing to happen after the meteorite fell in Turner Grove, though. Later that afternoon, I arrived home to find my mother reading a note from my school.

"Felix," she said, when she saw me. "This says you have Ms. Jade for fourth grade. None of your siblings had her, I don't think. She must be new."

"Probably. I don't know her," I said, which was strange, because I knew every teacher at Turner Grove Elementary School. I quickly brushed this aside, though, and texted Zoe, to see if she was going to be in Ms. Jade's class, too.

I have Mr. Violet, she typed.

What? I thought I had misinterpreted her message, but no.

WHAT?

Zoe and I were going to be in a different class? It was impossible! Ridiculous. A massive mistake!

Besides, I had never heard of Mr. Violet either, and Turner Grove Elementary rarely got a new teacher, let alone two of them.

"Mom," I whined, "you have to call the school immediately."

ms. jade AND mr. violet

"Why?" my mother questioned.

"Because they put Zoe and I in different classes for fourth grade."

"Oh, Felix, don't fret," she said. "You'll get to see each other at lunch and at recess. It's about time you two became more independent of each other."

No matter how much I argued, my mother wouldn't listen. I went to bed feeling discombobulated that night and every night for the next week.

Zoe and I lived in close proximity to the school, so we used our feet as transportation each morning. On that first day of fourth grade, we couldn't stop jabbering about how we'd been split up.

"I can't believe it, either," Zoe exclaimed. "But like my dad said, it was bound to happen sometime."

"It's all because of that mystical rock," I said grumpily.

"What?"

"You know that meteorite that fell behind the old fire station? It caused this."

Anyone else would have told me that I was being delusional, but not Zoe. She always believed me, regardless of the situation, and I always believed her. That was one of the reasons we were such good friends.

"You are probably right, Felix," she said. "I bumped into The Terror Twins at the market recently. They weren't knocking shelves over or throwing groceries around or anything!"

"Yep," I said. "That rock must have had an effect on them. I could have predicted it."

It made my heart ache when Zoe and I had to go to completely separate classes. Her classroom was far down the hall from mine, too, which only made it that much worse.

I couldn't fathom where to sit when I got to Ms. Jade's room, since Zoe and I had always picked our seats together, always in the front row. This year, I chose a seat in the back of class next to Mila, in the darkest corner. It fit my disposition.

Ms. Jade was a tall woman with broad shoulders and long, black hair. She

ms. jade AND mr. violet

wore a green dress and had a wispy voice. She seemed pleasant, but I wasn't interested in her, even if she was nice. I was too busy pouting about not being in the same class as Zoe.

Our schedules were so misaligned, we didn't even have recess together! I was miserable for many weeks because I missed my best friend. Since math had never been one of my strengths, Zoe used to help me out with this subject. Since she wasn't the best at reading, I used to help her. Now we couldn't offer any aid to each other in class.

One day, Ms. Jade ambled over to my desk while I was doing a worksheet on multiplication. She watched me while I scribbled in the answers.

"Very impressive, Felix," she said in her wispy voice. "But I wonder..."

"What about?" I asked.

"Have you just memorized your times table, or do you really comprehend how to do multiplication?" When I didn't answer, because I was still trying to figure out what she meant, Ms. Jade asked me to multiply two numbers that I had never multiplied before.

I couldn't do it.

"I'd like you to stay in for recess today," she told me. "You're not in any trouble or anything. I'd just like to demonstrate something for you."

I wasn't bothered about staying in for recess because I didn't get to play with Zoe anyway. Mila also ended up joining me, which I thought was peculiar, because this year she had been very well behaved so far. Hopefully, she and Ben, who was in Mr. Violet's class, were finally starting to mature and practice better manners.

Ms. Jade gestured for the two of us to sit behind her big teacher's desk. Then she brought out some green marbles and put them down on its surface. She told Mila to pick up four marbles and had me do the same.

"Now you have two groups of four," she explained. "So, how many do you have all together?"

"Eight," I answered.

"Right, and two times four is..."

"Eight!" Mila said. We swiveled to look at each other with big eyes.

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It turned out that Mila had been struggling with math, too, which I never knew. Ms. Jade let us play and practice with the green marbles for the rest of recess. We got a little carried away and began tossing them too hard at each other.

That's when something flabbergasting happened!

The marbles all floated up in the air, hovering out of our reach. I turned to look at Ms. Jade, who winked as she held her hand out. All the marbles flew right into her palm and she closed her fist.

Mila had seen it happen, too, and we whispered about our magical teacher for the rest of the day.

The next morning, I told Zoe all about the incident on the way to school.

"That's so cool," Zoe said. "I think Mr. Violet must have magic, too. He moved letters around on the board without touching them to spell various words. It was awesome, and now I understand how vowels can have different sounds." She smiled. "I like how he always wears a purple suit, too."

All day I pondered about the new experiences Zoe and I were having with our teachers. Mr. Violet was the right teacher for Zoe and Ms. Jade was the right teacher for me.

We were also making new friends with Mila and Ben, who had gone from The Terror Twins to The Terrific Twins. The four of us enjoyed getting together on the weekends.

The rest of fourth grade went by like a flash of lighting. I improved a ton at math with help from Ms. Jade, as did Mila. Zoe became an excellent reader with help from Mr. Violet, as did Ben.

On the last day of school, we celebrated by having parties in our classes. I thanked Ms. Jade for a productive and successful school year and asked if I could visit her next year if I needed help in math. She just winked at me and twirled in her green dress.

After school, Ben, Mila, Zoe, and I traveled to the fire station. We headed around back and spotted the rock that had fallen from the sky. I clearly

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remembered how there were purple and green swirls all around it shortly after it landed, but now it just looked like an ordinary gray stone.

"I think this meteorite knew just where to land," Zoe remarked, and I agreed with her. Then the four of us ran off to play.

I never saw Ms. Jade again after fourth grade year, or Mr. Violet. Mila believes they must have transferred to different schools, but I'm not so sure. I think they beamed back up into the sky, from where they came.

I presumed this to be true because on some special nights, I can see flickers of light in the dark sky. The lights are very faint, but they seem to be winking at me, and they're always purple and green, just like Mr. Violet and Ms. Jade.

Ms. Jade AND Mr. Violet

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We were amusing ourselves in the park one day when we heard a far off whistling noise. Zoe pointed to the sky and I glanced up to see the strangest beam of colorful light zooming down toward the ground. It landed behind the old fire station with such force that we could feel the earth tremble from where we were, several feet away.

"What was that?" I asked in awe.

"I don't know, Felix, but let's go find out!" Zoe dashed in the direction of the fire station. She was always quite inquisitive and very bold. I tried to keep up with her, but she was also extremely fast.

When we arrived at the fire station, we witnessed many of the other residents of Turner Grove heading behind the building. I slowed my pace when some of them began shouting about what they found, but Zoe zoomed right after everyone.

What we discovered behind the original fire station was a humongous rock, which doesn't sound that interesting or intriguing. However, when I stepped closer to examine it, my eyes identified a striated pattern of lavender and green glowing swirls all over the gargantuan stone.

"Amazing!" Zoe said. She reached out to touch the rock, which was taller than she was, but Mrs. Peabody pulled her away.

"Don't touch that," Mrs. Peabody warned.
"We don't yet know what it is."

"My hypothesis is that it's a meteorite," said Mr. Thomas. We all scanned the sky to see if



ms. jade AND mr. violet

any more meteorites were going to cascade down that day, but none did. While we were gazing upwards, though, Ben and Mila, who were nicknamed The Terror Twins because they always misbehaved, began to climb the rock.

“Get down from there this minute!” exclaimed Mrs. Peabody. She may have been 80 years old, but she had raised 10 children and 26 grandchildren, and she knew which tone of voice to use with unruly kids. Ben and Mila leapt down and scampered off.

“Um, Zoe?” I asked, tapping my friend on the shoulder. “Do you see that?”

“See what?” she wanted to know.

“Ben and Mila...”

“Yeah, they’re terribly naughty sometimes,” she said.

I nodded, even though I hadn’t been referring to their terrible naughtiness, but the emerald and purple trails of light that had followed the twins as they ran away from the rock. I theorized that Zoe must not have caught sight of them like I did. It was possible I had just imagined the lights, although I wasn’t very imaginative.

That was just the first in a slew of peculiar experiences that occurred after the meteorite fell in Turner Grove. Later that afternoon, I arrived home to find my mother reading a note from my school.

“Felix,” she said, when she saw me. “This says you have Ms. Jade for fourth grade. None of your siblings had her, I don’t think. She must be new.”

“Probably. I don’t know her,” I said, which was strange, because I knew every single teacher at Turner Grove Elementary School. I quickly brushed this oddity aside, though, and texted Zoe, to check if she was going to be in Ms. Jade’s class, too.

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ms. jade AND mr. violet

Besides, I had never heard of Mr. Violet either, and Turner Grove Elementary rarely got a single new teacher, let alone two of them.

"Mom," I whined, "you have to call the school immediately."

"Why?" my mother questioned.

"Because they put Zoe and I in different classes for fourth grade."

"Oh, Felix, don't fret," she said. "You'll get to meet up with each other at lunch and at recess. It's about time you two became more independent of each other."

No matter how much I argued and attempted to persuade her, my mother wouldn't listen. I went to bed feeling discombobulated that night and every night for the next week.

Zoe and I lived in close proximity to the school, so we used our feet as transportation each morning. On that initial day of fourth grade, we couldn't stop jabbering about how preposterous it was that we'd been split up.

"I can't believe it, either," Zoe exclaimed. "But like my dad stated, it was bound to happen sometime."

"It's all because of that mystical rock," I said grumpily. It was the first time I'd voiced my suspicions about this to anybody.

"What?"

"You know that meteorite that crashed down behind the old fire station? It caused this."

Anyone else would have disagreed and told me that I was being delusional, but not Zoe. She regularly believed me, regardless of the situation, and I always believed her. That was one of the reasons we were such close, inseparable friends.

"You are certainly correct, Felix," she said. "I bumped into The Terror Twins at the market recently. They weren't knocking shelves over or throwing groceries around or doing anything naughty!"

"Yep," I said. "That rock obviously must have had an effect on them. I could have predicted it."

It made my heart ache when Zoe and I had to go to completely

ms. jade AND mr. violet

separate classes. Her classroom was far down the hall from mine, too, which made me feel so disassociated from her.

I couldn't fathom where to sit when I got to Ms. Jade's room, since Zoe and I had consistently picked our seats together, invariably in the front row. This year, I chose a desk and chair in the back of class next to Mila, in the darkest corner. It fit my bleak disposition.

Ms. Jade was a tall woman with broad shoulders and long, black hair. She wore a bright green dress and had a wispy voice. She seemed pleasant enough, but I wasn't interested in her, even if she was cordial. I was too busy pouting about not being in the same class as Zoe.

Our schedules were so misaligned, we didn't even have recess during the same time!

I was miserable for many weeks because I missed my best friend's companionship. Since math had never been one of my strengths, Zoe used to give me assistance with this subject. Since she wasn't the best at reading, I used to help and encourage her when we read literature. Now we couldn't offer any aid to each other in class.

One day, Ms. Jade ambled over to my desk while I was completing a worksheet on multiplication. She observed me while I scribbled in the answers with as much rapidity as I could muster.

"Very impressive, Felix," she said in her wispy voice. "But I wonder..."

"What about?" I asked.

"Have you just memorized your times table, or do you really comprehend how to do multiplication?" When I didn't answer, because I was still contemplating what she meant, Ms. Jade asked me to multiply two numbers that I had never multiplied before.

I couldn't do it.

"I'd like you to stay in for recess today," she told me. "You're not in any trouble or anything. I'd just like to demonstrate something for you."

I wasn't bothered about staying in for recess because I didn't get to gather together with Zoe anyway. Mila also ended up joining me, which I thought was peculiar, because this year she had been very well behaved so far. Hopefully, she and Ben, who was in Mr. Violet's class, were finally starting to mature and practice better manners.

ms. jade AND mr. violet

Ms. Jade gestured for the two of us to sit behind her professional looking teacher's desk. Then she brought out some luminous green marbles and put them down on its surface. She told Mila to pick up four marbles and had me mirror the action.

"Now you have two groups of four," she explained. "So, how many do you have all together?"

"Eight," I answered.

"Right, and two times four is..."

"Eight!" Mila said. We swiveled to look at each other, our eyes large and round.

Multiplication suddenly clicked for me. No one had ever explained the process to me; I had just been told to memorize the answers. But now I knew what the operation of multiplying really was.

It turned out that Mila had been struggling with math, too, which I never knew. Ms. Jade let us play and practice with the marbles for the rest of recess. The lustrous little orbs reminded me of the veined rock that had collided into our small town that summer. Mila and I got a little carried away with them and began tossing them too hard at each other.

That's when something inexplicably flabbergasting happened!

The marbles all floated up in the air in tandem, hovering out of our reach. I turned to look at Ms. Jade, who winked as she held her hand out. All the marbles swiftly traveled right into her palm and she closed her fist around them.

Mila had noticed this phenomenon, too, and we whispered about our magical teacher for the rest of the day.

The next morning, I related to Zoe all about the incident on our way to school.

"That's incredibly cool," Zoe said. "I think Mr. Violet must have magic, as well. He moved letters around on the board without touching them to spell various words. It was awesome, and now I understand how vowels can have different sounds." She smiled. "He always wears a purple suit, too, and that's my favorite color."

That was thought-provoking, since green was actually my favorite color.

ms. jade AND mr. violet

All day I pondered about the dazzling new experiences Zoe and I were having with our teachers. I concluded that Mr. Violet was the right teacher for Zoe and Ms. Jade was the right teacher for me.

The two of us were also making new friends with Mila and Ben, who had gone from The Terror Twins to The Terrific Twins. As a quartet, we enjoyed getting together on the weekends to hang out.

The rest of fourth grade went by like a flash of lighting. I improved exponentially at math with help from Ms. Jade, as did Mila. Zoe became an excellent reader thanks to Mr. Violet, as did Ben.

On the last day of school, we celebrated by having parties in our classes. I thanked Ms. Jade for a productive and successful school year and asked if I could visit her next year if I needed assistance with math. She just winked at me and twirled in her green dress.

After school, Ben, Mila, Zoe, and I traveled to the fire station. We headed around back and spotted the rock that had crash-landed in Turner Grove when it fell from the sky. I clearly remembered how there had been purple and green swirls all around it shortly after it landed, but now it just looked like an ordinary gray stone.

"I think this meteorite knew just where to land," Zoe remarked, and I agreed with her, just like usual. Then the four of us ran off to play.

I never saw Ms. Jade again after fourth grade year, or Mr. Violet for that matter. Mila believes they must have transferred to different schools in other districts, but I'm not so sure. I have this theory that they beamed back up into the sky, from where I supposed they came.

I presumed this to be true because on some special nights, I can see flickers of light in the dark sky. The lights are very faint, but they seem to be winking at me, and they're always purple and green, just like Mr. Violet and Ms. Jade.

WEEK #2

A Straw Hat for Cow

A straw hat FOR COW

Cow was caught in a tree again. As he struggled to get out, Squirrel came over to help.

"That's it!" Cow said as Squirrel untangled the leaves from his head. "I'm done with these horns!"

"I think your horns are cool," said Squirrel. "They make you look big and strong."

Cow rolled his eyes. "I don't look big and strong when I need help from a squirrel to get untangled from a tree," he said. "My horns are always in the way."

"I have an idea," Squirrel said. "Wait right here."

Squirrel was soon back with something brown in his tiny hand.

"What is that?" Cow asked.

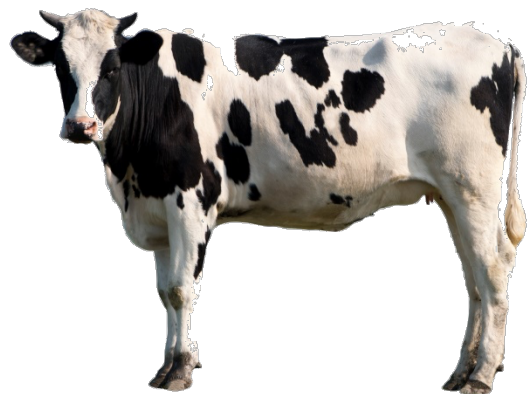
"It's a straw hat!" Squirrel said proudly.

"Where did you find it?" Cow asked.

"The farmer left it on a hook in the barn," Squirrel announced. "You can use it to cover your horns," Squirrel said as he tossed the hat on top of Cow's head. However, the hat didn't make it that far. It got caught on Cow's horns and left a gap between the bottom of the hat and the top of his head.

"My horns get in the way even when I'm trying to cover them up!" Cow shouted in disappointment.

"What's wrong?" Cow heard a voice say. It was his mother. She was walking towards the trees from the pasture. When she saw her son she let out a little giggle and asked, "What is on your horns?"



A straw hat FOR COW

"A straw hat. Squirrel thought it might be a good way to cover them up," he said.

"Why would you want to do that?" his mother asked.

"Because my horns are always in the way. I can't even walk through the trees without getting stuck. I wish I didn't have them at all," he said with a sigh.

"Come over here, both of you," Cow's mother said. She led Cow and Squirrel to a clear area of the pasture. She turned to her son and said, "I need you to know how lucky you are to have your horns. There are plenty of other cows in the world that don't have horns at all."

"They're the lucky ones," Cow said under his breath.

"Don't say that," Cow's mother replied. "Lots of cows are born with horns, but farmers take them off. Cows without horns don't take up as much room. This means the farmers give them much less space. How would you feel if you didn't have this beautiful pasture to roam?"

"I would be sad," Cow said.

"Not only that, but I need my horns to keep you safe. Imagine if a wolf found his way into the pasture? How would I protect you without my horns?" she asked.

"I never thought about that," Cow said.

"Horns are important, Cow. Not only that, but they're beautiful," his mother said.

"I told you that your horns were cool," Squirrel giggled.

"I guess I can handle them, but only if you'll keep rescuing me when I get stuck in the trees," Cow told Squirrel.

"Deal!" Squirrel said.

A straw hat FOR COW

Once again, for the third time in a week, Cow was tangled up in a tree. As he struggled to retreat, Squirrel came to his rescue.

"That's it!" Cow announced as Squirrel untangled the limbs from his head. "I'm done with these horns!"

"I think your horns are awesome," said Squirrel. "They make you look gigantic and tough!"

Cow rolled his eyes as he said, "I don't look so tough when I need a squirrel to rescue me from a dumb tree. My horns just get in the way."

"Wait! I have an idea," Squirrel said. "Don't move."

Squirrel speedily returned with a strange brown bundle in his tiny hand.

"What's that?" Cow asked.

"It's a straw hat, of course!" Squirrel said as he unfolded the hat and proudly presented it to his friend.

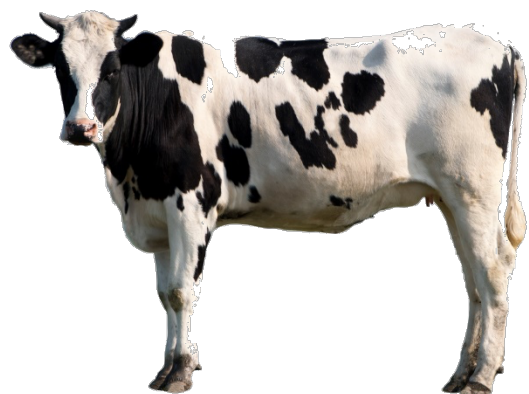
"Where did you find a straw hat?" Cow asked.

"The farmer left it on a hook in the barn," Squirrel explained. "Let's see if you can use it to cover your horns!"

Squirrel flung the straw hat straight towards the top of Cow's head. However, the hat didn't reach its destination. It got caught

on Cow's horns and left an odd gap between the bottom of the hat and the top of Cow's head.

"See? My horns get in the way even when I'm trying to cover them up!" Cow shouted in frustration.



A straw hat FOR COW

"What's this shouting I hear?" Cow heard a soft voice say. It was Cow's mother, and she was walking towards the trees from the pasture. When she saw her son, she couldn't help but chuckle.

"What in the world is on your horns?" she asked.

Cow's head drooped as he said, "Squirrel thought a straw hat might be a good way to cover them up."

"Why would you want to do that?" his mother asked in confusion.

"Because my horns are always in the way, Mom. I can't even walk through the trees without getting stuck. I wish I didn't have them at all," Cow said with a groan.

"Both of you, come over here now," Cow's mother said. She led Cow and Squirrel to a clear area of the pasture before turning to her son and saying, "I need you to know how fortunate you are to have your horns. There are plenty of cows in the world that don't have horns at all."

"They're the lucky ones," Cow murmured.

"Don't say that," Cow's mother replied sternly. "Lots of cows are born with horns, but farmers painfully remove them. Cows without horns take up less room, which means the farmers give them tiny spaces to live. Wouldn't you feel disappointed if you didn't have this big and beautiful pasture to roam every day?"

"I guess I would," Cow said.

"Also, we need our horns to stay safe. Imagine if a wolf found his way into the pasture? How would I protect you without my horns?" she asked.

Cow looked embarrassed. "I guess I never thought about any of that," he replied.

A straw hat FOR COW

“Your horns are important, Cow. Not only that, but they’re absolutely beautiful,” his mother said. “They make you who you are.”

“I told you that your horns were awesome,” Squirrel said slyly.

“I guess I can handle them, but only if you’ll keep rescuing me when I get stuck in the trees,” Cow told Squirrel.

“Deal!” replied Squirrel.

A straw hat FOR COW

Once again, for the third time in a week, poor Cow was caught in a tree. He simply wanted to graze near the shade, but Cow's horns seemed to be a magnet for branches. As he struggled to retreat, his friend Squirrel came to his rescue.

"Squirrel, I just can't take it anymore!" Cow announced while Squirrel untangled the limbs from his head. "I'm absolutely done with these horns!"

"Why?" Squirrel asked. "I think your horns are awesome. They make you look tough!"

Cow rolled his eyes and retorted, "I don't look tough when I need a squirrel to rescue me from a ridiculous tree. My horns are just a great big nuisance."

A fantastic idea suddenly came to Squirrel. "Wait right here," he instructed his friend.

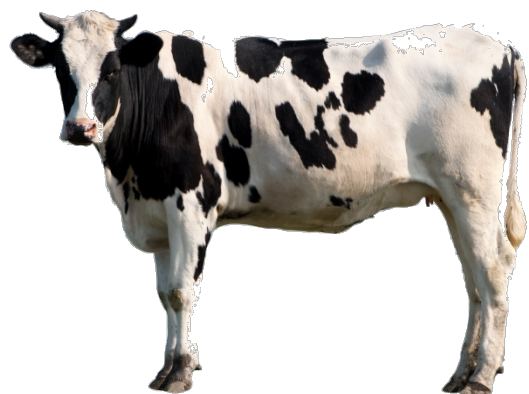
Squirrel speedily returned to Cow with a peculiar brown bundle in his tiny hand.

"What on Earth is that?" Cow wondered.

"It's a straw hat, of course!" Squirrel said as he unfolded the hat and proudly presented it to Cow.

"Where did you find that?" Cow asked.

"The farmer left it on a hook in the barn," Squirrel explained. "Perhaps you can use it to cover your horns so you won't get trapped by the trees!"



A straw hat FOR COW

Squirrel flung the straw hat upward, straight towards the top of Cow's head. However, the hat didn't reach its intended destination. Instead, it got hooked on Cow's horns and produced an odd gap between the bottom of the hat and the top of Cow's head.

"See? My horns get in the way even when I'm trying to cover them up!" Cow bellowed.

Suddenly, Cow heard a soft, sweet voice ask, "What's this shouting I hear?"

It was Cow's mother, calmly tottering towards the shady trees from the pasture. When she saw her son, she couldn't help but chuckle. "What in the world is on your horns, my dear?" she asked.

Cow's seemed embarrassed, frustrated, and completely dejected as he sputtered, "Squirrel thought a straw hat might be a good way to cover them up, ok?"

"Why would you want to do that?" his mother asked in genuine confusion.

"Because my horns are always in the way, Mom. I can't even graze near the trees without getting stuck. I wish I didn't have them at all," Cow groaned.

Cow's mother was silent for a moment before she requested that Cow and Squirrel join her in the pasture. She led them to a lovely, sunny spot before she turned to her son and exclaimed, "You must know how fortunate you are to have your horns, my dear. There are plenty of cows in the world that don't have horns at all."

"They're the fortunate ones," Cow murmured.

A straw hat FOR COW

"That's completely incorrect," Cow's mother retorted sternly.

"Plenty of cows are born with horns, but farmers detach them, and the process can be quite painful. You see, cows without horns take up less room on a farm, which means the farmers merely provide them tiny spaces to live. Wouldn't you feel miserable if you didn't have this vast, beautiful pasture to roam every day?"

"I guess I would," Cow whispered.

"Furthermore, we need our horns to remain secure. Imagine a wolf crept into our pasture? How would I protect you without my horns?" she asked.

An embarrassed expression stretched across Cow's face. "I guess I never thought about any of that," he replied.

"Your horns are important, Cow. Not only that, but they're absolutely beautiful," his mother said with pride. "They make you who you are."

"I told you that your horns were pretty awesome," Squirrel said shrewdly.

"I guess I can handle them, but only if you'll keep rescuing me when I get stuck in the trees," Cow told Squirrel.

"Deal!" replied Squirrel.

WEEK #3

Joshua and the Man with the
Rainbow Coat

joshua AND THE MAN WITH THE rainbow coat

Joshua grew up in the city. He shared an apartment with his parents near the financial district. Even though the city was a fun place to grow up, Joshua was always bothered by its lack of color. The cement and steel buildings that surrounded him made Joshua feel a bit drab. There were a few fountains and a smattering of trees near his apartment, but they did not provide enough color for Joshua. What's more, all of the people Joshua saw each day looked just as dull as the buildings. Men and women wore dark suits and carried dingy-looking briefcases as they rushed into tall skyscrapers. Sometimes their suits had a bit of color, but not often. It was a treat when Joshua saw someone wearing a red scarf, navy coat, or green tie. He even turned this into a game; Joshua would look out the living room window towards the streets below and make a mental note whenever he saw someone wearing a color that wasn't black, gray, or brown. He couldn't remember ever counting past three.

When Joshua asked his father why everyone dressed the same, he would say, "That's just the color of the city, Son." His mother would add, "You have to dress a certain way if you want to be taken seriously in this town." But these responses made no sense to Joshua. To him, it seemed strange that a city so exciting contained people who all looked the same.

One Monday morning, Joshua sat in the living room window to eat his toaster waffle and play his game. He scanned the streets below, seeing nothing but a sea of dull clothing. Suddenly, Joshua saw something in front of the fountain across the street. It was a tall man moving through the crowd of hurried businesspeople. The man moved slowly, almost as if he was looking for something. But the man's pace isn't what Joshua noticed the most; it was his suit coat. It wasn't dull or drab at all. In fact, it was the exact opposite. It was bright, colorful, and beautiful.

Joshua wanted to run and grab his camera, but he also didn't want to take



joshua AND THE MAN WITH THE rainbow coat

his eyes off of the man. He needed to make sure it wasn't an illusion; that he was actually seeing a real person wearing several bright colors. But soon, he disappeared into a building and out of Joshua's sight.

As Joshua walked to and from school, he continued to search for the man in the bright coat, but to no avail. When Joshua arrived home, he resumed his search in the same spot from the morning. He looked down from his perch for a good hour when suddenly the front door opened.

"Hi, honey!" Joshua's mom said as she deposited her briefcase on the kitchen counter. When she saw Joshua staring out the window, she asked, "What are you doing?"

"Nothing," Joshua tried to say casually. He didn't want his mom to think he was nuts for looking for a guy in a colorful coat.

"I expected you would be in your room playing a video game," she said.

"I guess I'm just tired," Joshua replied, not breaking his gaze out the window.

"Well, once your father gets home, we'll..." his mom said, trailing off as the front door opened again.

Joshua's father was on his cell phone, laughing at whomever was on the other end. As his father wandered over, Joshua heard him exclaim, "What?!" and "Are you serious?" before he hung up.

"Who was that, John?" Joshua's mother asked.

"Oh, just Larry. He was just telling me about a new photographer his office hired. Apparently the guy is a bit strange. He showed up in a rainbow-striped suit coat for his first day."

Joshua's jaw dropped as he rose from his seat at the window.

"Well, that's...interesting," Joshua's mom replied. "Although, I'm not sure that's appropriate attire for anyone's first day at a new job."

"No!" Joshua practically yelled towards his mother. His sudden outburst startled both of his parents who were now staring at him.

"Sorry," Joshua continued. "It's just...I saw that guy walking in front of our building this morning. His coat was really cool."

joshua AND THE MAN WITH THE rainbow coat

"I don't know, Son," his father said. "Anyone who shows up to work like that can't be taken seriously."

With that, the conversation merged into other topics. Soon, it was dinner time. Joshua was quiet as he ate. The man in the coat was still stuck in his head. Somehow, Joshua knew that he wasn't a crazy weirdo. He decided right then that he would find out for sure.

Joshua rose early the next morning and was dressed before either of his parents were up. When they made their way to the kitchen for coffee, Joshua was already sipping on orange juice. His father, surprised, asked, "What are you doing up this early?"

"I wanted to get a doughnut on the way to school. I know the lines get long once people are on their way to work, so I thought I'd go early," Joshua said. He wasn't lying. He had every intention of getting a doughnut, but he planned to eat it at the fountain that the rainbow man passed yesterday.

Joshua grabbed his backpack, said goodbye to his parents, and left for the doughnut shop. It was still early, so Joshua was able to get his doughnut in just a couple of minutes. Then he went to sit by the fountain and wait.

Joshua hesitated to take a bite as he surveyed the passing crowds. As person after person passed him, Joshua noticed it was hard to discern one from the next. However, just five minutes later, Joshua saw a flash of color. The man was still wearing rainbow colors, but today's coat had rainbow polka dots instead of stripes.

The man seemed to be about the same age as Joshua's dad. While everyone around him seemed stern and focused, the man appeared calm and carefree. The pleasant expression on the man's face helped Joshua pluck up the courage to shout out, "Excuse me, Sir!"

The man turned around, made eye contact with Joshua, and asked, "Me?"

"Yes, Sir. Ummm...I noticed you yesterday. I mean, I noticed your coat."

"Yeah," the man said with a smirk. "Most people do."

"It's so beautiful," Joshua said, almost mesmerized by seeing so many beautiful colors in one place. He continued, "Most people around here

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only wear dark colors."

"I've noticed," the man replied. "Kind of depressing, isn't it?"

"Yes!" Joshua practically shouted. "That's what I always say! I hate that everybody looks the same in this big city. That's why I was so excited to see you yesterday. It seems like you don't care about fitting in, huh?"

"Do you have a minute?" the man asked. Joshua nodded and the man sat down next to him. He introduced himself as Sam.

"I'm an artist," Sam began. "I've been a painter and photographer for most of my life. Fortunately, I've had a pretty good career. I've worked in a lot of big cities all over the world. But the more time I spent in cities, the less color I saw. All the buildings started to look the same, then most of the people started to look the same too. I missed seeing bright, vibrant colors...so I just decided to wear them. It's a small way that I can stay connected to my creativity."

As Joshua sat next to Sam, he noticed tiny names stitched into the polka dots. Sam saw Joshua looking closely and explained, "I have to travel a lot for my job. I want to make sure my family is always close to me, so I have their names stitched into my jackets as well. Aside from beautiful colors, my wife and three sons are my greatest source of inspiration."

Joshua smiled. He had never seen a more beautiful or meaningful piece of clothing. Then, he remembered his parents' criticisms the night before. He asked Sam, "Don't people think your clothes are strange?"

"Probably," Sam admitted. "But I'm fine with being different. So many people in big cities are hurried. They might notice me for a moment and chuckle, but then they're off to the next pursuit. But when I wear my colorful jackets and coats, I feel bonded to the things in life that are most important to me. It inspires me to keep creating."

Sam could see that Joshua was carefully taking in his words. He offered, "Joshua, if you get sad when the world seems dull, think of ways to insert color into your world. Try your hand at painting something yourself. Or take photos of the occasional flowers you see around town. And don't forget to pay attention. Sometimes color can sneak up on you. Take this fountain; when the sun shines on the water in the afternoon, it's a beautiful shade of deep blue."

joshua AND THE MAN WITH THE rainbow coat

As Joshua began taking mental notes of all the ways he could make his life more colorful, his watch started beeping, indicating it was time for him to walk to school. "I have to go," he told Sam.

"It was nice to meet you, Joshua," Sam smiled. "I'll be working here for the next month. If you want to chat again, I'll be passing by here most mornings."

Joshua was sure he would have more questions for Sam. "See you tomorrow?" he asked.

"Sounds great," Sam smiled.

joshua AND THE MAN WITH THE rainbow coat

Joshua grew up in the city where he shared an apartment with his parents near the financial district. Even though the city was a fun place to live, Joshua was always bothered by its lack of color. The cement and steel buildings that surrounded him made Joshua feel a bit drab. Sure, there were a few fountains and a smattering of trees near his apartment, but they did not provide enough color for Joshua. What's more, all of the people Joshua saw each day looked just as dull as the buildings. Men and women wore dark suits and carried dingy-looking briefcases as they rushed into tall skyscrapers. In fact, it was an unexpected treat when Joshua saw someone wearing a red scarf, navy coat, or green tie. He even turned this into a game; Joshua would look out the living room window towards the streets below and make a mental note whenever he saw someone wearing a color that wasn't black, gray, or brown. He couldn't remember ever counting past three.

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One Monday morning, Joshua sat near the living room window to eat his toaster waffle and play his color-spotting game. He scanned the streets below, seeing nothing but a sea of dull clothing, when suddenly, Joshua spotted someone in front of the fountain across the street. It was a tall man moving slowly and carefully through the crowd of hurried businesspeople. But the man's pace isn't what Joshua noticed the most; it was his suit coat. It wasn't dull or drab, but bright, colorful, and beautiful.

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joshua AND THE MAN WITH THE rainbow coat

streets. But soon, the man disappeared into a building and out of Joshua's sight.

As Joshua walked to and from school, he continued to search for the man in the bright coat, but to no avail. When Joshua arrived home, he resumed his search in the same spot from that morning. He looked down from his perch for a good hour. Joshua was jolted back to reality when he suddenly heard the front door open.

"Hi, honey!" Joshua's mom said as she deposited her briefcase on the kitchen counter. When she saw Joshua staring out the window, she asked, "What are you doing?"

"Ummm...nothing," Joshua tried to say casually. After all, he didn't want his mom to think he was nuts for spending the past hour looking for a guy in a colorful coat.

"I expected you would be in your room playing a video game," she said.

"I guess I'm just tired," Joshua replied, trying to keep his gaze out the window.

"Well, once your father gets home, we'll..." his mom said, trailing off as the front door opened once again.

Joshua's father entered the apartment, cell phone to his ear, laughing at whomever was on the other end. As he wandered over to his wife and son, he exclaimed, "*What?!*" and "*Are you serious?*" before signing off and hanging up.

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joshua AND THE MAN WITH THE rainbow coat

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Joshua grabbed his backpack, said goodbye to his parents, and left for the doughnut shop. It was still early, so Joshua got his doughnut quickly, then went to sit by the fountain to wait. He hesitated to take a bite as he surveyed the passing crowds. As person after person passed, Joshua noticed it was hard to discern one from the next. However, just five minutes later, Joshua saw a flash of color. It was the same man, still wearing rainbow colors, but today’s coat had polka dots instead of stripes.

Joshua noticed that the man was around the same age as his own dad. While everyone around him seemed stern and focused, the man appeared calm and carefree. The pleasant expression on the man’s face helped Joshua pluck up the courage to shout out, “Excuse me, Sir!”

The man turned around, made eye contact with Joshua, and asked, “Me?”

“Yes, Sir. Ummm...I noticed you yesterday. That is, I mean, I noticed your coat.”

“Oh, yeah,” the man said with a chuckle and a smirk. “Most people do.”

“It’s so beautiful,” Joshua said, almost mesmerized by seeing so many

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beautiful colors in one place. He continued, "Most people around here only wear dark colors."

"I've noticed," the man replied. "Kind of depressing, isn't it?"

"Yes!" Joshua practically shouted. "That's what I always say! I hate that everybody looks the same in this big city. That's why I was so excited to see you yesterday. It seems like you don't care about fitting in with a crowd, huh?"

"Do you have a minute?" the man asked. Joshua nodded and the man, who introduced himself as Sam, sat down next to him.

"I'm an artist, Joshua," Sam began. "I've been a painter and photographer for most of my life. Fortunately, I've had a pretty good career. I've worked in a lot of big cities all over the world. But the more time I spent in large cities, the less color I saw. All the buildings started to look the same, then most of the people started to look the same as well. I desperately missed seeing bright, vibrant colors...so I just decided to wear them so they're always with me. It's a small way that I can stay connected to my creativity."

As Joshua sat next to Sam, he also noticed tiny names stitched into the polka dots. Sam saw Joshua looking closely and explained, "I have to travel a lot for my job, so I want to make sure my family is always close to me. I have their names stitched into my jackets as well. Aside from beautiful colors, my wife and three sons are my greatest source of inspiration."

Joshua beamed at the most beautiful and meaningful piece of clothing he had ever witnessed. Then, he remembered his parents' criticisms from the night before. He asked Sam, "Don't people think your clothes are strange?"

"Probably," Sam admitted with a shrug. "But I'm fine with being different. So many people in big cities are so hurried anyway. They might notice me for a moment and chuckle, but then they're off to their next pursuit. But I don't really notice how others react; I pay more attention to how I feel. And when I wear my colorful jackets and coats, I feel bonded to the things in life that are most important to me."

Sam could see that Joshua was carefully taking in his words. He offered, "Joshua, if you get sad when the world seems dull, think of ways to insert

joshua AND THE MAN WITH THE rainbow coat

color into your world. Try your hand at painting something yourself. Or take photos of the occasional colorful things you see around the city. And don't forget to pay attention because sometimes color can sneak up on you. Take this fountain for example; when the sun shines on the water in the afternoon, it's a beautiful shade of deep blue."

As Joshua began taking mental notes of all the ways he could make his life more colorful, his watch started beeping, indicating it was time for him to walk to school. "I have to go," he told Sam with a disappointed sigh.

"It was nice to meet you, Joshua," Sam smiled. "And don't worry; I'll be working here for the next month. If you want to chat again, I'll be passing by here most mornings."

Joshua's expression brightened. The more he spoke with Sam, the more encouraged he became. He was sure he would have more questions for Sam, and soon, so he asked, "Can I see you tomorrow morning?"

"Sounds great," Sam smiled.

joshua AND THE MAN WITH THE rainbow coat

Joshua grew up in the city where he shared an apartment with his parents near the financial district. Even though the city was a fun place to grow up, Joshua was always bothered by its lack of color. The cement and steel buildings that surrounded him made Joshua feel a bit drab. Sure, there were a few fountains and a smattering of trees near his apartment, but they did not provide enough color for Joshua. What's more, all of the people Joshua saw each day looked just as dull as the buildings. Men and women wore dark suits and carried dingy-looking briefcases as they rushed into tall skyscrapers. In fact, it was an unexpected treat when Joshua saw someone wearing a red scarf, navy coat, or green tie. He even turned this into a game; Joshua would look out the living room window towards the streets below and make a mental note whenever he saw someone wearing a color that wasn't black, gray, or brown. He couldn't remember ever counting past three.

When Joshua asked his father why everyone dressed the same, he would say, "That's just the color of the city, Son," while his mother would add, "You have to dress a certain way if you want to be taken seriously in this town." But these responses made no sense to Joshua. To him, it was nonsensical that a city so exciting contained mostly people who looked the same.

One Monday morning, Joshua sat near the living room window to eat his toaster waffle and play his color-spotting game. He scanned the streets below, seeing nothing but a sea of dull clothing, when suddenly, Joshua spotted someone in front of the fountain across the street. It was a tall man moving slowly and carefully through the crowd of hurried businesspeople. The man moved quite methodically and cautiously, almost as if he was looking for something. But the man's pace isn't what Joshua noticed the most; it was his suit coat. It wasn't dull or drab, but the exact opposite: bright, colorful, and beautiful.

Joshua wanted to run and grab his camera, but he also didn't want to take his eyes off of the man. He needed to



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make sure it wasn't an illusion; that he was actually seeing a real person wearing several bright colors on the city streets. But soon, the man disappeared into a building and out of Joshua's sight.

As Joshua walked to and from school, he continued to search for the man in the bright coat, but to no avail. When Joshua arrived home, he resumed his search in the same spot from that morning, looking down from his perch for a good hour. Joshua was jolted back to reality when he suddenly heard the front door open.

"Hi, honey!" Joshua's mom said through an exhalation as she deposited her briefcase on the kitchen counter. When she saw Joshua staring out the window, she asked, "What are you doing?"

"Ummm...nothing," Joshua tried to say nonchalantly. After all, he didn't want his mom to think he was nuts for spending the past hour looking for a guy in a colorful coat.

"I expected you would be in your room playing a video game," she said.

"I guess I'm just tired," Joshua replied, trying to remain calm yet keep his gaze out the window.

"Well, once your father gets home, we'll..." his mom said, trailing off as the front door opened once again.

Joshua's father entered the apartment, cell phone to his ear, laughing at whomever was on the other end. As he wandered over to his wife and son, he exclaimed, "*What?!*" and "*Are you serious?*" before signing off and hanging up.

"Who was that, John?" Joshua's mother asked.

"Oh, just Larry. He was just telling me about a new photographer his office hired. Apparently the guy is a bit strange. He showed up in a rainbow-striped suit coat for his first day."

Joshua's jaw dropped as he rose from his seat at the window.

"Well, that's...interesting," Joshua's mom replied cynically. "I'm not sure that's appropriate attire for anyone's first day at a new job."

"Wait!" Joshua practically yelled towards his parents. His sudden outburst startled them both and they started with puzzlement at their son.

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"Sorry," Joshua continued. "It's just...I saw that guy walking in front of our building this morning and I thought his coat was really cool."

"I don't know, Son," his father said. "Anyone who shows up to work like that can't be taken seriously."

With that, the conversation merged into other topics until it was dinner time. However, Joshua was quiet as he ate. The man in the coat was still stuck in his head. Somehow, Joshua knew that the man wasn't some crazy weirdo. He decided right then that he would find out for sure.

Joshua rose early the next morning and was dressed before either of his parents were awake. When they made their way to the kitchen for coffee, Joshua was already sipping on a glass of orange juice. His father, surprised, asked, "What are you doing up this early?"

"I wanted to get a doughnut on the way to school. I know the lines get long once people are on their way to work, so I thought I'd go early," Joshua said. He wasn't lying. He had every intention of getting a doughnut, but he planned to eat it at the fountain that the rainbow man passed yesterday morning.

Joshua grabbed his backpack, said goodbye to his parents, and left for the doughnut shop. It was still early, so Joshua got his doughnut quickly, then went to sit by the fountain to watch and wait. He hesitated to take a bite as he surveyed the passing crowds. As person after person passed him, Joshua noticed it was hard to discern one from the next. However, just five minutes later, Joshua saw a flash of color. It was the same man, still wearing rainbow colors, but today's coat had polka dots instead of stripes.

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joshua AND THE MAN WITH THE rainbow coat

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joshua AND THE MAN WITH THE rainbow coat

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“It was nice to meet you, Joshua,” Sam smiled. “And don’t worry; I’ll be working here for the next month. If you want to chat again, I’ll be passing by here most mornings.”

Joshua’s expression brightened. The more he spoke with Sam, the more encouraged he became. He was sure he would have more questions for Sam, and soon, so he asked, “Can I see you tomorrow morning?”

“Sounds great,” Sam smiled.

WEEK #4

Brass Band Blues

BRASS BAND blues

Every year the Loop River High School band put on a spring performance at the town fair. This year was no different. There was only one more day before this year's concert, and Curly couldn't wait. Being a French horn, he was a very special member of the band. He had a significant part.

"I'm so excited, Talullah," he said to his tuba friend. "Aren't you?"

"Sure," Talullah said, but she didn't sound that excited.

Gladys the trumpet let out a blurp. "It's just always the same, isn't it?" she asked.

"Another fair, another blare," Sylvester the trombone added.

Curly looked at his friends in amazement. All the people that lived in Loop River came out to fair. They loved listening to the music. The concert was a very important event.

"What's wrong?" Curly asked. "You usually all love performing at the spring band concert. It's even better than our winter holiday performance."

"I'm just tired of always playing the same notes," Talullah said gloomily.

"Oom-pah, oom-pah, oom-pah."

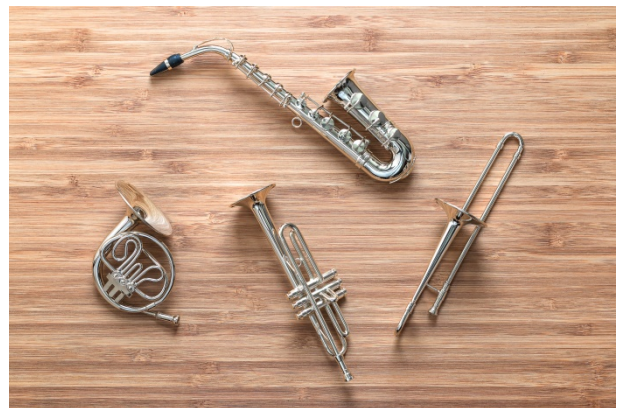
"Yeah, I'm the only one of us that ever gets to play a melody," Gladys piped up, "and that is rare. The woodwinds and strings get all the good parts."

"You all look best in the back!" one of the clarinets yelled from the other part of the band room. Curly was sure it was Veronica, since she was the meanest instrument. "You're good at backup notes, not playing in the front." She laughed wickedly and the other clarinets and flutes all joined in.

"Nobody asked you!" Gladys scolded Veronica.

Sylvester made a sad sound by moving his slide forward and back.

"You see?" Talullah said, trying to lower her voice, which was hard for a tuba to do. "Brass is for backup and nothing else."



BRASS BAND *blues*

Curly couldn't believe his ears. He'd never thought about their position in the band. The brass instruments were an important part of the overall sound, but Talullah was right. They were always put in the back at every concert, and during practice, too.

"Just once, it'd be nice to show Loop River what I can do," Gladys said. "Without having to share the limelight with the first three rows of instruments."

All of the instruments settled down for the night to get some rest. Curly curled in on himself even more than usual, trying not to cry. He no longer felt very special or significant.

The day of the fair came. The high school kids came to get all of the instruments and take them out in the warm sunshine. The spring concert was held right in the middle of the fair. Everyone stopped going on rides or buying sugary foods and drinks to listen.

They sounded great, just like always, but Curly knew that his friends' hearts weren't in it. Neither was his heart. He realized that the brass instruments were indeed just backup. They came in with a couple notes here and there, while the woodwinds showed off all their skills. Even the percussion got more claps at the end, because they played the whole time.

Many of the townspeople of Loop River said they wanted more concerts than the two they held each year.

As the teenagers began packing up the instruments, Curly heard the principal talking to his brother. "Remember when we blew the socks off of everyone with our brass band, Joe?" he asked. "That was the greatest."

"Oh yes," Joe said. "With your trumpet and my tuba, we sounded amazing."

A brass band? Curly wondered if that meant just brass instruments and no others. He asked his friends about it when they were back inside the band room, safe and sound.

"My great-grandfather used to talk about a brass band he was in," Sylvester said. "They played jazz music."

"I love jazz music!" Gladys said, trumpeting brightly.

"I think paradise must be made out of brass, just like us," Talullah dreamed.

BRASS BAND *blues*

"I wonder if we can revive the Brass Band of Loop River," Curly said.

"Maybe we can prove to the band teacher that we can carry a band all by ourselves. Perhaps then he'll consider starting the brass band again."

"Fat chance of that happening," said Veronica the clarinet. "You can't have a full band with only brass instruments. It would just be a lot of bleating and blaring." All of the woodwinds began laughing again, except for one.

"I think it's a great idea," Axel the Saxophone said. "I'd love to hear a jazzy brass band play."

All night, Curly and his friends practiced jazz music. They were so loud that the rest of the instruments couldn't get any sleep.

"Would you stop all that honking?" Veronica asked. Talullah oom-pah-pahed louder to stop her complaining.

When the band teacher came in the next morning, the brass instruments started to jazz it up. Gladys trumpeted high, clear notes, while Sylvester the trombone added a sliding tone. Curly and Talullah blasted out a melody.

"My goodness," the band teacher said. "What talented brass instruments we have. This gives me an idea."

During band practice, the teacher asked the students if they'd like to start a brass band. "It would only be for brass instruments," he said. "But we could put on more concerts each year."

Curly and his friends were happy that everyone thought it was a great idea too.

It took many hours of practice, but the brass instruments didn't mind. Finally, the Brass Band of Loop River was ready for their first concert. The townspeople came into the auditorium and quieted down to hear the music.

When the curtain opened, Curly could see everything clearly. No one was in front of him! Gladys, Sylvester, and Talullah were in the front row with him, too. The first song started and the brass band blared and blasted. The townsfolk jumped up from their seats to dance on their feet to the jazzy music.

BRASS BAND *blues*

After the concert, the principal and his brother shook hands with the band teacher. "The brass band sounds amazing!" the principal said.

"It blew off my socks," added his brother, Joe.

That evening, Veronica the clarinet told them she had been wrong. "We could hear you all the way backstage," she said, "and the music was terrific. It turns out that brass isn't just for backup after all."

"We love playing with all of you," Gladys said to her and the other instruments. "But it's nice to be in the limelight sometimes, too."

"You deserve to be," Axel the saxophone said. "That was some fun jazzy music."

"Well Axel, I think we can make some room for you in the band," Curly said. "After all, you're mostly made of brass, just like us."

BRASS BAND blues

Every year the Loop River High School band put on a glorious spring performance at the town fair, and this year was no different. There was only one more day prior to this year's concert, and Curly couldn't wait. Being a French horn, he was a very special member of the band, and had a significant part.

"I'm so full of anticipation, Talullah," he said to his tuba friend. "Aren't you?"

"Sure," Talullah said, but she didn't sound that excited.

Gladys the trumpet let out a blurp. "I empathize with you, Talullah. It's just always the same, isn't it?" she asked.

"Another fair, another blare," Sylvester the trombone intoned.

Curly gawked at his friends in amazement. All the people that lived in Loop River came out to the fair, especially to enjoy the music. The concert was a very momentous event.

"What's wrong?' Curly asked. "You usually all love performing at the spring band concert. It's even better than our winter holiday performance."

"I'm just weary of always playing the same notes," Talullah said gloomily.

"Oom-pah, oom-pah, oom-pah."

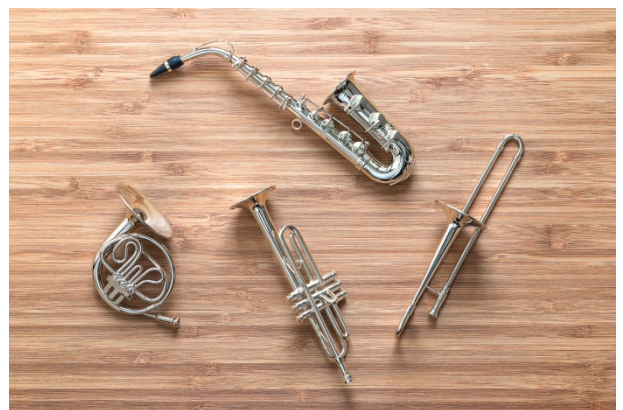
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"You all look best in the back!" one of the clarinets yelled from the opposite direction in the band room. Curly was sure it was Veronica, since she was

the cruelest instrument. "You're good at backup notes, not as the main attraction." She laughed wickedly and the other clarinets and flutes all joined in.

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Sylvester made a mournful sound by moving his slide forward and back.



BRASS BAND *blues*

"You see?" Talullah said, trying to lower her voice, which was difficult for a tuba to do. "Brass is for backup and nothing else."

Curly couldn't believe his ears. He'd never thought so negatively about their position in the band. The brass instruments were a crucial part of the overall sound, but Talullah was right. They were always arranged in the back at every concert, and during practice, too.

"Just once, it'd be awesome to show Loop River what I can do," Gladys said. "Without having to share the limelight with the first three rows of instruments."

All of the instruments settled down for the night to get some rest. Curly curled in on himself even more than usual, trying not to cry. He no longer felt very special or significant.

The day of the fair arrived and the high school kids came to get all of the instruments and take them out in the warm sunshine. The spring concert was held right in the middle of the fair and everyone stopped going on rides or buying sugary foods and drinks to listen to the music.

The band sounded remarkable, just like always, but Curly knew that his friends' hearts weren't in it. Neither was his heart. He had come to the realization that the brass instruments were indeed just backup. They came in with a couple notes here and there, while the woodwinds ran through all the scales. Even the percussion received more appreciation at the end, probably because they played the entire time.

Several of the townspeople of Loop River discussed how they'd love to attend more concerts than the two annual ones.

As the teenagers began packing up all the instruments, Curly overheard the principal reminiscing with his brother. "Remember when we blew the socks off of everyone with our brass band, Joe?" he asked. "That was the greatest."

"Oh, indeed," Joe said. "With your trumpet and my tuba, we sounded amazing."

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BRASS BAND *blues*

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All night, Curly and his friends practiced jazz music. They were so loud that the rest of the instruments couldn't get any sleep.

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When the band teacher came in the next morning, the brass instruments started to jazz it up. Gladys trumpeted high, clear notes, while Sylvester the trombone added a sliding tone. Curly and Talullah blasted together in a pleasing melody.

"My goodness," the band teacher said. "What fine, talented brass instruments we have. This gives me an idea."

At band practice that day, the teacher asked the students if they'd like to launch a brass band. "It would only be for brass instruments," he said, "but we could put on more concerts each year."

Curly and his friends were ecstatic that everyone thought it was a fabulous idea, too.

It took an agonizing amount of practice, but eventually, the Brass Band of Loop River was prepared for their first concert. The townspeople entered the auditorium and quieted down to hear the music.

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BRASS BAND *blues*

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"Well Axel, I think there's room for you if you want to join the brass band, too," Curly said. "After all, you're mostly made of brass, just like us."

BRASS BAND blues

Every year the Loop River High School band put on an enchanting springtime performance at the annual town fair, and this year was no different. There was only one more day prior to this year's concert, and Curly was bristling with anticipation. Being a French horn, he was a very distinguished member of the band, and had a significant role in the concert.

"I'm so eager and excited, Talullah," he said to his tuba friend. "Aren't you?"

"Sure," Talullah said, but she didn't sound enthusiastic in the least.

Gladys the trumpet let out a high-pitched blurp. "I empathize with you, Talullah. It's getting monotonous. Every year is always the same, isn't it?" she asked.

"Another fair, another blare," Sylvester the trombone intoned.

Curly gawked at his friends in amazement. All the people that resided in Loop River came out to the fair, especially to experience the music. The concert was a very momentous event.

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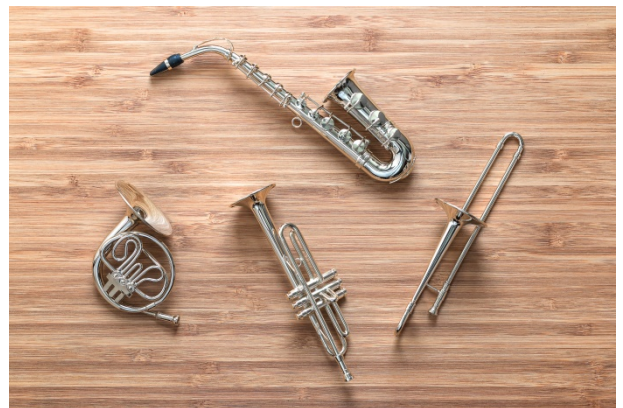
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"You all look best in the back!" one of the clarinets yelled from the adjacent corner in the band room. Curly was certain it was Veronica, since she was the most malicious instrument. "You're decent at backup notes, but not as the main attraction." She cackled wickedly and the other clarinets and flutes joined in.



BRASS BAND *blues*

"Nobody asked you!" Gladys admonished Veronica.

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The day of the fair arrived and the high school kids gathered all of the instruments and took them out in the warm sunshine. The spring concert was held right in the heart of the fair and every attendee stopped going on rides or buying sugary foods and drinks to listen to the music.

The band's songs reverberated around the fair remarkably, just like always, but Curly could tell that his friends' hearts weren't in it. Neither was his heart. He had come to the realization that the brass instruments were indeed just backup. They came in with a couple notes here and there, while the woodwinds ran through all the scales. Even the percussion received more appreciation at the end, probably because they played the entire time.

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BRASS BAND *blues*

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"Would you stop all that honking?" Veronica asked. Talullah oom-pah-pahed even louder to drown out her complaining.

When the band teacher came in the next morning, the brass instruments started to jazz it up. Gladys trumpeted high, clear notes, while Sylvester the trombone added a sliding tone. Curly and Talullah blasted together in an appealing melody.

"My goodness," the band teacher said. "What fine, talented brass instruments we have. This gives me an idea."

At band practice that day, the teacher asked the students if they'd like to launch a brass band. "It would only be for brass instruments," he said, "but we could offer more public concerts each year."

Curly and his friends were ecstatic that everyone else thought it was a fabulous idea, also.

BRASS BAND *blues*

It took an agonizing amount of practice, but eventually, the Brass Band of Loop River was prepared for their first concert. The townspeople entered the auditorium and quieted down to hear the music.

When the curtain opened, Curly could see everything clearly because no one was in front of him to block his view. Gladys, Sylvester, and Talullah were in the front row with him, too. The first song commenced and the brass band blared and blasted. The townsfolk jumped up from their seats to dance on their feet to the jazzy music.

Afterward, the principal and his brother shook hands with the band teacher. "The new brass band sounds amazing!" the principal said.

"It blew off my socks," added his brother, Joe.

That evening, Veronica the clarinet admitted how wrong she had been. "We could hear you all the way backstage," she said, "and the music was tremendous. It turns out that brass isn't just for backup after all."

"We love playing with all of you," Gladys assured her and the other instruments. "But it's nice to be in the limelight sometimes, too."

"You deserve to be," Axel the saxophone said. "That was some sensational jazzy music."

"Well Axel, I think there's room for you if you want to join the brass band, too," Curly said. "After all, you're mostly made of brass, just like us."