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# I CAN

India  
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Philippines  
Portugal  
Singapore  
Spain  
Taiwan  
UK  
USA

**REAL** Super Heroes  
**REAL** Stories  
**REAL** Change



## **DESIGN FOR CHANGE**

The Riverside School, 307, Next to Army CSD depot, Airport Road,  
Hansol, Ahmedabad-380004

## **AMAR CHITRA KATHA PVT LTD.**

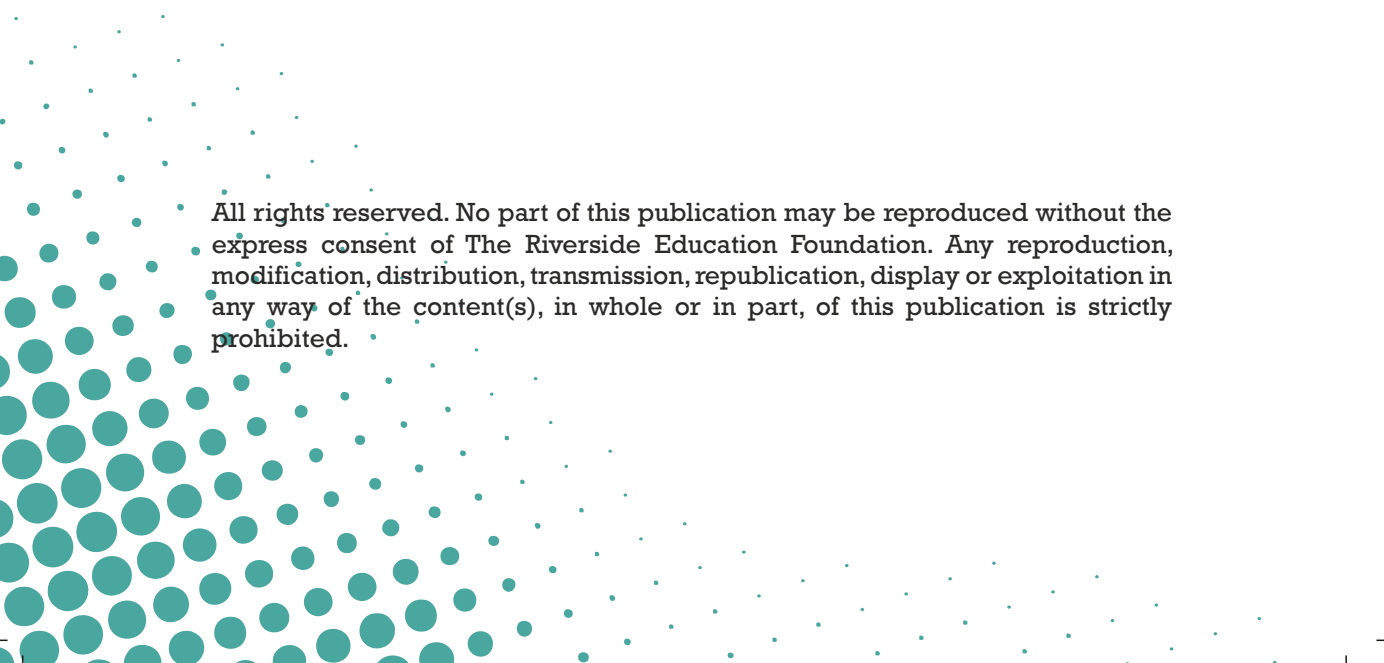
Krishna House, 3rd Floor, Raghuvanshi Mills Compound, Senapati  
Bapat Marg, Lower Parel(W), Mumbai-400013, Maharashtra

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First published by Riverside Education Foundation , 2014

Printed at Fine Graphics,  
20, Everest Industrial Estate, Pratapnagar, Baroda-390004, Gujarat



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# MEET THE **I CAN** SUPERHEROES



Introducing you to a new generation of superheroes!

We grow up seeing so many problems around us and believing that things are the way they are and that we alone cannot bring about any change. We often wait for that big idea, for that one superpower, we wish we all had, to change the world.

How about if I tell you that our children have found that superpower. That they are changing the world, one idea at a time.

Design for Change, a simple design thinking process empowers children to realise this superpower, this sense of responsibility and agency. Through the four steps of this process- Feel, Imagine, Do and Share, children around the world are stepping up and learning that the power to create change lies in them as much as with the adults who educate them and influence their lives. From stopping child marriages to caring for the elderly, from reducing the weight of school bags to fixing potholes on the road, children are telling us that they don't have to be rich or strong or powerful to make change happen.

**FEEL  
IMAGINE  
DO  
SHARE  
IS I CAN**

This book is an invitation all children and adults around the world to join the movement of these new-age superheroes who derive their strength from empathy and the courage to make a difference.

This book's message is very simple – A more optimistic future can now be claimed not by chance – but by design.

**Kiran Bir Sethi**

Founder  
Design for Change

*Being the Change, Changes the Being*

# FOREWORD

Our world, as we know it, learns from, grows with and thrives on stories of heroism. These stories are the first building blocks of character when imbibed as bed time entertainment, related by doting parents or grandparents. These stories grow in detail, scope and size as we graduate to reading books ourselves. And these stories continue to be our best friends as we journey through life, giving us hope, direction and inspiration.

The **I Can** stories from **Design for Change**, that **Amar Chitra Katha** has been proudly associated with from the first issue onwards, give us a whole new paradigm of heroism in modern life.

The young heroes we have featured in this book have gone ahead and changed the world. These true stories must be read by every child and parent so that they may be inspired to make a change to the world around them and make it a better place.

**Manas Mohan**  
CEO - Publishing  
ACK Media



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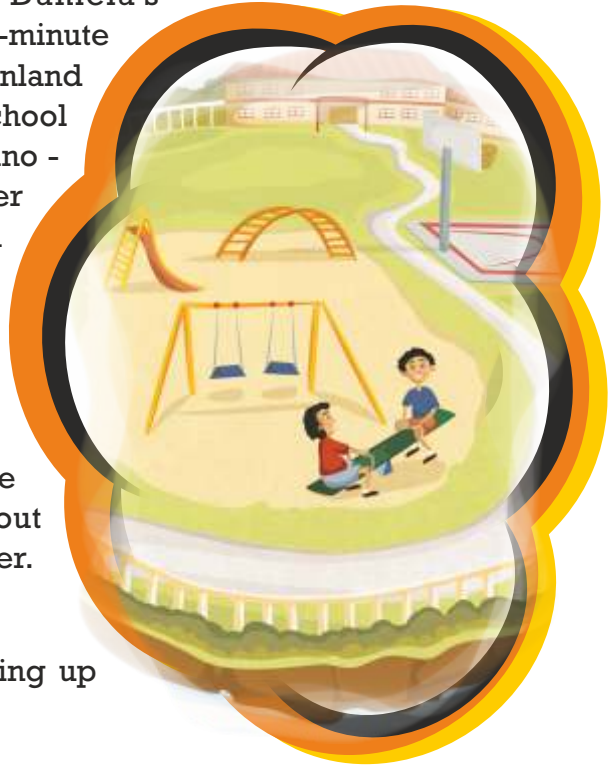
**Escuela N. 12, Delta, Argentina**

Written by: Semanti Ray  
Illustrations by: Aishwarya Rathore



[bit.ly/icandfc-childsplay](https://bit.ly/icandfc-childsplay)

Dani closed her eyes and savoured the wind whistling through her hair and the spray on her face as the boat sped through the waters of the Paraná River. This was Daniela's favourite part of the day - the 45-minute morning boat ride from the mainland to her school, Elementary School Number 16, Florentino Ameghino - on an island of the Paraná River Delta. Away from the congested streets and chaos of Buenos Aires, Dani didn't mind the crowded boat that took her to school at all. The whirring of the boat's engine, the lap of the water against the prow and the cacophony of birds calling out from the nearby trees soothed her.



“Enjoy it while it lasts, Dani.” muttered Nicolás without looking up from his book.

A wrinkle appeared on her brow and Dani turned to look at her best friend. While never particularly talkative, Nicolás seemed unusually surly that day.

“What's wrong, Nico? You seem upset.”

*“Anybody would be upset about the way we're slowly destroying our environment, but don't mind me.”*



Immune to Nico's sarcasm, Dani ploughed on. "And what brought this on, all of a sudden? Did you watch a documentary or something last night?"

"No! Yesterday, in Biology, remember when Ms. Sanchez was talking about how the ecosystems of deltas are particularly delicate and the slightest imbalance would have catastrophic results? No one seemed to care! During recess, I saw so many students casually throwing paper and plastic on the playground. It's as though no one understands how important it is to ensure that nothing happens to the Delta Islands' ecosystem!"

Dani sat silently for a few minutes, contemplating her friend's words, before speaking up again. "Nico, maybe the students don't see the connection between what they're learning in the classroom and real life? After all, we don't really think about classes during recess! Maybe they just need to be reminded and given a concrete plan of action?"

Nico nodded slowly. "You may be right, Dani. But what should we do?"

"I think the first thing to do is talk to Ms. Sanchez and ask her what she thinks. We will need the teachers to help us with anything we choose to do."

Accordingly, Dani and Nicolás went up to Ms. Sanchez after their Biology class.

"Ms Sanchez, we've been thinking about this lesson and we think that we ought to do something about it -- as a class, that is. Our school is on a delta island and everything we've been learning hits very close home. Don't you think it would be a good idea to do some sort of project that connects what we're studying to our school and lives?"

Ms. Sanchez was pleased and touched that these two children had been paying so much attention to what she had been saying. "That's a wonderful idea, Dani. Why don't you two gather some of your friends and think about what you would like to do? You definitely have my approval and support!"

Elated with the success of their first step, Dani and Nicolás quickly gathered their closest friends from fourth and fifth grade -- Valentina, Pablo, and Adriana -- during recess and told them about their plan. The other three were immediately drawn to the idea and they started discussing what might be the most effective project which would draw the whole school in.

“Why don't we have an awareness campaign?” asked Pablo.

“We like action, Pablo. What would the difference between a biology lesson and an awareness campaign be?” pointed out Valentina.

*“Well, what do you want us to do? Collect all the trash and recycle it?” snorted Pablo.*

“Pablo, that's brilliant! That's exactly what we should do!” clapped Dani.

“Hold on,” interrupted Adriana, “Why would the other students agree to do this?”

Nicolás chewed on his thumb. “What if... we threw in some direct reward? What if we said that this exercise will benefit their lives in some tangible way?”

Valentina nodded in agreement. “So how about collecting all the trash we can, taking it to the recycling centre, and getting whatever money we can in exchange for it? Then we can use that money to...”

“...to do something for the school!” Dani finished triumphantly.

Knowing that they would need the permission of the school board before they could do any of this, the children ran back to Ms. Sanchez. Permission was procured fairly quickly and the students of fourth and fifth grade got to work.

They combed the school and the grounds for any and every bit of recyclable material they could find -- cardboard, waste paper, bottles, cans, badges, etc. Unwilling to stop there, they went back and collected trash from their homes and neighbourhoods as well.

After a sizable pile of trash had been collected, Ms. Sanchez asked her cousin who had a boat to come to the school and help them ferry all the material to recycling centres.

As expected, the money raised by selling all the trash was not substantial, but the children were thrilled with the fruits of their labour. They decided to use the money raised to make improvements to everyone's favourite part of the school - the playground.

“Are you happy now, Nico?” teased Dani as they made plans for the playground's improvement.

Nicolás nodded. “I am, but I think we can do better.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that we should involve the whole school! So far, only grades four and five have contributed. For them to truly value what we're doing to the playground, even the younger grades need to be involved!”

“But what can the little kids do?”

“Something simple - but something that will contribute to this project.”

“Do you remember how Ms Sanchez told us that one of the main causes of soil and water pollution is improper disposal of batteries and other electronic waste?” broke in Adriana. “Why not ask the



little ones to collect batteries for us? And we'll figure out a way to get rid of them.”

“Getting rid of them won't be difficult at all! We've been meaning to get benches for the playground. We could store all the batteries in glass jars so that the chemicals don't come in contact with soil or water and then design our benches around them!” pointed out Valentina.

They talked to the teachers and roped the younger children in as well. The little ones thought it great fun and they scrambled to collect as many batteries as possible! The batteries were then stored in glass jars in the courtyard and the older children, true to their word, designed concrete benches around the jars.

It was a beautiful day in Buenos Aires and the sunlight glimmered on the water as the boat made its daily journey to the school. This time, Dani's eyes were open and she was content with watching the world go by.

“Thank you, Dani!” whispered Nicolás from his seat next to her.

Dani turned to him in surprise. “What on earth are you thanking me for?”

“Thank you for showing me that it isn't enough to worry about the environment.

It's also important to take action. And doing things isn't nearly as difficult and daunting as it appears!”

Dani smiled.

“This is our home, Nico. If we don't take care of it, who will? I want to be able to enjoy the boat ride to school even when I'm 75 years old and need a cane to help me walk.”

“You're going to stay in school till you're 75, Dani? You're not that bad of a student.”

Sticking her tongue out at Nico, Dani went back to admiring the sunlight playing on the water.



**THE**  
**VANISHING WASTE**  
**ACT**

**BRAC Nobodhara School, Bangladesh**

Written by: Samudyata Sreenath  
Illustrations by: Anish Daolagupu

**You**Tube

[bit.ly/thevanishingwasteact](https://bit.ly/thevanishingwasteact)

“Before I finish this class,” said Mr. Roy, “I have one last question to ask you.”

Mr. Roy, whilst teaching at the BRAC Nobodhara School for the last seven years found that the best way to engage students in learning and understanding is by inquiring and then allowing students to discover the answers to those inquiries on their own.



“Where do you think all that waste goes?” inquired Mr. Roy, pointing at the brown dustbin in the corner of the class.

“To the bigger dustbin at the back of the school.” quipped Shuvo. The whole class split into laughter.

“You are right! And from there, where does the waste go?” continued Mr. Roy.

The class fell silent. They had not stopped to think about what happened to the waste when the dustbins were cleared.

“This is going to be your homework for tomorrow,” said Mr. Roy concluding his class for the day.

The next day, Mr. Roy posed the same question to the class.

“Sir!” volunteered Aumi, “It gets collected by the garbage trucks and taken to a disposal site.”

“Very good!” said Mr. Roy. “And does anyone know what happens at the disposal site?”

“It gets disposed of,” answered Shanto cheekily amusing the class.



“Yes, Shanto,” laughed Mr. Roy while allowing the class to fall back into a state of relative quiet, “but how does the waste get disposed of?”

No one seemed to know. So then Mr. Roy explained the various stages of waste disposal. He told the students how waste, after being collected, was segregated and treated. He showed them pictures of waste being recycled and how some waste gets dumped in landfills. He also went on to show them images of what happens when waste is not disposed of properly and how that pollution poisons the soil and water, killing animals and people.

The class was stunned at the extent of harm that was caused by improper waste disposal. What shocked them further was the realisation that this can be prevented by each one of them taking small, simple steps.

*“But, Sir, if it is so simple to do,” asked Jasmin, “why don’t people dispose of waste in the correct manner?”*

“Well,” answered Mr. Roy, “lack of awareness is probably the only reason for improper waste disposal.”

“In that case,” said Rasel, “why don’t we inform them? We can start right here in school by telling all the other classes.”

“Yeah!” exclaimed Khadija, “let us start a club to ensure that everyone knows how to dispose of waste properly.”

“But how do you plan on getting the other students to listen to you?” asked Mr. Roy.

“The most important thing for us to let people know,” said Souptik, “is that the things they throw away do not magically disappear. They stay on and harm the earth.”

“Yes, and we have to find a way to talk about it so that people are interested in what we are saying,” agreed Shabik with a perplexed look on his face. “The only question is how?”

“Perhaps, it will help if you all take a break.” suggested Mr. Roy.

The class looked at Mr. Roy in surprise. It was very unlike Mr. Roy to suggest that they take a break in the middle of class. “And while you take your break,” said Mr. Roy, “I am going to teach you a magic trick.” The class began to murmur in excitement.

“For my magic trick,” said Mr. Roy, being as dramatic as he could be, “I am going to make a coin completely disappear.” Saying this, he placed a coin on his right palm, showed it to the whole class and closed his hand into a fist around the coin. Then he rolled up his sleeves, and asked his class to say the magic words. The whole class chanted “Abracadabra” and Mr. Roy opened both his palms and showed them to the class. They gasped and cheered on seeing the empty palms.

“Now,” said Mr. Roy, “do you want to know what happened to the coin?” Mr. Roy unrolled his sleeve and took the coin out from within the folds of the fabric. He had placed the coin there when pretending to roll up his sleeves before the act. The whole class began laughing and playfully accused Mr. Roy of being a fraud.

“Now, can anyone tell me how that trick is related to what we were discussing just before the break?” asked Mr. Roy. The faces of the entire class lit up as they realised what he had just done. Mr. Roy had just shown them how to demonstrate the fact that

*nothing disappears magically.*



“Does anyone know anymore tricks we can use?” asked Mr. Roy.

“I do.” volunteered Survoy. “My grandfather taught me one.”

He pulled out a deck of cards from his bag and made his way to the front of the class. “I will need a volunteer!” said Survoy with a cheeky grin. “Will you volunteer, Roy Sir?”

He then asked Mr. Roy to separate the deck into four stacks. Once the deck had been separated, Survoy picked up the first card of each stack, showed them to the class and then placed them back on the stacks.

“I will now use my magic powers to turn each of these first cards into Aces.” He said as he waved his hands above the four stacks. Then he turned over each of the cards and held them up for the whole class to see. The class began cheering and clapping at the four Aces being held up in front of them.

“Now, Survoy,” said Mr. Roy who was still clapping, “how did you do it?”

Survoy deconstructed his magic trick and showed the class how he had to prearrange the deck in such a manner that no matter how the deck is broken, he would have the cards he wanted and how by sleight of hand, he had managed to switch the cards.



“And how can we use this?” asked Mr. Roy.

“I know,” said Jasmin, “we can use it to show how important waste segregation is.”

The class was delighted! They decided to spread their message through a magic show. They spent the next two weeks going from class to class putting up their show. The impact was that lots of students enrolled.

“You should give yourselves a name now that you've grown into such a large group.” suggested Mr. Roy.

The students threw around a few names like the “Go Greeners” and the “Planeteers” but they could not decide on one.

Finally, Murafa stood up and said, “I know - we should call ourselves, ‘The Magicians’!”

The Magicians went about trying to fix the way in which waste was disposed at school. The students rearranged and labeled all the dustbins on their campus. They made sure they had the dustbins in pairs - one for the biodegradable waste (like paper) and the other for the plastic waste (like food wrappers). The Magicians also managed to convince their Principal, Ms. Paul, to help them set up an electronic-waste disposal bin on their campus to throw away things like batteries and CDs responsibly.

Soon the news of the BRAC Nobodhara School's Magicians spread to other schools in the neighbourhood.

*Students of other schools, not wanting to be left behind, also initiated similar clubs.*

The Magicians were proud to see that the wave that started at BRAC Nobodhara School was spreading far and wide.



# TREASURE HUNT

**Langmadung Primary School, Bhutan**

Written by: Camille Testard  
Illustrations by: Anish Daolagupu



[bit.ly/icandfc-treasurehunt](https://bit.ly/icandfc-treasurehunt)

“Acho! Acho!” I yelled, as I ran up the stairs and through the apartment’s door, zig-zagging through the rooms to find him. My elder brother was at his table, writing.

“Acho,” I was panting as I walked towards him. He turned around and looked at me, eyes widening.

“Why are you covered in mud?” he asked.

I had been playing football, but that was another story. “Why are they digging outside our compound?” I was excited. In all the comics I read, people always found something special when they dug: magic lamps, chests of gold, old and important books, mummies. In Jurassic Park, they even found the remains of a dinosaur!

“What do you mean?” he asked.

I was jumping with impatience. He stood up and walked towards the window.

“Oh, that! They’re digging it for a landfill,” he said.

“No treasure?” I asked.

“No treasure.”

*“What’s a landfill?”*

“They take all the waste from our compound and the neighbouring ones.” He was still staring out of the window. “They then empty the waste into that pit and cover it up with mud,” he said.

The next day I ran again, but this time Acho was with me. He was the one who was making me run; I was late for school and we both sprinted up the stairs, down the hallway, into my classroom. Our school, Langmadung Primary School was located in the Trashiyangtse district of Bhutan.



“Made it just in time!” he grinned.

I looked at the big table at the front - there were newspapers, flour, salt, brushes and a large tub of water. It's Wednesday! Every Wednesday, we make something in class. Last Wednesday, we made our own picture books. We also presented them to the class. Mine had been about a treasure hunt.

Ms. Tshering was writing on the board. “Reduce...Reuse...Recycle” I read out as she wrote the words on the board.



“Today,” Ms. Tshering turned around, “we are going to recycle newspaper! But first, who can tell me what that is?”

What was recycling? I knew reuse and reduce. Our mother always brought cloth bags to the market so we didn't have to use plastic bags. There was silence.

“This is yesterday's newspaper,” she said pointing to it on the table “and instead of throwing it away, we're using it to make something else. Who wants to see how?”

The classroom was filled with raised hands and the sounds of “Me, me, me, me!”

Ms. Tshering signaled us to the big table. She mixed flour and salt in the tub of water then dipped strips of newspaper in it. She held one out for us to touch; it stuck easily to the other strips of paper. She then laid the sticky paper into a star shape and we slowly watched as she filled the spaces to make a circle out of the strips. It almost looked like a plate.

“Now, we let this dry and we'll paint it tomorrow,” she said and then divided the class into 4 groups.

We all had to make something. I suggested to Jigme, Sonam and Dorji that we make a globe. We had learnt about it on Monday.

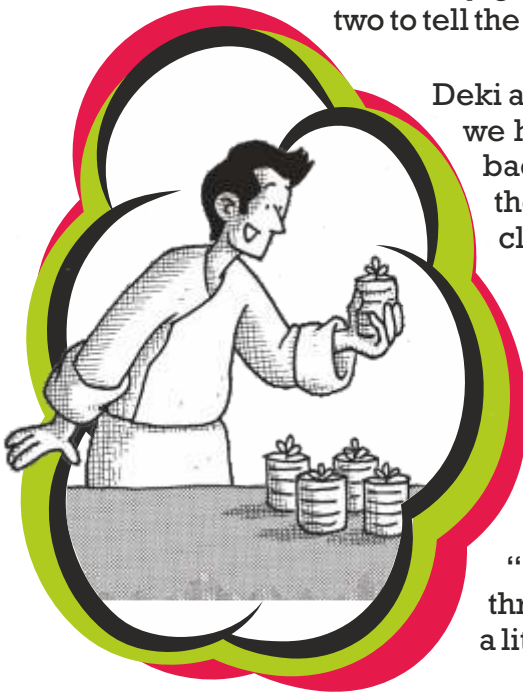
By afternoon, everyone in the class was almost finished with their figures. We came together and placed our creations carefully on the table to dry. A model of the water cycle caught my attention. It was made out of used newspaper, bottle caps, old pieces of cloth – it was brilliant!

And then I was struck by an idea...we could all use the waste to make the teaching material that we're missing!

We could use our globe, this water cycle model, and create other scientific models and new notebooks made out of recycled paper! I immediately told Deki my idea.

My little speech had caught Ms. Tshering's attention. She came around and asked what Deki and I were talking about.

“That’s a very good idea! Ugyen and Deki, I want you two to tell the class what you told me.”



Deki and I took turns in telling the class what we had thought of. Sonam, who was at the back of the crowd, came forward to face the class, “I think we should tell every class in school to do this.”

“We should also use other materials, like plastic!” I said, remembering the landfill next to my compound.

That evening when I went home, I told my family about our mini-project.

“I want to use the plastic bottles they throw away, but I don't know how,” I said, a little disappointed.

Later, as Acho and I walked to our bedroom, I

stopped in front of our window to see how much larger the landfill pit was. I looked outside at the large machines on the land. Why weren't they thinking of other ways to dispose waste? Couldn't they have plants or trees in the compound instead? It would be healthier for the environment and nicer to look at.

Wait! That was it! The next day, I rushed to school. I was pulling Acho this time. "I have an idea for the plastic bottles we use in school." I said, walking into my classroom. Ms. Tshering turned around, a little startled.

"What is it?" Dorji asked.

*"We should use bottles as pots for small plants. We can cut holes in them, have some soil and plant some seeds!" I told them.*

"I have a chilli plant at home. Apa once collected the seeds and I planted them with him. It can be one of our plants!" said Dorji.

"Ama has coriander seeds in the kitchen. She uses them almost everyday. We can use them, too!" said Sonam.

Ms. Tshering offered to bring in some seeds herself. We then set out to find plastic bottles. We found fifteen.

For the rest of the day, we were chattering and busy painting our paper models.

Later that week, we planted our seeds into the fifteen different plastic bottles. We regularly watered and cared for them. They had their own desks and tables in our classroom. They sat by the window where it was warm and sunny. The teachers also used our paper models in their classrooms. One day, when passing by grade one, I saw our globe in the hands of a little girl.

A couple of weeks later, Ms Tshering walked into class with an excited look on her face.

“Class, I have an announcement to make,” she said. She had a wide grin as she walked towards our bottle-pots and our paper model fruits.

“Our idea to make teaching materials from waste has reached other schools in the district!” She scanned through our faces, filled with astonishment.

My eyes widened, “Really?” I asked.

“Yes! And since we’re approaching World Environment Day, all the seven schools are holding a contest where we all have to design learning materials from the waste.”

When World Environment Day finally arrived, I saw so many different things made out of waste. We gave a presentation to everyone who attended the event. I was nervous. I walked around with Deki and Dorji and saw how plastic and wood was used to model a generator and there were paper models of the different workers in Bhutan. Acho had made a distillation apparatus from empty water and juice bottles lying around at home. I finally reached the table that held our plastic-pots, I looked into one and saw tiny leaves growing.

I had always hoped to find some sort of treasure. I had only seen treasure as gold, the remains of a dinosaur, or a magic lamp. Today, I realized that it was more.

I found treasure in working with my friends and family to help save the planet. I wasn't nervous to speak anymore.

*I can, I thought.*

*We all really can.*





**A  
BONBON  
IN BRAZIL**

**EMEF Padre Jose Pegoraro, Sao Paulo, Brasil**

Written by: S.Z. Ruhi  
Illustrations by: Rohan Jhunjha



[bit.ly/icandfc-abonboninbrazil](https://bit.ly/icandfc-abonboninbrazil)

Ó Pátria amada,  
Idolatrada,  
Salve! Salve!

Luiza Perez sang along with her friends from the 7th grade, the joyful words of her national anthem echoing around the large classroom.



When the song ended with a flourish, she took her seat in the fourth row.

With bated breath, she watched her friend Mariana announce the very first viewing of the video their class had painstakingly put together over the past few weeks.

As the first image flickered on the screen, her eyes automatically went to the faces of the parents, teachers and the community members who were here tonight. She frowned for a moment; their expressions mirrored the same disbelief and pessimism that had been apparent on her own face, a few weeks ago.

They did not believe that this project would show them that there was beauty and pride and love in this neighborhood, too.

*They did not believe it yet...*

*but they would.*

Luiza smiled, hoping with all her heart that this would happen, and soon. All they had to do was watch it and feel, just as she had done, a few weeks ago...

After moving to a Sao Paulo neighbourhood with her parents from a small town, Luiza was faced with an astonishing number of differences from her quiet and peaceful life in her hometown.

Her new home had more people, more cars and more smoke than

she had ever imagined. The lack of trees and open spaces made her feel distinctly out of place.

After seeing all this, Luiza was not very enthusiastic about starting her new school. Making friends with Mariana on the very first day had helped just a little.

Then something happened that made her look at things in a very different light. During the Geography class, Mr. Rodrigues told them about a research article that had just been published. It named their neighbourhood as the worst place to live in the entire city.

Luiza did not know how to react to that news, but her other friends were shocked. Mariana was so disappointed by this news that she spent the lunch hour with a few of her friends making plans to go out into their community and see for themselves if things were really as bad as what the article said.



Mariana approached Luiza.

"You are coming too, aren't you?"

"I'm not sure, Mariana. I am new here and I know nothing about this place."

Mariana smiled. "That's a very good reason for you to come with us, Luiza. I think you'll find that there's more here than what you've seen so far."

So, Luiza accompanied the rest of her class as they walked through the streets, taking pictures. When they got back to school, they shared these with other students and quickly realized this was only a part of their neighbourhood, and not the whole picture they wanted the world to see.

After giving it some thought and sharing their ideas with each other, they came to the conclusion that the people at large needed to see the other side of the coin.

How were they going to do accomplish that?



Mariana walked up to the front of the empty class where they had gathered.

"I think I may have an answer. It's not going to be enough if we tell people about our home. We need to show them."

Luiza was puzzled by this. "Show them? But how can we possibly bring everyone in the city to our neighbourhood?"

Mariana smiled. "We don't need to. We can take our neighbourhood to them. To the entire world, actually."

Mariana explained her plan. She wanted the group to try and make a film about their neighborhood, one that would showcase all the positive aspects. Most of the group was skeptical, and one of the boys asked the question that was at the forefront of everyone's minds.

"You really think that we can do this? We know nothing about film-making."

"But we do know all about living here, don't we?" Mariana countered.

Mariana rapidly gained the support of all the students. As the first step towards this goal, they decided to enroll in video-making courses.

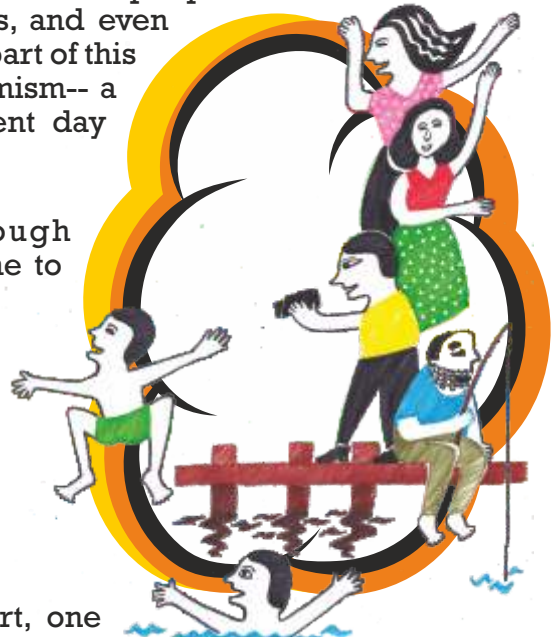
Armed with this knowledge, the class met to discuss the history and culture of their region they wanted to highlight through this film. They also met and interviewed people who lived in the neighborhood earlier, as well as some leaders of the community.

Through these field trips, Luiza started learning and experiencing something new every day. When they walked along the waterfront, she wished that she could jump in and join the swimmers as they fought off the humidity in the cool, sparkling water. Her feet tapped in rhythm when they came across a group of young girls learning the samba. When they continued the research, she was surprised to find that a remnant Atlantic forest area was in their region, as well as one of the water reservoirs that supplied the entire city of San Paulo.

One thing struck her the most. She realized that this neighbourhood wholeheartedly accepted and embraced people from many other regions, races, and even nationalities. The diversity was part of this place's unique spirit and dynamism-- a fact that became more apparent day after day.

When they finally had enough material for the film, Luiza came to one startling conclusion.

*There really  
was beauty  
here.*



Their neighbourhood had heart, one that was big enough to embrace everyone who came here to live.

Just like her and her parents.

And today, as she watched the video with all the others, she hoped with all her heart that everyone from the community could see that too. Mariana slid into place beside her and whispered, "I was watching you from up front. Why do you look so worried?"

"It's this video. I hope that everyone can see what we did."

"Don't worry, they will."

"How can you be so sure, Mariana?"

"Because it's the truth. Our neighbourhood is like....like brigadeiros."

Luiza stared at her, wondering what their neighborhood had in common with the chocolate bonbon so popular in their country.

"Brigadeiros?"

"Yes. When someone sees it for the first time, they see only the sprinkles on top. It is only when they actually eat it that they finally experience the chewy deliciousness inside."

This time, Luiza smiled too. "I was one of those people too, wasn't I? I couldn't really see what was hidden below the surface."

"But now you do, Luiza. And so will everyone else. The magic was always there, we just put it on film for everyone to see. And now the world will, too...once Carlos posts this on the internet."

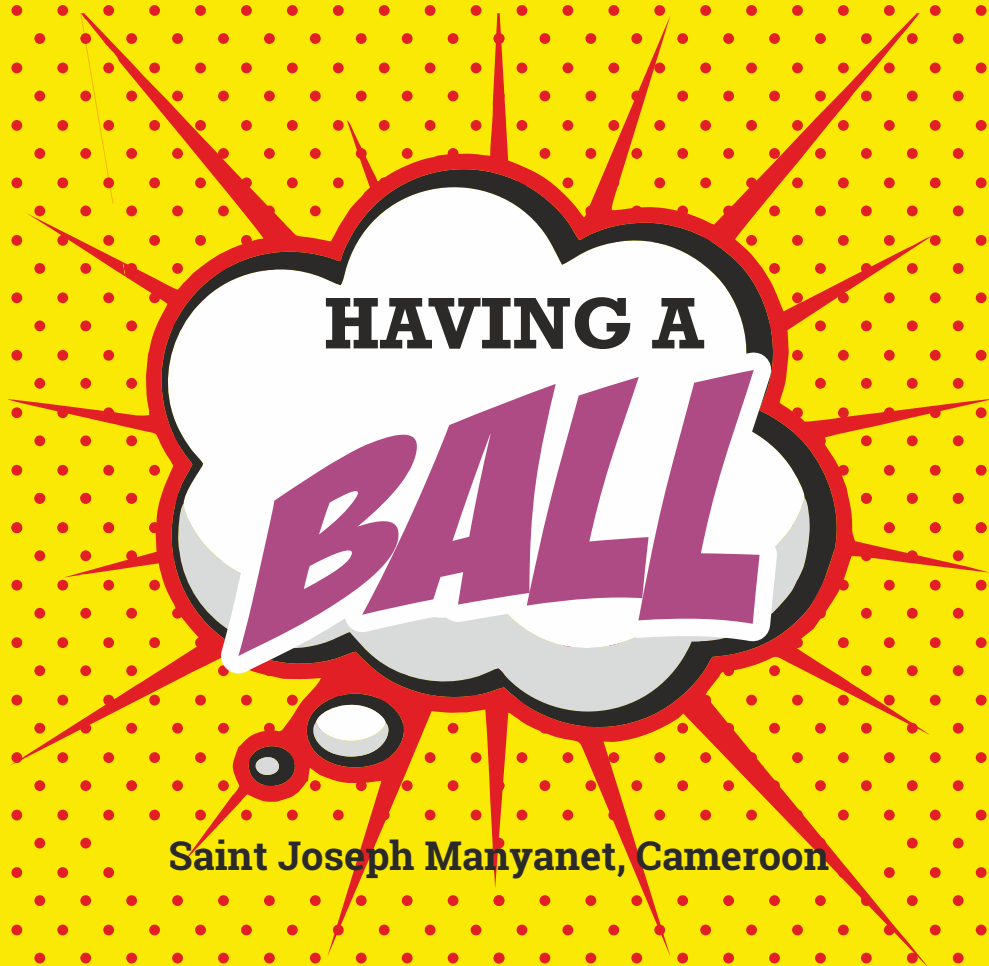
Luiza took a deep breath, unconvinced by her friend's optimism. When the end credits finally rolled, she walked out to the side with Mariana, just as Mr. Rodrigues turned to face them and reached for the microphone.

Luiza looked out over the crowd, and as she saw the surprise and dawning happiness on every face there, her heart soared with relief and joy.

*She knew her class accomplished what they set out to do.*

And finally, their geography teacher confirmed it for them.

"Now that we have seen the results of what our students set out to do all those weeks ago, I have only one thing to say. On behalf of the entire community, I would like to thank my 7th grade class for doing something that no one else could. Thank you all...for giving our home, our neighbourhood back to us."



**HAVING A**

**BALL**

**Saint Joseph Manyanet, Cameroon**

Written by: Semanti Ray  
Illustrations by: Anish Daolagupu

**You**Tube

[bit.ly/icandfc-havingaball](https://bit.ly/icandfc-havingaball)

The distant ringing of the school bell made Ako'o perk up in her seat. It was time. The four year old and her friends at Saint Joseph Manyanet in Yaoundé, Cameroon particularly looked forward to one period every week: recreation time. Madame Justine always had something new and interesting up her sleeve.

At the head of the class, Madame Justine cleared her throat and waited for the usual chatter and muffled giggles to die down. With an inviting smile on her face, she began.

"Today, I have a question for all of you. I want to know about the things that you like, as well as the things that you don't like. Who would like to begin?"

Ako'o raised her hand immediately. "I like recess," she said without an ounce of hesitation.

The class immediately broke out in cheers and laughter. "Ice-lollies!" offered Kenmegne.

"Football!" shouted Tuekam.

As the decibel level in the class started rising alarmingly, Madame Justine laughingly put a stop to all the declarations.

"I understand that there are a lot of things that you like, but nobody has mentioned any of the things that you don't like. Would anyone like to share?"





After a moment or two of consideration, Ambassa volunteered, “I don’t like it when we play rough - when some of us shake the swings in all directions or when the older kids hit the younger ones. I’ve fallen over so many times and scraped my knee!”

Nga nodded. “I don’t like it when people slam doors shut. It startles me.”

Aminatou raised her hand. “I also don’t like it when our friends play football with bottles. I’m always worried that they’re going to poke someone’s eye out.”

Madame Justine nodded gravely. “I agree with all of the things you have mentioned.

*Now, what if I told you that we could change the things that you don't like?”*

“But how?” questioned Ako’o with a curious glint in her eyes.

“We’ll get to that in a moment, Ako’o. But the first thing we need to do is select the problem that all of us want to fix.” Using pictures to represent the problems that the children had mentioned, she asked the class to vote for the one thing that they would like to change the most.

After the votes had been cast, Madame Justine did a quick count: playing with bottles had won with nineteen votes!

“Children, I am very glad that you have all thought so carefully about this and I am in agreement with you - this is a



worrying situation. Playing football with bottles is dangerous and there is always the chance of someone getting injured in the process. We will do our best to change this. Now, does anyone have any ideas about how we can stop our friends from playing with bottles?"

The whole class thought about what Madame Justine had said until Kenmegne started. "Why don't we make a rule that no one is allowed to play with bottles? That should do it."

Aminatou shook her head. "It's not that simple. How do we ensure that everyone actually follows this rule? I think a better idea would be to ban bottles in school altogether. Or recycle all of them. That way, no one has access to a bottle in school."

"We can tell the teacher if someone breaks this rule! I still think the best way to stop this is to make a rule about playing with bottles. Besides, it is not practical to ban all bottles in school!"

Nga intervened cautiously. "Yes, but the thing is that these solutions don't affect the main reason behind why we play with bottles. We play with bottles because we don't have a ball! Making rules or banning bottles isn't going to change that. But balls are so expensive."

Ambassa clapped her hands in delight.

*"Of course! This is what we need to do - we need to make a ball that we can play with during recess! What do you think, Madame Justine?"*

As the class looked struck and excited by the brilliance of the idea, Madame Justine smiled.

“Very good, Ambassa. I like how you’ve tried to fix the root of the problem. This means that the chances of this solution working are greater than the other ones mentioned so far. Since none of us know anything about making balls, I have an idea. Why don’t we collect different materials, test them and see which one works best? The next time we meet, I’d like everyone to bring something to make a ball out of. We’re going to test out our idea!”

The following recreation hour, there was a greater than usual air of excitement and anticipation in the class. Everyone had brought something or the other that they thought they could make a ball out of. With Madame Justine’s guidance, all the children created prototypes of balls using the different materials they collected. There were balls made of paper, of cloth, of felt, of plastic, and even Styrofoam. Then they began the fun process of testing all of them out. One by one, the children bounced the different balls and noted how well each worked.

The winner was clear: plastic.

“Fantastic work, children! We’re on the right track. As you can all see, plastic is the material that works best. Our next task is to collect as much plastic packaging as possible in order to actually make the ball. Let’s get started today!”

The children returned home in high spirits. This was turning out to be more fun than they had imagined. Each one of them spoke to their parents and neighbours, explaining the situation and asking for help with the plastic collection.

And everyone obliged! Thrilled that little children were showing such maturity and thoughtfulness, not to mention innovation, they all dug up as much plastic packaging they could and gave it to the children.

Excited, the children returned to school with all the plastic that they had collected. It was time to start working on the actual ball.

With lots of help from Madame Justine, several attempts and trial-and-error sessions, the children finally managed to fashion a ball out of the plastic packaging.

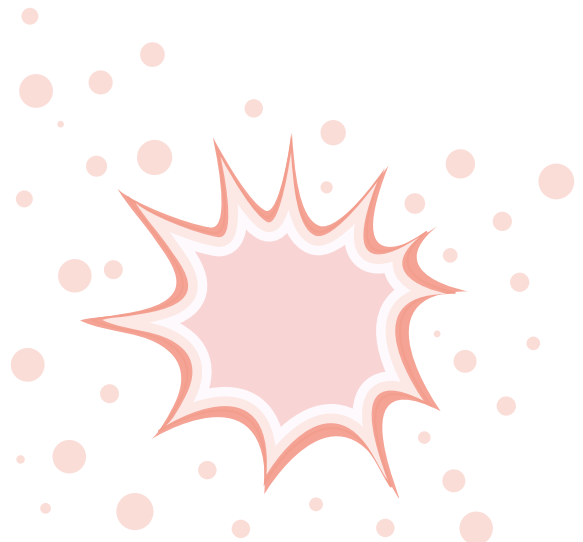
It was a beautiful ball that bounced well and was perfect to play different recess games with!

When the children proudly took their new ball outside to play, a loud cheer erupted from all around. No one would have to play with bottles anymore and get injured.



Madame Justine had been right.

*It was possible to change everything they didn't like about the world- all it took was one step at a time!*





**TO  
CATCH  
A SMILE**

**Ecole Puntledge Park Elementary School, Canada**

Written by: Semanti Ray  
Illustrations by: Anish Daolagupu



[bit.ly/icandfc-tocatchasmile](https://bit.ly/icandfc-tocatchasmile)

“Alright, class, settle down. Today, we're going to talk about my favourite time of the year-Christmas!”

Ecole Puntledge Park Elementary School's 5th and 6th grade class looked at their home-room teacher, Mme. Attfield, with barely suppressed excitement. Christmas was around the corner and everybody had made special plans for the holidays.

“So, who would like to share their favourite bit about Christmas?”

As expected, almost all the hands in class shot up, making Mme. Attfield smile.

“Alright then, one at a time. Brian, why don't you begin?” Brian grinned.

“Presents!” Most of the children laughed, nodding in agreement.

“I can't deny that I love presents too, Brian,” conceded Mme. Attfield. “What about you, Julia?”

“Christmas cake!” burst out Julia.

One by one, the children started calling out the names of everything they loved, about Christmas: turkey, candy, snow, vacations, Christmas trees, fairies, ice-skating, family dinners, egg nog, Santa Claus, elves, and, of course, reindeer!



Mme. Attfield finally broke in with a smile, “While I love all those things as much as the next person, do you know what I love the most?”

The class fell silent, trying hard to think about what they may have possibly left out. When no one volunteered an answer, Mme. Attfield continued, "I love looking at people's happy faces."

*I love knowing that everyone is sharing the joy and feeling thankful. I love being the reason someone smiles."*

The children nodded. How could they have forgotten this one thing? "Yes, Mme. Attfield, I agree. For instance, it made me very happy to see the way our presents were received at the homeless shelter last weekend."

"That's right, Becky, and why did you feel happy?"

"I guess, just seeing all those people smile and knowing that they won't be sad over Christmas made me happy. No one should be sad during Christmas!"

Chris chimed in, "Yeah! And it takes so little to make someone happy! All we gave the homeless shelter were care packages with warm clothes, toothbrushes, toothpaste and homemade cookies! But they were so happy with these things!"

"That's right, Chris. It takes very little to make someone happy -- that is a very valuable lesson!"

The children whipped out their 'Be the Change' journals and made a note.

"Now, do you think it's important to continue spreading this joy? Is it something that we should be doing actively?" The class rang with a chorus of "Yes, Mme. Attfield!"



“Would anyone explain to me why that is?”

Sydney put her hand up. “It's because people should be happy all the time and not just during Christmas. And making other people happy will make us happy. It's like...like the multiplication tables! The more people you share it with, the more joy multiplies.”

“Very good, Sydney! Joy does indeed multiply the more you attempt to share it.” Noticing the continued scribbling around her, Mme. Attfield waited for the sound of scratching pencils to subside. “I'm glad that you've all gotten into the habit of making notes in your 'Be the Change' journals. It's going to help you organise your thoughts and remember what we talk about here for years to come. Don't forget to maintain these journals during your holidays too! Have a great vacation, class! We'll pick up from where we left off when we come back in spring.”

The school reopened after the vacation to an unusually cold spring in British Columbia, which Molly thought was an odd coincidence given that they had started studying extreme environments and Antarctic flora and fauna in Geography. She found penguins fascinating, and Geography was rapidly becoming her favourite class.

And this is what gave her a brainwave during recess, one fine day.

“Sydney! I have an idea for the 'Create Something Project'. So you know how Mr. David said that

*we need to create something that spreads happiness and kindness to anyone it is shared with, and how it can be anything at all?”*

Sydney nodded, a furrow between her brows. After the vacation had ended, the students had been talking about how they would like to do a project that would allow them to spread kindness and joy but have



complete creative freedom while doing so. Mr. David obliged by assigning the 'Create Something Project'. Molly and Sydney had paired up with a lot of enthusiasm, but hadn't been able to think of an adequately exciting idea.

Molly now looked like she'd hit the jackpot. "I think we should do something with penguins!"

"What?"

"Yes! Think about it: everyone loves penguins and they're sure to put a smile on everyone's face. Why not do something that involves penguins?"

"You can't mean live penguins? Where on earth would we be able to work with live penguins?"



Molly had to concede that live penguins would perhaps be too difficult to source and work with. She somehow couldn't see any zoo or sea world officials allowing two school children to borrow a couple of penguins for a project. Of course, a trip to Antarctica would have been best, but there was that matter of nine and a half thousand miles separating British Columbia from Antarctica.

"No...not live penguins. Maybe...pictures of penguins? How about a collage?"

There was a sudden gleam on Sydney's face. "No. I have a better idea. How about a short film?"

"But Sydney, we can't use live penguins!"

"Who said anything about live penguins, Molly? I'm talking about animation!"

"Sydney, neither of us is very good at drawing. How is animation going to work?"

“We'll use clay figures and stop motion animation, silly! We'll create the sets out of cardboard or something and the objects out of clay. We'll manipulate those and photograph them, and then play the photographs in a stream!”

Molly could have done a little jig. “This is going to be the best project ever, Sydney! Let's get started right away!”

The girls talked to Mme. Attfield and began work on crafting their sets and figures. While an old shoebox furnished the set, clay was procured to sculpt the penguins, fish and various other objects from. They enlisted the help of their classmates and even Mme. Attfield to help them make all the figures. After that, they began the painstaking process of manipulating the figures and photographing them.

Sydney and Molly finally had a finished product in hand and they couldn't wait to show their work to the class!

On the day of the screening, they waited with bated breath. The projector flickered on and their tale of two penguins who gradually become friends started playing. It was a sweet and heartwarming story, but the two girls were too nervous to focus on their own film. The class was watching with rapt attention. As the film came to an end and the lights came on, the class broke out into resounding applause.

Mr. David was grinning from ear to ear. “Sydney, Molly, that was terrific! You two have done spectacularly well! If you're in any doubt about how successful the film is, you only have to look around this class.”

Sydney and Molly whipped around to look at their classmates. Every single face sported a dazzling smile.

Their nerves dissipating rapidly, the girls beamed back at their friends.

*It was true; smiles did have a peculiar tendency to multiply.*



**JUST A  
SPOONFUL  
OF SUGAR**

**George Chaytor English College , Chile**

Written by: Pooja Lakshmanan  
Illustrations by: Souradeep Ghosh



[bit.ly/icandfc-justaspoonfulofsugar](https://bit.ly/icandfc-justaspoonfulofsugar)

It had been three months since Maria and Sofia had shifted to George Chaytor English College and they were having the time of their life. For outgoing girls like them, making friends was a piece of cake. The teachers were helpful and they loved their new school.

Every day the girls would go back home and report to their mother over the dinner table, telling her about all their new experiences with arts and craft, something new that they had learned in History class, what Felipe had said to Alessandra or why Benjamin had pulled Vicente's hair.

They told their mother about everything -- from the moment they hopped on to the school bus to the time they got back home with one exception.

*There was one problem that the girls faced during their recess.*

The girls' mother gave them money to buy something from the candy counter. And every day, Maria and Sofia would plan what they would tell their mother they had eaten, while climbing up the stairs to get to their door.

However, on this one day, both of them had been chosen to represent the school in an upcoming dance competition and they had completely forgotten to discuss dessert as they speculated about what they might wear, what song they would choose, the other boys and girls they would be dancing with.

They reached home and when their mother asked them the inevitable question, "So, what did you get at the candy store today?" they both answered simultaneously.

"Chocolate!" cried Sofia. "An ice lolly," replied Maria.

Trying to cover up, they both swapped responses before stopping in guilty confusion. Their mother narrowed her eyes.

“Have you two forgotten what you ate or did you not eat at all?”

The girls knew it was time to confess. "Mom, we love buying from the candy counter. But sometimes we can't eat any of the food that's there," Maria explained.

"Well, why not? And why haven't you told me?"

The girls knew that their mother was not going to be happy with their answer. "Mom, the line is too long and nobody stands in queue. By the time we get to the counter to get some food, the recess bell rings and we have to get back to class. If we get late because we waited for our turn at the candy counter, the teachers reprimand us."



Sofia joined in, "Sometimes the older kids cut through the crowd because they're taller and the person at the counter can't see us when we hold our money out."

The girls' mother grimly decided to have a word with Ms. Marquez, the girls' class teacher.



Ms. Marquez sighed after her conversation with Maria and Sofia's mother. This was a persistent problem at the school. She knew that for anything to change, the children would have to do it themselves.

One day, during a free period, she discussed the matter with the class.

“Class, I've noticed the chaos that reigns during recess at the candy counter. Your recess time is meant for both eating and playing. Currently, neither happens and most of you spend all your recess just trying to get to the candy counter. Don't you think this situation needs to be changed? Think about it.”



The next morning, Paola, the class monitor, asked Ms. Marquez if she could share an idea with the class. Glad that the children had already started thinking, Ms. Marquez nodded her approval. Paola took a deep breath before beginning.

“I've been thinking about what Ms. Marquez said yesterday -- about the mess around the candy counter at recess. This is something that we have all noticed and complained about at some point or other. But we never do anything about it. I think this is something that can change. We just have to try. The main problem is that we don't respect each other's turn or a queue. We're always in such a hurry to get what we want, we don't stop to see if what we're doing is hurting anyone else. I think we need to remind ourselves and the whole school how important it is to respect everyone and their wants and needs.”

“That sounds like a good idea, Paola, but how do we do this?” asked Vicente.

Paola smiled. “We do this the same way we spread awareness about anything else: we create posters, talk to the students and make presentations. See, everyone knows that it is important to respect others, but we forget sometimes. Let's remind everyone!”

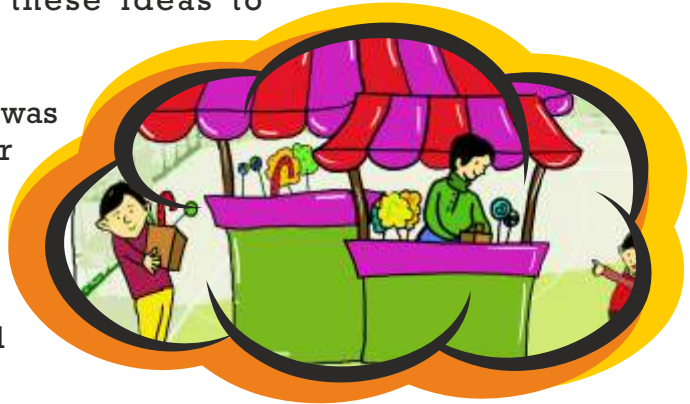
“An awareness campaign is all well and good, but what do we do about the fact that some of us and most of the younger children can't reach the counter?” grumbled Sofia.

Benjamin raised his hand. "I always stand on the side of the counter that is lower. What if we made it a rule? What if we said that the shorter kids must use the lower side of the counter and the taller kids can use the regular higher side of the counter?"

*Maybe we could cut down a section so that the youngest children don't have trouble either."*

Ms. Marquez wanted to applaud the simplicity and brilliance of the children's ideas. Maintaining a straight face, she reminded the children of one crucial fact. "Your ideas are wonderful, class, but we must remember that we need to involve the Principal and other people if we want these ideas to succeed!"

Energized, Class 5B was confident that their plans would work and they wasted no time in drafting a letter to request a meeting with the Principal and the concessionaire.



The authorities were glad that the students had come up with such a simple and effective solution to a long-standing problem, and extended their support.

The first order of business was to tackle the canteen. They designated the lower counter for the younger children and the higher counter for the older children. Additionally, they managed to cut down a section of the counter so that even the youngest children would be able to reach over it. This way, no one could take an unfair advantage of their height. Then they used tape to draw lines on the floor indicating queues.

The next step was to tell the whole school about the new system and talk about why it was important.

“Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. It doesn't matter how tall or short you are or how old you are -- we must ensure equality; because with respect, we all win!” Sofia's voice rang out confidently to resounding applause from the student community and teachers.

The class also made posters and put them up all over the school and in the canteen to ensure that everyone remembered the message at all times. Finally, the children, Ms. Marquez and the principal waited anxiously to see what would happen at the next recess.

*It was a miracle! Everyone had started following the directions.*

The students stood in the designated areas, and they stood within the lines drawn on the floor. There was a neat queue, everybody was patient and the cafeteria no longer sounded like a fish market. Nobody had to return to class empty-handed at the end of recess and there was even time to play!

While everyone in the school is proud of Class 5B's idea, no one was happier than Maria. Not only were Sofia and she able to buy at the candy counter every day, they no longer had to worry about what they would tell their mother. They had all won.





**THE**  
**SEA**  
**IN THE SCHOOL**

**Guangzhou Children Palace, China**

Written by: Charusheila Ramkumar  
Illustrations by: Aishwarya Rathore

**You**Tube

[bit.ly/icandfc-theseaintheschool](https://bit.ly/icandfc-theseaintheschool)

“What is that painting?” whispered a wide-eyed young girl wearing a yellow frock and pigtails. She moved closer to her Mum, and tugged her arm gently.

“Mum, what is that?” she pointed to the wall that flanked the main stairway of Guangzhou Children’s Palace School. Her Mum looked at the wall puzzled. It looked like some of the students had painted the wall to make it look like the ocean. But she had no idea why they would do that.

She smiled at her daughter. “Let’s go ask them, Ting-Ting,” she said. Ting-Ting and her Mum walked up to the students gathered by the wall.

“What is this creature you are painting?” asked Ting-Ting to a girl who looked about 10, and was absorbed in putting the finishing touches on a painting of a creature with the head of a beautiful girl with long black hair and the body of a graceful fish.

The girl smiled at Ting-Ting. “This is a Jiao-Ren. A mermaid. She sits on the waves of the ocean and spins waterproof silk,” she said.

Ting-Ting’s eyes were now as round as marbles. “Mum, it’s a mermaid!” she said excitedly.

“I see. But why are you painting a Jiao-Ren on this wall? Will your Principal not punish you for defacing the school wall?” asked Mum.

The girl beamed at them. This was what she’d been waiting for. “Oh no! We have the permission of the Principal to paint these walls. The reason we are painting them is so people will look at our pretty drawings and want to look at them more, and so they will walk up the stairs instead of taking the elevator.

*“It saves the elevator for those who really need them, and it’s good for your health too.”*

she finished proudly.

A young man, about the same age as the girl came and joined her. “Yes, Yahui is absolutely right. Our 5th grade class here has a student Namren, who needs a wheelchair to get around. He has to wait a long time for the elevator because there are always people waiting in line to use it.”

“Who’s Namren?” whispered Ting-Ting shyly.

“Namren is our classmate and friend who is unable to walk and uses a wheelchair to get around. He used to often be late to class because the elevator was always full and there was a long line to get into it.” the young man explained. “One day we saw that he was last in a

line of about 10 people to get in and, everyone in front of him was young, healthy and perfectly able to take the stairs. We wondered why they weren’t walking up the stairs. We asked Namren what he thought and he said, “They just didn’t think about the stairs. The elevator was just a much easier option.”

“And so we - that is me, my friend Pingsheng, and our whole class - decided to do something to help Namren and people like him to get to the elevator faster.” Yahui chimed in.

“We decided that we needed to make people think about taking the stairs. We asked our class teacher, Ms. Tan, for suggestions. She suggested that we should take this as a challenge and come up with our own solution.”

“Ms. Tan was very encouraging and she told us to hold a class meeting after school and discuss different ideas to find a way out.”



That's how this whole thing started, with an after-school meeting where everyone presented their ideas and we picked this one." said Pingsheng proudly.

"Your wall is just amazing!" exclaimed Ting-Ting. Pingsheng smiled at her and held out his hand. Come, let me show you our best painting- the Jiaolong" he said.

"I know what a Jiaolong is! It's a Dragon!" chimed Ting-Ting happily.

"Yes, a water dragon. See!" Pingsheng pointed to a huge painting of a green and blue serpent-like creature with horns and fiery orange scales.

Ting-Ting stared at it for a minute and said, "I like the mermaid better."

Pingsheng laughed. "OK, let's go back to the mermaid then."

"How did you think of painting the walls as a solution?" asked Mum, as they walked back to the Jiao-Ren.

"Well, our whole class got together in the meeting and thought about it. We knew it had to be something that would motivate people to take the stairs. At first, we thought we would stick messages on the walls about the importance of walking and how healthy it was. But people don't like lectures, we thought. We talked about what people liked, and what made them do something they didn't want to. We realized that everyone liked looking at beautiful things. Why not make our walls look beautiful, so people would want to go sight-seeing up our stairs?" explained Pingsheng.

"That's a great idea!" said Ting-Ting's mum, looking at the two kids with pride. Ting-Ting, you can walk up the stairs to class and not feel tired because you are looking at these beautiful paintings. At the same time you get exercise, and the people who really need the elevator are able to use them faster." she explained to her little daughter.

Ting-Ting nodded quickly and turned to Yahui again. "What is that white dot on the Jiao-Ren's cheek?" she asked.

“Oh, that! It’s a pearl. Jiao-Ren’s tears turn to pearls - they’re such magical creatures you see.” Yahui said solemnly.

“Can we go see more paintings, Mum?” asked Ting-Ting urgently.

“Yes, of course. Yahui, Pingsheng,

*I want to congratulate you and your entire class for this wonderful idea.*

And now, I’m going to walk up the stairs with my daughter and see what else you’ve painted.”

Yahui and Pingsheng beamed at them as they walked up the stairs.

“Oh, look - here’s someone else coming to ask about the Guangzhou Palace Ocean Wall.” said Pingsheng smiling. He turned to the small group who were clearly waiting to ask them the same question Ting-Ting and her Mum had.

Ting-Ting and her Mum walked up three flights of stairs, stopping to examine every angel fish, shark, sea horse, and even a giant Mazu in a red dress with a staff in her hands.

They spoke to several students on their way - each had chosen to paint their own favorite sea creature. The stairway walls were



transformed into a giant blue-grey ocean with white-tipped waves, filled with brightly colored fish, clams, pearls in oysters and coral reefs. It was magical!

Principal Zhang nudged his Vice-Principal, as they stood in the school corridor watching the crowd that had gathered. "I knew this was a good idea. I'm so glad the children came up with it themselves. They take the stairs more now, and so does everyone else who comes to the school."

"Yes, and so many people now come in just because they have heard of our wonderful wall and they love the reason behind it too. I'm really proud of our students for creating this change in our school." said the Vice-Principal.

*"The happiest person is Namren, who is never late to class because he doesn't have to wait for the elevator anymore!"*

replied Principal Zhang, smiling at the serious looking young man as he wheeled into school and got into the elevator, after high-fiving his classmates.



**THE  
WHEEL OF  
FORTUNE**

**Institucion Educativa Victoria Manzur, Colombia**

Written by: Sahana Srinivasan  
Illustrations by: Mohini Mukherjee



[bit.ly/icandfc-thewheeloffortune](https://bit.ly/icandfc-thewheeloffortune)

“How was your first day of eighth grade?” Nestor’s mother asked.

“Absolutely amazing! Luisa couldn’t come, but the rest of us had a great day!”

“At least YOU had a good day.” said Carlos, moodily. “I almost scored a winning goal today, but the ball rolled out of the park and into the street. We could not get it back and finish the game, so I never got to be a hero for my team.”

“Carlos, there’s a lot more to being a hero than scoring a goal in football. Eat up your rice, please.” their mother said. “Nestor, why was Luisa not at school? Perhaps we should visit them tomorrow.”

The next afternoon, Nestor and Mauren found their mothers waiting for them outside school.

“Come on, vamonos, we haven’t got all day!” said Senora Chima, Nestor’s mother. “We thought we would go visit Luisa. Yuliza, Jesus, you can join us too. I have spoken to your mothers and they said you may come with us.”

As the group made their way from the school to Luisa’s house, Nestor began complaining that his eyes hurt. He was quickly shushed by the ladies. Mauren wrinkled his nose in distaste.

As soon as they entered Luisa’s house, the children raced into her room, while the mothers stayed in the front of the house, chatting with each other.

“Doctor Salvador suggests we change houses because the air here is unhealthy.” said Luisa’s mother, as she served juice. “But I cannot do that to Luisa. Her father built this house for her, and I cannot give it away. There MUST be another way.”

As the children milled around Luisa, Doctor Salvador heard a small voice next to him. It was Mauren.

“Can a smell hurt your eyes, Doctor?” he asked with utmost seriousness.



Many adults laugh at children when they ask silly questions, but Doctor Salvador was not one of them.

“Yes, it is in the air, do you notice it too?”

Now Jesus turned to the doctor. “Yes, I do. How can the air be dirty?”



“I think it is because of the tyre-burning factory down the road. Particles of burnt tyre are in the air. They get stuck in your noses, eyes and throats.”

“That’s what made me sick and miss school,” said Luisa, on the verge of tears.

The next day, Luisa was still not back.

*“We have to do something!”*

said Nestor. “Let us meet after classes today. I will ask Miss Ramirez to help us.”

Miss Ramirez listened patiently as they told her about Luisa’s sickness and Doctor Salvador’s explanation of the dirty air.

“I agree with you, Jesus. Burning tyres pollutes the air, but it is done because there is no other way to dispose of tyres. Luisa’s sickness is very sad, but these old tyres need to be removed some way, no? Otherwise, we will have a giant pile of useless old tyres, and that is no better than stinky air.”

No one could disagree with this. Garbage needed to be thrown away and removed. If burning it was not the solution, what was?

That night, Carlos was in a bad mood again. Since the football had rolled onto the main street, his teachers decided that the playground was unsafe, so they could only play indoors during recess.

“It’s not FAIR! Just because the playground does not have a fence, we cannot play outdoors. If I can’t play, why even bother going to school?”

His mother tried calming him down, but the truth was, the school could not afford to build a fence around the playground until next year. Nestor ate his sancocho, his mind working furiously. The next morning, he went straight to Miss Ramirez.

*“Can tyres be used to make fences?”*

He told her all about the playground at Carlos’ primary school.

“I think that’s a great idea, Nestor. Let me speak to the principal about getting some old tyres and we’ll try out your idea.”

Miss Ramirez was true to her word. She spoke to the principal, who arranged for a few tyres to be brought over from the factory. By the time Luisa returned to school, her class was hard at work building a fence out of old tyres so that the little ones could play during recess. Mauren drew a line where the fence should go. Jesus and a few others from his class helped dig a shallow trench. Yuliza and her team placed the tyres in these trenches and packed the dirt tight so they would not fall over. Finally, Carlos and his classmates painted this tyre fence in bright colours.

“But we only used a few tyres. There are so many at the factory and more come in every day. Must we keep building fences?” asked Luisa.

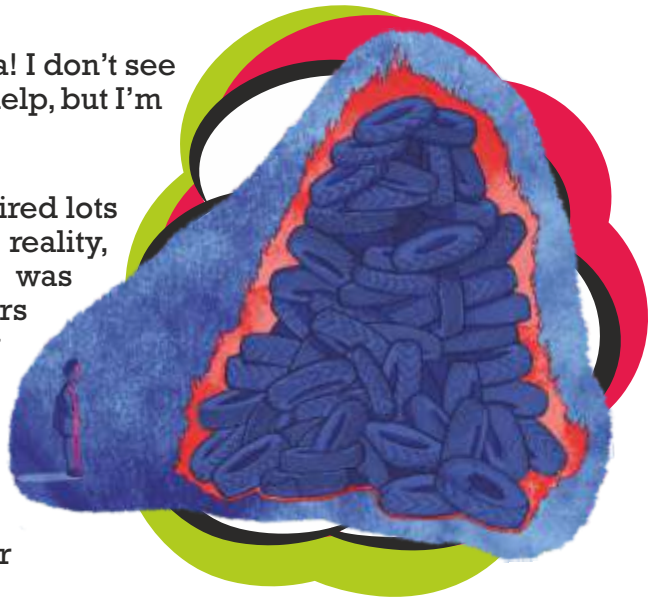
Yuliza piped up. “Well, let’s see here.” She stacked three tyres, and laid a plank of wood on top. “That looks like it could be a chair, doesn’t it?”

“Mr. Rodriguez, could we use these in the common room?” she asked her crafts teacher excitedly. “It’s so dark and scary in there. Could we make these tyre-chairs as colourful as the fence?”

“That’s such a fabulous idea! I don’t see why not. We’ll need lots of help, but I’m sure it can be done.”

Although Yuliza’s idea required lots of effort until it became a reality, the children’s enthusiasm was infectious. Even the teachers were eager to get cracking on this art project.

However, the tyre factory was not so sure. Wouldn’t they go out of business if the children used up all their material?



But, the students would not be deterred. The workers were invited to help them with making chairs. It would be cleaner and easier work than burning rubber all day, and they would not be unemployed.

This was an argument that even the factory owner could not refute. Fabric was cut, foam was modeled, and the old tyres were cleaned. It was a lot of hard work but the children loved every minute of it. Under the guidance of Mr. Rodriguez and Miss Ramirez, everything progressed smoothly. The old tyres were first carefully cleaned. Coloured fabric was cut to size, and wrapped securely around a stack of tyres. A round cushion made of foam and covered with cloth

was then added to the top. This put together made a unique, comfortable and surprisingly sturdy chair.

They made three chairs on the first day. These were proudly placed in the common room.



The principal was so proud of his students that he invited the councilor of Monteria to show him how this enterprising group of

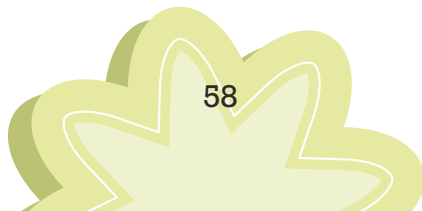
five had turned the town's chief source of pollution into a high-utility and high-demand local item. The councilor could not believe his eyes! The children had found such a simple way to reuse old tyres that the factory no longer needed to burn any. In fact, when the local community heard of the project and saw the beautiful chairs, they too wanted to buy them to decorate their own homes.

The children and factory workers could no longer keep up with demand, so the adults stepped in. Many single mothers, including Luisa's, preferred making chairs at the school over their regular jobs. Slowly, a small industry was set up in the crafts room.

Doctor Salvador often joked that the children had put him out of business by cleaning out the dirty air. In reality, he was incredibly proud of them, and would tell everyone he met about these young change-makers.

But it was Carlos who was the happiest with this entire project. Once the fence had been rebuilt, the primary school could play football in peace, and he finally scored a winning goal to become the hero of his class. That evening, he laughed and ate extra helpings of carne asada, and told Nestor that even though he was a hero for his class,

*Nestor, Yuliza, Luisa, Jesus and Mauren were now his personal heroes.*





**THE  
MAGIC  
WITHIN**

**Skorpeskolen Privatskole , Denmark**

Written by: Uttara Srinivasan  
Illustrations by: Aishwarya Rathore

**YouTube**

[bit.ly/icandfc-themagicwithin](https://bit.ly/icandfc-themagicwithin)

“Settle down class.” Mr. Jensen said clearing his throat and pulling out his famous weathered diary. “So, let’s pick up from where we left off yesterday, ‘Favorite characters from fiction and why’.”

Mr. Jensen’s cheerful voice ended Camilla’s train of thought as she looked up and instantly forgot about everything except the prospect of yet another interesting English class.

Mr. Jensen continued. “So far, we have Sherlock Holmes, Elizabeth Bennett, Heathcliff, Lady Macbeth, Tintin, Anne of Green Gables, Hannibal Lecter, James Bond and Harry Potter, of course.”

The class rang with cheers and laughter.

“Now, let’s have some more of you share your favorite characters.” Mr. Jensen said as he walked up to the class and stopped right in front of Sophie’s desk. “Sophie, do you want to share your favorite character with the class.”

Sophie stuttered, placing the pencil she was scribbling with down on the desk. “My favorite character...” She looked around her hesitantly.

*It was not the first time that Camilla had seen her classmate shy away from the spotlight.*

Sophie was one of the smartest students in their class. Her grades were always impeccable. Unfortunately, with her characteristic hesitance, unique dressing sense and simple appearance, she was often the center of many rude remarks and teasing comments in school.

“Looney Lovegood, of course.” Someone piped up from the back, referring to Harry Potter’s peculiar friend. Instantly, several students burst out laughing.

The embarrassment on Sophie's face and the tears in her eyes, were hard to miss. She looked away and blinked rapidly, making Camilla very angry.

"Though Sophie didn't actually say she likes Luna Lovegood, I think she is an excellent choice." Mr. Jensen exclaimed. "A girl who doesn't care about what others think of her, supports her friends, has a positive attitude towards every problem and every person around her. Who wouldn't like her?" His voice boomed in the class, making everyone smile. "I personally relate to Ms. Lovegood, too, you see." He leaned in towards the class and lowered his voice.

*"After all, people have been giggling and whispering about my multi-coloured sneakers and laces for years now,"*

he said conspiratorially, "not unlike many of you today." He leaned back and winked. Immediately, Camilla felt many of her friends shift guiltily in their seats even as weak laughter bubbled through the class.

At lunch time the next day, the events of their English class were still playing in Camilla's head.

"Did you see Sophie's face yesterday?" She said softly to her friend, Benjamin, as she toyed with her food. "Even this morning... Some folks have actually started calling her Looney. It's..."

"I don't know what the big deal is about the way she dresses. So she wears baggy sweaters and doesn't add layers of cake to her face each day." Ben shrugged. "Big deal. She is one of the smartest girls in our class. The other day she was the only one who could solve that Math problem Ms. Deen handed out in class."

“It’s not just Sophie. I have seen others getting treated this way too.” exclaimed Astrid. “The other day a bunch of kids from the football team were giving Akito a hard time because he came forward for football tryouts even though he is shorter than the others and rather skinny. The fact that he was faster and more agile than half the current team didn’t seem to matter. Even Juan here gets picked on all the time for his accent.”

Astrid shook her head as Juan waved his hand in the air, dismissing her statement.

“It’s because I sound different. They don’t understand different.” Juan shrugged.

It was as if a bulb came on in Camilla’s head. “Of course, that’s it! Juan, you are a genius!”

Juan, Astrid and Benjamin looked at her in confusion. “What do you mean?” Astrid asked keenly.

“The reason behind so many incidents is just that simple! The fact is that the other kids don’t seem to understand that not everyone needs to be blond, or tall, or athletic.” Camilla said out aloud, with an unmistakable cheer in her voice. “Maybe there is something we can do about it. To help Juan. To help Sophie.”

The small group of four began talking simultaneously and throwing out ideas. With visible excitement, Camilla and Astrid echoed in chorus “Fashion Show!!!”

With Juan and Ben’s additional suggestions, the group finally converged on the idea of a “Come As You Are” fashion show which would feature a select set of students – ones like Sophie and Akito, who stood out in the crowd for being different.





“Maybe we could meet with Mr. Jensen and run our idea by him?” Astrid suggested and others nodded in agreement as the bell sounded the end of lunch.

As Camilla had hoped, Mr. Jensen was entirely supportive of the idea. In fact, he was so pleased with the concept that he promised to not only speak with the Principal and seek permission but also volunteered to introduce them to his sister who ran a small boutique and could help them with the clothes they needed for their show.

Before they knew it, the idea had found many sponsors in the local neighborhood. They found themselves in possession of clothes, makeup, accessories and funds to organize the event. But what heartened Camilla and her friends the most was when Sophie and many others agreed to participate in the show. The show now had fifteen participants, each unique in their own way.



A day before the show, Camilla and Astrid beamed as their classmates sportingly walked the ramp for a trial run, each smiling just as brightly as ever.

“We can be ourselves.

*We can be different. Yes, we can!”*

They shouted in unison, their voices echoing in the air.

It was no wonder then, that the actual show was a runaway hit. It started with a few students curiously stopping by to see their dressed up classmates walk down the red carpet ramp laid down in the middle of the atrium outside the school building. Teachers

clapped sportingly as the first set of participants walked along the carpet.

Within no time, the music, the presence of teachers and the air of merriment drew more attention and the area around the ramp was surrounded with curious teenagers. The atrium echoed with fervent applause and cheering.

At the end of the show, the Principal addressed the crowd and launched the “Come As You Are” initiative that promoted the message of accepting everyone for who they were.

As Camilla watched Sophie laugh and answer interview questions about the event for the school newspaper later that week, she felt her lips curl into a small smile. The “Come As You Are” initiative had been appreciated and applauded wholeheartedly by teachers and students alike. In fact, a few parents had even sent appreciation notes congratulating the school and the students for their innovative idea.

“Hurry up, Cam, he must be waiting for us.” Astrid said urgently as the two friends walked towards Mr. Jensen’s room.

Mr. Jensen was thrilled with the outcome of the event.

*“Who knows, maybe we can send this idea out to more schools in the city. Maybe even to schools in other countries!”*

He had said excitedly.

Camilla couldn’t wait!



**Malmaison de Rueil Malmaison, France**

Written by: Sanika Dhakephalkar  
Illustrations by: Leina Godin



[bit.ly/icandfc-theipadpact](http://bit.ly/icandfc-theipadpact)

"Look, Martin! Look at what I made for you!"

Martin turned to look at little Cristoph, an eager boy with kind eyes. He took the iPad that Cristoph was holding, with the bright green holster dangling off it and peeked into the screen. He squinted through his thick glasses and saw a drawing of a yellow stick figure with a red beard and big green glasses and 'MARTIN' scribbled at the top in purple. He looked at the little boy and smiled indulgently.

They were sitting in a cosy little common room in an Old Age home in the city of Reuil Malmaison. The Home was fifteen minutes away from Ecole Malmaison where Cristoph studied in the 2nd grade. The room was decked with colourful balloons and streamers. Cristoph was there along with his classmates to help organize a party that was about to start in an hour.

Martin thought about how different Cristoph had been when he'd first met him at his school, a couple of months ago.

Martin and his friends from the Old Age

Home had decided to volunteer

at the Ecole to help little children read and write.

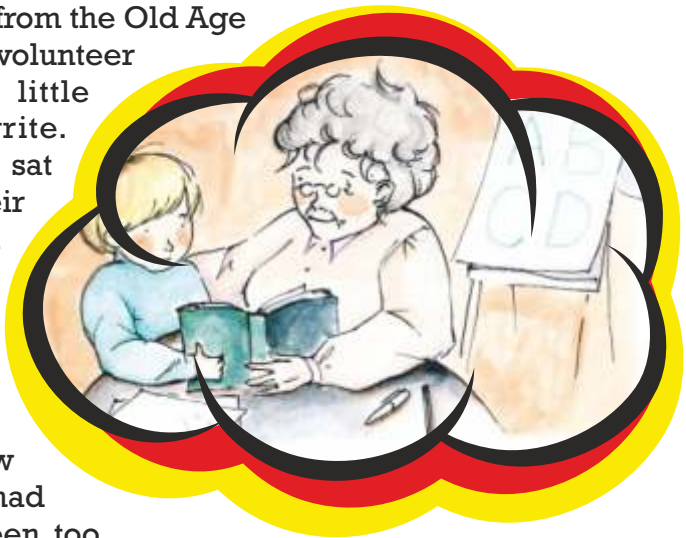
Once a week, they all sat with the little kids at their stations and helped them with their letters,

their words and their sentences. Cristoph was a shy kid who barely spoke in class.

He remembered how their first encounter had gone. The boy had been too

shy to even introduce himself, but as the hour had progressed, his enthusiasm had blazed through. He could

still clearly recall the first real conversation they had.



Cristoph had been very excited because his father had bought him a new iPad. "Look at my iPad, Martin! The games help me with my

math homework and, yesterday, my mother downloaded one that helps me remember all the words that you've taught me."

Martin was thoroughly confused by the fast moving images on the screen and some of the words that Cristoph had used to explain it to him. He took the iPad into his hands carefully and ran his fingers over the screen. A sudden sound emanated from the machine in his hand, startling him.

Cristoph snatched the iPad away from him and stopped it. "Don't you know how to use an iPad?" he looked at him quizzically.



"No, child, I've never had one. I don't know what I'd do with it. Besides, I'm afraid I'll drop it." He looked downcast.

"How do you work then? How do you take pictures? How do you talk to your family? Do you still use a big computer to send emails?" Cristoph grew more and more distressed with each question.

Martin's reply was drowned out by the shrill voice of a boy. Thomas, whose station was next to Cristoph's, was shouting at his senior buddy, Marta, so loudly that Miss Marie, their homeroom teacher, had to investigate.

"I'm sorry, Miss Marie, but Marta can't hear anything I say. She always thinks I'm spelling everything wrong," he explained woefully. Miss Marie glanced at Marta who grinned back at her, happily unaware of the exchange that had just taken place. She made a mental note to speak about their senior friends to the children. After they'd left, she gathered them.

"Children, our seniors come and visit us every week. They're your friends, aren't they? Tell me what you know about these new friends of yours."

Lea's hand shot up and she said, "Miss Marie, Marion likes to sing. She taught me an alphabet song!"

"Very good, Lea. Maybe tomorrow, you could teach it to all of us." She turned to Luc, "Luc, what about you?"

"Segolene told me I remind her of her grandson. She says she doesn't meet him very often. I see my grandma every day. She says she misses him." Luc piped.

Miss Marie smiled at him and turned towards Cristoph, "And Martin, Cristoph? Have you made friends with him?"

"Yes, Miss Marie," he began shyly, "he taught me so many games but he didn't know anything about the games on my iPad. I tried to show him but he was scared to hold the iPad." His face echoed the sympathy that was so evident in his voice.

"Children, your friends come here every week and help you. Don't you think you should help them too? Remember what we learnt from our lesson yesterday? When someone is kind to you, you should be kind to them too. What do you think we should do to help them?"

The room was suddenly abuzz. The class of six year olds looked at one another and began talking all at once. Ideas and suggestions began flying across the room and at Miss Marie who asked them all to calm down.

"Why don't you write your ideas on these papers," she said, as she went around the class distributing post-its to the children, "and stick them on the wall and then we can all decide." The children scribbled on their colourful post-its and then went and stuck them on an empty portion of the wall.

"You have all decided that we teach our friends how to use iPads. Good choice, children! Cristoph, since you were the one who came up with this suggestion, why don't you take charge of this project?"

Taking Cristoph's beaming face for a yes, Miss Marie gave the children a week to prepare. All week, she saw her students speaking with one another constantly, discussing and even writing things. They had ideas and plans and projects and they worked at them very diligently.

At the end of the week, Miss Marie stopped her lesson half an hour early for a very important meeting. She called Cristoph forward. Shyly, but determinedly, he came forward and looked at his classmates' excited faces and then at Miss Marie.

*"We have decided that we will go to the Old Age Home once every week after school and teach our senior friends how to use iPads."*

Lea and Thomas will tell you about their ideas now." Blushing, he ran back to his seat amidst excited applause.

Lea came forward. "They're scared of iPads so we will make holsters for them!" she announced confidently.

Thomas stumbled forward. "I'm always yelling at Marta and she never hears anything I say. So we should all make paper megaphones for them!"

Miss Marie joined in gleefully with the thunderous applause and the excited chattering of her class.

The next morning, Miss Marie took them to visit the Old Age home. The children quickly found their senior buddies and settled down next to them, listening eagerly as Miss Marie spoke to them about their decision and all their good work. Cristoph's face shone when she told them that he led his class and Martin looked at him with pride and affection.

When she was finished speaking, Martin turned to Cristoph with anticipation in his eyes as Christoph excitedly showed him the iPad holster and the paper megaphone. Martin was overjoyed.

The children looked forward to their sessions with the seniors every week and were more excited about schoolwork. Every Wednesday, they would all trudge down to the Old Age Home where the seniors were just as thrilled.

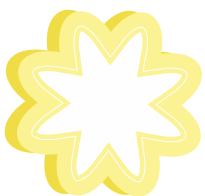


The following month was exciting for everybody. Miss Marie watched as her class made tremendous progress with their reading and the seniors with technology. Twice a week, they met, taught each other and learned from each other.

Today, a month later, the children led by Miss Marie, had arranged a party for the seniors and their families at the Old Age Home. They'd decorated the entire place and there was one last thing to do before the party started.

“Martin,” said Cristoph, pointing to the iPad, “this is Twitter. Tomorrow onwards, we will talk everyday with this! I can write to you and you can send me pictures! Isn't that cool?”

Martin smiled at Cristoph as he eagerly explained it to him. He thought about his son and his granddaughter who were coming to visit him that day. He couldn't wait to introduce them to his newest friend and show them his bright green iPad.







**PLASTIC**  
**PLANTS**

**Chung Sing Benevolent Society**  
**Mrs. Aw Boon Haw Secondary School, Hong Kong**

Written by: Pooja Yadav  
Illustrations by: Tasneem Mama



[bit.ly/icandfc-plasticplants](https://bit.ly/icandfc-plasticplants)

One fine morning, Miss Leslie greeted her kindergarten class with a special plan. She announced that her little superstars would enjoy a day under the sun. Unsurprisingly, every single child burst into applause. Steven shouted the loudest, "We should go to the park!"

Miss Leslie laughed heartily and agreed. In a matter of moments, all the children were lined up at the exit, with their little backpacks on and water bottles hanging around their necks.

As the bus took off for the park, the little children could not resist planning all that they wanted to play. Steven wanted to play ball, but Kelly wanted to play tag with the girls.

"My little superstars, please be careful! And Sean, please stay away from the pond. We don't need our little hero being rescued from mucky water like last time, do we?" Miss Leslie let the kids rush into various parts of the park after her standard safety instructions.

They ran onto the lawn, only to stop in dismay. A classmate, Mike, tripped on a plastic bottle and bruised his knees right before the entrance to the sand area. Instead of joining his friends, Steven stayed back with Mike as they sat by the swings and watched everyone else.

*"I wish I hadn't tripped. I am sorry for ruining your fun, Steven." said Mike, with the most apologetic face that Miss Leslie had ever seen.*

Steven immediately replied, "It's not your fault. It's the plastic bottle that got in your way!"

Miss Leslie smiled at the innocence of the two boys and explained, "Steven, think about this. How do you think the bottle got there in the

first place? Maybe if someone was more careful, today Mike wouldn't have gotten hurt."

Miss Leslie's explanation stayed with Steven. The next morning, he walked up to Miss Leslie's desk.

*"Miss Leslie," he began seriously,  
"I have an idea for the park."*

Miss Leslie heard him out before announcing to the class that they were going to start a new project under the leadership of Steven. He proudly explained to the class what he had discussed with their teacher.

"Yesterday in the park, while everyone was playing, Mike and I had to sit on the side watching. Mike tripped on a plastic bottle on the ground and hurt himself. When I went home, I realized that more people could have been hurt. Miss Leslie is always telling us we have to take care of each other and the spaces we use. So, I think we should do something about the bottles in the park. I still don't know what we are going to do, but I'm sure the first step is to decide we want to get rid of those bottles."

Noah raised his hand. "Maybe we should all go to the park, collect the bottles, and put them in the trash can. That way, people will not trip on them anymore."

"But my dad once told me that plastic can be re-used in a lot of ways. How about making something with those bottles? I know a lot of designs, and I know we all enjoy painting. We should paint the bottles and use them as containers," exclaimed Alison.

"But what would those containers be useful for? And where will we get so much paint from?" asked Lauren.

"We can all bring our painting sets!" answered Alison, who was now very excited about the idea.

Miss Leslie looked at her young students with a twinkle in her eye. "That's a brilliant idea, Alison. How about we look at what other resource we could get together?"

After an hour of suggestions, discussions, disagreements and note-making on the white board, Kelly happened to look at the plant diagram stuck on the wall at the back of their class. She jumped onto her chair to grab everyone's attention.

"I have an idea! We should plant little trees in the bottles so that we could be re-using them to get more..."

"OXYGEN!" shouted Steven.

For once, the entire class agreed unanimously. Without further ado, Miss Leslie arranged for the school bus to take the kids to the park. They divided themselves into smaller groups, and in a couple of hours, not a single bottle lay on the ground. Enthused, the children collected extra bottles from their homes and neighbourhoods.

The next morning, they realized that they needed the help of a few adults: people who could help them cut off the tops of the bottles and buy young plants and grow them inside the bottles. Kelly led the group who went to the local gardener to ask for help, while Steven stayed at school with the remaining children to remove bottle labels.



Kelly's group came back to school overwhelmed by the response they had received from the local gardener who had agreed to not only teach them the basics of gardening, but also sponsored the young saplings.

In the meantime, Steven's group had decorated his dad's old truck. They converted it into an 'Environment Friendly Truck'.

They also cleaned and removed the dome shaped top of every bottle. Now, they had a hundred plastic bottle pots, a hundred saplings, a lot of children, and one gardener.

They sat outside in a circle where Miss Leslie handed them a sapling each, with some fertile soil and a small spade. The local gardener instructed them on how to plant the sapling inside the bottle and level the soil carefully.

“Take care of these babies, their mothers still lives at my place,” he said to the kids who laughed and assured him that they would nurture his baby plants.

For the next week, Steven would rush to his class instead of the playground after coming to school.

Instead of touching the ball, he would hold the bottle with his young sapling and water it with utmost care. Then he would place it back on the

windowsill and run outside to remind everyone else to water his or hers. After a week of nurturing, Steven’s plant started growing a bud.



*“Look Kelly, my plant is going to grow a flower!” he called out to his best friend.*

The whole class gathered around his baby plant to see the little bud, their eyes gleaming with fascination and hope.

Over the next few days, all their plants had buds or little flowers. Overjoyed by their hard work, they decided to share it with the community.

Miss Leslie, inspired by the creativity and proactiveness of her wonderful kids, decided to treat them all with another outing. She took them to the same park they had cleaned, and got them to share their message for the community on a large chart paper. The little ones worked diligently on drawing their bottles, plants, the park and a big, bold 'PLEASE REUSE PLASTIC BOTTLES'.

Miss Leslie tried holding back her tears of happiness. She was not only proud of her students but was also hugely inspired by their simple act of change.





**DREAMING IN**

**TECHNICOLOR**

**Kaligi Ranganathan Montford**  
**Matriculation Higher Secondary School, India**

Written by: Pragya Lal  
Illustrations by: Anish Daolagupu



[bit.ly/icandfc-dreamingintechicolour](https://bit.ly/icandfc-dreamingintechicolour)

Suresh and his classmates sat impatiently in their seats; time seemed to move at an unbearably slow pace today. They stared at the wall clock; mentally daring the minute and hour hand to finally overlap so that they would be put out of their misery. Usually this kind of restlessness was noticed right before the recess but today was different.

The heady sense of nervous excitement that filled the classroom reminded Suresh of that day when an afterschool discussion with his classmates had completely turned their lives around.

“What is the point of education if it doesn’t make us more sensitive to our surroundings?” asked a seething Nayana.

“What happened, Nayana? What is the matter?” enquired Rishi.

“I saw Susan and her friends make fun of an Aya-amma today because she couldn’t respond to them in English. They laughed at her and walked out of the room leaving the Aya-amma in tears. We keep talking about equality and how everyone should have equal opportunities in life but we treat those who are less privileged than us like they ought to be nothing but our servants. How is that fair?”

“You are right, Nayana. I too have noticed that our classmates and juniors treat Aya-ammass differently because they aren’t educated. Most students greet teachers when they run into them in the corridors but they walk past Aya-ammass like they are invisible.” said Deepali.



“We will graduate this year, we can’t leave without trying to change these unfortunate circumstances. I want us to be remembered as students who tried to make a difference to the world around them



and not just sat around whining about the situation.” mused Nayana.

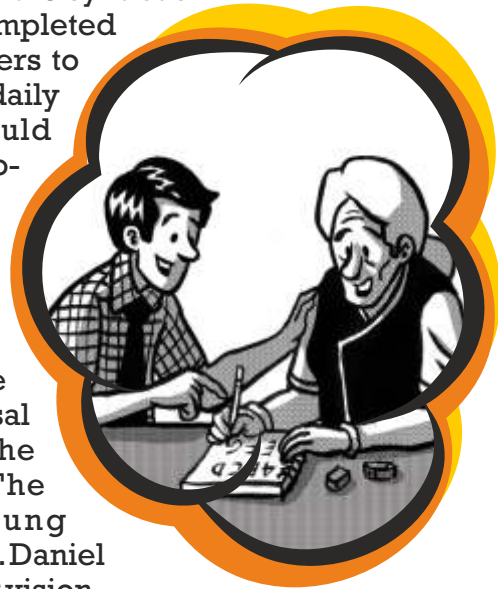
## “But what could a bunch of 9th and 10th graders do?”

Suddenly, Suresh was struck with an idea. If they wanted to make the students respect Aya-ammams then they would have to ensure that the Aya-ammams were not just looked at as mere employees but as a part of the schools’s family.

“We should call this the ‘We Are One’ campaign!” exclaimed Rishi.

Having worked with a children’s NGO in his summer vacations, Suresh had some experience in leading workshops on spoken English and inculcating self-confidence through team building exercises. Perhaps the same model of engaging workshops could be applied in their school? Since the syllabus for this term had almost been completed they could convince their teachers to allot a special period in their daily timetable where students could interact with Aya-ammams one-to-one.

The initial plan was to teach Aya-ammams not only the English alphabet and simple English phrases, but also how to write their names. Having this proposal approved by teachers and the Principal was rather easy. The Principal assigned two young teachers – Ms. Fernandez and Ms. Daniel to help the students execute their vision.



Suresh remembered the time Revathi Aya-amma had wept tears of joy when she learnt how to write her name in English. “Look! This is my name in English! See! See!” She had taken her notebook around the classroom and shown it to everyone she knew. Evidently, one was never too old to learn something new.

Kavitha Aya-amma came from a family that had spent most of their lives as cleaners. But now Kavitha Aya-amma left for school with a school bag on her back and a twinkle in her eyes.

All the Aya-ammams were stunned when they saw forty eager kids line up to help them sweep the corridors and clean the toilets.

*“The kids tell us we are all one. They want to help us,” confessed Renu Aya-amma.*

Through the ‘We Are One’ initiative, the students worked towards bridging the gap created by years of casteism and elitism. By visiting their houses, sharing meals and playing games with the Aya-ammams, the students fostered a bond with these women. Naturally then, interacting with each other was the highlight of their days.

An idea that had originated among a small circle of friends took the whole school by storm. As more and more people joined hands and became a part of this campaign there was an influx of ideas and suggestions.

“We should make a video!” said one.

“How about a Facebook page or a music video?” said another.

As the clock struck noon, Suresh’s day-dreaming was untimely broken by the shrill sound of the bell. His classmates and he rushed out to see the Aya-ammams gathered outside their classroom.

“Are the results of the GESE out?” asked Suresh. The Graded Examinations in Spoken English, or the GESE as they were popularly known, were the most important thing in the lives of these children presently. The students had spent hours helping five Aya-



ammās prepare for these exams and their hearts were stuck in their throats to find out the outcome of their joint efforts.

The Aya-ammās sneakily took out a box of sweets and presented it to their young teachers. A rush of excitement and cheer passed through the crowd. They could not believe it! They had done it! Their hard work had paid off! As the students and the Aya-ammās celebrated their victory by jumping with joy and hugging each other.

From the corner of her eye, Nayana caught her classmate Susan apologizing profusely to the Aya-amma she had once mocked and congratulating her on clearing level one of the GESE. As Susan bent down to touch the Aya-amma's feet to ask for her blessings and forgiveness, Aya-amma caught her and said, "No! You are like my daughter, and daughters don't belong at one's feet; they reside in your heart."

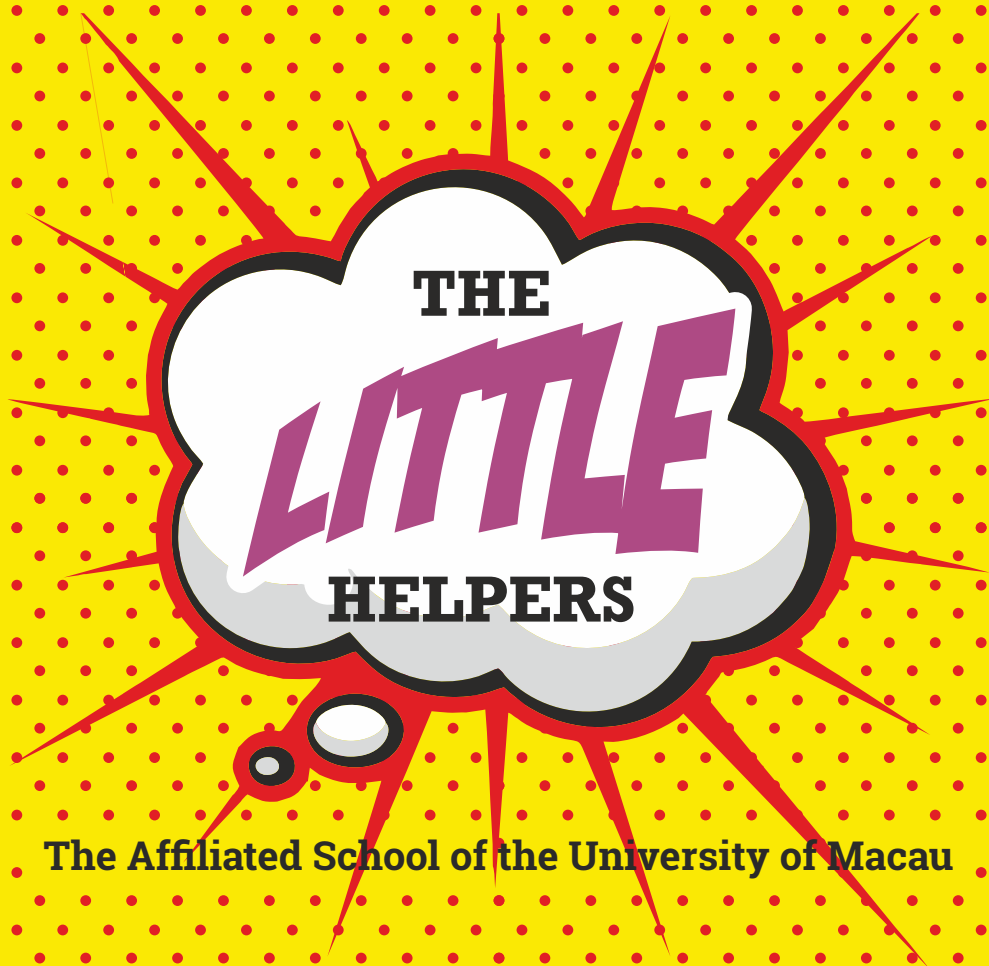
That was Bindu Aya-amma for you. Ever forgiving, ever kind and ever smiling. She had an eighteen year old son who had moved to the United States to study engineering. Unlike her, her son was educated in an English medium school; he was a stellar student and had won several scholarships that helped propel him further in his career. His pursuit for a better life had taken him away from home and his mother.

"After Monu left, I would often dream of meeting him, I imagined hugging him and kissing his face but only a strange incoherent noise would come out every time I tried to speak to him. I felt like I couldn't communicate with my son anymore because I couldn't speak in English." she said wiping a stray tear that had rolled down her cheeks. "My dreams were in black and white but the workshops with all of you have filled the colour of a new language in them. I

can't wait for Monu to return and see his English speaking Amma!" gushed Bindu Aya-amma.

The Aya-ammass were always an integral part of the school. Even before the school buses had maneuvered through the by lanes of Perambur and brought enthusiastic and sleepy children to the school grounds, the Aya-ammass would move deftly from one classroom to the other ensuring that the spaces were sparkling clean for the students. Sadly, despite having worked in a school for ages they had been deprived of an education and dignity.

This initiative led by students helped the Aya-ammass overcome their sense of inferiority, and broke down the seemingly insurmountable barrier of an alien language like English. This was a milestone in their lives that they would all remember and cherish. This graduating batch had outdone themselves; they had sensitized the students as well as the faculty about an issue that seemed to pass everyone by. The juniors certainly had large shoes to fill.



**The Affiliated School of the University of Macau**

Written by: Caroline Mary Abraham  
Illustrations by: Souradeep Ghosh



[bit.ly/icandfc-thelittlehelpers](https://bit.ly/icandfc-thelittlehelpers)

It all started when Hei Tong noticed how Luisa did everything for him, even though he was too old for a Nanny. Luisa had been with them for years and she did all the housework, which Mummy could not do when she was at work. She did all the cleaning and cooking, dressed him, dropped him off at the bus stop for school and even made his bed! She always looked so tired and worried that Hei Tong started feeling very guilty. He wanted to help. So the next day, he spoke to his friends in class about it.

“I make my bed!” Danielle had said.

“But do you do anything else?” asked Lok Weng.

Danielle shook her head in shame.

Lam looked upset now. “I never noticed that Erika does everything. It’s like magic how everything is clean and smells nice.”



“I want to help!” Lok Weng declared.

They all decided they would find one thing every week that they could do to help around the house. And so they started.

Hei Tong woke up to Luisa calling him for breakfast. He had overslept! He rushed through the morning routine - brushing his teeth, washing his face, slipping out of his pyjamas and into the school uniform.

“Good morning, Luisa!” he called out cheerfully.

Luisa came in smiling and put down a plate of sandwiches and a glass of milk in front of him. “Good morning, Hei Tong! You’ve dressed yourself again, I see.”

Hei Tong had just taken a big gulp of milk. He tried swallowing and nodding at the same time and ended up looking like a baby bird.

“Eat first please, Hei Tong.” said Luisa laughing a little. “Then, we’ll make sure you’ve dressed well and I will take you to the bus stop.”

He quickly ate his breakfast and finished his milk. But Hei Tong made sure to do it all neatly - he couldn’t get any food on his nice, clean uniform.

“Are you ready, Hei Tong?” Luisa asked.

“Yes!” he replied.

He stood while Luisa looked him over carefully to make sure he hadn’t spilled anything. Finally, she smiled. “Well done! You’ve gotten ready all by yourself now, Hei Tong. Thank you.” Hei Tong was proud of himself. He could do things for himself and help Luisa with work around the house now, and he felt like a big boy.

When he reached school, Danielle came to him before the class to talk. “I was thinking,” she said, “that maybe we should speak to the whole class.”

“About what?” asked Hei Tong.

“You know, how we help at home. I think we should see if the class wants to help. Or if they already help.” she replied.

Hei Tong thought it was a good idea. He felt good when he helped his mother and Luisa, so of course his classmates would also feel the same. Lok Weng and Lam agreed that Danielle’s idea was good and Lok Weng went to speak to Miss Sing about it.

“Miss, we were wondering if we could speak to the class,” said Lok Weng.

Miss Sing looked at the earnest children and smiled. “What for, Lok Weng?” asked Miss Sing.

“We want to ask if they help out at home! You see, our mothers and helpers are so busy, that we wanted to help them. It’s fun! We help with laundry, and clean our rooms and get dressed by ourselves. Sometimes we do a little bit of the sweeping or stirring soup.” said Lam.

Miss Sing was very surprised. Most children didn’t know how hard

their parents and helpers had to work. Now these little children were helping them, and becoming independent.

“Do you really help out at home so much?”

“Yes, Ma’am! It’s so easy and such a little thing for us to do!” said Lam excitedly.

Miss Sing was impressed. “Well, you all can definitely speak to the class, and maybe you can also tell them how they can help out?”

“Yes! We can teach them how to fold their clothes!”

“And how to pick out clothes to wash!”

“And to get dressed!”

“Children, children!” laughed Miss Sing. “You must calm down. I don’t know which one is speaking anymore.” Lam and Lok Weng quieted down, but they were grinning with excitement. They were all going to be small housework helpers!

After lunch, Miss Sing called them up in front of the class. “Lok Weng, Lam, Danielle and Hei Tong have something to ask you children, so we must all be quiet and listen carefully.” she said. Then she nodded at Danielle to speak.

“We have been doing some simple house work to help our parents and helpers. It would be great if we all could start doing it at our homes!” Danielle said.



The entire class was silent. Help with housework? They had never even thought of housework! Their parents or helpers did it, didn’t they?

Danielle continued speaking while the class looked at her in disbelief. “Think about how hard our parents work! They’re out all day, and then they come back and do chores, and they have to look after us”



“And Luisa works very hard too. She has to clean and make our food and do laundry and she looks so tired every day!” interrupted Hei Tong.

“Erika’s feet hurt all the time.” said Lam sadly. “She doesn’t say anything, but she is always running around or standing and the veins are big and bulging and my Mummy says that it causes her loads of pain.”

“But you’re helping out now, Lam! Don’t be sad!” said Lok Weng.

“Yes, but we should all help! And we’re not babies, we can do things ourselves!” said Lam. “It’s not hard to clean our own rooms, and set the table. And cooking is really fun! I’m not allowed to cut the vegetables but I get to mix things on the stove and add the ingredients.” added Danielle.

Slowly the class began murmuring among themselves about why they hadn’t noticed earlier! After all, it wasn’t hard to dress themselves or fold their clothes. They could easily help!

And that is how the entire class began helping with housework. They all started that very day with little things like cleaning their rooms and folding their clothes. Miss Sing watched with pride as the children came up to her every day to tell her about all the things they had done.

*“We went grocery shopping with Mummy!”*

*“I cleaned up my room and the main room!”*

*“We helped by washing clothes!”*

With every passing day Miss Sing would get more and more such reports from her class.

“It’s time we involved the other students.” she announced.

They began by talking to the other classes, and then they decided to show them how to help! Hei Tong and Danielle came up with the idea of posters, some to encourage them to help at home, and others to show them how to do some of the work. Lok Weng and Lam decided to make little cards for the younger children to encourage them. Slowly, everyone was caught up in doing little things at home, at least for themselves.

“You know, Hei Tong, the younger children aren’t really getting it. I don’t think they enjoy housework,” said Lam one day.

“We need to make it fun for them!” piped Lok Weng.

Danielle thought. “Maybe we need to show them? Like how to fold clothes? We can do that in school!”

“We should make it a game,” said Lam, getting the idea. “So when they fold their clothes, they get a reward,” she said.

“We’ll have to talk to Miss Sing again, we need the teachers involved!” insisted Lok Weng. And that’s what they did.

Miss Sing helped them organise little games and gifts for the primary school children, so they could help out at home as well. All the teachers were caught up in the excitement right along with the children. They were all now engaged in helping at home.

“I would have never thought that all the children would get involved.” said one teacher.

“Somehow they have managed to find a way for everyone to help!” said another. “Our small housework helpers have taught all of us that it isn’t right to underestimate anyone!”



**THE**  
**WIZARDS**  
**OF NUEVO LEON**

**Capitan Jose Azueta Elementary School, Mexico**

Written by: Manasi Nene  
Illustrations by: Tanvi Karnik



[bit.ly/icandfc-thewizardsofnuevoleon](https://bit.ly/icandfc-thewizardsofnuevoleon)

“I'm going to be a Wizard.”

“No, I'm going to be a Wizard!”

“You're both wrong. It's going to be ME!”

“Children, you all know that there are going to be five Wizards, right? This isn't about competition, this is about teamwork!”

“Yes, Ma'am! I know that, but still, I'm going to be a Wizard!”

Although the kids argued their loudest, not one of them was certain they were going to be a Wizard. After all, it was the first election they had ever seen in Capitan Jose Azueta Elementary School, and nobody knew what to expect. Would their friends vote for them? What would happen if they became a Wizard? What would happen if they didn't?



Martin didn't care about any of that. He had all the poise an eight-year-old could possibly have as he told himself repeatedly that everything would be alright, whatever happened. After all, they were missing an entire day of studies for this event. Why would anyone waste that time being nervous? His friend, Ado, didn't share that attitude. He was older than most of the class - he was eleven years old - and he had something to prove. He badly wanted to be a Wizard.

Five Wizards, the class had been told, would be elected by the class from amongst themselves. These Wizards would be the leaders of a project to create a sustainable orchard, and the entire class would help with the design.

The class cast their ballots, little pieces of paper in a plastic tub that could control the fate of the class. They all waited anxiously as their teachers counted the votes. Alexia and Ektor were not particularly nervous, as they had never expected to be elected.

But, they were popular children, and the class elected them as Wizards – along with Fernando, Ado and Martin! The five children were overjoyed. They had been given such a big responsibility! They felt proud. Little did they know, the hard work was just beginning.

It had started a week earlier.

“There's no place to play anywhere.” Martin frowned. “There's no place to play football, no trees to climb...and if you're in the house, you have to study. That's not fair!”

Alexia tried to console him. “It's okay, Martin. All of us feel this way. The grown-ups control everything, we just have to live with it.”

*“No!” cried Martin. “I don't want to live with it! I want to climb trees! I want to play! I want to do more than come to school and study every day!”*

“You know that big lot behind the school?” Martin's classmate Ektor piped up. “What if we could use that?”

“What do you mean?” Alexia asked. She knew talking to any of the adults about more place to play was useless, they never gave the kids anything. Why would they clear out the area behind the school?

“I mean,” said Ektor, “it is a very big place. We could do something

with that place. Nobody is using it, and there are just dead trees. We can remove the dead trees, and use that place for living trees! Even a football field!”

Martin was seriously interested now. Their friends Fernando and Ado also gathered around.

“But,” Ado moaned, “they will never let us do anything there. They won't clean up the place, and they won't let us clean it up either.” Alexia agreed with him. She and Ado were the oldest and the most cynical children of the lot.

“No!” exclaimed Martin. “Don't talk like that! Of course, they'll help! We just have to ask them enough times. In fact, we'll ALL ask. There's no way they can say no!” Everyone knew the “they” referred to the adults in their lives: their parents and teachers.

It was worth a try. Martin and Alexia went up to their class teachers, and asked if there was any way the children could use the barren land behind the school for a better purpose. Football, thought Martin, but the teachers had grander ideas. They too had been discussing renewal of that land themselves, and wanted to put it to use. And now the children wanted to do that too!

Soon afterwards, an announcement was made in class – the teachers, children and their parents, along with the Environmental Coordinator of the Municipality of Santiago, would be working together to clear the dead trees and garbage from that land, and plant a new orchard.

Ektor, Fernando, Alexia, Ado and Martin went around telling their classmates about the idea. Everyone loved it, and decided to work towards it immediately. The class decided they needed leaders – Wizards, as they liked to call them – to organize the project and to sift through the ideas.

It was now upto the newly elected Wizards to help their class execute the idea.

At first, all their friends split into groups and made clay models of

how they saw the perfect orchard. Sometimes a friend of a Wizard would have to be let down, sometimes the best ideas were given by kids that the Wizards weren't friends with. But all the arguments, mess and clay-stained hands were worth it at the end. The teachers, Wizards and the class, all came together to agree on a design and proposal for the orchard.

The second part made the Wizards more nervous than they thought they could be -- even little Martin! They had to put forward their ideas to the Environmental Coordinator of the Municipality of Santiago. If she said no, all their hard work would have been in vain. She turned out to be a very nice lady, however, and even offered them chocolates during their meeting. She applauded their bravery and initiative, and all the children could feel their chests swell up with pride. The proposal was passed and another step had been accomplished!

Now came the part that the children were most excited about. They had partnered up with the Social Participation Committee and Parents' Association, all adults who were willing to help them get their orchard. The adults were an invaluable help with the physical work – removing the dead trees, clearing out the area, ploughing the land. The children would direct them and transplant seedlings from their school to the orchard. It was an amazing experience for all of them.

In the end, they had an orchard that would always have fruits no matter the season, shade for the children to relax in, and areas to play as much as they wanted.



Ado wiped his brow with a grimy hand and grinned at Martin. "What are you frowning about now, Martin? Isn't this better than a football field?"

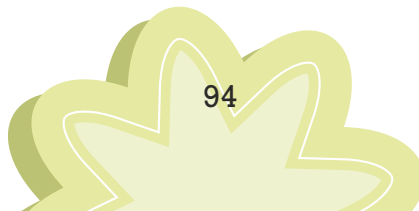
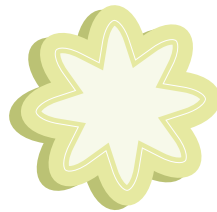


Martin nodded in agreement. "It is. I was just wishing that we were real Wizards who could cast a spell and make these saplings grow faster. Then we could climb these trees and eat the fruits now!"

Alexia laughed.

*"Martin, we are real Wizards! Didn't we just prove that patience and persistence are the only spells we need to accomplish anything that we want?"*

As for the trees -- they aren't going anywhere and neither are we."







**Ecole Essalam, Morocco**

Written by: Rohan Jhunja  
Illustrations by: Rohan Jhunja



[bit.ly/icandfc-whoseparkisitanyway](https://bit.ly/icandfc-whoseparkisitanyway)

Ahmed was playing a game of Dinifri in the park with his friends from Essalam School. The Ain Vitel National Park was their favourite place in the world. They had drawn a large square on the ground and at the centre of this square was a tower made of five flat stones and tiles. Ahmed aimed the ball at the pile of stones and threw it. The ball struck its target and the stones scattered.

Ahmed's team scattered just as quickly; they had to hurry and rebuild the tower before the other team got them out. Ahmed ran towards the stone closest to him, the wind whistling through his hair. He had his eyes on it. One moment he was running, the next, he was flat on the grass. He had tripped on a plastic bottle lying on the ground. But he was a strong kid and he picked himself up without making a fuss.

His friends were amused at the fall when Ahmed retorted, "Who left that bottle here?"

It wasn't the first time something like this had happened. Just last Monday, Sara had slipped on a plastic bag. While playing Dinifri in the park, they had to keep one eye on the tiles, the other on the players of the other team, and look out for bottles and plastic bags on the ground -- all at the same time.



The children loved the openness and greenery of the park. They loved listening to the birds and splashing in the water pools.

Ahmed, like many of his friends, had known the park ever since his parents brought him here for weekend picnics.



However, their beautiful park was losing its charm. Litter - on the grass, around trees, under the benches and sometimes even in the water pools - was an eyesore and had quickly become a nuisance.

In school, Ahmed and his friends were learning about the environment and how they had to protect it. That day, their teacher made an important announcement at the end of the class.

“You know that Earth Day is coming up soon.” informed the teacher.

“The 22nd of April!” shouted his friend, Youssef.

“Well, for Earth Day, I want each one of you to think of something you could do for our environment in your own small way.”

After getting home, Ahmed was still trying to come up with something special to do for Earth Day, when his mother’s annoyed voice rang out. “Ahmed, why have you left your books all around the living room again? I’m tired of having to go around tidying up after you. Remember, you aren’t the only person living in this house!”

Ahmed got down to clearing his books away with a secret grin. He knew what he was going to do for Earth Day now!

The next day at school Youssef asked Ahmed, “What are you thinking about so deeply?”

*“Well, I was thinking about that bottle I tripped on at the park that day.”*

Youssef chuckled at the memory.

“People don’t care who else uses the park. They probably don’t consider it their own park, or they would never litter it so much.”

“That’s probably true.”

“But I consider the park to be mine as much as anyone else’s. So I’ve decided that I will clean the park up for Earth Day.”

“Well Ain Vitel is the largest park in Ifrane; you certainly can’t do it single-handedly. You’ll need a lot of help,” said Sara joining the conversation.

They discussed the idea with their classmates. Everyone agreed that cleaning up their park was the best thing they could do for Earth Day. They approached their teacher, who thought it was a splendid initiative. Everyone was excited about the plan, but Ahmed knew Sara was right and he wondered whether they would be able to clean up Ain Vitel.

Youssef was a confident speaker, so he was nominated to talk to the park manager. He sought permission to clean up the park and raise funds for the endeavour. They went shopping and bought garbage bags to collect litter, paint for the old benches and gloves to protect their hands while they were working.

All of Ahmed’s doubts were blown away when he saw the number of students who enthusiastically came to volunteer at the park. They divided themselves into groups and decided which group would cover which part of the park. To keep everyone interested, Ahmed suggested a little competition to see whose bag was the most full at the end.



They spent hours at the park combing the place for litter. They scrubbed the old benches down and applied a thick coat of fresh, gleaming paint.

At the end of the day, they were very pleased with what they had done. It was difficult to decide a winner; even the youngest volunteer had collected almost as much trash as the elder children!

Ahmed and his friends visited the park again a few days before Earth Day and were shocked! There was litter everywhere again.

Sara thought aloud, “Where did all this come from now?”

A family was having a picnic on a bench that the children had painted. They packed up to head back home but they left food dropped all over the bench they were sitting on. They hadn't even picked up the packet of chips they had brought. A young couple dropped a chocolate wrapper on the ground and walked away without a care.



“Are they blind to the amount of effort we put into cleaning up our park?!”

Ahmed saw a neighbour he was friendly with, walking down the path. He had a soda-can in his hand. Once he finished his soda, he carelessly flung the can onto the grass.

Ahmed confronted him. “Hello! Excuse me. Why did you throw that can there?”

The man looked puzzled and annoyed. “What do you mean, Ahmed?”

Youssef joined in, “Shouldn't you have thrown it into a dustbin?”

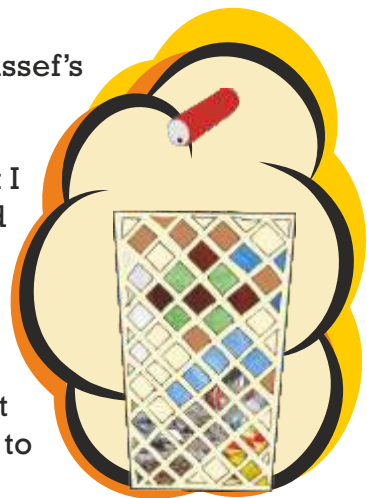
“Don't you know we play here?”

Look around and see how messy the park is because people like you litter the place carelessly!”

The man was taken by surprise by Youssef's sudden barrage.

He said, “Oh! I'm sorry. I didn't realize what I was doing.” He went back up the path and found the can. He took it over to a bin and disposed of it properly. Embarrassed, he smiled and went on his way.

Youssef was delighted. “See! We can get people to stop littering. They just have to realize their mistake.”



Ahmed remarked, “You could have offended him. Maybe you shouldn’t have been so loud.”

Youssef replied obstinately, “Well someone has to tell them!”

Sara had an idea. “We can’t go around catching individual litter-bugs in the park. We need to educate everyone about keeping our park clean.”

“Well how are we supposed to educate them?” asked Youssef. He was more than willing to go around the park catching litter-bugs and giving them a piece of his mind.

“We could make them aware by putting up posters. Everyone needs to be sensitized against littering or the park will never be clean.”



The children made lots of colourful posters and put them up all over the park. All the posters read: PLEASE DON'T LITTER - WE PLAY HERE!

On Earth Day, the park never looked more beautiful to Ahmed. “Something is different,” he thought to himself, “more than just the fact that the park is now clean.”

“Well now we’ve made everyone realize what a public park is.” said Youssef. “A public park is meant to be shared and isn’t a private dumping ground! Hopefully, people have realized that the park belongs to each one of us and for all of us to enjoy.” said Youssef.

“And for all of us to take responsibility for.” added Ahmed.

The children enjoyed being in the park even more now because it was *‘theirs’*.



**BRIDGING THE**

***GAP***

**Christa McAuliffe School, Peru**

Written by: Pradipta Ray  
Illustrations by: Tasneem Mama



[bit.ly/icandfc-bridgingthegap](https://bit.ly/icandfc-bridgingthegap)

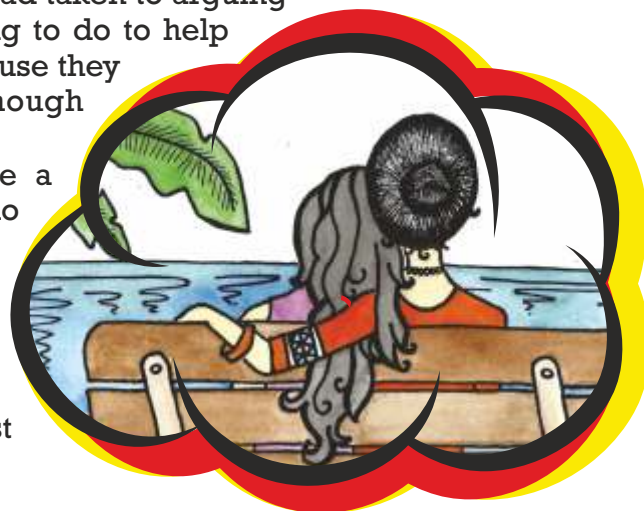
Camila was sitting in her bedroom working on the computer, when the noise of her parents arguing became louder. Not being able to concentrate on her work, she got up and went to shut the door to her bedroom. As she was closing the door, she overheard snatches of the argument.

*“...can't afford to pay for tuition...can get scholarship...expensive college, but her future depends on it...more shifts...career choices...”*

This was a discussion that had been creating a lot of unease in the household. The colleges that she wanted to apply to were expensive, due to the fairly specialised subjects she wanted to study. Of late, her parents had taken to arguing about what they were going to do to help cover her tuition fees, because they could not get a large enough student loan.

Camila didn't want to be a burden and yet, she saw no way out of the problem.

A week later, Camila was called up to the teacher's desk. Her math teacher, Monica, had Camila's most recent test in her hand.



“Camila, you are one of my brightest students, but recently, I've noticed that you seem unable to focus--you also lose your temper at the drop of a hat. A few of the other teachers have also approached me on this matter. This is extremely



unlike you. I just wanted you to know that we are all here if you are having problems or are in any trouble.”

After reassuring her teacher of her wellbeing, Camila was dismissed. But for the next few days, she could not get Miss Monica’s words out of her head. She knew Miss Monica was right. She had never been this angry and bitter. She did not like this person that she was becoming. She thought long and hard and finally an idea came to her.

A few days later, after school, Camila stayed back in the class. Soon, three more students joined her. After another two minutes, another three had arrived. In about fifteen minutes the entire classroom had been filled.

“I have gathered you all here today, to talk about a certain issue that all of us here have been facing, a communication gap with our parents. We may not all have the same problem, but all of us can empathise with each other and try to come up with a solution.”

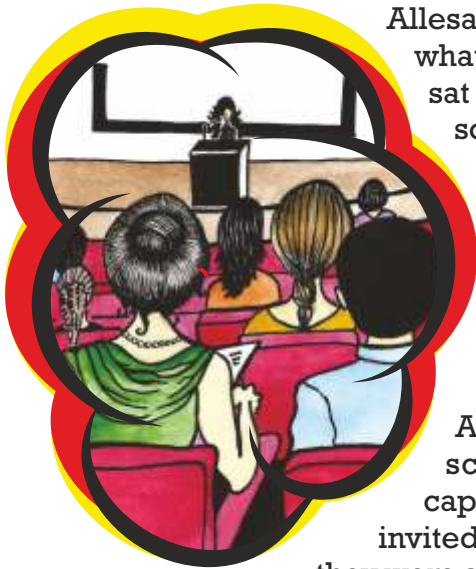
At this point a few people had started muttering and shifting around. The subject was quite obviously a sensitive one and most of them didn’t feel comfortable talking about it with a large group, although they had opened up to Camila when she had approached them.

So Camila started off the session by narrating her own troubles communicating with her parents and her dilemma about deciding colleges. And how it troubled Camila. But she felt unable to share her worries with her parents.

After that, her peers started to slowly open up as well. Hector, Juan, Alejandro and Fabrizio all told their stories. Their stories all touched the core problem: there was a large communication gap that was creating problems between the students and their parents.

Allesandra was the final speaker for the group. She seemed extremely nervous as she spoke. “As all of us here face a similar problem, why don’t we work on a solution together? I know that I would never have the courage to approach my parents alone. They are extremely supportive, but sometimes I feel as if they do not

quite understand me. Nor do I always get what they say! Perhaps it is the generation gap between us. I often feel as though we're speaking at cross-purposes."



Allesandra had vocalised almost perfectly, what the group had been feeling. They sat and brainstormed for a good hour or so, and decided to be proactive.

By the end of the session they had decided on a hazy plan of action. And within a month, the students had modified and finalised their plan and set it in motion.

A month after the first meeting, the school auditorium was packed to capacity. All the parents who had been invited to the event had no idea about what they were about to witness. There was a podium on the stage.

Hugo, a member of the original group that Camila had called together, stood at the podium. He addressed the parents respectfully and with confidence. "We are all gathered here today, to address a matter that concerns not only students, but also parents. I'm talking about the growing communication gap between the students and their protectors and caregivers. To bridge this growing gap and mend our relationships with those whom we should be closest with, we have organised this gathering."

One by one, students came up to the podium and talked about their fears for the future and the problems they faced– racism, bullying, and discrimination.

They also talked about their home situation and their relationship with their parents. Some talked about the indifference they faced due to lack of understanding of the youth's problems, some talked about never seeing their parents at home, or being stuck between separated parents and their problems.

In this manner, all the students that had been part of the original group and the many students who had later joined addressed the problems they faced with the support of the student community.

*They all had simply needed the courage to talk about the troubles they had. It was simply a matter of initiative.*

The school psychologist had also supported the entire venture. She spoke after all the students had had their turn. She validated the fears of the students and addressed the problems that they faced mentally and academically. This helped the parents to further develop an understanding of their children and what they faced. The psychologist also gave many solutions and ways in which these problems could be solved or lessened.

By the end of the whole thing, there wasn't a single parent or student to be found, who had a dry eye. The message had been received by the parents and they embraced their children as they stepped off of the stage.

A week later, all the students had once again been gathered. This time it was by the school psychologist. She stood in the centre of the room. No one had any idea as to why they had been called. So they looked very puzzled. The psychologist waited for everyone to assemble and settle down, before addressing all of them.

“You must all be wondering why I wanted to talk to all of you. Well, I won't keep you in suspense. I just wanted to congratulate you all. Your efforts have paid off.

I have been getting incessant calls from concerned parents who wish to try and work towards addressing the issues their children might have. You had taken the first step and now your parents have

met you half way. Most of your academic results have improved over the last week, and there has been more participation in classes. Your initiative has been a huge success.”



She spoke for a little while longer, and shared stories about how many students had reconciled with their parents and how some students had understood their parent’s side of the issue better after they truly opened up to them after the session.

The students left feeling proud of what they had achieved.  
All it took was one leap of faith!





**SOWING**  
**SEEDS**  
**OF LOVE**

**International School Manila, Philippines**

Written by: Ananya Balabhadrapathruni and Juanita Naidoo  
Illustrations by: Tanvi Karnik



[bit.ly/icandfc-sowingseedsoflove](https://bit.ly/icandfc-sowingseedsoflove)

This is a story of how a small class in a big school made a huge difference by sowing seeds of love. I know this story very well, because I was a part of it...

A few years ago, in 2009, I was in grade-one. We were called the 'Amazing Ants'. We started the year getting to know each other and learning what we needed to keep our bodies healthy. Then as we were investigating plant growth, something awful happened, hurting thousands of people in the Philippines--Typhoon Ondoy.

He was like a big, strong, man who was hitting Manila because something about it made him angry. There were floods everywhere, it was scary and devastating. He roared as he destroyed homes and filled roads up with water. Big trees swayed from side to side. Even buildings fell over because a typhoon is a strong type of storm that causes a lot of rain and very strong winds.



I was scared for all my friends and was only reassured when Dad hugged me and said, "Let's send our love to everyone in Manila."

When I got to school on Monday, I was relieved to see that my friends were alright.

Sam immediately started talking about the typhoon, "My family helped people who lost their homes," he said. "They rushed to our car, and we gave them food but didn't have enough for all."

I could see how emotional he was and we started discussing what we could do to help those in need.

"Help them get a new home!" said Georgina,  
"They need food and drinking water." said Kovean,  
"We could give clothes and toys to the children." I suggested.  
Soon the classroom was abuzz with ideas and in the next few days we brought in food, water and other supplies, carrying them to the

collection points ourselves. It felt good to help but something else was on my mind-- the big tree on my street was no longer standing.

I asked Ms Rea, "Why aren't we helping trees as much as we're helping people? Nature is alive and breathing like all of us after all."

Kovean nodded saying, "I feel that natural disasters are messages from Mother Earth telling us to remember our connection to the planet."

"How can we do that, Kovean?" asked Ms Rea.

Kovean didn't even pause to think and excitedly replied,

"We should show Mother Earth that we have not forgotten her by planting more trees around our school and Manila!"

"Yes!" I exclaimed, "We should have gardens and parks everywhere so that people can appreciate nature and remember that it needs food and water just like us."

"We should grow a community garden where we can give our love to our planet. It is just as important to care for nature as it is to care for the community." Georgina exclaimed with a wide smile.

*"Yes, let's garden!" shouted the whole class!*

How our faces shone and our eyes sparkled at that thought.

"Well, Amazing Ants," said Ms Rea, "I am curious about just one thing. How are you going to actually do this? Let's discuss this tomorrow, shall we?" and that is how it all began.

The next day, she asked us what we needed to do first.

"Buy some seeds," said Sam.

"Build a fence," I suggested.

“Ask for permission and help!” shouted Georgina.

Georgina was absolutely right. We decided to first write letters to our school Principal to ask for permission. We got into groups, talked about what to say and then wrote in our best handwriting. It was difficult not to rush as we were in a hurry to deliver the letters!

As we were editing, a friendly face appeared at the door-- it was Ms Gillman, the High School Eco and English teacher.

“Hello, Amazing Ants. What have you got there?” she asked.

We showed her our letters and she smiled brightly, telling us how much she loved them. That evening I kept thinking about the envelope with our letters that Ms Rea said she'd deliver for us.

You can imagine how we all jumped up and down when our Principal gave us his answer.

“Of course you can!” he said.

Ms Rea then asked us “So class, what do you need to do next?”

This time, each group made mind-maps.

“We need to write letters to so many people,” sighed Kovean. “Our school is so big. It will take ages!”



“You are right and wrong, Kovean!” grinned Georgina, “There may be lots of people but we can email most of them!”

“Yes, we can!” beamed Sam happily.

So each group took turns to send emails asking many students and teachers to join in too.



The next few days throbbed with activity! All the grade-one students investigated which was the best place for the garden and found a nice, sunny patch. The school gardeners helped to mark the plot and together with middle school students, we removed the grass and tilled the soil. Then everyone in elementary school painted bamboo, to create a colourful fence. When they were dry, the strong high school students from Ms Gillman's class hammered each one into the ground to make the fence. It was a happy noise to listen to! They also carried the heavy bags of soil, which our little arms could not lift.

Soon we all gazed proudly at the fence that protected and cherished our efforts. The community garden was our gift of love. Each first grade class had a special section in the garden and as we planted our seedlings over the next week, many curious students joined in.

One day Ms Rea said, "Well class, you certainly have been busy ants in the garden! Now it's time to show what you have learned."

We each wrote and drew on big sheets of paper, gradually realising how much we had learned: how to write letters and emails, make posters, measure the length of our plants, how to make graphs and so much more! We were brimming with pride and could barely wait for the launch in December, where we would tell the whole school about the garden.

On the day of the launch, many parents, students, teachers, Principals first gathered in the Theatre and we talked about what the garden meant to us and why we had created it. Then we all went down to the small community garden that bustled with energy.

I still recall the awe in the eyes of brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, grandpas and grandmas and was overjoyed when Mum said, "Saiya, this is beautiful."

The next day we continued to reflect on what we had learned. As we drew lines on our sheets, showing which things were connected, something struck me.

"All these things we have learned at the garden are connected!" I exclaimed.

My classmates looked at their sheets, nodding in agreement.

“Of course!” said Kovean, “The waste from our food becomes fertiliser for the garden, which helps the plants grow, and improves the harvest.”

“Our Trash Team that cleaned up the playground is connected, because we are making sure that plastic does not get into the soil and affect plant growth,” gleamed Georgina.

“The more we recycle and garden the more we remember our connection to Mother Earth. We take care of her, as she takes care of us. The garden shows us that we are all one!” Sam said wisely.

The message stuck in our minds and the next day Georgina came into class with a poster she had made at home.

It said, “Amazing world, amazing world, we are all one. Amazing world, amazing world, let’s go green and have some fun!” It became a virus!

Soon all the Amazing Ants were making posters and Ms Rea asked us who we wanted to share them with.

“Let’s give everyone at school a poster on Earth Day!” shouted Kovean.

It was a unanimous decision and on Earth Day we delivered our posters around the whole school, proudly sharing the message that “We are all one!”

Five years later, our tiny garden has grown and remains a fun place to learn and there is even an after school student club, twice a week.

I guess I should end this story going back to the day when I shared a special dream with my class, telling everyone that I was making a pledge, “I CAN be a caring community gardener!” and that I would ask my Dad to ask our whole family and his friends, and for his friends to ask their family and friends to make pledges too.

In my dream I can see the whole world saying,

*“YES WE CAN!”*



**THE KINGDOM OF**  
**CITIZENSHIP**

**Escola Basica D. Manuel II, Portugal**

Written by: Anushka Joshi  
Illustrations by: Souradeep Ghosh



[bit.ly/icandfc-thekingdomofcitizenship](https://bit.ly/icandfc-thekingdomofcitizenship)

Albert wheeled slowly through the hallway of his school. He watched the other children walk in clusters, or stand together, and as his wheelchair wheels whirred and creaked, it seemed to him the loudest sound in the world. He saw a few children glance his way with ill-disguised pity on their faces - a pity that had little to do with real understanding - and somehow that made his long, exhausting journey through the hallway even more painful. Albert wound his



way toward that little group of people he knew best - they were his real friends. As he approached they did not pause in their chatter to exchange looks of uncomprehending sympathy. They greeted him just the way he was - Albert, and not the kid in the wheelchair.

“Hey, Albert,” said Gabriela,  
“What’s up?”

Albert was about to answer wistfully, but stopped himself. Something was going on. His friends seemed fidgety and excited. David was impatiently tapping his toes, Sara was playing with her hair, Iris and Ricardo were beaming. Albert felt a wave of affection for his friends. They always had something up their sleeve, and unlike everyone else, they never saw any reason why he shouldn’t be a part of their adventures.

“Nothing,” said Albert, grinning, “but something’s obviously up with you.”

“Well, yes,” said Iris, “I think we should tell him now, guys.”

“Okay,” said David, “the thing is, Albert, we saw you as you were making your way through the hallway - not just today, but whenever we’re going to another class or leaving school...”

Oh no, Albert thought. Till now, his friends had treated him just like they treated each other. That was what he valued most about them -

their ability to look beyond the fact Albert couldn't walk, and see instead that he liked football, and strawberry ice cream, and rainy days. Was this the moment he had dreaded all this time - the moment they started treating him differently?

He cut them off, "Guys, it's okay. I'm fine. It's no big deal."

"We know that, Al," said Iris, "but they don't."

Albert looked around at the other children in the hallway, bustling around, and he realized that what Iris was saying was true.

"They don't talk to you or even say hi when you pass by, like they do to everyone else!" Sara pointed out, "Not because they don't like you or because they're mean, but because they just don't know how to act around you. They don't see you for you, they just see you as- " She paused, uncertain about how to finish the sentence without hurting Albert's feelings.

"A kid in a wheelchair," Albert finished for her. He knew that all too well.

*"But we can't do anything," said Albert, "this is just the way things are."*

"True," said Gabriela, smiling, "but this is not the way things have to be."

Albert looked up at his friends. Each radiant, excited face seemed to be pleading with him.

Okay, he thought, I'll do this - just for this one time, so they won't be disappointed.

"So what's the plan?" he asked.

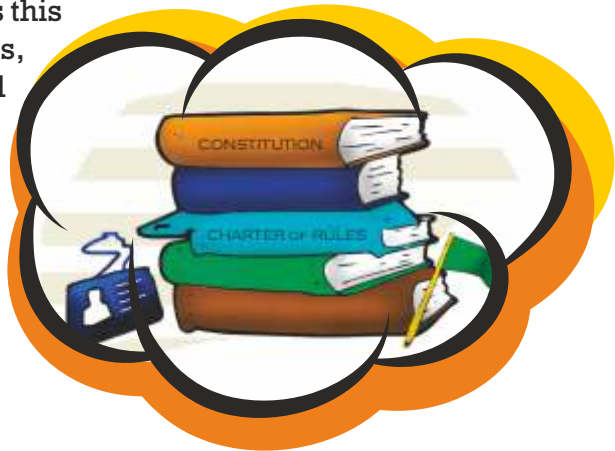
At first it was impossible to understand - his friends were so excited they kept constantly interrupting each other. They faced a

formidable challenge, they had to convey the ideas of diversity, togetherness and acceptance - words which already sounded stale and jaded - to the others in school without sounding preachy or boring.

“Anyone can stand on a platform and lecture them about how they should treat you like everyone else,” argued Ricardo, “but we realized... we don’t just want to ask for change - we want to ensure it.”

“So here’s what we came up with,” said Sara, “we will establish a Kingdom of Citizenship.”

“A kingdom which includes this whole school,” added Iris, “and has its own flag, and anthem, and even its own constitution...”



“And that constitution,” said David, “will have its own laws.”

“Like what?” asked Albert.

“Well, like...being respectful, talking out problems instead of fighting them out...”

*“Encouraging and including kids who are different,” added Albert slowly, joining in.*

“Exactly,” said Gabriela, “and we need your help.”

Over the next few days, the little group spoke to the other children in the school, and watched as amusement turned to earnestness and finally to solidarity.

At first, most of the other kids were reluctant, but as they slowly realized the urgency and importance of what was needed, they too began helping. One group of children wrote the anthem of the Kingdom of Citizenship, the others began creating a map that encompassed all the different regions of the school - that is, each of the classes, including, Albert noted happily, the one for children with disabilities. Yet another group made ID cards that contained the fingerprint and name of each student, so that the Kingdom of Citizenship seemed more and more like a real country in its own right.

Slowly, Albert found himself becoming more and more involved in a cause he had been so hesitant about - and soon enough, he was doing it not because he didn't want to disappoint his friends, but because he didn't want to disappoint himself. He wheeled himself from group to group, helping each, adding ideas and suggestions, becoming, without realizing it, not just a participant, but a leader.

Finally the day they had all been waiting for arrived, all the children gathered in front of their teachers and hoisted up the flag of the newly established Kingdom. Together, they sang their anthem and finally, read out the laws of their constitution. Albert noted with joy that each person in the room seemed committed to a cause that had seemed impossible such a short while ago.

"Wait," announced Iris, "there's still something left."

Everyone nodded - Albert wondered what this could be. Once again, he felt as if the others knew something he didn't, and he searched the faces of all the children for hints as to what was coming.

"It wouldn't be a kingdom without a king and queen," said David simply.

At first, Albert didn't realize what he was saying. When it finally hit him, he said to his little cluster of friends, "Thanks, you guys. But you can't pick me. That wouldn't be fair."

"We didn't pick you, Albert," said Sara, smiling. "They did."

Albert looked at all the other children in the room – they were all smiling, and Albert felt overwhelmed. In a daze, he let David place a small paper crown on his head, and on the head of the elected queen, Elisabete. She had a speech impediment, but Albert had seen her sing the anthem with more spirit and hope than all the others.

As the children and teachers dispersed, Albert made his way slowly through the hallway. This time, it took him long, as he stopped to exchange words of congratulations with the others, and also talk over what their first step together as the citizens of the new Kingdom would be.



There was still so much to do - but as Albert wheeled his way through the hallway in a journey he had once dreaded, he felt as happy as if he truly was sitting on a throne.







**THE HELPING**

**HAND**

**Fengshan Pri, Singapore**

Written by: Semanti Ray  
Illustrations by: Swathi Viswanath

YouTube

[bit.ly/icandfc-thehelpinghand](https://bit.ly/icandfc-thehelpinghand)

“That was a disaster!” Insyirah covered her face with her hands. Wei nodded in glum dejection.

“How on earth are we going to finish our project on creating awareness about global issues among the youth if our own schoolmates and juniors are so clueless about the world? Everyone seems to be happy in their own bubble!” lamented Afiq.

Insyirah and her friends were P5 students of Fengshan Primary School in Singapore. Over the last week, they had been planning an ambitious project to document awareness of problems faced by Asian children in developing nations among the students of their school. The results of their initial surveys were not promising.

Syafeqa, ever optimistic, tried to cheer her friends up.

“It wasn’t that bad. A few of our mates did have an opinion about many of the issues we mentioned and were helpful while filling up the questionnaires.”

“Yeah, Syafeqa, but not nearly enough of them!” pointed out Wei.

“Our project results are going to be so disappointing if we continue in this vein! We want to show people that our school children care about the world-- not that they’re unaware!”

“Maybe, we’ve been looking at this the wrong way.” Erna finally spoke up.

*“Maybe our focus should be on what we can do to spread awareness and empathy, rather than trying to measure existing awareness.”*

“What do you mean, Erna?” asked Insyirah.

“I mean what if we changed our perspective a little? Now that our initial surveys have shown us that children in our school are mostly unaware about the plight of children in developing nations in Asia, shouldn't we do something to address this problem?”

“Do you think Mrs. Low would let us do that?” asked Wei referring to their Principal.

“I don't see why not. As long as we have a definite plan of action, I'm sure Mrs. Low will agree.”

Afiq was still unconvinced. “But can we do?”

“Instead of lamenting about how so many of our friends aren't aware of children less privileged than them, why don't we help them become aware and show them how they can help?” offered Insyirah.

The more she thought about it, the more she liked this idea.

Erna beamed. “That is exactly what I mean! Let's speak to Ms. Asha, our teacher in-charge before meeting Mrs. Low!”

Once all five had agreed to the plan, the children decided to approach, Ms. Asha. The five of them were school prefects and they knew they had a reputation to live up to. Therefore, they carefully formulated a plan of action and prepared themselves well before speaking to Ms. Asha.

Ms. Asha was as helpful as always. She listened to their plan and agreed that their new approach seemed more effective than the earlier one. With her help, they wrote a formal letter seeking permission from Mrs. Low and went to see her.

Mrs. Low was heartened to see the initiative the children wanted to take up and showed keen interest. “Children, I'm glad that you've

thought of such a wonderful way to address this problem and I think what you're doing is very important too. While your planned activities in school are undoubtedly important, I have another suggestion to make. Why don't some of you travel to Cambodia in the coming months for a more hands-on experience of working with children who need our help?"

They looked at each other in delight. They hadn't remotely anticipated their ideas finding so much favour with the Principal. Determined not to let her down, the children agreed and set to work immediately.

They created a number of slides for a presentation that they would make to the whole school. Their presentation focused on how so many children all over Asia didn't have some of the basic facilities which they so took for granted and how it was important to try and help them in any way they could.

For the children of Fengshan Primary School, the project was an eye-opener.



Inspired by the presentation, they pledged to help their prefects in this endeavour!

Following the presentation, Insyirah, Wei, Afiq, Erna and Syafeqa organised a fundraiser and a collection drive to help collect useful items that they could take to a school in Cambodia. It was an unprecedented success!

*The entire school donated books, clothes, shoes, toys, stationery items and even money.*

As September drew nearer, Erna could barely control her excitement. Along with her friends and fifteen other Pupil Leaders from P5, and three teachers, she would be travelling to a local village community school and the Dump Site T-House school in Cambodia, and distributing the donated items they'd collected as part of their Bazaar. They would also be helping by volunteering to teach basic English Language skills to the children there.



Looking at the tremendous progress they'd made in the last few weeks, she knew with certainty that they'd done the right thing by changing their approach. Instead of complaining about the problem, it was far more fruitful to focus on what the solution could be. And that was a lesson that the whole school had learned together!

The trip to Cambodia was a huge success and the team had so many stories and experiences to share with the rest of the school.

Erna shared with tears in her eyes,

*“It was an unforgettable experience from me and I am really happy that we all could contribute to this wholeheartedly.”*

Both Ms. Asha and Ms. Low were proud of their students and the maturity they displayed to not only understanding the problem but also their enthusiasm to offer a solution.



**DROPS OF AN**

**OCEAN**

**Santa Teresa De Jesus, Spain**

Written by: S.Z. Ruhi

Illustrations by: Arpana Desai



[bit.ly/icandfc-dropsfanocean](https://bit.ly/icandfc-dropsfanocean)

Sara! It's almost time to leave for school!"

Eleven year old Sara looked up at her mother, then smiled as she turned off the tap in the kitchen. "I was just shutting off this tap, Mama. Emilio washed his hands but left the water running!"

Her mother shook her head. "You know how I always tell him not to do that, Sara. But he's just five, and he doesn't always remember. But I'm glad that you know that it is never a good idea to waste water, because..."

"...water is a precious natural resource and something that we should always save. I know that, Mama!"

Her mother sat down beside her and began tying her hair up in two pigtails. "Is this something you're learning now in your classes?"

Sara turned around to face her. "Water and its importance is something we have been studying for a very special project, Mama. It started while you were away visiting Tía Isabel, but I have told Papa all about it."

"I know, and he did tell me a little about it as well. Isn't that the reason behind your charity market today?"

"Yes! From the past few weeks, my friends and I have been making small objects to try and sell them to raise some money."

"And what are you going to do with the money, Sara?"

*"We are going to use that to replace some of the taps in the school, Mama."*

"In that case, I hope that everything you and your friends have made gets sold really fast, Sara. But tell me, how did all this begin?"

Sara held on to her mother's hand as they started walking out towards the front door.





"It began when Ms. Alicia told us about how our country and many others are facing a shortage of water. And then she told us how there was only so much water in the world, and if we continued to be careless while using it, soon there would be none left at all. Everything would be like a desert...and when she told us that, we asked her how we could stop that from happening."

"And what did she say, Sara?"

"She told us that we could start by not wasting water in our own school first. And so all the kids from my class went around the school and tried to figure out how we could save water."

"What did you do after that?"

"Well, Ms. Alicia told us more about how important water was to all living beings on our planet, including humans and plants and animals...and then she asked us to try and come up with ways to start saving this precious resource."

"And one of those ways was your charity market for the new taps?"

"Yes, but that was an idea that we came up with much later. First, we started a 'water challenge' where we made charts with green, yellow and red stickers for good and bad behavior to show who was good at saving water. And at the end of the month, we could see who did best! And then we placed recipients around our campus to collect rainwater and we used that water for the plants."

"That's wonderful, Sara!"

"And it wasn't just for students of our class, Mama! We even designed games for the smaller kids and taught them some fun ways in which they could save water and take part in all this. Do you remember my friend Laura? She helped too, we enjoyed it so much!"



"Sounds like you all had a great time, even the younger kids! I love this idea."

"We love it too, Mama. The past few weeks have been fun, and you should see some of the things we have made for today's market! I made ten bracelets with red and green beads, and Laura made some with..."

As her daughter told her all about the items they had created on the way to her school, Sara's mother found herself hoping that she wouldn't be disappointed today. She wished that everything they had made would get sold and the new taps could be placed as they had planned. As they approached the School of Teresianas, Valladolid, her eyes went straight to the small crowd that had already formed before the gates, and she smiled. The market already had its first customers, and she had a feeling that things would only get better as the day went on.

"Mama, look! There are so many people there already! I have to find Laura and set up our table too, adiós!" Sara ran off towards the entrance, and her mother followed at a slower pace.

When she finally entered the school premises, she looked around and saw that most kids from her daughter's fifth grade class were there already, and little tables and stalls had been set up in the playground with colorful items for sale. As she walked closer, she saw that there were pens, bracelets, bookmarks and many other small objects. And then there were the posters with messages of water conservation displayed throughout the school-yard.



She walked on, talking to several other parents and teachers, and finally meeting the school principal to whom she conveyed her appreciation of the water project.

Before she left for work, she stopped by at Sara's table and bought some of her bracelets and some from Laura as well.

"I'll be back to pick you in the afternoon, Sara."

Her daughter's bright gaze and excited smile stayed with her the entire day as she went about her work, and she found herself hoping again that the student's charity market would be a success. Even though she had seen the crowd at the school earlier, she couldn't help but worry about the fact whether the students would be able to raise enough money for the new taps.

At the end of the day, when she returned to the school and saw Sara's ecstatic face, she knew that she needn't have worried.

"We did it, Mama! Ms. Alicia counted the money and told us that we had enough for the new taps! "

"I am so proud of you, Sara! "

She bent down to kiss her on the cheeks before taking her by the hand and leading her out of the school. On the way home, she listened to the details of how the day was, and laughed at her excited chatter throughout the evening as she repeated the tale when her father came home.

After dinner, she waited while Sara changed into her nightclothes and then sat down beside her in bed with her hairbrush. As she loosened the pigtails, she wondered why all the enthusiasm seemed to have left her little girl.

What had happened to make her look so sad after the wonderful day she'd just had?

"Sara? Is everything alright?"

As Sara turned around to face her, her mother's eyes filled with worry at her unhappy expression.

"Mama...I was just thinking..."

Her mother placed both arms around her and pulled her close.  
"What is it, mi niña? "

"I was just thinking that...everything that we have done over the past few weeks...is that really enough? Ms. Alicia told us that the problem of water shortage exists all over the world, so what if all

that we have done is of no use, because it is too little and the problem is too large?"

Her mother sighed. "You are right, Sara. The problem is a huge one. But what you have done today is not useless, never think that! Everything that you have done is a step towards learning how to conserve this important natural resource. And now, you can teach your families and neighbours about this too. You can even take this message to other children and other schools. By sharing this knowledge and the news of what you have accomplished here, you might be able to inspire others to do the same. And little by little, as the message spreads, other people will see what you have done and try to save water too. So in your own way, you have helped, Sara. You all have taken the first, important step."

"But how, Mama? How will others know what we have done? "

"Do you remember the video that Ms. Alicia and Mr. Martin were making with your fifth grade class? When I met them earlier today, they told me that they would put it on the internet for the world to see."

As she spoke, she saw the light begin to come back into her daughter's eyes.

*"So do you really think that more and more people will understand why we need to be careful with water by seeing what we have done, Mama?"*

"Of course they will, Sara. It is always the initial step that makes the difference. You have placed the first drop, and as more drops join in, an entire ocean will be formed. That is how it always works, mi niña."

Finally, Sara smiled. "A new ocean? That sounds wonderful, Mama."



**Jian Gong Primary School, Taiwan**

Written by: Akanksha Agarwal  
Illustrations by: Shalaka Pai



[bit.ly/icandfc-weloverice](https://bit.ly/icandfc-weloverice)

Every summer break, Bo-Ren Chen looked forward to going to his village to meet his grandparents. His grandfather worked on paddy fields and was very proud of the rice he grew.

This year, however, Chen noticed that his grandfather was very disturbed about something. He had been looking tired and worried for days. Although he had initially insisted that everything was alright, Chen had not believed him.

After repeated questions, his grandfather finally confessed. "It is my rice harvest, Chen. I have not been able to sell it at a good price because low quality imported rice has brought down the overall price of rice in Taiwan. All the paddy farmers in the village are worried about this. We have worked so hard throughout the season to grow high quality Taiwanese rice and now it feels as though it was all in vain. It is so disappointing when our own countrymen are willing to buy the imported rice and do not appreciate the paddy farmers and the hard work that goes into producing the best Taiwanese rice. It used to be a matter of national pride. Sadly, that isn't the case anymore."

Chen felt troubled by his grandfather's words and the woes of the other paddy growers. He was inspired by their hard work but felt mere words of solace would not help. That was when he decided that he would create more awareness about Taiwanese rice among consumers in his own town of Taichung City and help his grandfather and other farmers to be able to sell the rice at price it deserved. With this resolve, he bid goodbye to his grandparents and returned to school.

Chen shared his story with his friends, Wang, Lin, Zhang and Li. Wang also had faced a similar experience in his village.

"I know what you mean, Chen. The situation was the same at my uncle's home. My uncle is worried about saving enough money to send my cousin to college, and the plummeting rice prices have only compounded the problem."

“It’s not just rice, Lin. I’ve heard my parents talk about how imported fruits and vegetables are hurting the local producers! Apparently, much of what we eat isn’t Taiwanese at all!” exclaimed Zhang. “This is bound to hurt our farmers.”

*“The question is, is the imported rice better? Shouldn’t we see for ourselves?” interjected Li.*

There was a chorus of approval.

The children decided to go for a walk in their neighborhood market to see what farm-produce was being sold. Chen and his friends noticed that most shops had rice which was being sold as Taiwanese, however, when questioned the shopkeepers had no idea about the place where the rice came from.



They bought a packet and brought it to Chen’s home. They compared it with the rice he had got from his grandfather’s field. The two certainly did not feel and look the same. One was big and round while the other was small and thin. The children realized that this rice was not grown in Taiwan but was still being sold as Taiwanese. Therefore, the consumers remained unaware about the injustice they were doing to the farmers from their own country. Moreover, a little bit of research told them that this rice was being sold at a much higher price and the money would go to the packaging companies who were selling the rice under different brands. Thus, none of these profits would reach

the farmers of Taiwan.

“This is terrible!” said an appalled Lin. “No wonder our families and the farmers of Taiwan have such difficulty selling their local produce and making ends meet! We must do something about this!”

“But what can we do? We’re just children. We don’t even buy the rice!” exclaimed Zhang.

“We can tell other people what we now know, can’t we? This way the people in charge can help make the change.” Chen was determined that his grandfather get the fruits of his labour. “All we need is more concrete information and a will to change things.”

This brought the five of them into action. They expanded their research and learned how to distinguish the Taiwanese rice from non-Taiwanese rice. They also found

out where consumers can buy high quality Taiwanese rice from. Furthermore, they conducted field research and got to know more about the distributorship and how the origin of the rice matters.



With this information in hand, they approached their school. They analyzed the school lunch and created a blueprint for how the school lunches could be made healthier and more sustainable by replacing the imported ingredients with local and seasonal ones. The authorities at Jian Gong Primary School were touched and very impressed by this initiative. They promised to look into the matter and ensure that the school did its bit in promoting indigenous produce and local farmers.



“Chen, why do you look so lost? Aren’t you glad that our idea worked? The school has promised to support Taiwanese rice and our paddy farmers! Things are looking up!”

Chen sighed at Lin’s words. “I am happy. It’s just that I don’t think we’re doing enough. It’s true that our school has been very encouraging and helpful, but we are one school! Can you imagine the impact we could make if we could reach out to other schools and tell them what it really means to be a paddy farmer and how important it is for us to buy Taiwanese rice?”

“If we want to tell others what it really means to be a paddy farmer, I think we need to experience it for ourselves,” mused Lin.

“Only then will we be able to convince others. Chen, can’t we visit your grandfather and spend a day working in his paddy fields?”



Chen grinned. He was elated. “I’m sure we can. Let me talk to my grandfather and organise it.”

Chen’s grandfather was very happy to have Chen and his friends come over and help him. He immediately agreed.

The next weekend found the children standing knee-deep in the water in the paddy fields and listening to Chen’s grandfather’s instructions as though their lives depended on it.

The children came back from the paddy fields tired, wet, grimy but ecstatic. They were in awe of how hard their paddy farmers worked. At the same time, they felt a deep sense of pride and accomplishment in being able to help out in any way they could.

It was finally time to execute the last step of their plan. They set up a blog to document and share their activities and achievements during their campaign. The blog became a record of all the information they had found, all the data they had collected, all the work they had done and how it related to the plight of the paddy farmers and of Taiwanese rice. It became a go-to for their friends in all the other schools as well.

These little farmers' diligent investigation and aspiring promotion was a huge first step towards helping out the local farmers and creating awareness about indigenous crops.

The next time Chen telephoned his grandfather to speak to him, he could hear the gruff pride and affection in his voice.

*And that, to Chen, was worth all the rice in the world.*



**THE HELPFUL**  
**HEDGEHOGS**

**Ashley C of E Primary School, UK**

Written by: Rukmini Banerjee  
Illustrations by: Shalaka Pai



[bit.ly/icandfc-thehelpfulhedgehogs](https://bit.ly/icandfc-thehelpfulhedgehogs)

It had been a long and tedious week at the Ashley C of E Primary School, with the incessant rain forcing the Reception year students to remain indoors. Mrs. Williams – the class teacher of the Hedgehog class – was busy overseeing the students at the writing table, when she heard a sharp cry from the other end of the classroom.

“My skirt!” cried Amber, looking positively alarmed. “It’s ruined!”

Rushing over to the recycling table, Mrs. Williams found a most distraught-looking Amber, holding the lower rear end of her skirt in her hand.

“What’s the matter, Amber?” asked Mrs. Williams.

*“There was paint on her chair,” said Phoenix, pointing to an open tube of bright green poster paint lying on Amber’s seat. “She sat on it!”*

Almost on cue, the kids burst into loud giggles, much to Amber’s embarrassment. This was the third time this week that such a mishap had occurred – first, Jemima had stepped on an open pot of glue and then walked all over the classroom in her sticky shoes; then Max lost three colour pencils from the brand new set he received from his parents on his fifth birthday; and now, Amber’s spotless, white skirt had an ugly blotch of green paint at the back. Free flow was becoming a messy affair for the Hedgehog class, with more and more students neglecting to tidy up their respective work stations at the end of the day.

Mrs. Williams was not amused. “This is becoming a big problem for us,” she said, shaking her head in dismay. Just as during recess, the

Reception teacher encouraged her students to go outdoors, explore, and get their hands dirty, she wanted to make learning indoors fun too! She was beginning to realize, however, that her students needed a little more than just independent learning time – they had to learn to be responsible, and clean up after their work was done, in order to avoid any more accidents in the future.

“Now children, before we carry on with our activities, I think we all need to put our heads together, and discuss something very important to all of us,” said Mrs. Williams, rounding up her Hedgehog class.

The little kids looked up with curious eyes.

“There has been a series of unpleasant accidents in the class this week, and I think we all need to think of ways in which we can prevent these accidents from happening again. Do you agree?”

The children nodded in agreement.

Mrs. Williams then went on to explain – in simple terms – the only way the Hedgehog class could enjoy a safe and happy classroom environment where no sketch pens would be lying around lidless or dry, nor would anyone trip on objects and fall, was by keeping the classroom clean and free of clutter.

“But in order to achieve this,” continued Mrs. Williams, “we need to work together as a team. What can we do to remind each other to clean up after our work is done?”

There was a moment of silence, after which little Max Bloom’s hand shot up.

“Yes, Max?” said Mrs. Williams, looking at him inquiringly.

“We can put post-its on the wall!” said Max, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

“No! Let’s make posters! Post-its are too small...” said Jemima. The

entire class squealed in unison, as if to express their excitement and support at the same time.

The Hedgehog class decided that the first step in their new project would be to make badges for all the students, and posters for the classroom.

Soon the little children got busy with their cardboard cutouts and water colours.

“I’ve done this before, you know,” Mrs. Williams overheard Phoenix telling Bertie, the rather timid looking little boy who always seemed to be in awe of Phoenix’s overpowering personality.

“The nursery teacher used to make me pick up my toys and put them back in the play space after I was finished playing with them. I never lost a single toy.”



Mrs. Williams couldn’t help chiming in: “Perhaps you can help your friends remember to do the same, Phoenix?” Phoenix beamed at Mrs. Williams. He had been entrusted with a new responsibility!



In scrawling handwriting, the round, cardboard badges read, TIDY UP BEFORE YOU MOVE ON. The students of Hedgehog class wore the badges with a sense of honour and pride – almost as if they had carved little medals out of cardboard, which had now become the single-most important part of their clothing.

Then the class got busy making posters. They used crayons, watercolours, pencils, pens, little tubes of glitter. Mrs. Williams was proud of her little Hedgehogs. She hung up the posters all over the classroom walls, hoping that these little masterpieces would serve as daily reminders to the students about cleaning up their mess before moving on from one activity to another.

The parents too greatly appreciated this new project. The children had gradually started tidying up after themselves at home. They took their newfound responsibilities and badges very seriously.

“She refuses to take it off,” said Jemima Smith’s father, sounding amused.

“Her mother has to force her to take it off every morning, before going in to take her bath.”

Isla Spencer’s father made her a small wooden box where she could store all her art supplies.



The Reception students began to take ownership of every project they undertook.

All pens and pencils were put away where they belonged, all paint tubes kept in their boxes with the caps tightly screwed on. After every activity, the students checked the floor for scraps of paper, pots of glue, or any object that might cause an accident.

The entire school had heard of the Mrs. Williams’ project, and the Hedgehog class was specially commended by the Headmaster of Ashley C of E Primary School, for outstanding contribution towards the school community.

“This project has served as an example for students and teachers across the entire school,” declared a beaming Headmaster Dunne.

“The Hedgehog Class has made us all very proud!”

*“Hurraaaaayyy!”* shouted the little Hedgehogs, clapping and cheering for themselves and for Mrs. Williams.

Soon the rain clouds disappeared and the children were able to expand their free flow outdoors – playing on their scooters and racing with their friends. But no matter where they went or how complex their activity was, it was always wonderful to see how their voices came together in song; how their individual gestures came together in every wooden bench that was waxed, or every cloth napkin that was folded.





**YELL**  
**FOR THE**  
**ENVIRONMENT**

**Family and Children's Service  
of Greater Lynn, USA**

Written by: Rasika Ramanathan  
Illustrations by: Arpana Desai



[bit.ly/icandfc-yellfortheearth](http://bit.ly/icandfc-yellfortheearth)

“Dad, I think I caught something!”

Neil pulled the hook excitedly out of the water, only to find... a plastic bag? He winced, glancing out at the rest of the lake, which was covered in trash.

Sundays spent together, were an important family tradition, and Neil and his father would go out every weekend for some father-son bonding. But for the last couple of weeks, they had been rather disappointed.

“Neil... maybe we’d better stay at home from now on. The lake is just too littered for fish, and the plastic keeps making the boat stop. There isn’t any space to play in the park, not even the beach!”

Neil looked sadly at his father, knowing he was right.

Barry Park was littered with waste of all kinds too. There weren’t any trash cans nearby, only one in the far corner of the park underneath the shelter. That meant that after eating a snack to re-energize in the middle of a football game, kids did not want to interrupt play by walking over to the trash can. They would toss the empty plastic bags onto the ground right where they were standing, and the bags would fly across the park in the wind, clogging drains and floating into the sewers.



The rest of the park faced the damage as well. The swings were creaky and old, and the woodchips that were placed underneath it were barely visible underneath the paper tossed to the ground. Soda cans lay all over, often making kids trip and fall as they ran around the field.

Lynn Beach and Lynn Common were no better off. The amount of litter everywhere was staggering!

After a couple of Sundays moping around the house, Neil knew that something had to be done about their city spaces. He decided to bring it up at the next Teen Scene session. Teen Scene was an after school academic enrichment program run for the youth of Lynn and Neil was a mentor.

He was sure his friends at Teen Scene would have some ideas. While another mentor, Jama pointed out a practical problem.

*“Neil, the problem isn’t as simple as just cleaning up the park and spaces. We have to think of a way to make this sustainable.”*

Eli, another peer-mentor, agreed. “We will have to involve as much of Lynn as possible, Neil!”

Neil knew that his friends were right. This sort of action needed systematic planning and sustained action to be successful. And that is how a new initiative by Teen Scene slowly unfurled, Young Environmental Leaders of Lynn (YELL).



YELL’s first plan of action was to organize a clean-up of the three most littered public spaces in Lynn-- Barry Park, Lynn Beach and Lynn Common. About fifteen of Teen Scene’s members signed up for YELL and they started soliciting for help and volunteers on both social media and in their respective schools.

Their goal was simple: spread awareness about the environment and the importance of looking after it for a sustainable future for Lynn.

That Saturday, the fifteen members of YELL began with the Barry Park clean-up. As people realized what they were doing, more started helping out a little or joining their efforts. YELL worked better than any of them had anticipated.

“Here’s another bag!”

A small kid pulled a heavy, overflowing trash bag over to the small white table, his face glowing with pride. Neil took the bag from his hands, putting it in the pile and wiping the sweat from his brow. He smiled as he looked out across the large playground that was once covered in trash. There were now almost five trashcans, gleaming with fresh green and gold paint. Bright blue recycling bins with the triangle neatly painted in white paint sat by the side of the trashcans, urging visitors to sort out their garbage.

Right next to Neil’s table, empty paint cans and brushes stiff with dried paint lay waiting for cleaning.

“Should I use the blue marker or the red marker?” He looked down to see little Anita holding up two thick markers towards him. In her other hand was a poster, almost larger than her, with carefully drawn pictures and neat block letters drawn by the older kids.



“How about the red marker, Anita? That will be brighter, and then everyone can see it!”

She nodded and plopped herself down next to the white table, spreading the poster out carefully on the grass. Biting her lower lip, she carefully began to fill in the thick bubble letters that read:

**PUT THE TRASH IN ME, PLEASE!**

“Neil! Can you help us carry these bags?” Jada’s voice echoed across the field, as she waved from the other end, nearly hidden by the full black garbage bags surrounding her.

Neil walked over to Jada, unable to hold back the gigantic grin stretching across his face. More people dotted the ground, pitching in to clean up Lynn Common.

Later that afternoon, Neil, Jada, Jama and Eli all looked on as the volunteers filed away a huge pile of trashbags waiting to be deposited. The signs made by the younger kids stood next to the new trashcans, encouraging people to use them.

This was the third clean-up in three consecutive months. Over May, June and July, they had indeed managed to clean up Barry Park, Lynn Beach and Lynn Common. In fact, they had managed to collaborate with the Lynn City Department of Public Work and had their full cooperation in maintaining and managing these spaces in future.

Neil shared a grin with his friends.

“I’m so proud of you, Neil, for coming up with this idea! This initiative really goes to show that anyone can make a difference, even if they think they’re only one person.”

“I couldn’t have done it without all of you, Eli! You and Jama helped us understand the importance of helping Lynn accept ownership of its public spaces and automatically look after them better.”

## “So what’s next?”

Jada shrugged, an excited gleam in her eyes. “Oh, you know-- stop people from littering, continue spreading awareness, tie up with other organizations with similar goals, save the world-- the usual.”

That Sunday, Neil woke up with a unique sense of peace and accomplishment. His father stood at the foot of his bed with a football in his hand. “Neil! How about you and I head out to Barry Park to play some ball today? It’s been a while, hasn’t it?”

Neil jumped out of bed and ran to get dressed. It had been a while, but YELL would ensure that they never had to wait as long to play football in their own park, ever again.



# It's your turn now to **Inspire** others!

Children around the world are telling us that they don't have to be rich, strong or 18 to make the world a better place and changing what bothers them. Design for Change is the global movement of these children sharing their amazing stories of change. Join them!

Using the simple four step process of **Feel, Imagine, Do** and **Share**, you can put your ideas to action.

## STEP 1 **FEEL**

Think from your Heart

*THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN IS TO TRY TO UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE FEEL.*

### 1.OBSERVE

Observe closely your physical (infrastructure, spaces), social (culture, traditions) and emotional (relationships, feelings) surroundings in your class, school, community.

What bothers you?

Draw a map and mark the areas that you would like to see changed (you can also take photographs).

### 2.VOTE

Share your observations with the team.

VOTE for the one situation that you would all like to see changed.

### 3.ENGAGE

Go out and talk to the people who are involved and affected by the situation.

Interview them to understand their concerns. This step will help you identify the various parts of the situation that can be improved.

## STEP 2

## **IMAGINE**

Visualize success

*A SITUATION IS A SUM TOTAL OF DIFFERENT PARTS. EACH PART MIGHT NEED A DIFFERENT SOLUTION TO CHANGE THE SITUATION FOR THE BETTER.*

### 1.BRAINSTORMING TOOLS

(explore ideas for creating the quickest impact, maximum people impacted and long lasting change) Encourage a variety of ideas- don't shy away from wild ones.

Build on the ideas of others - use the word 'and' instead of 'but'.

Illustrate your ideas for greater clarity.

### 2.VOTE

Vote for the ideas that best address each part of the situation to 'design for change'.



## message from the DFC jury!



“Do not get bogged down by big problems just because they sound important. Choose something that is closer to your heart and ask yourself what change you can bring to that situation. Using the Design for Change framework, you will be able to realise your ideas and make a difference.”

**Poonam Bir Kasturi**  
Compostwali

Log on to **challenge.dfcworld.com**  
to register your story and submit to share it with the world.



### STEP 3 **DO**

Make change happen

#### 1. PLAN

What resources will be required? What is the budget? How will you get the money? How many people will be required? How much time will it take?

How will you document your work?

Divide the work amongst yourselves.

#### 2. IMPLEMENT

Go out and put your plan in action!  
**YES YOU CAN!**

#### 3. REFLECT

What 3 things did you learn about the situation?  
What 2 things did you learn about your team-mates?  
What 1 thing did you learn about yourself?  
How do you continue your work for long-term impact?



### STEP 4 **SHARE**

"I Can! Now  
You Can Too!"

Sharing your story with the world will help others say I CAN! As you capture stories, focus on **F.A.C.T.S** :  
**Feelings:** How can you depict the feelings of people and your Supermates?  
**Actions:** Capture your Supermates in action.  
**Changes & Transformations:** How were people changed? Capture quotes.  
What was your community like before? How has it transformed?

#### 1. SUBMIT

Share your story with us at  
[www.challenge.dfcworld.com](http://www.challenge.dfcworld.com)

You may include:  
Photo & text documents (max 4 photos for each step)  
Video/YouTube link (max 3 min long)

If you don't have internet access, send in your submission form to us by post.

#### 2. INSPIRE

You could use these ideas to expand your circle of influence

Share your story at your morning assembly  
Organise a parent meeting  
Spread awareness through a newsletter  
Share your story via local media, TV



"Design for Change gives you the power to use your imagination and ideas and make it matter. Like you have taken inspiration from these stories, your story could also inspire someone in some part of this world to believe that they too CAN! "

**Sandy Speicher**  
**IDEO**



"A good designer always designs with the people. Remember, being empathetic will allow you to understand people involved in the problem better and come up with an effective solution."

**M. P. Ranjan,**  
**Design Thinker**

All children grow up listening to stories. Tales of great valour and courage showed by superheroes with magical powers. Children listen with wonder and amazement at how these heroes save the world. And just as children start idealising and believing in this, we adults tell them that superheroes exist only in fairy tales.

Today, Design for Change has unleashed a new generation of superheroes. These are heroes who are making the world around them a better place. And their power is their belief in their own selves to lead change. The two powerful words, " I CAN" is their superpower.

Read how students in India worked to gain equal respect for the aya-ammas in their school, a group of Taiwanese children grew rice and campaigned to support local farmers, and children in Argentina cleaned up their school playground and recycled all the trash, and more.



Be inspired by these twenty-four stories of change from children around the world. Lend your ears to their stories of care and determination. Celebrate the tales of the real super heroes. Learn that if you try hard enough, you will most certainly overcome adversity. Come, be the change. For all you know, you may be in these pages next year.



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