What Makes a Good Friend?

A Children's Picture Book About Finding Your People

By
Kayla Smith

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Dr. Gavin Keulks,
Honors Program Director

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Abstract

Friendship is magic, at least that's what they say. But are all friendships good ones? Growing up, I found myself in a strange streak of toxic friendships, constantly in search of a group of people who would finally appreciate me for who I was. Across my search, my own creativity and artistic capabilities always stuck by my side. Now that I have grown up and finally found a true group of friends, I want to impart my knowledge onto the younger generation to teach them what it means to be a good friend and how they deserve to be treated by their friends. My ultimate goal was to create a story that fully encapsulates my own experiences and what I have learned about what a true friend is, that children are able to learn from as they look to find the friends that are right for them. Putting my artistic skills and creativity to use, I created a children's picture book centered around a girl trying to find her people as she navigates through the social world. This book explores themes of not only being a good friend to those around you, but also how you should be treated by a good friend. Following the book, is an extensive reflective paper including details of my creative processes and artistic influences, and insight into the publishing process.

Where It All Started

Art has always been an important pillar of my life, becoming a cornerstone of my identity. I've been pursuing my passion for art in almost every way possible, in a variety of mediums, ever since I was a young child. My love for art started in my great grandma's backyard, sitting at a pollen-covered glass table, playing with water colors as she painted away. At the time, I took more of an abstract approach, placing blobs of color on the page at random as my great grandmother, Gobi, regaled me with stories of when she was young, pausing occasionally to replace the water dish or praise my work. It was one of the first activities that felt completely natural to me and I instantly fell in love.

The hobby continued to evolve from spending all of my time in after-school care coloring with dried out markers at the art table to taking elective classes in middle and high school. I dabbled in a large variety of mediums, gathering a large collection of art supplies that overflowed in my closet. I went through phases of favorites, my most popular of which were acrylic paint and custom greeting cards for family birthdays. The rest of my family wasn't quite as artistically inclined, so I soaked up every minute I could with Gobi, aching at the chance to use her old brushes and large paint collection. Despite their lack of talent, the rest of my family was incredibly supportive of my passion and would all practically bribe me for the next piece I created.

When starting my college career, despite art not being involved in my direct career path, I knew I needed a way to stay motivated to keep creating. I chose to

add an art minor as an excuse to consistently take art classes and to help fill my schedule. The range of classes offered opened me up to new mediums and experiences in art that I never would have dreamed of before. I explored as many mediums as possible from figure drawing with charcoals to carving wooden blocks for printmaking. When I was younger, I used to be so concerned with finding “my style”, feeling an urge to find what made my art unique in comparison to others. With every step I took to explore a new facet of this passion or try my hand at a new medium, I felt more and more free, able to appreciate my passion for creativity for what it was.

When it was time to select a project for my honors thesis, I knew I wanted to do a creative project, but I wasn’t sure what I specifically wanted to do. I bounced around the idea of a collection of charcoal works or a poetry book, but at first nothing felt quite right until my roommate suggested a picture book. Despite their lack of general artistic ability, my family had always toyed around with the idea of creating picturebooks in the past, but it was more of a fleeting thought than a realized idea. However, this time the concept felt different. This time, there were two little boys who became a silent influence on my determination to work on the project, my one year old nephews. In being an aunt and taking care of the twins one day a week, suddenly the project felt more feasible and impactful.

I’m no stranger to interacting with and working with children. At the time of starting my thesis, I had worked as a camp counselor for four summers, being an assistant camp counselor for two years before that. Working with kids was

another aspect of life that came easy to me, and where most people found children annoying, I found them endearing. I had worked with children for so long and consistently that people assumed I wanted to work with kids in my future career, so much so that when I would tell people I attended college at WOU, they would all nod knowingly and say “education”. I still receive perplexed looks when I tell people I chose to study psychology and plan to focus on adolescents and young adults in my work as a therapist. Finally, in the combination of a need for a creative project, my history working with children, and the personal motivator of my family’s own new generation, my dream of creating a picturebook was fully realized.

Then came the question of what exactly is my story? I wanted to create a story that reflected my own experiences and struggles as a child, specifically focusing on the common childhood theme of friendship. Growing up, finding friends was always a bit of a struggle for me, or maybe I should say finding the *right* friends. It felt like everytime I got settled somewhere and finally found people I connected with, I would age up to a new school or my family would move to a new school district where I had to start all over again. I did usually manage to find a group of friends to hang out with to pass the time during school, but for one reason or another, I never really felt like I fit in, or the group would crumble to pieces from the weight of adolescent drama.

My senior year of high school, I especially felt like I was scrambling. I had just gotten out of the last of a long string of toxic friendships, and coming out of

the pandemic shutdown, I didn't know who to turn to. I sat with a couple different groups during lunch or with acquaintances during class but as everyone had seemed to solidify their friend groups over the past four years, I always felt like a bit of an outsider. One group that I sat with consistently at lunch would act happy to have me there and welcome me with open arms, but then would turn around and say that they have a rule of not adding anyone new to the groupchat so I ended up left out of inside jokes and uninvited to hang out with them outside of school. The hard thing was that these teens weren't even what one would consider "bad" or "mean" kids, so I just ended up feeling like I was the issue.

Then, by sheer happenstance, that summer I ended up finding a little group where I felt like exactly the right fit. They made me feel accepted and reminded me what true friendship looks like. The reminder couldn't have come at more of a perfect time as I was slotted to start college in the fall at a school no one else I knew was going to and I was going to have a randomly assigned roommate. On the tails of my new understanding of healthy friendship, and with some stroke of fate, the randomly assigned roommate quickly becomes my platonic other half. Somehow she was the missing puzzle piece I had been searching for my whole life, the friendship I was so desperately seeking. This new positive streak continued to build as I met more and more friends who have become core to my story.

Unfortunately, I don't think there are enough children's books in the world, let alone enough pages in just one, to fully encapsulate *everything* I've

experienced in the realm of friendship, so my story has been somewhat altered and condensed to fit the younger audience and smaller page count. I decided to base the story around a little girl on her first day at a brand new school, looking for a friend group where she feels like she can be herself. As I started thinking about creating this book, I felt like all the picturebooks I read as a kid about friendship had a very black and white view of friendship. Kids were either a bully because they were mean or a friend because they were nice. I sensed that this could be the reason why some people stick with friend groups they don't feel they relate to or fit in anymore. These friends are still nice to them, but that doesn't mean that they're the right group either. I made it a goal for my book to represent this nuance to friendship by making sure that the other kids in the story weren't necessarily "mean" or "bad" kids, but that they just weren't the right group for my main character. Thus, my thesis project was born, a picturebook, written and illustrated by me, about finding the *right* friend.

Literature Review

Children's literature takes the world children are able to experience and expands it to cultures and experiences different from their own. Through interacting with literature, youth are able to not only adapt a better understanding of what is happening in their own life, but they are also able to develop empathy and compassion for others who differ from them in one way or another. Children's literature, when done correctly, is specifically designed to confront children with experiences both familiar and unfamiliar to the reader. One article explains how quality literature for children "encourage children to interact with the characters and help them understand how they solve similar problems in their daily lives" (Ismail 2023). Literature is extremely important for children as it not only helps them better understand their own lives but also works to expand their understanding of others.

The idea of literature working as both a reflection of a child's life and an opening to other worlds is not new. The idea first became popular after an article by Rudine Sims Bishop introduced children's literature acting as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. The author first explains that books act as windows in which children are able to experience the story through. Windows can also act as mirrors, reflecting oneself back to them, or as sliding glass doors, in which one can walk through. While this article is somewhat older now, it is still considered one of the most accurate ways to describe the impact of children's literature. Using children's literature in this way is extremely beneficial as when

children are exposed to cultures and ideas different from their own, they are able to move from being egocentric to being able to appreciate and care for others (Ismail 2023). Additionally, when children see their own experiences reflected back to them, they are able to learn how to address issues they are likely to encounter in their own life, leading them to develop further emotional intelligence and problem solving skills (Ismail 2023).

Seeing oneself reflected positively in literature is even more important for children who belong to minority groups or groups often subject to harmful stereotypes. By seeing themselves reflected in a nondiscriminatory, biased, or stereotyped way, children learn that they are valued by the society they live in. Specifically, Bishop (1990) states "when children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part". Additionally, when children of any background are exposed to literature containing a basis of discrimination or political biases, the literature becomes counterintuitive to expanding the horizons of the reader (Ismail 2023). Children learn immensely about themselves and others through the literature they encounter so it is imperative that they find all cultures and identities reflected kindly.

While it is called children's literature, words are not the only aspect of a children's book in which children derive meaning from. Illustrations play an important role in aiding children in the discovery of plot and character

development. In a study done to investigate the role illustrations play in books between younger and older readers, it was found that in about 43% of the books for young readers (aged preschool to 8 years old), illustrations played a primary role in telling the story (Martinez & Harmon 2012). Additionally, the study also revealed that 63% of picturebooks heavily relied on illustrations to develop character within the story. A similar study revealed that children largely used illustrations to draw conclusions about the emotional state of the characters as well as the narrative content (Karchorsky et al. 2017). Additionally, the results also showed that children depended on paralinguistic elements to interpret the loudness of the words spoken along with the emotional state of characters.

To further expand the importance of illustrations, they also impact the recall and distractedness of a child when reading a book. In a study investigating the influence of illustrations in parent-child story reading, results showed that children in the illustrated condition were less likely to become distracted during the story and had increased abilities to remember the narrative of the story (Greenhoot, Beyer and Curtis 2014). Not only do illustrations aid in keeping children engaged while reading, they also work to increase the child's ability to remember the events of the book. One explanation for this increased recall comes from an author who believes that illustrations help children imagine the events of a story: "since the child has little life experiences, it is more difficult for him to recreate what the writer says in his mind. He must see and believe in order to imagine" (Tursunmurotovich 2020). As children have little life experience, it can be difficult

for them to imagine specific events, so illustrations help them bridge the gap. Based on the amount children rely on the pictures in a book and the impact they have on a child's reading experience, it is key to consider the words and illustrations on the page with equal importance.

Friendship is a common topic of children's literature and for good reason. Building friendships during childhood is incredibly important to the development of social skills and cognitive functioning. Specifically, one study found that adverse childhood friendship experiences led to a lack of opportunities for individuals to be cognitively stimulated by communication and social interaction (Burr, Han and Peng 2020). Results showed that this impact resulted in increased social isolation in adulthood and had a significant impact on cognitive functioning later in life. Knowing that friendship experiences in childhood can impact the remainder of an individual's life makes it all the more imperative to teach children about friendship and how to find the relationships that best suit them.

One of the children's literature classics, *The Rainbow Fish*, follows the story of a fish who learns how to become a good friend to others through the power of sharing. In the story, Rainbow Fish is first ostracized by his peers as he refuses to share his beautiful rainbow scales with others. When he seeks the advice of a wise octopus, he is encouraged to share his scales with the others as it will make everyone happy and he will feel happy after sharing. Rainbow Fish returns to his peers and gives away all but one of his scales, ending his story swimming in a sea of fish who each have their own rainbow scale, feeling happy that he has

made all of these new friends. While sharing is definitely a key skill for youth to learn, this story fails to give a well-rounded perspective of what friendship is and what it means to be a good friend. The story starts with the fish isolating Rainbow Fish because he won't share his scales. Additionally, with the item being shared with his peers being a physical piece of Rainbow Fish, this metaphor encourages children to give away pieces of themselves rather than learning to take turns or sharing toys. Lastly, Rainbow Fish receives no thanks in return from his peers, teaching children that friendship is all about giving and expecting nothing but acknowledgement in return.

Another classic that follows this same framework is *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein. This story follows the relationship between a boy and a tree as the boy grows older. With each new life stage the boy asks for something new from the tree starting with her apples and ending with her trunk until she is nothing but a measly stump. Each time the tree says she feels happy, yet when the boy leaves to live his life, she discovers she really is not happy at all. The book concludes with the boy as an old man, in his old age he no longer requires anything from her but a place to sit. When the tree offers her stump, she is happy again, thus ending the story. Similar to the issues in *The Rainbow Fish*, this story of friendship involves giving away pieces of oneself in order to make others happy. The boy gives nothing in return to the tree and often leaves her to her lonesome while he goes on to live a full life. Children's literature should reflect a

fully developed view of what friendship looks like as children deserve to understand when they are being treated right.

Some newer picturebooks have worked to undertake this task, such as one book called *Stick and Stone*. In this picturebook, Stick and Stone become friends after Stick stands up for Stone when he is being bullied by a pinecone. Stick and Stone go on little adventures and must endure some hardships as their friendship ensues. While this book does an excellent job of giving a more rounded idea of friendship, there is one minor issue: the only other kid pictured in the book is a bully. While many bully victims do identify defenders as their friends (Kucaba & Monks 2022), bullies are not the only way kids can form friendships. Many children's books start with one kid who is being picked on and follow with another child who sticks up for them. While defending others is an important moral to learn, it is also important to teach children how to find friends outside of this scenario.

One book that takes a step closer to this direction is *A Friend for Henry* by Jenn Bailey. Through this story, Henry, a child with autism, struggles to make friends in his class as he navigates a bout of misunderstandings with his classmates. Henry eventually finds friendship in a girl named Katie who watches the fishtank with him. This book does an excellent job of depicting the other kids as just different from Henry rather than mean or bullies. However, this book displays a very base level of friendship and fails to explain what makes Katie a good friend for Henry. Also, a large theme of this book is bringing awareness to

the social behaviors of children with autism so as to destigmatize the way they may act slightly differently in a classroom. While this is an extremely important story to tell and there should be an influx of the amount of these books in the market, it is not everyone's story and serves more as a window or sliding glass door than a mirror to many.

While there are far too many books on friendship to pick apart to analyze each one, these four examples show clear signs of a gap in the literature. There has yet to be a book made in which the concept of finding friends that are right for a child is specifically addressed. This book needs to have decent reasoning and explanation to what makes those friends good friends and showcase how they are the right friends for the main character. The others who are not quite the right fit should not be introduced as bullies like in *Stick and Stone*, but rather just different from the main character like in *A Friend for Henry*. Instead of showing a single aspect of friendship like *The Giving Tree* or *The Rainbow Fish*, it should display a multi-faceted concept of friendship that is still digestible to young readers. In creating my own children's book, my goal is to create a story in which children are able to learn these morals and ideas so they are able to best understand what makes someone a true friend to them.

Exposition

While my background as an art minor was a large influence in my decision to create a children's book, I had many creative inspirations who helped guide which style and medium I selected for the illustrations within the book. Originally I wanted to use a mix of physical and digital mediums to create the book, utilizing some of my favorite mediums such as collage or printmaking while still being able to create and place unique characters through digital illustration; however, after evaluating the scope of the project and the length it usually takes me to create one collage or print, I realized this was not a feasible option and decided to try my hand at fully digitally creating the illustrations within the book. I had dabbled a bit in digital illustration before so I already had the tools I needed, but it felt like a weak spot for me artistically. As I still had yet to find a specific style, I started by looking into children's media for illustrators and writers who inspired me.

The first source of inspiration came from an author and illustrator whose books I used to read when I was a little kid. When I was thinking about what kind of children's books I wanted to make, I immediately thought of *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Hankes. *Chrysanthemum* is one of many books in a mouse series written and illustrated by Hankes in which he tells the story of a little girl who learns to love her unique name. Hankes' illustrations might be on the simpler side, but they are quite stunning in their own right. His use of bright colors and dynamic movement on the page bring each of his distinct characters to life. His stories perfectly capture the complex emotions and fears of young children, teaching

themes and morals that cater specifically to his audience. Hankes illustrated his books on paper, using more physical mediums as digital illustration was yet to be as developed and popular as it is now. The general page structure of Hankes' books also helped inform me as to how to format the illustrations within the page and understand the balance of words to pictures on a page. I know that my illustration skills are nowhere near that of Hankes, but I hoped that my book would elicit the same feelings for someone that his books did for me when I was young.

Another childhood reference that came to mind as I was trying to decide on the illustration style for this book was the children's television show *Max and Ruby*. This show tells the story of a brother and sister rabbit as they navigate their everyday lives. These illustrations (or animations) are again in a simpler style yet utilize bright colors and light shading to make the bunnies come to life. One of the most notable traits of the characters is that they are often in the same outfit or similar outfits across all of the different episodes, aiding in making the characters recognizable and identifiable for young viewers. When looking into this television show, I was reminded of another show from my youth which utilized a very unique animation style. The animators of *Charlie and Lola* use collage and overly simplified illustrations to create the settings and characters. While I enjoyed the color blocking and more "unfinished" feel of this art style, it didn't quite feel like *my* style, but I knew I was getting close to finding the perfect balance.

As I was fairly certain that the previously mentioned illustrators and animators were not using the same technology I planned to use, either because they use physical mediums or because the media was created before the invention of newer technology, I wanted to find an illustrator who used modern illustrating tools. That is when I came across the illustrator and author Paul Castle. Castle is a blind artist who is working on creating as many children's books and illustrations as he can before he fully loses his sight. As he has a fairly heavy social media presence, I was able to find out that Castle uses an iPad and the software Procreate to illustrate his books, the exact same tools I planned on using for my own illustrations. Castle's books *The Secret Ingredient* and *Pringle & Finn* are incredibly detailed and beautiful pieces of work. He uses brushes and techniques that emulate the feel of a colored pencil drawing with the range and creativity provided by digital software. His illustrations feel like they pop off the page with their unique characters and bright colors. Castle's illustrations are far more detailed than I know I currently have the skill for in digital mediums, but it gave me a better idea of what I could accomplish with the tools and software I planned on using.

While each of these illustrators are very unique in their own way, there were some common themes and techniques I was able to pull as inspiration for my own story. First, I knew that my character needed to have a distinct personality and design to make them recognizable on each page. This includes the character themselves as well as the clothes they are wearing to create a distinct personality

and image. Secondly, I knew that I wanted my characters to be animals. Almost every one of the examples I named above had animals as the main character and using an animal allows the reader to relate to the story without the bounds of race or ethnic identity. Lastly, I knew I wanted to use bright colors with subtle yet intentional shading. These illustration techniques were what made the images feel like they popped right off the page. Additionally, in general, bright colors are an easy way to cater to a young audience and pull the attention of young readers. Using everything that I learned from these artists and their individual styles, I started working on curating my very own.

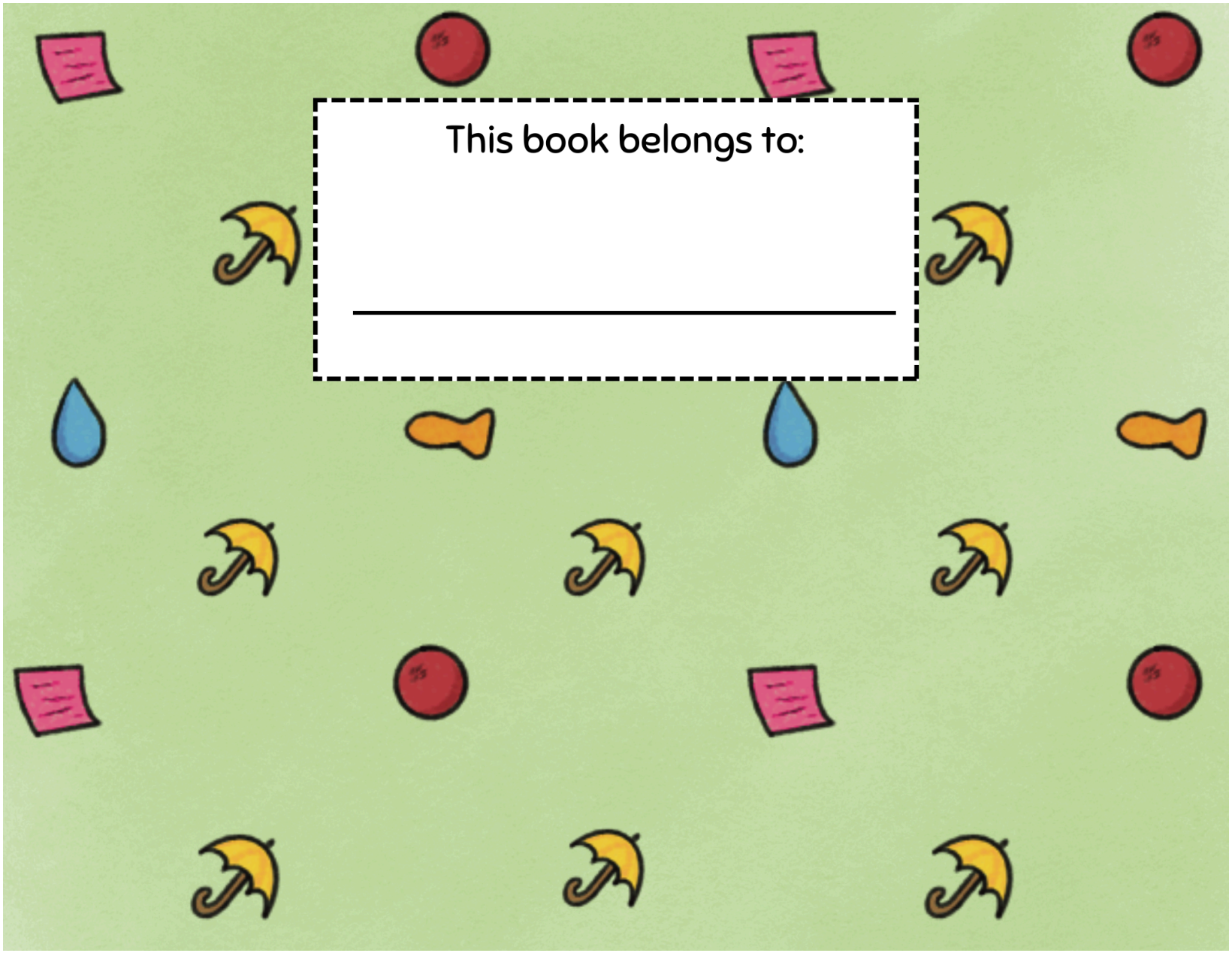
Finished Book

The a digital e-book version of the finished work is available for viewing at the following link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mZfrL-SrQeXgstSXizlvfKTXgzK4f9dq/view?usp=sharing

The following pages display the pages as it would appear from cover to cover in print form. As the following pages will display a singular page spread, a blank half of a sheet would represent a page left blank in the printed form. Pages with the inscription “this page remains blank” would not be printed with text but are merely a representation of the book format in printed form. Below is the illustration for the cover based on the IngramSpark cover template.



See cover file above.


This book belongs to:

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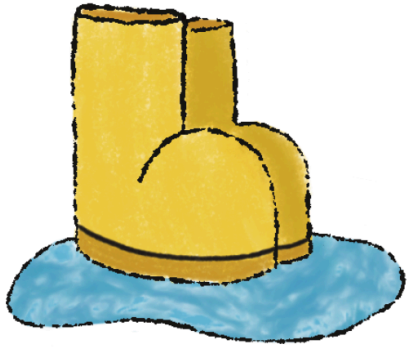
Illustrations by Kayla Smith

For my closest friends,
thank you for giving me the gift of true friendship

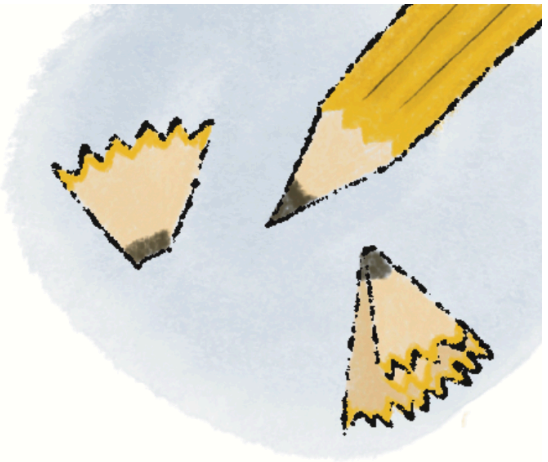
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KIT'S PURR-FECT FRIEND

Written and Illustrated
by Kayla Smith



KIT LOVED SCHOOL!





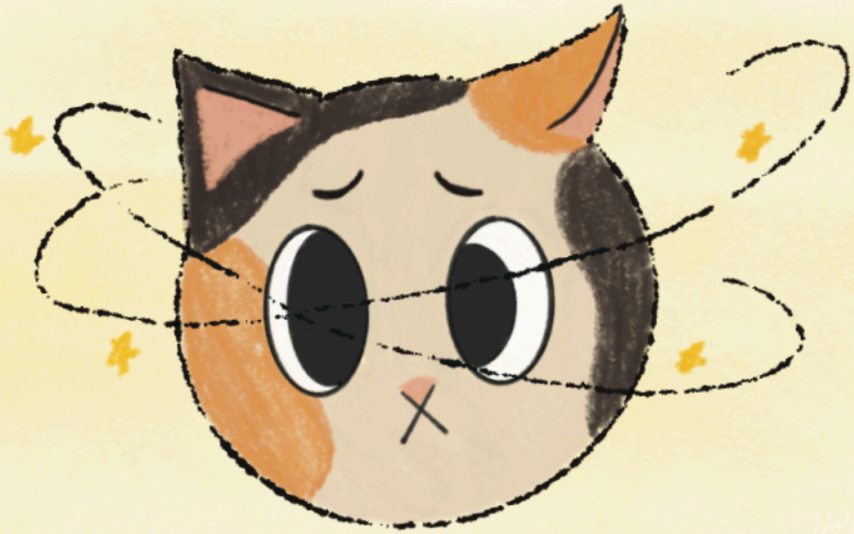
She loved the smell of pencil shavings and the feeling of getting called on when she raised her hand.



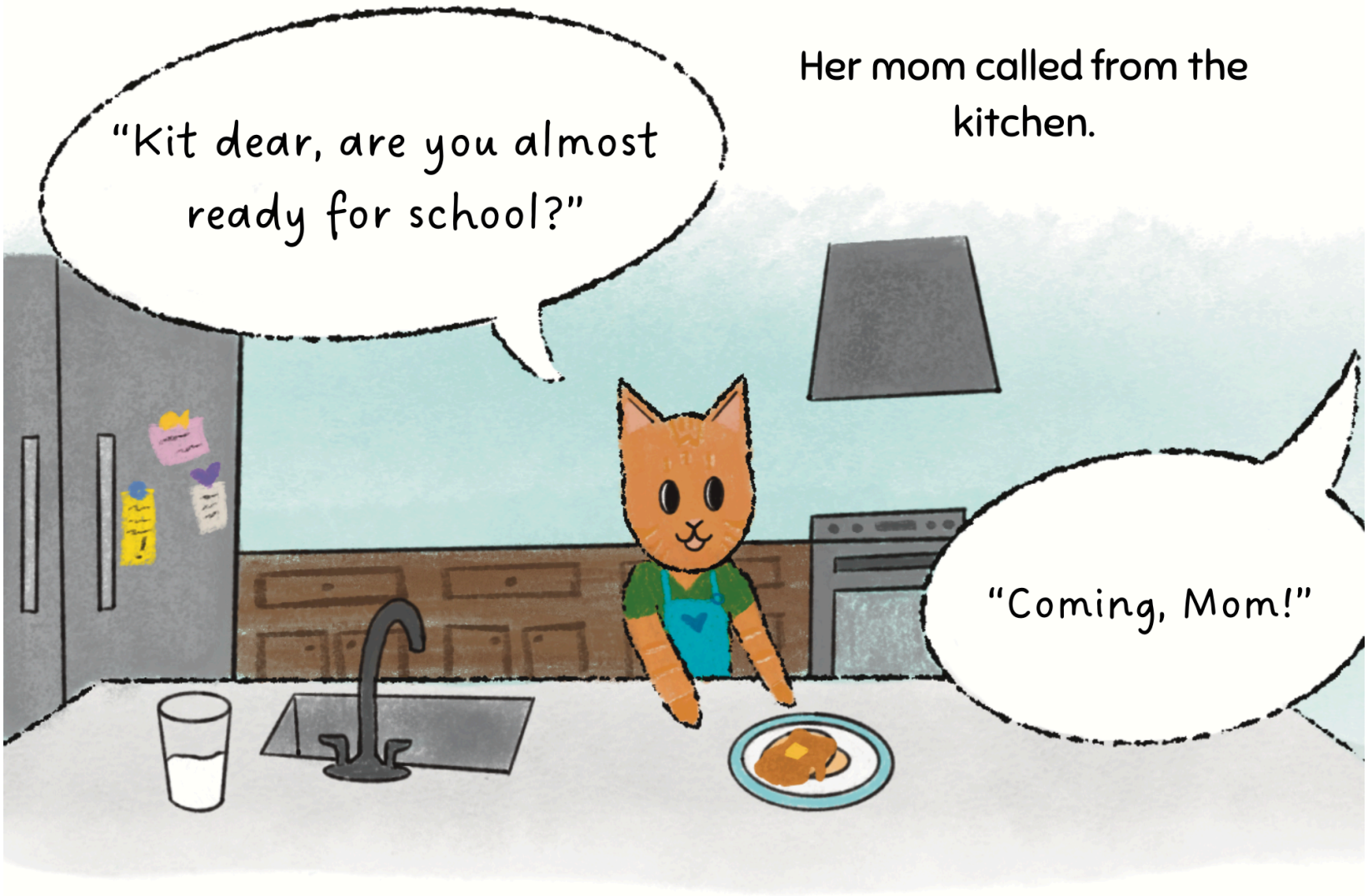
However, there was always one day of school she dreaded . . .

The first day of school.

Kit was especially dreading this first day of school
because it was her very first day at a BRAND new school.



Her mind felt like it was spinning at the thought of all the
new faces she would see and names she would have to learn.



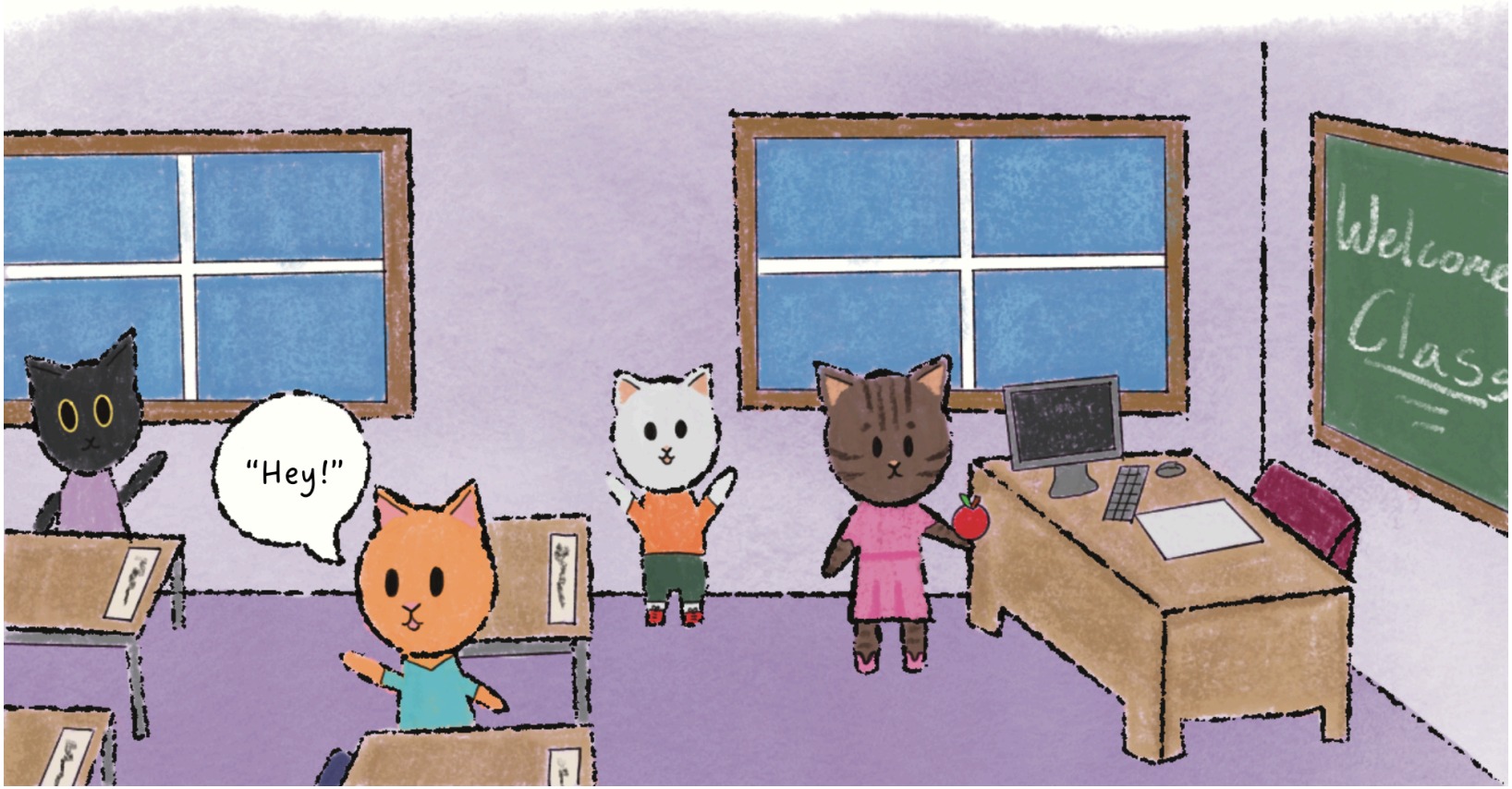
Kit raced down the stairs.

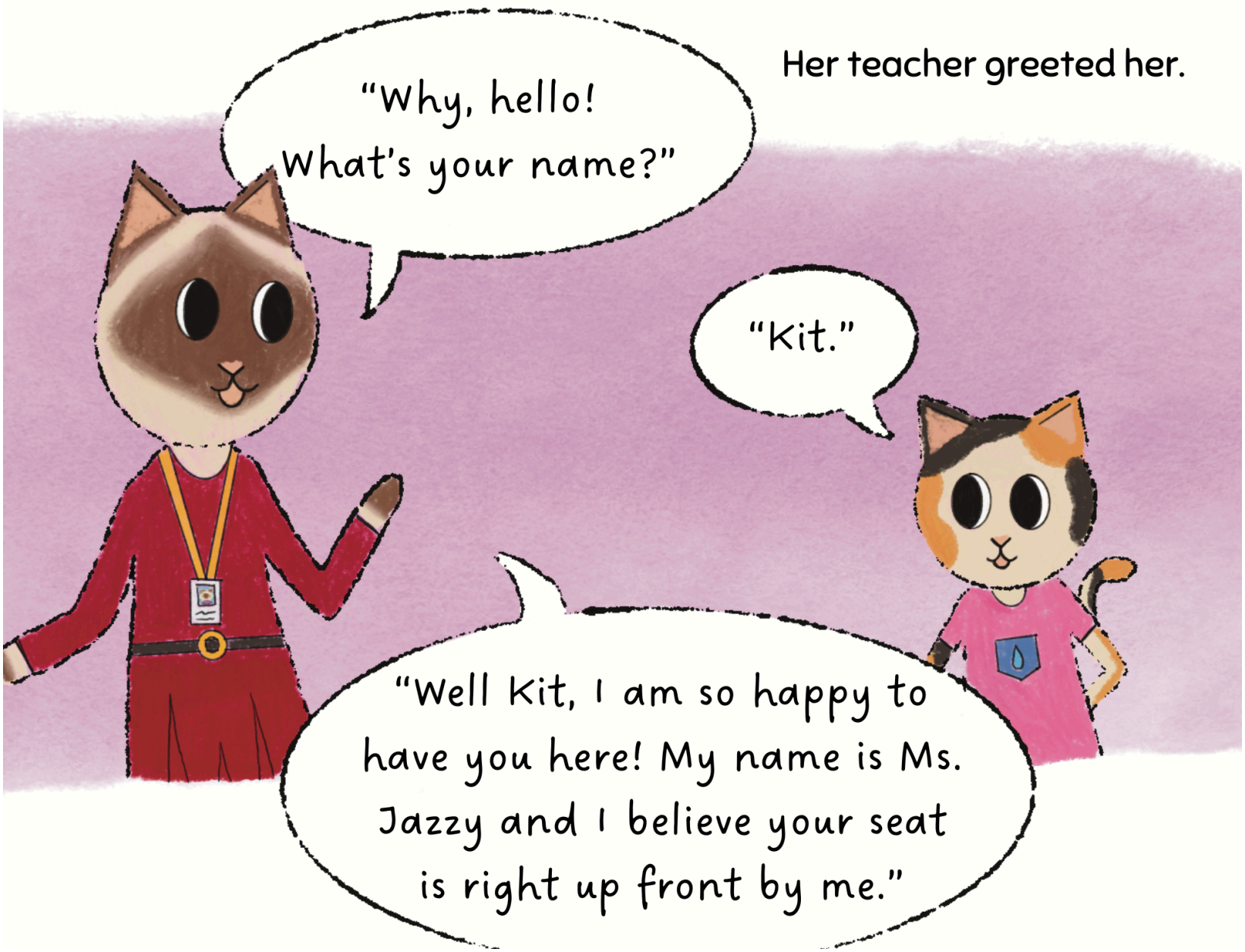

"Remember, make good friends, learn a lot, and try your best!"
Her mom kissed Kit on the forehead and sent her out to catch the bus.



The whole bus ride over, Kit tried her best to focus on her favorite parts of school.

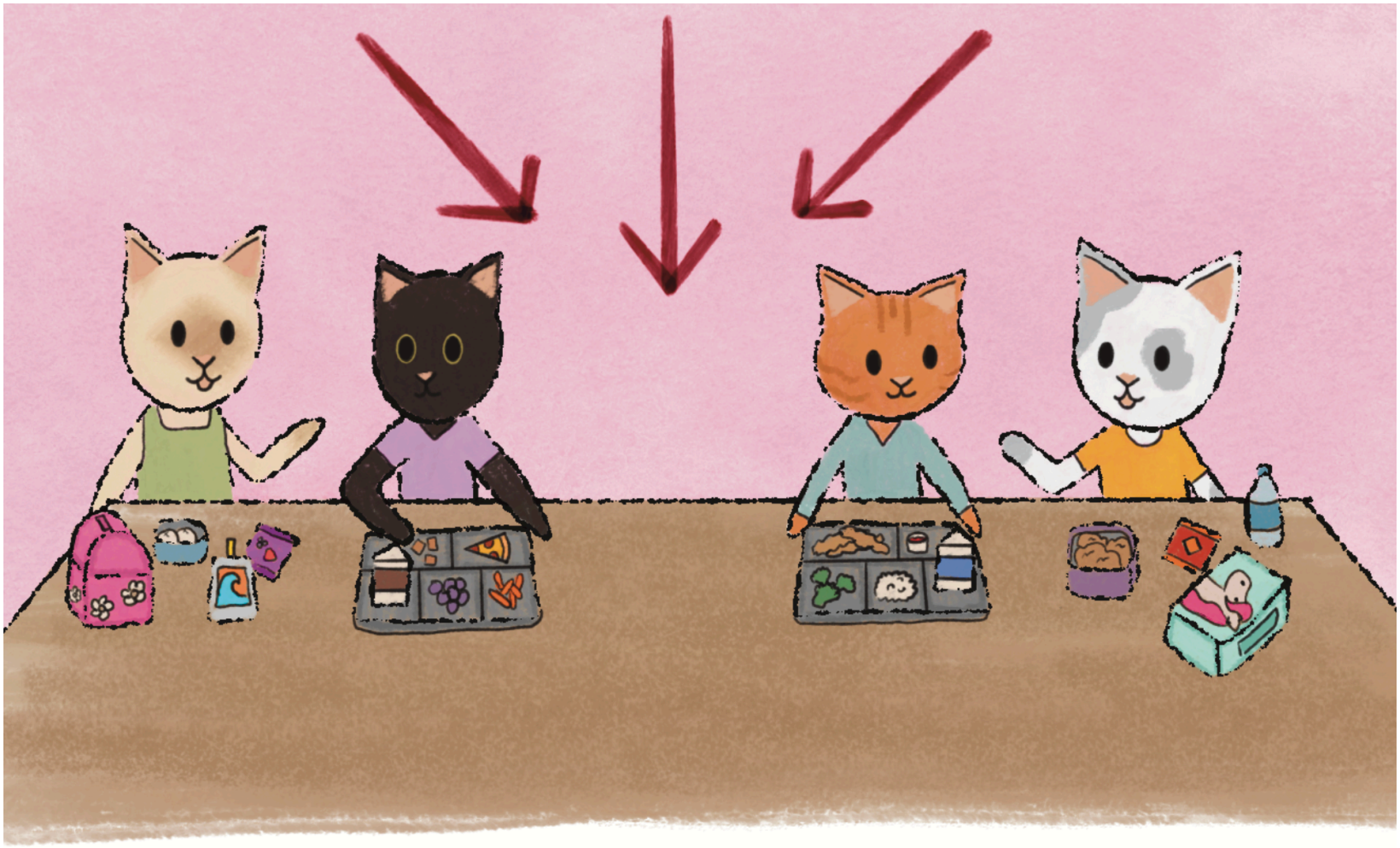
When she walked in the classroom, Kit didn't even know where to start! Kids ran around the room, catching up with friends they hadn't seen since last year.



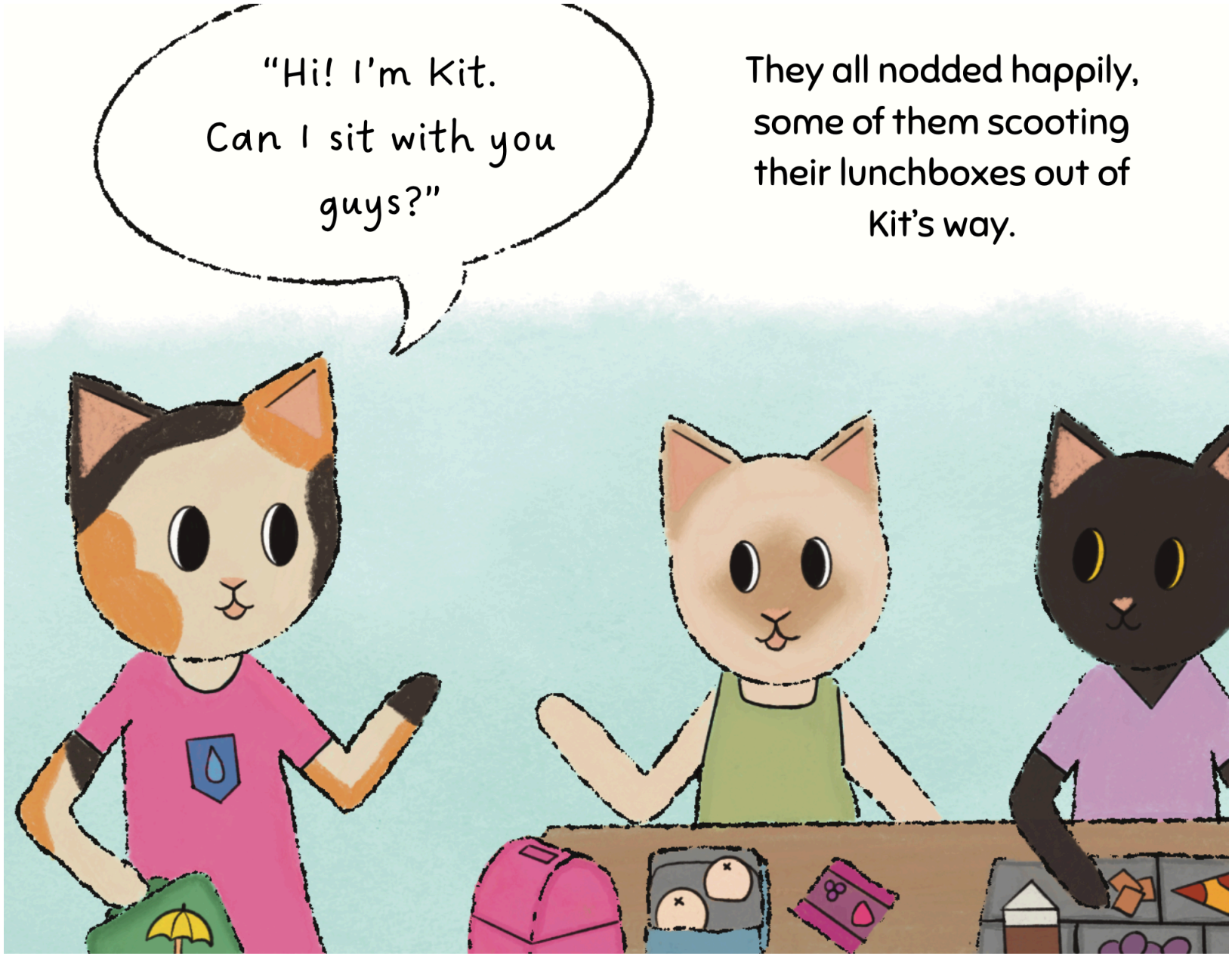

Her teacher greeted her.
"Why, hello! What's your name?"
"Kit."
"Well Kit, I am so happy to have you here! My name is Ms. Jazzy and I believe your seat is right up front by me."

The first part of Kit's day seemed to fly by as she dove into all the fun first day activities. It was already time for lunch when Kit decided she was ready to try making some friends.





As she walked into the busy lunchroom, Kit was feeling brave! She saw an empty spot next to a few of the kids from her class and decided she would ask to sit with them.

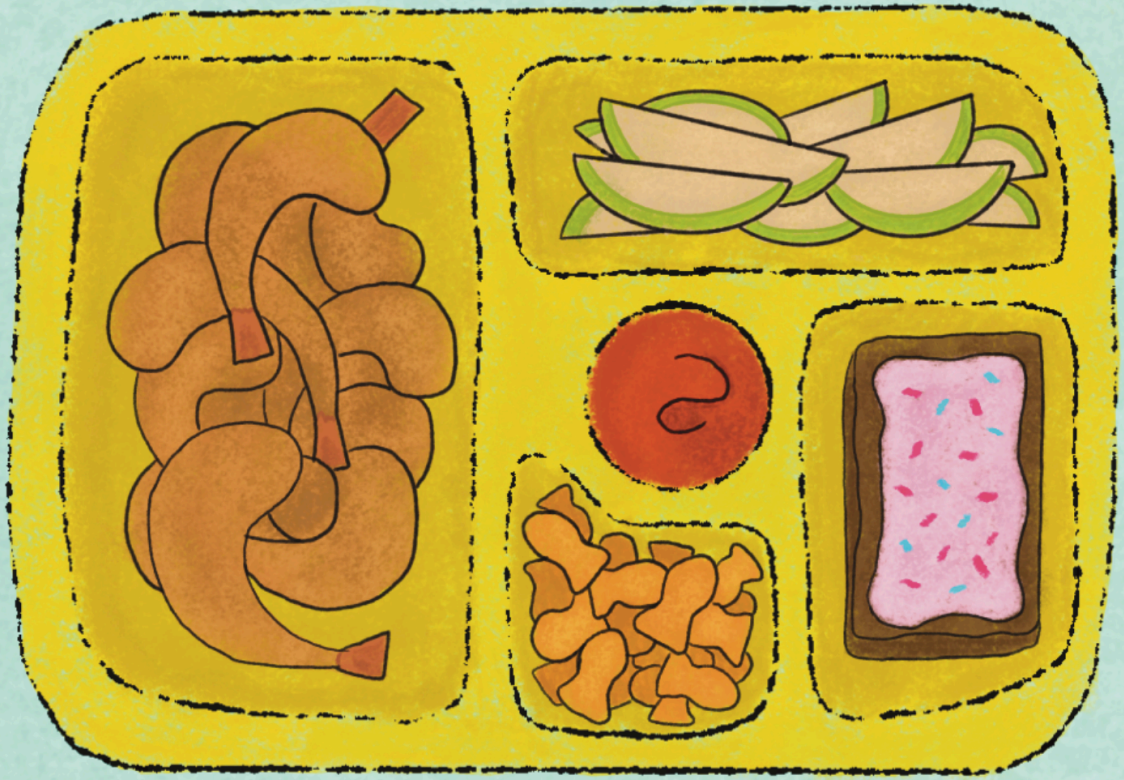

"Hi! I'm Kit. Can I sit with you guys?"
They all nodded happily, some of them scooting their lunchboxes out of Kit's way.



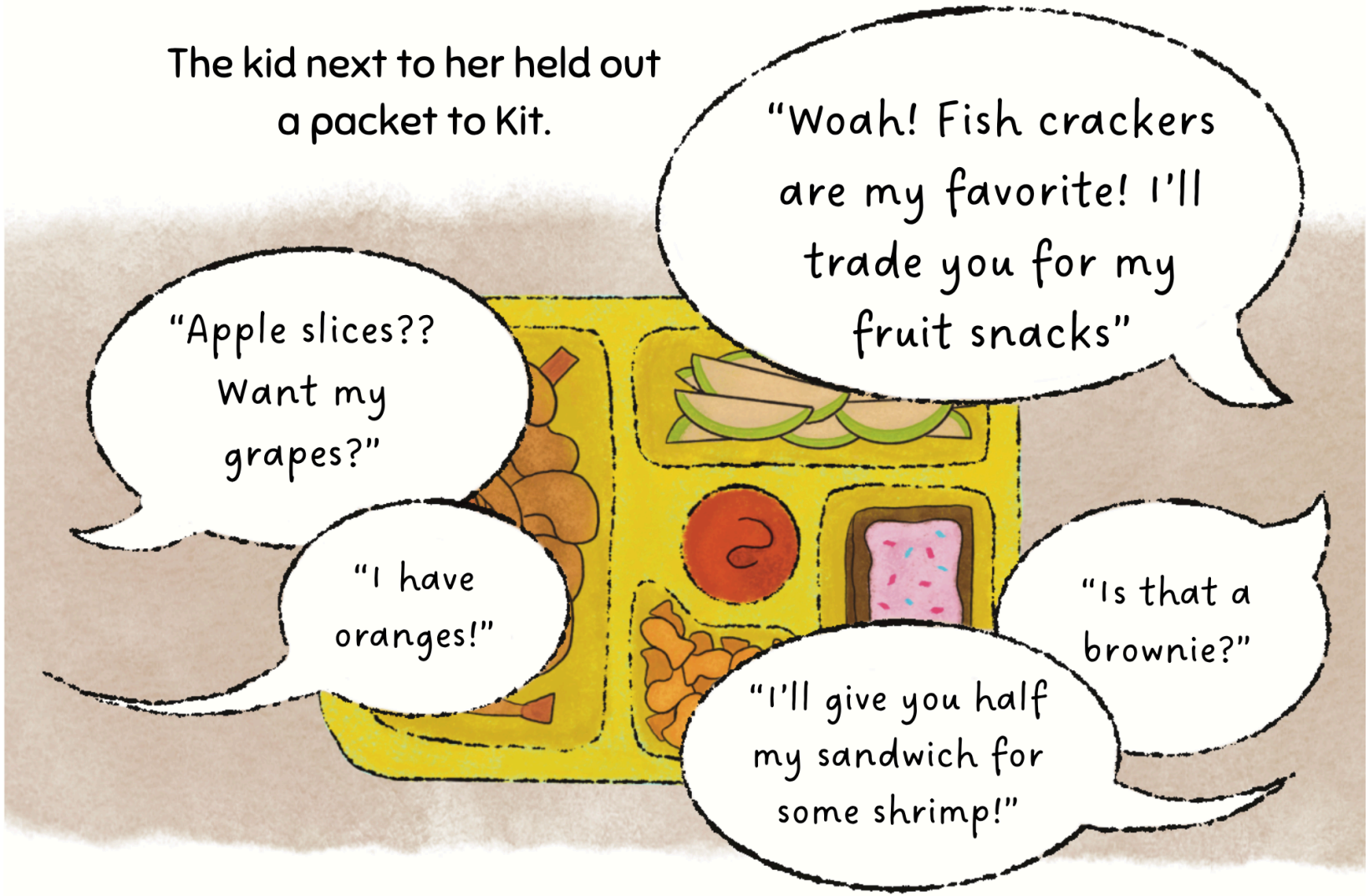
KIT WAS STARVING!

She couldn't wait to see what her mom had packed her for lunch.

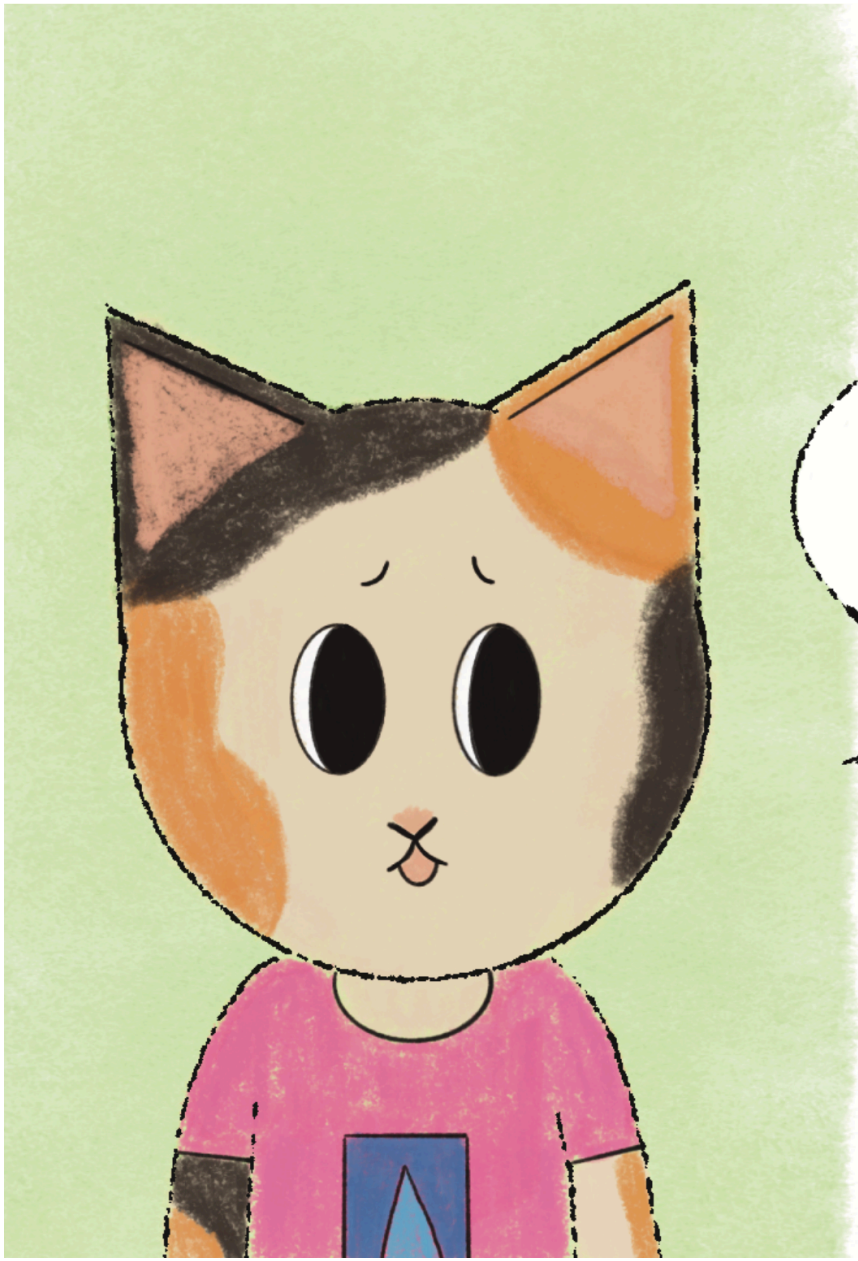
WOWEE!! Kit's mom has packed all of her favorites (most of them fish related) and a special dessert!



The kid next to her held out a packet to Kit.



Suddenly all of the kids were offering to trade, holding out their most prized lunch items.



Kit knew sharing was kind, but she couldn't bring herself to say yes.

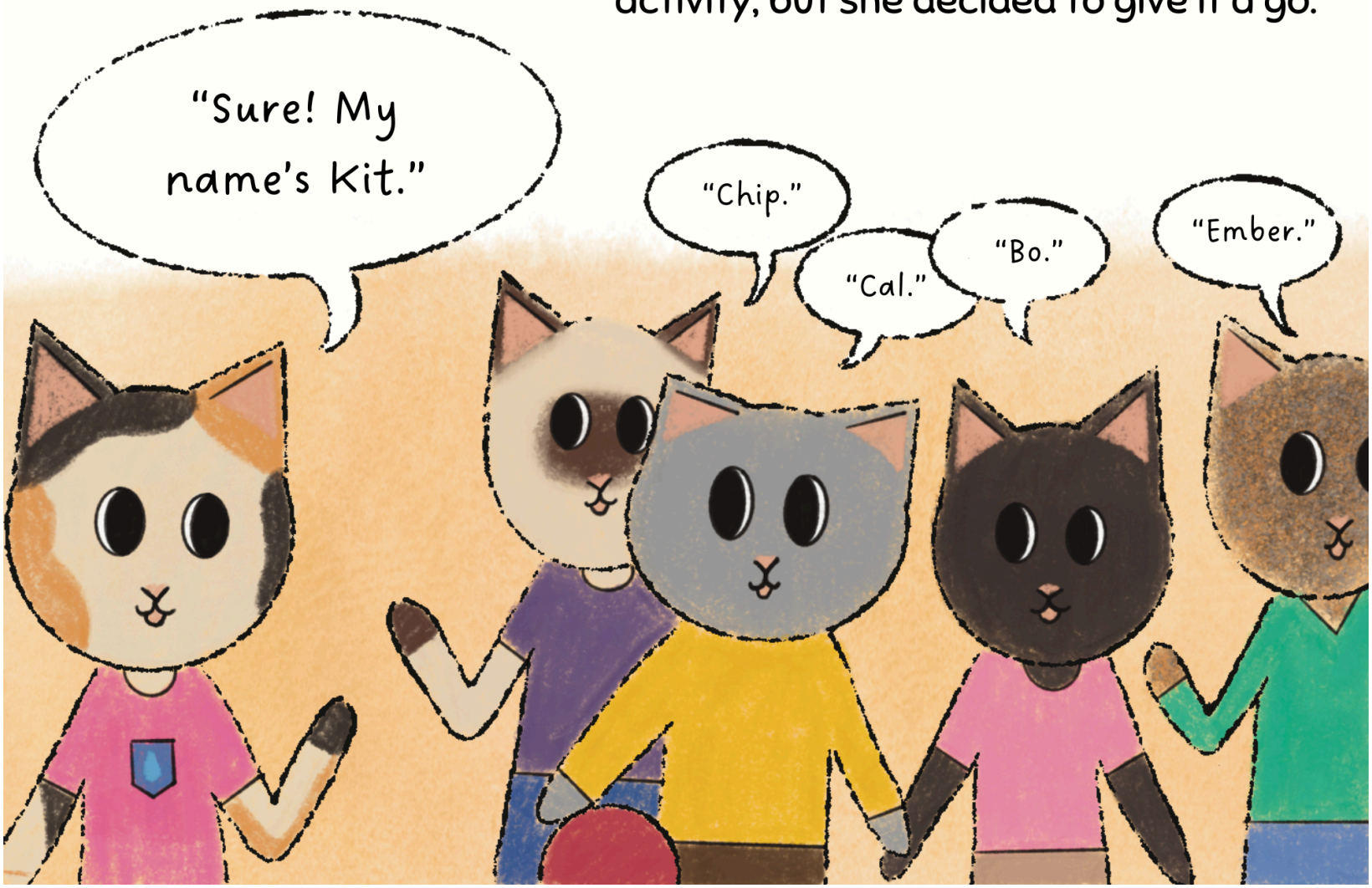
"Sorry, not today."

The other kids shrugged and swapped amongst themselves. She knew they weren't mad, but she suddenly felt very out of place.

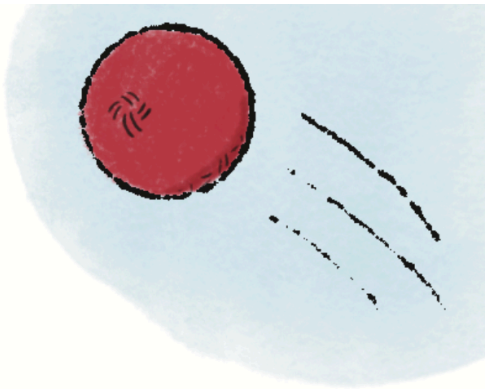
Kit was hoping her luck would be better at recess when she spotted a group of kids holding a ball and waving at her.

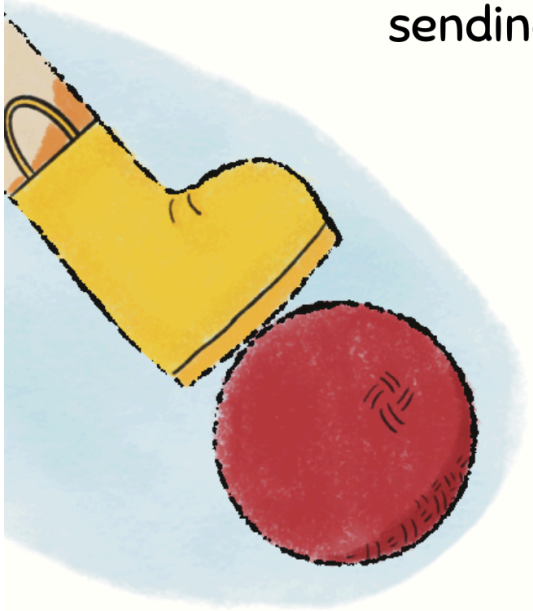


Sports weren't Kit's favorite recess activity, but she decided to give it a go.

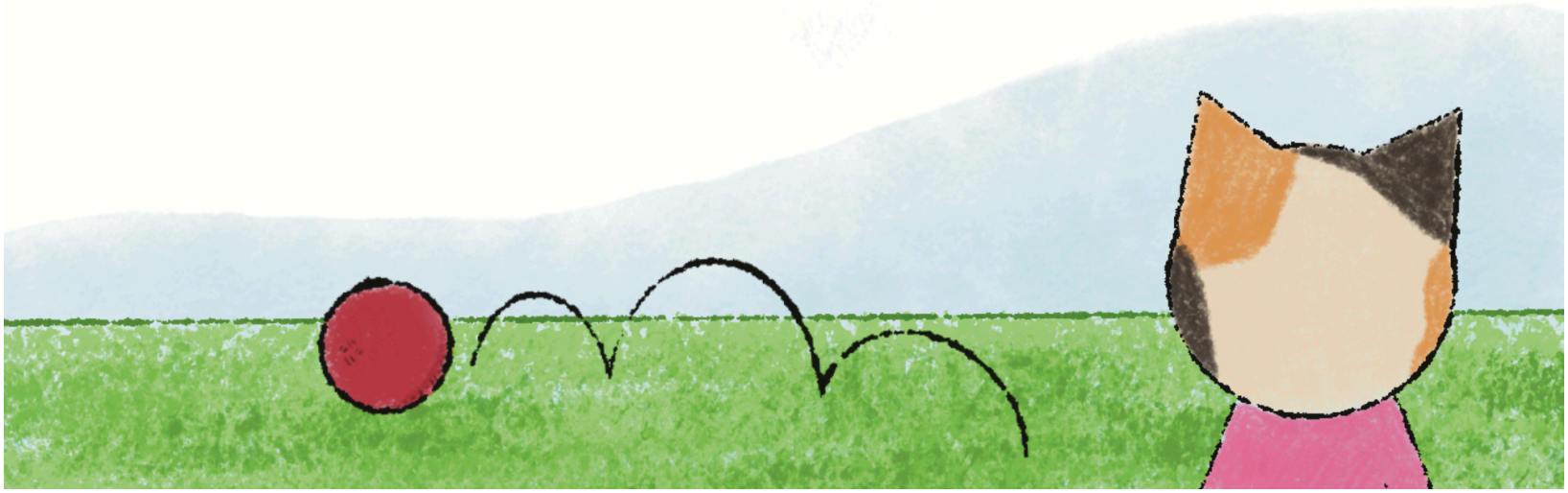


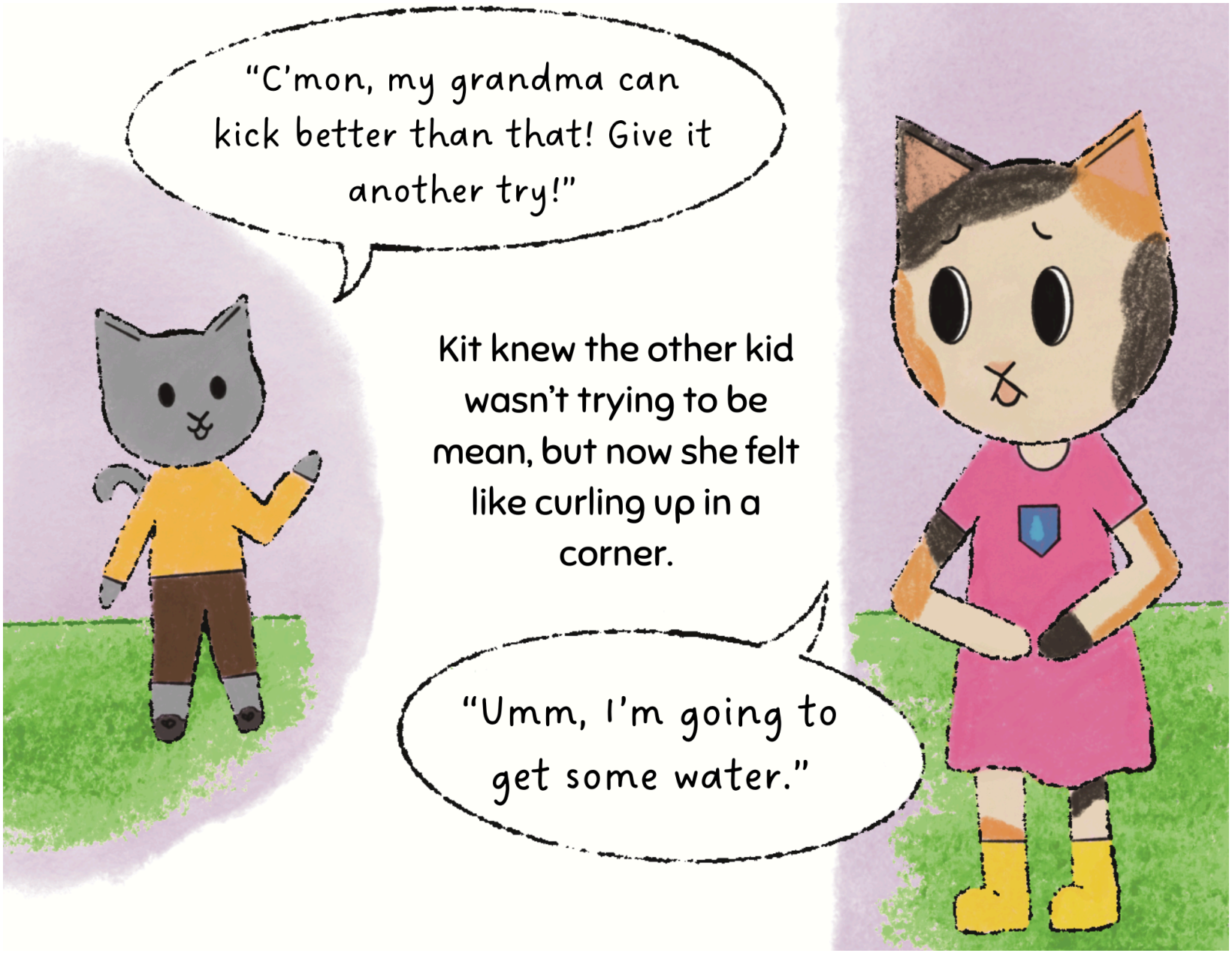
One by one, the kids took their turn,
sending the ball far into the field.
Now it was Kit's turn.

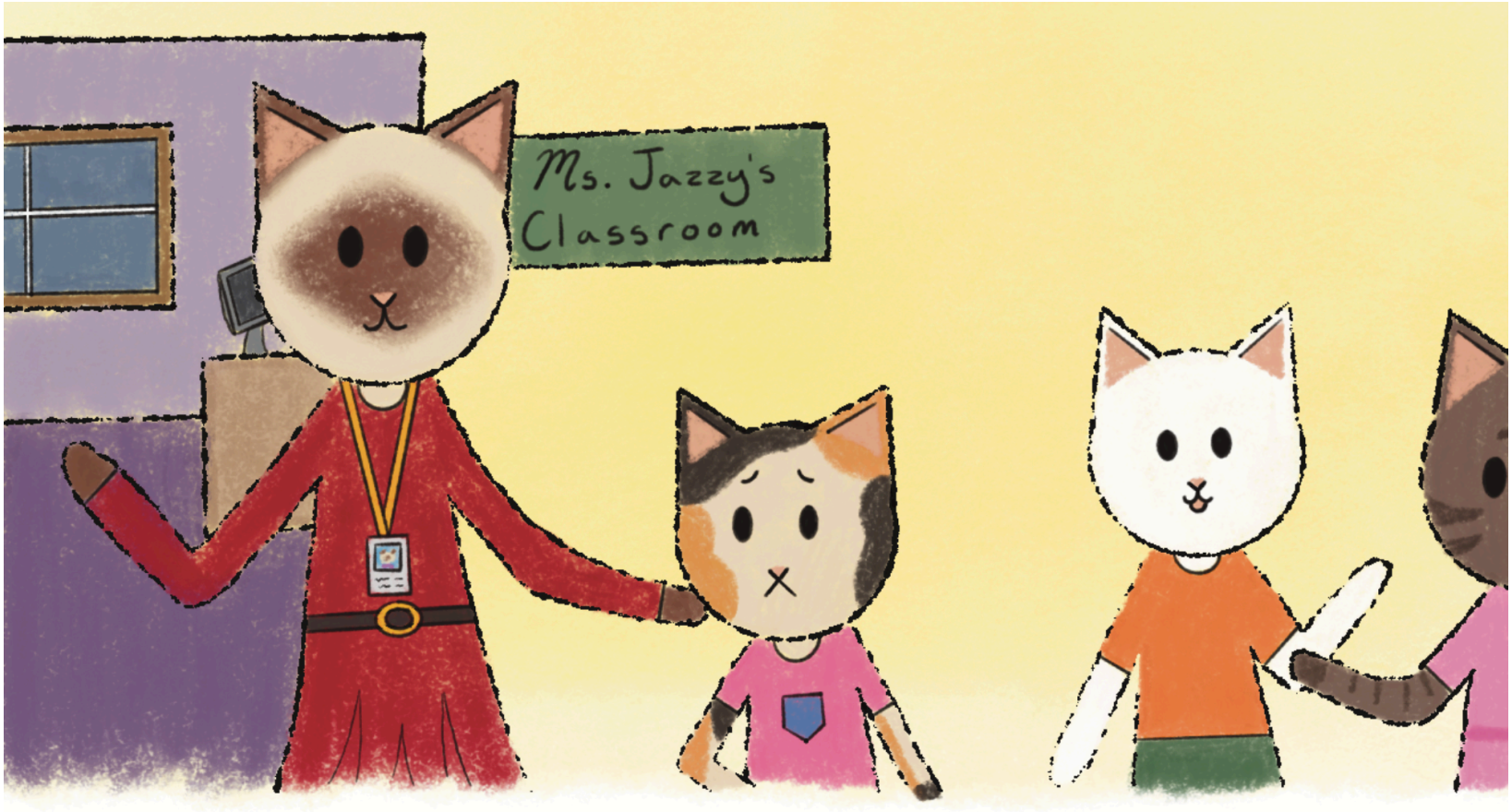




She shuffled to the plate, nervous to take her turn. As the ball rolled towards her, her foot barely scraped the top of the ball causing the ball to barely bounce to the side.

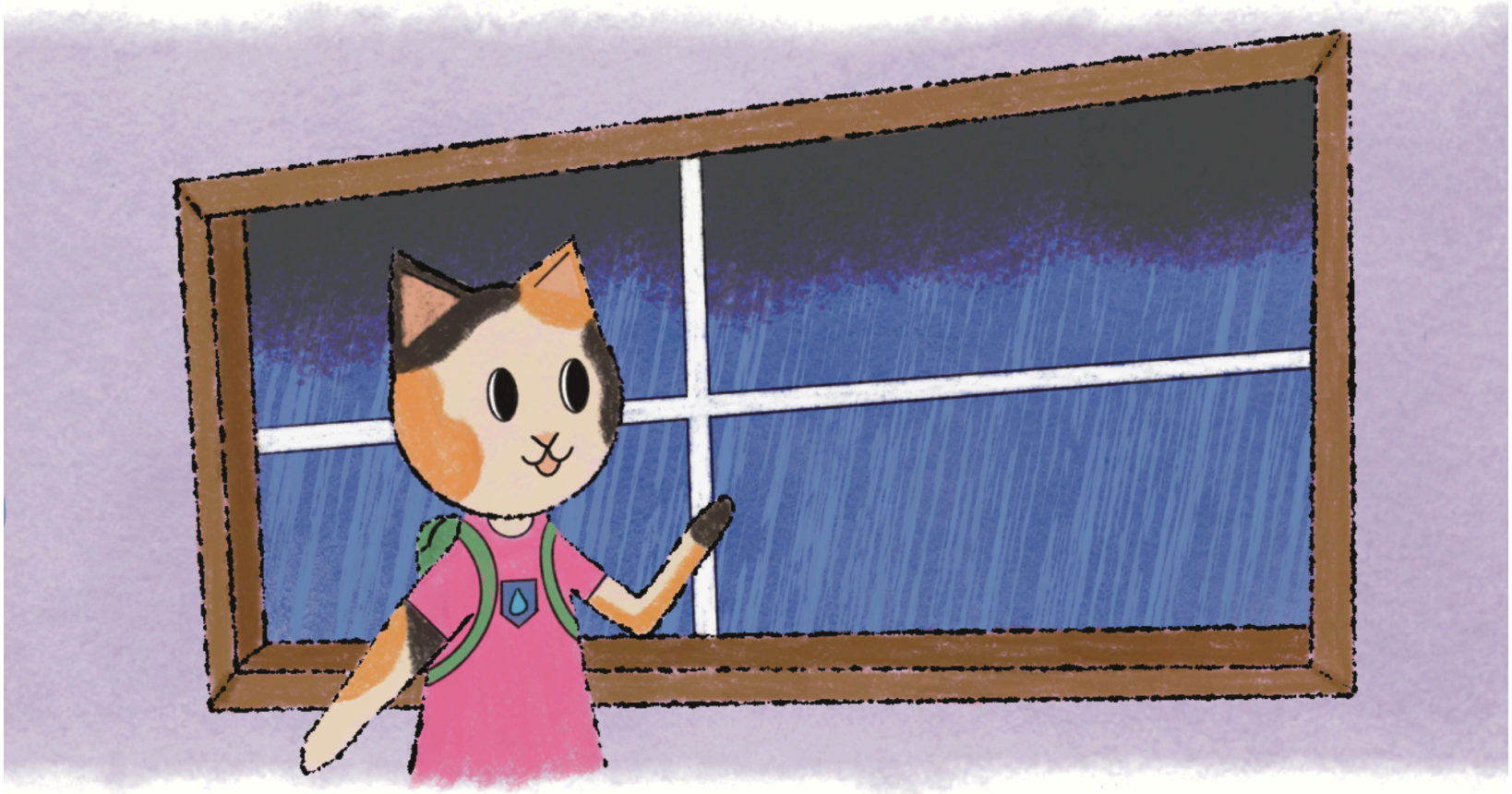



"C'mon, my grandma can kick better than that! Give it another try!"
Kit knew the other kid wasn't trying to be mean, but now she felt like curling up in a corner.
"Umm, I'm going to get some water."



As the recess bell rang, Kit walked back to the classroom feeling defeated. All of the kids she had met were nice, but she still hadn't found a group where she felt like she belonged.

By the end of the day, Kit was ready to go home when she heard . . .



RAIN!

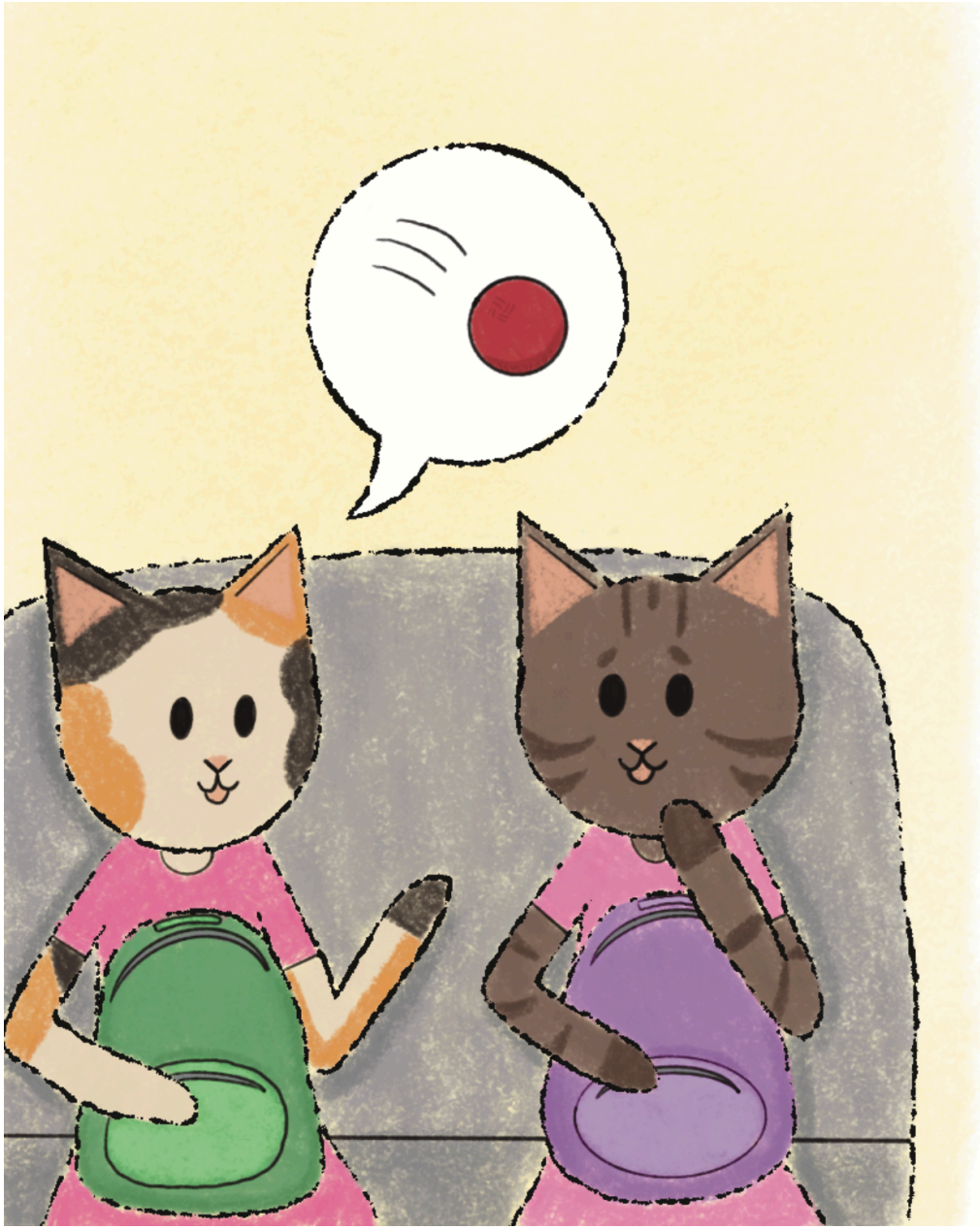
If there was one thing Kit loved more than school, it was rain!

As she raced outside to play while she waited for her bus, Kit saw some kids in colorful rain gear stomping around in the puddles. She slowly splashed her way over to them.



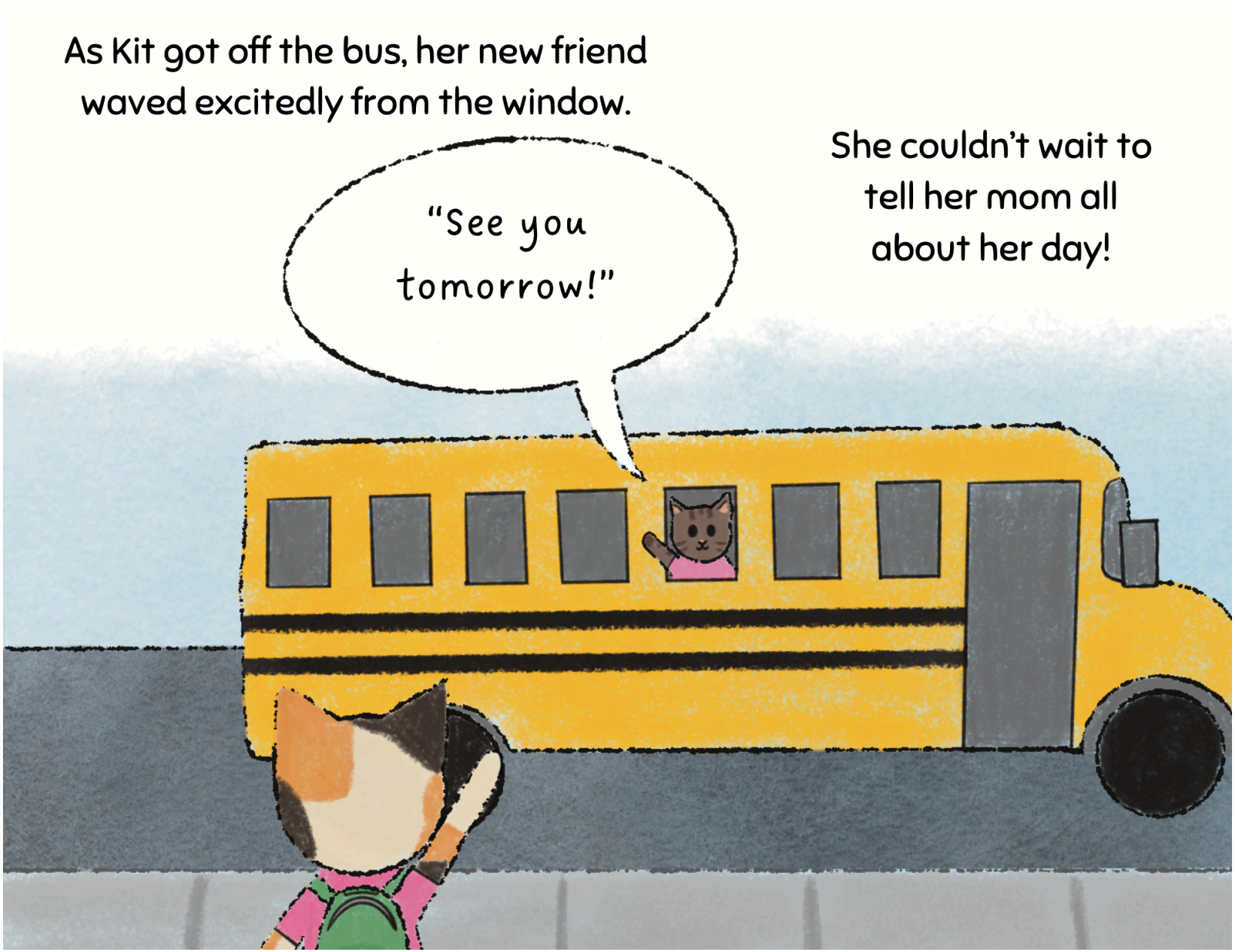


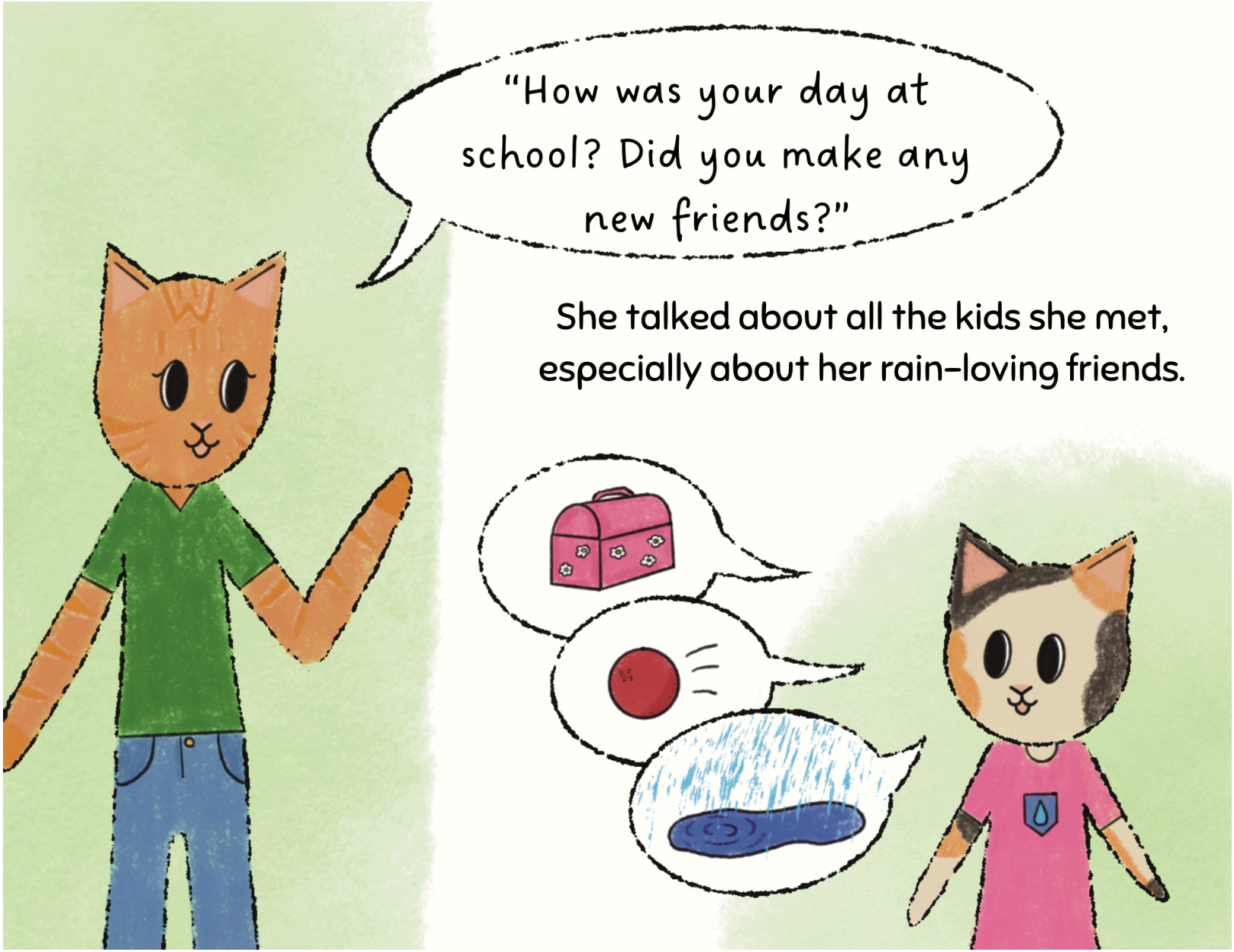
One of the kids greeted her as she walked up. Kit smiled big as they all jumped around in the puddles.



Kit sat next to the girl who invited her to play on the whole ride home.

They talked about their days and she felt like she had finally found the right friend and a place where she belonged.


As Kit got off the bus, her new friend waved excitedly from the window.
"See you tomorrow!"
She couldn't wait to tell her mom all about her day!

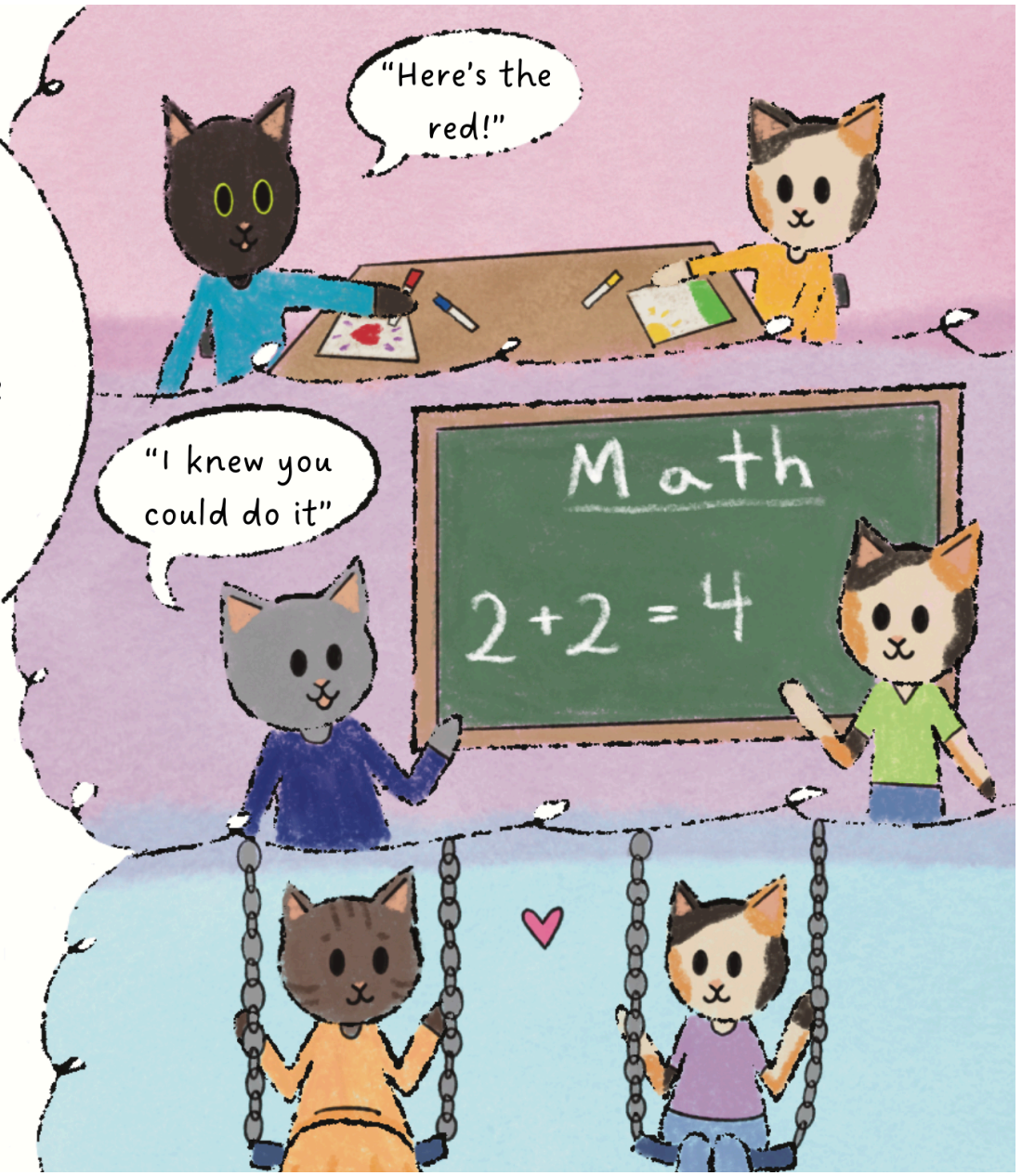


She talked about all the kids she met, especially about her rain-loving friends.

"Sounds like quite the day! I'm glad you found your group and I'm sure the other kids will be nice to have around too."

Kit was pretty sure too!

THE END!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR!



Kayla is an honors student at Western Oregon University and chose to write and illustrate this book for her thesis project. While she is majoring in psychology, art has always been a passion of hers, so creating this book felt like a natural choice.

This story is loosely based off of experiences from Kayla's own life as she struggled to find the right friends. Kayla is now living happily ever after with her super cool best friends.

Reflective Essay

Writing Process

Before I could begin creating illustrations, I needed to develop the structure and content of the story I was telling. I knew I wanted the experiences of my character to somewhat mirror my own personal friendship struggles, but I would need to condense them into a few core concepts that were digestible to a younger reader. I decided that these core topics would be covered through different groups encountered by the main character. I reduced my experiences to three distinct concepts: feeling used, feeling degraded, and feeling accepted.

My original concept for the book included the main character, Kit, interacting with and reflecting on these experiences with different friend groups over the course of a week. However, as I began to write out the story, it just felt too drawn out and repetitive. As I have never written or illustrated a children's book before, my original concept felt like much larger of a scope than I was able to handle, especially on top of my classwork. I ended up reducing the timeline of the book to a single day to make the project more realistic and manageable.

As I wrote the scenes I also jotted down ideas for illustrations associated with certain pages. While some pages brought immediate inspiration, others would be paired with visual concepts during my illustration process. As I knew that this draft would be edited when paired with the visual element, writing the manuscript went fairly smoothly. By the end of the writing process, I felt confident with the

direction the project was headed and knew it was time to move on to the illustrations.

Illustration Process

After completing the first draft of the written part of the book, I started working on creating illustrations for each of the pages. In taking what I learned from my artistic influences, I was able to develop a distinct style that perfectly fit the theme and audience of the book. I used an iPad and an illustrating software called Procreate to create my images for the book. In this software, there are a plethora of brushes, colors, and a multitude of settings to play with. As I wanted the illustrations to have a hand-drawn feel, I focused my attention on brushes that were designed to replicate physical mediums such as pencils, watercolor, and charcoal. I wanted it to have a sort of sketchbook feel to it so I used a brush which elicited the image of a broken pen line for the primary outlines in the images. I used bright colors with subtle shading to cater to the younger audience while making the illustrations feel somewhat three dimensional.

I started with a pencil sketch of each scene, which later gets erased once I get to the linework stage. The background uses a watercolor brush to create a soft, but colorful background. I chose to use a watercolor brush as I wanted the background to have some subtle texture without taking away from the image. I used two different pen brushes in order to create the linework for the illustrations, one that has the “broken” effect and a secondary that is a standard solid line. The

characters and a majority of the other elements are colored using a pencil brush to create the appearance of a colored pencil drawing. For the siamese cats throughout the story, I also used the blur tool in order to make a softer edge of where their two different fur colors blend together. For illustrations that included asphalt, grass, clouds, or rain, I strayed from my typical brushes in order to create unique textures. For the ground textures such as the grass and asphalt, I used brushes designed to emulate oil pastels for the stippled and grainy texture they created. For the rain clouds, I used a charcoal brush to get the soft edges with a creamy and solid color. The rain was created using a brush from the "grunge" that created short, varied, and textured vertical dashes as you drew. I would draw one line and then use the transform tool in order to stretch them out to be longer lines. Combining all of these elements together really helped bring my vision to life and I felt really satisfied with the style it created.

When it came to designing the main character, Kit, I wanted to make sure that she felt like she stood out from the rest of the characters. While she needed to be easily identifiable, she also needed to be easily replicable as she would be on almost every single page of the book. I decided to use cats as they are fairly simple animals to draw and easily recognizable for young children. Cats are also quite expressive with their ears which I knew I could use to help further express and communicate Kit's emotions with a simpler illustration style. I went with giving her a calico cat design as the spots make her identifiable, but they are easy so repeat from scene to scene. As I wanted to stay fairly realistic to different cat

colorings and breeds, I knew most of the cats would be a solid color so I felt like the calico spots would help her contrast the other book characters. In creating her clothes, I wanted to have elements that tied into her personality. I included a lot of rain elements on her clothing and on her bags to elude to later scenes where the reader discovers that Kit loves rain. She wears bright yellow rain boots, has a little rain drop on the pocket of her dress, and has a little yellow umbrella on her lunchbox. I also opted to make her dress a bright pink color to help standout against the lighter backgrounds. By the end of the book, I felt like Kit really fit the role of the main character as her personality shone through on every page.

The next element of design choice came when I was ready to add words to the page. I wanted to pick fonts that emulated the children's book theme while still remaining readable. In order to have a wider variety of font choices, I uploaded my illustrations to Canva to add the textual elements. I chose to use a total of three different fonts which each served a different purpose. I wanted the dialogue to stand out on the page so I gave it a different font to the narration chunks. I also wanted to emphasize a couple of words across different pages of the book, so I wanted to find something that was a little bolder and would be able to draw the eye better. I chose a chunkier and rounder font that really meshed well with the playful elements of the illustrations. Any of the other text elements remaining in the book such as words on a chalkboard or poster were drawn in to make them more realistic. Adding in the text element after the illustrations made it much easier to manipulate the text to fit the space and to adjust the layout of the page. I

ended up feeling really good about the fonts that I chose and feel like they work together quite nicely and helped add to the aesthetic of the book. And just like that, I found myself staring at the complete pages of a picture book.

Publishing Process

Publishing this children's book had been an idea I was considering from the beginning, but after completing the illustrations, I knew I wanted to be able to create public access to this book. I decided to look into different self-publishing methods, preferably one in which the publisher printed via demand rather than me fronting a specific amount of books. I originally was planning to publish through Amazon's self-publishing service as I have known multiple people who have used this service; however, Amazon's service did not print books in the formatting ratio I required for my children's book. Their format options only included a true square or portrait while my book was designed in a landscape format.

After many long moments of frustration and research, I found a website called Ingram Spark which offers a similar self-publishing process to Amazon, but would actually make the book available to a larger variety of booksellers such as Barnes & Noble and Target. While its user interface isn't exactly as intuitive as Amazon's, I continued to work towards the publishing process working on book descriptions, cover designs, and pricing.

With publishing, comes creating additional illustrations and content for the book. I needed to include elements such as title pages, copyright text, as well as

some elective pages in order to make the formatting of the illustrations accurate to how I created them. For my spare pages, I chose to add in a “This book belongs to” page as well as a page about the author at the back of the book. Most of the pages just required adding text elements with a few small illustrations here and there, and my biggest obstacle was yet to come - the cover.

Despite working on this project for almost a year, creating the cover of the book, what it would most likely be judged by, completely stumped me. Although I had yet to share the full contents of the book with anyone, I turned to my roommates for help. I gave them a general description of the book and the concept of the character and told them to shoot for the stars. I sketched out their ideas and one of my own which was inspired by their concepts, and picked my favorite. After a struggle of finding the correct template for the Ingram Spark publishing process, I started to finalize the elements of the cover, realizing that I was once again stumped by the back cover. Pushing through some intense artists' block, I created a cover which represented the content of the book, and after juggling it through a couple different softwares, it was finally complete with text and its own barcode.

Once I had completed all of my different elements and worked my way through Ingram Spark’s steps, the book was off to be proofed. There were a few clerical errors I had to work through, including resolving any clarity issues for the illustrations. I eventually received a digital proof from IngramSpark and approved it just days before the publication date I had set for the book. I ordered my own

copy of the book to ensure that the book was up to my standards and did not have any printing errors before sharing it with the rest of the world. On May 26th, 2026, I got to hold my picturebook in my hands for the first time, flip through the bright pages and share it with my closest friends and family. It was perfect. Well, perfect enough for me. After soaking it in for the day, I shared the purchasing link as well as some pictures of the book on my art Instagram account, effectively allowing the rest of the world, or more realistically, my friends and family, to finally order their own copy. I have currently confirmed that not only is my book available to purchase through Ingram Spark's website, but also available through Barnes & Noble and Amazon. It is so surreal to see my book and name on these websites and could not be more proud of the project I have created.

Future Considerations

After completing this project, I have been thinking a lot about if I would ever create any more children's books or if I would eventually turn this into a series. For right now, my answer is maybe. As I am headed into the next exciting chapter of my life with starting graduate school in the fall, I find it hard to imagine having the time to dedicate to creating more books in my immediate future. That being said, I did really enjoy this process and could see myself investing time into this medium once again as more of a backburner project. I don't think that I would ever turn this book into a series as I feel very satisfied with Kit's ending, or if I did it would more closely resemble Kevin Hankes' mouse book series where the books follow different characters from the same world.

For now, I feel very satisfied with closing the chapter on children's literature alongside this chapter of my life. I feel very proud of the final product I was able to produce and can't believe I actually get to hold this book in my own two hands. I smile to think of all of the times I can read it to my nephews and to children of my own one day. Who knows, maybe one day it will reach some little kid who needed it as much as I did. But, even if it doesn't, I will forever be proud of Kit and her story.

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