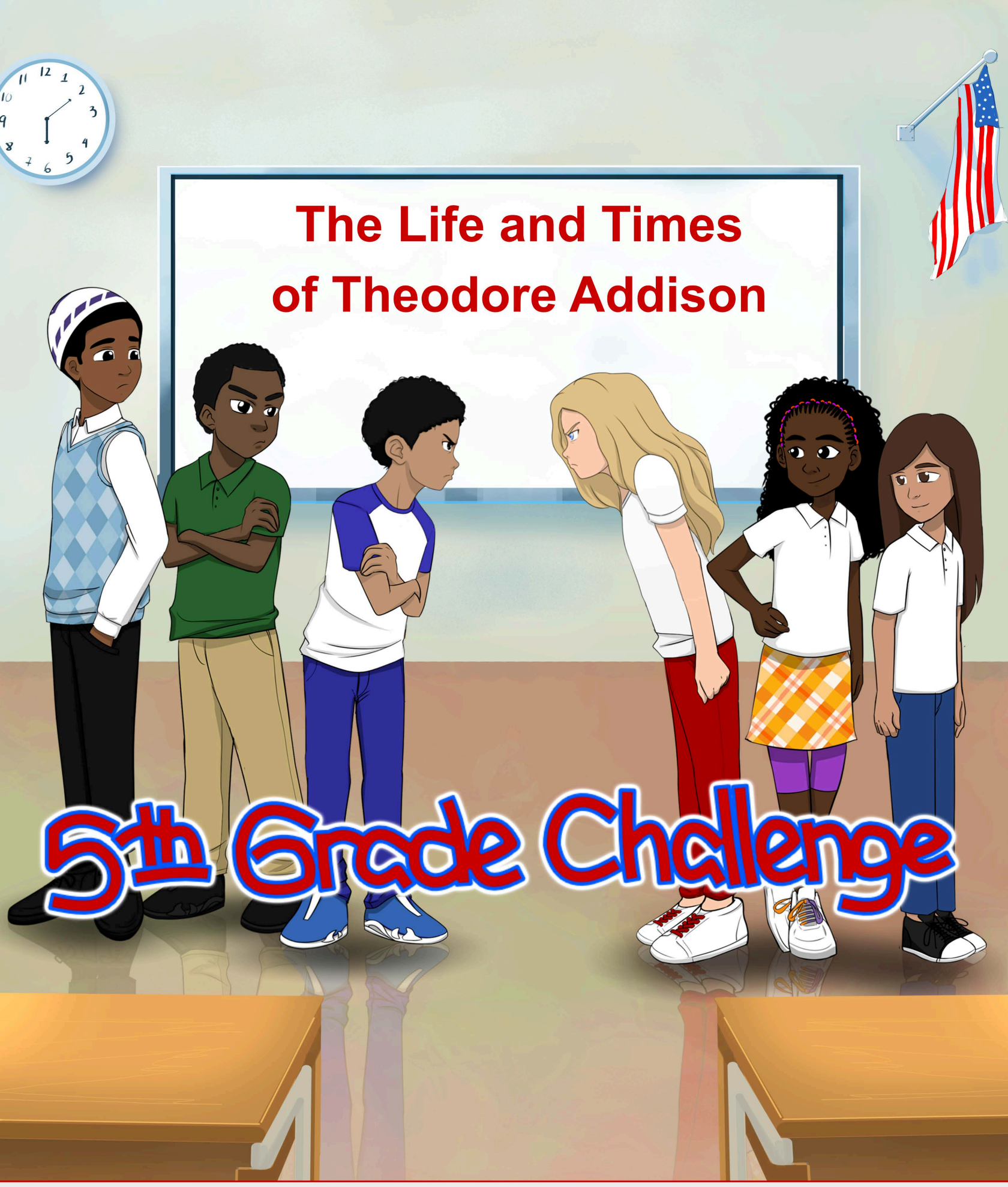


A Christian middle-grade novel series by Jamaal Fridge

The Life and Times of Theodore Addison: 5th Grade Challenge

By Jamaal W.M. Fridge

© 2024, All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law.

DEDICATION AND DOXOLOGY

Dear Lord,

Back when I was a teenager, you inspired me to create video games. But You didn't reveal Yourself to me yet. You let me go on my own course for a few years. Then You inspired me with a unique game idea that had You in it! I was overwhelmed at the thought of what it would take to represent You correctly, so I turned to the Bible. But I didn't understand it. So you brought me to Chris, and You used him to teach me. I thank You that You didn't beat me over the head for all the things I did wrong in my life. Instead You gave me purpose. You took my dream and used it for building Your kingdom. You changed my heart and life. You guided me this way and that, taking me as far as China in pursuit of Your purpose. You taught me that I could rely on You, that I didn't have to worry, because You would take care of me.

Lord, You took my life story and background and juxtaposed it with the negative stereotypes I normally would've been saddled with. A black boy from Chicago. With an absent father. Poor. A lazy student. Named Jamaal. (I even have the ghetto double-a. (And I love it.)) Everything in my background would make others assume the worst about me. But You, Lord, endowed me with intelligence, creativity, and most of all, dignity. You are sovereign, and You pay no mind to outside appearance or even outside circumstances. Who You bless, no one can curse. What You open, no one can shut.

Since I couldn't yet afford to make the games a reality, I've got to do something with this creativity You gave me. So the stories You inspired me with, I'm going to start putting out as books. It was the same series You inspired me with that drew me to You. And I hope I'm just the first of many these stories bring to You. It's my honor to be chosen by You for this work. I can't imagine where my life would be if I didn't meet You. But I'm glad I did. Thanks for always being there for me. I will live my life in service to You. So, I dedicate to You this book.

Your eternal son,
Jamaal W.M. Fridge

CHARACTERS



Theodore "Ted" Addison — A 10-year-old genius who moved to Miracle City, a large metropolis in the Midwestern United States, early in 5th grade after dealing with bullying at his former school. Moving gave him a chance to shed the "bad kid" image he'd been developing when fighting his bullies. When he arrived, he and his classmates helped him defend the city from a terrorist attack. (These are the events of another book, **The Life and Times of Theodore Addison: My New Home.**)

Ted loves engineering and pairs his curiosity with his handyman skills to make new inventions. When he gets advice, Ted likes to sit down and think it through completely. It can, therefore, take him quite a while to make decisions. He can be quite mischievous, as well, but he doesn't tend to be mean-spirited.

Veronica Teal — Veronica moved from Ontario, Canada about a year ago, when her parents decided to do mission work in the US. This move put a lot of pressure on her because she wasn't sure how she would be received in America. She adopted a tough exterior to command the respect of her classmates. On the inside, she can be friendly, loving, and loyal, though only a few get to see that side of her.

She is Ted's foil. She helped him during the terrorist attack, but because they got off on the wrong foot, they are not friends. While she is not as smart as Ted, Veronica is quick-witted, which she often uses to mess with him.



Derrick Read — Derrick grew up with Ted and later moved to Miracle City about a year before him, briefly straining their friendship. When he lived in his old hometown, Derrick learned martial arts to defend himself and Ted.

In his new school, he finally felt free to be his nerdy self without fear of bullying, and was elated when Ted's family later moved into his neighborhood. It would be just like old times...

Derrick loves to play video games, read comics, and help Ted with his inventions. His keen eye for detail often saves Ted's ideas before they crash and burn. Derrick tends to be serious and level-headed, but has a funny side few get to see.





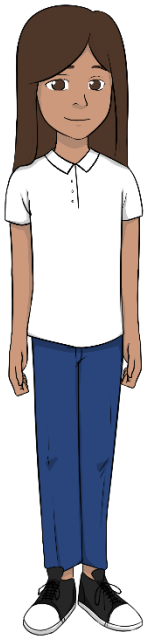
Diamond Forté — Diamond's family moved to Miracle City the summer before her 5th grade year after their juice business took off. After finding that they could pass their business down to Diamond, her mom especially tried to push her into accounting and business studies, but Diamond loves the arts, like music and dance. Unfortunately, her mom doesn't embrace those subjects.

She hit it off with Veronica when they both transferred into the school on the same day, and helped each other adjust. She isn't friends with Ted or Derrick, largely because of Veronica's influence, but she is not mean-spirited and tries to get along with everybody. Diamond often goes along with Veronica's pranks, but other times she'll dissuade her from doing something too devious.



Yaakov "James" Asefa — James moved to the United States from Israel about a half-year before 5th grade, due to Middle-Eastern strife. James' family is an Ethiopian Jewish family that believes in Jesus, making them "Messianic Jews". They faced discrimination because of their religious beliefs from other Jews who questioned the family's Jewish identity, but it was the rocket attacks that made the family move.

James has not adjusted well to America, and tends to self-isolate. If not for Ted and Derrick's insistence, James wouldn't have any friends. He has a hard time coming out of his shell, and hesitates to plant roots, because he expects his family to move again.



Ambrosa "Bookworm" Rodriguez — Bookworm was born and raised in Miracle City, and loves to read just about anything she can get her hands on, from presidential memoirs to funny adventure books. Because of her avid reading, Amber has encyclopedic knowledge and wisdom beyond her years.

She volunteered as a host for new students at orientation before the start of 5th grade, where she met Veronica, and they soon became friends. But after Veronica found her social circle, Amber got cut out. To make matters worse, Veronica sometimes even made fun of her. This drove her even more to her books, which served as a distraction from the pain of loneliness.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

	monophthongs (1-part sounds)				diphthongs (2-part sounds)				
Vowels	ɪ ship	i sheep	ʊ look	u Luke	ɪə here	uə tour	ɛə hair	aə far	ɔə score
	ɛ extra	ə ago	ɜ bird	ɔ on	ɛi wait	ɔi boy	ai my		
	æ cat	ʌ up	a spot	ɒ caution	ʌu show	æu cow	Midwestern Phonemic Chart		Jamaal Fridge
Consonants	p pop	t two	θ thin	k carry	f fairy	s sip	ʃ mission	tʃ change	h hello
	b Bob	d do	ð this	g Gary	v very	z zip	ʒ vision	dʒ change	
	m math	n nice	ŋ sitting	j you	l little	r river	w west	unvoiced voiced	

This is the Midwestern Phonemic Chart. I made this during my time teaching English in China to help students learn how to pronounce words in the Standard American accent. It's a little different from the official IPA phonemic chart, especially the vowels, because I wanted to match the pronunciation symbols (phonemic symbols) with the American accent instead of the British accent. I'll be using these throughout the book for tough words that young readers might not know, along with the definitions so they won't always have to put down the book to grab a dictionary.

THURSDAY

It was a normal April day for Theodore's 5th-grade class. Well, if by 'normal' you mean 'days-long silent warfare' that the teachers didn't seem to notice. The boys and girls had been quietly pulling pranks on each other, shooting spitballs and popping rubber bands on their rivals. No one could speak up and tell the teacher because it was basically a sign of defeat when the adults got involved. All one could do was get even, quietly.

The students were just finishing lunch, and lining up to head back upstairs for their afternoon classes. Next would be Math, followed by PE, the boys' favorite, and Social Studies.

"Mr. Gibson, can I go to the bathroom before class?" Diamond asked as she raised her hand in line.

The teacher nodded his head, asking her to hurry up since they were already waiting for Veronica. Diamond rushed off to the ladies' room and set her books on a small table by the bathroom entrance.

"Did you bring the pouch?" Veronica asked, stepping out of the stall with an inflated whoopee cushion in hand.

Diamond pulled the flat, green pouch from between her books, saying, "I did, but are you sure he won't notice this? I'd notice it."

"It looks just like the seat," Veronica said as she stuffed the whoopee cushion into the pouch. "He doesn't look directly at his seat before he sits down. We're go on this."

"You really study that boy, don't you?" Diamond asked, winking.

"Don't start, DeeDee, you know it's not like that."

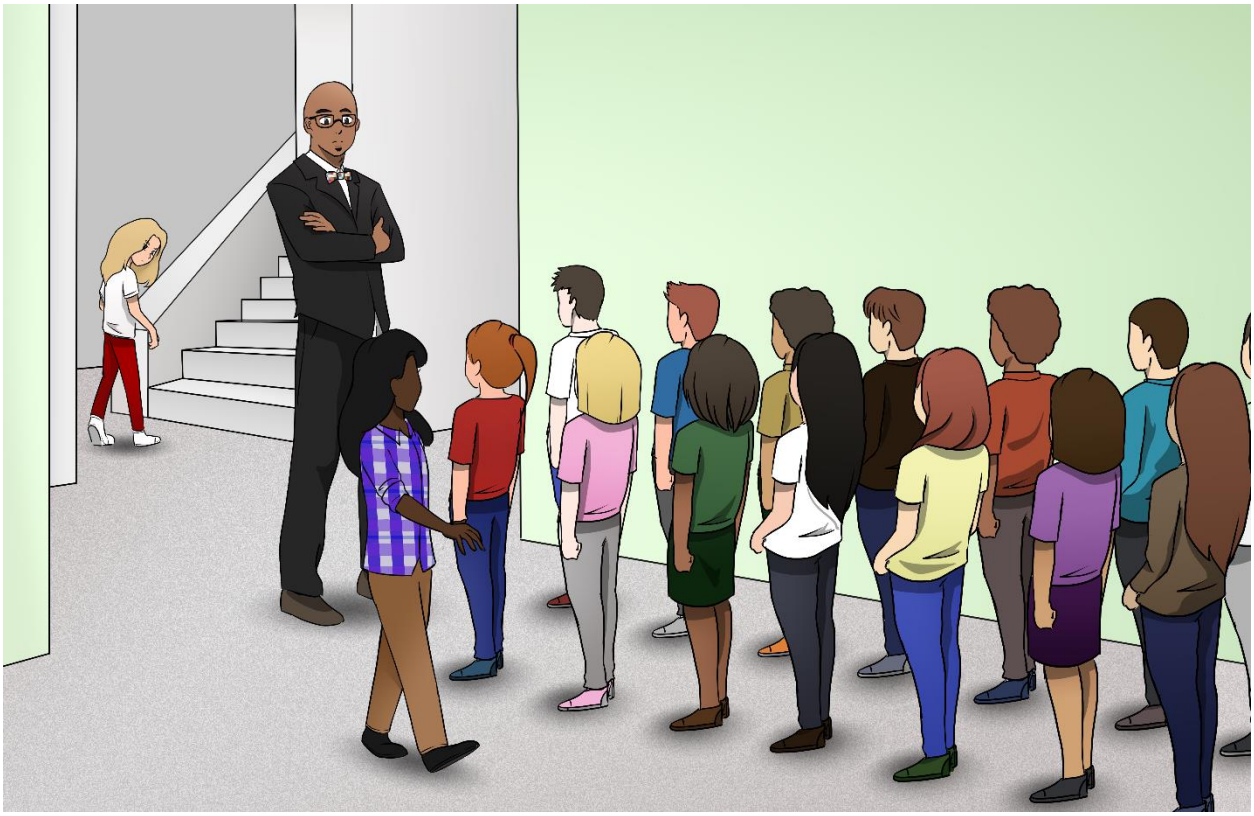
"Seriously, though, are you sure you wanna use this way to get back at him? Once you go loud, the gloves come off."

"Cool, they come off then. I'm ready. You know what they say, revenge is a dish..."

"Best served cold," Diamond finished as she shrugged her shoulders.

Diamond left the bathroom, wiping her hands with a paper towel as if she had just finished washing her hands, and walked past the teacher.

"Sorry for the wait. I made it as quick as I could. But Veronica might need some more time."



As Diamond distracted Mr. Gibson, Veronica snuck past him and went upstairs into the classroom. She found Ted's seat and set the whoopee cushion pouch on it, and snuck back down a different way. When she got back, she also apologized to the teacher for taking so long, and the teacher led the class back upstairs, none the wiser.

When they arrived, Ted set his books down on his desk and immediately noticed the pouch on his chair. There was something inside it, he could tell.

"Veronica's at work again, I see. It's cool. Take the little L, get the big W," he thought.

Ted sat down, and the long, loud, flatulent[1] sound filled the room. Everyone froze until the last of the air left the cushion, then the class erupted in laughter as they all pointed at him.

"GOTCHA!" Veronica victoriously yelled as she high-fived Diamond.

Ted then pulled the pouch from under him as if he was annoyed, and the teacher saw what really happened. "Real original, Veronica."

"So *that's* what this was about, you two? You wasted all this time over some silly prank? Alright, fine. You wanna waste my time? I'll waste yours. No Gym class for you two. Take your seats!"

[1] Flatulent - ˈflæ ʧu lɛnt - Like the sound of a fart

The two girls were stunned. No warnings, no 3-step punishments. Automatic no Gym! Their plan was trashed since they were ready to prank all the boys in PE class.

They tried to appeal[2] his decision, asking for leniency[3] or even more homework, but the teacher refused. No Gym class and that was final. (Veronica loved PE more than the boys, but Diamond didn't care much for it.)

When they realized his mind was made up, they sat down, and Ted burst into laughter. He tried to cover his mouth as the teacher shot him an angry look, but he couldn't contain his laughter. The girls, of course, assumed he was laughing at their punishment, and turned around in their seats with annoyed looks on their faces.

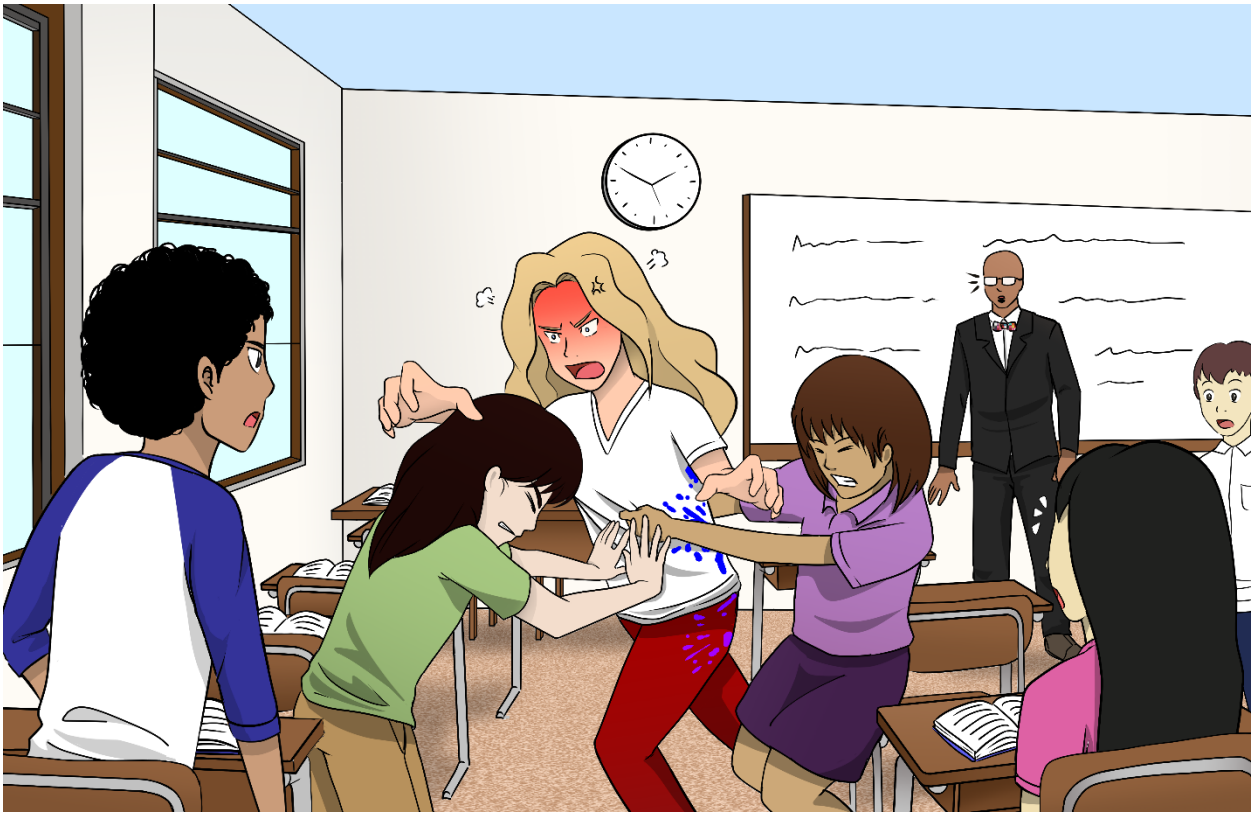
Fifteen minutes later, while the teacher's back was turned to the class, Ted passed a note across the room to Veronica.

"*You look better in blue. Or purple*," the note read.

Veronica turned the paper over, thinking there had to be more. She knew it was Ted's handwriting, so she looked at him, confused. He merely shrugged and turned back to his book.

Then it hit her. She stood up to check her clothes, where she found blue paint on her pants that made them look purple, along with blue paint on her white shirt. Ted turned and winked at her.

[2] Appeal - ə 'pil - To ask someone to rethink their decision
[3] Leniency - 'li njɛn si - Toleration and mercy



Blind fury rose in Veronica as she let out a piercing scream and charged at Ted, wanting to tear him apart. Several students had to hold her back until Mr. Gibson got to her and dragged her out of the classroom.

“YOUR SHIRT’S GONNA BE RED AFTER I’M DONE WITH YOU!!” she yelled while being carried out of the room.

Ted, now that he was safe from her, started to laugh, and high-fived Derrick. Diamond looked scornfully at Ted, taking her friend’s side, naturally.

“That was uncalled for, Ted. You know there’s gonna be consequences for this,” she said.

“You just better be glad I didn’t have more paint,” Ted replied.

Meanwhile, outside in the hallway, Mr. Gibson finally calmed Veronica down a bit, asking what happened and why she was so angry.

“Are you blind?! Look at me! Oh… and look at you…”

She noticed the paint on him as she showed the smears on her clothes as well. Mr. Gibson looked down and saw how much of that paint got on him when he carried her out. It was one of his nicer suits, now ruined.

As Mr. Gibson rubbed his fingers across the paint, as if he could clean his suit off that way, he stood in stunned silence, wishing this moment wasn’t real. After taking a breath, he poked his head into the

classroom and asked whoever else got paint on them to step outside with him. The three students who had tried to restrain Veronica left the room, and the first thing Mr. Gibson asked after closing the door was, “Who did this?”

Veronica immediately blamed Ted, but Mr. Gibson wanted witnesses. When the other students affirmed seeing Ted pass the note, Veronica asked him to look at the note directly.

“Just check the writing, you’ll know it was him!” she said, still high-strung[4].

The teacher stepped back into the room, picked up the note, looked at the writing, and gave Ted the “come here” finger gesture.

After closing the door behind Ted, the teacher, in front of Veronica and the three other classmates, launched into a tirade[5].

“This suit cost me $450. $450!! Do you have any idea how to get paint out of it?! Or out of the four other people’s clothes you may have ruined?! All this over some stupid prank that never seems to stop. Look at this mess you’ve caused!”

Ted was afraid to look in the eyes of his classmates or the teacher. He had never been so scolded by the teacher since he’d arrived. The prank had clearly gotten out of hand.

“Now, I’m going to take them downstairs to get a change of clothes. But as for you, I’m calling your folks. We need to have a parent-teacher conference today. And you can forget about PE class. When we get back, I want to see apology letters for everyone whose clothes you ruined. Corner desk against the back wall. Go.”

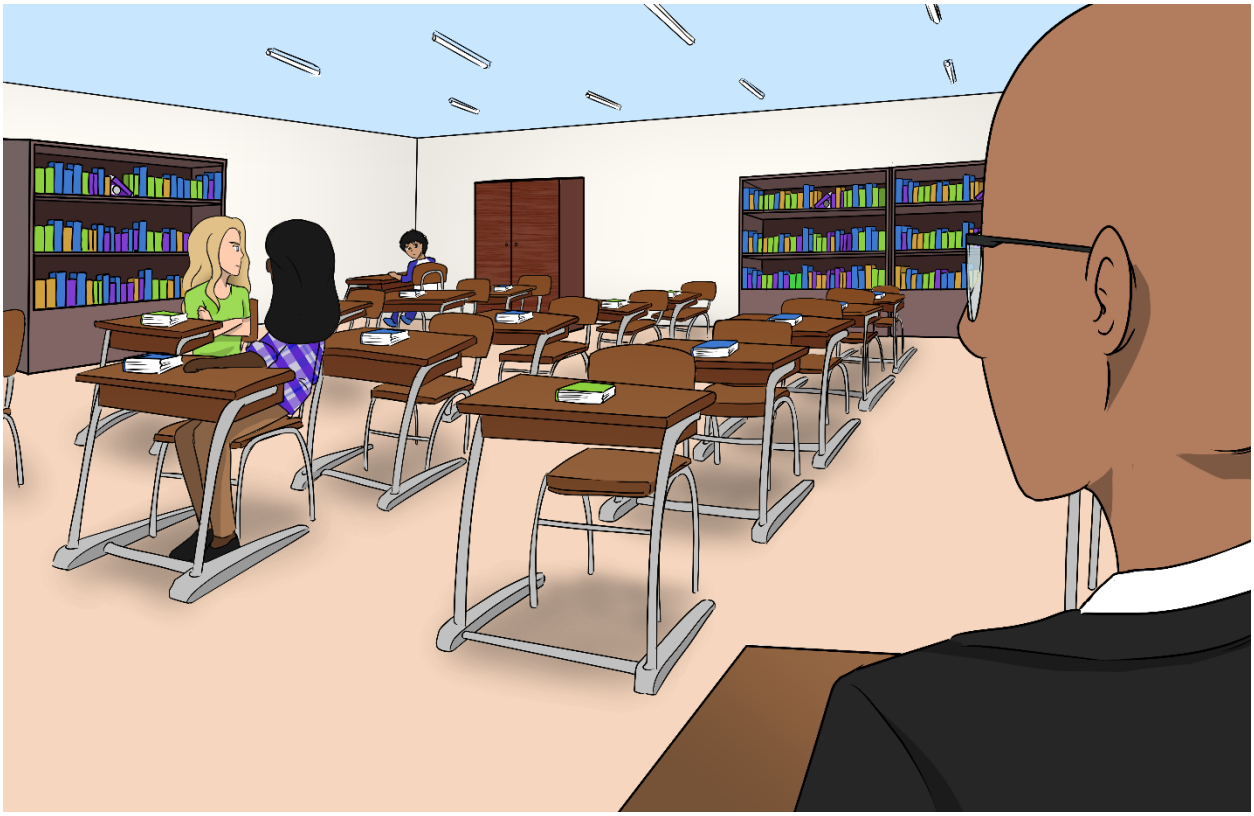
Another 20 minutes later, Mr. Gibson and the three students returned from the office. Veronica had to wear a spare pair of blue jeans and a lime green t-shirt. She walked back into the room, firing a scowl at Ted. As for Mr. Gibson, he had tried to change into a makeshift jogging suit, but it was a few sizes too small, and even his colleagues[6] in the office couldn’t help but laugh at him. He decided the stained suit was a far preferable option.

He also called Ted’s mom, asking her to come to the school, but Mrs. Addison was stuck in a meeting that would go for a few hours, so she asked Mr. Addison to go see the teacher, but didn’t detail the nature of Ted’s trouble. She just told him to get there ASAP[7] because their son was in trouble.

Back in class, while the other students were at PE, Ted was relegated[8] to the back desk facing the wall to write his apology letters. Veronica and Diamond had to stay behind, and weren’t allowed to talk. Mr. Gibson tried calling different dry cleaners, hoping they could get paint stains out of his suit, but each one said he’d have to come in immediately to have a chance. He couldn’t leave for several hours, though, dooming his suit.

---

[4] High-strung – hai stʃrʌŋ – emotional; on edge
[5] Tirade - ‘tai rɛid - A long, angry speech
[6] Colleagues - ‘ka ligs - Coworkers
[7] ASAP - As soon as possible
[8] Relegated - ‘rɛl ə gɛi tɪd - Assigned to a lower position



As Mr. Gibson sighed and leaned back in his chair, he heard a muffled voice coming from the back. Ted had his head on the desk as the teacher asked him to repeat himself.

“I said it’s a water-based paint. It’ll come out,” he said a smidge louder, his head still on the desk.

Mr. Gibson jumped back on the phone and called the dry cleaners to inform them the paint is water-based, and they told him it would be no trouble to clean. After hanging up, he breathed a sigh of relief and said, “Thank goodness.”

Then, turning his attention to Ted again, Mr. Gibson said, “Since you’ve got your head down, I take it you’ve finished all the apology letters?”

Ted nodded as he stood up to bring Mr. Gibson his personalized letter. He hung his head as he returned to the back desk, but then, the teacher asked him to give Veronica her letter as well. Ted handed her the letter and sat back down, looking away from everyone.

After Mr. Gibson finished reading Ted’s apology, he looked up and asked Ted to come back to the front desk.

“If you could be this thoughtful to not ruin people’s clothes completely, why couldn’t you be thoughtful enough to leave it alone? Like, just let it go. This stuff is so petty.”

“He’s still petty,” Diamond interrupted.

With all eyes on her, she grabbed Ted's letter to Veronica, and started reading an excerpt[9]:

"'I mean, let's be honest, you know you had it coming. And if I didn't think of this, you know you would have. Then you'd be the one writing an apology letter you didn't mean.' Mr. Gibson, this is what Ted honestly wrote in his so-called 'apology' letter. 'But even if I was sincere, tell the truth, you would've still gotten me back, anyway, right?'"

Mr. Gibson asked for the letter, with one hand holding his forehead. As he read over the letter, he asked, "Were you all always like this?"

He looked at the three students, who each had confused looks on their faces, as if to ask, "Always like what?"

"You worked together to save the tri-city area from a terrorist attack. I *still* can't wrap my mind around that. But even after all that, you still treat each other so badly. I would've thought you'd be the best of friends after that. That whole experience didn't bring you any closer together???"

Both Veronica and Diamond mouthed "Nope."

"Did you all get off on the wrong foot or something, what made you this way? Whatever it was, I guarantee it's small enough that you could learn to let it go."

Before the teacher could dig deeper and find the source of their conflict, the main office buzzed the room.

"Mr. Gibson? We need you to go retrieve your class from the Gymnasium. A fight has broken out."

In horror, the teacher asked if any injuries were reported, but none were.

"No talking," he told the three, then he immediately dashed out of the room, asking another teacher to make sure they stayed quiet.

As soon as he was gone, Diamond made a whipping sound with her mouth, signifying the trouble Ted would be in once his parents arrived.

"Hope they get him good, too. Messed up my clothes. I should make him do hard labor to pay for replacements," Veronica said under her breath.

"I said it'll come out," Ted replied.

"Oh, shut up!"

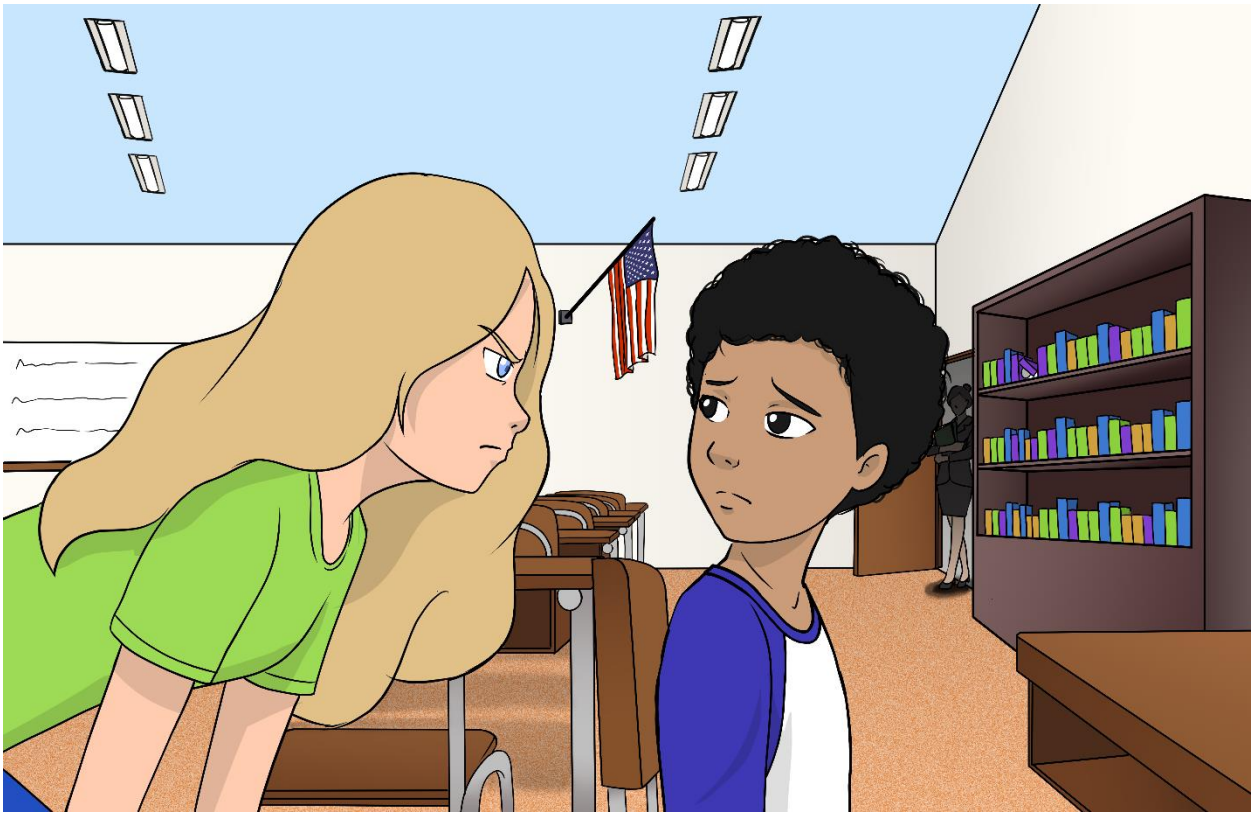
"You're the one who started all this in the first place."

"I said, SHUT UP!! You may have all the teachers fooled into thinking you're some golden boy, but I *know* you. And I know what you're capable of. But don't forget who *I* am and what *I'm* capable of. You better hope my clothes come out looking brand-spanking-new or you're going to get it."

---

[9] Excerpt - 'ɛks sɜpt - A small part of a document

“Excuse me?” a teacher said as she stepped into the room.

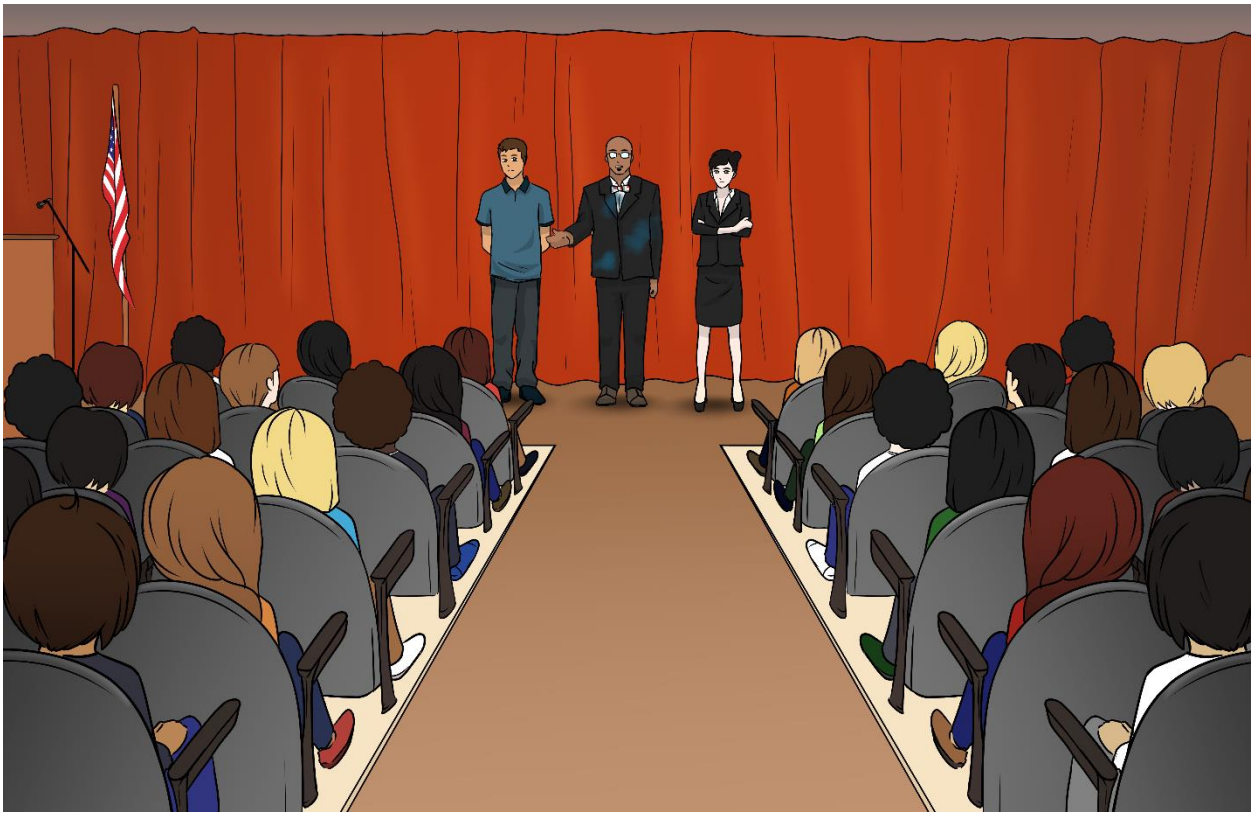


Veronica had gotten in Ted’s face as she was threatening him and now realized she was in more trouble. Whatever she had to say to Ted, she had forgotten to say it quietly. The teacher stood there until Mr. Gibson returned with the other students and told him what she saw.

Mr. Gibson put his head in his hands, unsure of how to solve the problem. After hearing Veronica’s threats to Ted, he knew he had to call her parents, too. But after the brawl in the gym, he knew that conferences and punishments just weren’t going to be enough. But what could he do?

As he was trying to think of a solution, someone from the main office came and brought back the clothes that had been stained. They were good as new, much to the students’ relief, especially Veronica’s. Mr. Gibson let them go get changed into their original clothes while he called together the other teachers in the hallway, who had also been struggling to deal with the flare-ups between the boys and girls.

After putting their heads together for a few minutes, they had an idea of how to resolve the conflict, so they gathered all the students into the auditorium to announce their plan.



Once they were all seated, Mr. Gibson started. “Teachers, first, thanks for letting me interrupt you and your lesson plans. I wouldn’t do this if it wasn’t absolutely necessary. As we talked about earlier, there’s a lot of animosity[10] between the girls and boys in our classes, and we need to put a stop to it before anyone gets seriously hurt or worse. Just now, we had a big fight in the gym because one of the girls carved a dent into the boys’ vaulting pole. One of the boys almost broke his neck! I don’t know what it is with these kids… Nevertheless, students, we’re here to announce that next week we’re going to have a grade-wide competition between the boys and the girls, the 5th Grade Challenge. We’re going to test everything you all like to brag about. Your academic skills, your artistic skills, your athletic skills; we’re going to compare them all. We’re only going to do this once, so if you want to earn your bragging rights, whatever that means to you, you’d better do it then.”

The students were immediately excited about the idea. Their excited chatter had to be calmed by another teacher so Mr. Gibson could continue.

“Tomorrow, we’ll nominate[11] who will be the representatives for each room, and you’ll receive whatever resources you need to compete well. Since next week’s shortened, we’ll have one day be academics day, another will be sports day, and the other will be hobbies day. Next week, come out, do your best, and learn to frickin’ respect each other. For now, we’ll defer[12] the suspensions for all the fighting until two weeks from now. Your classmates are going to need you. And just in time, class is over for today. Go home.”

---

[10] Animosity - æn ɪ ‘ma sɪ ti - Hatred
[11] Nominate - ‘na mɪ nɛit - Choose
[12] Defer - də ‘fɜ - Put off until later

The students started to head out as they bounced off the walls about the coming competition. The teachers liked seeing the excitement on their faces but were only cautiously optimistic[13]. Some worried that the loser of the competition would start another conflict as revenge. Mr. Gibson, for his part, knew this was a risk, but felt they had no better options besides constant suspensions and possible expulsions. He wanted to get to the root of the problem.

Mr. Addison arrived shortly after school let out and rushed into the building to catch Matthew before he got on the school bus. After finding his younger son, he went to the office, where Ted and several other students who started the fight in the gym sat with the teacher, waiting.

Mr. Gibson stepped out of the office and told Ted's dad what had happened, to which Mr. Addison replied, "He did WHAT?!"

Ted knew he would be in severe trouble. Veronica, sitting not far from him, made a whipping sound with her mouth, to which the other students laughed. Still, they knew deep down that they also would be getting the same treatment later.

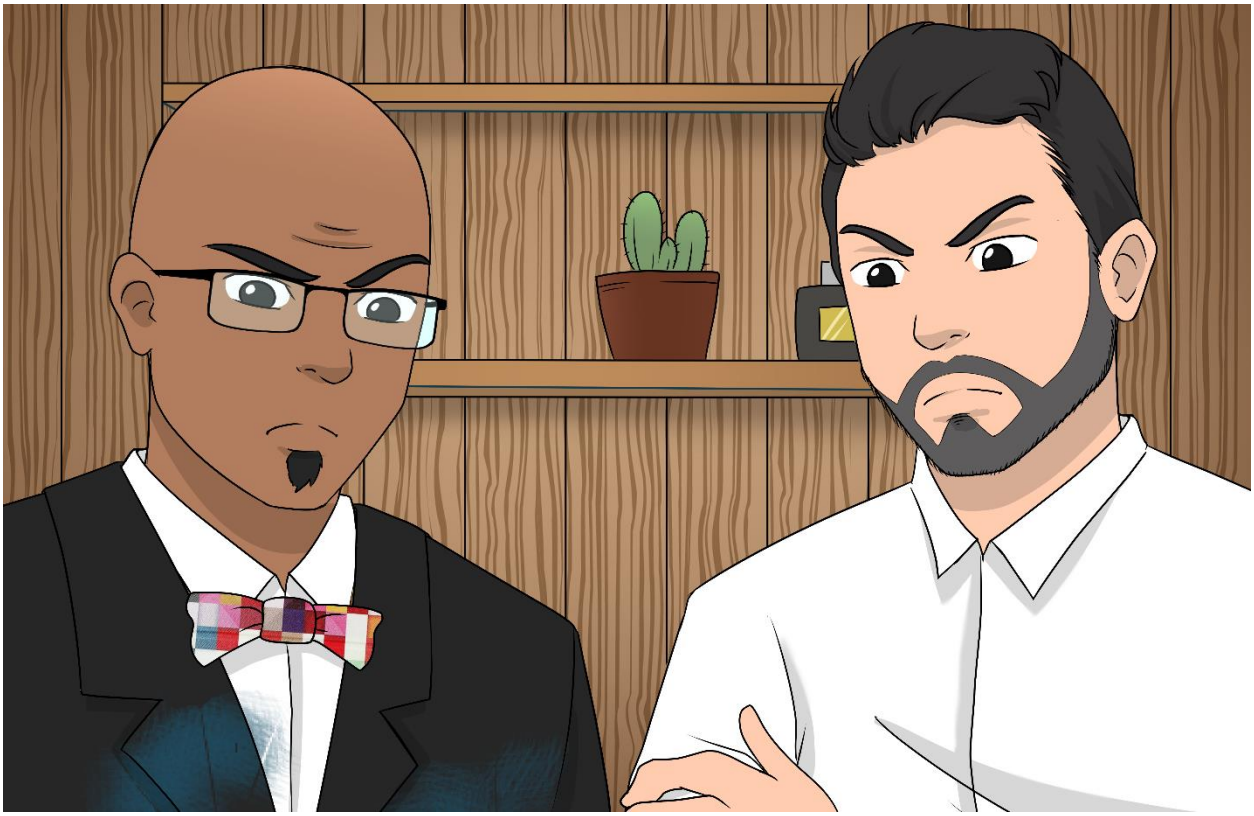
"Hey, Veronica!" Matthew said as he walked over for a hug, to his brother's chagrin[14].

After a few minutes, the teacher and Ted's dad returned, and within earshot of Ted, Mr. Addison apologized again and again for his son's behavior and for messing up his suit.

"Don't worry about it, don't worry about it. But like I told you, the best thing you can do right now is help Ted see the intrinsic[15] value in those he doesn't like. I'm going to ask all the other parents for the same thing, and we're hoping this competition gets us closer to that goal. Expect an email about this later tonight."

The adults reentered the office room, and Ted stood up, waiting for words of reprimand[16].

[13] Optimistic – ap tə ˈmɪs tɪk – Believing that good things will happen
[14] Chagrin - ʃə ˈgrɪn - Annoyance
[15] Intrinsic - ɪn ˈʧrɪn zɪk - Belonging to something by its very nature
[16] Reprimand - ˈrɛ prɪ mænd - A scolding by an authority figure



“Absolutely! And I’ll make sure to forward you the money for the dry-cleaning. It’ll be coming out of Ted’s allowance,” Mr. Addison said while flashing a glare at his son. “For now, I hope the next time we meet, it’ll be for more positive reasons.”

Veronica quietly made another whipping sound, evoking quiet giggles from the other students.

“I don’t spank my kids, Veronica,” Mr. Addison said matter-of-factly, wiping the gleeful smile off her face. “Come on, boys.”

As they followed their father out of the school, Ted whined in a low voice, “Dad, it wasn’t supposed to happen like this.”

Mr. Addison waved to another school official with a happy face as if all was well, not responding at all to Ted. When they got to the car, and the doors were closed, Mr. Addison turned to Ted and stared at him without saying a word. It was the “you know you’re in big trouble” look.



“Dad, I just meant to prank Veronica cuz she kept pranking me, but then, she went crazy and tried to attack me, and all those other kids got stains on their clothes trying to stop her, and then Mr. Gibson had to pull her out of the room, and that’s how he got his suit stained, but even then, it wasn’t supposed to be that bad cuz it was all water-based paint instead of oil-based paint cuz that’s easier to get out, and that fight in the gym was completely separate from me, but then I got lumped in with all that other stuff and—”

“Just. Stop.”

Ted closed his mouth, knowing his dad wasn’t going to let him off the hook.

Dad sat silently, thinking for a moment before he asked, “You seem to have an excuse for everything, don’t you?”

Ted didn’t answer. Kid Rule #18: When being scolded by an adult, say nothing if at all possible. Each violation increases scolding by 10 minutes.

“You don’t seem to get that this is your second chance, and you’re blowing it. Other kids less fortunate than you are would kill to be in your position, but here you are, creating a bad reputation in your new environment. I remember before we moved, you were desperate for a change; a new home, a new school, and a chance to start fresh. You used to come home to roaches. You used to get beaten up. Now, you come here, and you get a hero’s welcome, a nice big house, friends, opportunities. And what do you do with that? Splash paint on some girl’s chair. Spend all your time on video games and pranks. And that huge basement? The one we bought just so you’d have space to work on new

inventions? And that supercomputer in the basement? All gathering dust. I think it's time I told you the full story of how we moved here."

Ted's face scrunched up in confusion. What more was there to know? Apparently, a lot more.

"That time you snuck onto government property and stole their technology, they had a mind to prosecute[17] you and throw you in juvenile hall. They only reconsidered when one of their own generals decided to be lenient to you, but the next step down from that was a trespassing fine of $20,000 and another fine of $50,000 for the stuff you stole. When you were away at school, your mom and I got a visit from the FBI. Long story short, they learned that we wanted to move, which worked out great for them because they didn't want you anywhere near a military base again. So you know what they did? They put in good words for both your mom and me, and we both got high-paying jobs in Miracle City, which, if you haven't noticed, is the only major city in the United States without a military base nearby."

Mr. Addison paused for effect, as Ted stared at the floor.

"Yeah. We were funneled here by the government so you wouldn't cause any more problems. We barely escaped heavy fines and harsh punishment. Oh, and have you noticed how we haven't been back to Ecclesia to visit your grandparents? It's because we're banned from the town. Your grandparents now have to drive up here to see you."

Both Ted and Matt's eyebrows arched up at the news. But there was more.

Dad sighed as he turned back forward in the seat. "I don't know if I made the right decision by not telling you back then. But how do you tell a kid who just saved a city that he was still in trouble? It's like, you didn't realize how bad a place you were in at the time. Like, psychologically[18]. You really needed a win. You needed to feel like you belonged. You needed friends. You needed a chance to spread your wings without this thing hanging over your head. So we buried it, thinking you'd make better decisions now that you've started a new life. But instead..."

Dad started the car and drove off. Everyone stayed silent through the entire trip. As they drove, Ted looked at the downtown area through the side mirror, wondering if everyone now saw him as a bad kid. Having learned the government's view of him as a threat, he hoped that this wouldn't follow him for the rest of his life. But more than anything, he just wanted to have fun and enjoy life like a regular kid. But now, he became the bad kid because of a prank that everyone else was doing? It all seemed incredibly unfair, especially since Veronica started it the day he arrived, half a year ago.

When the family got home, Ted was sent to clean the entire basement, partly as punishment, but also to get his mind back on track. He was an engineer. He would need his lab. Maybe seeing all his old stuff would inspire him. And it did. After about two hours, he finally finished the cleanup. As a reward to himself, Ted sat down at his desk and turned on the computer. A blue face appeared on the screen and greeted him warmly.

"Good evening, Theodore. It's good to see you again."

---

[17] Prosecute - 'pra sə kjut - To push for legal action against someone

[18] Psychologically - sai kə 'la ʤɪ kli - In the mind

His lips curled up as he replied, “It’s been too long.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What kinds of pranks are okay to play on your friends? What kinds of pranks go too far?
2. Have you ever been punished by your teacher? What was the punishment, and what was the reason for the punishment?
3. Ted and Veronica aren’t friends, even after working together before. Is there anyone you’ve worked with that you still don’t like? Why?
4. If you were Mr. Gibson, how would you try to resolve the long-running conflict between the boys and the girls?
5. Ted thought it was unfair that he was being judged differently because he’s gifted. Is it fair, or should he be treated like any other kid?

FRIDAY

PART 1

There was a buzz in the air the next morning at school. It started with a very unusual, sudden photo shoot. Students took one face portrait and one full-body photo against a white brick wall background. The pictures would be used to make a “scouting report[19]” for the competition. It was really more like a hastily-made[20] yearbook that would be mass-printed on regular copy paper, put into a binder, and handed out to all the students before the weekend.

To go along with the pictures, the students had to write short introductions about themselves, like what they like and dislike, their favorite school subjects, etc. Their GPA (minus music and art) was also posted below their introduction, along with their music and art GPA, and their 50-yard dash time.

After the writing, the classes had to nominate their representatives for each day’s activities. The breakdown of the activities was:

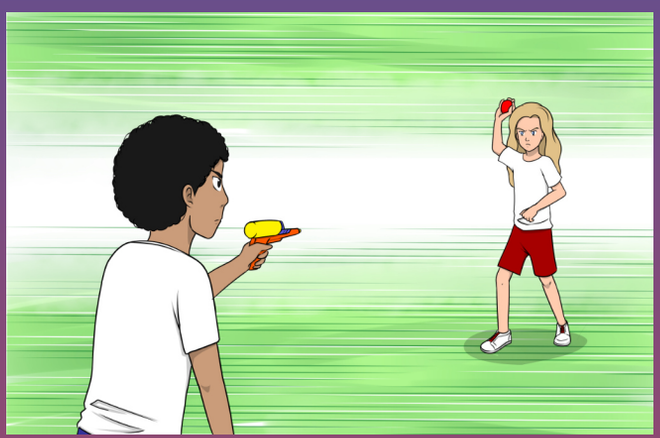
Monday – Academics Day: Math speed drills, Trivia, and Memory

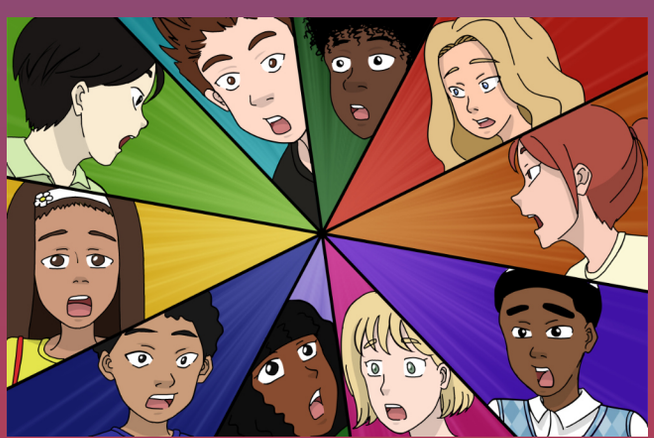
[19] Scouting report - A detailed account of someone’s strengths and weaknesses
[20] Hastily - ‘hɛis tə li - Done in a hurry, often without thinking something through

The Life and Times of Theodore Addison:

5th Grade Challenge

Ted, the 5th grade genius and his rival, Veronica, constantly prank each other. When the pranks spill over and cause a grade-wide conflict between the boys and girls, the teachers organize a competition between the two sides.





Hoping to teach the kids to respect each other, they set up contests in academics, hobbies, and sports. But competitions aren't always fair, and when two girls suddenly become friendly with Ted's teammates, he immediately suspects the girls are trying to cheat.

Determined to stop Veronica from succeeding and possibly hurting his friends, Ted will go to extremes, maybe even at the cost of losing.



Learn more about the book at:

AddisonBooks.Com