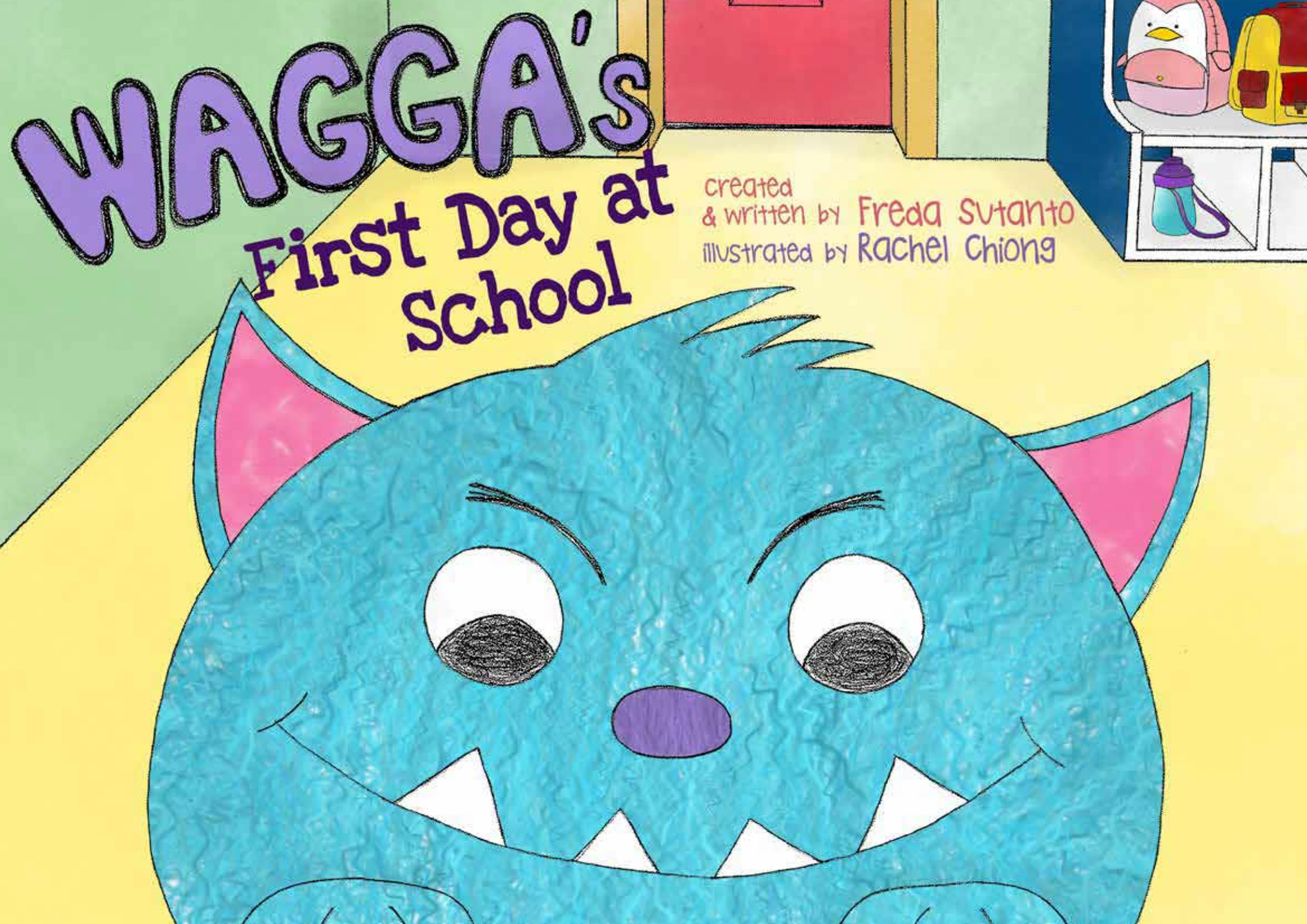
WAGGA's First Day at School

created & written by Freda Sutanto

illustrated by Rachel Chiong



Wagga's First Day at School

Created & written by: Freda Sutanto
Illustrated by: Rachel Chiong

Funded by: LIEN foundation

Published by: KK Women's and Children's Hospital
SingHealth

Copyright © KK Women's and Children's Hospital, 2015

All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior permission in writing from KK Women's and Children's Hospital.

Produced by: Department of Child Development, KKH

ISBN: 978-981-14-2306-2

A Guide to the 'Wagga' Book Series

Brief background

As with most ideas, the 'Wagga' book series was born out of necessity. The series creator, a developmental psychologist, found it frustratingly difficult to obtain appropriate books that aim to teach social and emotional skills to children. There were books that had social and emotional themes but with no clear learning goals. Importantly, available books did not appear to use current research and theory as a basis for framing stories. Thus, the 'Wagga' book series was created to fulfill two needs – (1) a need to teach socio-emotional concepts with specific learning goals, and (2) a need to create stories that were based on clear theoretical frameworks. A fellow psychologist, who happened to draw beautifully, was roped in and the 'Wagga' book series was born!

Who can use the books?

The 'Wagga' book series is written for children aged 5 to 10 years old. Apart from just considering the recommended age range, it is also worth noting that the books were written for children who are able to understand basic social skills concepts. For example, children who are able to broadly explain what sharing is. Discussion segments are a key part of using the books. Thus, the series is especially suitable for children who are able to provide basic insight into their social environment – children who are able to explain why their classmate cried and how that classmate felt, for instance. These criteria mean that the target audience includes both typically developing children and children with developmental needs, who may have difficulties with socialization, attention, and emotional regulation.

Interactive reading, where a facilitator reads and discusses a story with the audience, is the recommended manner of using the 'Wagga' books. Facilitators may be child professionals (e.g. teachers, psychologists, occupational therapists) or parents. The books may be read in various settings ranging from one on one to the classroom, depending on whether the target child or children require more individualized attention to learn social and emotional concepts.

The 'Wagga' book series as a tool for developing social competence

Social competence may be defined as the ability to generate positive social outcomes[1], such as forming satisfying peer relationships and successfully dealing with interpersonal conflict. Social competence is an attribute that is not only important in social settings, but also predicts non-social outcomes such as academic achievement and personal resilience. In creating the 'Wagga' book series, the notion of social competence was selected as a theoretical framework for the stories and discussions. Social competence may be broken down into three core components of (1) social awareness, (2) self-regulation, and (3) problem solving[2,3].

Social awareness

Social awareness refers to the ability to accurately interpret the social environment, such as reading facial expressions[4]. The process of social awareness helps children to identify social opportunities and problems[5]. The 'Wagga' books incorporated social awareness by storylines in which the main character, Wagga, learns to look at and listen to others, and by discussion questions that encourage children to attend to salient aspects of the social environment.



Self-regulation

Self-regulation is the process of controlling emotional and behavioral impulses[6]. It plays a key role in reducing inappropriate behaviors, which results in positive attention from others[7]. Throughout the series, Wagga learns to demonstrate different ways of self-regulation, including inhibiting his body movements when listening and calming down when angry.



Problem solving

Problem solving occurs when individuals select successful courses of actions during a challenging social situation[8]. Problem solving is emphasized in each 'Wagga' book, where Wagga encounters a social problem. He first reacts by displaying inappropriate social behaviors, and receives an undesirable consequence. In the second half of the book, he chooses to display more appropriate social behaviors, which lead to more desirable consequences. During discussions, children are asked to think of more appropriate ways for Wagga to behave given the preceding situation where he showed inappropriate social behaviors.

How to use the books

Discussion segment

The 'Wagga' book series was designed to serve as a tool to help children understand and *apply* socio-emotional concepts, such as identifying emotions in self and others and dealing with losing. Facilitators are highly encouraged to go beyond just reading the stories and actively discuss concepts raised in the stories. Each book includes a discussion segment, which should be conducted where it is placed within the book.

Discussion questions generally increase in difficulty and may be asked in order. Questions are designed to elicit the key learning goals of the book. For example, in the book 'Wagga Learns to Share', a question is, "Once Wagga had given the toy to Abby, what should he do instead of snatching it back?" Correspondingly, the learning goal is for the child to understand that once someone has agreed to share, he/she should not take back the toy until the other child has had his or her turn playing with the toy. The child is also expected to brainstorm what they can do while waiting for the toy.

Key learning goals and answer suggestions to discussion questions are included in the individual guide accompanying each book.

Order of books

It is recommended that facilitators read the book 'Wagga's First Day at School' before reading the other books in the series. This book provides the context for Wagga's social and emotional difficulties and sends a strong message to children that social and emotional skills can be learned. Thereafter, it is advisable to read 'Wagga Learns to Listen', 'Wagga Learns about Feelings', and 'Wagga Learns to Calm Down' because these books feature foundational concepts.

Each book may be read multiple times in the process of teaching a child a concept. In the same vein, some children may not be able to provide an adequate response for more difficult discussion questions the first time around and may need to developmentally mature in order to comprehend the learning goal of the book.

Beyond stories

To reinforce learning of skills and concepts taught in the stories, facilitators are encouraged to conduct complementary activities. A useful framework to help children learn, retain, and apply social and emotional skills is 'Teach, Model, Practice'.

Teach refers to teaching a concept through reading the relevant 'Wagga' book and conducting discussions about the concept. For example, facilitators may choose to teach the concept of sharing with others by reading the book 'Wagga Learns to Share'.

Model means that facilitators demonstrate a skill to the child, highlighting appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. For example, facilitators may act out appropriate sharing behaviors and inappropriate sharing behaviors. Demonstrations may require involvement of another adult or child.

Practice means providing opportunities for a child to demonstrate the above skill by asking the child to participate in role-play. When the child is ready, actual situations may be set up for the child to apply the learned skill. For example, the target child may be asked to play with another child and only given one toy to share between them.

[1]Spence, S. H., & Donovan, C. (1998). Interpersonal problems. In P. J. Graham (Ed.), *Cognitive behavior therapy for children and families* (pp. 217-246). New York: Cambridge Univeristy Press.
[2]Minne, E P, & Semrud-Clikeman, M. (2011). A social competence intervention for young children with high functioning autism and Asperger syndrome: A pilot study. *Autism, 16*(6), 586-602.
[3]Spence, S. H. (2003). Social skills training with children and young people: Theory, evidence and practice. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 8*(2), 84-96.
[4]Minne, E P, & Semrud-Clikeman, M. (2011). A social competence intervention for young children with high functioning autism and Asperger syndrome: A pilot study. *Autism, 16*(6), 586-602.
[5]Spence, S. H. (2003). Social skills training with children and young people: Theory, evidence and practice. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 8*(2), 84-96.
[6]Masten, A. S., & Coatsworth, J. D. (1998). The development of competence in favorable and unfavorable environments: Lessons on successful children. *American Psychologist, 53*, 205-220.
[7]Alvord, M. K., & Grados, J. J. (2005). Enhancing resilience in children: A proactive approach. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 36*(3), 238-245.
[8]Spence, S. H. (2003). Social skills training with children and young people: Theory, evidence and practice. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 8*(2), 84-96.

A Guide to:
'Wagga's First Day at School'

About this book

The book 'Wagga's First Day at School' was written to introduce the main character, 'Wagga', to readers. Wagga is an adorable and memorable character who goes on to learn various socio-emotional skills in the subsequent books. The first book was also written to provide a context for readers to understand Wagga's social and emotional difficulties. Through reading the story, children begin to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate social behaviors. As the story unfolds, children may recognize some of those behaviors in themselves, but in a non-confrontational way.

Key learning goals

1) For children to recognize and identify different types of inappropriate social behaviors.

2) For children to understand that inappropriate behaviors lead to undesirable consequences.

3) For children to understand that behavior is a choice and appropriate skills can be learned to replace inappropriate behavior.

Other titles in the 'Wagga' book series:

Wagga Learns to Listen with his Body
Wagga Learns about Feelings
Wagga Learns to Cool Down
Wagga Learns to Share
Wagga Learns to Play Fair
Wagga Learns to Calm Down after Losing
Wagga Learns to Work with Others
Wagga Learns about Bullying

Answer suggestions to discussion questions

1. Did Wagga behave well at school? Why not?
   a. *When he entered the classroom, he did not say, 'Hello', to the teacher (not greeting).*
   b. *During story time, he wiggled, shouted, and laughed (not listening).*
   c. *He threw toys during playtime.*
   d. *When told to stop throwing toys, he screamed and jumped up and down (not controlling anger).*
   e. *During playtime, he blocked Jonas from having a turn by sitting at the top of the slide (not taking turns/playing fair/sharing).*
   f. *During snack time, he ate all the cookies (not sharing).*
   g. *When asked to carry a table together with his classmates, he tried to carry the table by himself and pushed the other children away (not working together).*
   h. *During naptime, he made noises and ran around (not following rules).*

   Note: It is not necessary for children to provide all the above answers. In addition, when children provide a descriptive answer, try to rephrase their response into a social skills concept. For example, when children respond, "He ate all the cookies", the facilitator can add, "That's not sharing".

2. What happened when Wagga threw toys?
   The teacher got angry and told him to stop.

3. What did Wagga do when he was angry?
   Wagga screamed, turned red, and jumped up and down.

4. What happened when Wagga tried to move the table by himself?
   Wagga was not able to as the table was too heavy.

5. What happened to Wagga when he made noises and ran around during naptime?
   The teacher asked him to go home.

6. Why did Wagga cry when he was asked to go home?
   He wanted to stay at school.

7. Why didn't Wagga follow the rules?
   He has not learnt them yet.



This is Wagga. It was a special day for Wagga because it was his very first day of school. Wagga saw many children going into the classroom.

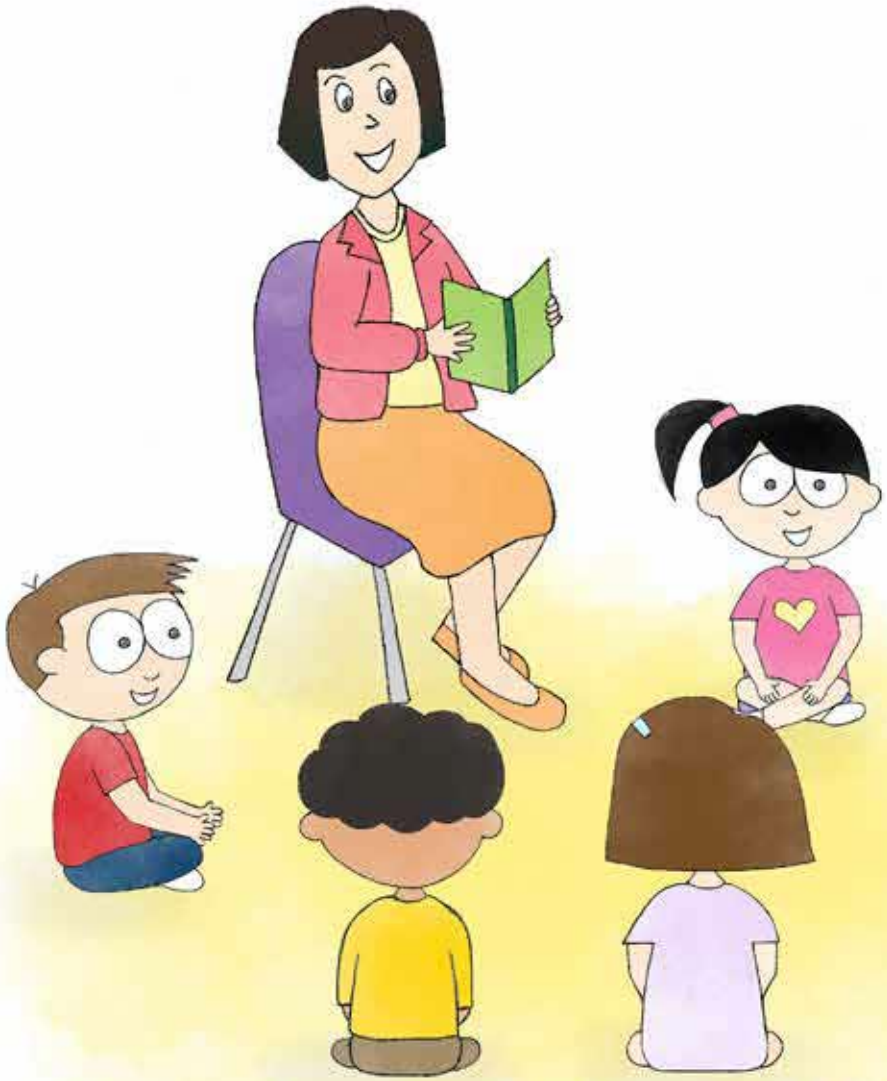


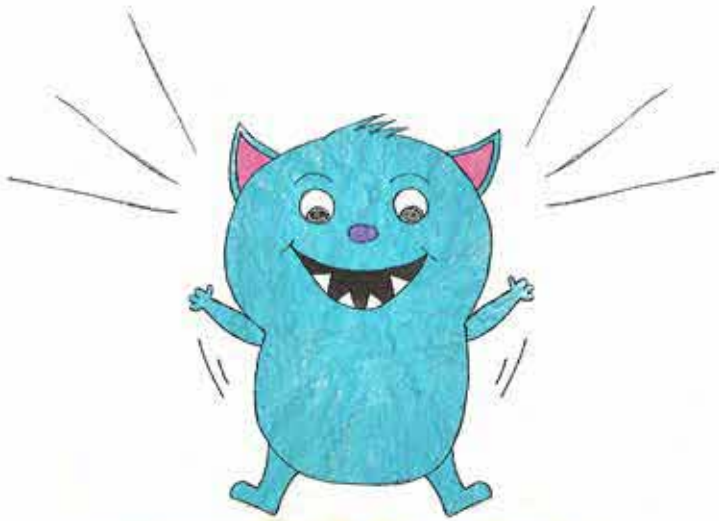
Wagga followed the children into the classroom, where his teacher was waiting for him.

“Hello, Wagga,” said the teacher.

But Wagga did not answer his teacher. He had spotted a box of toys and ran towards the toys.

The other children said, “Hello,” to the teacher nicely.





Class had started and it was story time! The children sat down and listened to the story. But Wagga started to wiggle all his body parts. He couldn't keep still.

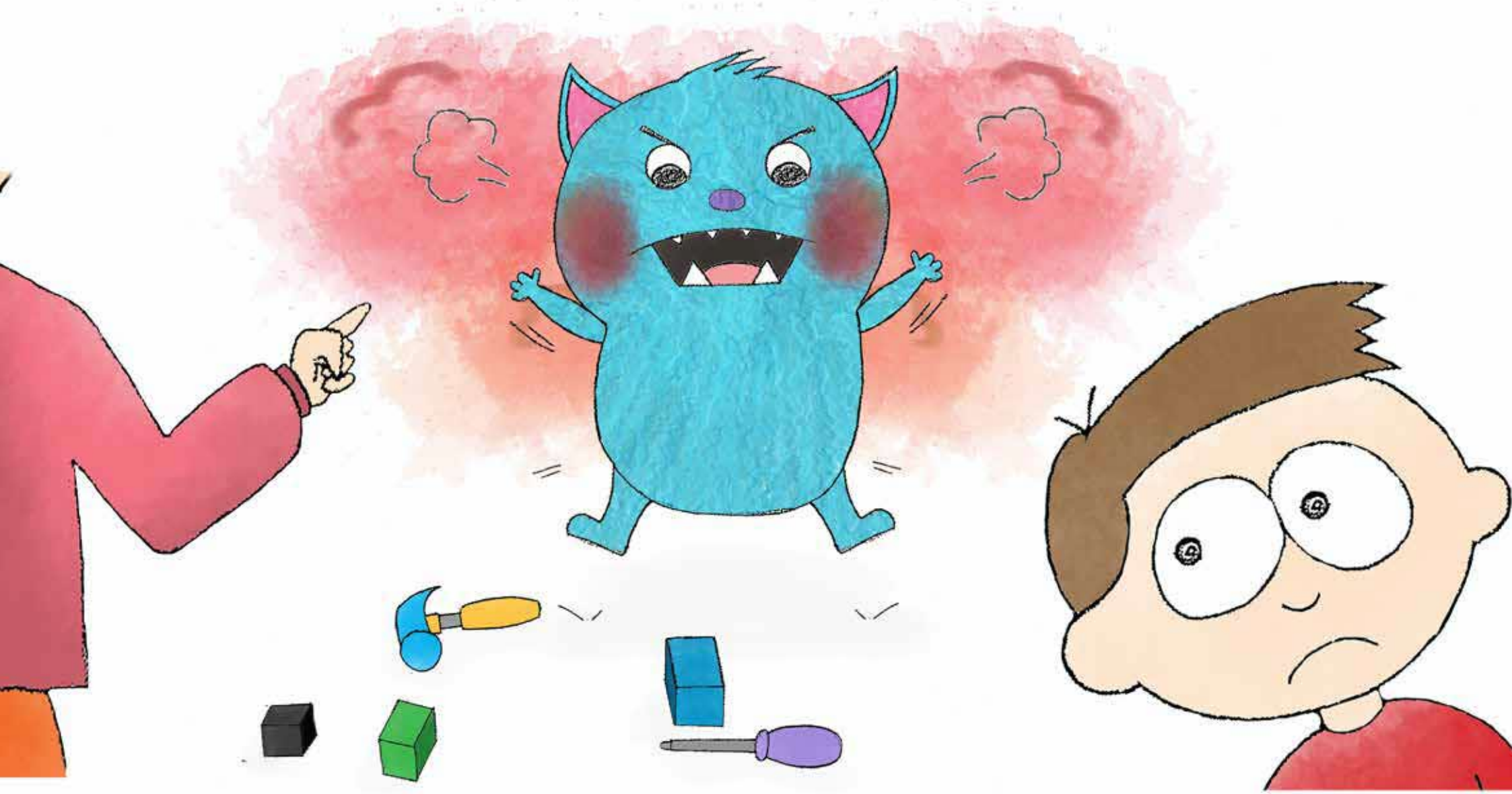
Then, he shouted and laughed, and the other children couldn't hear the story. Wagga did not keep quiet and listen.



During playtime, Wagga picked up a box of toys and poured all the toys onto the floor. The floor looked very messy. The other children played quietly. But what did Wagga do? Wagga started to throw the toys around!



Wagga's teacher saw that Wagga had thrown the toys around and felt angry. You could see that she was angry because she was not smiling and had her hands on her hips. But Wagga did not look at his teacher and did not know that she was angry.



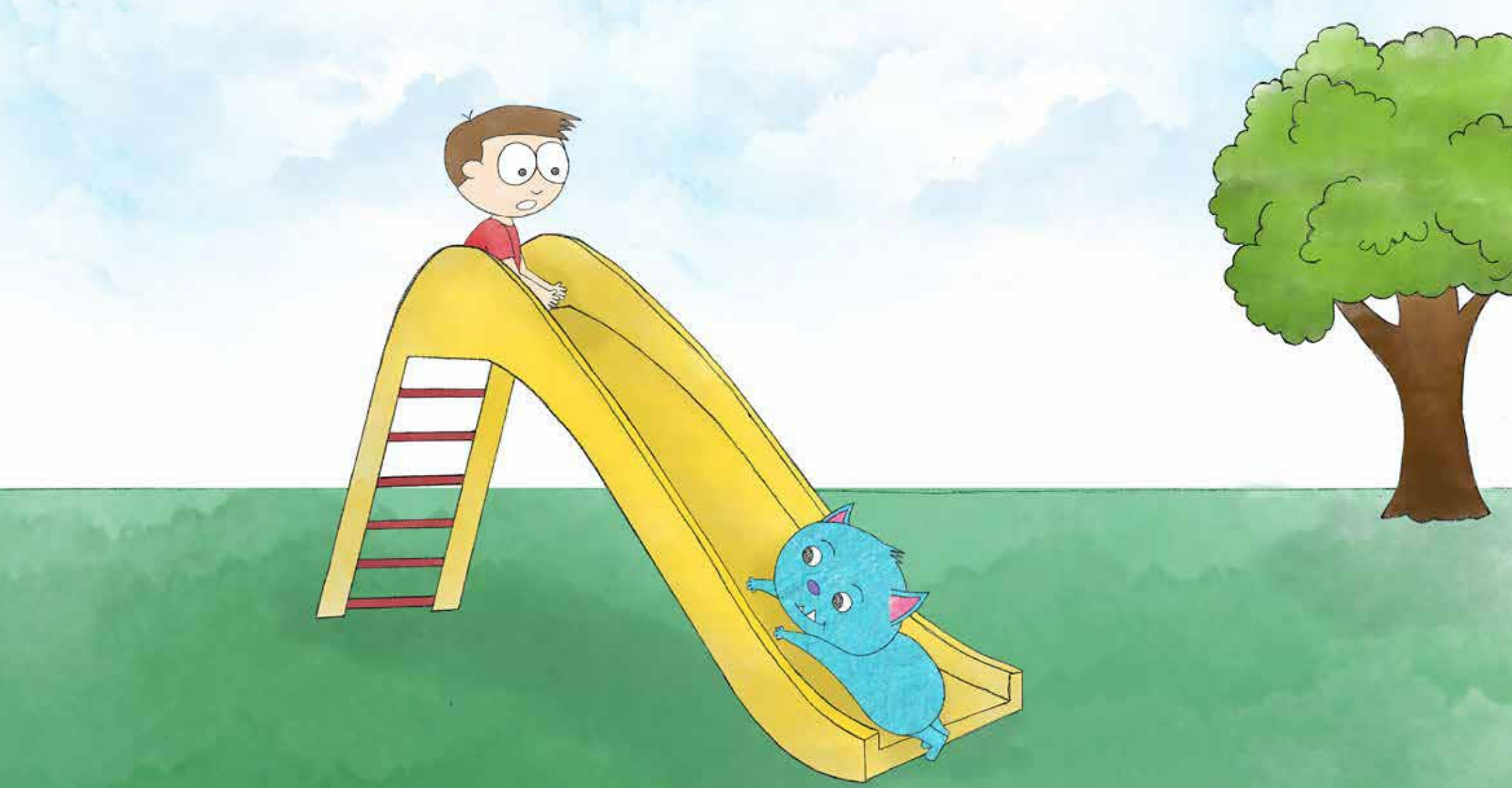
“Wagga,” said the teacher, “stop throwing toys right now.”

“No, no, no!” shouted Wagga. He was so angry that his face turned red and he started jumping up and down.

“He looks like he is going to burst,” said Jonas.



After a long time, Wagga finally stopped shouting. It was a bright and sunny day and the teacher said that the children could play outside. Wagga ran out of the door without waiting for the other children.



Outside, Wagga played on the slide. But when it was Jonas' turn on the slide, Wagga climbed up the wrong way and blocked Jonas. Jonas did not get his turn on the slide!



Then, Wagga sat at the top of the slide and did not move.

"Wagga, can you please move?" asked Abby. But Wagga did not move.



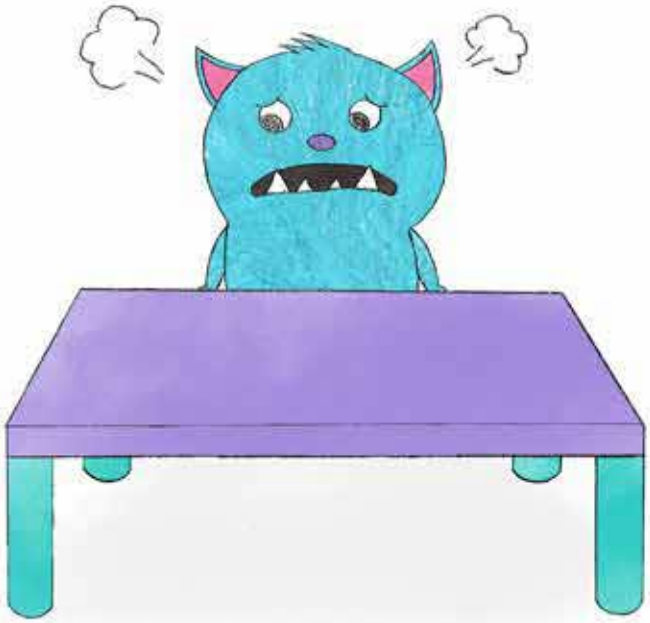
The children went back into the classroom for snack time. When the teacher took out a plate of cookies, Wagga ate every single one of them. He did not share them with the other children.

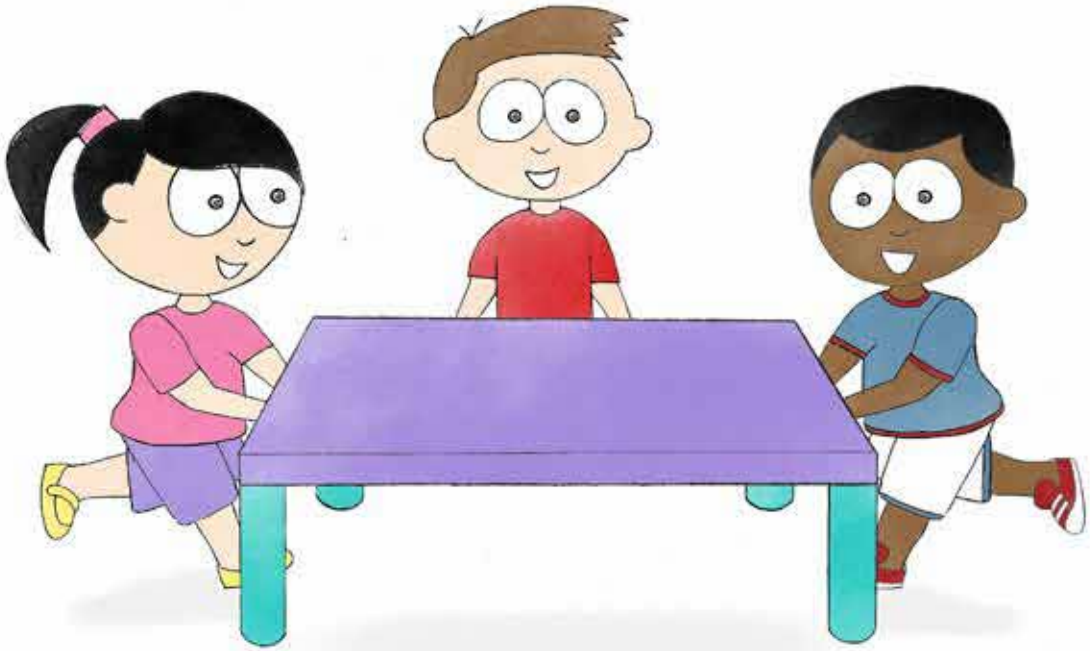


The teacher asked the children to carry a big table together.

Wagga ran to the table and said, “Me, me, only me.”

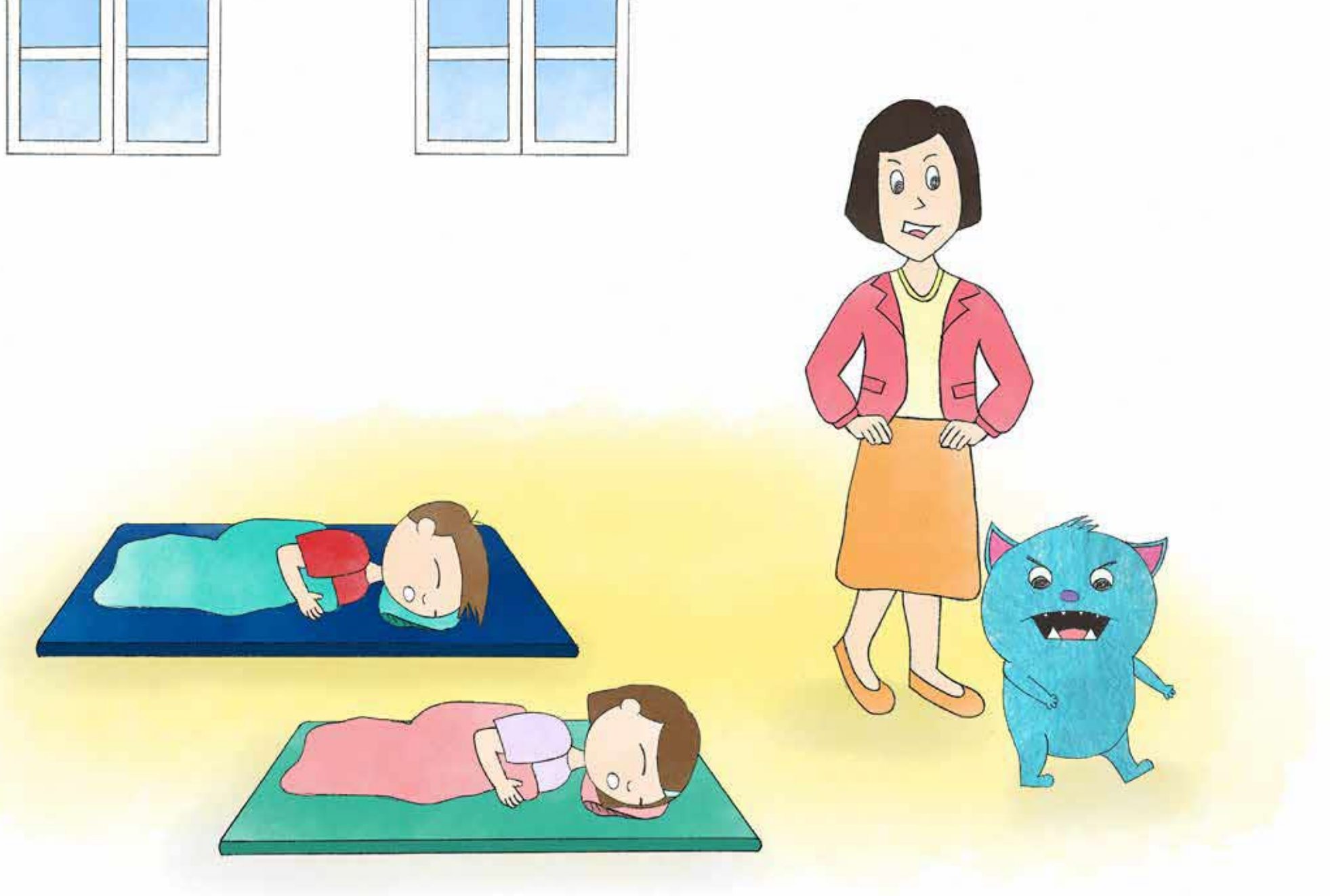
When the other children tried to help, he pushed them away!





Wagga huffed and puffed and tried to carry the table, but it was too big and heavy to lift by himself.

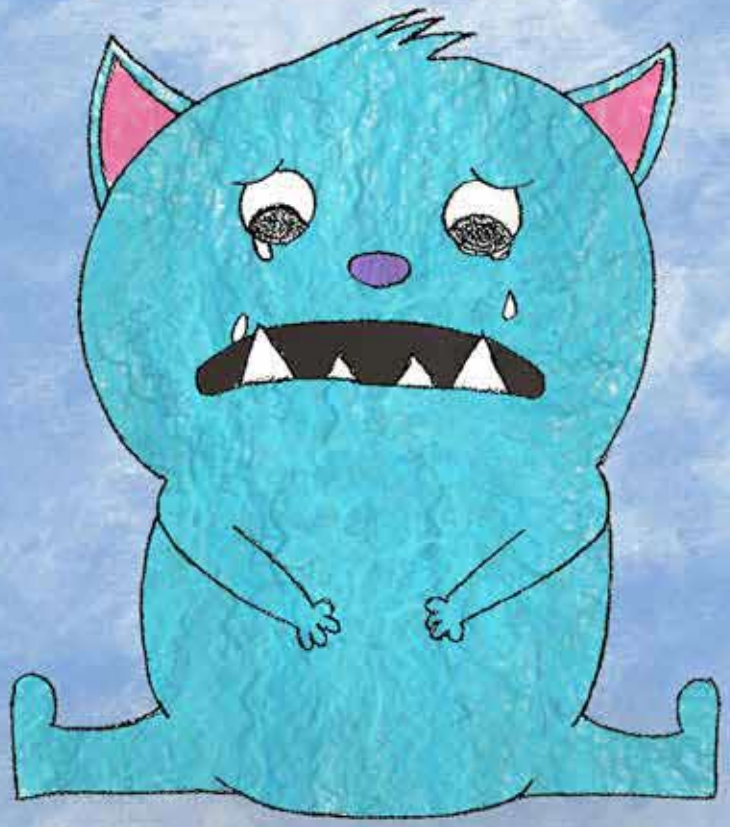
In the end, Jonas, Abby, and Govind had to work together to carry the table.



At nap time, the children slept quietly on their mats. But Wagga made noises and ran around the room, which woke the other children up. The teacher was very, very angry.

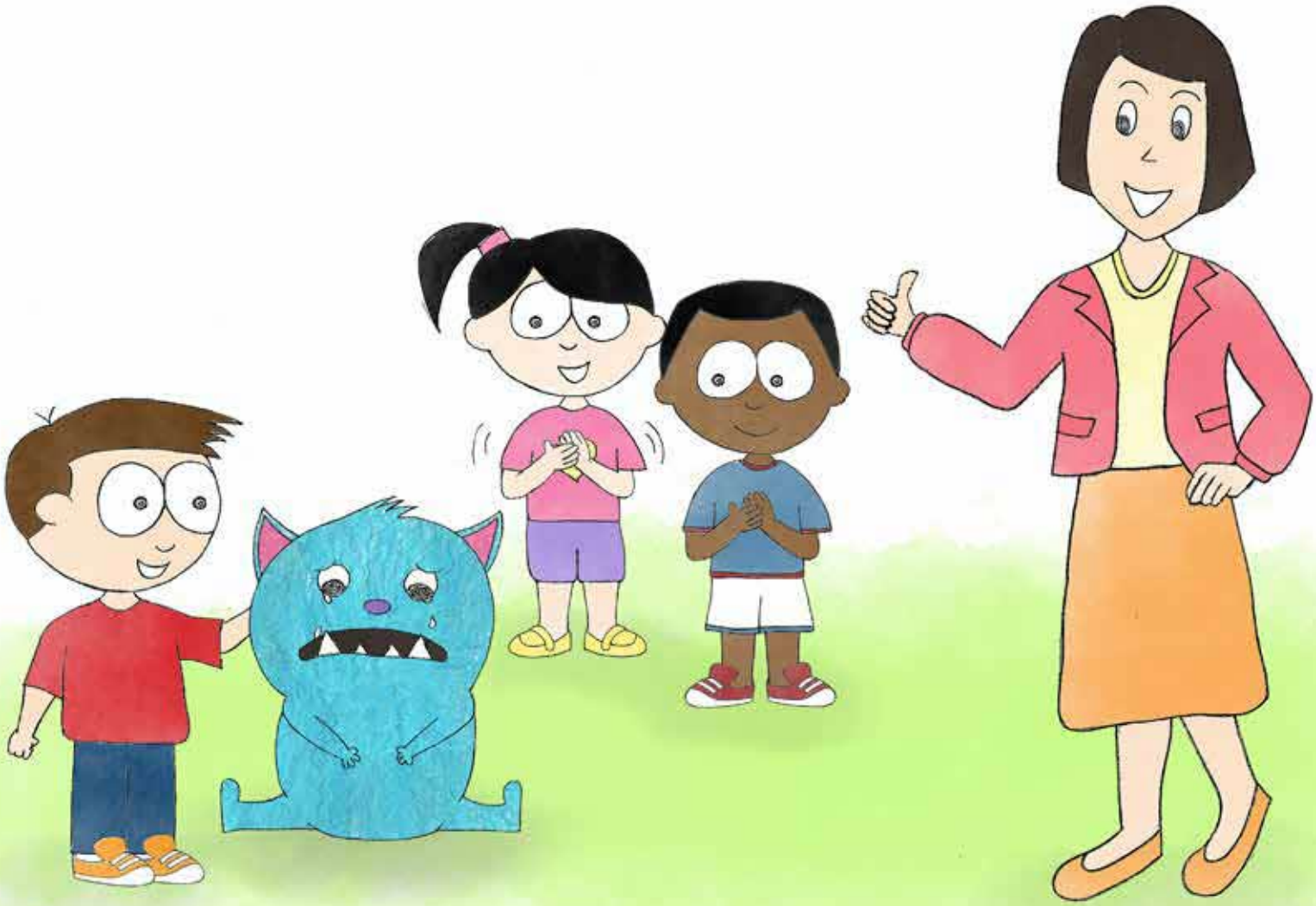


"Wagga," said the teacher, "you shouted and threw toys. You did not listen or share or work with your classmates. You also woke your classmates up. You are not allowed to stay here. Go home right now!"



Wagga was shocked! He was suddenly very quiet. Then, his lips trembled and he began to cry!

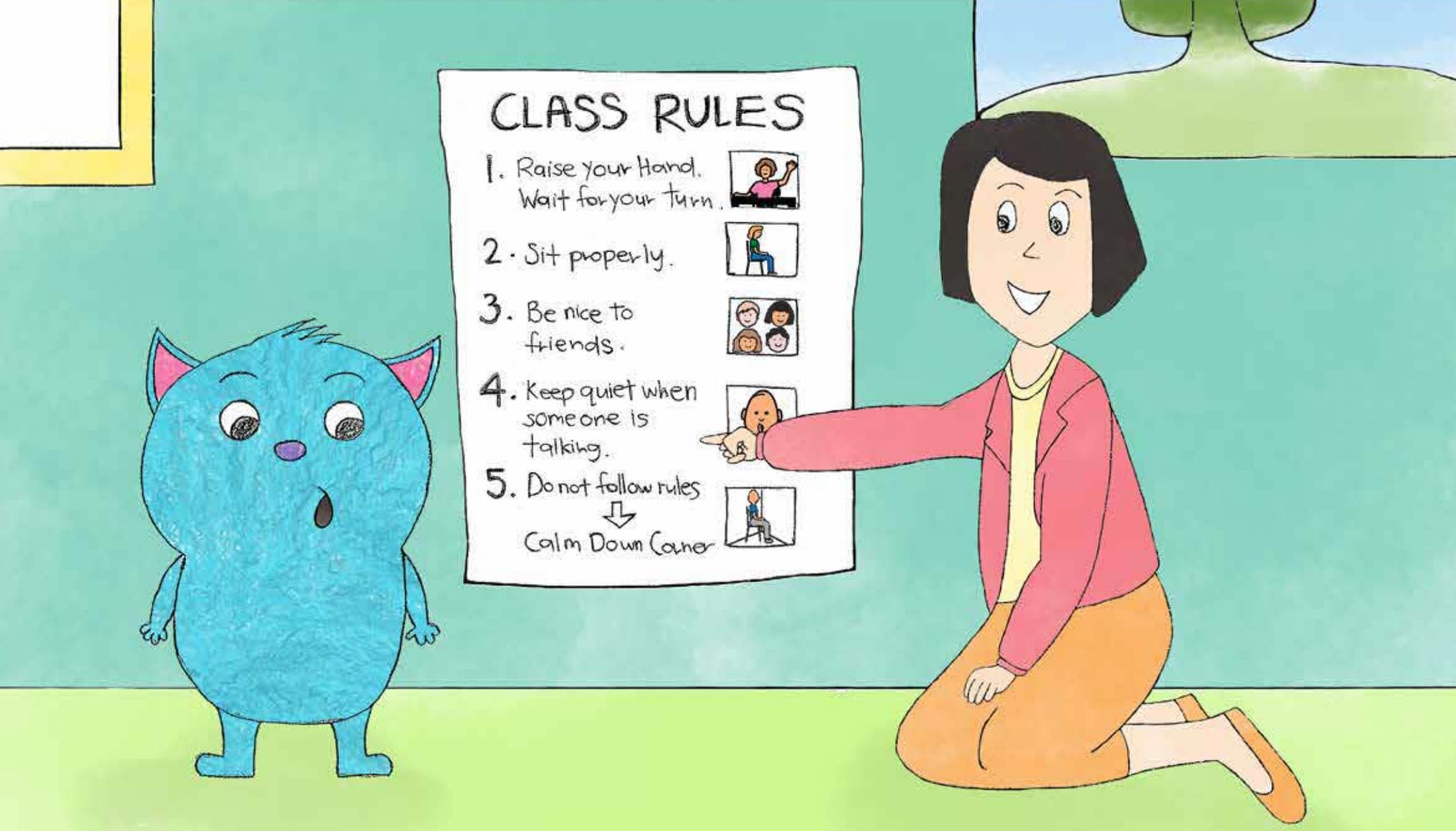
“Please don’t make me go!” he cried. “I’m sorry that I shouted and threw toys and didn’t share! It’s only my first day of school and I didn’t know what to do. I will try to behave better, if you show me how to. I really like school! I like my teacher, I like my new friends, and I like the toys. Please let me stay!”



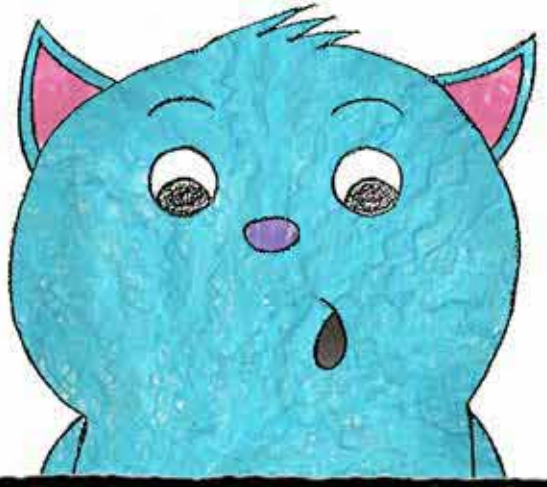
“I know,” said Jonas, “let’s teach Wagga the rules. If Wagga can learn the rules, then he will know what to do in school.”

“That’s a clever idea,” said the teacher.

The children agreed that it was a good idea to teach Wagga the rules.



The teacher began to teach Wagga the rules and the children helped him to remember the rules. Wagga worked hard to learn how to behave. He learned about many new ways to behave at school.



Questions:

1.Did Wagga behave well at school? Why not?

2.What happened when Wagga threw toys?

3.What did Wagga do when he was angry?

4.What happened when Wagga tried to move the table by himself?

5.What happened to Wagga when he made noises and ran around during naptime?

6.Why did Wagga cry when he was asked to go home?

7.Why didn't Wagga follow the rules?

Funded by: LIEN foundation

Published by: KK Women's and Children's Hospital SingHealth

Produced by:
Department of Child Development

ISBN 978-981-14-2306-2