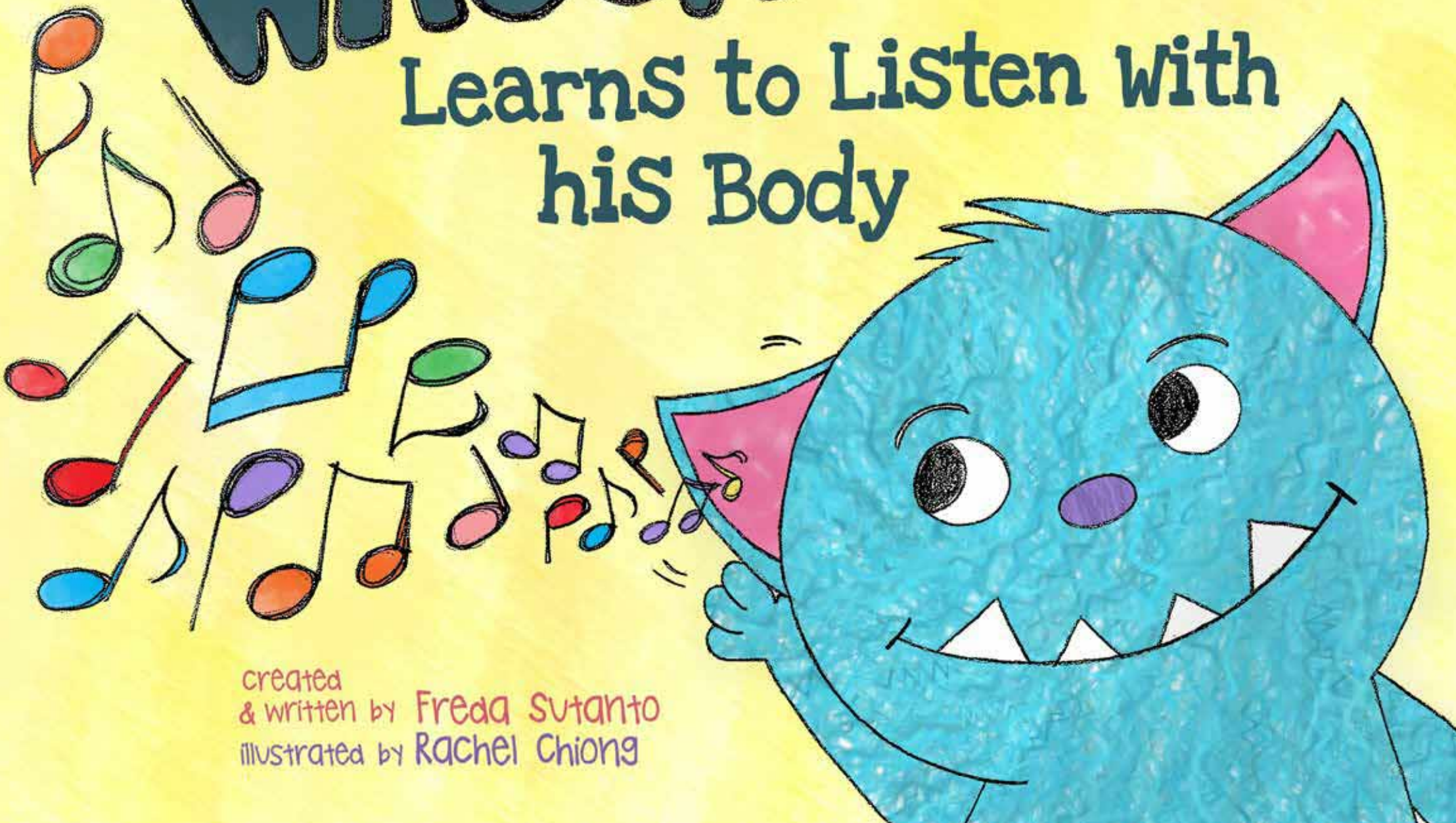
WAGGA Learns to Listen with his Body



created
& written by Freda Sutanto
illustrated by Rachel Chiong

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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 comepetence 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 Learns to Listen with his Body'

Why is it important for children to learn to listen?

Listening skills are the crux of all communication. In the classroom, children who are perceived as good listeners tend to be seen as well-adjusted children and receive positive attention from peers and educators. Children with poorer listening skills tend to miss out on key messages from the social environment. Consequently, they may not carry out instructions correctly or respond to peers in an appropriate manner. Imagine a child who does not listen well when a classmate speaks to the class about his pet. The child may make incorrect assumptions about the topic at hand and blurt out an off-topic comment, which may lead to a reprisal from the teacher and/or attract negative reactions from peers.

The seemingly passive skill of listening requires consistent mental control and physical coordination. In this book, the set of physical actions involved in listening is emphasized with the aim of making the concept of listening more concrete and graspable to children.

Key learning goals

1) For children to understand that various body parts are involved in the act of listening.

2) For children to identify body actions that are perceived to be good listening and body actions that are perceived to be poor listening.

Answer suggestions to discussion questions

1. While the teacher was singing, did Wagga show good listening?
   Wagga did not show good listening while the teacher was singing.

2. Which of Wagga's body parts were not showing good listening?
   His eyes, hands, body, legs, mouth, and ears were not showing good listening.

3. What should Wagga have done while the teacher sang?
   Wagga should have listened to his teacher by showing good listening with his body parts.

4. What can Wagga do with his (eyes/hands/feet/body/mouth) next time to show good listening?
   Look at the teacher with his eyes.
   Place his hands on his lap.
   Place his feet on the floor or wrapped around the legs of the chair.
   Keep his body still.
   Keep his mouth closed/ do not talk when the teacher is talking.
   Note for questions 2 and 4: Children may be asked to expand upon their answers and describe examples of good and poor listening they have seen.

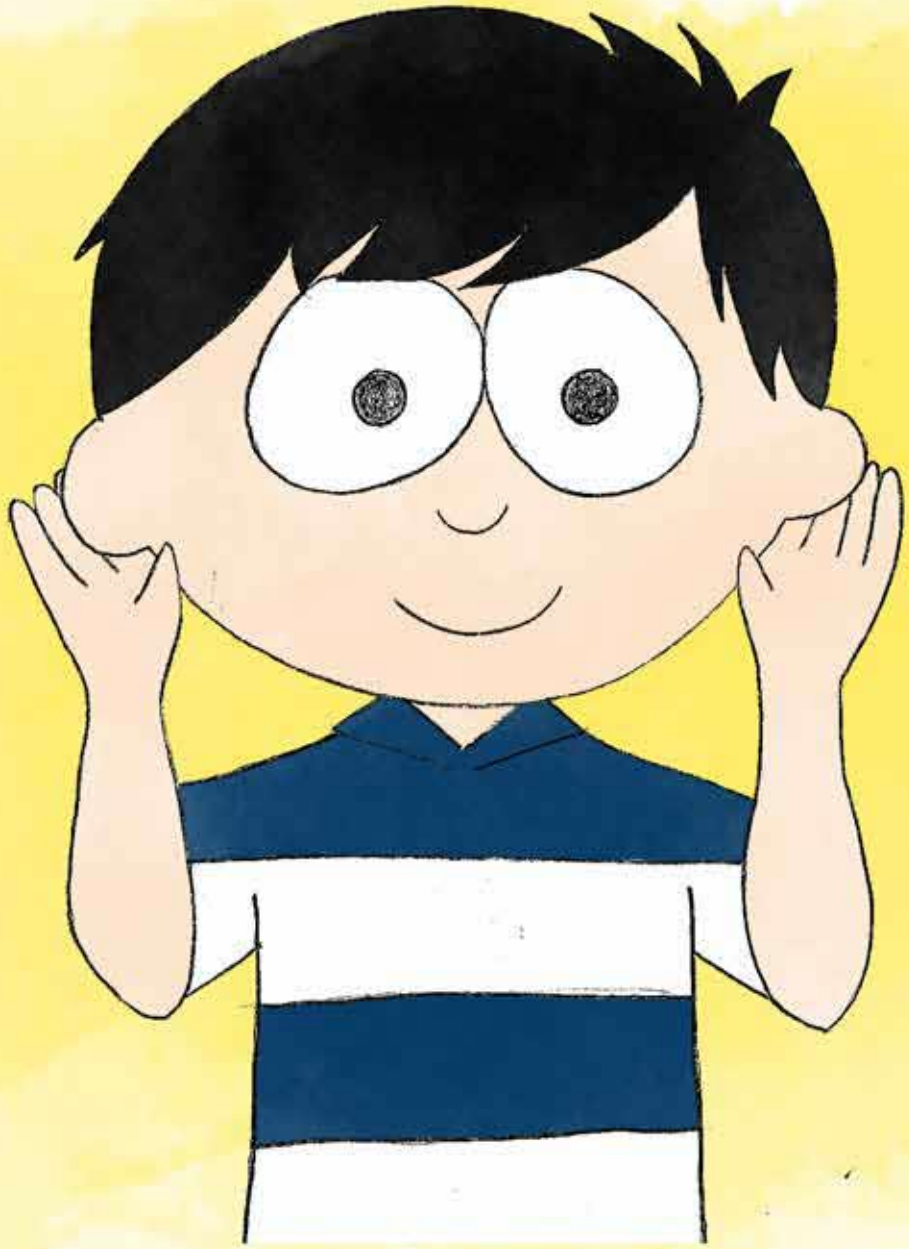
5. Why should we show good listening?
   If we don't, we might miss out on something important and/or interesting;
   It makes the teacher and other children happy;
   So that we can all learn in class;
   It's fair to everyone

Other titles in the 'Wagga' book series:

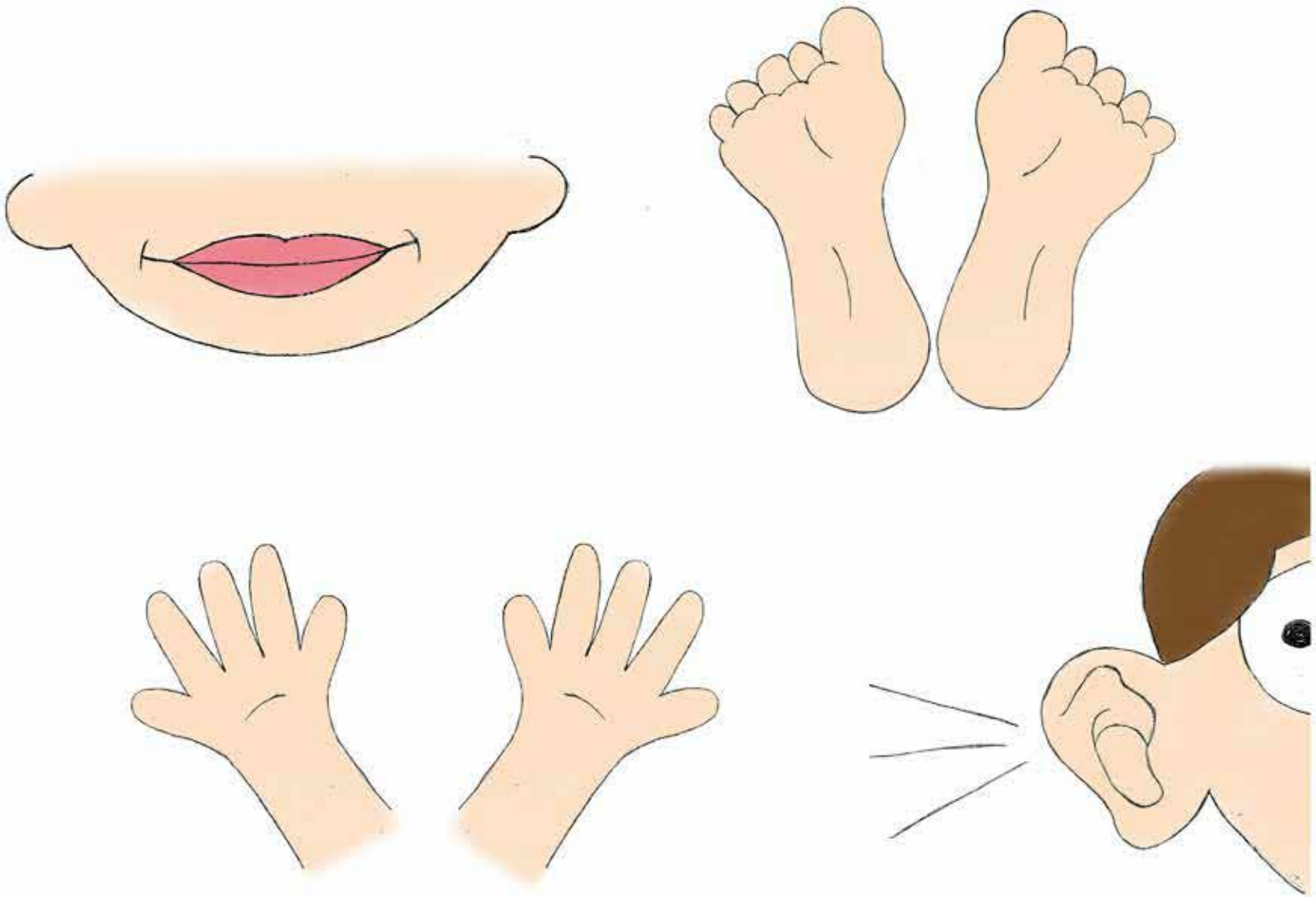
Wagga's First Day at School
Wagga Learns about Feelings
Wagga Learns to Cool Down
Wagga Learns to Share
Wagga Learns to Play Fair
Wagga Learns to Calm Down after Losing
Wagga Learns to Work with Others
Wagga Learns about Bullying



One day, Wagga and his friends were in music class. The teacher had chosen a new song for the children to learn. The children sat down and listened closely to the teacher.



The children who were good listeners listened with their ears. But the children who were very good listeners were clever. They knew that you could use more than just your ears to listen.

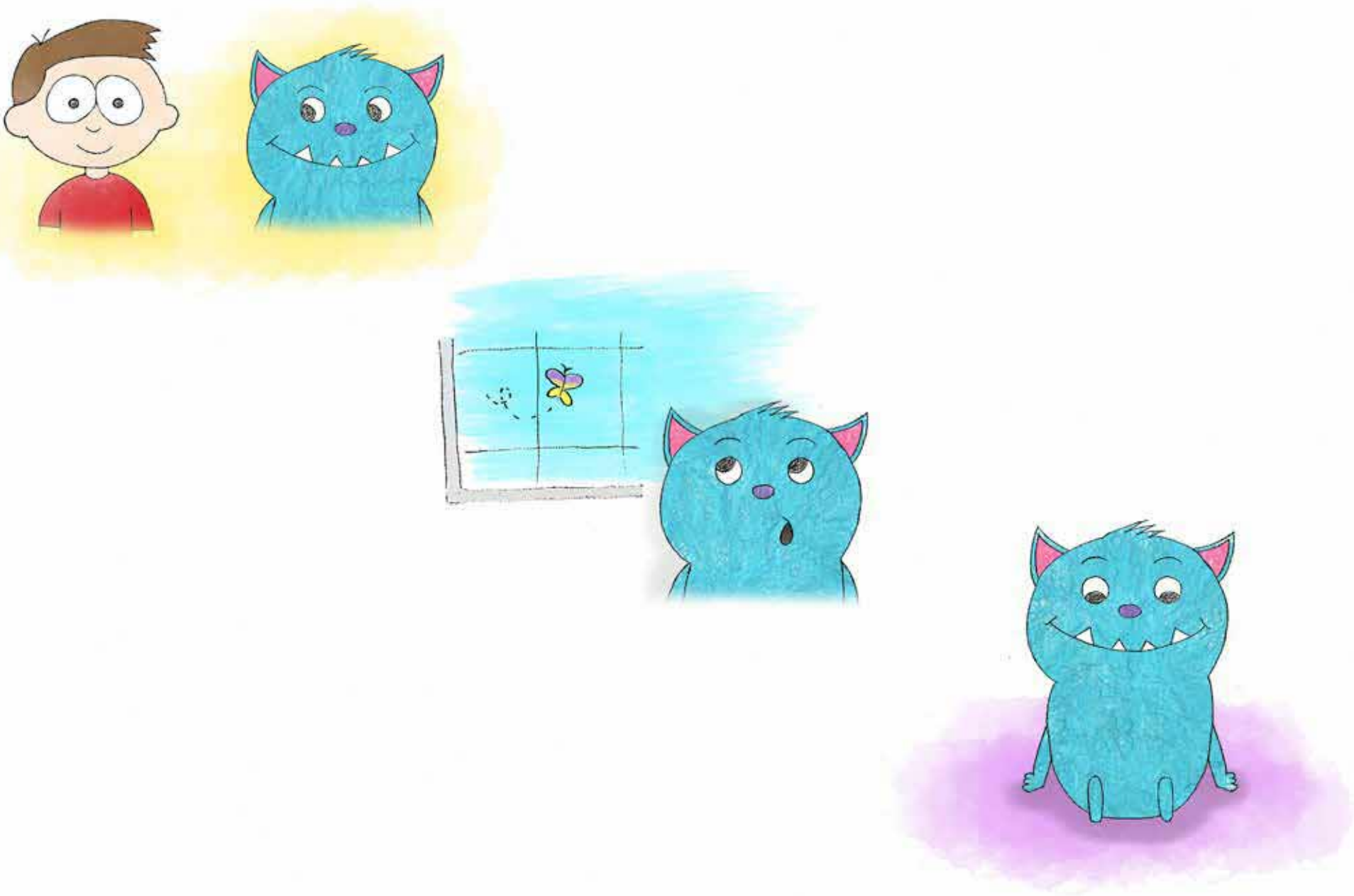


You can use all sorts of body parts to listen!

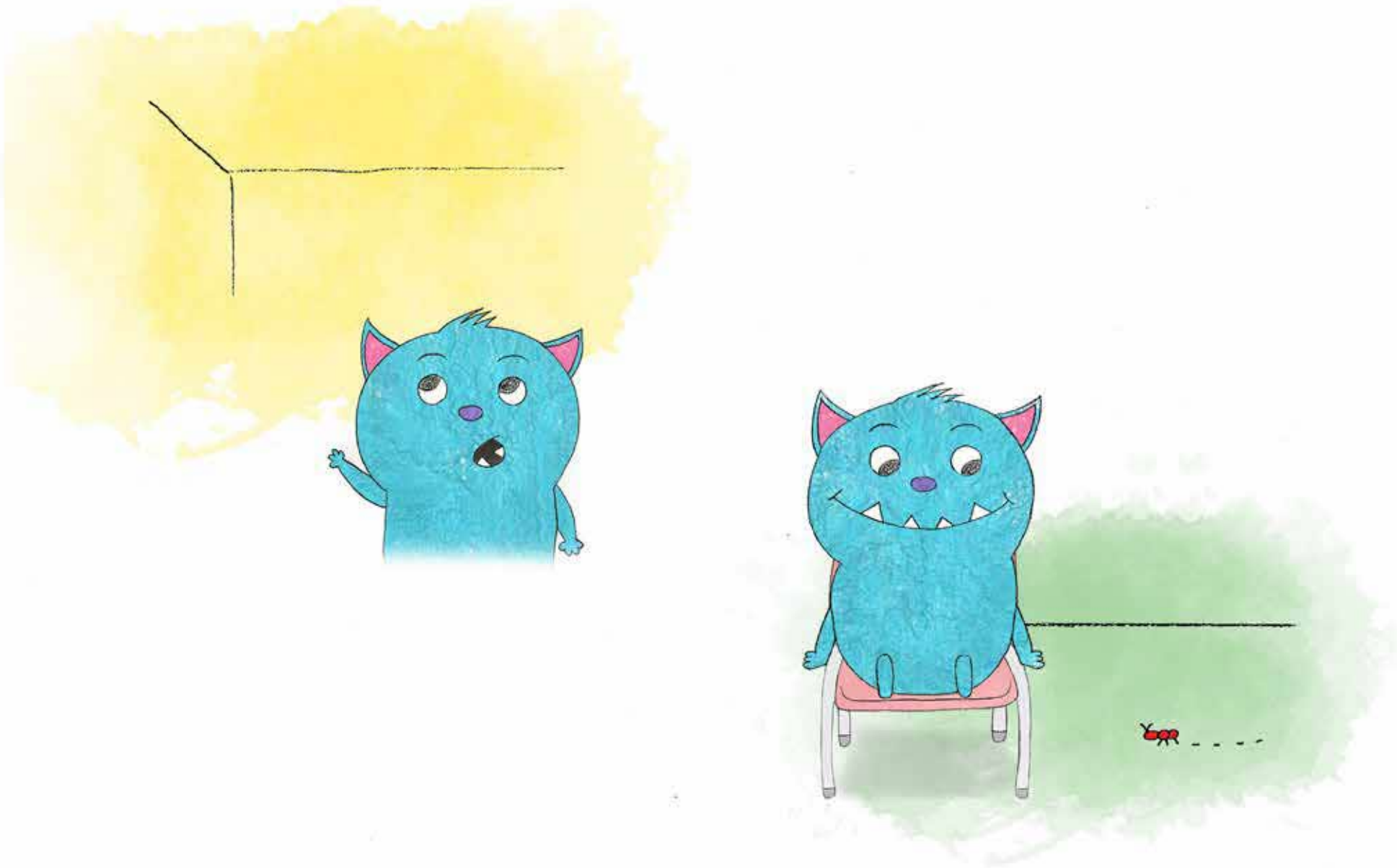


The very good listeners listened by looking at the teacher with their eyes, keeping quiet with their mouths, placing their hands on their laps, putting their feet on the floor, and keeping their body as straight as soldiers.

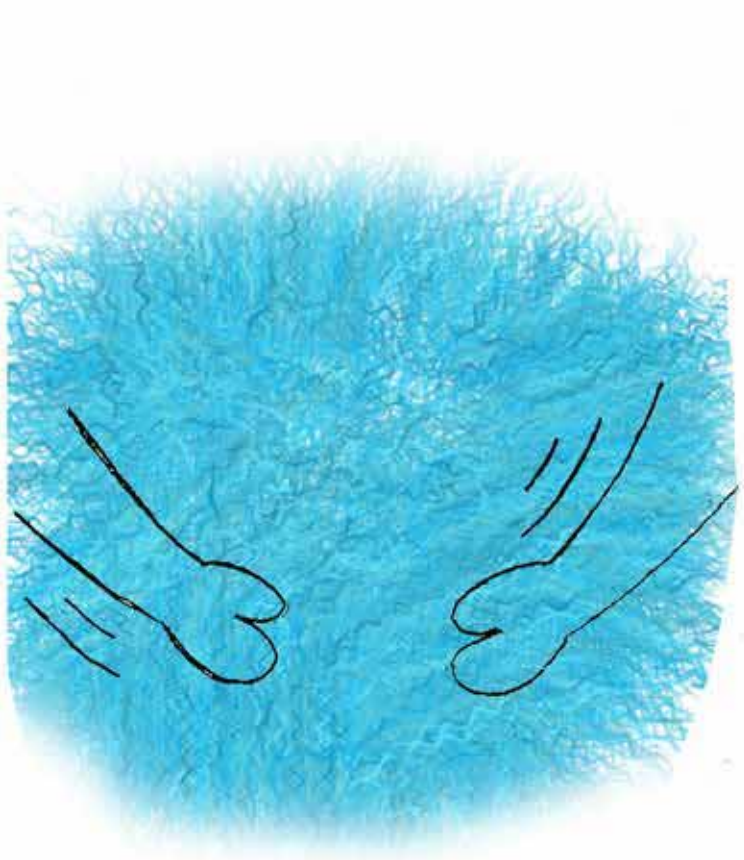
All the children were listening to their teacher singing the song. All except Wagga!



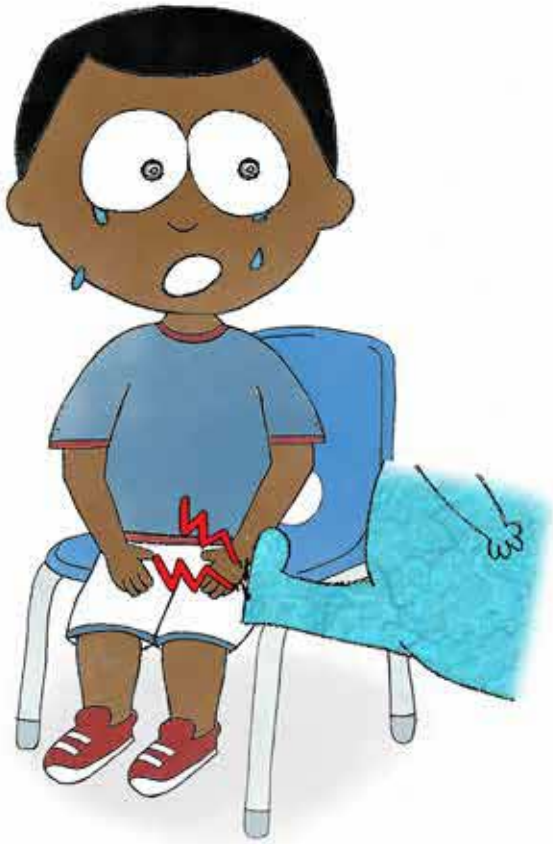
While the teacher was singing, Wagga's eyes got wiggly and stopped listening. He looked at his friends, he looked out the window, he looked at his feet.



He even looked at the ceiling and floor. He looked everywhere but he did not look at the teacher!

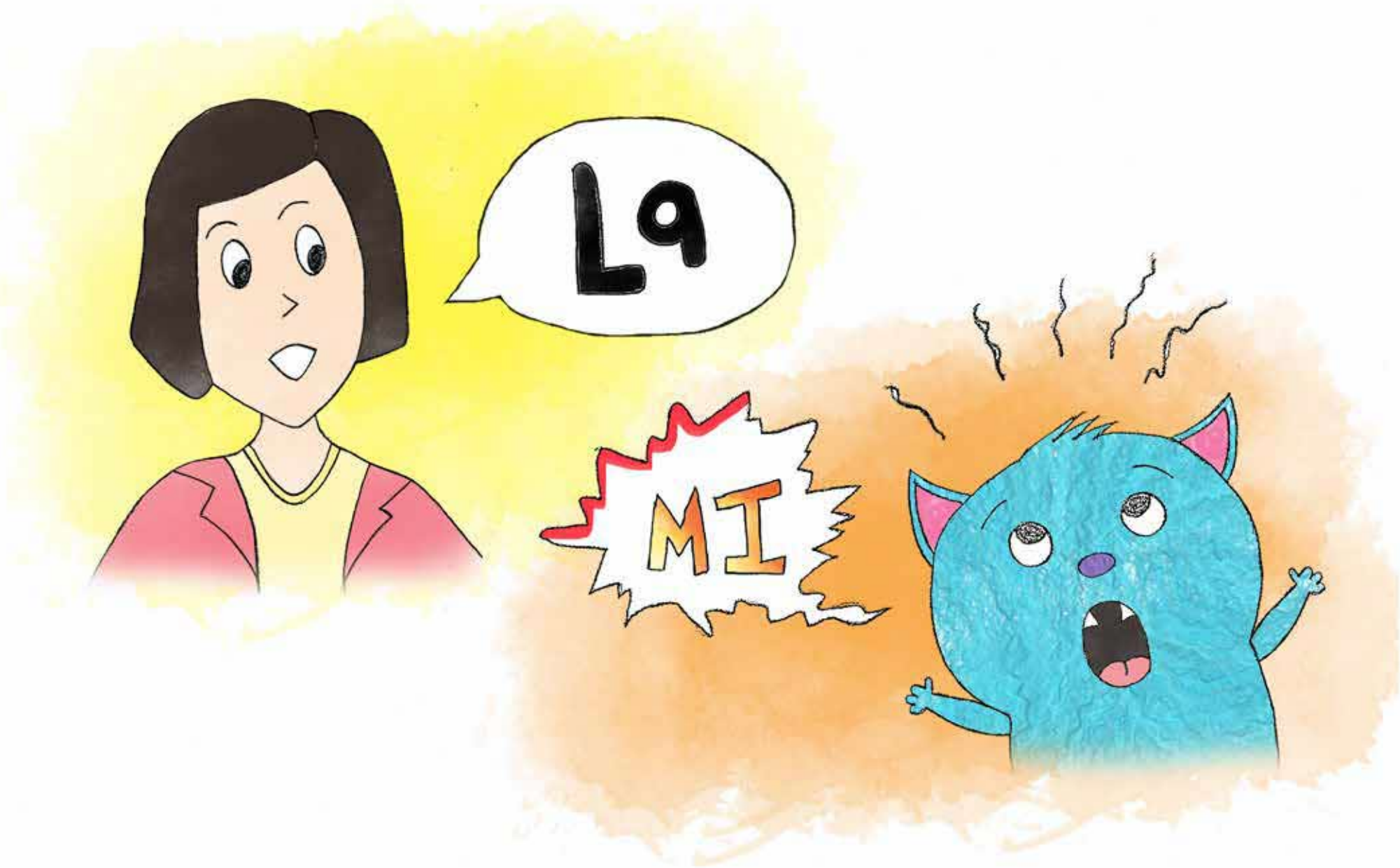






And then, Wagga's hands got wiggly and stopped listening. He started to drum his hands on his lap and sway his wiggly body. What's more, his wiggly legs started swinging.

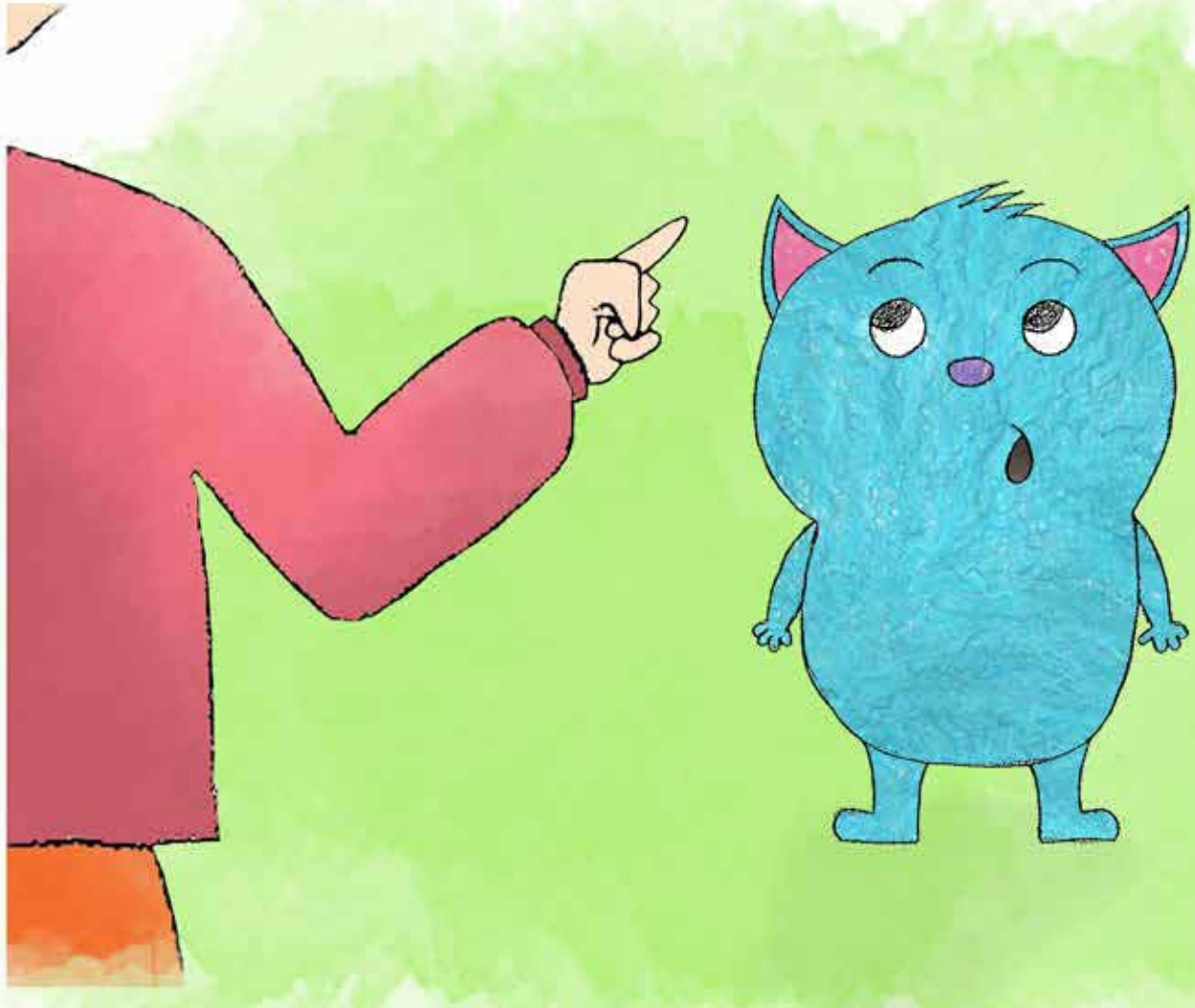
He even kicked poor Govind who was sitting beside him!



By now, Wagga's eyes, hands, body, and legs were not showing good listening. But Wagga was not done. His mouth got wiggly and he started to sing a song, but it was not the same song that his teacher was singing!



Wagga's singing was so loud that his ears could not hear anymore, so his ears stopped listening too.



Suddenly, Wagga's teacher stopped singing. She had finished the song.

She turned to the children and said, "Okay children, now it's time for you to come to the front of the class to sing, one by one – starting with you, Wagga."

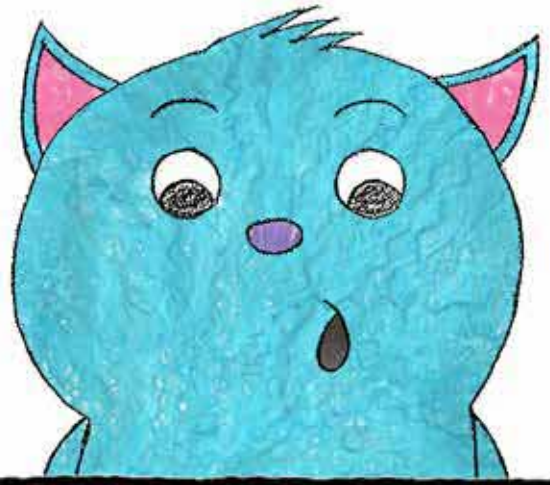


Wagga slowly stood up and walked to the front of the class, facing his friends. But because he had not been listening, he got the words of the song all wrong!

Wagga felt very embarrassed.



The teacher also gave Wagga extra homework to learn the song. Wagga did not get to watch TV that night because he had to finish his homework.



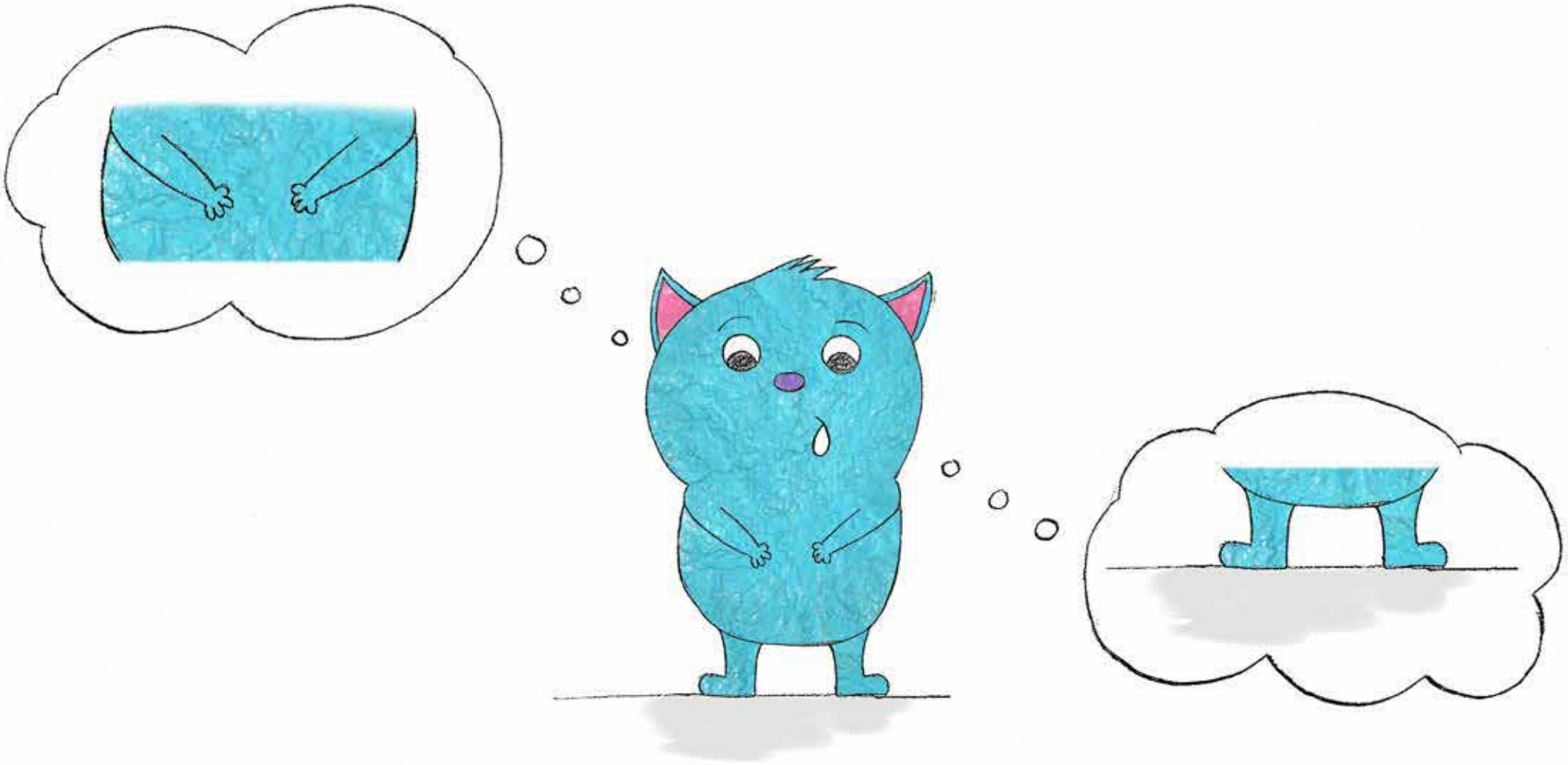
Questions:

1. While the teacher was singing, did Wagga show good listening?
2. Which of Wagga's body parts were not showing good listening?
3. What should Wagga have done while the teacher sang?
4. What can Wagga do with his (eyes/hands/feet/body/mouth) next time to show good listening?
5. Why should we show good listening?

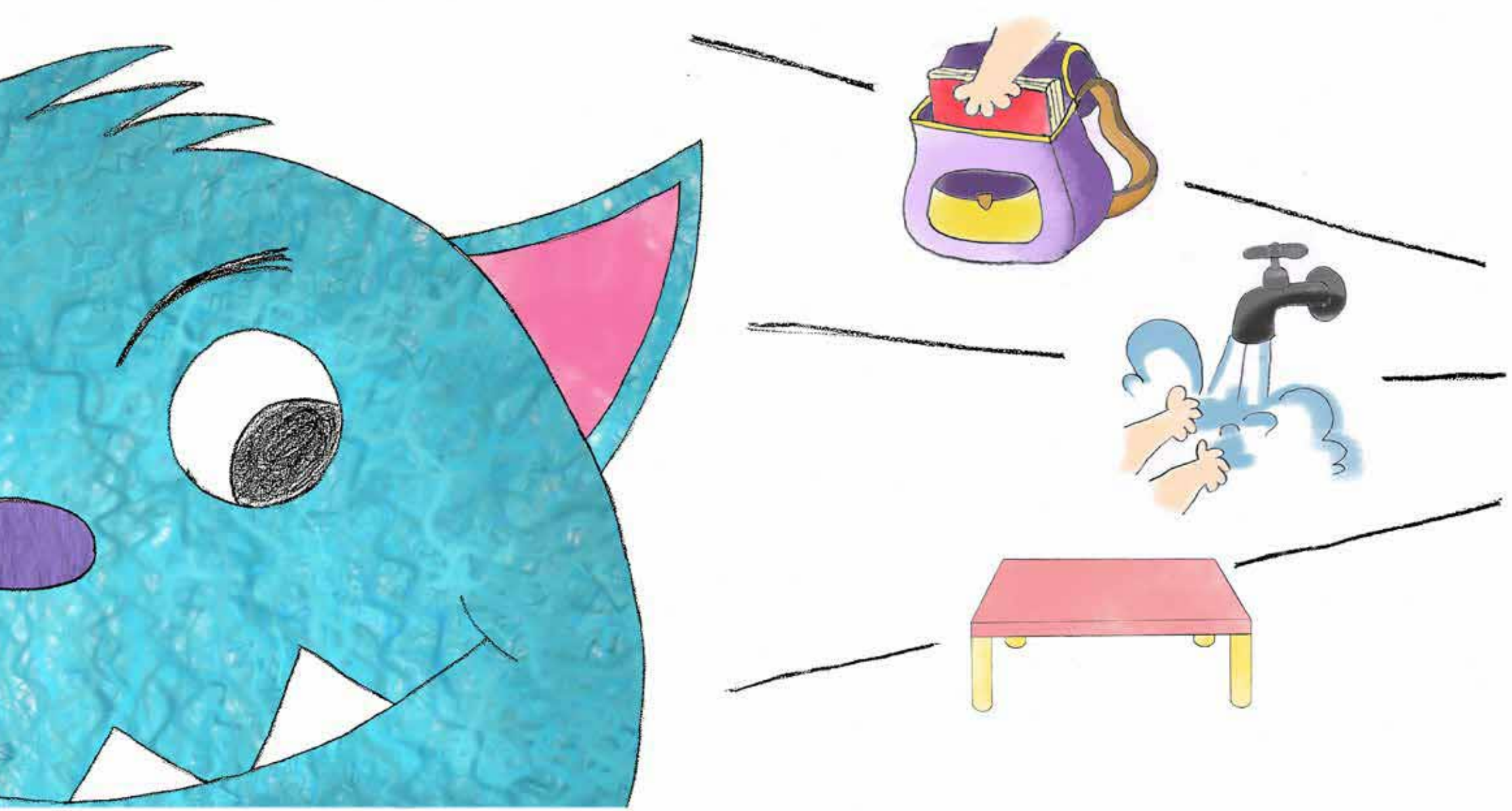


On another day, Wagga and his friends were in class. It was Abby's birthday and she had brought a yummy chocolate cake for everyone to share. Before they could eat the cake, the children had to wait for the teacher to give instructions.

While waiting, Wagga felt a bit bored. Guess what? His hands and legs started to get wiggly. He wanted to swing his arms and jump around the room!



But this time, instead of letting his hands and legs do what they wanted, Wagga decided that he was going to be clever. He quietly told his hands and legs to stop moving. He placed his hands on his lap and his feet on the floor. He looked just like all the other very good listeners in class.



Just then, the teacher said, “Children, put your book in your bag, wash your hands, and sit down at the table.”

Wagga heard everything! Even better, he did everything the teacher asked him to do.



Because of his good listening, Wagga was given an extra big piece of yummy chocolate cake that day.

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