WAGGA Learns to Play Fair



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 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 Learns to Play Fair'

Why is it important for children to learn to play fairly with others?

Playing fairly with others is a concept that is usually implicitly learnt through participating in play, games, and sports. However, for many children with social difficulties, engaging in such activities may be an over-stimulating experience due to increased noise levels, heightened emotions, social demands, and the different roles of the participants. They may not be able to attend to subtle social information on how to participate in an appropriate manner. Therefore, they benefit from learning the basic "rules" that govern good sportsmanship.

Key learning goals

1) For children to understand the "rules" of playing fair.

2) For children to understand the purpose of playing fair.

Other titles in the 'Wagga' book series:

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

Answer suggestions to discussion questions – Part 1:

1. Wagga took three jellybeans and gave Claire one jellybean. Do you think that Wagga was being fair to Claire?
   Wagga was not being fair to Claire because he took more jellybeans than his share.

2. What could Wagga have done to be fair to Claire?
   Wagga could have given Claire two jellybeans and they would both have the same number of jellybeans, which is fair.

Answer suggestions to discussion questions – Part 2:

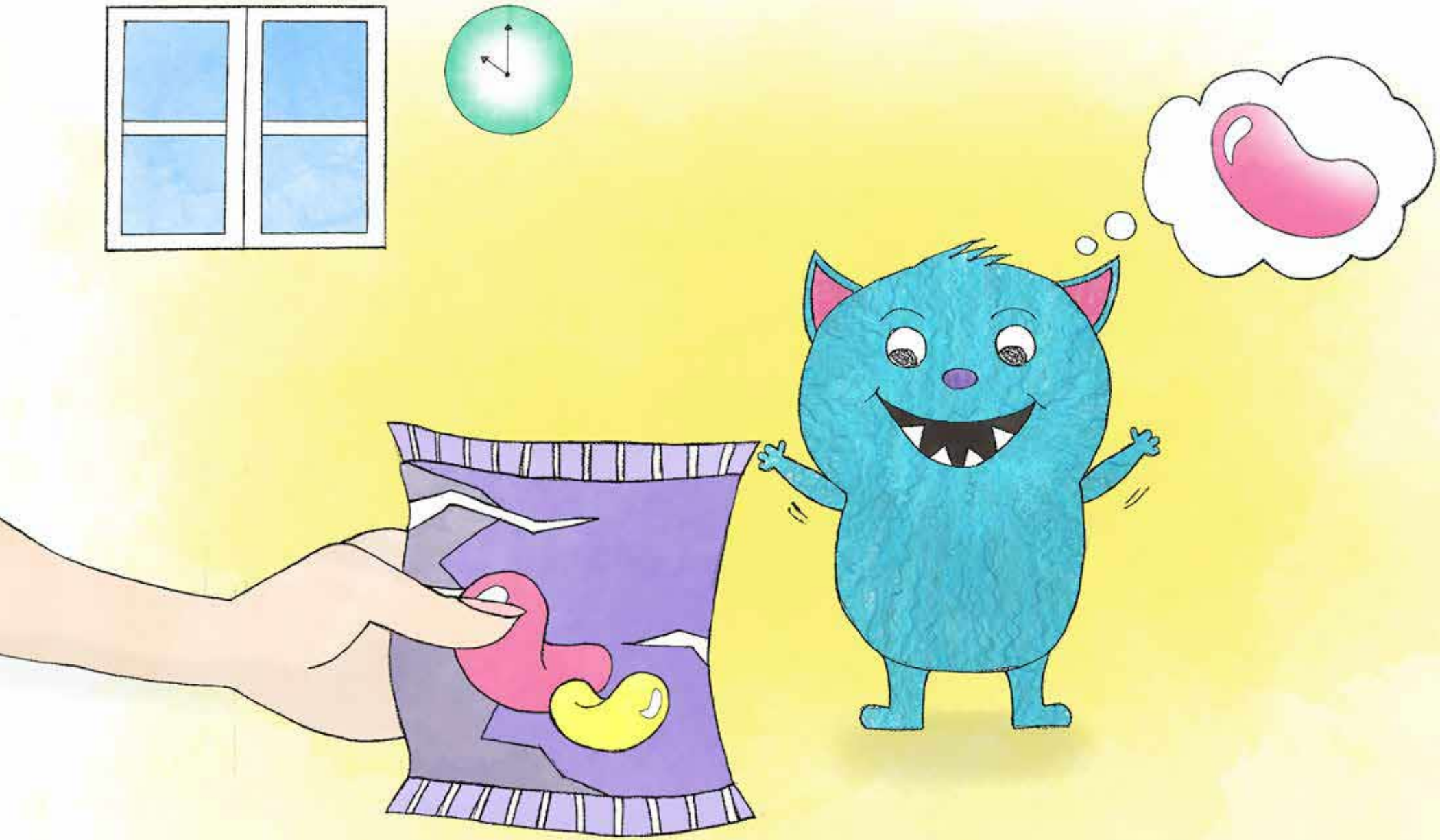
1. During the Simon Says game, did Wagga play fair?
   Wagga did not play fair during the Simon Says game.

2. Why not? What did he do that was not fair to the other children?
   He did not listen to others, he cheated, he did not take turns, and he did not try his best to play.

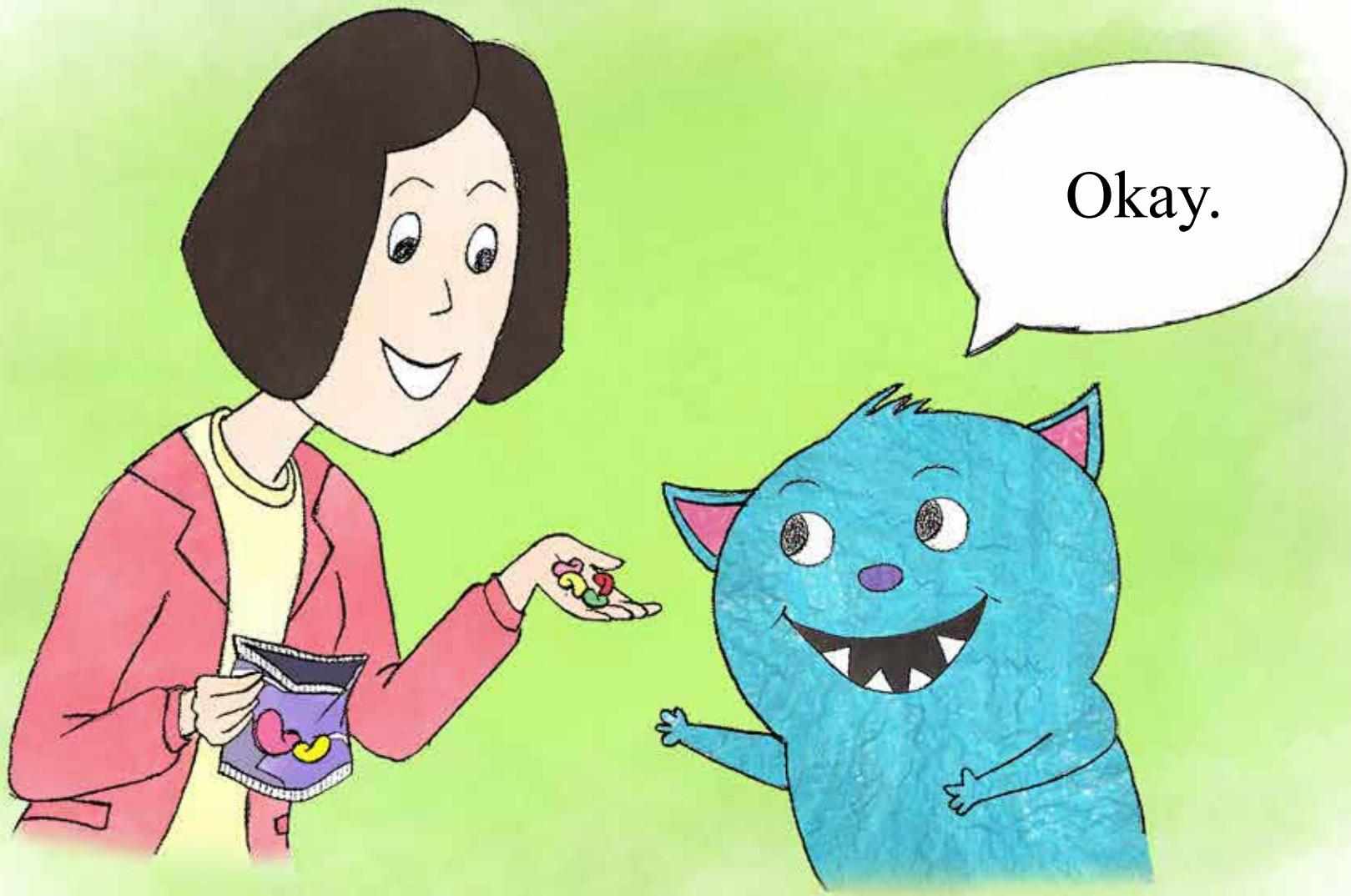
3. What happened to Wagga when he did not play fair?
   Wagga did not get to join in the rest of the games.

4. What could he have done when the teacher said that it was Claire's turn to be Simon?
   Wagga could have agreed to let Claire have her turn.

5. Why is (not listening/cheating/not taking turns/not trying your best) not playing fair?
   Not listening is not playing fair because you need to listen to others to play a game *properly.*
   Cheating is not playing fair because you might win but you are not the real winner.
   Not taking turns is not playing fair because other people don't get a chance to play the game.
   Not trying your best is not playing fair because other people don't get to have fun.
   Note: Positive rephrasing may be used in addition to or instead of the above question. 'Why is (listening/following the rules/taking turns/trying your best) playing fair?'

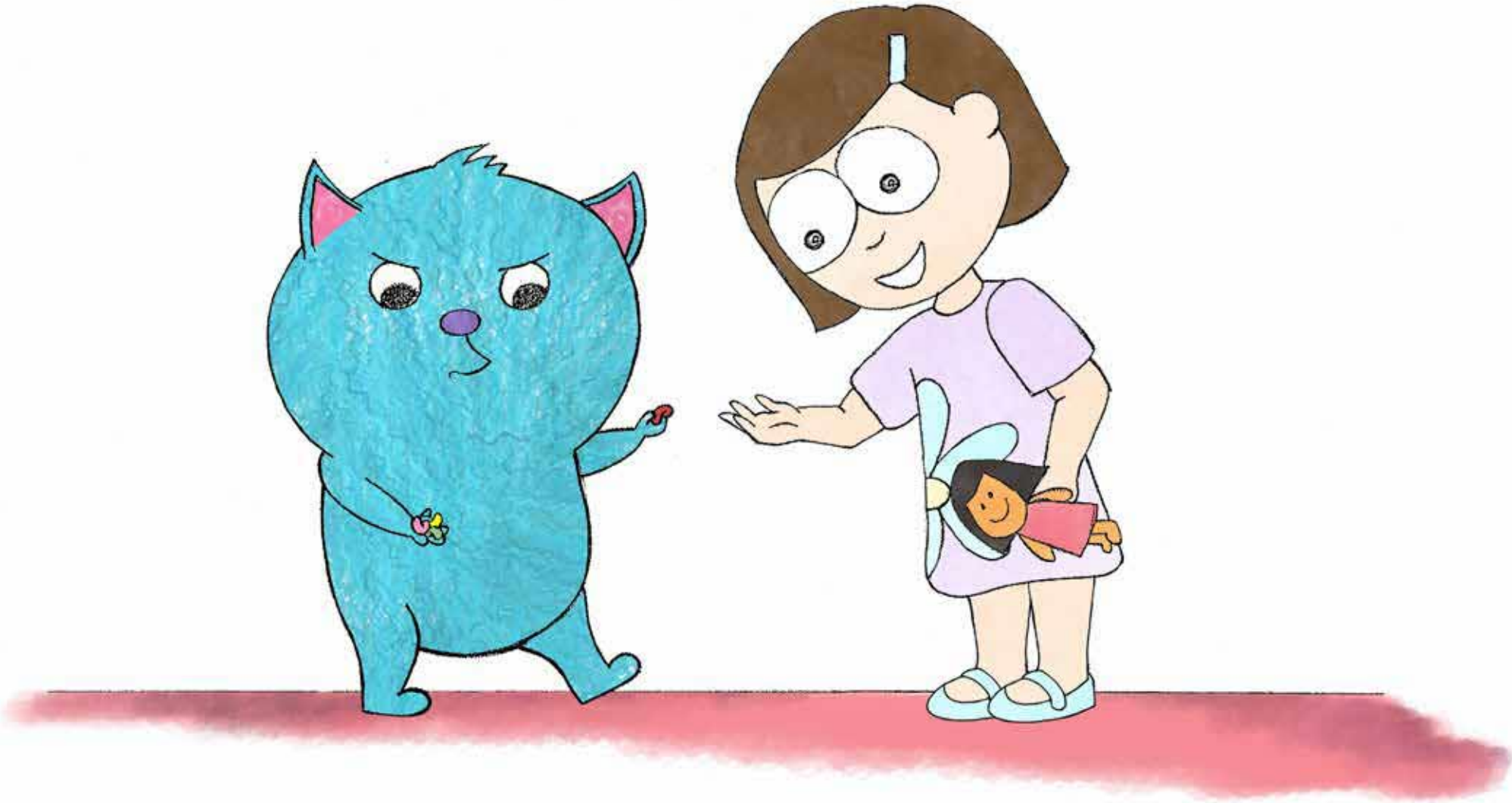


One day, Wagga's teacher brought jellybeans to school to give to the children. Wagga thought that jellybeans were yummy. He really liked the strawberry ones!

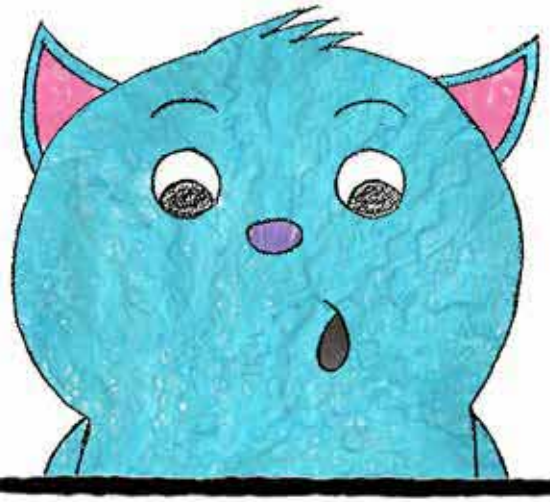


Wagga's teacher came over to Wagga and said, "Wagga, here are four jellybeans. I want you to give two to Claire and take two for yourself."

Wagga replied, "Okay."



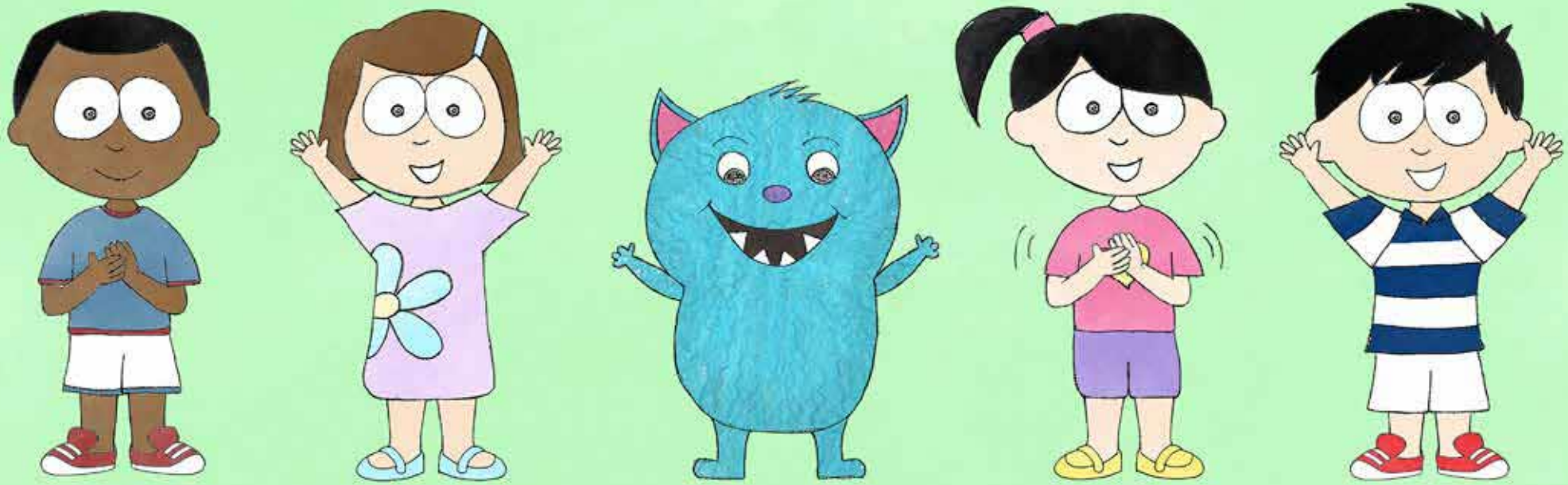
Wagga went to look for Claire, but instead of giving her two jellybeans, he gave Claire only one jellybean. Wagga kept three jellybeans all to himself!



Questions – Part 1:

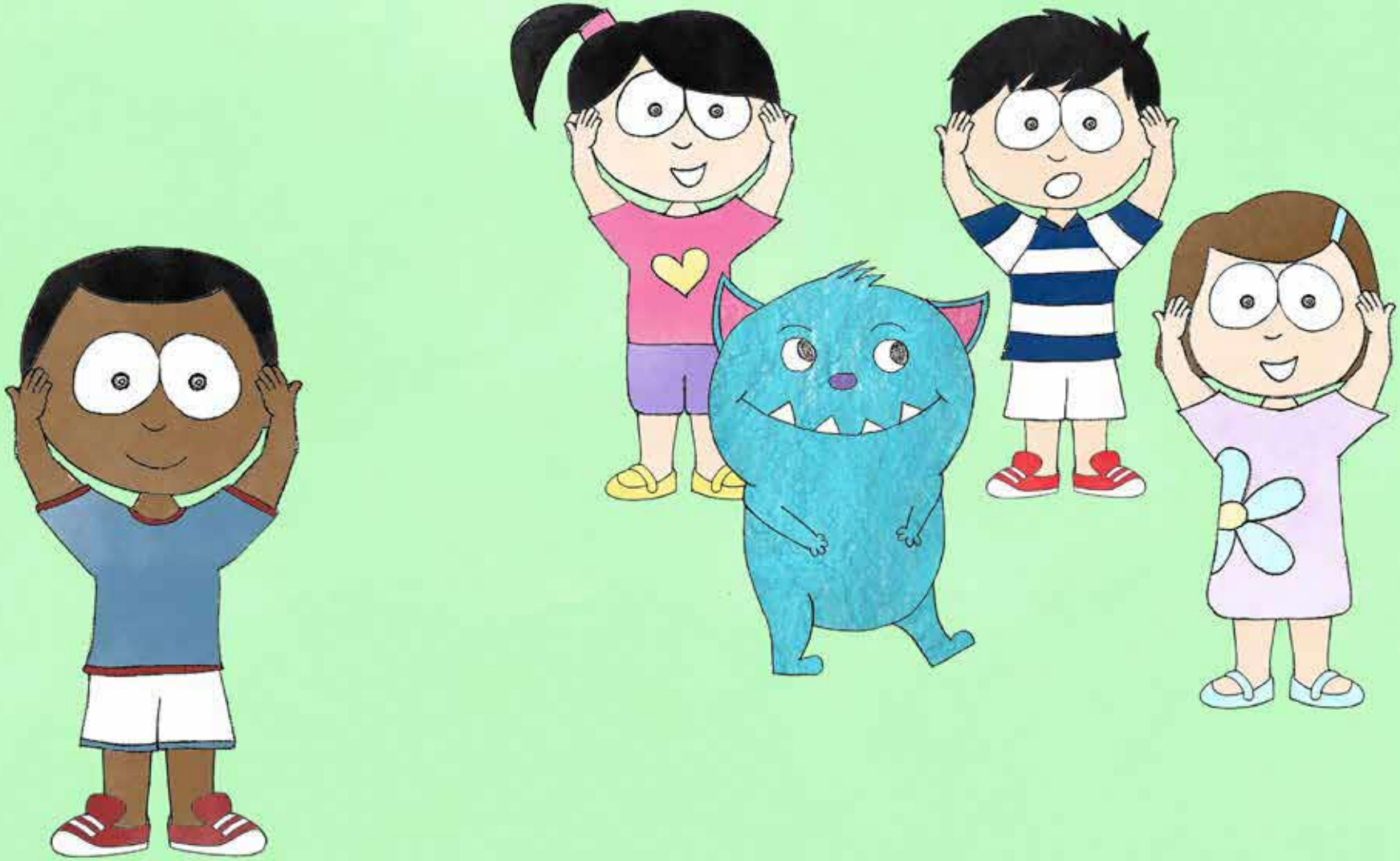
1. Wagga took three jellybeans and gave Claire one jellybean. Do you think that Wagga was being fair to Claire?

2. What could Wagga have done to be fair to Claire?



Later that day, the children were feeling excited because it was games afternoon. Games afternoon meant that the children get a chance to play many different games for the whole afternoon.

The first game that the children would play was Simon Says.

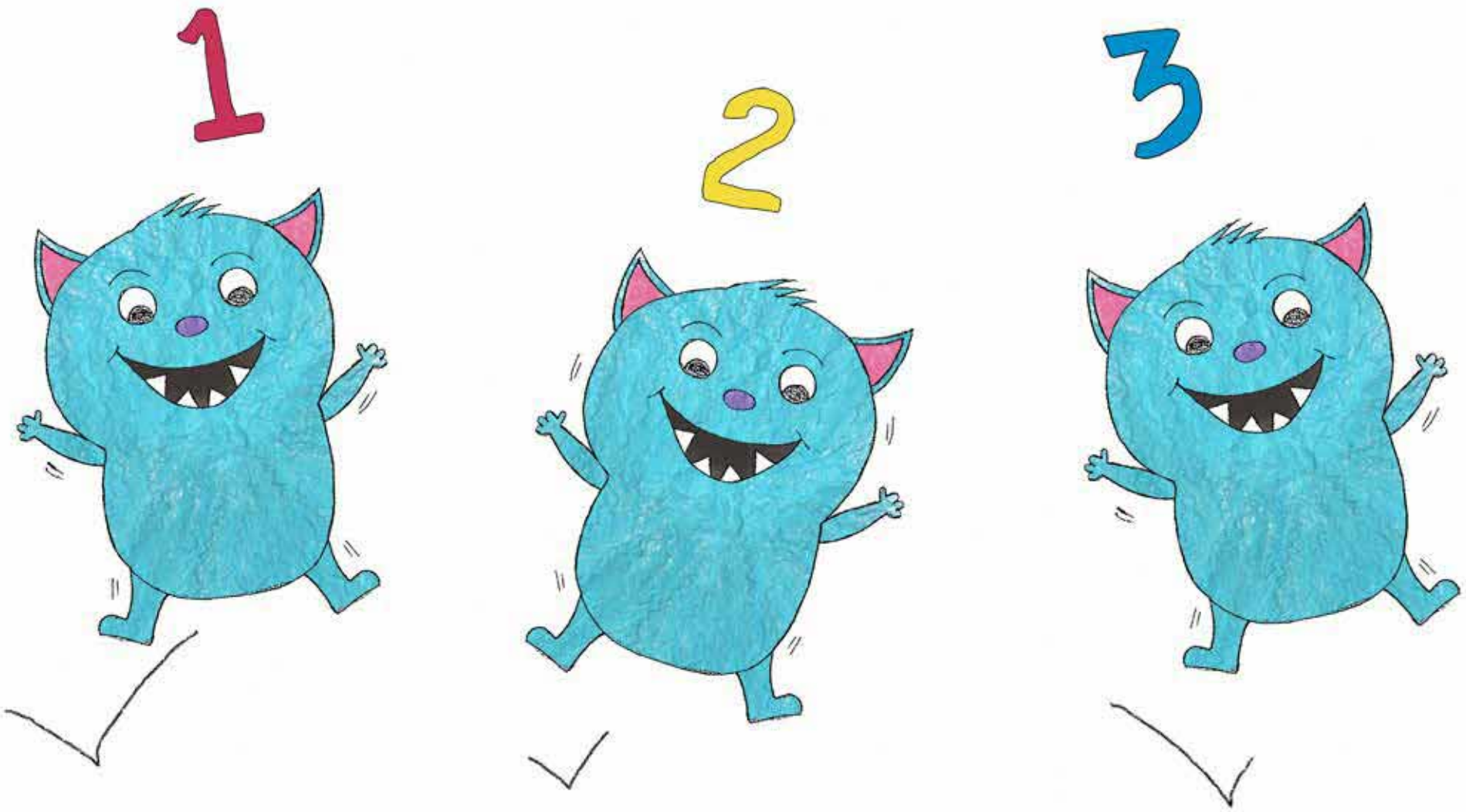


During Simon Says, Govind was chosen to be Simon. “Simon says, put your hands on your head!” said Govind.

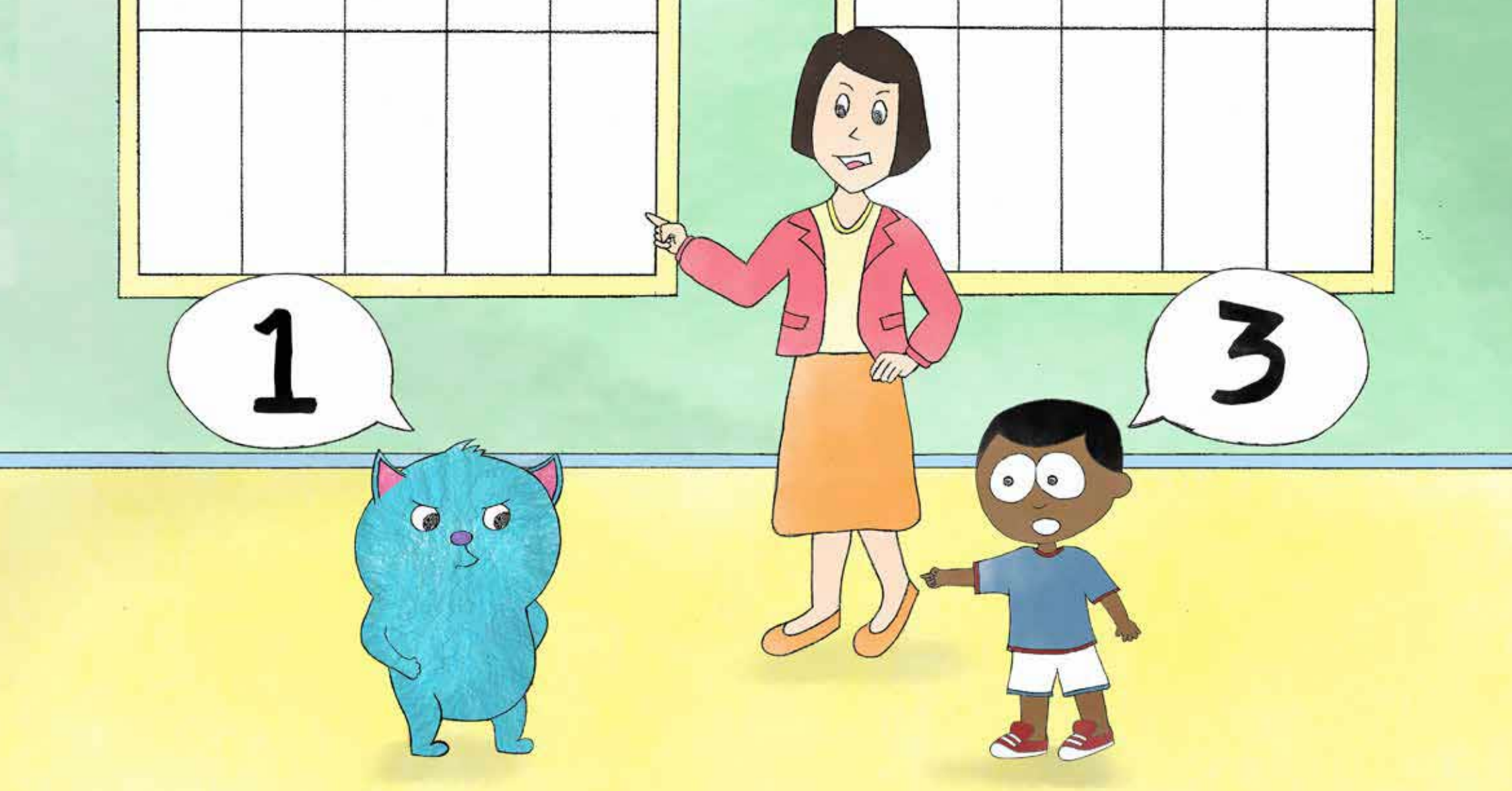
Most of the children quickly placed their hands on their heads. But what did Wagga do? Wagga wasn’t listening when Govind spoke, so he placed his hand on his tummy!



"Simon says, jump one time!" said Govind. Most of the children made one big jump. But what did Wagga do?



Wagga was feeling silly and jumped 3 times!

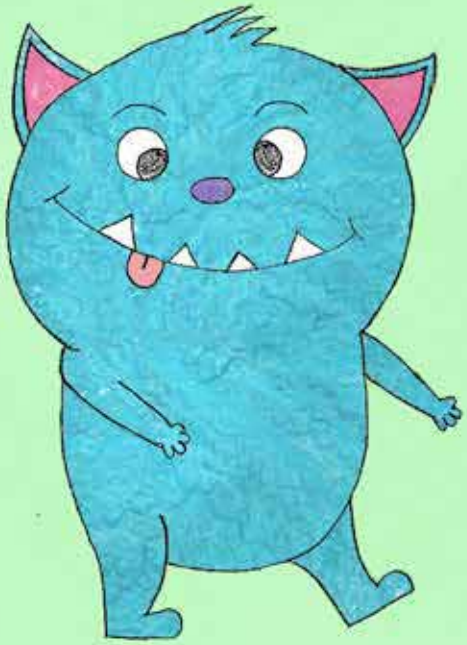


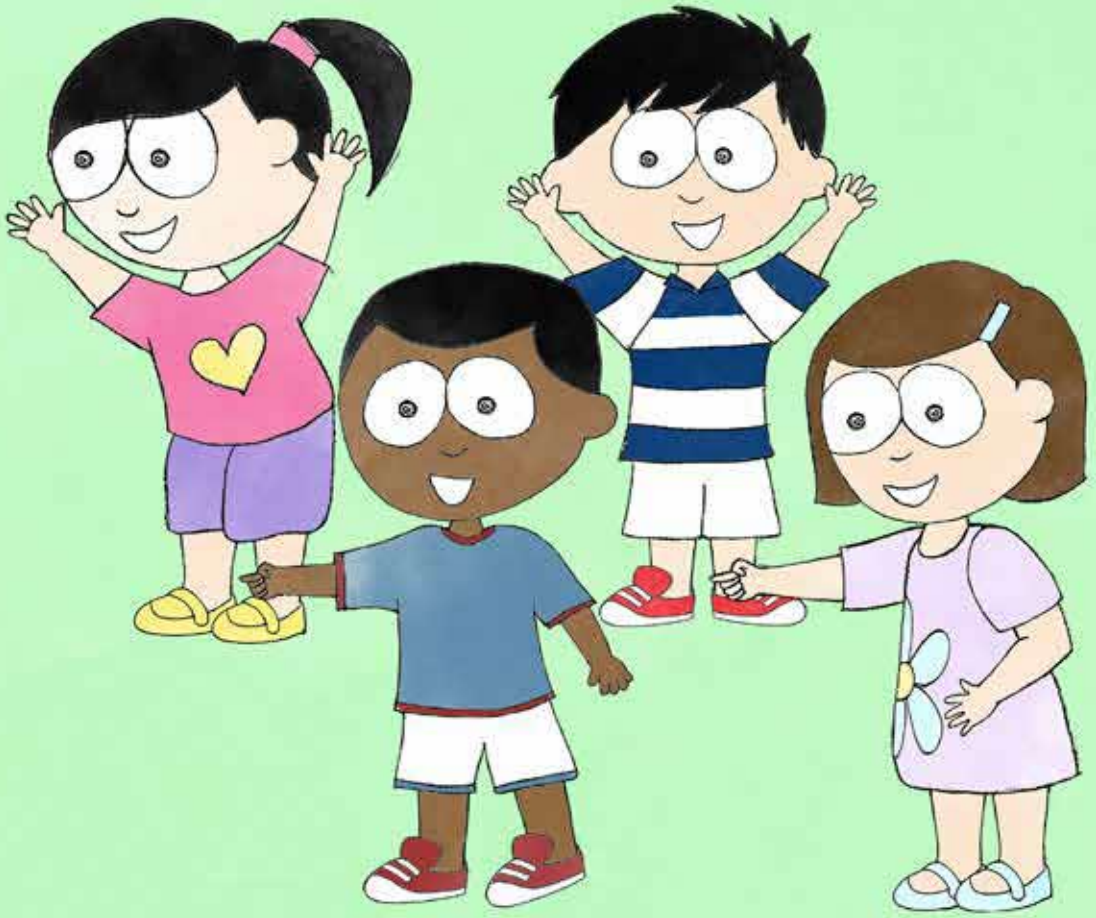
“Wagga,” said his teacher, “you jumped too many times.”

“I didn’t, I only jumped once!” shouted Wagga.

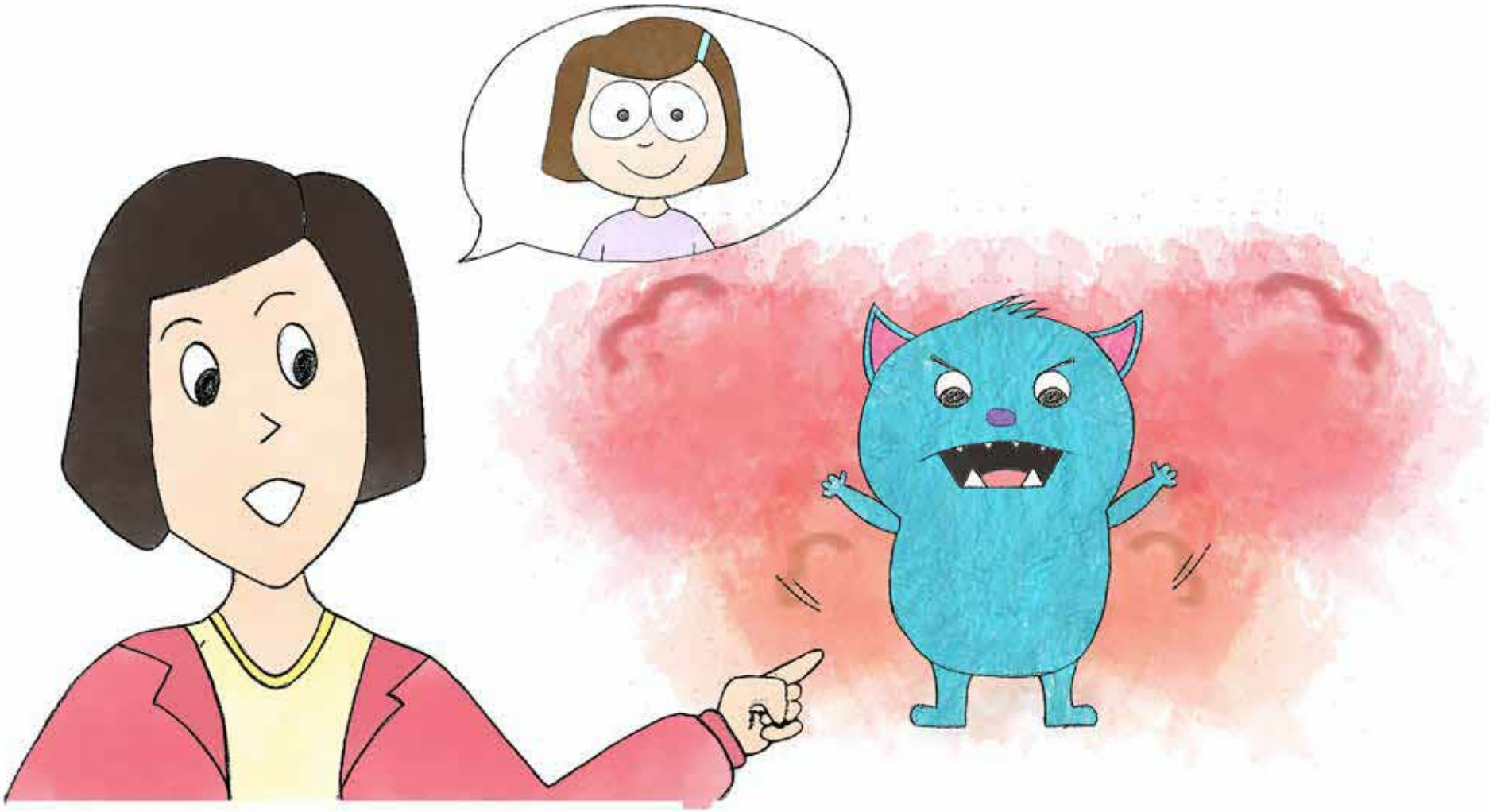
“Hey, that’s cheating,” said Govind, “I saw you jump three times.”

Oh dear, Wagga did not listen and then he cheated. He did not play fair.





Next, it was Wagga's turn to be Simon. Wagga gave instructions such as, "Simon says, walk like a zombie." He made the other children laugh and giggle.

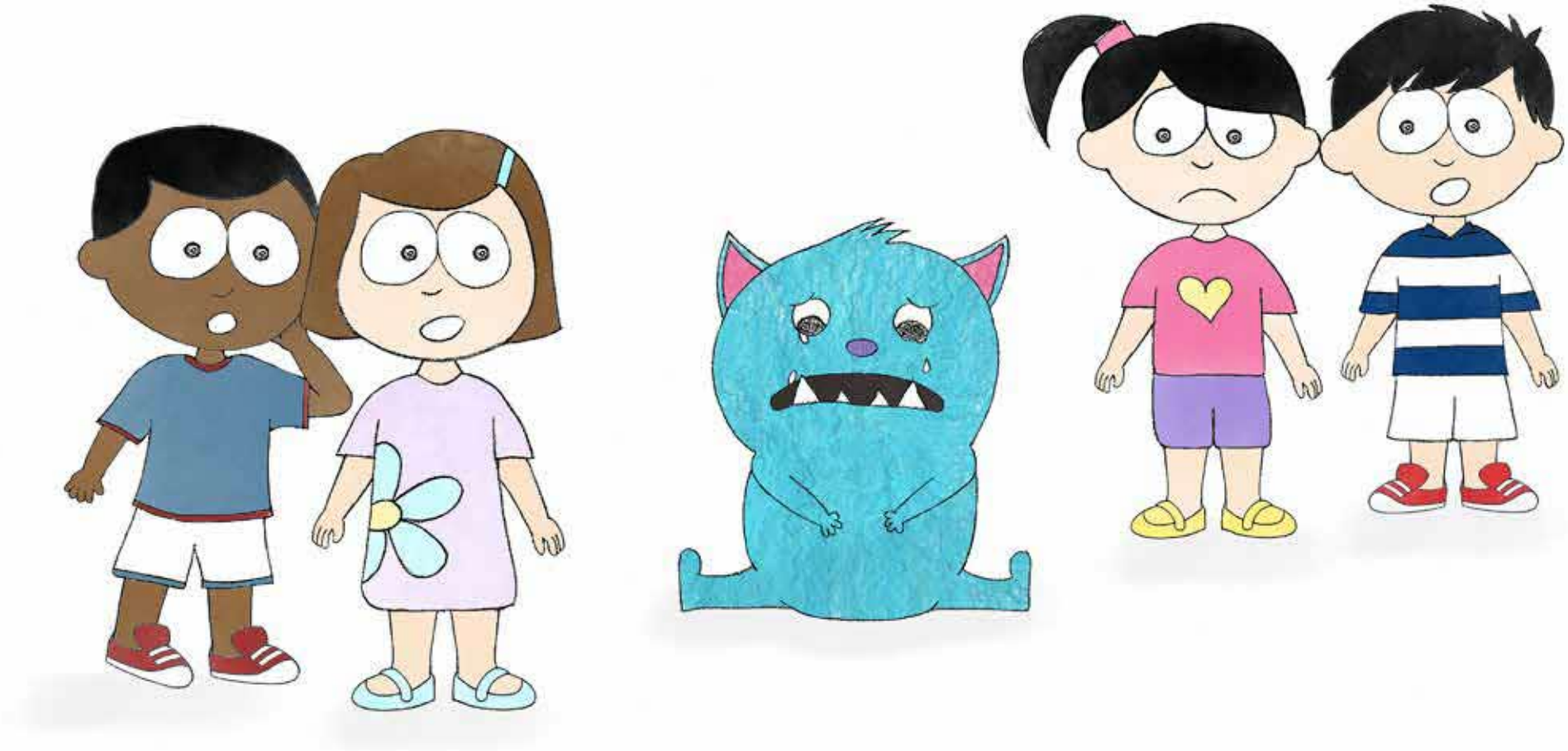


However, when the teacher said that it was Claire's turn to be Simon, Wagga refused.

He said, "No, no! I still want to be Simon!"

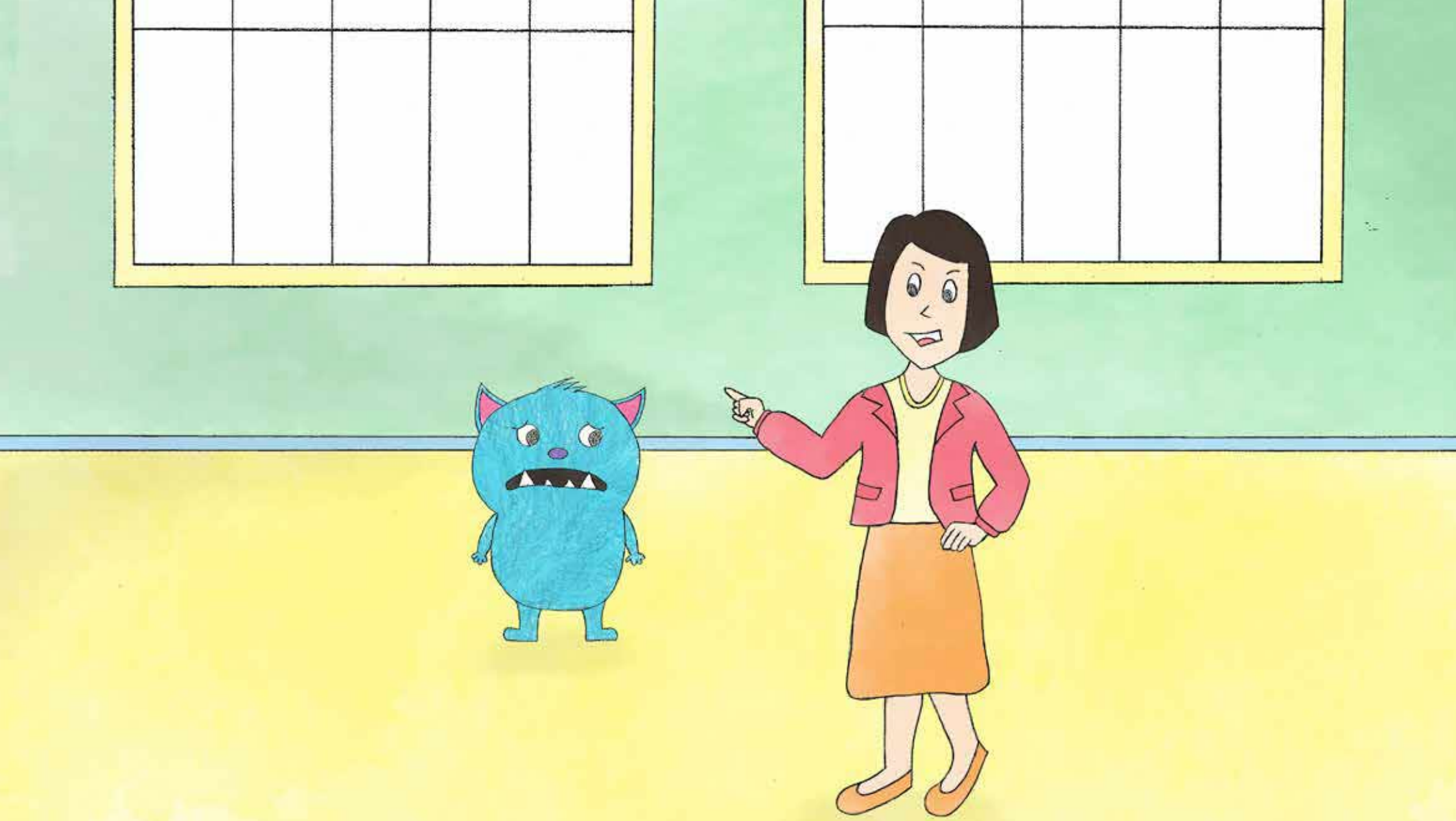
"Wagga, we need to take turns," said the teacher.

"I don't want to play anymore!" shouted Wagga.



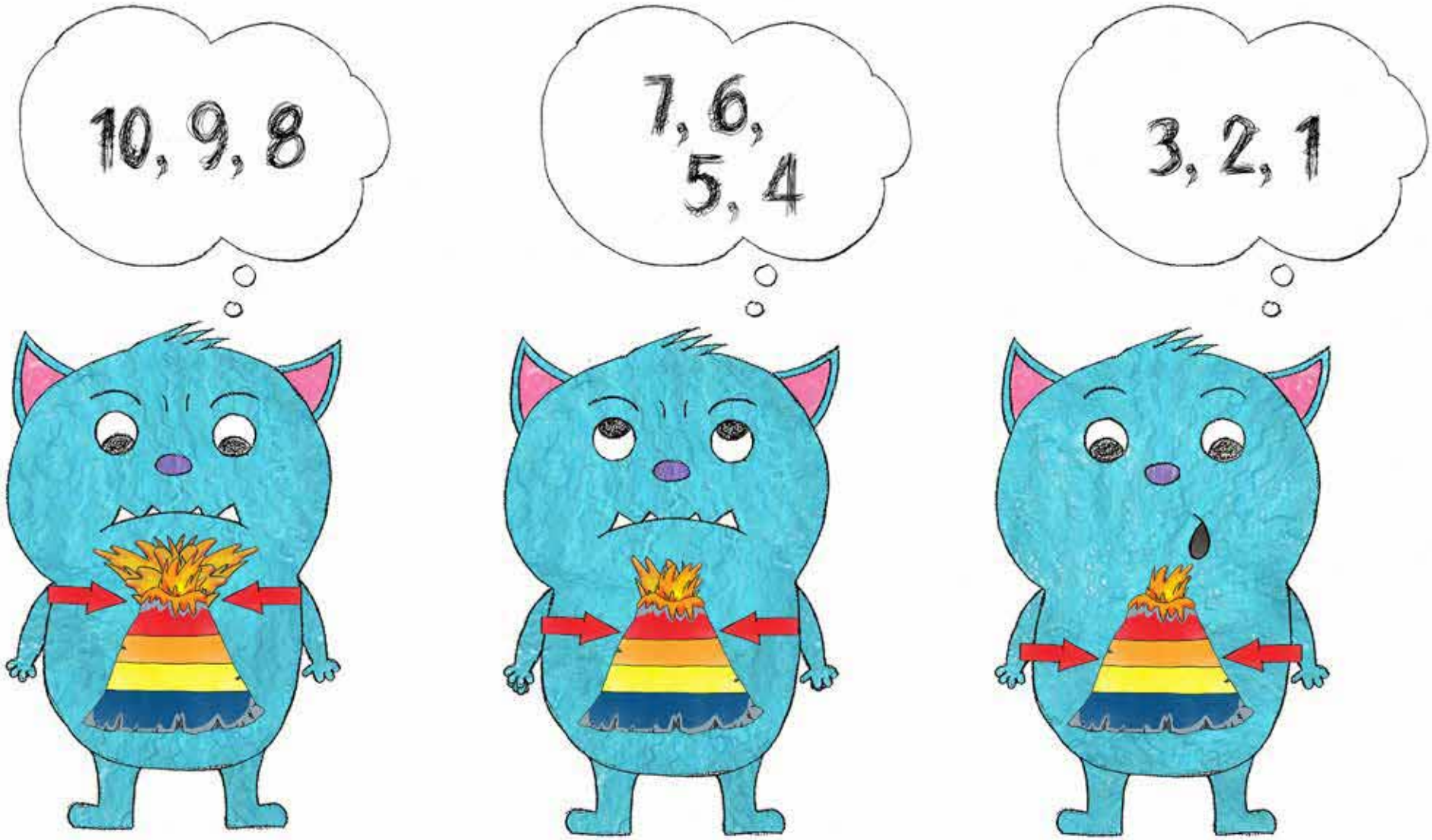
Wagga didn't want to take turns. And he said that he didn't want to play anymore, which meant that he didn't try his best to play. He really wasn't playing fair at all!

All the other children stopped having fun. They had to stand and watch Wagga shout and whine.



Guess what happened next?

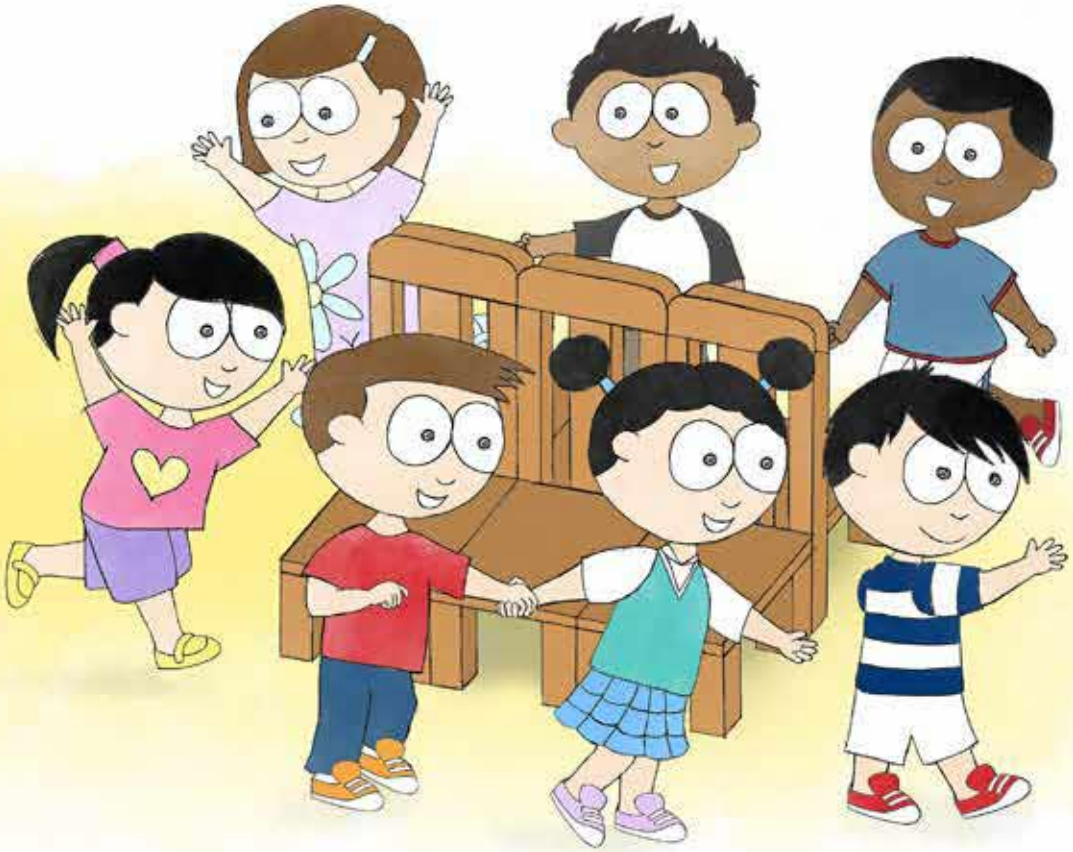
Wagga's teacher said, "Wagga, since you didn't listen, and cheated, and didn't want to take turns, AND said that you didn't want to play, you don't get to join in the other games."



After his teacher said that, Wagga started to feel angry. But he remembered that he needed to control the volcano in his body before it got too hot. Wagga took ten deep breaths and felt less angry.







Wagga spent the rest of the afternoon watching his friends play all sorts of fun games, like Musical Chairs and Three-legged Race. He felt left out and sad.

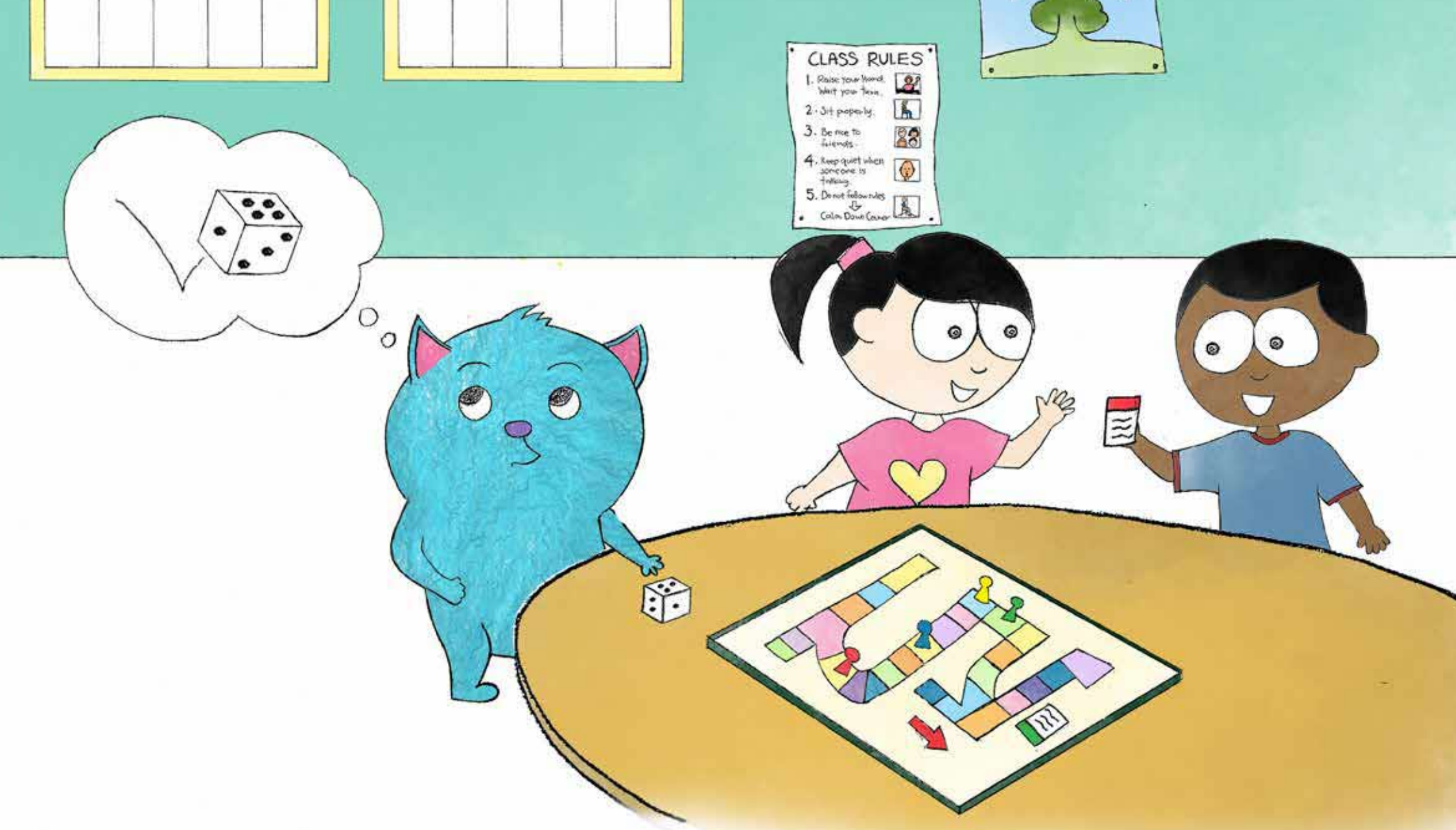


Questions – Part 2:

1. During the Simon Says game, did Wagga play fair?
2. Why not? What did he do that was not fair to the other children?
3. What happened to Wagga when he did not play fair?
4. What could he have done when the teacher said that it was Claire's turn to be Simon?
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   Note: Positive rephrasing may be used in addition or instead of the above question: ' Why is (listening/following the rules/taking turns/trying your best) playing fair?'

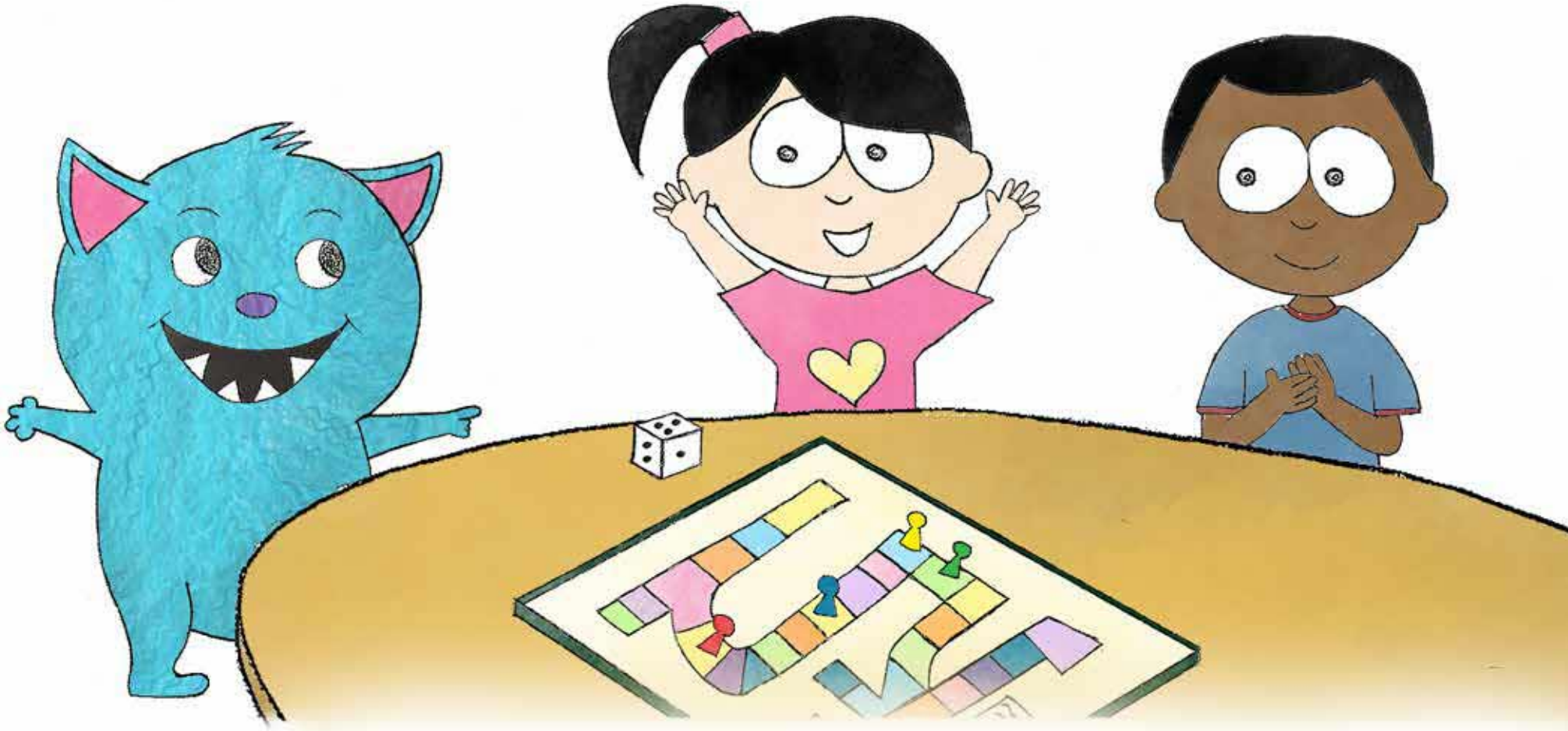


On another day, Wagga played a board game with Abby and Govind. It was Wagga's turn to roll the dice – if he rolled the right number, he would win!



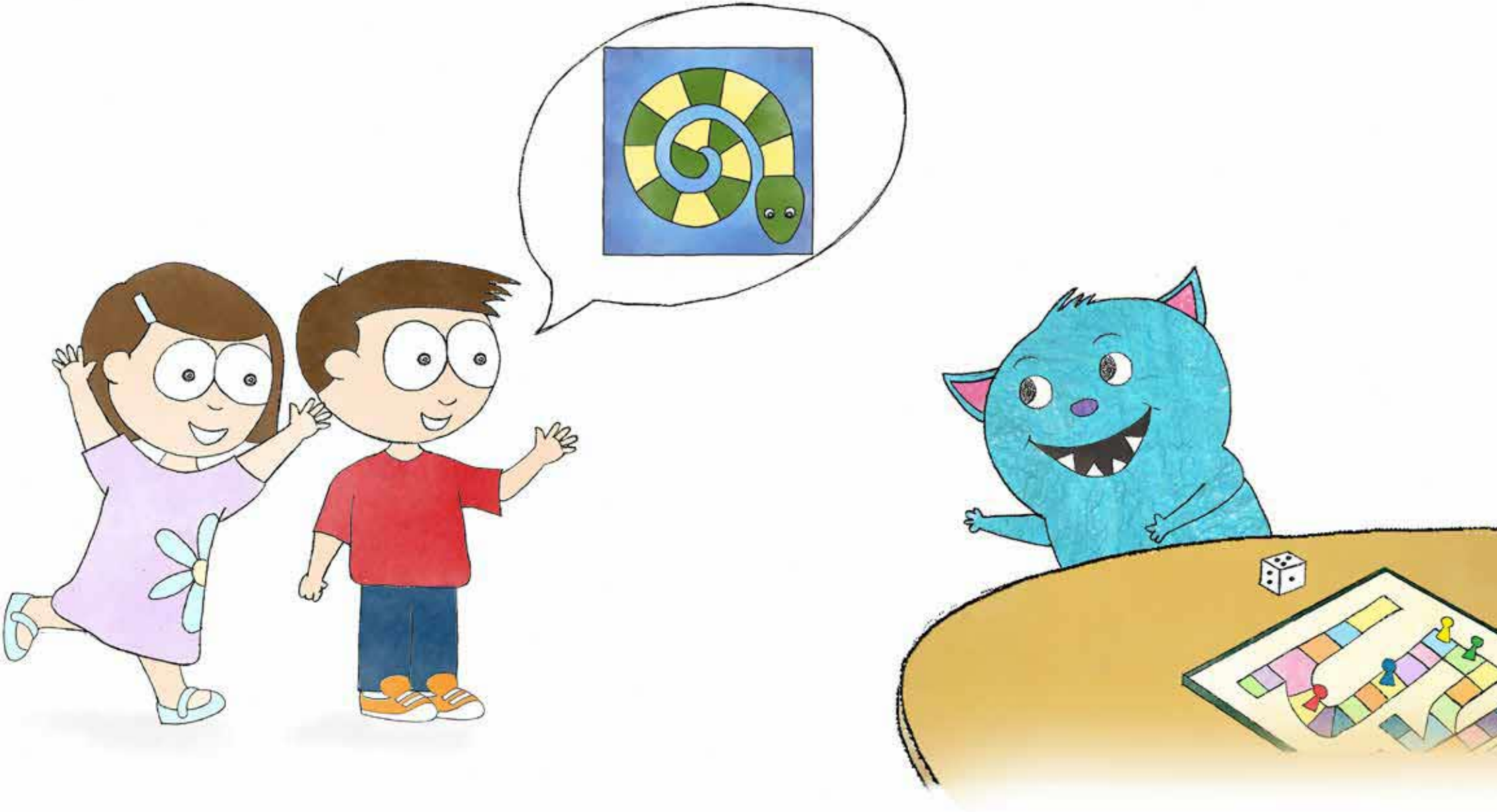
But when Wagga rolled the dice, he did not get the right number to win! Wagga looked up and saw that Govind and Abby were not watching him. He thought about rolling the dice again even though it was no longer his turn.

But this time, he remembered that cheating is not playing fair.



Wagga said to his friends, “I finished my turn.”

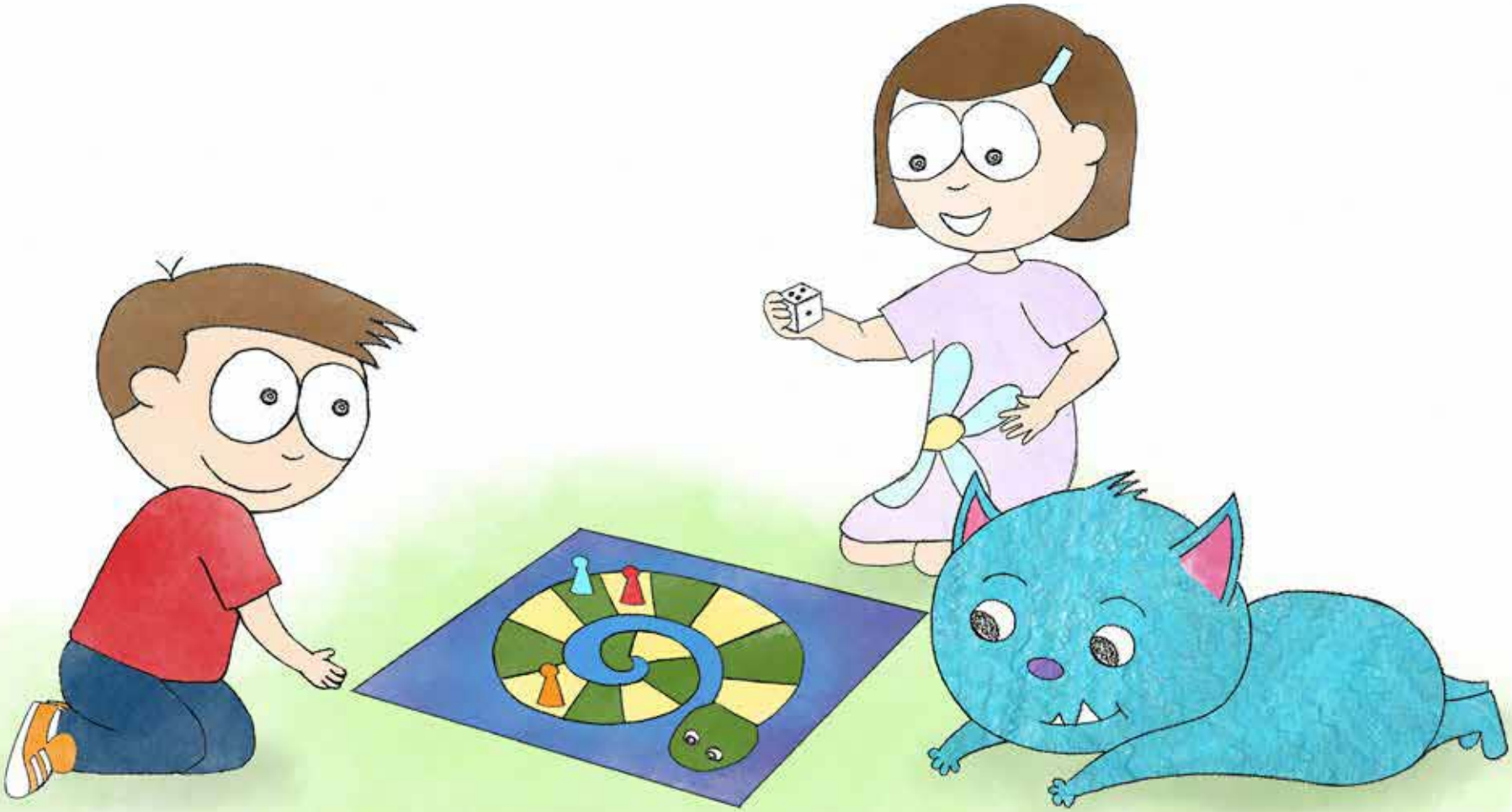
It was Abby’s turn next and she won the game.



But guess what? Claire and Jonas were watching the game and saw that Wagga played fair.

They thought to themselves, “Wagga is fun to play with because he plays fair.”

They invited Wagga to join in their board game.



Wagga had a lot of fun playing fair. He listened to his friends, he did not cheat, he took turns, and he finished the game. He even won once!

Wagga now understood that playing fair meant doing nice things so that EVERYONE can have fun.

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