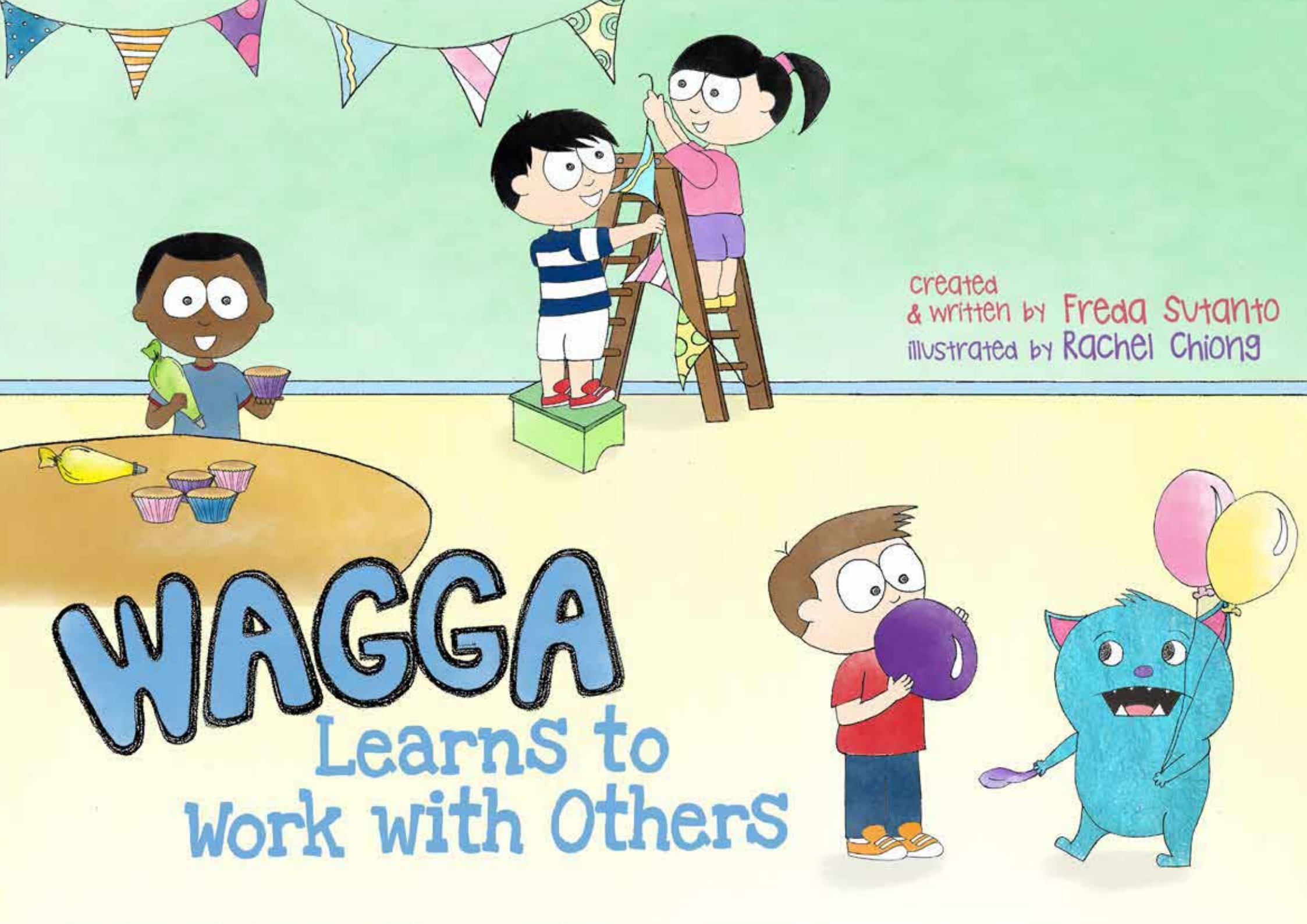


created
& written by Freda Sutanto
illustrated by Rachel Chiong

WAGGA
Learns to Work with Others

Wagga Learns to Work with Others

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

Funded by: LIEN foundation

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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 Work with Others'

Why is it important for children to learn to work together with peers?

As children move beyond kindergarten and into primary school, the expectation that children will work with their peers, in and out of the classroom, increases. Working together, whether in pairs or a group, is a dynamic process that requires collaboration, negotiation, and flexibility. This process is often overwhelming for children with social and emotional difficulties. To guide these children to work well with others, it is helpful to provide clear expectations prior to the activity. For example, during arts and crafts where children are expected to make a piece of drawing together, the facilitator can assign a child two specific social tasks – (1) ask another child a question about their drawing and (2) offer to share a color pencil.

Key learning goals

1) For children to identify behaviors that represent the concept of working with others versus working alone.

2) For children to understand why it is important to work with others.

Answer suggestions to discussion questions

1. What is working with others?
   Working with others means doing something together to make something, such as preparing for a party together to have a party.
   Note: Emphasize that we need to work with others sometimes because there are things that are hard to do alone.

2. When Wagga blew up the balloons, would he have finished faster if he had worked with others?
   Yes, it would have been faster if there were more people to blow up the balloons.

3. When Wagga made animal shapes with the cupcake frosting, would it have looked nicer if he had worked with others?
   Yes, the frosting would have looked nicer because other people can give ideas.

4. When Wagga moved the tables, would it have been easier if he had worked with others?
   Yes, it would have been easier because the tables would not be so heavy.

5. Why should we work with others?
   We should work with others because it might be faster, nicer, and easier than to work alone.

6. What should Wagga have done instead of working alone?
   Wagga should have worked with others.

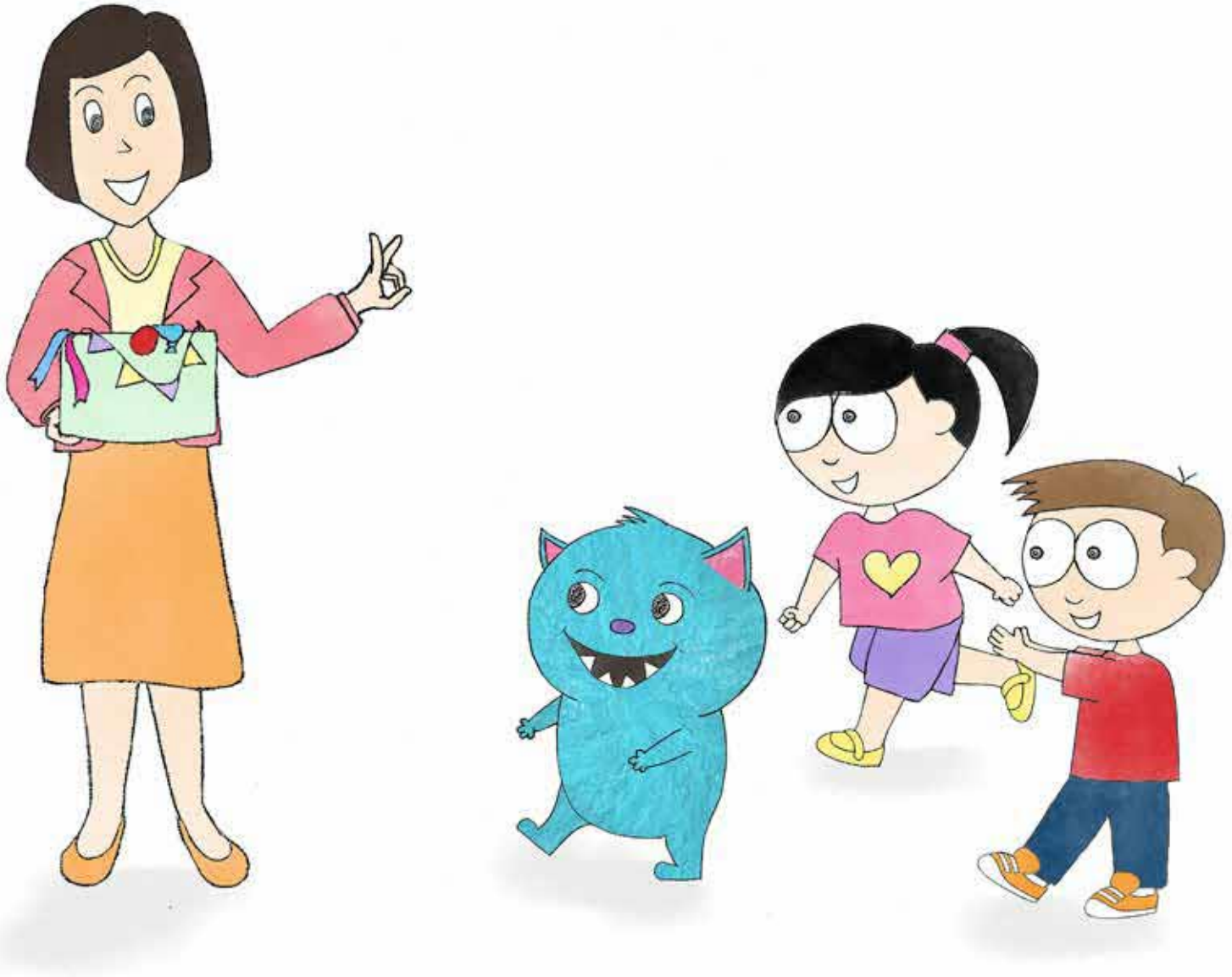
Other titles in the 'Wagga' book series:

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 Play Fair
Wagga Learns to Calm Down after Losing
Wagga Learns about Bullying



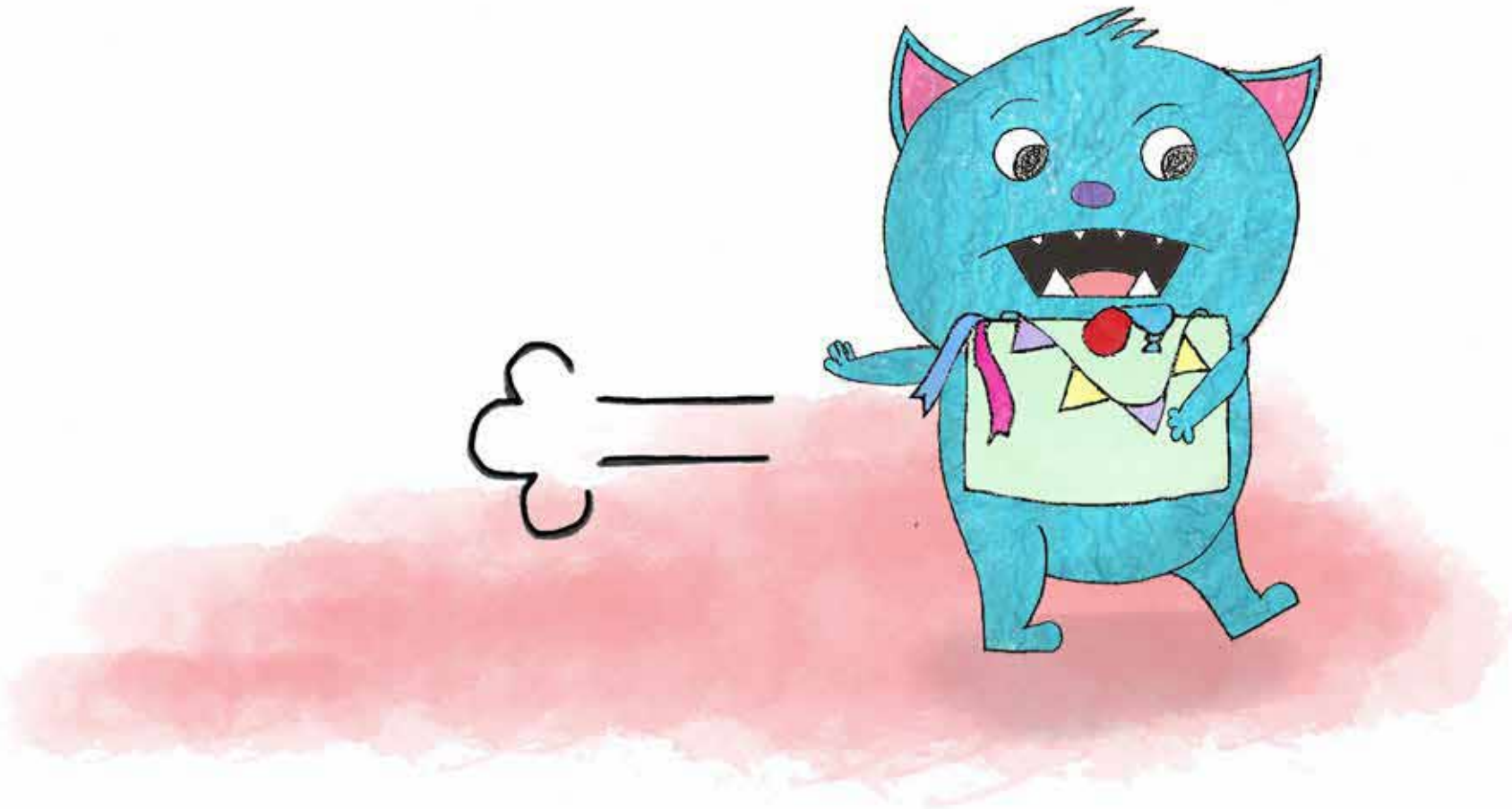
One day, Wagga's teacher had something exciting to tell the children.

"Children," she said, "we are going to have a party tomorrow! We will have decorations, food, and games. Today, we are going to be very busy preparing for the party, and I need all of you to help me!"



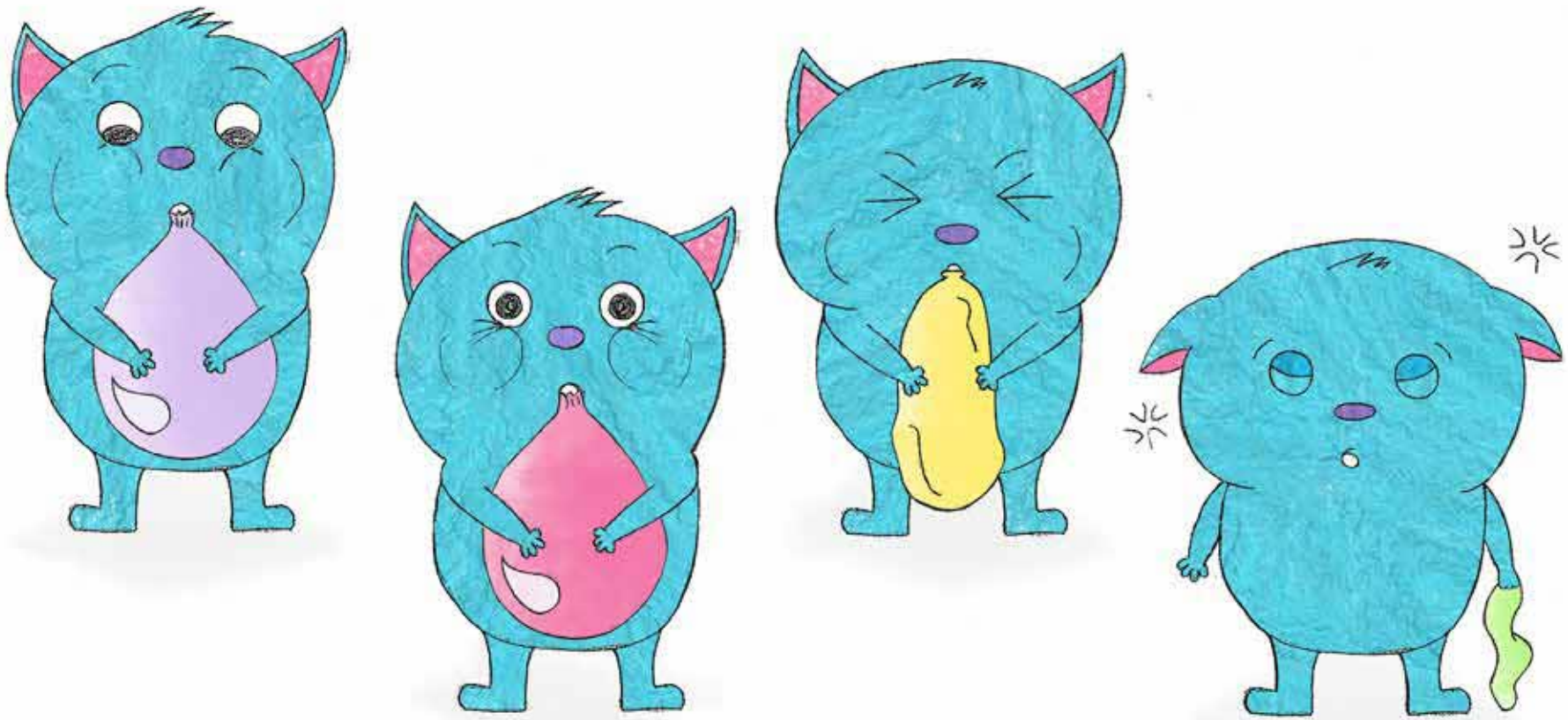
The first thing that the children needed to do was to decorate their classroom, so that it would look bright and colorful for the party.

"Wagga, Abby, and Jonas, I want you to blow up twenty balloons," said the teacher.

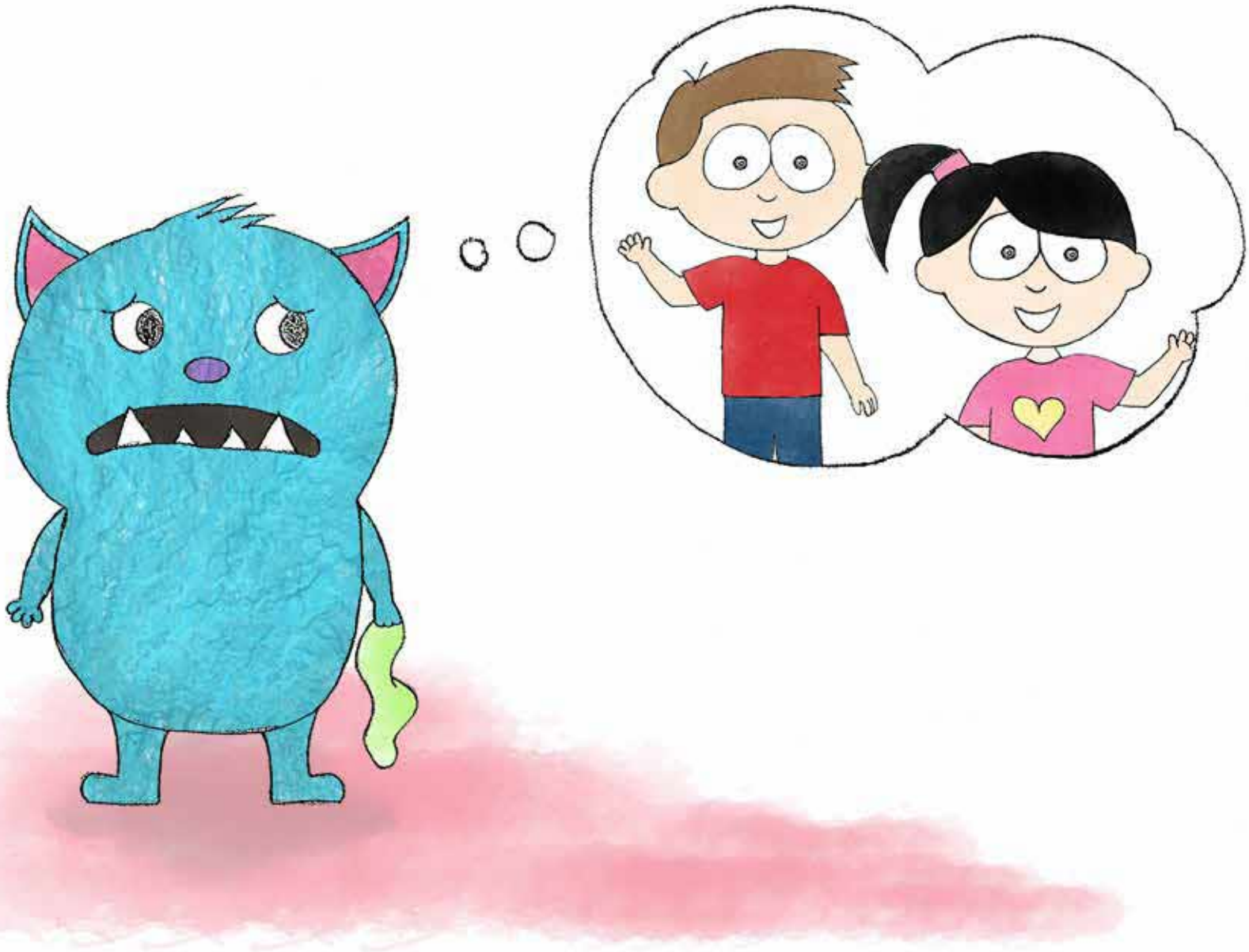


Wagga was very excited about the balloons. He thought that it would be quick to blow up the balloons by himself.

He took all twenty balloons and told his friends, “Me, me, only me. I can blow up all the balloons myself.”



Wagga blew up one, two, and three balloons. By the time he blew up four balloons, he felt very tired and had no more air inside of him to blow up any more balloons.



"I should have worked together with Abby and Jonas to blow up all these balloons," thought Wagga. "There are too many balloons for me to finish."



Next, it was time to prepare the food.

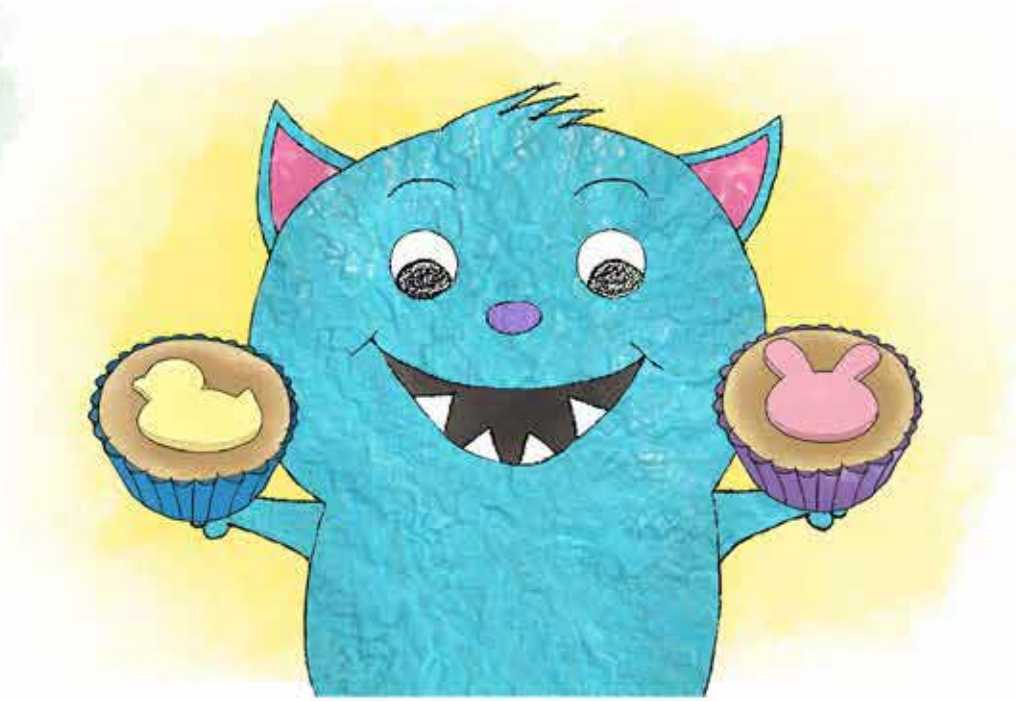
The teacher said, “Wagga, I want you and Govind to put frosting on the cupcakes. Make the frosting in the shapes of ducks, rabbits, and fishes.”



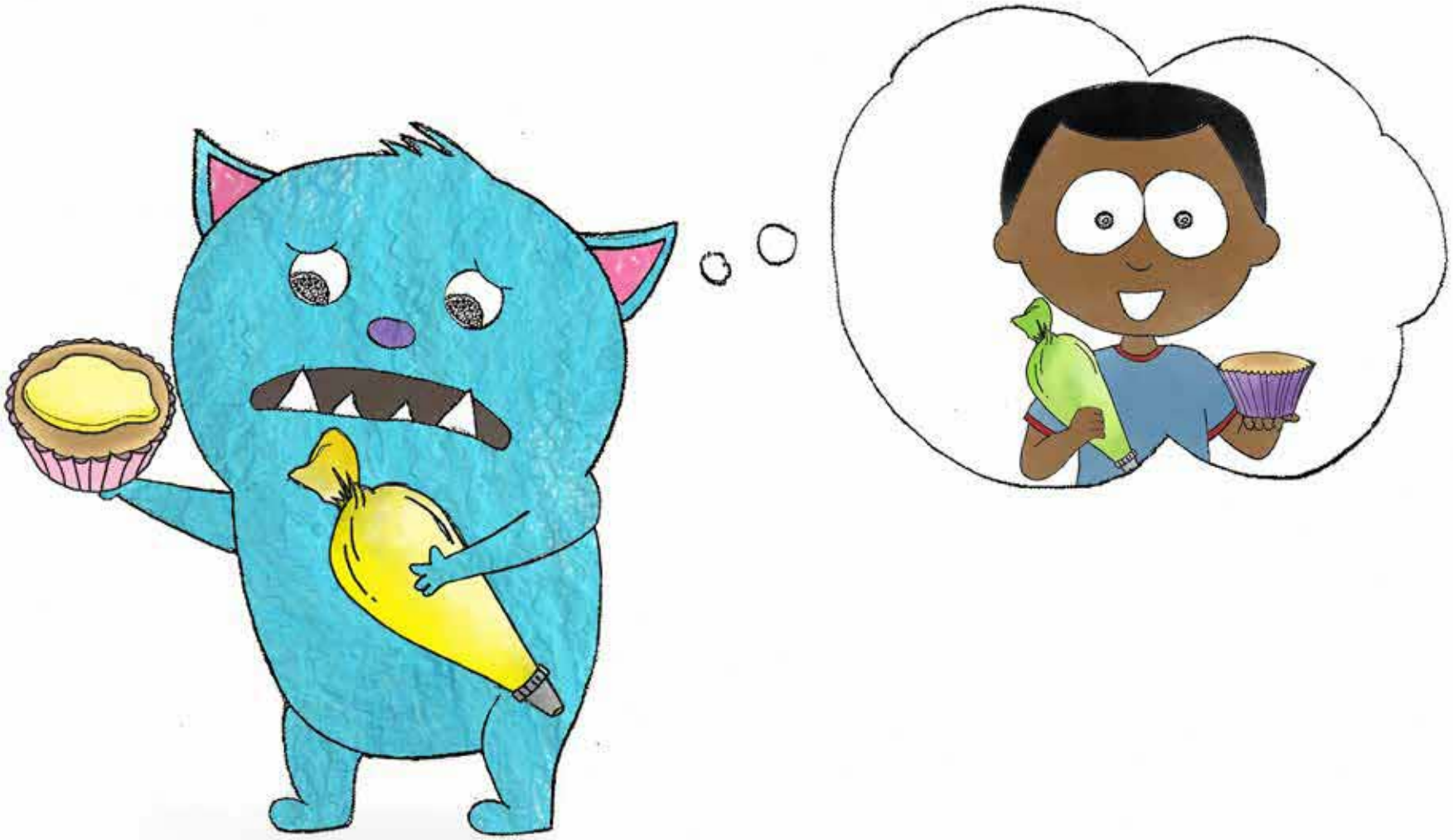
Wagga thought that he could draw the nicest animal shapes with the frosting.

"Me, me, only me," said Wagga to Govind. "I can make all the animal shapes by myself."





Wagga made the shape of a duck on the cupcakes. Then, he made the shape of a rabbit. He did a good job with the duck and rabbit.



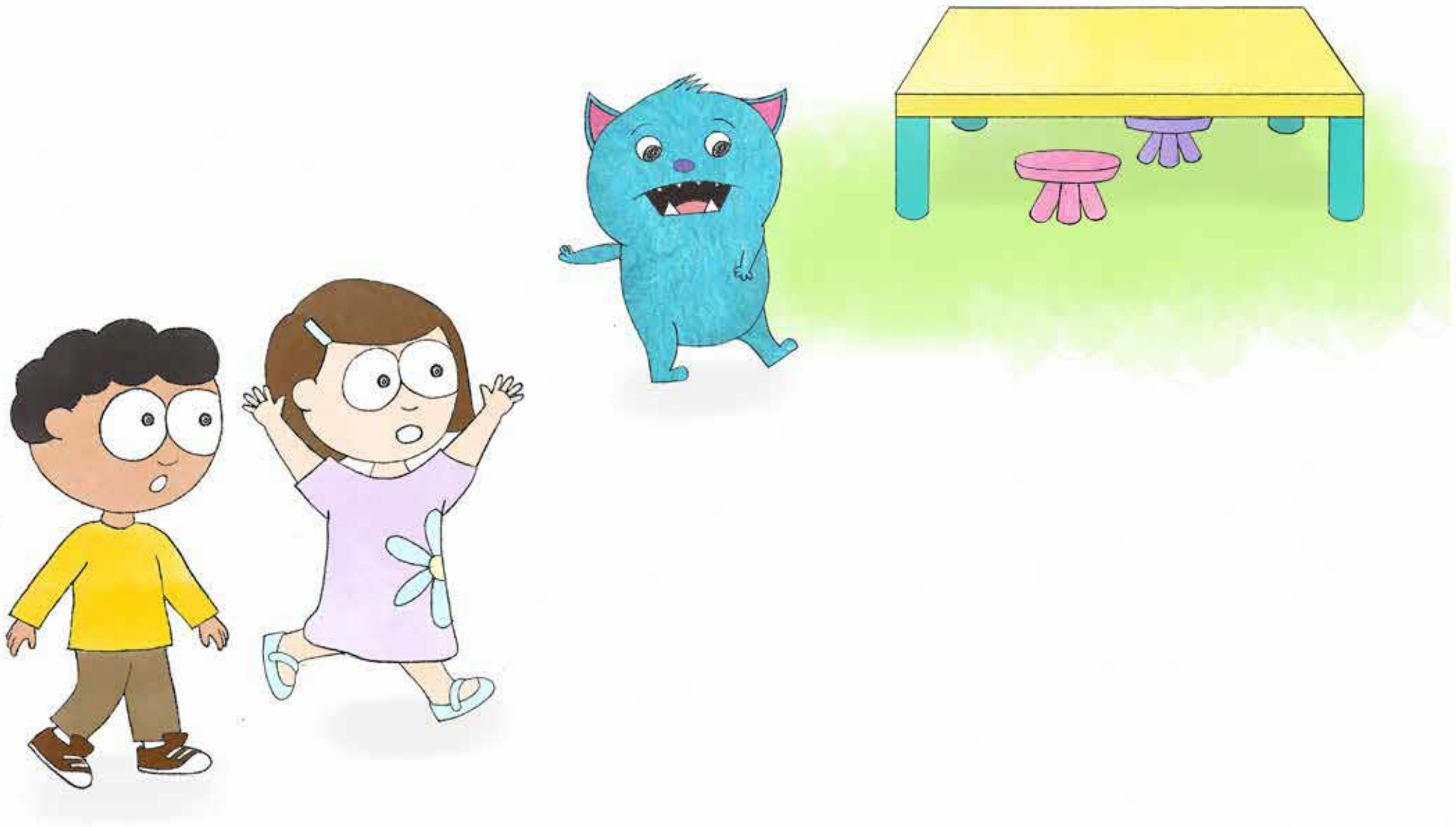
But when he tried to make the shape of a fish, he saw that his fish didn't look right. His fish looked like a fluffy cloud!

"I should have worked together with Govind to make the animal frosting," thought Wagga. "Govind can draw well and I bet he knows how to make the frosting look like a fish."



Finally, it was time to prepare the room for the games.

The teacher said, “Wagga, I want you to move the tables with Claire and Hanish. Move the tables to the back of the room. We need to make space for the games.”



Wagga thought that he was strong enough to move the tables by himself. He was eager to show the teacher that he was a strong boy.

"Me, me, only me," said Wagga to his friends. Without waiting for his friends, he ran to carry a table by himself.



But when he tried to lift the table, he found that the table was too heavy. Instead of lifting the table up, Wagga had to drag the table across the floor.

"I should have worked together with Claire and Hanish to move the tables," said Wagga. "It's so hard to carry this table by myself."



The teacher came over to Wagga. She was disappointed.

“Oh Wagga,” she said, “the balloons and cupcakes are not finished, and the tables have not been moved. We might not be ready for the party tomorrow.”

Wagga felt sad that he had not worked together with his friends to prepare for the party.

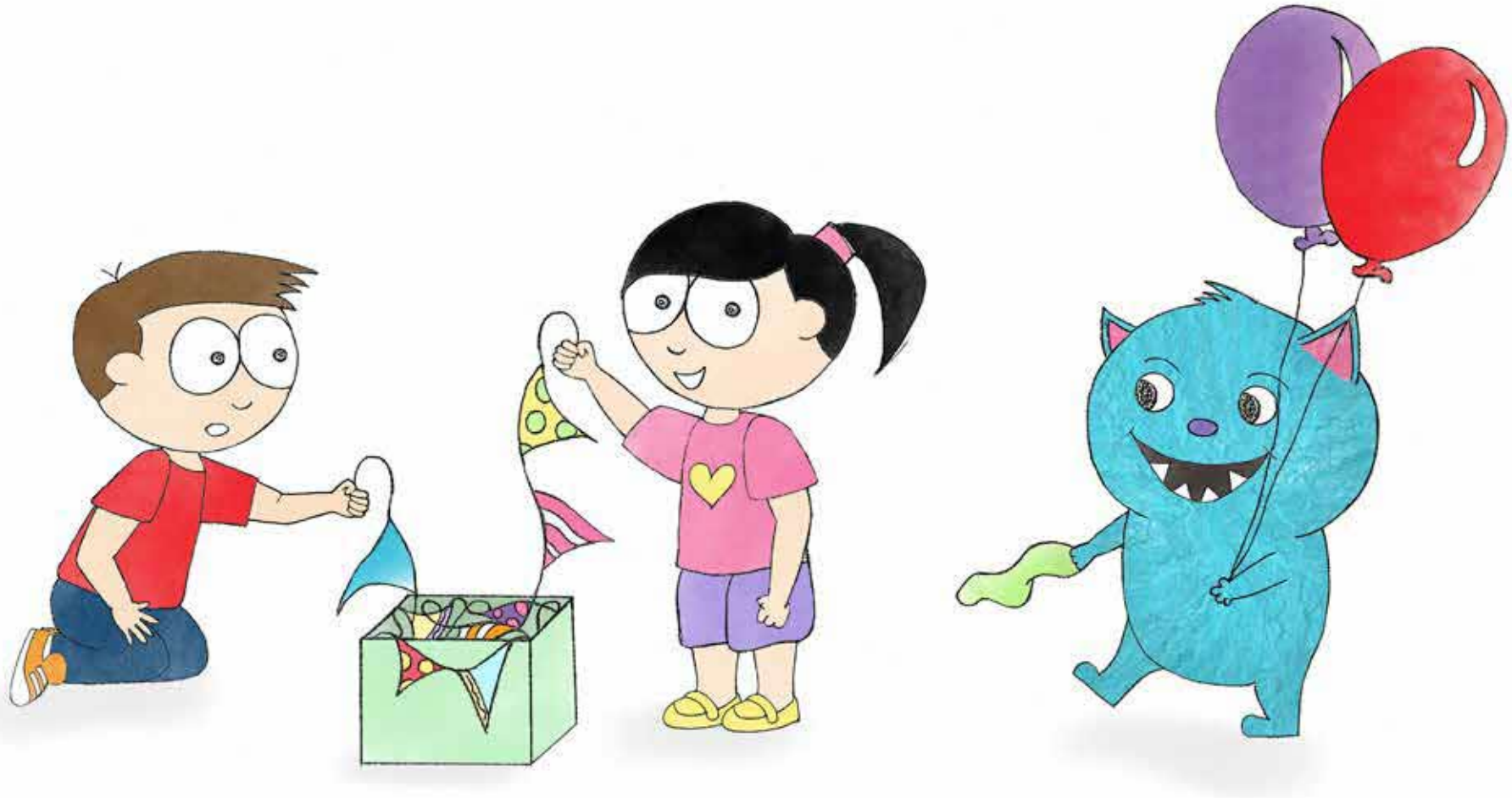


Questions:

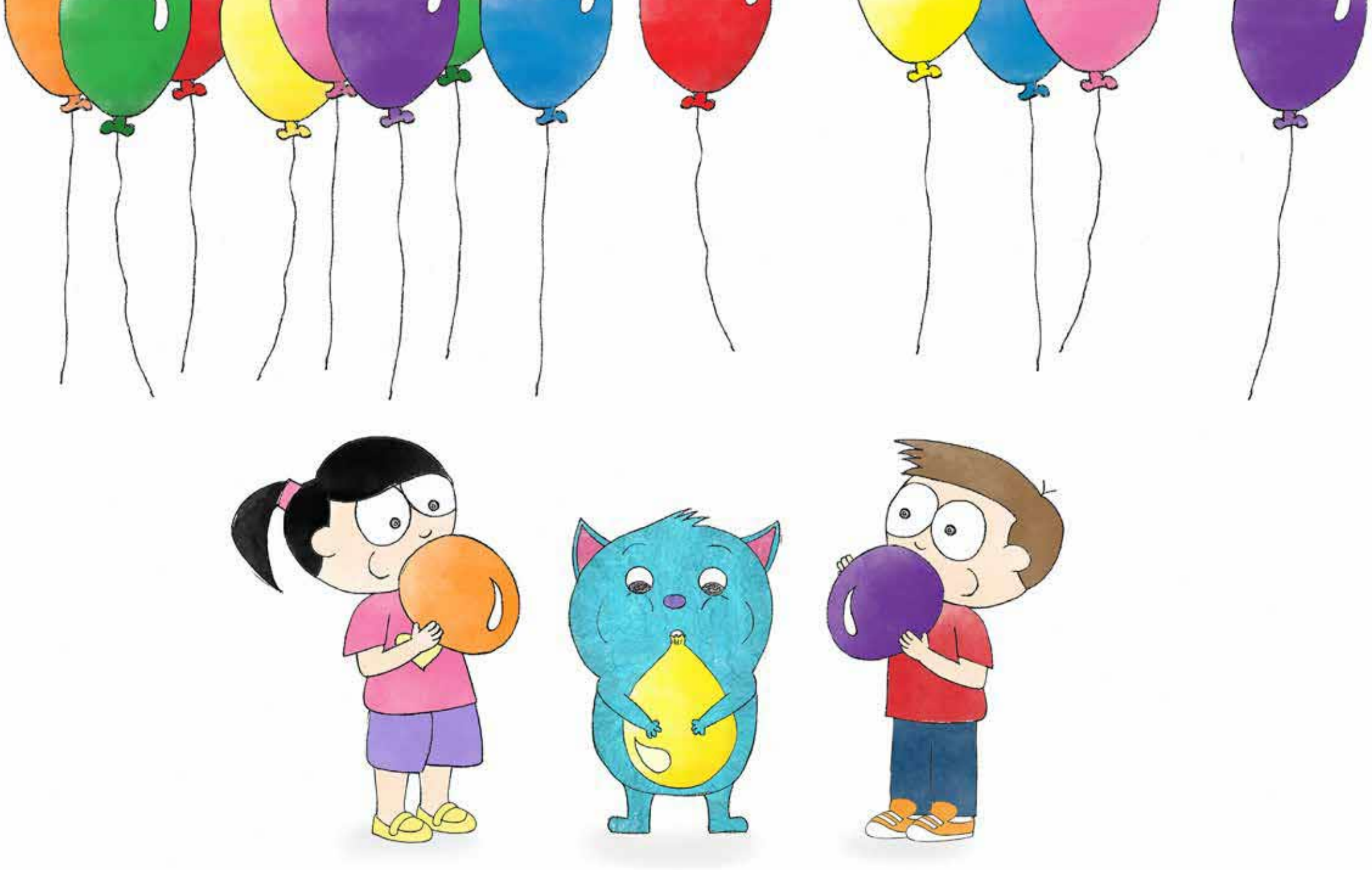
1. What is working with others?
2. When Wagga blew up the balloons, would he have finished faster if he had worked with others?
3. When Wagga made animal shapes with the cupcake frosting, would it have looked nicer if he had worked with others?
4. When Wagga moved the tables, would it have been easier if he had worked with others?
5. Why should we work with others?
6. What should Wagga have done instead of working alone?



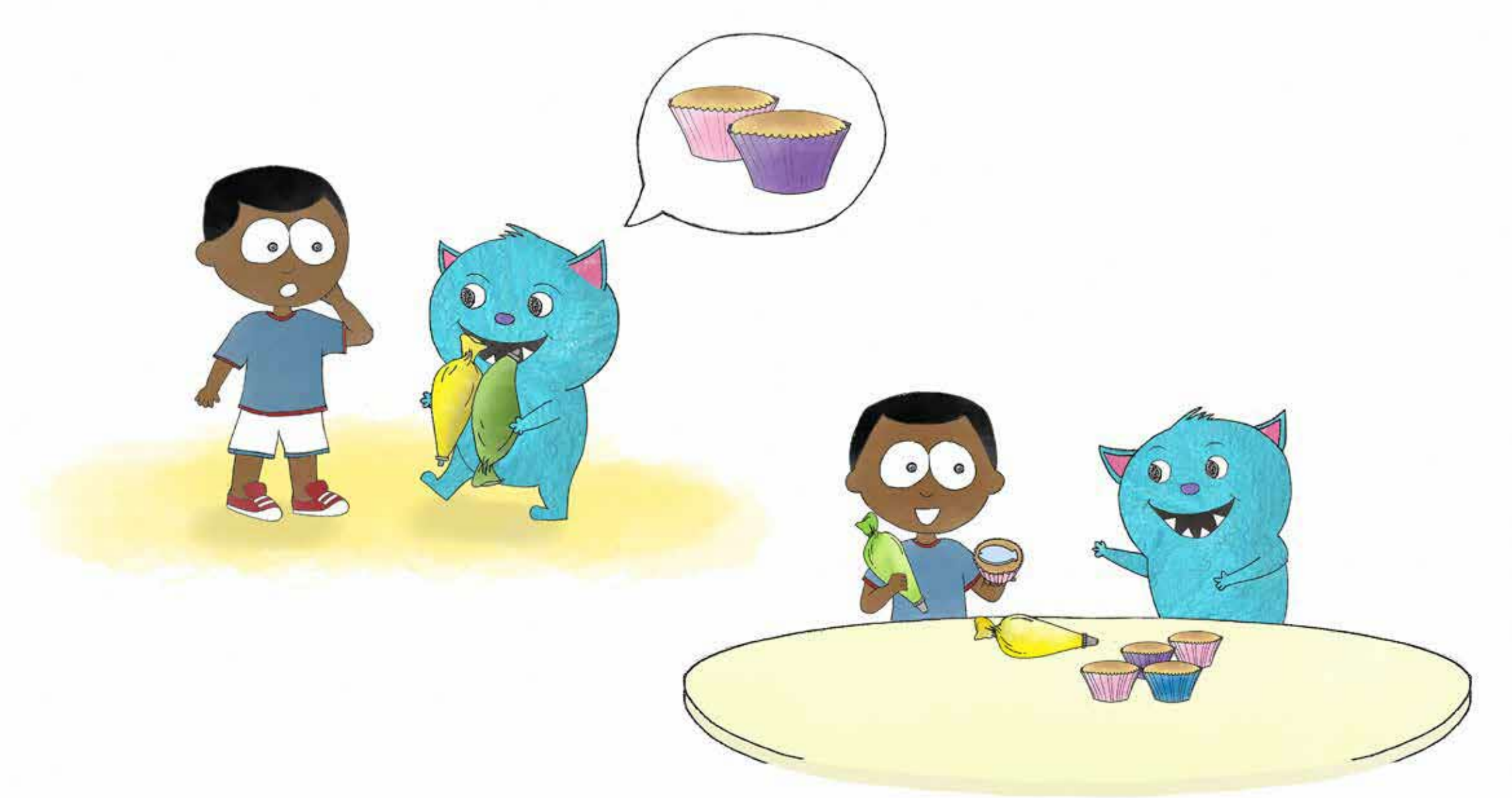
Later in the day, everyone was working hard together to prepare for the party. Wagga felt worried that the balloons, cupcakes, and tables were not finished. He thought about it and a clever idea popped into his head.



"Abby and Jonas, can you please help me blow up the balloons?" asked Wagga.

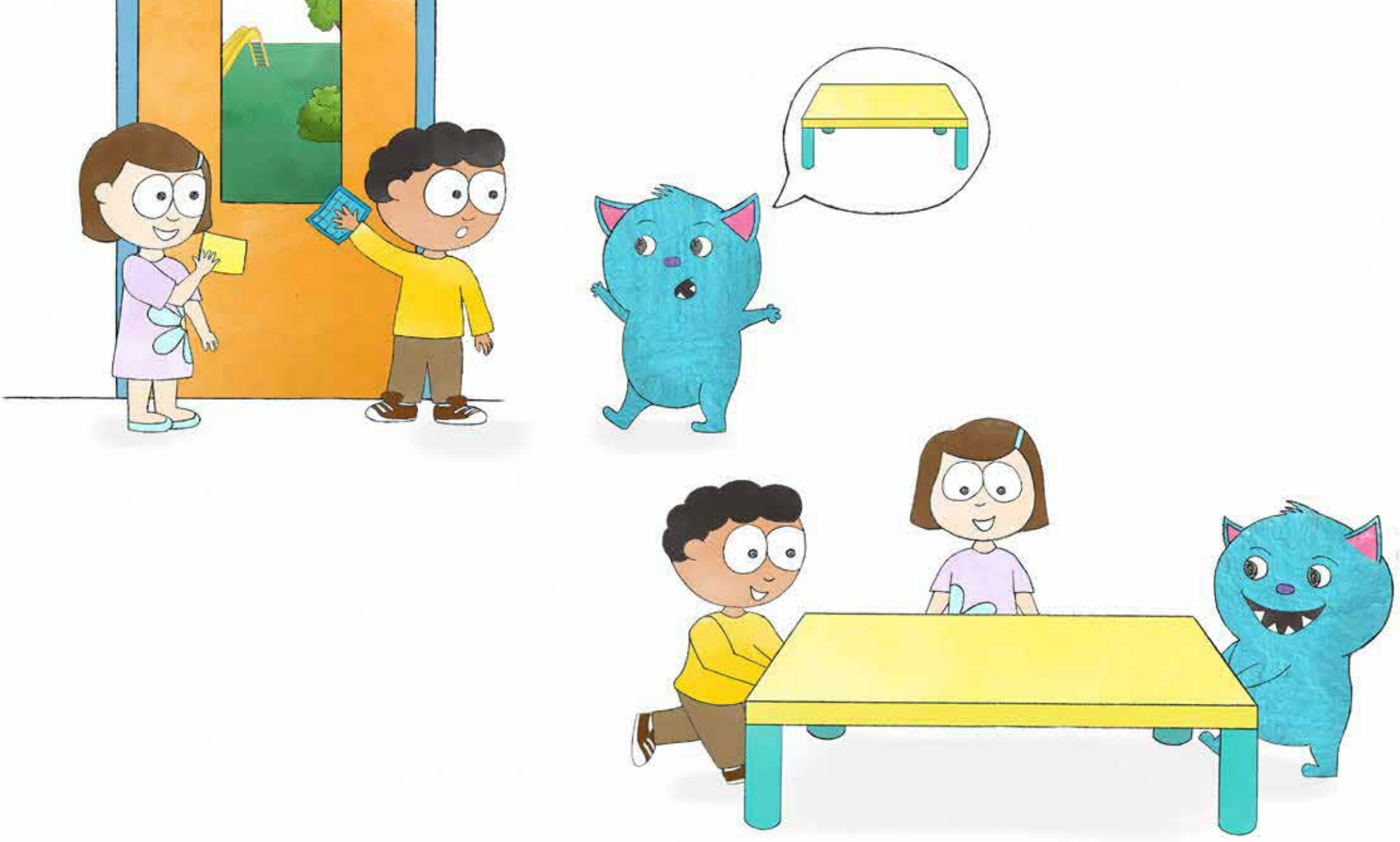


Abby, Jonas, and Wagga blew up the balloons together. Wagga was surprised at how quickly they finished all twenty balloons.



“Govind, will you please help me make animal-shaped frosting on the cupcakes?” asked Wagga.

Govind showed Wagga how to make the frosting look like a fish. Wagga learned how to make nicer looking frosting when he worked together with Govind.



“Claire and Hanish, can we please carry the tables together?” asked Wagga.

When Wagga worked together with his friends to lift the tables, the tables were easy to carry. After moving all the tables, Wagga did not feel so tired.



The next day at the party, Wagga had so much fun throwing balloons, eating cupcakes, and playing games. He felt very happy that he had worked with others so that they could all enjoy the party!

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