

Zoe and the Very Different New School Year

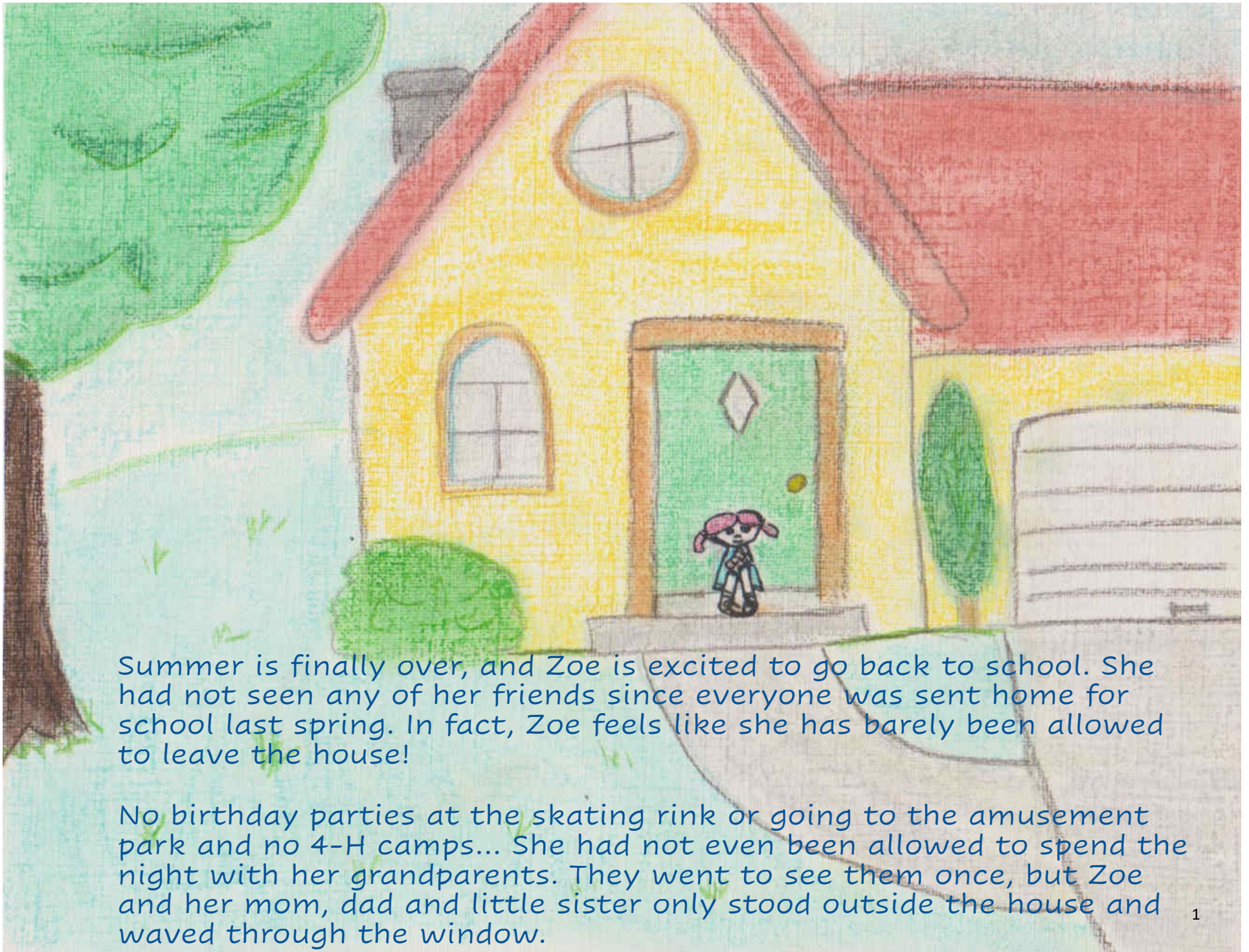
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Summer is finally over, and Zoe is excited to go back to school. She had not seen any of her friends since everyone was sent home for school last spring. In fact, Zoe feels like she has barely been allowed to leave the house!

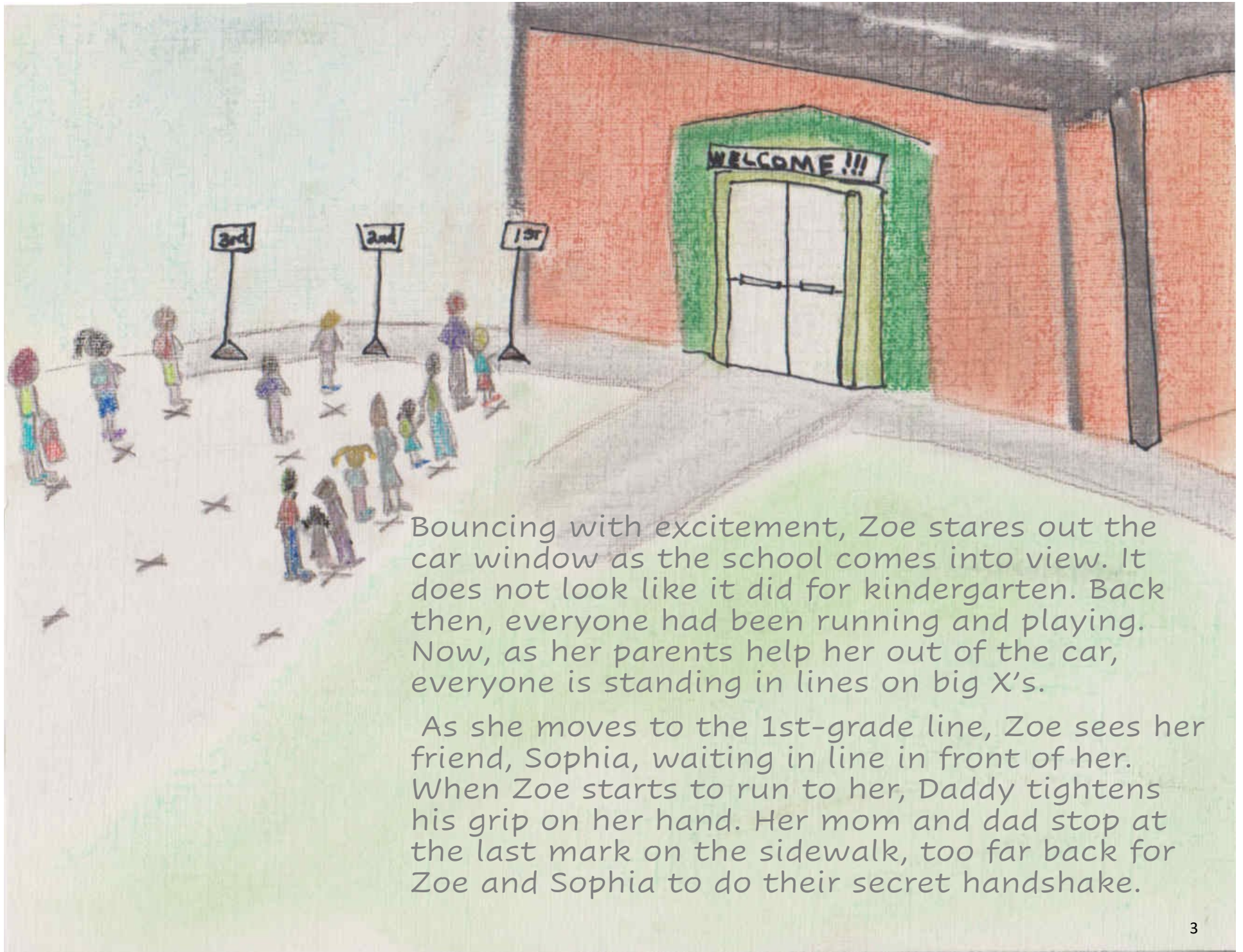
No birthday parties at the skating rink or going to the amusement park and no 4-H camps... She had not even been allowed to spend the night with her grandparents. They went to see them once, but Zoe and her mom, dad and little sister only stood outside the house and waved through the window.

Finally, it's time for school to start, Zoe thought. Zoe had made a lot of friends last year in kindergarten. She hoped they would all be in the same 1st-grade class!

Zoe's mom helped her get ready for the all-important first day of school. She has a new backpack filled with lots of cool, school supplies – pencils, and paper, and special scissors, and glue.

Her mom even made her a pretty mask with a big pink butterfly on it.





Bouncing with excitement, Zoe stares out the car window as the school comes into view. It does not look like it did for kindergarten. Back then, everyone had been running and playing. Now, as her parents help her out of the car, everyone is standing in lines on big X's.

As she moves to the 1st-grade line, Zoe sees her friend, Sophia, waiting in line in front of her. When Zoe starts to run to her, Daddy tightens his grip on her hand. Her mom and dad stop at the last mark on the sidewalk, too far back for Zoe and Sophia to do their secret handshake.

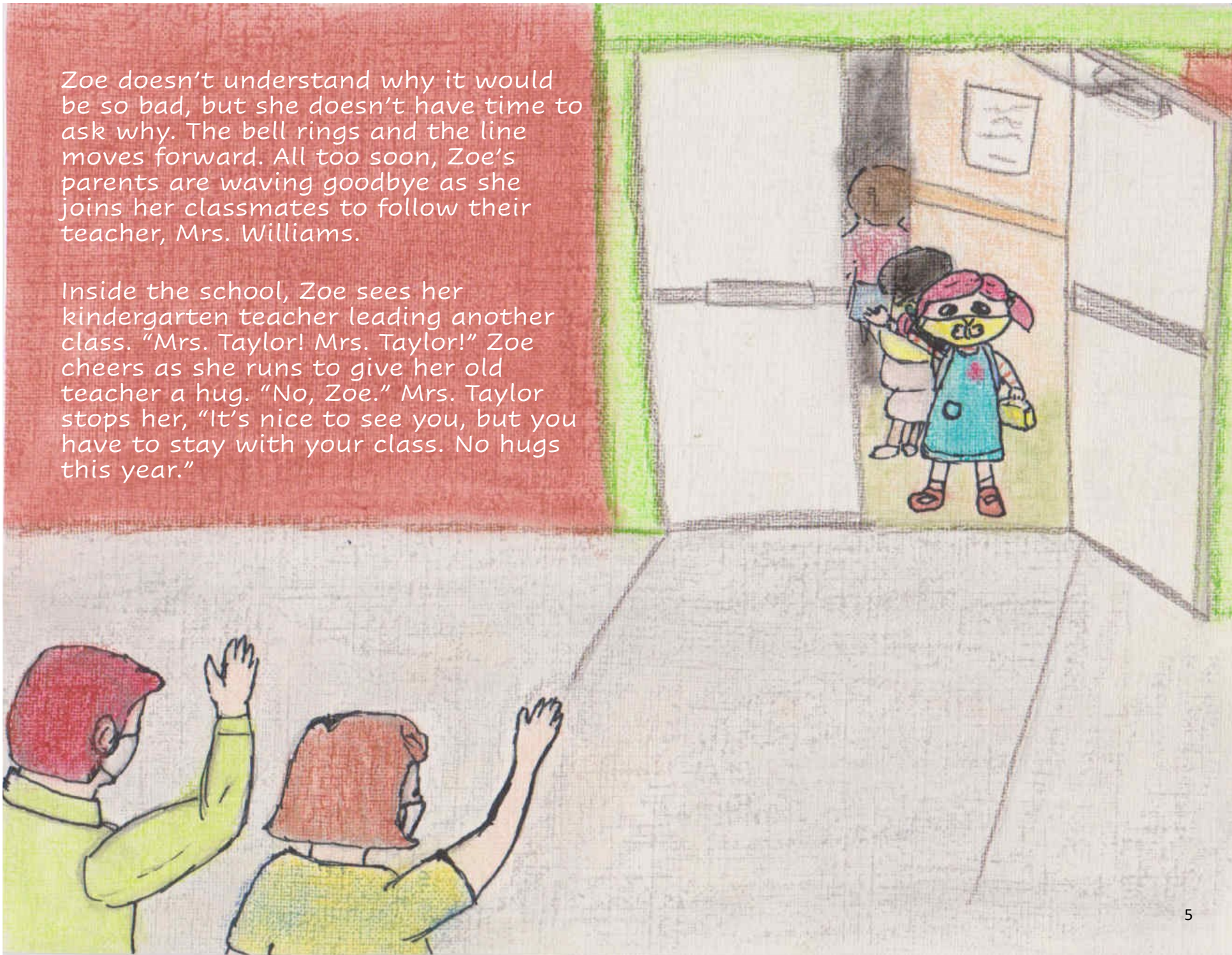
Sophia turns around and waves at Zoe. She has a really, pretty unicorn mask on. "I like your butterfly!" Sophia yells across the gap. Zoe grins under her mask, "I like your unicorn! Want to trade?"

Sophia lets go of her dad's hand and runs over to Zoe. The two girls take off their masks and are about to switch when their parents pull them apart. "Girls, you can't trade masks.



Zoe doesn't understand why it would be so bad, but she doesn't have time to ask why. The bell rings and the line moves forward. All too soon, Zoe's parents are waving goodbye as she joins her classmates to follow their teacher, Mrs. Williams.

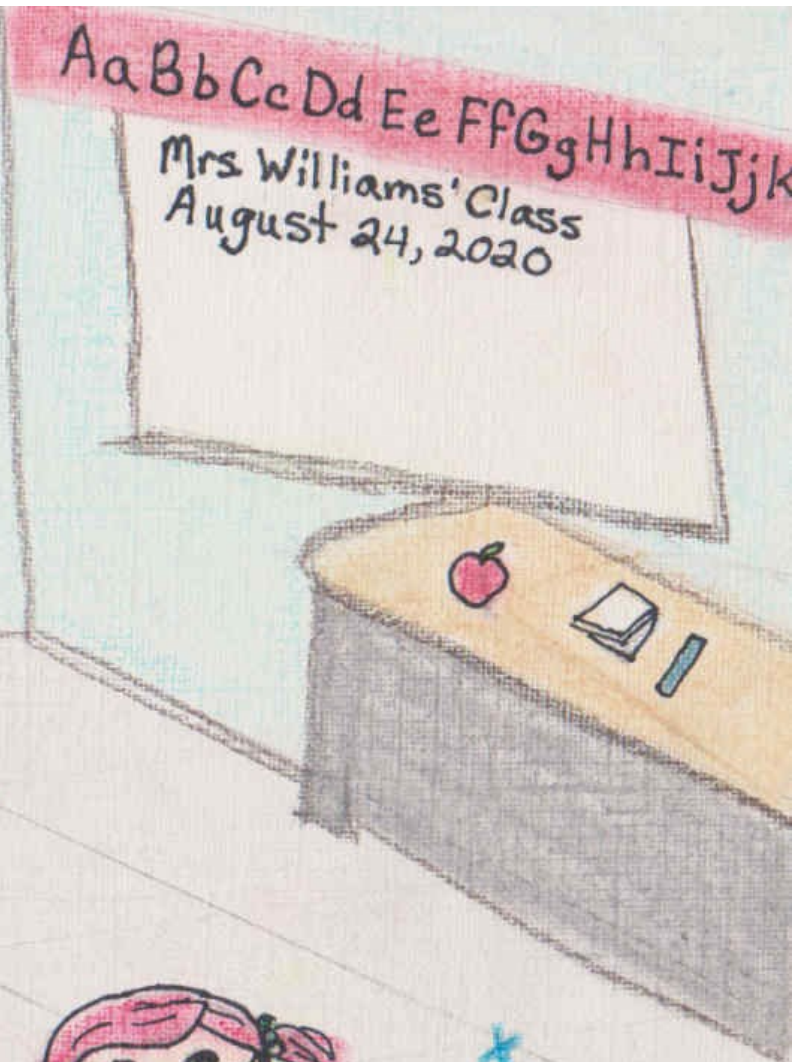
Inside the school, Zoe sees her kindergarten teacher leading another class. "Mrs. Taylor! Mrs. Taylor!" Zoe cheers as she runs to give her old teacher a hug. "No, Zoe." Mrs. Taylor stops her, "It's nice to see you, but you have to stay with your class. No hugs this year."

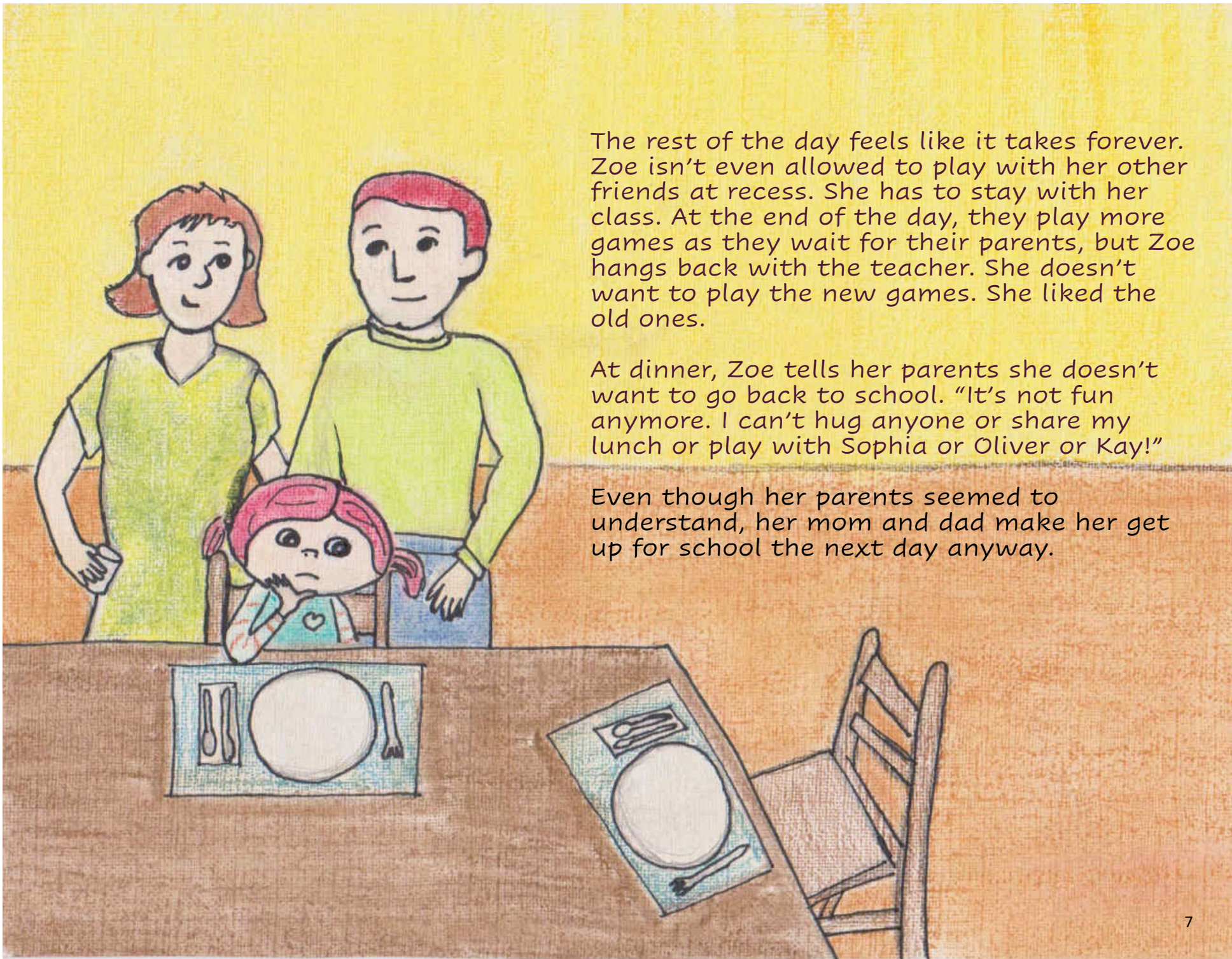


In the classroom, the desks are very far apart. Zoe sees her friend, James, is sitting in the desk beside hers, so she moves her desk closer to his so they can talk. "I'm sorry, Zoe. The desks have to stay where they are." Says Mrs. Williams as she moves the desk back.



By the time Mrs. Williams announces it's time for lunch, Zoe is absolutely starving. As she takes a big bite of her sandwich, she notices that James' mom forgot to give him a dessert. "James," She whispers, "want one of my cookies?" Even though she whispered very quietly, Ms. Williams heard. "We can't share our lunches right now, Zoe."

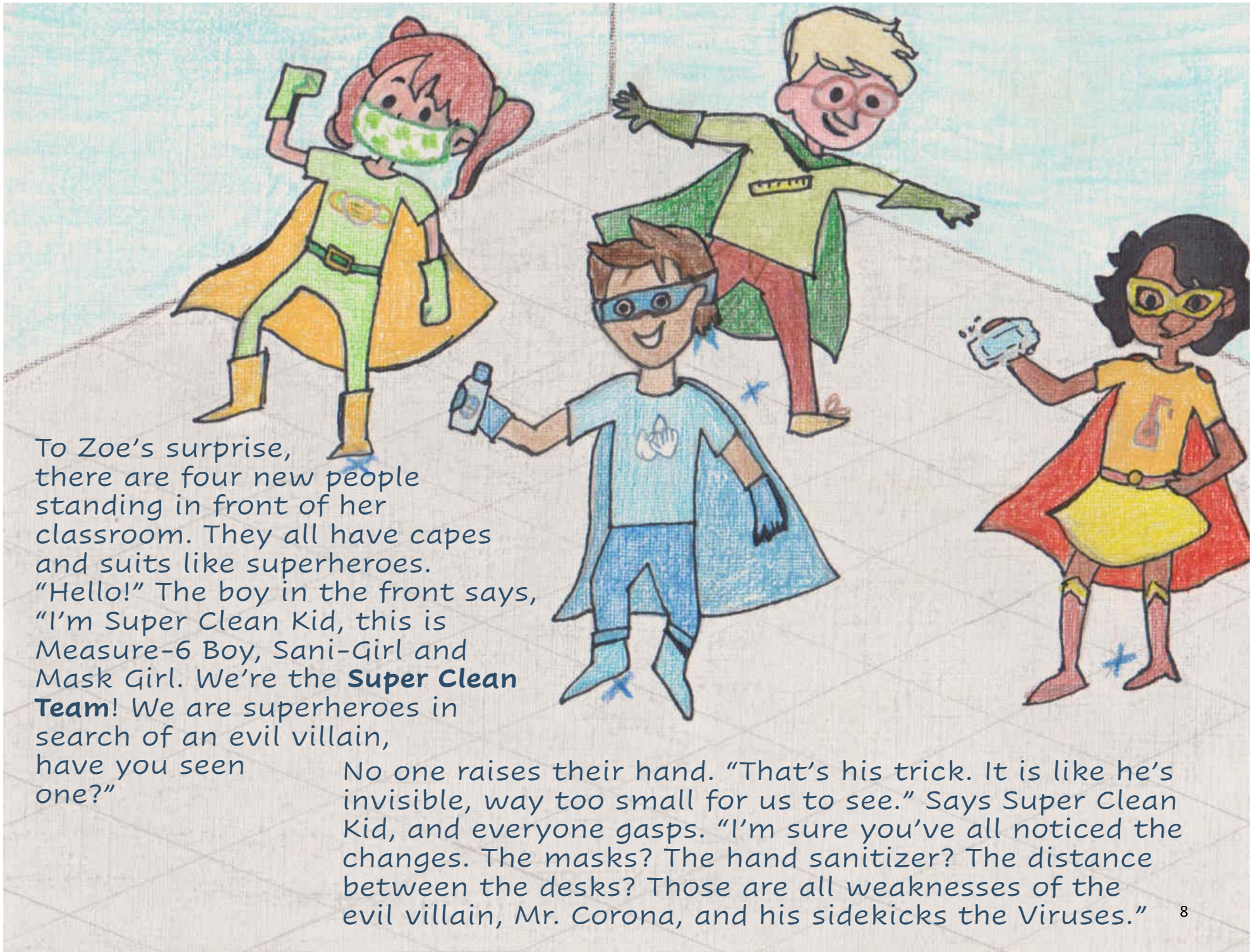




The rest of the day feels like it takes forever. Zoe isn't even allowed to play with her other friends at recess. She has to stay with her class. At the end of the day, they play more games as they wait for their parents, but Zoe hangs back with the teacher. She doesn't want to play the new games. She liked the old ones.

At dinner, Zoe tells her parents she doesn't want to go back to school. "It's not fun anymore. I can't hug anyone or share my lunch or play with Sophia or Oliver or Kay!"

Even though her parents seemed to understand, her mom and dad make her get up for school the next day anyway.



To Zoe's surprise, there are four new people standing in front of her classroom. They all have capes and suits like superheroes. "Hello!" The boy in the front says, "I'm Super Clean Kid, this is Measure-6 Boy, Sani-Girl and Mask Girl. We're the **Super Clean Team!** We are superheroes in search of an evil villain, have you seen one?"

No one raises their hand. "That's his trick. It is like he's invisible, way too small for us to see." Says Super Clean Kid, and everyone gasps. "I'm sure you've all noticed the changes. The masks? The hand sanitizer? The distance between the desks? Those are all weaknesses of the evil villain, Mr. Corona, and his sidekicks the Viruses."



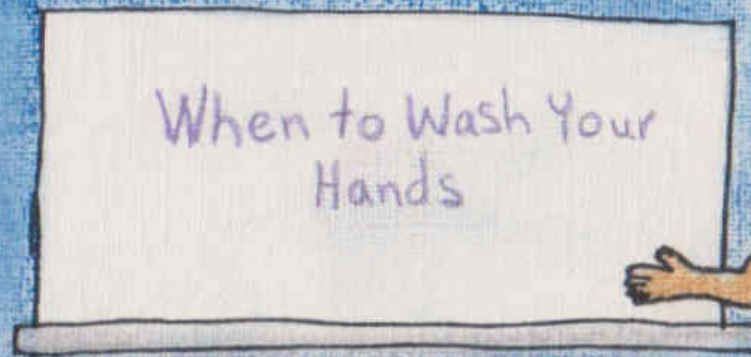
Superheroes
in
training!

"I know these new changes are hard, but they're necessary to keep you and your families safe. You've seen evidence of Mr. Corona before. Last year, did anyone ever get sick and have to stay home from school?" Everyone nods. "That was Mr. Corona's sidekicks. They worked hard to make you and your friends sick."

"You can help protect your school from Mr. Corona. That's by listening to your teachers and following what they say. This year, your teachers are all specially trained superheroes, armed with the knowledge to protect you. They can't do it alone, though. We need your help to defeat Mr. Corona. From now on, you are all superheroes in training!"

“As trainees, it’s important to remember to stay on the lookout for Mr. Corona, even when you’re not in school. But you are not alone, there are trained superheroes out there helping protect you - doctors and scientists and now your teachers. With all of you helping them, we can win this!”

Super Clean Kid begins to walk around the classroom, always keeping 6 feet between him and the desks. “Now I hope you’re all ready to begin work as superheroes in training. The first thing we’re going to do is... have fun! Keeping social distance and following rules doesn’t mean you can’t still have fun. You just have to be a little more creative.”



Super Clean Kid and his Super Clean Team are amazing! Zoe listens as the team tells the class how studying hard and by practicing their reading and writing, they can still have contact with people.

This makes her happy knowing she can soon keep up with her friends in other classes by writing notes.

Zoe also learned that playing the new games and being active at recess are fun and help keep Mr. Corona weak.

Finally, the Super Clean Team taught the class the Super-Secret No Contact Superhero Handshake!



It's different at school for Zoe this year, but now that she's a superhero in training, it's not as bad as she thought. She can greet her friends with the new no touch handshake and play with her classmates without worrying about getting sick.

This time, as everyone waits to go home, Zoe joins the games. They play a game where you find the person changing the pattern. When Zoe is in the middle, she finds them quickly. She's ready to start her work as a superhero, looking out for Mr. Corona. She can't wait to tell her parents everything she's learning!





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The End... or is it?

For more information on how your class or child can become an illness fighting superhero or for ways to help your child adjust to the changes that have been brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, contact the Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture at www.uaex.edu.

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