

DEAR DIARY

Our Stories of Inclusion



Copyright © 2020 by National Council of Social Service and Nanyang Polytechnic

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage system and retrieval, without the written permission of the copyright owners.

Author's Note



Hello, it's really nice to meet you! We are a group of final year students in Nanyang Polytechnic's Diploma in Social Sciences (Social Work). In collaboration with the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), we are embarking on our Final Year Project titled "Unseen Colours", to advocate for the inclusion of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Persons with disabilities often struggle to be included and accepted by mainstream society due to the negative stereotypes portrayed in traditional media and the lack of understanding from the general population.

Like rocks in the dark cave, if light is not shone on it, nobody will ever know that the rocks in the cave can be beautifully coloured.

Through "Unseen Colours", we would like to inculcate an inclusive mindset in our younger generation using a series of educational publication. We hope to shed light on the potential and hidden talents of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

This story, **Dear Diary**, follows the journey of Violet, a 7-year-old girl who is beginning a new chapter of her life in primary school. Violet is a special girl born with autism. Autism is a condition that changes the way a person's brain is developed, and this impacts the person in various ways. For Violet, autism causes her to struggle to adjust to her new environment. This story shares how a little patience, understanding and kindness can pave the way towards an inclusive world for everyone.

We hope you enjoy **Dear Diary** together with us!

Scan here to read
along with us!

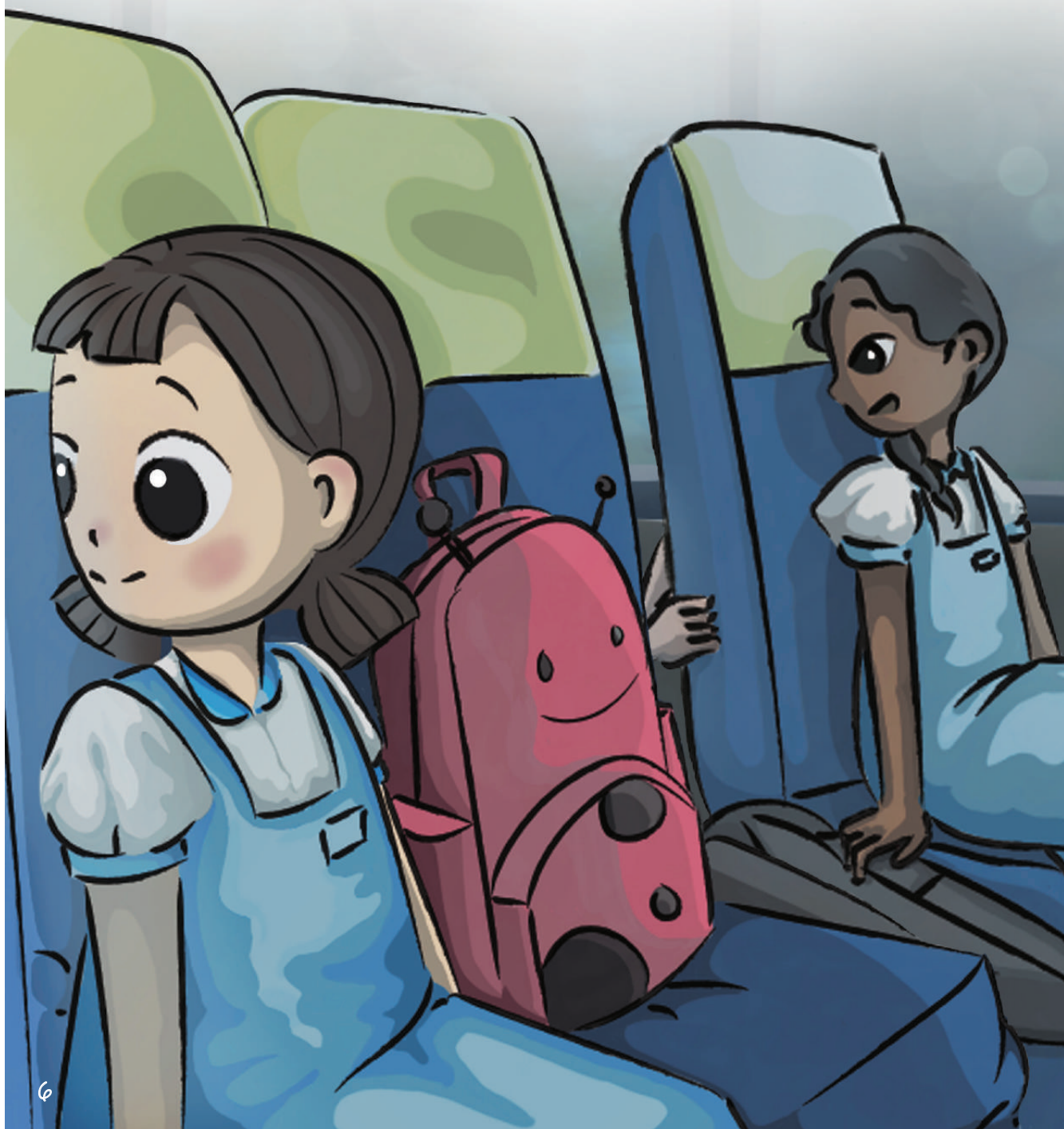


Dear

Diary



I cannot wait to start my first day at my new primary school! I am a little worried too because I will be in a new place, but I hope everything goes well.





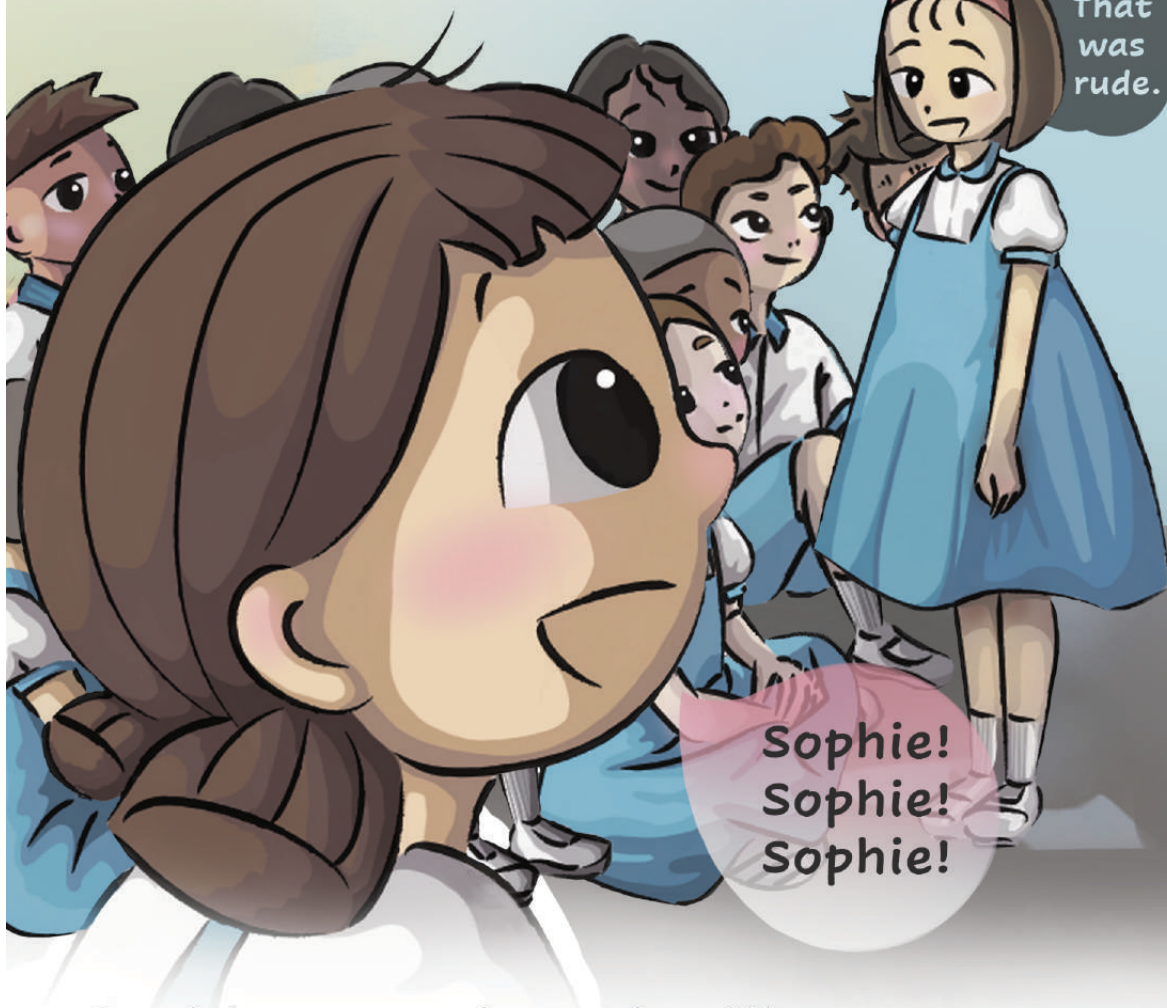
My form teacher is Mrs Tay. She has a very bright smile!

Mrs Tay tells us to introduce ourselves. That girl over there is Sophie. Wow, Sophie is such a nice name!

"Sophie, Sophie, Sophie!"
I repeat after her.

Hi, I'm
Sophie!

That
was
rude.



Sophie says that she likes computer games. I did not know that girls like those too!


"Oh! I thought only boys like computer games!" I said.



Hi,
I'm Violet.
I like to...

It is my turn!
I tell the class my
name, and at
this moment,
I see a...

LADYBUG!



It has such a
bright red
colour and
round black
spots on its
body. What is
it doing, flying
around? Oh, I
love, love
ladybugs!

I want to hold it! Mrs Tay asks me to sit back down. But I want to hold the ladybug! Why can't I hold it? Did she not see the ladybug?



I quickly scoop the ladybug into my hands and sit back down. Why is everyone looking at me? I look at the ladybug in my hands. It is so pretty - much redder than an apple, and much smaller than an eraser.

During recess...

I look at the food stalls. Sadly, I don't see anything that I like. Yay! Our parents are here with us on our first day.

Mummy is here with my favourite French toast! It is golden brown, warm, crispy with cheese and as big as a sponge!



The next day at recess...



Mummy is back with my favourite French toast again! I chomp it all down in a minute...

Why is everyone looking at me?

After Recess...

It is time for music class. I am so excited! I can't wait! I want to play the recorder!

Everyone starts to play the recorder at the same time. Everyone looks like they are having fun...

But...Oh no, it's too loud. The noise is too much. My ears start to ring. My head is hurting...

Argh!
My recorder drops to the ground.

My face is getting hot... Tears start to well up... I need to get away from the noise! Before I know it, my legs take off and I start running around the classroom.



Everyone in class is looking at me. Mrs Tay asks
"Is everything okay, Violet?".
Abigail says something, but I can't hear her and my head is hurting.
Why are they staring at me?



Mrs Tay asks the whole class to go for a short toilet break.

I immediately run out of class.
Abigail follows behind.

There's a bench in this quiet room. I sit down to take deep breaths, counting to myself... 1... 2... 3...

Abigail finds me and sits next to me. **"Is everything okay?"** she asks.



"I'm sorry, it was too loud in there. I just need a moment to calm myself down." She gives me a hug. I feel uncomfortable, like I can't move.



I tell Abigail that I don't like being touched. She respects that and apologises. She continues to sit beside me until I feel better.




At home, I start to feel sad about what happened in class today.

Why was everyone staring at me?
Is it because they think I am weird?



Mummy comes into my room and asks why I look so sad.



"I could not handle the noise
in music class today and started
running around. My classmates
probably think I'm weird
but it was really too loud"

Mummy tells me that it's okay to feel
this way. She says that everyone is
different and we respond differently to
different things.

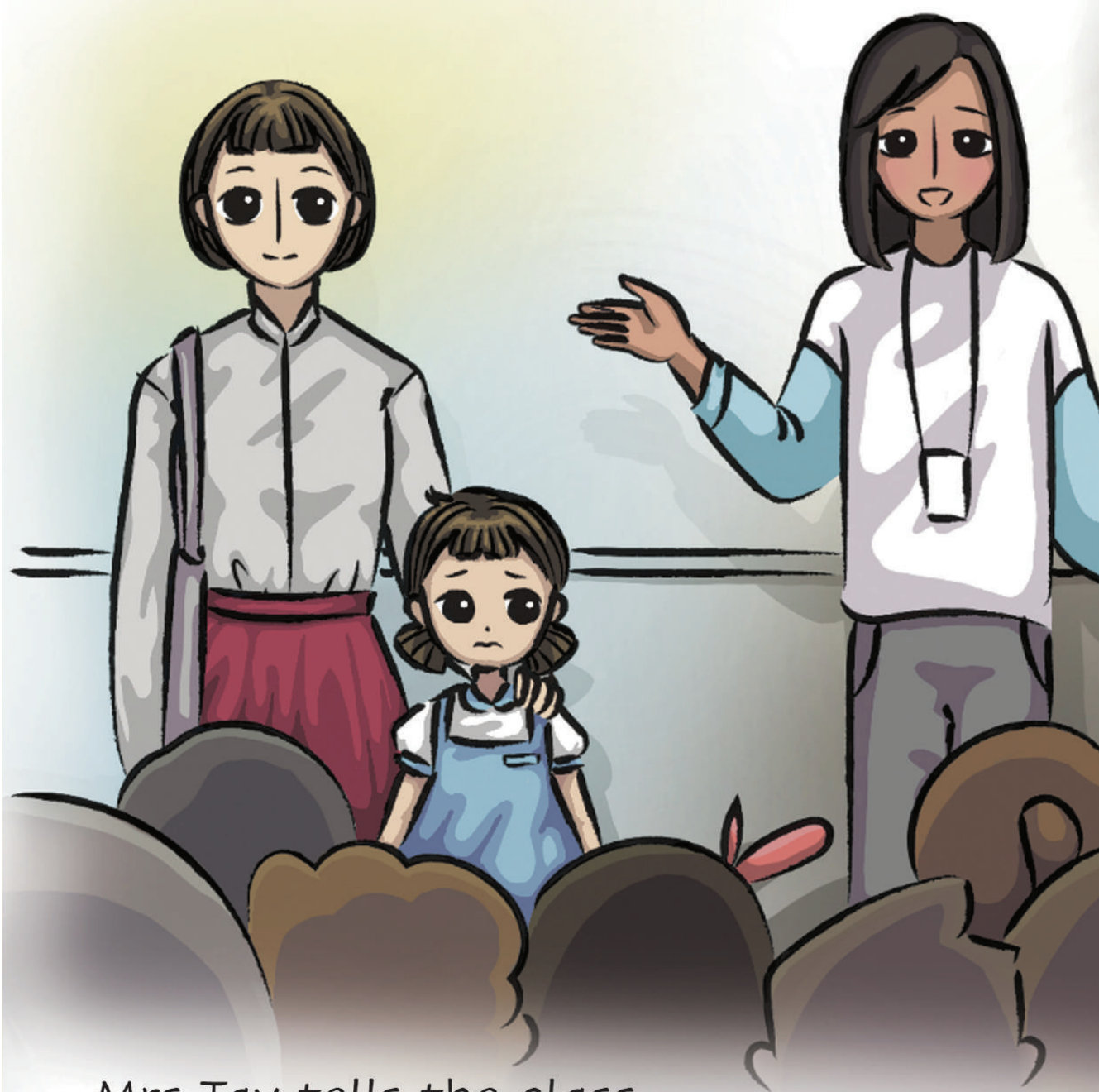
Mummy thinks we should explain this
to my friends.

The next day, mummy calls Mrs Tay to ask for her permission to go to school to explain what had happened to my friends.

Ring... Ring...

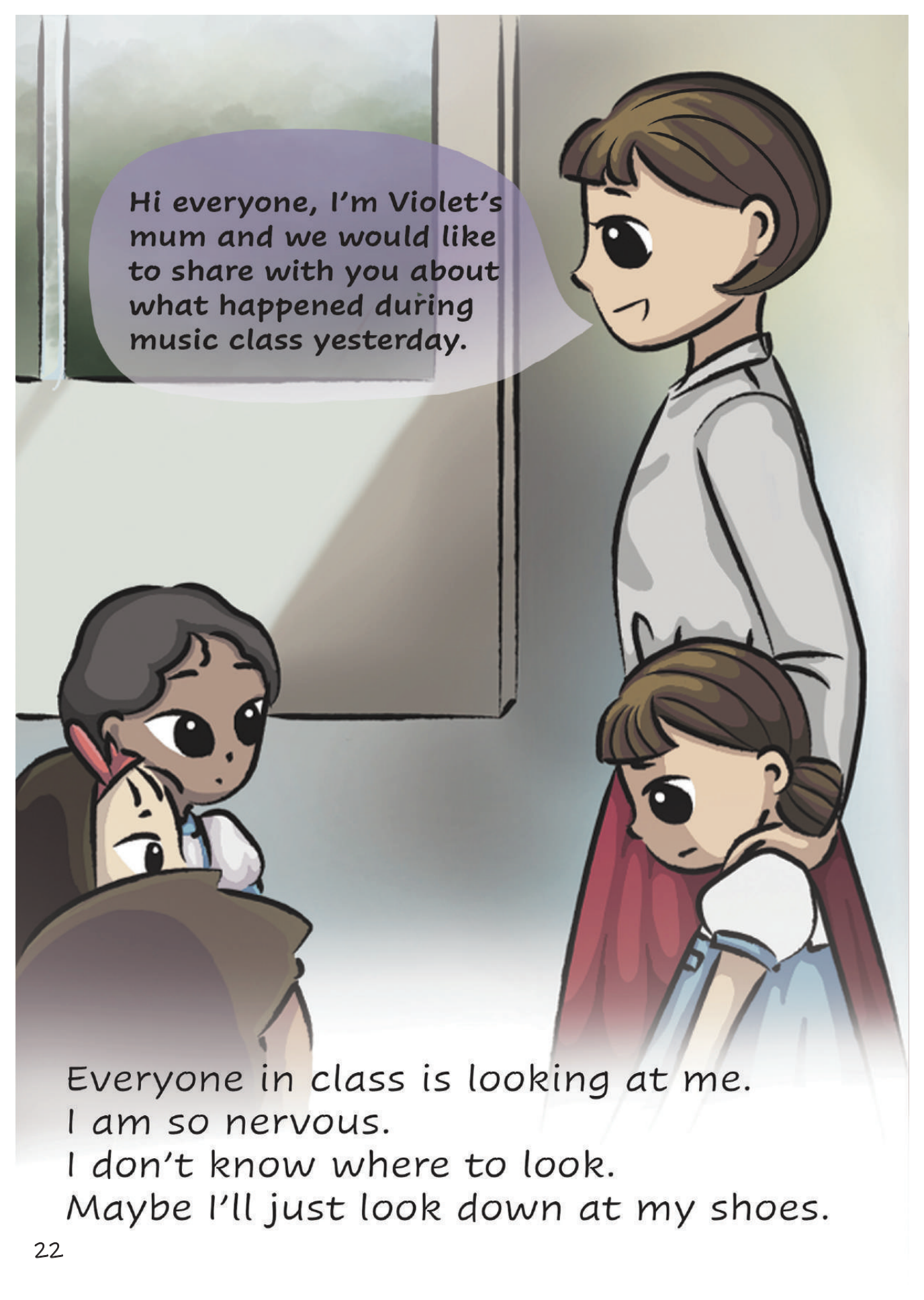


The next day,



Mrs Tay tells the class,

“Class, we have a special visitor today. Violet’s mum would like to say a few words.”



Hi everyone, I'm Violet's mum and we would like to share with you about what happened during music class yesterday.

Everyone in class is looking at me.
I am so nervous.
I don't know where to look.
Maybe I'll just look down at my shoes.


I take a deep breath.....

I have
Autism...

For people with autism, their brains are developed differently. Some people with autism may be easily affected by certain smells, sounds, light or touch.

For me, certain noises make my head hurt.

When that happens, I don't know how to make it stop. That was why I started running around in music class yesterday.

A cartoon illustration of a young girl with brown hair in pigtails, looking down with a sad expression. She is wearing a pink shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and green. Several speech bubbles are overlaid on the image, containing text about autism and social interactions.


Some people with autism may avoid eye contact as it makes them feel uncomfortable.

It is hard for me to look at people in the eye when talking to them.


Sometimes I may not understand how others feel and may say things that make them upset. Although I have autism, I still want to have friends and feel accepted.

Don't worry! We still want to be your friends!

I'm so happy that my classmates still want to be my friends!





When we learn more about autism, it is the first step towards understanding and accepting people with autism as our friends.



My classmates nod in agreement.

Children with autism have special gifts too! Such as being very good in the arts, sports or even a subject.

Like for Violet, she is very observant and notices the small details that others usually don't.



Does that mean I have a special gift too? Hmm...



Sophie says, "Oh! No wonder Violet saw that tiny ladybug on our first day of school but we didn't!"

Wow... my classmates think I have a special gift too!

Okay class. Now that we know more about Violet and autism, let's be more patient and understanding towards people with autism.





Everyone in class is looking at me with smiles on their faces. I'm so happy that everyone wants to learn more about autism and are still willing to be my friends :)

The End!

Questions

1. Why was Violet upset during music class?
2. What are some things that can affect persons with autism?
3. What can I do when I know someone with autism?

Answers

1. Violet was upset because of the loud noises during music class. As everyone was staring at her, she was also worried that they will think she is weird.
2. Certain smells, sound, light or textures can affect persons with autism.
3. Learn more about what Autism is. Treat them with patience and be understanding.

Key Takeaways

1. When we have no or little knowledge about someone different, we tend to judge them and jump to conclusions. Let's learn and understand Autism.
2. Be kind and do not say unkind things to people who may be different from you. We can create an inclusive world for everyone.
3. A little effort to befriend persons with autism is all it takes to start a new, meaningful friendship.



Glossary

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

According to Autism Resource Centre, autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects a person's ability to make sense of the world and relate with others. Autism comes from 'autos', the Greek word for 'self', and a person on the autism spectrum is often referred to as someone who lives in a world of his own.

Common Traits of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

1. Prefers routine and structure
2. Have difficulty maintaining eye contact
3. Face difficulties in communication and flexibility in thought
4. Repetitive behaviors like repetitive body movements
5. Sensitivity to certain lights, sound, smell etc.
6. Difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions

Definitions of words used in the book:

Avoid: Keep away from or stop oneself from doing (something)

Accepted: Regard favorably or with approval; welcome



Glossary

How to have a conversation about ASD with your children:

#1

Share with your child about Autism and that it is a spectrum; different people will exhibit different characteristics. No two people are the same, like you and me.

#2

Teach them to use respectful words to describe someone with Autism.

#3

Share that people with autism can sometimes get upset because some smells, noise or many people in the same room may overwhelm them.

#4

Focus on abilities & talents of people with autism, instead of what they can't do. People with autism have special gifts such as being observant.

#5

Emphasize on similarities that your child has with other children who have autism. Share with them that people with autism are not that different.

Scan here for inclusive games and activities!



Acknowledgements

Produced by,

Wong ZhiXiang

Nur Hidayah Sarifudin

Leong Kai Lin Tricia

Chloe Lim Ann

Jananeswary d/o Satiah Kumar

Jonathan Tan Sheng En

Lim Ying Xin Matilda

Soon Ling Xin Gabrielle

Tan Khai Qi

Illustrated by,

Tan Jia En

Tan Yan Yee Brenda

Special thanks to,

Diana Wee from Nanyang Polytechnic

Elly Sim from National Council of Social Service

Elaine Wah from Kinderland Siglap

Adelia Naomi Yokoyama, Adriel Ow Yong, Akmal Sarifudin,

Alvina Koo, Chan Xin Yi, Chu Tne Teck, Claudia Khoo,

Damian Quah, Faith Ang, Hazel Lim,

Jessie Tan, Karen Yeo, Kenneth Hong, Lee Ci En,

Leong T.C., Loy Yong Shin, Sarifudin Sapari,

Shahirah, Roslina Said, Yap Qian Yin



Breathing Exercise

4-7-8 Technique



1. Empty your lungs of air
2. Breathe in quietly through your nose for 4 seconds
3. Hold your breath for a count of 7 seconds

4. Exhale through your mouth, pursing your lips and making a "whoosh" sound, for 8 seconds

5. Repeat the cycle up to 4 times



Deep Breathing exercises are known to be beneficial for us. It is said to have many benefits, such as helping us to reduce anxiety, stress and keeping us calm. Above is one of the breathing exercises which you can try out for yourself! Follow Violet as she teaches you how to do it!

Scan here for a live demonstration!



Word Search



Autism

Acceptance

Behaviour

Patience

Spectrum*

Observant

Sensory*

Inclusion

Communication

Friends

Noises

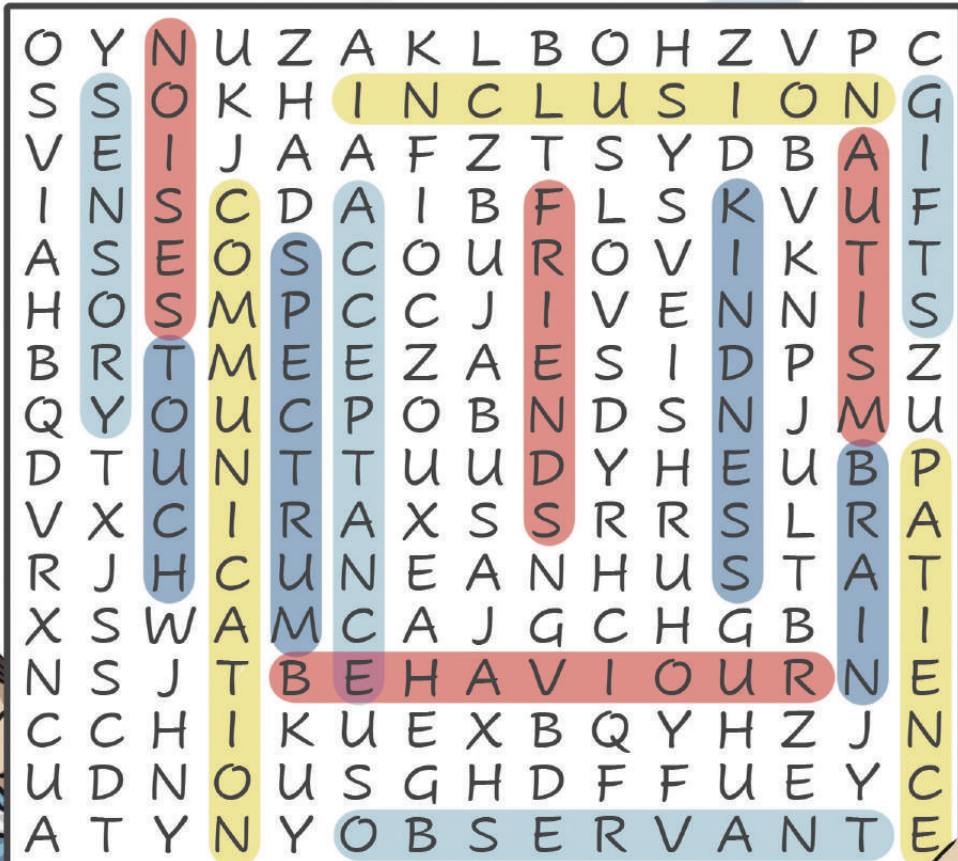
Touch

Gifts

Kindness

Brain

Answers



Definitions

Spectrum means the range of one extreme point to another

Sensory is related to the physical senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight

Colouring



Challenge yourself to colour the picture using only colours from the Autism Ribbon!



Fun Fact: According to Autism Society the "Autism Awareness Ribbon" - The puzzle pattern reflects the complexity of the Autism Spectrum. The different colours and shapes represent the diversity of the people and families living with the condition. The brightness of the ribbon signals hope - Hope that people with Autism will lead full lives, able to interact with the world on their own terms.

References

- Autism Society. (2020). The Autism Awareness Ribbon. Retrieved from <https://www.autism-society.org/about-the-autism-society/history/autism-awareness-ribbon/>
- Autism Speaks. (2017, November 30). How do we explain autism diagnosis & special class to our 7-year-old? Retrieved from <https://www.autismspeaks.org/expert-opinion/how-do-we-explain-autism-diagnosis-special-class-our-7-year-old>
- Autism Speaks. (n.d.). What Are the Symptoms of Autism? Retrieved from <https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-are-symptoms-autism>
- Fletcher, J. (2019, February 12). Medical News Today. How to use 4-7-8 breathing for anxiety. Retrieved from <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324417>
- National Council of Social Service. (2015). Let's Play Together. Retrieved from <https://www.ncss.gov.sg/Press-Room/Publications/Detail-Page?id=Let-s-Play-Together>
- National Council of Social Service. (2020). Interaction Tips. Retrieved from <https://www.ncss.gov.sg/Our-Initiatives/See-The-True-Me/Interaction-Tips#:~:text=Autism%20is%20a%20brain%2Dbased,mild%20to%20moderate%20to%20severe>
- Watkins, A. (2019). Urban Balance. Benefits of Deep Breathing. Retrieved from <https://urbanbalance.com/benefits-deep-breathing/>
- What To Expect. (2013, April 29). How to Explain Autism to Typical Kids (and Lots of Others While You're At It). Retrieved from <https://www.whattoexpect.com/wom/family-life/how-to-explain-autism-to-typical-kids-and-lots-of-others-while-you-re-at-it.aspx>

In Partnership with



In Support of

LOOK BEYOND MY DISABILITY
SEE THE TRUE ME

An Initiative by



In Collaboration with

