

The illustration features a hand from the top right placing a white ballot into an orange ballot box. The ballot has the words 'THE VOTE' in a bold, purple, sans-serif font. The word 'THE' is smaller and positioned above 'VOTE'. There are four orange stars: one to the left of 'THE', one to the right of 'THE', one inside the 'O' of 'VOTE', and one to the right of 'VOTE'. The background is a light blue with several white, torn paper shapes scattered around.

THE **VOTE**

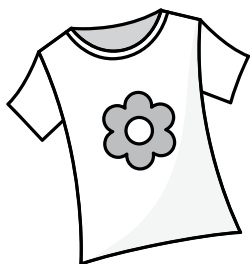
Jeff Gottesfeld

1

NEW SCHOOL

Wow! Sixth grade! Rae Mars was excited to start school. She thought sixth grade was a big step up. In her town, there was one school for the whole grade. That seemed special to her.

Rae got ready for her first day. Picking what to wear was a big deal. A black skirt and red top seemed best. Tying back her long dark braids added to the look. Rae felt grown up.



The perfect outfit!



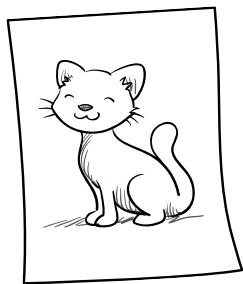
She could no longer walk to school. The new one was too far away. Rae had to take the bus.

Her best friend was Kia Ladd. They had the same bus stop. Kia was at the stop when Rae arrived.

“Are you ready?” Rae asked Kia.

Kia shook her head. She wore jeans and a gray T-shirt. “Not really. You know I don’t like change.”

Rae nodded. She got it. Kia was quiet. Talking was not fun for her. Drawing and reading were better. Rae was the opposite. Socializing gave her joy. But she loved Kia. They had been friends for years.



Kia is
the BEST
artist.



“Don’t worry,” Rae told her. “I’ve got your back.”

Kia smiled. “Thanks. That means a lot to me. Here’s the bus.”

The girls got on. It was almost full. Only two seats were open. One was close to the front of the bus. Another was near the back. Rae knew Kia would hate walking past all the kids to sit in the back.

“You can sit up front,” Rae told her.

Kia looked grateful and took the first open seat.

Rae walked toward the back. She saw a boy seated next to the second open spot.

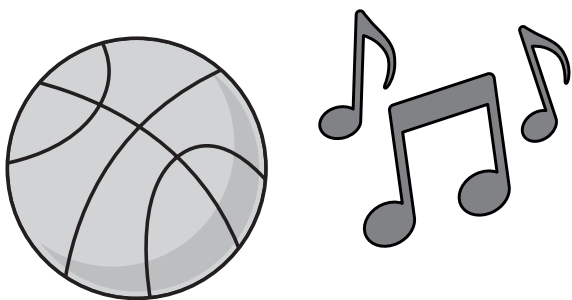
“Hi. My name is Rae,” she said, sitting down next to the boy.

“Hey,” he replied. “I’m Leo.”



Rae and Leo talked a lot. Leo thought she was cool. They both liked sports. Their taste in music was the same too.

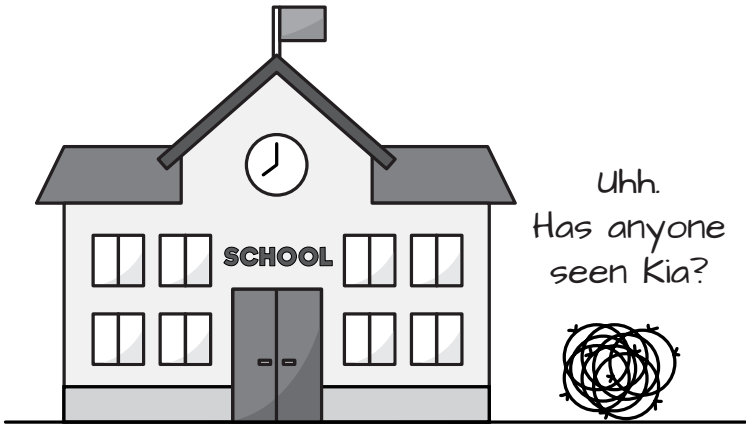
Instant friendship!



They did not stop talking until the bus arrived at school. Leo knew some other kids on the bus. He introduced them to Rae. All of them were as nice to her as he was. One girl's name was Elly. She was super funny.

Rae had made a group of new friends before even leaving the bus. She wanted Kia to meet them. Then they could all be friends.

She got off the bus. But her best friend was nowhere in sight. *Did Kia go inside already?* Rae wondered. *Why didn't she wait for me?*



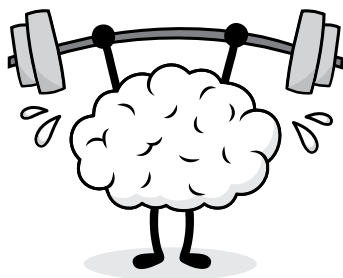
2

SURPRISE

A month later, Rae was still happy with school. She loved sixth grade. Having different classes, each with its own teacher, was new. Math was her favorite. The teacher was Mr. Elliot. Rae thought he made math easy. She was a top student.



The school clubs were even better. There were some for math, service, sports, and cooking. Rae was in meetings all the time. They were never boring. She was learning so much.



But her new friends were best of all. Rae thought Leo and Elly were awesome. Many others were great too. Rae had friends from her classes and clubs.

She and Elly often hung out. Elly's dad owned horses. He took the girls on trail rides.

For Rae, the only bad part of the new school was her best friend not liking it. No

clubs sounded good to Kia. Math was her only class with Rae. They barely saw each other.

It's like
Kia is a
ghost.

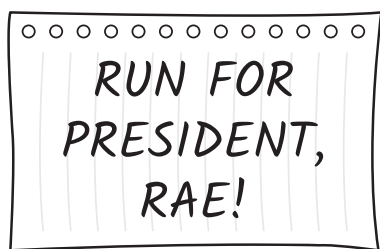


One Friday, Mr. Elliot shared some news. “Listen, class. Before we start, I have something to say. You know that sixth grade is a *big deal*.” He smiled at his last two words. “There is a student council. Each homeroom class sends a member. Councils have leaders too.”

Mr. Elliot pointed to the class calendar. “Next week, you will choose your leaders. Voting is for all students. The vote will be next Friday. Some of you may want to lead.

If so, you must run for one of the offices. I have the form for you to fill out. Give it to Principal Kwan today. The council offices are president, treasurer, and secretary. Good luck to all who run. Now get your books out. Turn to page 20.”

Kids started to look at Rae. Some gave her a thumbs-up. Others nodded their heads. One even held up a note to encourage her.



The kids went to her as soon as class was over. All of them were excited.

“You need to lead us, Rae.”

“You’d be great!”

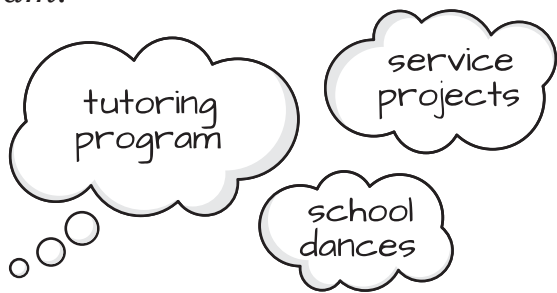


“Everyone likes you.”

“Please run for president. I’ll help you.”

So many kids wanted Rae to run. She had never led a club before. Student council was big. It was for the whole school.

Why not? she thought. Kids like me. They listen when I talk. The council could do a lot of good. We can plan school dances and service projects. Maybe I can start a tutoring program.



Her mind was made up. At the end of the day, Rae went to the principal’s office. She was ready to turn in her form. When she got there, Kia was just walking out.

“Hey, what’s up?” Rae asked her. “I hardly ever see you anymore.”

“That’s your call, not mine.” Kia started walking away.

“But you don’t even sit with me on the bus,” Rae responded. “That’s *your* call.”



Kia stopped, turned around, and folded her arms. “Well, you sit with your new friends.”

“They’re nice.”

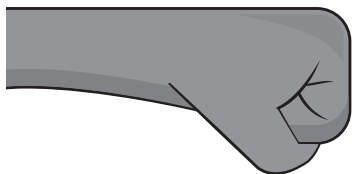
“But we’re supposed to be besties.” Kia seemed upset.

Rae sighed. She did not want Kia to be mad at her. It was okay to have new friends. To Rae, there was no need to argue.

“Okay,” she told Kia. “I’ve got an idea. I’m going to run for class president. You can be in charge of helping me. It’s perfect. There are so many people you will meet. You’ll have a lot of power too. Everyone will want to know you.” She took her friend’s hand. “What do you say? You in?”

“No.” Kia snatched her hand away. “I’m not in.”

“Oh, come on. I’m sorry. It was my fault for not introducing you to my new friends. You’ll like helping out. I promise. We’ll be a team.” Rae put out her fist for a bump.

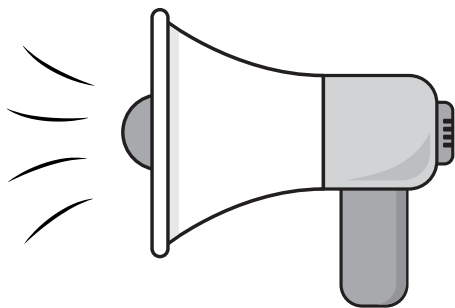


Don't leave
me hanging . . .

Kia didn't bump it. "Nope."

"Why not? I just said I was sorry. Or did you not hear that?"

Is she even listening?!



Kia smiled. "You want to know why not? It's easy. I heard you were running for president. Guess what? If you win, you'll have to beat me. I'm running too!"

Rae looked at her friend in shock. Then she laughed. *Wow, Kia is too funny! I love her jokes.*