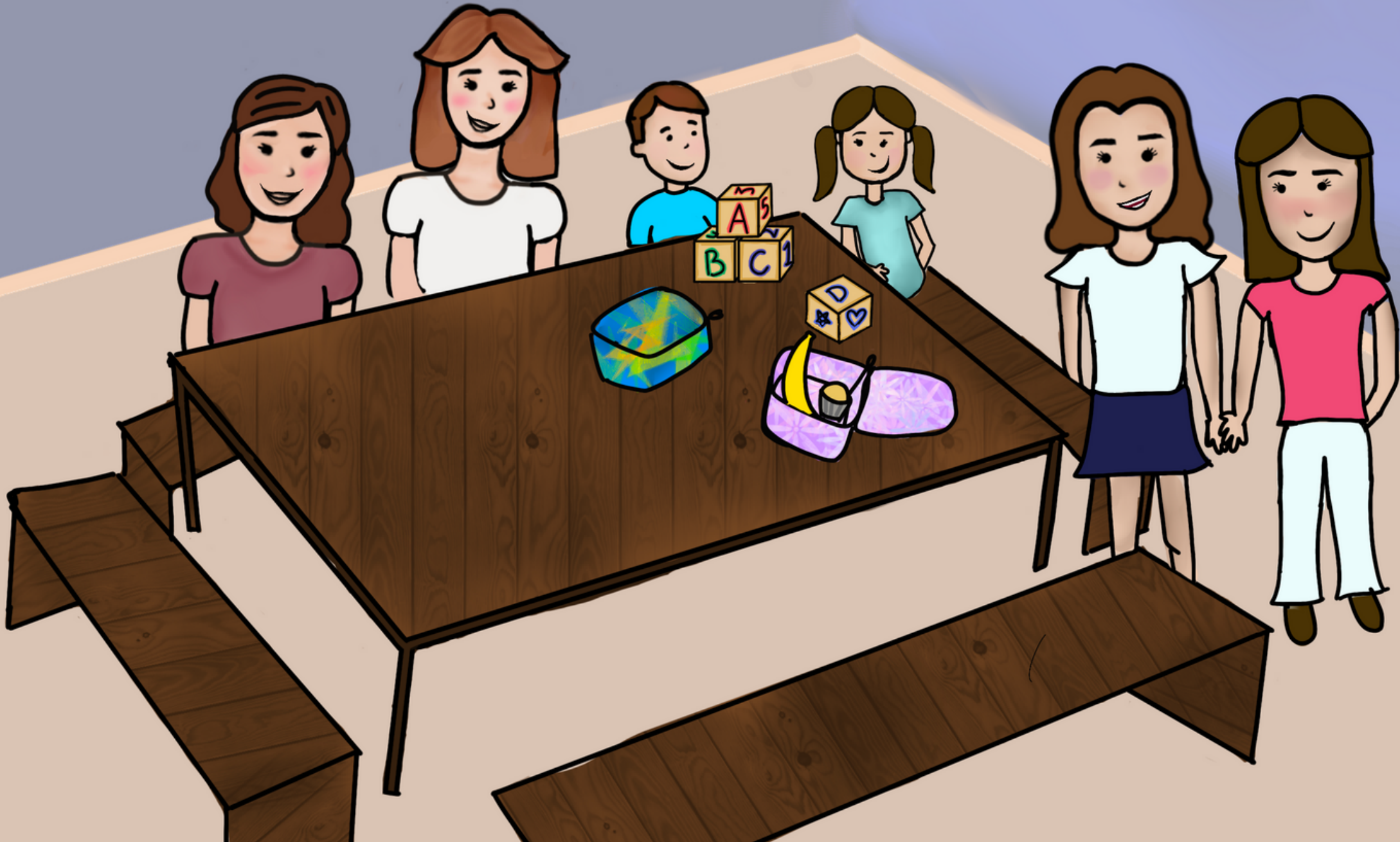


A
Heart-
shaped
life

A Heart-shaped life

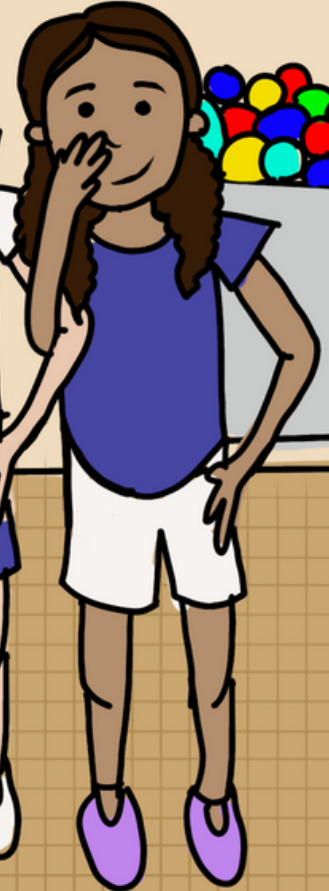
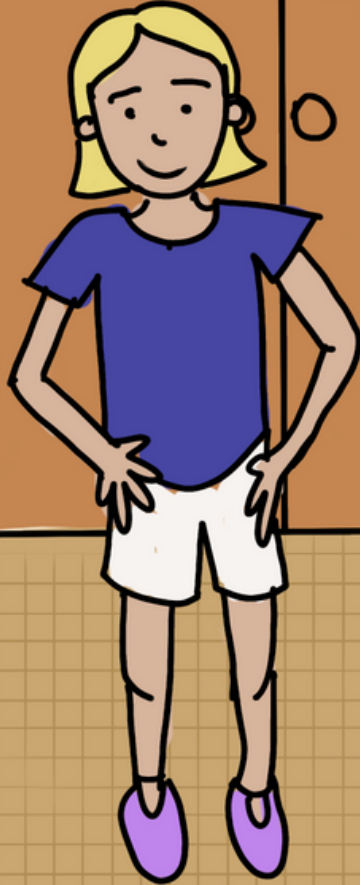
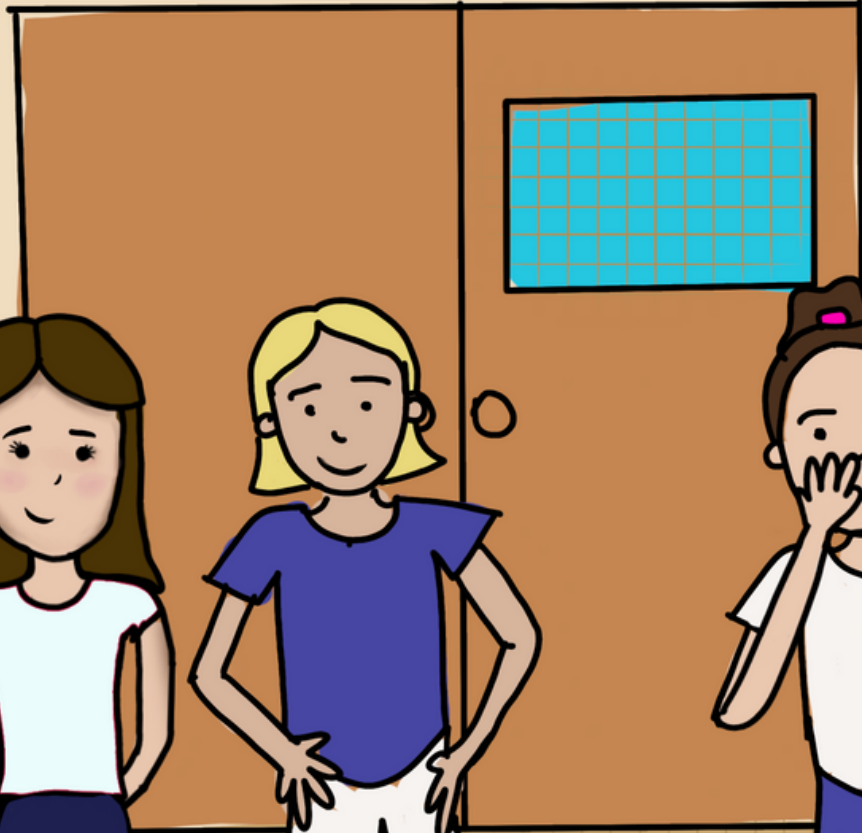
Author: Yasmine Hamd
Illustrator: Rania Salman

In 8th grade, Leen moved to a new school with her best friend. Leen and Marya were very excited to move and mostly, they were looking forward to making new friends. The first day was going great! Their classes were fun, the teachers were nice, and they had made some new friends... At the end of their first day, they walked out and found their moms sitting in the cafeteria waiting for them with their younger siblings. They joined them at the table and began sharing details of their entire day! "How would you rate your day out of 10?" asked Marya's mom. "10 OUT OF 10!" they both screamed. "Maybe even eleven!" said Leen. That day Leen went back home happily and enjoyed the rest of her evening at home playing with her siblings in their garden.



The next day at school, Leen and Marya were even more excited because they had PE class as the last period of the day. During PE, they started off with a game. While waiting for their turn, Leen and Marya were making a new friend, Talia. Although Talia was very kind and welcoming, her friend Dana seemed to be looking weirdly at them. Leen noticed this and found it strange...

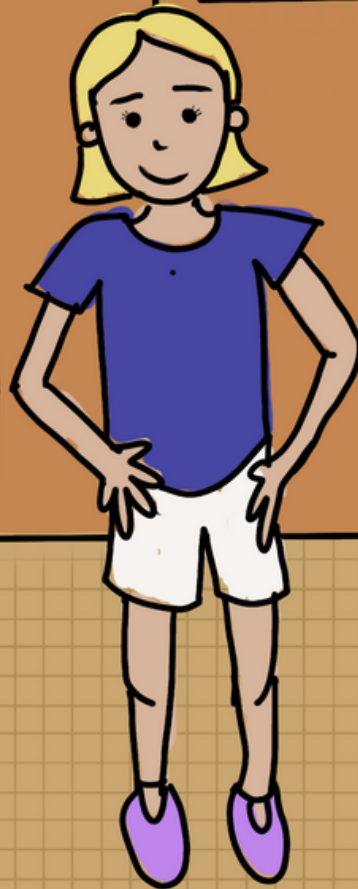
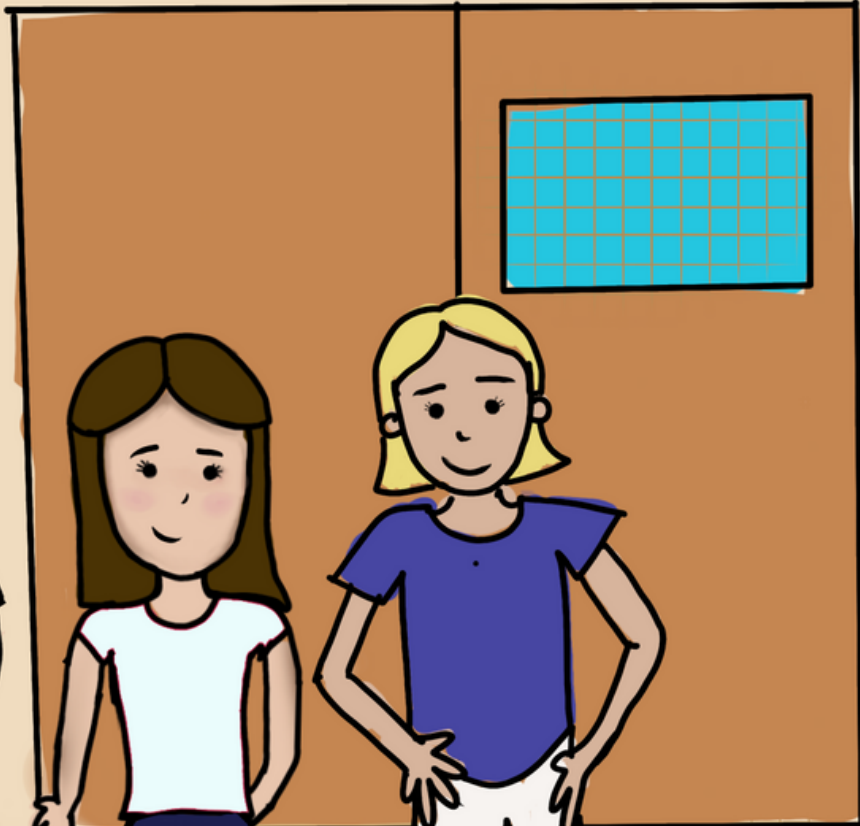
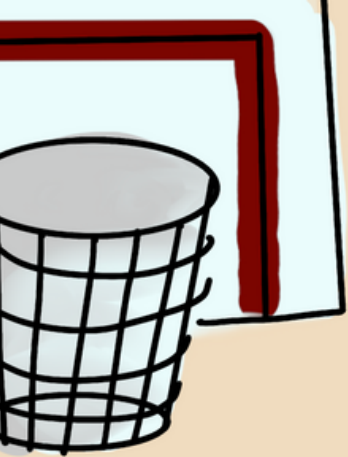
Physical Education



Leen couldn't help but notice that Dana had stopped staring, but she turned to the girl next to her, Tala, and started whispering and chuckling. It seemed there was something in Leen that they found funny! A few minutes later, as Marya and Leen continued to talk with Talia, Dana moved closer to Leen and asked her: "So, where are you from?". Her bright smile did not seem so genuine...and Leen felt tense as she had just seen Dana laughing at her a few minutes earlier!

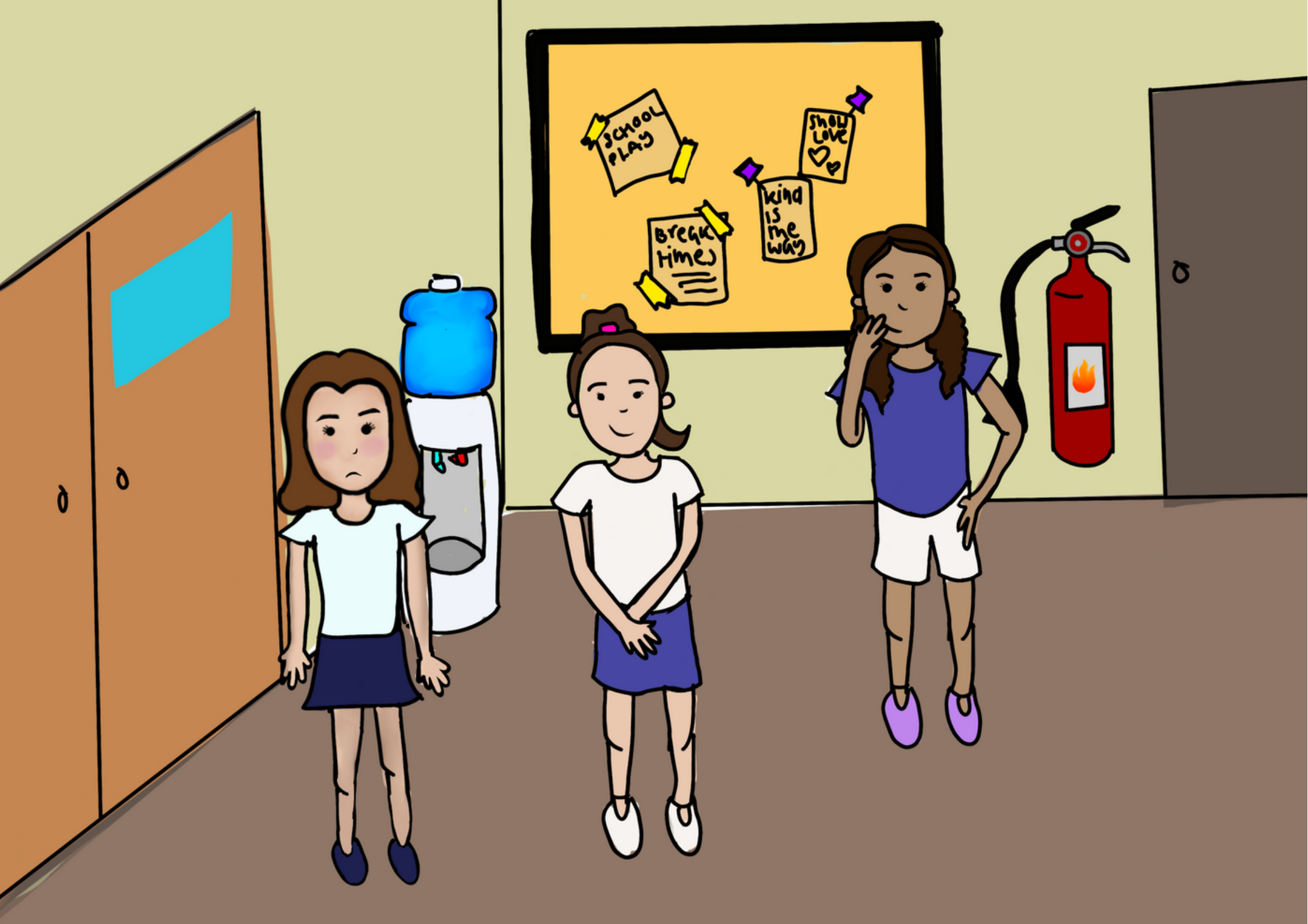
"Lebanon", Leen replied. Dana went back to Tala and they continued to whisper and giggle. Leen brushed that situation off and continued to enjoy her time with Marya, and their new friend Talia.

Physical Education



When the class was over, Dana came up to Leen. "So why is it that your face has that kind of shape, a weird hairline shape? Shouldn't you be more normal or something? Normal people have a round face shape, you know?" said Dana before she ran away laughing with Tala.

It all made sense to Leen what these girls had been whispering and chuckling about! Although Leen knew she should defend herself, she had nothing to say, because she was confused and hurt by this comment...



SCHOOL
PLAY

SHOW
LOVE
♡♡

BREAK
TIME

kind
is
the
way

When Leen went back home that day, she was much quieter than usual. Her parents noticed that and began to worry about her. The rest of the evening was slow and gloomy for Leen. She spent her evening in her room, thinking about this and feeling angry at how she let these girls speak to her that way! She thought and thought until she heard a knock on her door and her parents came in.



They sat on either end of the bed and gave Leen a big hug. Although she hadn't said a word all evening, she finally opened up and told them what happened at school that day. After a good and long talk, Leen agreed with her parents on two things:

1. She was going to defend herself directly next time.
2. She was going to go back to Dana and stand up for herself the next day.



The next day at school, Leen kept the deal she made with her parents in mind. Standing up to a bully was going to be something new to her, so she felt kind of nervous...

As she walked around in recess preparing herself, she began to think of her life and how love, warmth, and happiness have surrounded her for as long as she could remember!

From a young age, Leen had lived a joyous and loving life. The blanket she was covered in at birth was a heart-patterned blanket.



Congrats
it's a
girl!

She grew up with heart posters and drawings plastered on the walls
of her room...



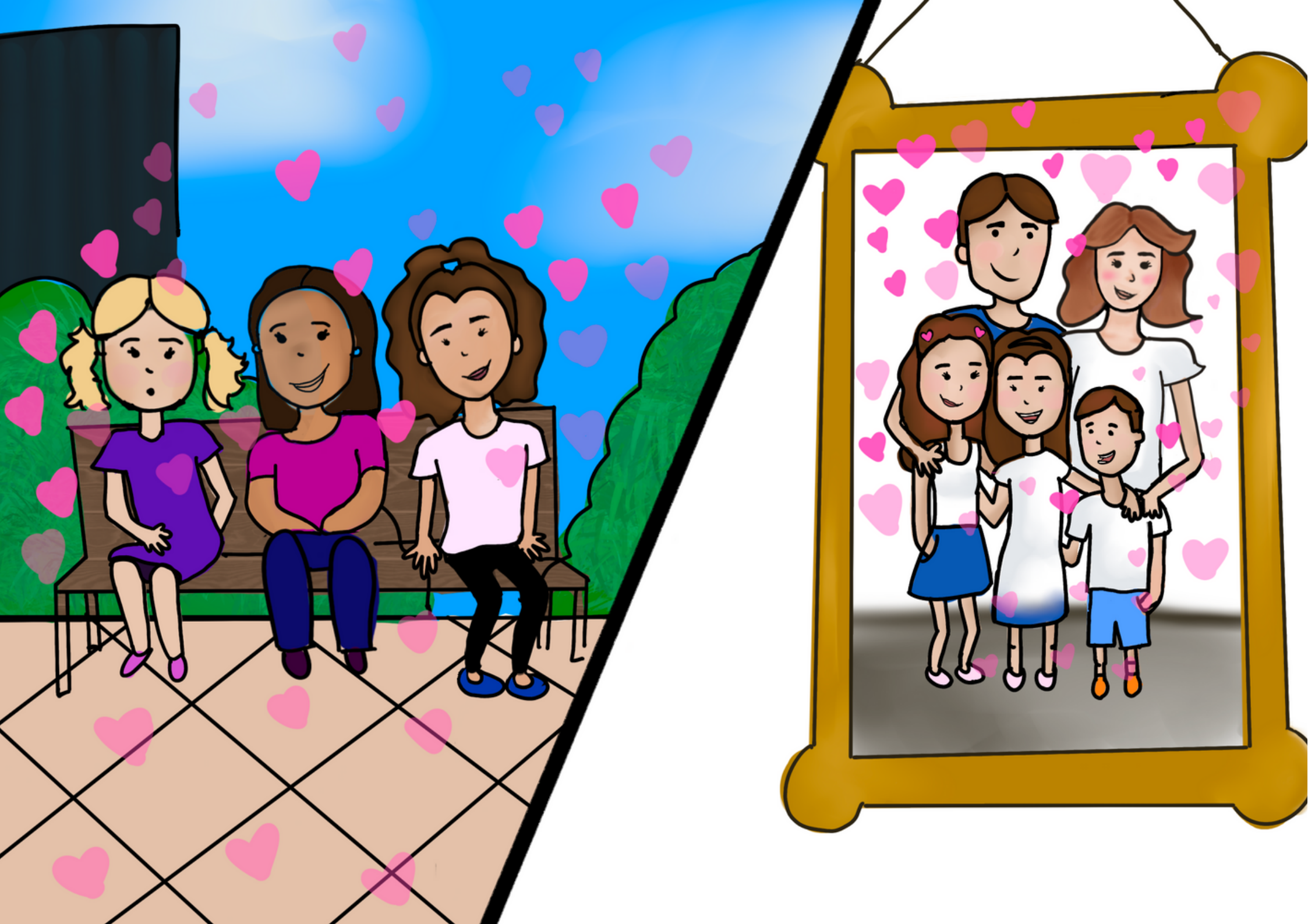
And her wardrobe was one filled with hearts and love too....



Birthday's usually meant heart-shaped cakes.



And in the time she spent with family, friends, and loved ones, she
found it in the air too.



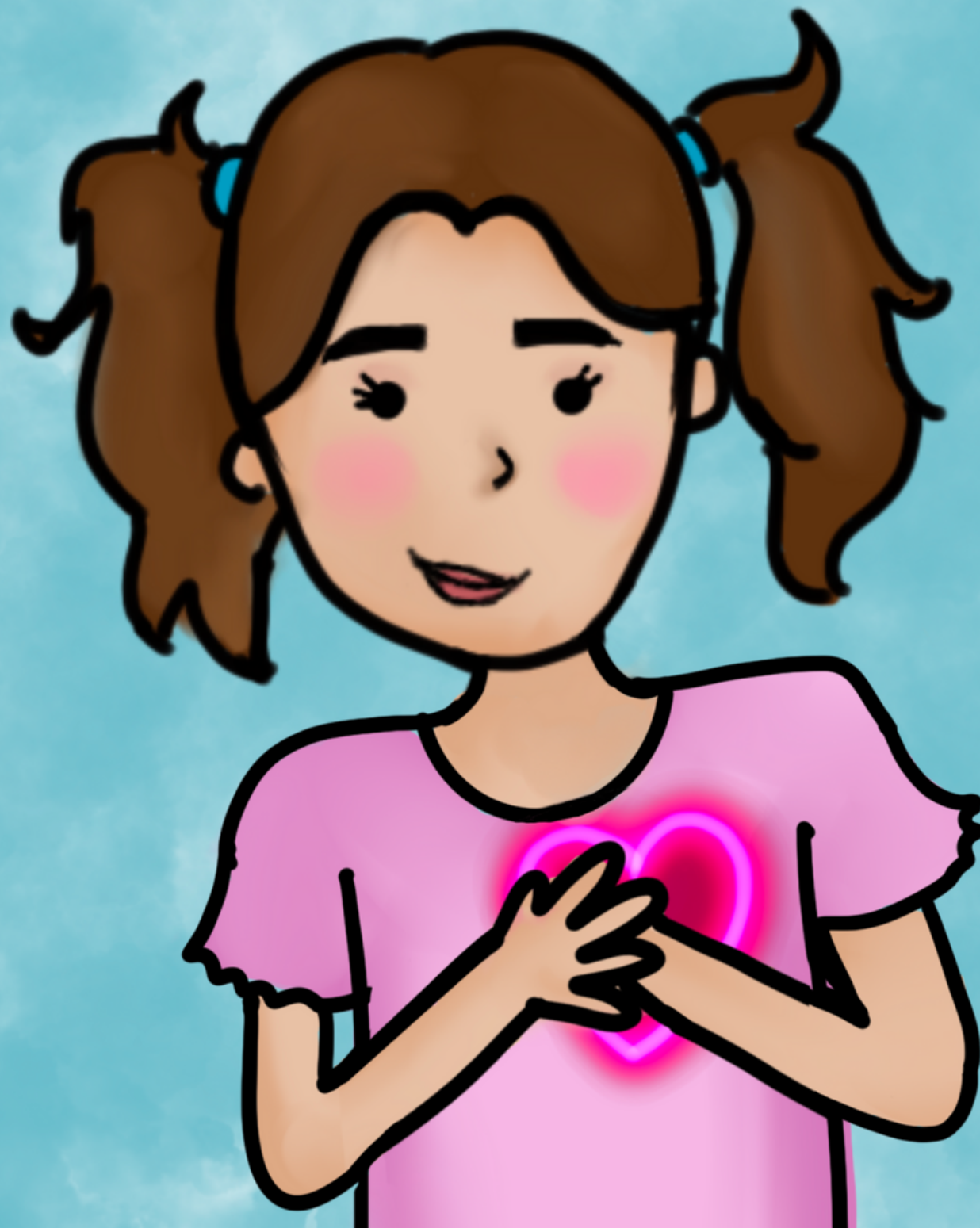
In 2009, Leen travelled with her family to France, Val-d'Isère. Leen was excited to join a kids ski school. And to the instructor's surprise, she let go of his hand and went down the slope on her own!



Beyond all these parts of her life that were filled with love, Leen had two heart-shaped features she carried around with her everywhere.

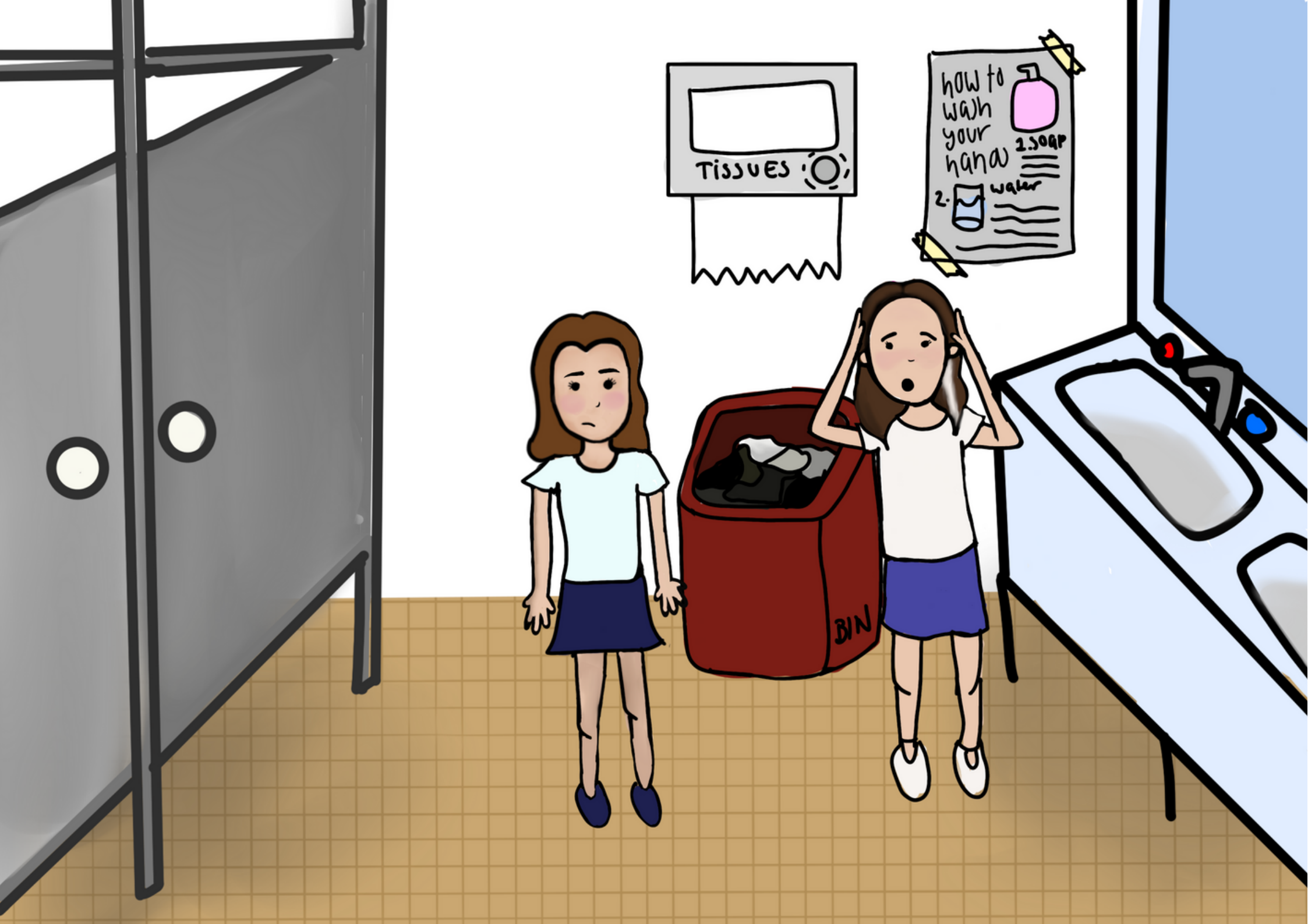
After all these thoughts came to mind, Leen felt strong. Everything she thought of reminded her of who she was, and how loving and loved she was. Confidence was overflowing in her body, and Leen realized there was nothing to fear or be nervous about. In fact, she strongly believed that her hairline was just one extra special thing about her!

Instead of feeling ashamed or scared, Leen realized she loved herself.



Leen saw Dana going into the girl's bathroom, so she followed her in. "Hey Dana, I wanted to talk to you." said Leen. Dana turned around quickly as she was fixing her hair, she seemed very nervous and surprised.

"Umm, sure" said Dana with a panicking look as she quickly tied her hair back up. "Hey you know what you said to me yesterday was not cool at all. What's wrong with having a heart-shaped hairline? Does it hurt to be unique? I think you should learn to be kinder and more respectful." said Leen.



TISSUES

how to wash your hands

- 2. soap
- 2. water

Woman in light blue shirt and dark blue skirt

Woman in white shirt and purple skirt

BIN

“Uh, uh, um... hahaha, um I obviously was just joking! You look beautiful, um... uhh I’m sorry about that.” said Dana.

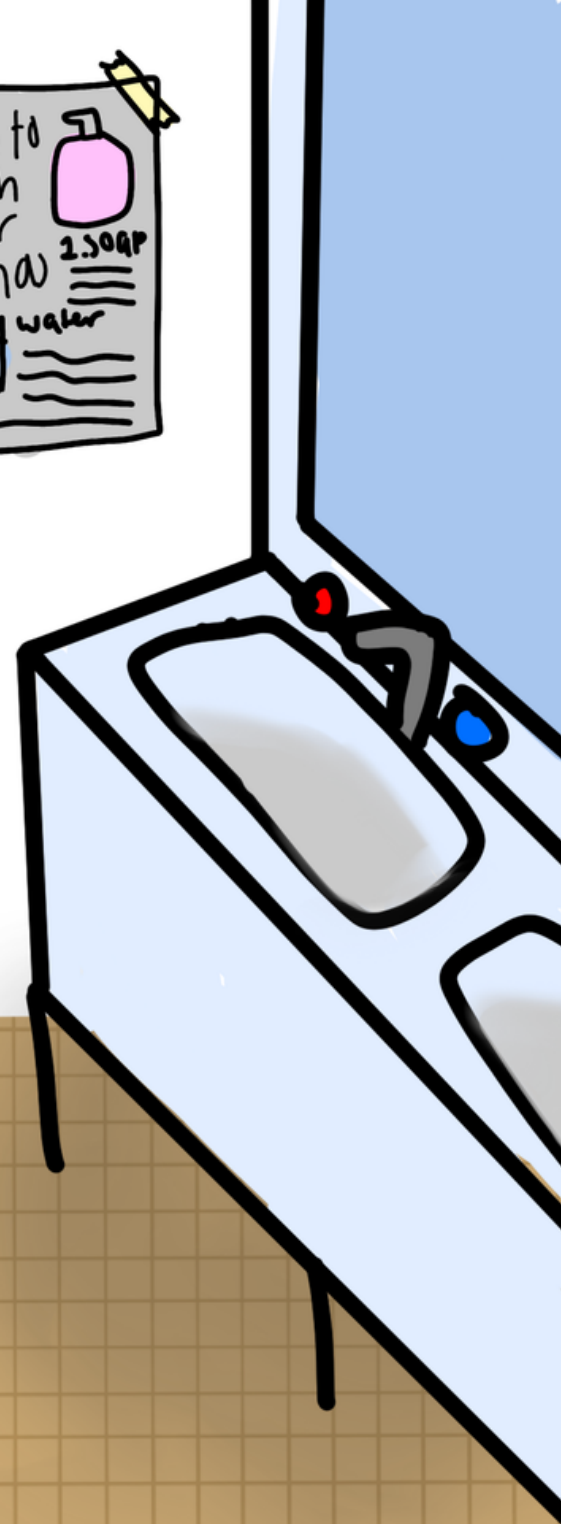
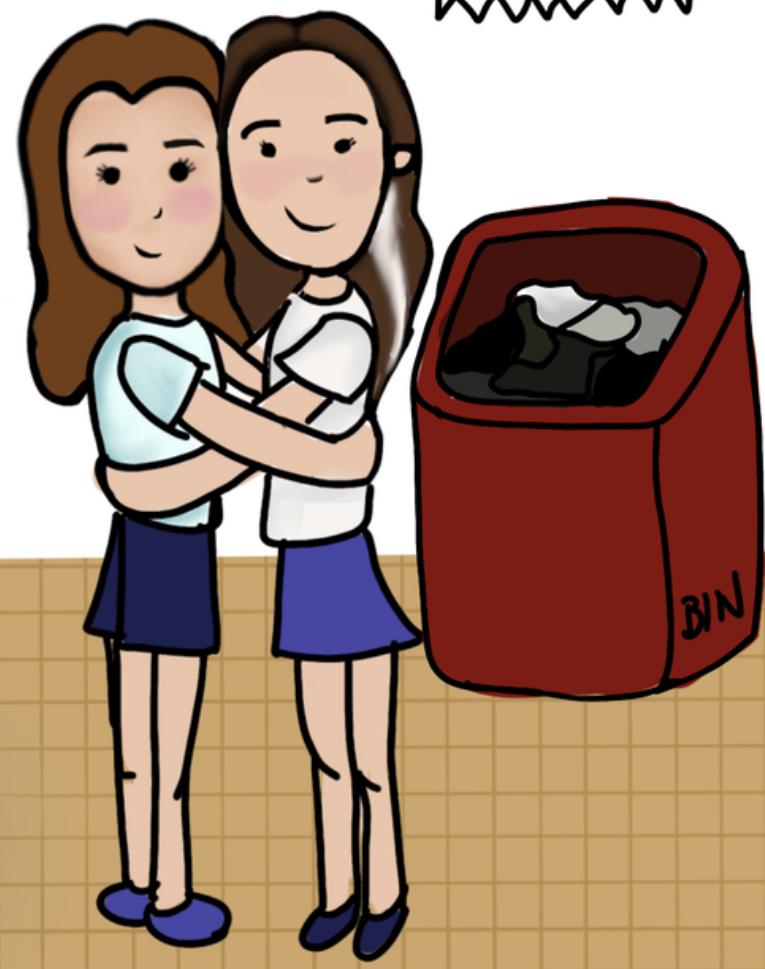
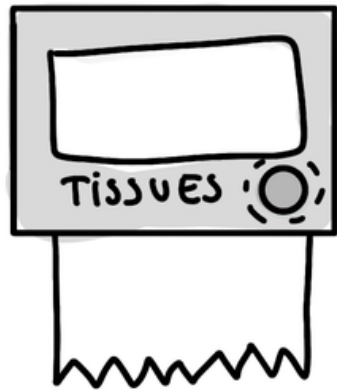
“I like your hair, is that a natural strand?” said Leen.

“Oh no! You saw it. I always keep my hair tied so no one sees it.” said Dana as she started to cry.

“What! Why would you hide it? It’s so special. You are the only person I have met who has this feature!” said Leen.

“Oh why are you being nice to me, I was so mean yesterday, how can you forgive me?” said Dana.

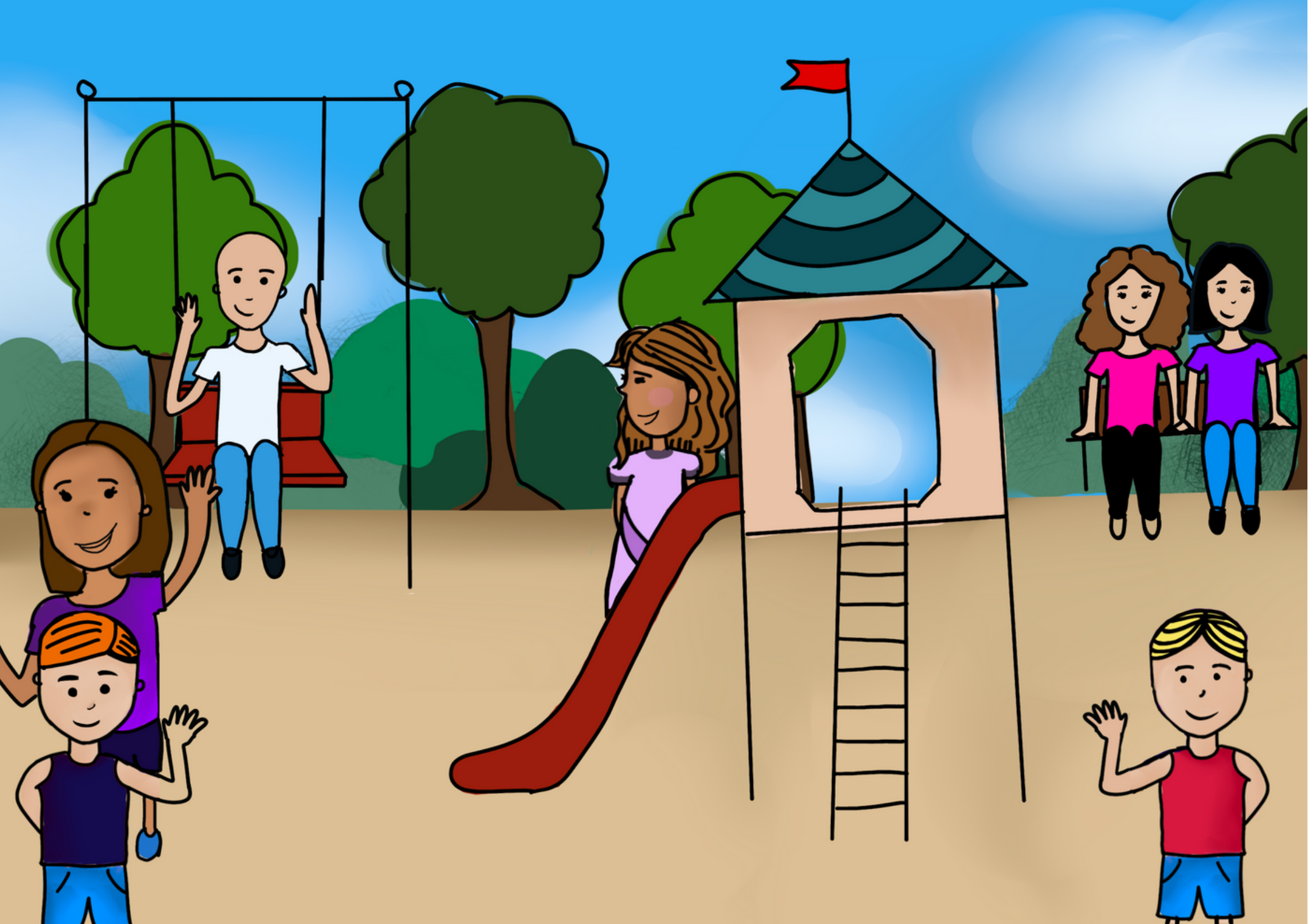
“Well, I love and appreciate how different we all are in our own ways, so your hair is special, you shouldn’t be ashamed of it” said Leen.



Dana apologized again, and Leen walked away satisfied.

Leen learnt to love herself and that even if this happened to her again, it wouldn't upset or anger her. Instead, she was going to learn to confidently love her differences.

For the rest of that day, and every other day after that one, Dana was always nice to Leen, as was Tala.



Leen gained a new appreciation for differences. Every time she came across someone who had their own difference, she would compliment it.

Different was never a problem to Leen, but this experience taught her to find strength and pride in the differences amongst us all.

