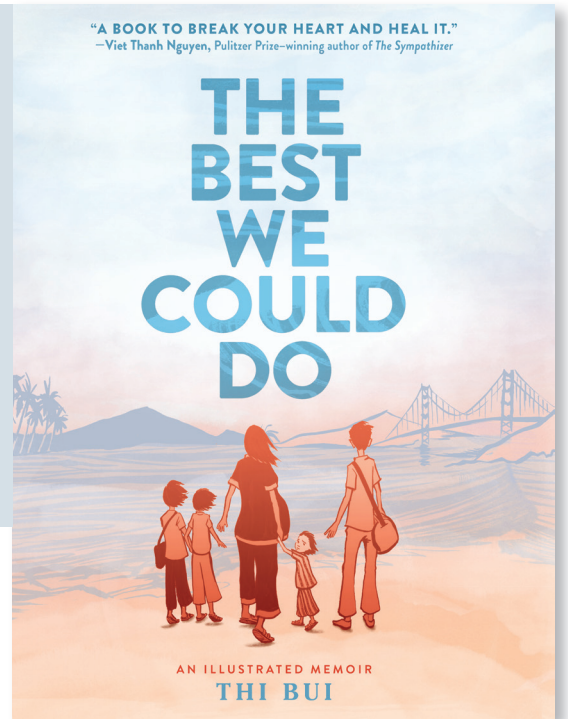


# TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE BEST WE COULD DO

BY THI BUI



## CURRICULAR RATIONALE

*The Best We Could Do* addresses identity, displacement and assimilation, race, decolonization, and political and historical movements and their impact on people, with advanced vocabulary, similes, idioms, and historical context and culture. While blending the written word with images, it promotes critical thinking through a coming-of-age memoir laden with issues of cultural and self-identity, and intergenerational trauma and endless sacrifice within a family. Using the graphic novel format, this book serves readers through verbal and visual storytelling that supports multimodal teaching. Primarily told as a memoir, *The Best We Could Do* also includes major historical events. This text is ideal in reading lists in both college and college-preparatory history or English classes. The intent of this brief guide is to provide flexible teaching options that educators can adapt to their needs and those of their students.

## About the Author

**Thi Bui** was born in Việt Nam and came to the United States as a child with her family. They were part of the “boat people” wave of Southeast Asian refugees. She studied art and legal studies and thought about becoming a civil rights lawyer, but became a public school teacher instead. Bui lives in Berkeley, California, with her son, her husband, and her mother. *The Best We Could Do* is her debut graphic novel.



## As you Read: A Pronunciation Guide

Some of the names and words that appear in this story may be unfamiliar to students. Please visit [www.abramsbooks.com/thebestwecoulddo](http://www.abramsbooks.com/thebestwecoulddo) for a list of approximately 100 names and terms in Vietnamese, French, and Malay, along with recordings of their appropriate pronunciations.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

### Good, Better, Best

What is the difference between these three words: good, better, and best? Why might the author have chosen the latter word as part of the title? What is the significance of the verb tense? Who do you think is implied by “we” in the title, *The Best We Could Do*?

### Family

How do you define a family? What are the bonds that make up your family? Who are the people you would go to for help if you were ever in trouble?

### Historical Events

The author references events in the world as she describes her family members’ lives: France surrendering to Nazi Germany (p. 102), U.S. dropping atomic bombs (p. 115), First Indochina War (p. 157), Geneva Accords (p. 167), Vietnam War (p. 200), Fall of Sài Gòn/Liberation Day (p. 211), and Vietnamese boat people exodus (p. 267) are a few examples. In groups or individually, research these topics and make a rough timeline; include a short description of each event.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### On Family

“Family is now something I have created and not just something I was born into” (p. 21). What does the author mean by this statement? What is the difference between “created” and “born into”? What is similar?

Bô’ states, “You don’t have a sister named Bích anymore. She is dead to us” (p. 27). What events caused Bô’ to say this about his daughter? If you were Thi or Tâm, how would you interpret this statement?

In the set of panels on page 28, the family avoided ever talking about the incident to the point that Má thought that Thi didn’t remember. Thi exclaims, “I was there! How do you think I could forget something like that? Almost thirty years later, I didn’t know I was still angry.” Why would this memory still make Thi angry? How would you feel if you were Thi? What might cause a family to avoid discussing a difficult situation?

On page 29, the author draws portraits of her parents and siblings. In the second panel, Quỳn and Tha’ are shadows. What was the artist’s purpose for blurring these two siblings? Was it effective to use an image instead of words? Explain.

The author desires to be closer to her parents as an adult and realizes “proximity and closeness are not the same” (p. 31). What is your definition of proximity? Closeness? How do these two words differ? Which of the two words would you rather use to describe your relationship with your parents?

The births of the six siblings are told in reverse chronological order (pp. 42, 46, 47, 48, 50, and 52). What was the author’s purpose in using this storytelling element? Is it effective?

“Home became the holding pen for the frustrations and the unexorcised demons that had nowhere to go in America’s finest city” (p. 68). “In my sleep, I dreamt of how terrible it would be to not find my way home” (p. 83). “And then I came home to a tiny hovel” (p. 186). “My parents built their bubble around us—our home in America” (p. 294). What does home mean to Thi and her family members? Does her definition of home change as the story progresses? How? What does home mean to you? What is the difference between a home and a house?

### On Culture and Identity

“And imagine each block, each day turned us a little more American” (pp. 65). “I learned about America mostly through books and TV, and from what my sisters learned in school” (p. 67). If you were going to mentor a new classmate from another country, how would you share and explain what it means to be “a little more American” to your new classmate? What books, television shows, or other media would you use to demonstrate your ideas? What elements in your everyday environment shape your national or cultural identity?

Examine the panels where someone spits on Bô’ on page 67. What is meant by “there were reasons to not want to be anything other?” How would you have reacted if you were Bô’? How would you react if you saw someone spit on another person? What might motivate one person to react to another in that way? Can you think of similar hateful actions and tensions you’ve seen or read about throughout history or on the news?

On page 187, Bô’ reminisces about the books, music, and movies that influenced him as a teenager. Compare his influences with your own. How have your tastes shaped you as a person?

“Don’t be such a REFUGEE!” (p. 285). What is meant by this comment? When you hear the word “refugee,” what do you think of? How do perceptions of refugees affect their experience?

What is the difference between leaving a country voluntarily and being forced to leave your homeland? What are some positive and negative effects of a dislocation?

When Thi and her siblings go to school (day care, elementary and middle schools), all three are treated differently (p. 287). Explore how Bích, Lan, and Thi could have been more supported by their peers and teachers.

How did French colonialism influence Thi’s parents while they were growing up? Cite specific examples from the book that show that impact. How might a French colonist’s description of this influence differ from a Vietnamese nationalist’s?



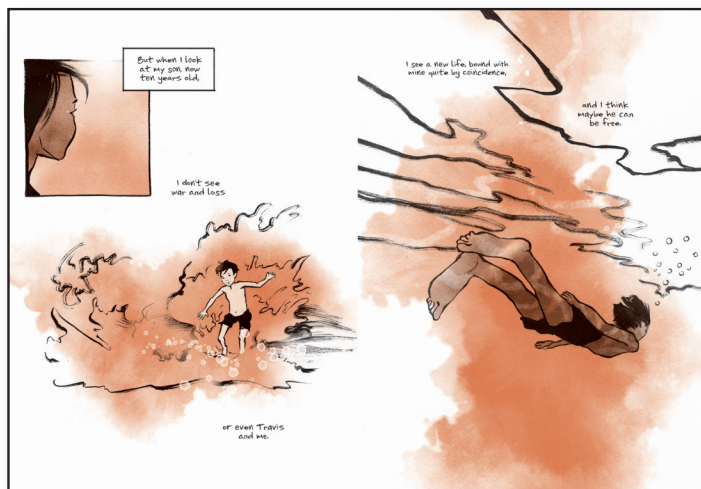
On **page 41**, Bui states that she was seeking “an origin story . . . that will set everything right.” **Does she find what she was looking for in the pages of this book? Why or why not?**

## On War and Conflict

Using specific examples from the book, how did class differences affect people’s experience of war and their decisions about which side to take?

How did certain features of geographic location affect people’s experience of war? Cite specific examples from the book.

As explored throughout the book, war can have immediate and lasting impacts on the people experiencing it. Find specific examples in the book that show the direct or implied impact of war on children and families.



**What factors contributed to Thi’s parents’ decision to leave Việt Nam after the war ended? What would you have done in their place?**

Describe the various authorities that the Buis encounter during their refugee experience. **Who are they and from where do they derive their power to make decisions about refugees? Consider our national discussion on refugees today. How is it similar to the Buis’ experience? How does it differ?**

## On History

**Page 66** refers to California’s Proposition 187, which voters passed in 1994 but was subsequently struck down in a federal court. **What were the arguments for and against this law? What similarities do you see to debates today on immigration?**

“I had never, before researching the background of my father’s stories, imagined that these horrible events were connected to my family history” (p. 116). **How would you feel if you were Thi? What historical events are tied to your own family history? How and when did you learn about them?**

**What factors contributed to Bô’s decision to leave North Việt Nam in 1954? Cite specific events and context clues from the book. What would you have done if you were in his position?**

Examine the four panels on **pages 128 and 129**, and the quote “I had no idea that the terror I felt was only the long shadow of his own” (p. 129). Compare Bô’s upbringing in Việt Nam to Thi’s upbringing in San Diego. **How are they similar? Different? What is meant by Thi’s quote? How is trauma passed down between generations?**

Thi’s family escapes to Việt Nam on a boat bound for Malaysia. They face many hardships—little food (p. 235), tight sleeping arrangements (p. 236), possible pirates (p. 242), bad potable water (p. 244), etc. **If you were aboard a boat headed toward freedom, what five items would you want to bring on the boat to survive? What would you have to leave behind?** Share your list of items with a partner, and then narrow your list to three items for the two of you. **What similar stories of escape have you read about throughout history or on the news?**

On **page 267**, Bui incorporates her family’s real refugee camp identification photographs into the graphics. **What was Bui’s intention in doing so? Was it effective?** Find another page where real photographs could enhance the storyline.

In **Chapter 6**, Bui suggests that she is making up for not having memories of her own by doing a lot of research. **What is the difference between personal knowledge and relying on secondary sources? What can be gained from interviewing primary sources? What could be tricky about interviewing primary sources?**

## ADDITIONAL EXERCISES AND RESOURCES

### Family History

“I began to record our family history . . . thinking that if I bridged the gap between the past and the present, I could fill the void between my parents and me” (p. 36). Explore your family history. Find out about your ancestry by interviewing family members. Ask your parents or other family members about their courtship stories. How did they meet? Where did previous generations come from or move to? What did they hope for? What challenges did they encounter in raising a new generation? List family members and important dates.

## Gender Roles

Consider the perspectives of the women in the stories of Thi's parents and grandparents. Retell a story from their point of view. Cite specific examples from the book to support your retelling.

## Graphic Novels

Have you read other graphic novels? How did those graphic novels compare to *The Best We Could Do* in how they told a story? Visually speaking, what elements appealed to you in this graphic memoir? Share a particular layout or panel that best demonstrated these features. How do you think the graphic novel format of this memoir affected its message and potency?

## Literary Scavenger Hunt

Throughout *The Best We Could Do*, Bui infuses her story with rich, figurative language and beautiful panels. Embark on a literary scavenger hunt to locate your favorite phrases or quotes. Create a shareable quote card image to be published on the social media site of your choice (remember to attribute appropriately).

## Finding and Using Related Sources

Compare and contrast the ways in which Vietnamese people are represented in different accounts, fiction and nonfiction, of the Việt Nam War. What factors could affect these differences?

Create a timeline of Việt Nam's transition from feudalism to colonialism to nationalism to full independence. Use online research to find dates. Select key moments from the book and plot them on your timeline. How does your relationship with the characters affect your understanding of the history?

**Pages 205-209** discuss Nguyễn Ngọc Loan, the former chief of National Police in South Việt Nam, and the Pulitzer Prize–winning photograph of him, titled, “Saigon Execution.” Why is Thi confused about what her father thinks of him? Compare the accounts in this book with other descriptions of the photograph or the incident. How does one's perspective influence one's opinion about what the photograph represents?

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Below are the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards that can be met by extending *The Best We Could Do* with these questions, prompts, and activities.



### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3

Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, 11-12.2, 11-12.3

Key ideas and details: Citing textual evidence, determining a theme or central idea, describing how a plot unfolds, analyzing how particular elements of the story interact; analyzing how particular lines of dialogue or incidents of a text reveal aspects of a character or provoke a decision; and analyzing how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4, 9-10.5, 9-10.6 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4, 11-12.5, 11-12.6

Craft and structure: Determining the meaning of words and phrases including figurative and connotative meaning; analyzing how particular sentences, chapters, scenes, or stanzas fit into the overall structure of a text; explaining how a point of view is developed; analyzing how a text's structure or form contributes to its meaning; analyzing a particular point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9

Integration of knowledge and ideas: Comparing and contrasting texts; distinguishing among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text; analyzing how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works describing how the material is rendered new; analyzing how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific way.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.10

Range of reading and level of text complexity: Reading and comprehending literature, including stories, dramas, and poems; in the grades 6-8 and in the grades 9-10, text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range, with independence and proficiency.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3

Knowledge of language: Using knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening; applying knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4, 9-10.5, 9-10.6 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4, 11-12.5, 11-12.6

Vocabulary acquisition and use: Determining the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases; demonstrating understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings; and acquiring and using accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Comprehension and collaboration: Engaging effectively in a range of collaborative discussions building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4

Presentation of knowledge and ideas: Presenting claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes.

This guide was created by Gregory Lum, Library Director at Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon, and an adjunct instructor at Portland State University, along with author Thi Bui.

**Instructors:** Enjoyed using this guide, or have feedback for us? Please take our brief 5-minute survey to help us improve our guides: <http://bit.ly/ABRAMSTeachingGuides>

# GUIDE FOR EDUCATOR AND CLASSROOM USE

## Thinking through the format

When considering a graphic novel in a classroom or educational setting, it's important to encourage readers to look at all of the elements that make up a graphic novel. Here are discussion prompts and visual examples to get discussions started.

### Panels and gutters

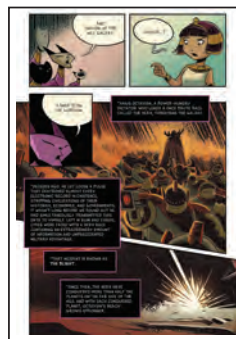
Consider the size and shape of panels. How do they fit together? Do they interrupt or overlap with each other? Are there any images without any panel borders at all? The spaces in between the panels—the gutters—indicate a change: in how time is passing, in where you are, or in whom you're looking at or talking to. What do the gutters add to how you understand the story?



Art © 2008 Kazu Kibuishi.



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Art © 2018 Kristen Gudsruk.

### Description and word balloons

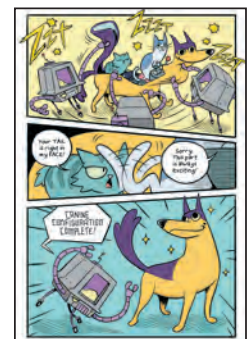
Think about how the dialogue appears. Are the words different colors? Written with thicker or thinner lines? How would that sound? How about the silence when no one is speaking? Is there any narration or description (words in boxes, but not spoken)? How is that important to how the story unfolds?

### Sound effects and motion lines

Sounds set the scene, signal something off scene, and add another layer to each story. Motion lines indicate how characters or objects are moving. What sounds do you see? How are each of the sounds written—does the way it's written reflect what it actually sounds like? What gestures do you see?



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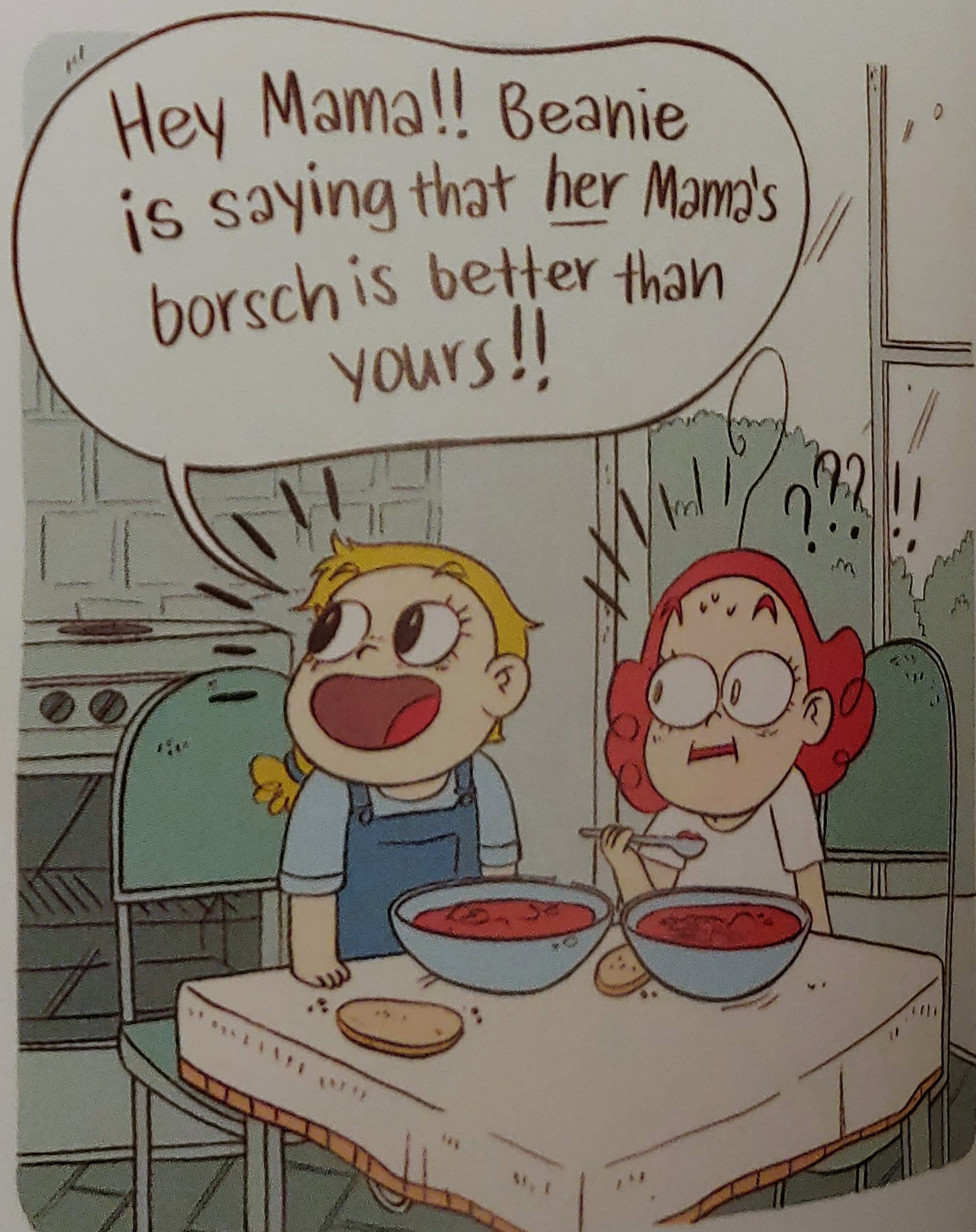
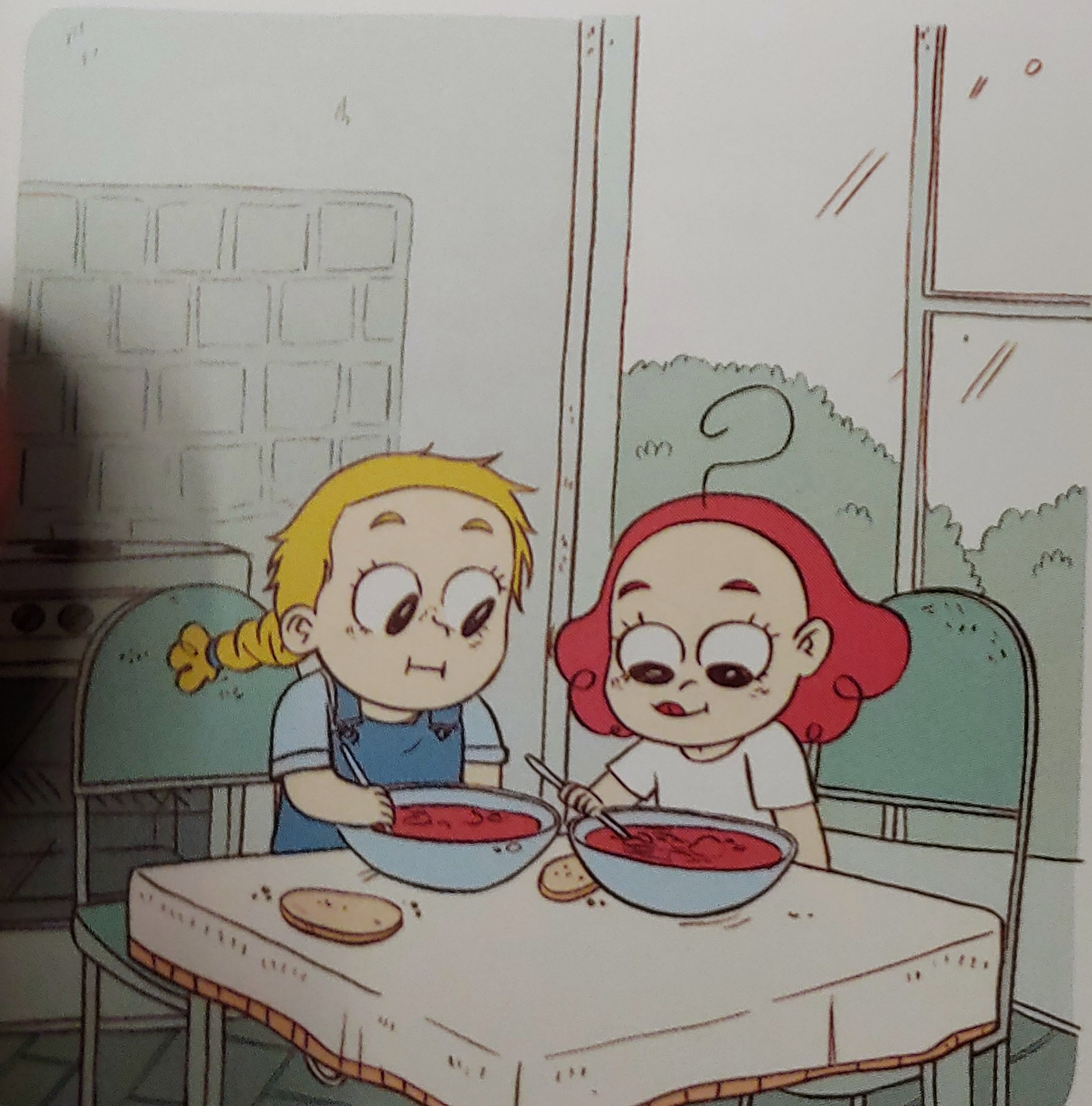
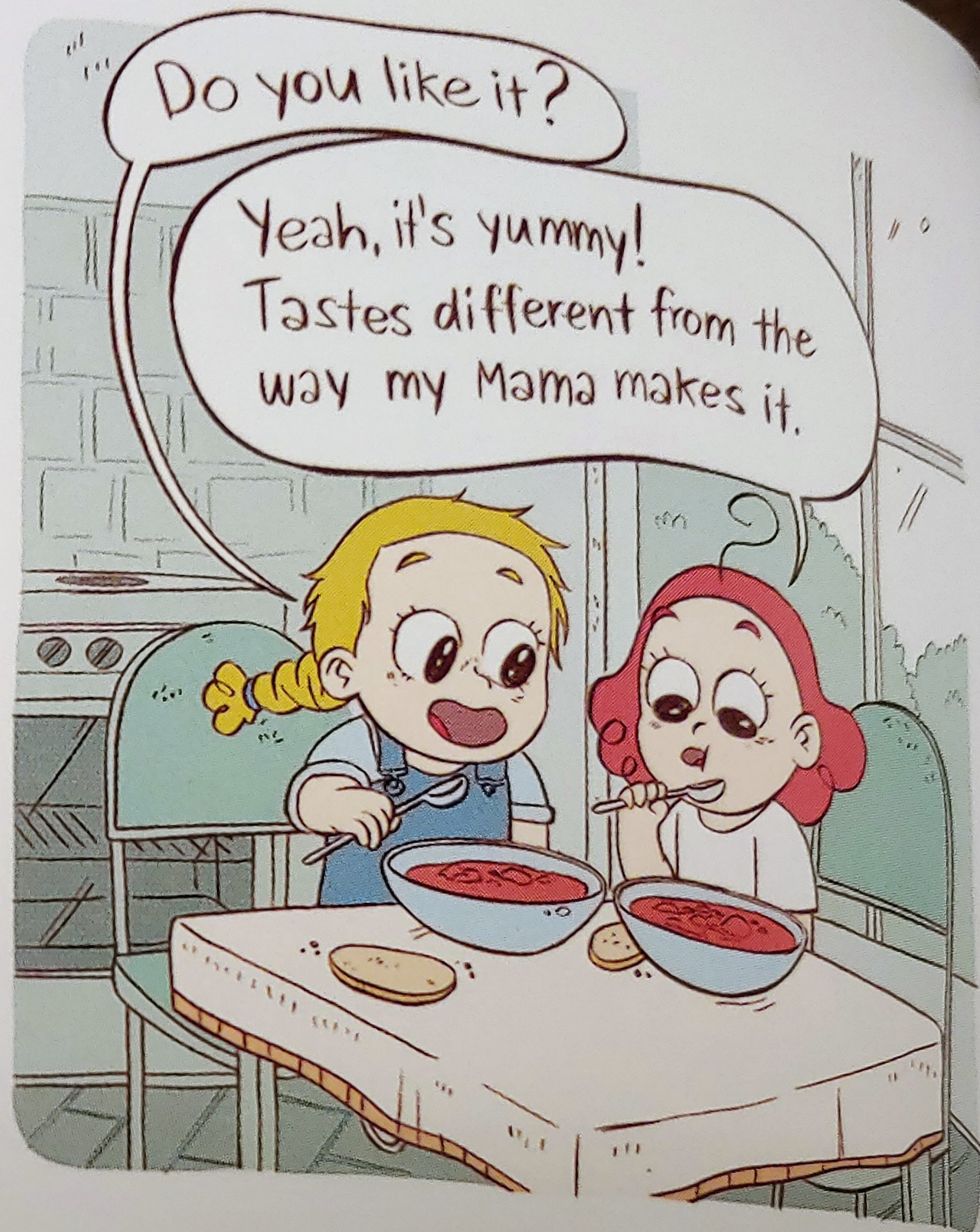


Art © 2017 Molly Knox Osterlag.

### Art

Every creator has their own style. Is the art realistic? Cartoony? What can you tell from the expressions on faces? The gestures and movement of characters? The background and its details? If there is color, how does that change over the course of a page? Each chapter?

# Mama's Food



# Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

## Level 1

### Visuals

1. List the objects or people you see in the cartoon.

### Words (not all cartoons include words)

1. Identify the cartoon caption and/or title.

2. Locate three words or phrases used by the cartoonist to identify objects or people within the cartoon.

3. Record any important dates or numbers that appear in the cartoon.

## Level 2

### Visuals

2. Which of the objects on your list are symbols?

3. What do you think each symbol means?

### Words

4. Which words or phrases in the cartoon appear to be the most significant? Why do you think so?

5. List adjectives that describe the emotions portrayed in the cartoon.

## Level 3

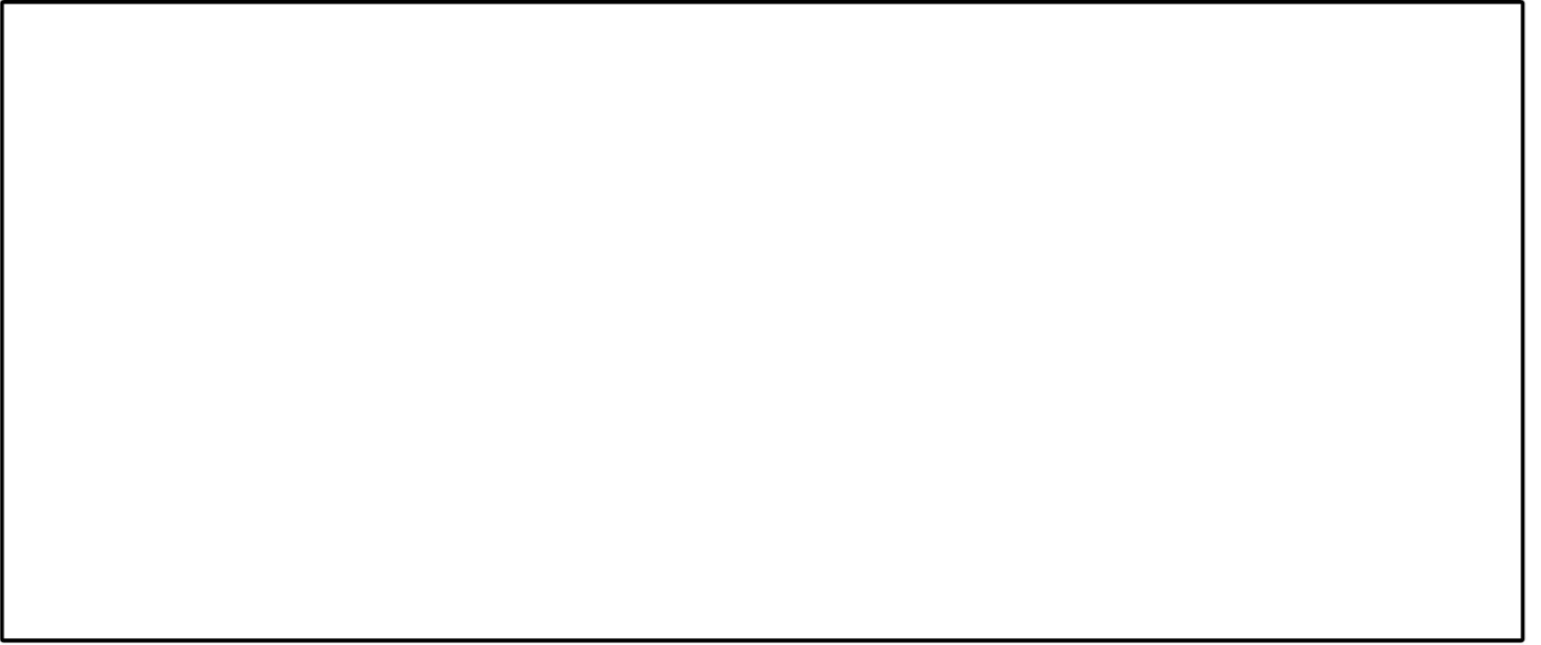
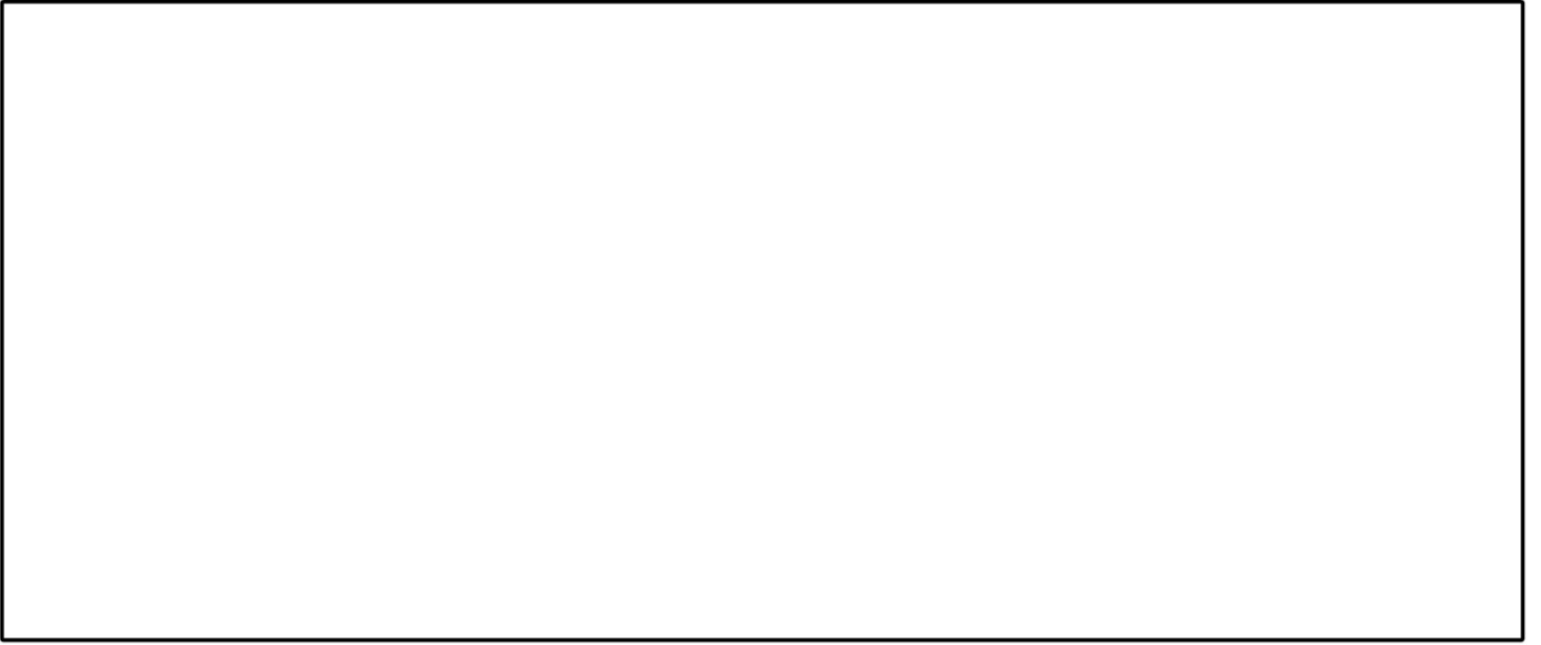
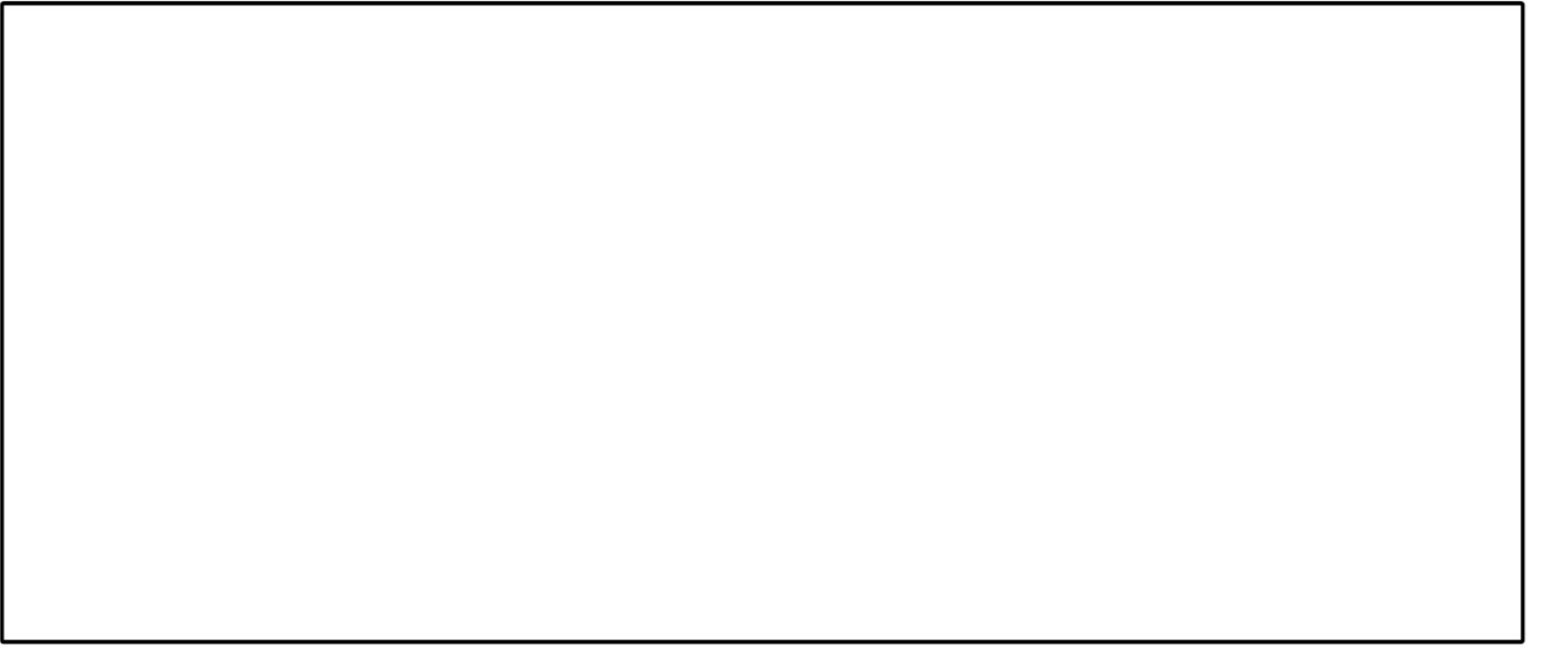
A. Describe the action taking place in the cartoon.

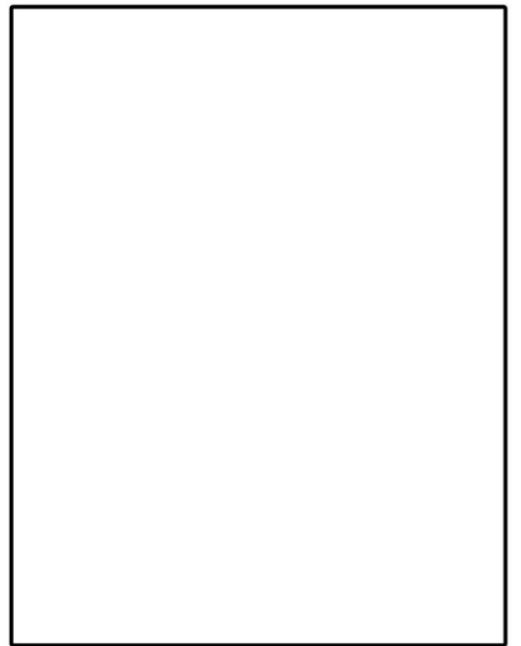
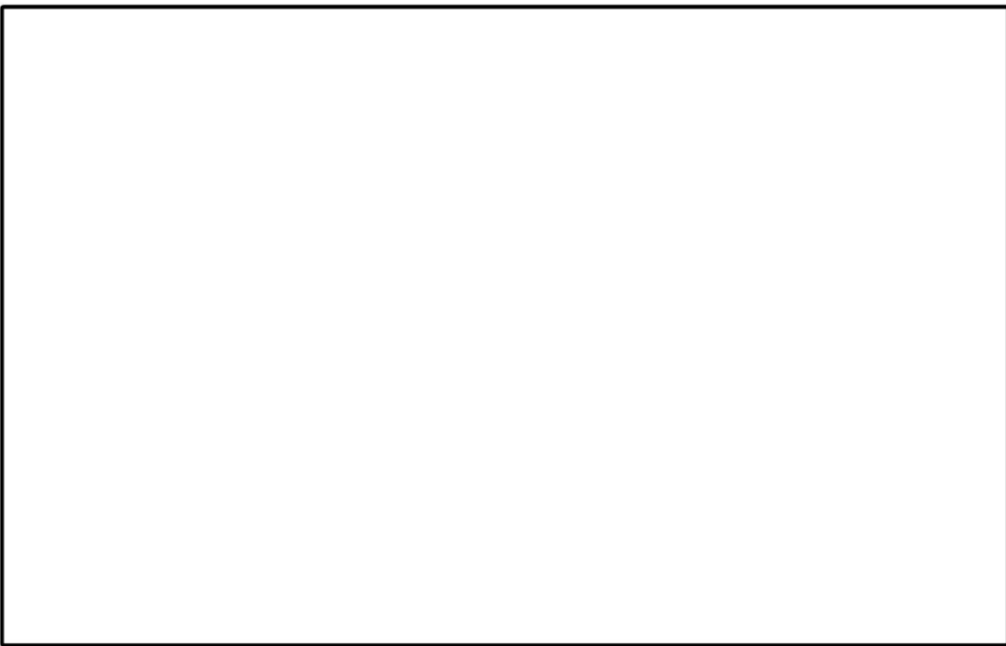
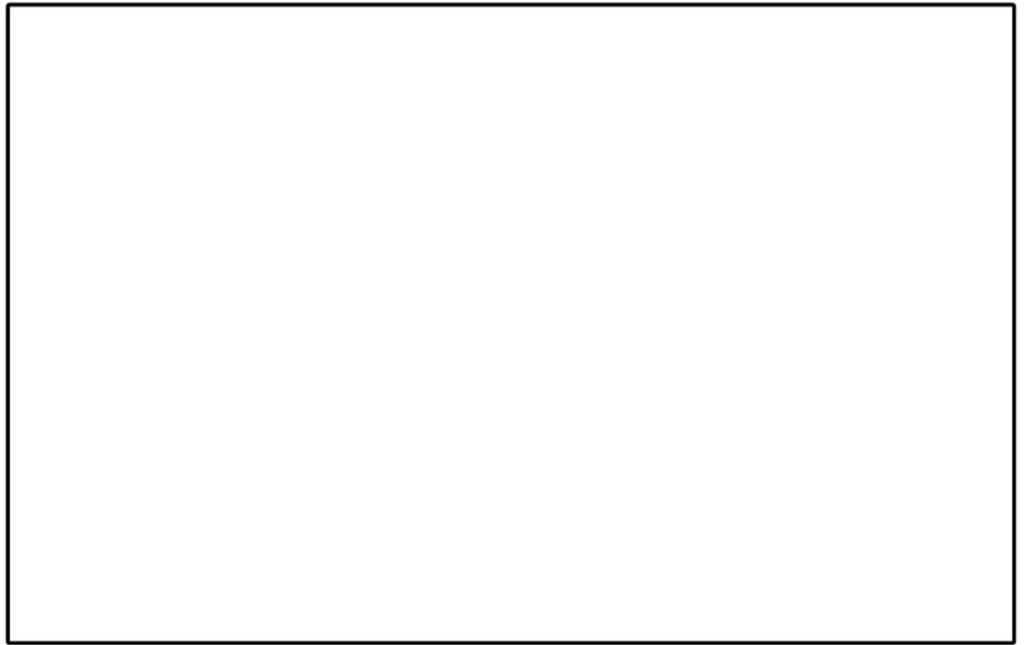
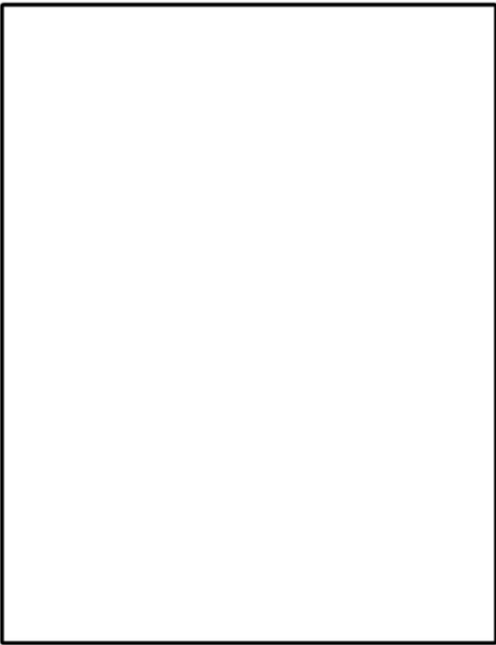
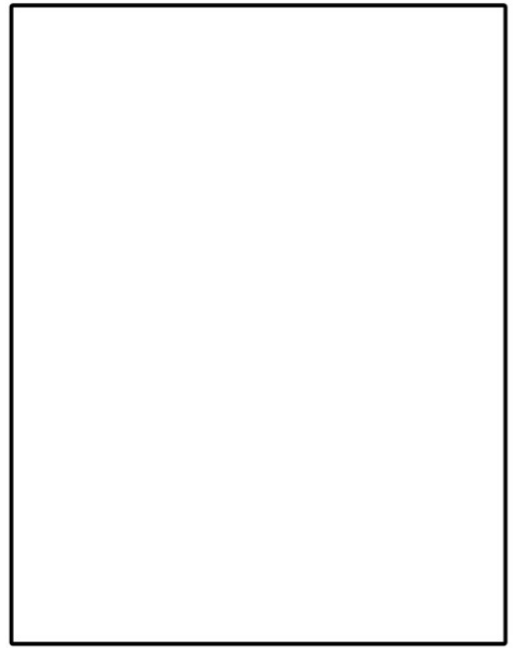
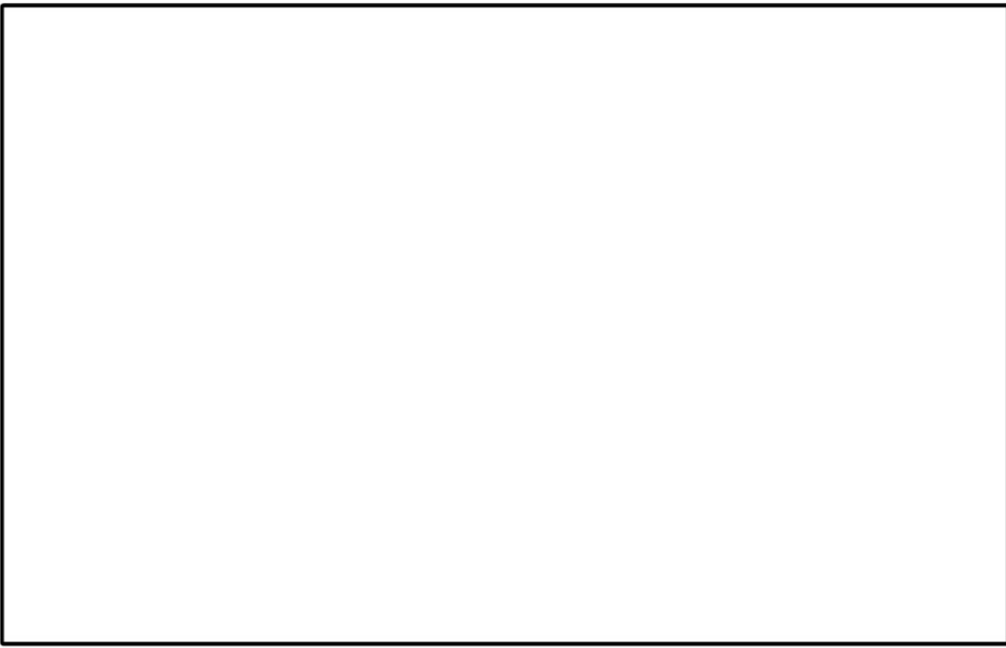
B. Explain how the words in the cartoon clarify the symbols.

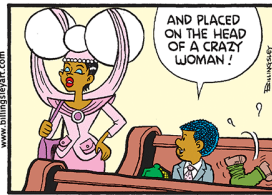
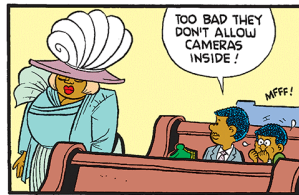
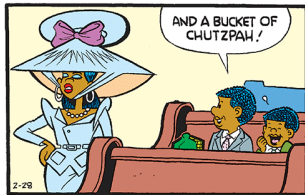
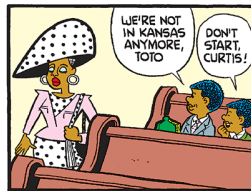
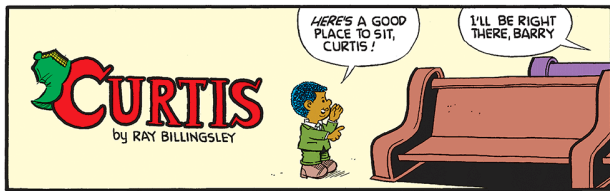
C. Explain the message of the cartoon.

D. What special interest groups would agree/disagree with the cartoon's message? Why?



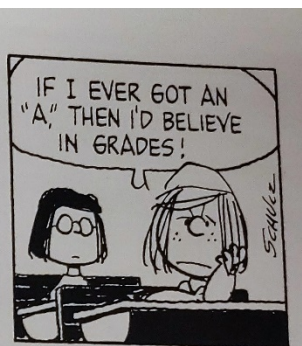
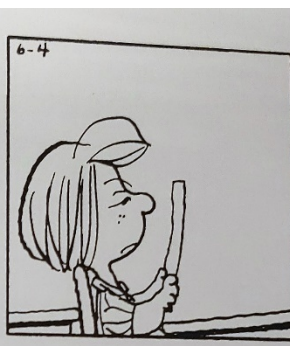
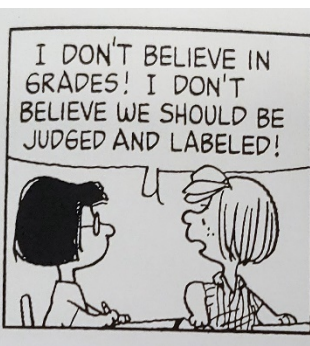
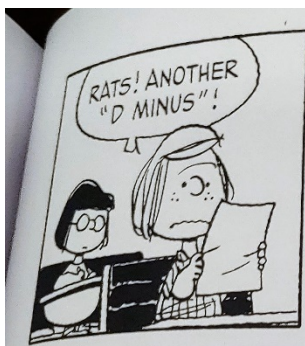


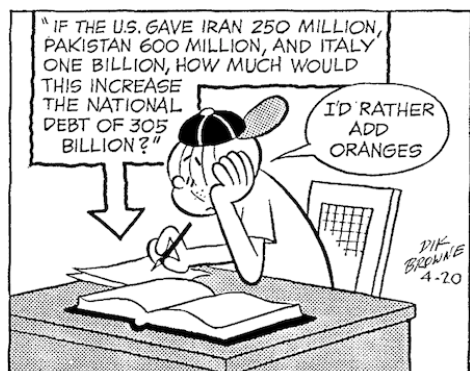
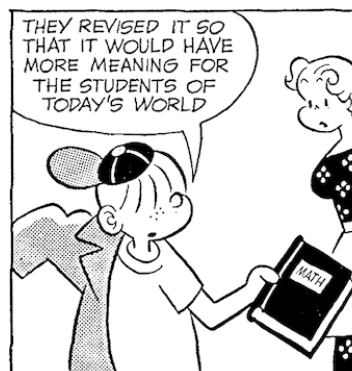
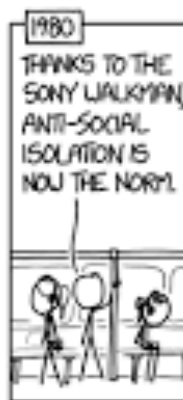
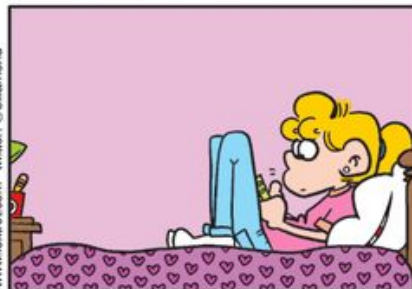
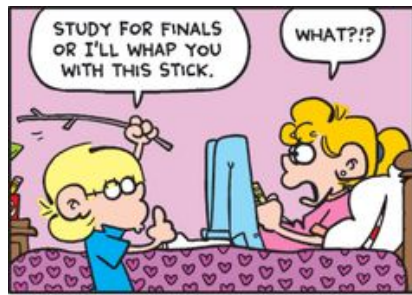




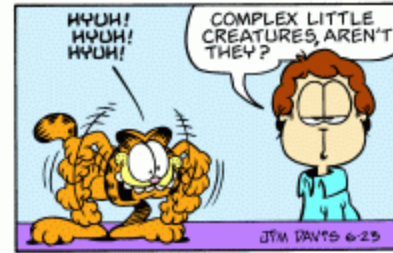
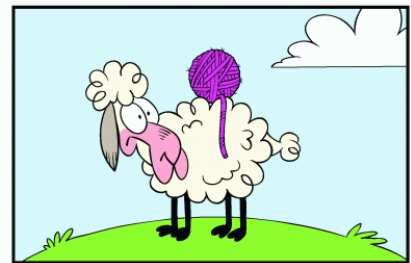
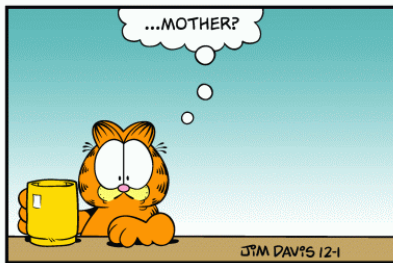
**CALVIN AND HOBBS**

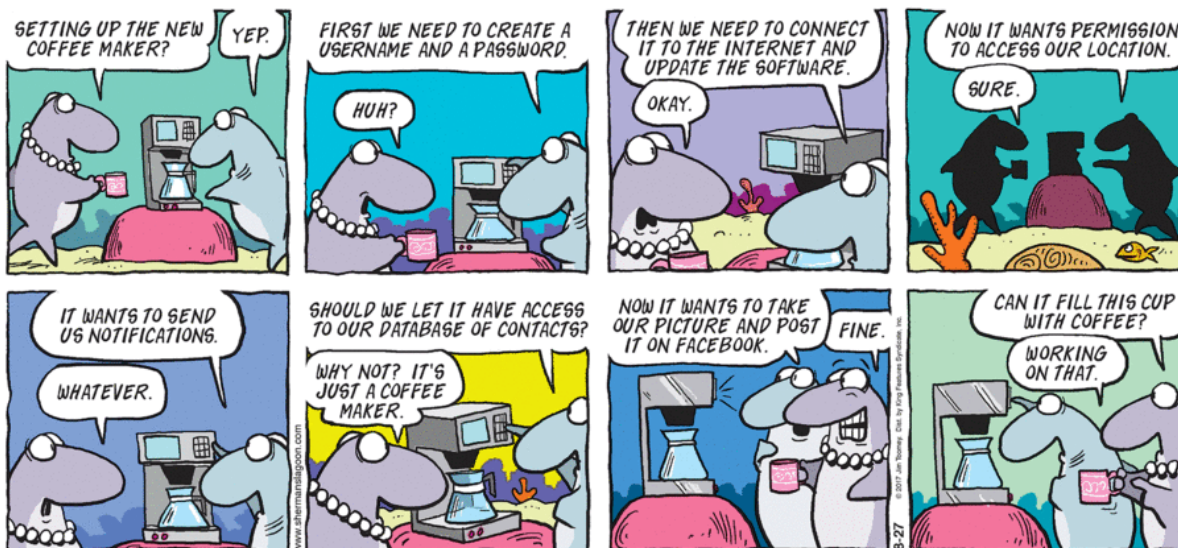
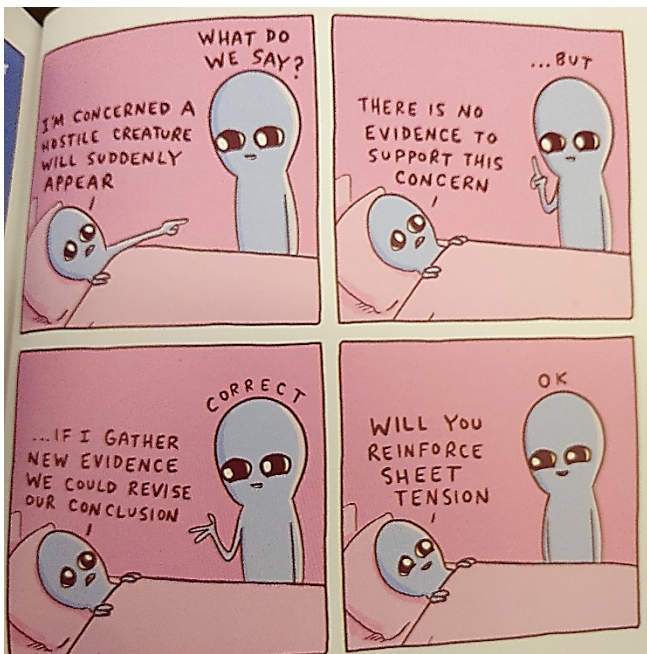
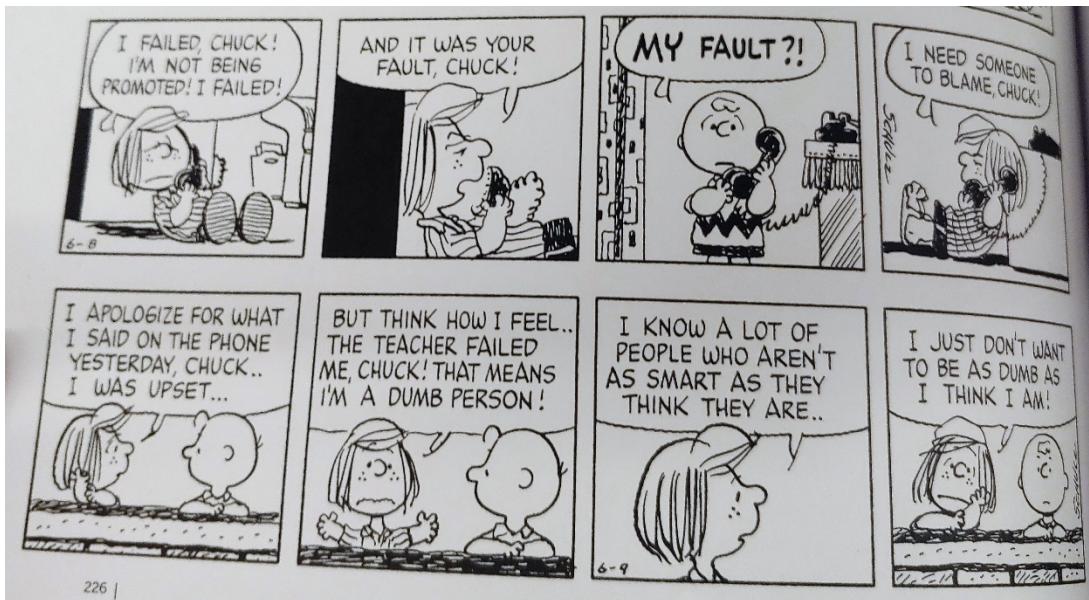
**BY WATTERSON**





# GARFIELD

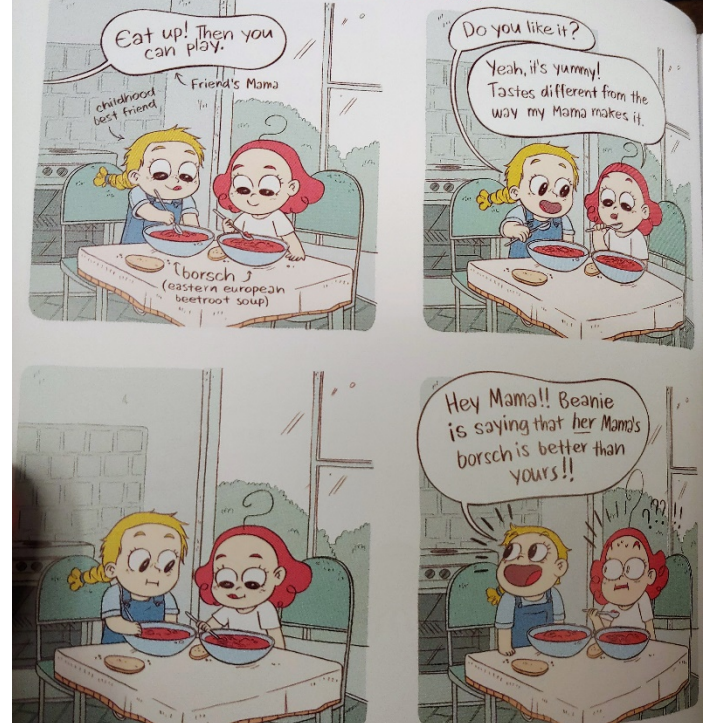


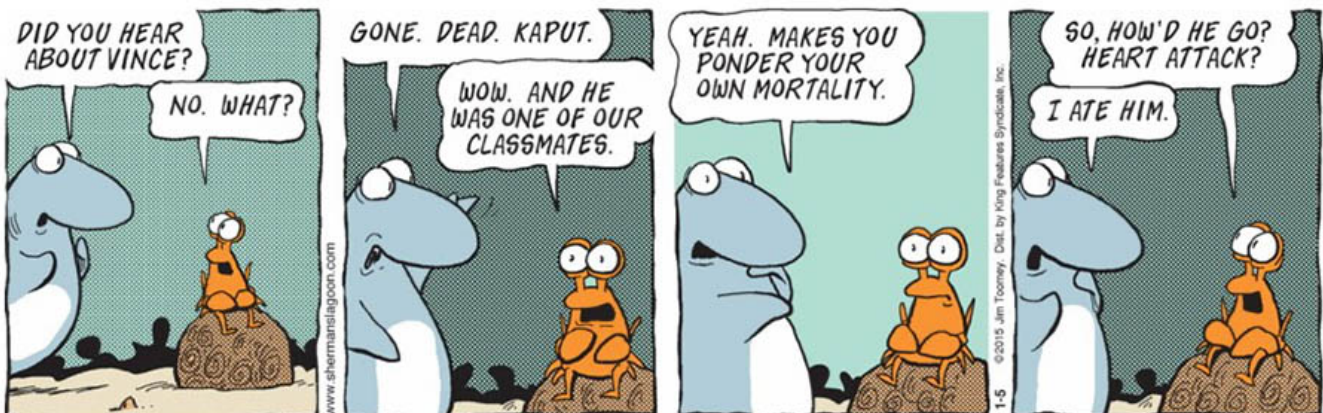
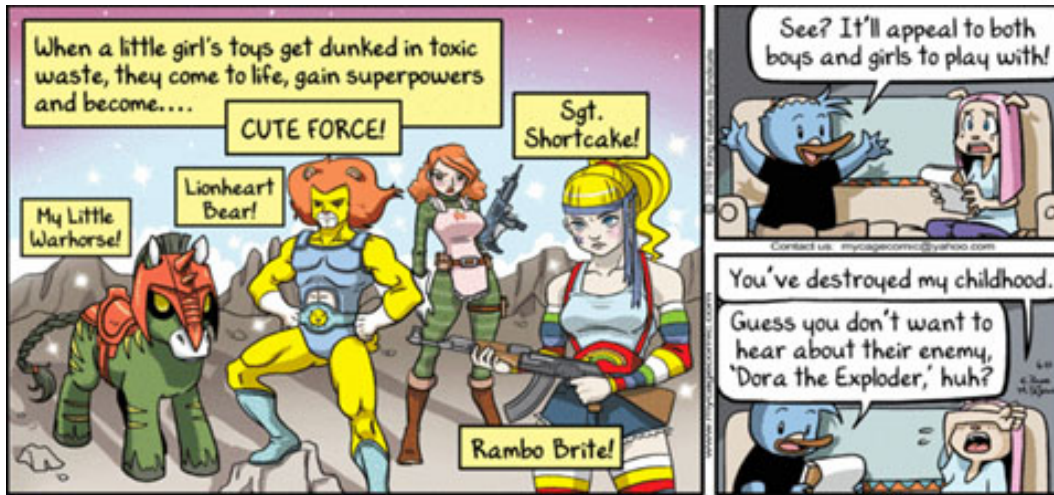


### Speaking English



### Mama's Food

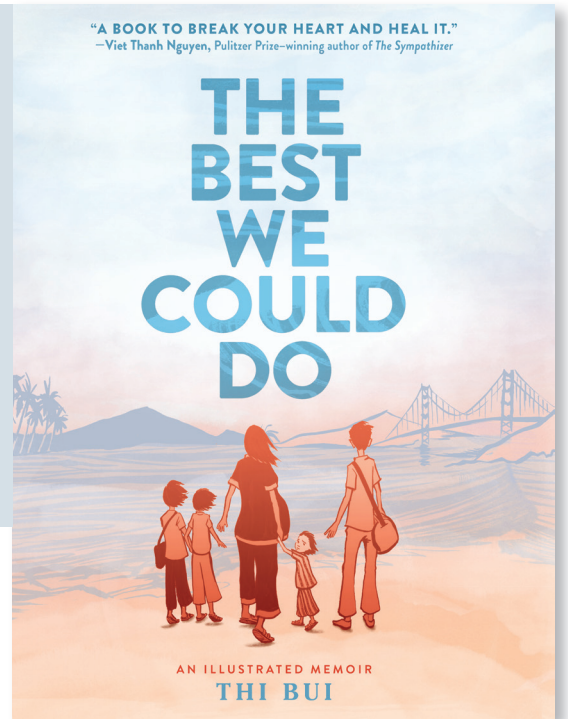






# TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE BEST WE COULD DO

BY THI BUI



## CURRICULAR RATIONALE

*The Best We Could Do* addresses identity, displacement and assimilation, race, decolonization, and political and historical movements and their impact on people, with advanced vocabulary, similes, idioms, and historical context and culture. While blending the written word with images, it promotes critical thinking through a coming-of-age memoir laden with issues of cultural and self-identity, and intergenerational trauma and endless sacrifice within a family. Using the graphic novel format, this book serves readers through verbal and visual storytelling that supports multimodal teaching. Primarily told as a memoir, *The Best We Could Do* also includes major historical events. This text is ideal in reading lists in both college and college-preparatory history or English classes. The intent of this brief guide is to provide flexible teaching options that educators can adapt to their needs and those of their students.

## About the Author

**Thi Bui** was born in Việt Nam and came to the United States as a child with her family. They were part of the “boat people” wave of Southeast Asian refugees. She studied art and legal studies and thought about becoming a civil rights lawyer, but became a public school teacher instead. Bui lives in Berkeley, California, with her son, her husband, and her mother. *The Best We Could Do* is her debut graphic novel.



## As you Read: A Pronunciation Guide

Some of the names and words that appear in this story may be unfamiliar to students. Please visit [www.abramsbooks.com/thebestwecoulddo](http://www.abramsbooks.com/thebestwecoulddo) for a list of approximately 100 names and terms in Vietnamese, French, and Malay, along with recordings of their appropriate pronunciations.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

### Good, Better, Best

What is the difference between these three words: good, better, and best? Why might the author have chosen the latter word as part of the title? What is the significance of the verb tense? Who do you think is implied by “we” in the title, *The Best We Could Do*?

### Family

How do you define a family? What are the bonds that make up your family? Who are the people you would go to for help if you were ever in trouble?

### Historical Events

The author references events in the world as she describes her family members’ lives: France surrendering to Nazi Germany (p. 102), U.S. dropping atomic bombs (p. 115), First Indochina War (p. 157), Geneva Accords (p. 167), Vietnam War (p. 200), Fall of Sài Gòn/Liberation Day (p. 211), and Vietnamese boat people exodus (p. 267) are a few examples. In groups or individually, research these topics and make a rough timeline; include a short description of each event.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### On Family

“Family is now something I have created and not just something I was born into” (p. 21). What does the author mean by this statement? What is the difference between “created” and “born into”? What is similar?

Bô’ states, “You don’t have a sister named Bích anymore. She is dead to us” (p. 27). What events caused Bô’ to say this about his daughter? If you were Thi or Tâm, how would you interpret this statement?

In the set of panels on page 28, the family avoided ever talking about the incident to the point that Má thought that Thi didn’t remember. Thi exclaims, “I was there! How do you think I could forget something like that? Almost thirty years later, I didn’t know I was still angry.” Why would this memory still make Thi angry? How would you feel if you were Thi? What might cause a family to avoid discussing a difficult situation?

On page 29, the author draws portraits of her parents and siblings. In the second panel, Quỳên and Tha’ are shadows. What was the artist’s purpose for blurring these two siblings? Was it effective to use an image instead of words? Explain.

The author desires to be closer to her parents as an adult and realizes “proximity and closeness are not the same” (p. 31). What is your definition of proximity? Closeness? How do these two words differ? Which of the two words would you rather use to describe your relationship with your parents?

The births of the six siblings are told in reverse chronological order (pp. 42, 46, 47, 48, 50, and 52). What was the author’s purpose in using this storytelling element? Is it effective?

“Home became the holding pen for the frustrations and the unexorcised demons that had nowhere to go in America’s finest city” (p. 68). “In my sleep, I dreamt of how terrible it would be to not find my way home” (p. 83). “And then I came home to a tiny hovel” (p. 186). “My parents built their bubble around us—our home in America” (p. 294). What does home mean to Thi and her family members? Does her definition of home change as the story progresses? How? What does home mean to you? What is the difference between a home and a house?

### On Culture and Identity

“And imagine each block, each day turned us a little more American” (pp. 65). “I learned about America mostly through books and TV, and from what my sisters learned in school” (p. 67). If you were going to mentor a new classmate from another country, how would you share and explain what it means to be “a little more American” to your new classmate? What books, television shows, or other media would you use to demonstrate your ideas? What elements in your everyday environment shape your national or cultural identity?

Examine the panels where someone spits on Bô’ on page 67. What is meant by “there were reasons to not want to be anything other?” How would you have reacted if you were Bô’? How would you react if you saw someone spit on another person? What might motivate one person to react to another in that way? Can you think of similar hateful actions and tensions you’ve seen or read about throughout history or on the news?

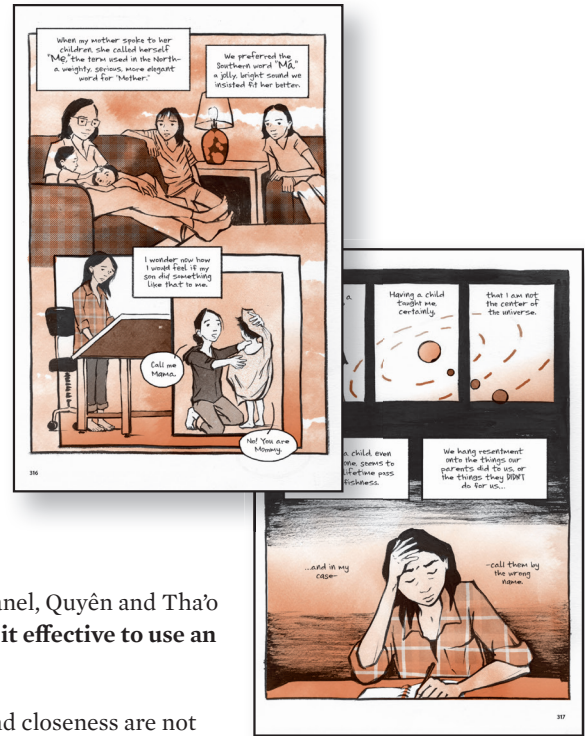
On page 187, Bô’ reminisces about the books, music, and movies that influenced him as a teenager. Compare his influences with your own. How have your tastes shaped you as a person?

“Don’t be such a REFUGEE!” (p. 285). What is meant by this comment? When you hear the word “refugee,” what do you think of? How do perceptions of refugees affect their experience?

What is the difference between leaving a country voluntarily and being forced to leave your homeland? What are some positive and negative effects of a dislocation?

When Thi and her siblings go to school (day care, elementary and middle schools), all three are treated differently (p. 287). Explore how Bích, Lan, and Thi could have been more supported by their peers and teachers.

How did French colonialism influence Thi’s parents while they were growing up? Cite specific examples from the book that show that impact. How might a French colonist’s description of this influence differ from a Vietnamese nationalist’s?



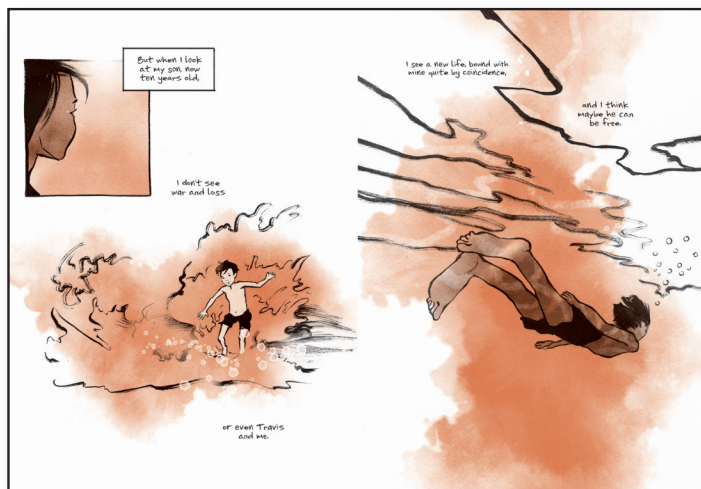
On **page 41**, Bui states that she was seeking “an origin story . . . that will set everything right.” **Does she find what she was looking for in the pages of this book? Why or why not?**

## On War and Conflict

Using specific examples from the book, how did class differences affect people’s experience of war and their decisions about which side to take?

How did certain features of geographic location affect people’s experience of war? Cite specific examples from the book.

As explored throughout the book, war can have immediate and lasting impacts on the people experiencing it. Find specific examples in the book that show the direct or implied impact of war on children and families.



**What factors contributed to Thi’s parents’ decision to leave Việt Nam after the war ended? What would you have done in their place?**

Describe the various authorities that the Buis encounter during their refugee experience. **Who are they and from where do they derive their power to make decisions about refugees? Consider our national discussion on refugees today. How is it similar to the Buis’ experience? How does it differ?**

## On History

**Page 66** refers to California’s Proposition 187, which voters passed in 1994 but was subsequently struck down in a federal court. **What were the arguments for and against this law? What similarities do you see to debates today on immigration?**

“I had never, before researching the background of my father’s stories, imagined that these horrible events were connected to my family history” (p. 116). **How would you feel if you were Thi? What historical events are tied to your own family history? How and when did you learn about them?**

**What factors contributed to Bô’s decision to leave North Việt Nam in 1954? Cite specific events and context clues from the book. What would you have done if you were in his position?**

Examine the four panels on **pages 128 and 129**, and the quote “I had no idea that the terror I felt was only the long shadow of his own” (p. 129). Compare Bô’s upbringing in Việt Nam to Thi’s upbringing in San Diego. **How are they similar? Different? What is meant by Thi’s quote? How is trauma passed down between generations?**

Thi’s family escapes to Việt Nam on a boat bound for Malaysia. They face many hardships—little food (p. 235), tight sleeping arrangements (p. 236), possible pirates (p. 242), bad potable water (p. 244), etc. **If you were aboard a boat headed toward freedom, what five items would you want to bring on the boat to survive? What would you have to leave behind?** Share your list of items with a partner, and then narrow your list to three items for the two of you. **What similar stories of escape have you read about throughout history or on the news?**

On **page 267**, Bui incorporates her family’s real refugee camp identification photographs into the graphics. **What was Bui’s intention in doing so? Was it effective?** Find another page where real photographs could enhance the storyline.

In **Chapter 6**, Bui suggests that she is making up for not having memories of her own by doing a lot of research. **What is the difference between personal knowledge and relying on secondary sources? What can be gained from interviewing primary sources? What could be tricky about interviewing primary sources?**

## ADDITIONAL EXERCISES AND RESOURCES

### Family History

“I began to record our family history . . . thinking that if I bridged the gap between the past and the present, I could fill the void between my parents and me” (p. 36). Explore your family history. Find out about your ancestry by interviewing family members. Ask your parents or other family members about their courtship stories. How did they meet? Where did previous generations come from or move to? What did they hope for? What challenges did they encounter in raising a new generation? List family members and important dates.

## Gender Roles

Consider the perspectives of the women in the stories of Thi's parents and grandparents. Retell a story from their point of view. Cite specific examples from the book to support your retelling.

## Graphic Novels

Have you read other graphic novels? How did those graphic novels compare to *The Best We Could Do* in how they told a story? Visually speaking, what elements appealed to you in this graphic memoir? Share a particular layout or panel that best demonstrated these features. How do you think the graphic novel format of this memoir affected its message and potency?

## Literary Scavenger Hunt

Throughout *The Best We Could Do*, Bui infuses her story with rich, figurative language and beautiful panels. Embark on a literary scavenger hunt to locate your favorite phrases or quotes. Create a shareable quote card image to be published on the social media site of your choice (remember to attribute appropriately).

## Finding and Using Related Sources

Compare and contrast the ways in which Vietnamese people are represented in different accounts, fiction and nonfiction, of the Việt Nam War. What factors could affect these differences?

Create a timeline of Việt Nam's transition from feudalism to colonialism to nationalism to full independence. Use online research to find dates. Select key moments from the book and plot them on your timeline. How does your relationship with the characters affect your understanding of the history?

**Pages 205-209** discuss Nguyễn Ngọc Loan, the former chief of National Police in South Việt Nam, and the Pulitzer Prize–winning photograph of him, titled, “Saigon Execution.” Why is Thi confused about what her father thinks of him? Compare the accounts in this book with other descriptions of the photograph or the incident. How does one's perspective influence one's opinion about what the photograph represents?

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Below are the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards that can be met by extending *The Best We Could Do* with these questions, prompts, and activities.



### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3

Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, 11-12.2, 11-12.3

Key ideas and details: Citing textual evidence, determining a theme or central idea, describing how a plot unfolds, analyzing how particular elements of the story interact; analyzing how particular lines of dialogue or incidents of a text reveal aspects of a character or provoke a decision; and analyzing how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4, 9-10.5, 9-10.6 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4, 11-12.5, 11-12.6

Craft and structure: Determining the meaning of words and phrases including figurative and connotative meaning; analyzing how particular sentences, chapters, scenes, or stanzas fit into the overall structure of a text; explaining how a point of view is developed; analyzing how a text's structure or form contributes to its meaning; analyzing a particular point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9

Integration of knowledge and ideas: Comparing and contrasting texts; distinguishing among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text; analyzing how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works describing how the material is rendered new; analyzing how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific way.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.10

Range of reading and level of text complexity: Reading and comprehending literature, including stories, dramas, and poems; in the grades 6-8 and in the grades 9-10, text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range, with independence and proficiency.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3

Knowledge of language: Using knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening; applying knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4, 9-10.5, 9-10.6 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4, 11-12.5, 11-12.6

Vocabulary acquisition and use: Determining the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases; demonstrating understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings; and acquiring and using accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Comprehension and collaboration: Engaging effectively in a range of collaborative discussions building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

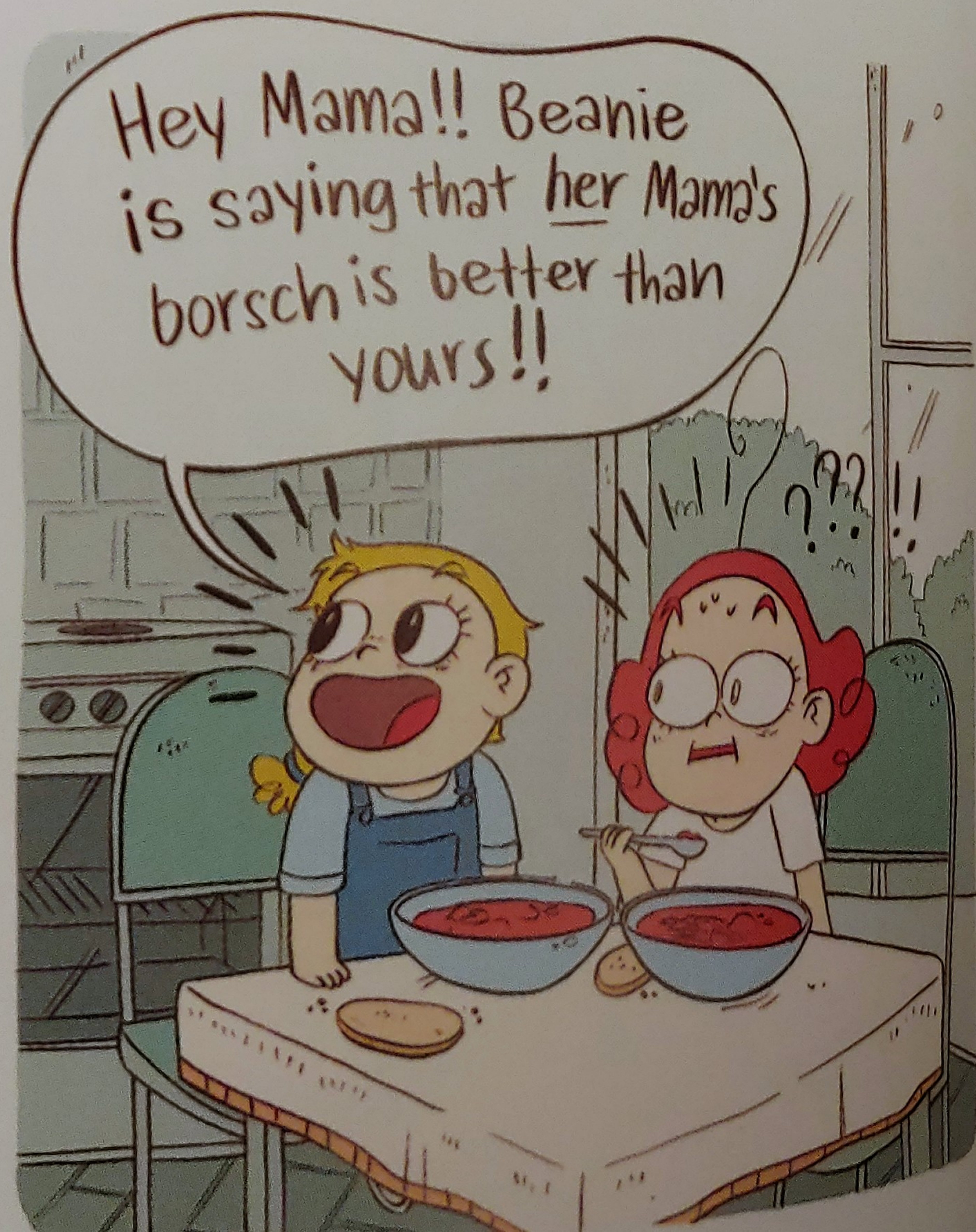
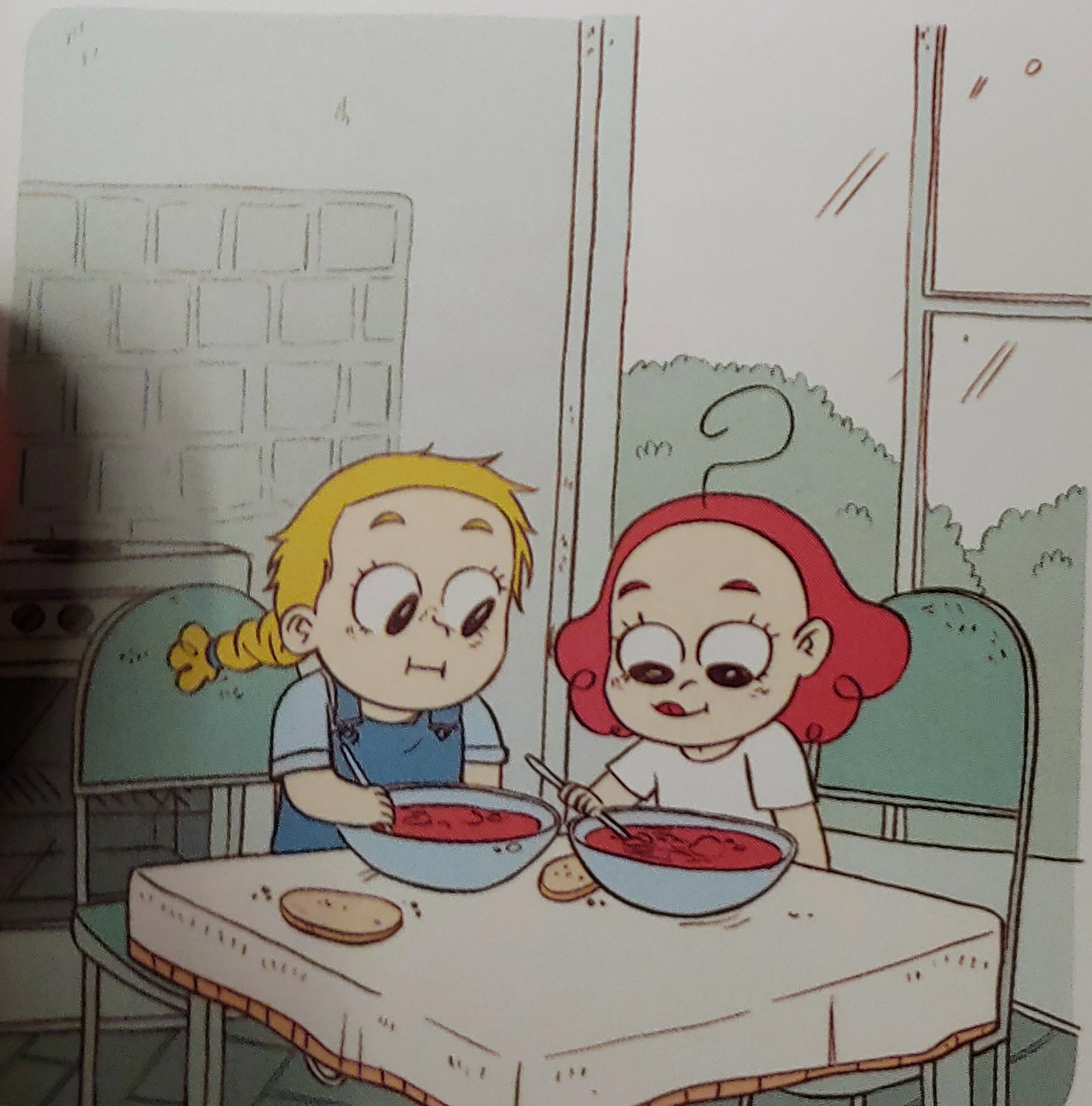
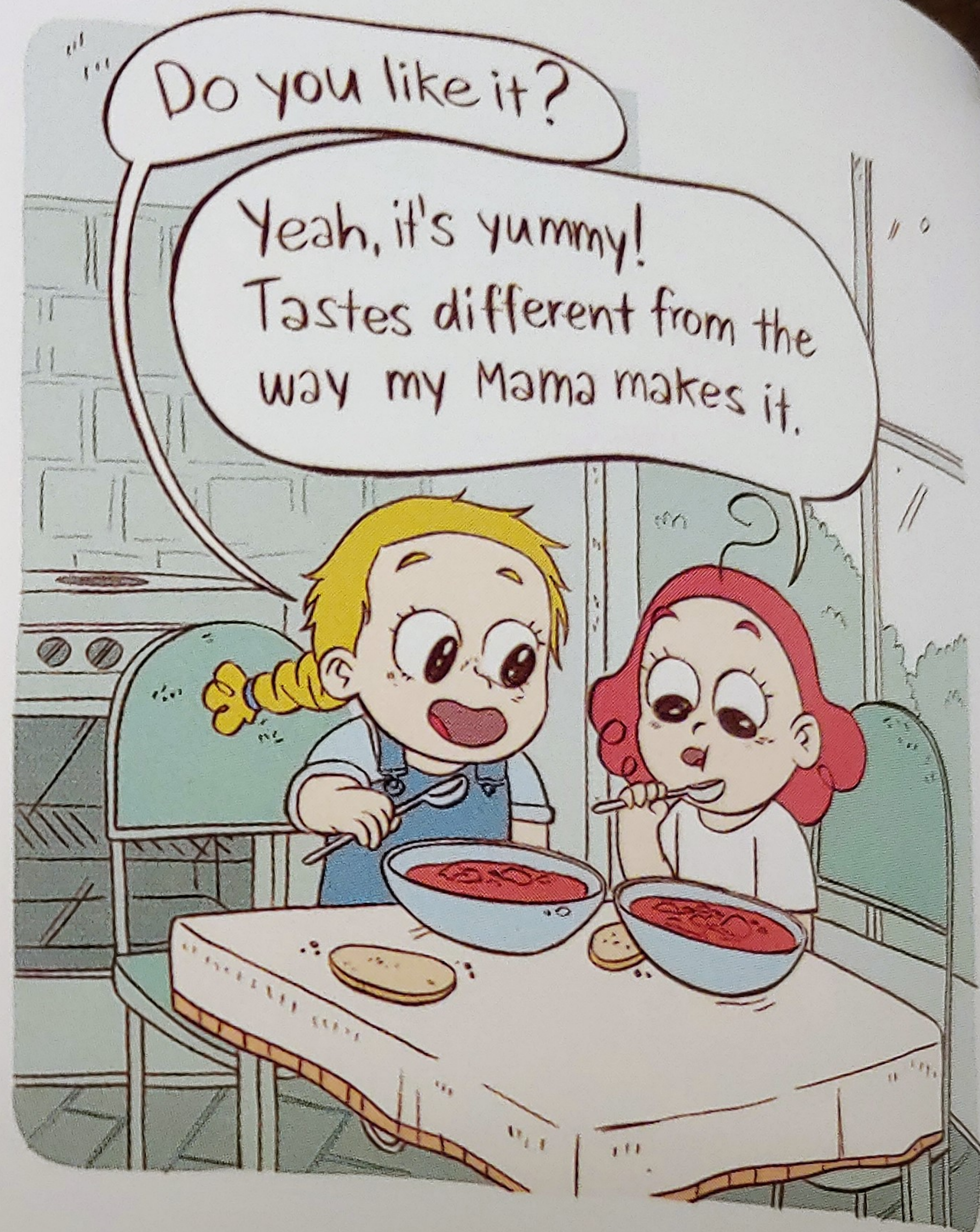
### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4

Presentation of knowledge and ideas: Presenting claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes.

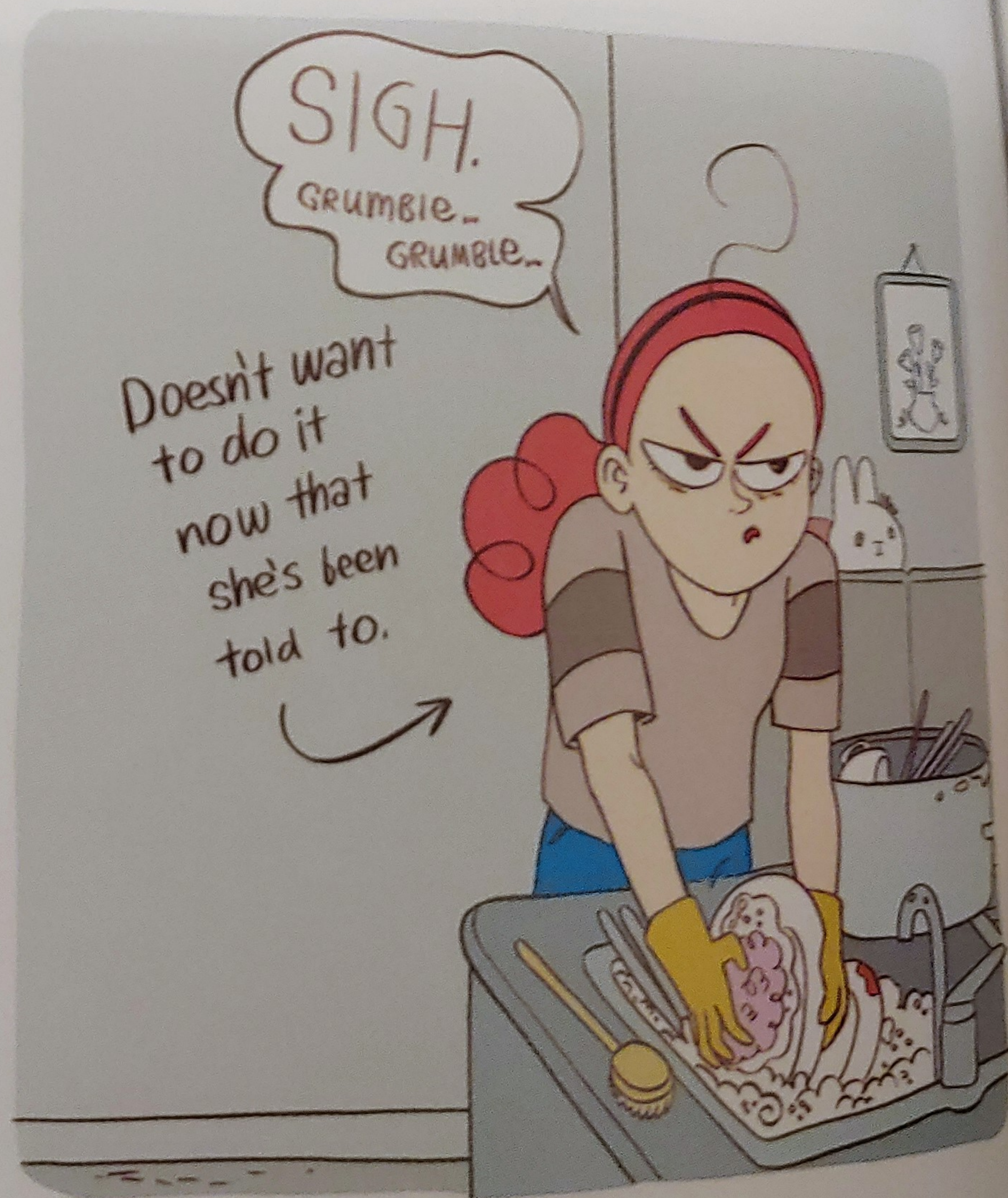
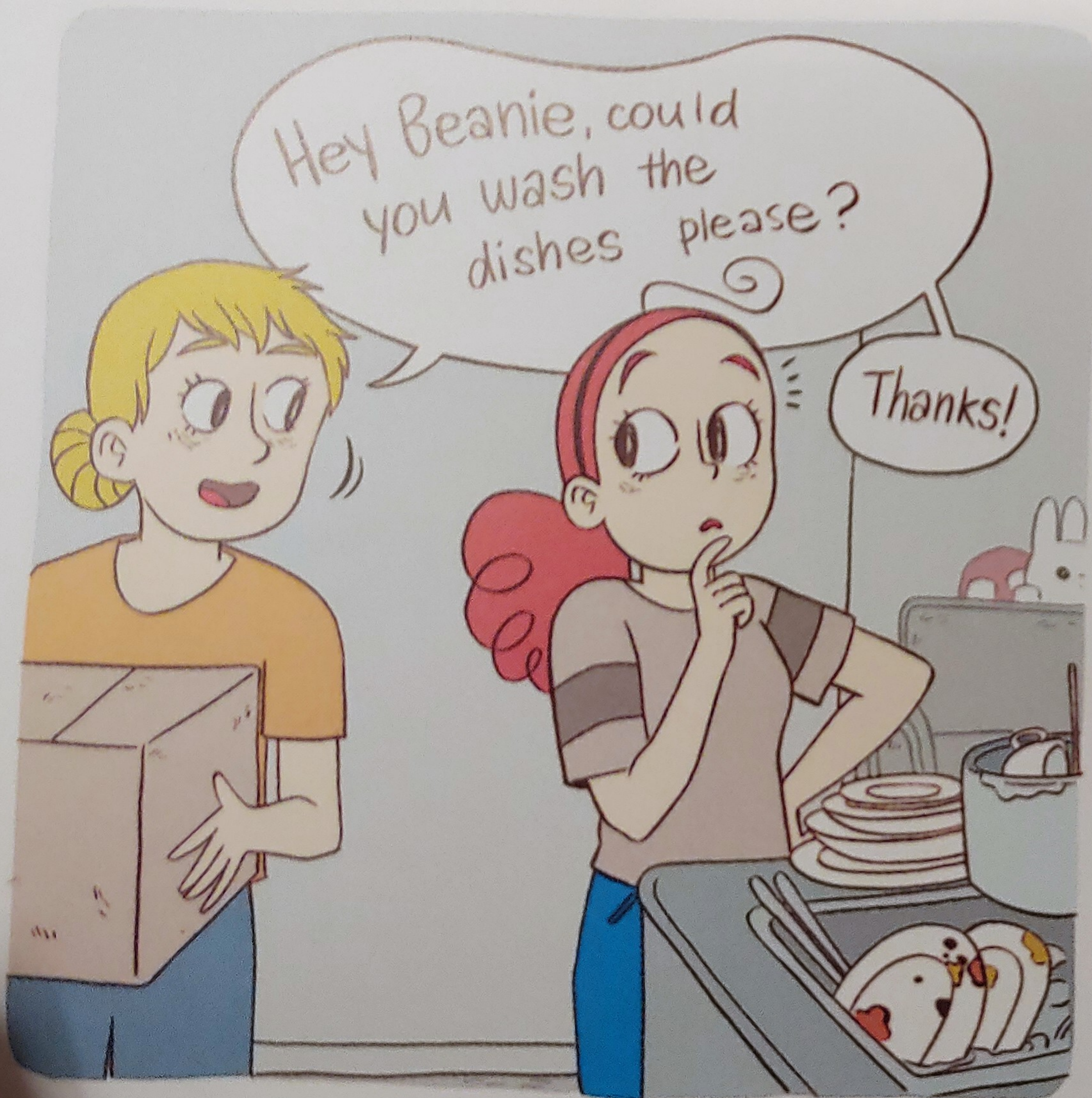
This guide was created by Gregory Lum, Library Director at Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon, and an adjunct instructor at Portland State University, along with author Thi Bui.

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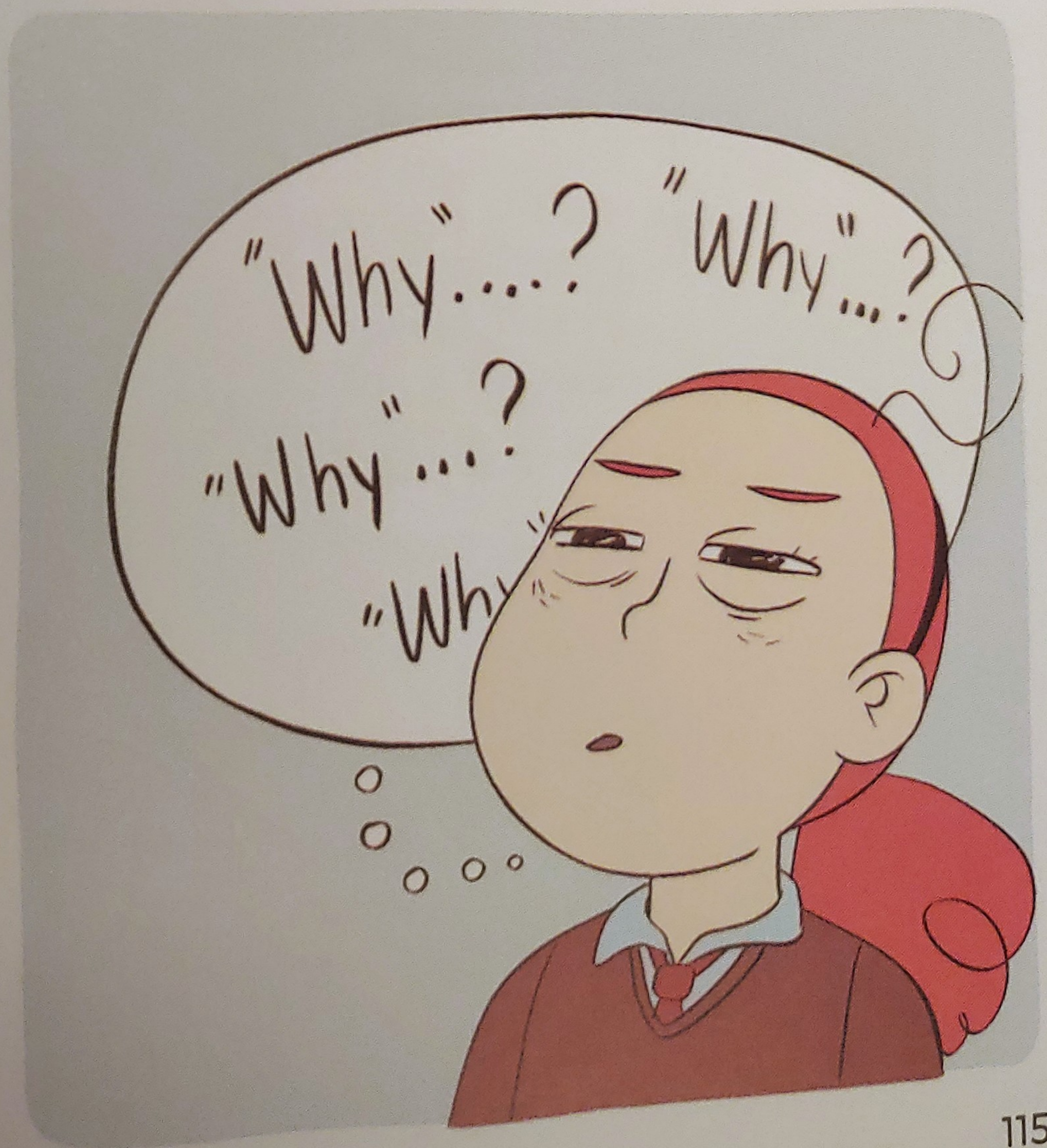
# Mama's Food



# Washing Dishes



# Speaking English





***MY STORY -  
A GRAPHIC NOVEL***



# ***INSTRUCTIONS:***

- You will be creating your own 2 – 4 page graphic novel spread.
- Choose a event/moment that was significant in your life. Now retell this story through a mini graphic novel.
- Don't panic if you feel like you are not an artist or comic book enthusiast. There are multiple programs you can use and the most important part is telling your story.

## Requirements:

- Must have a title (can be it's own panel or at the top with your name)
- At least a two page spread. At most four.
- Must reveal something important about you/your life story so far
- It does not need to be funny. It also does not need to be super serious. (The content is up to you)
- Must be colored in (whether physically drawn or printed) yes black and white are ok as a stylistic choice, but NO Pencil!

***BEFORE YOU  
BEGIN...***



## Q. What is a "graphic novel"?

A. Graphic novels have a few defining characteristics. But first and most importantly, they are long comic books. (I'll get back to the rest.)

## Q. What is a "comic book"?

A. You may think you know the answer to this one, but stick with me a few minutes: A comic book is a magazine or bound book that contains "comics" (also known as "comix."). Comics is a medium for expressing information and/or artistic ideas that is defined by



... and that's it. However, comics also often feature such things as

"word balloons..."

... and sometimes, "thought balloons."

It's also common to have the sequential images delineated by "panels," which are surrounded by lines called "panel borders."

These techniques aren't necessary to make comics, but they are quite common. There are other common, familiar, but even more optional elements of many comics, such as certain kinds of characters, like funny animals or licensed characters. But I'll get to that in a minute.

Here's how to read a comic:

1. Just as in our written language, you read the elements of a comic starting with...

2. ... the upper-left corner of a page, and then you read across to the right...

3. ... before proceeding down to the next row...

4. ... and then the next.

comics are a nested system.

when you finish reading...

... everything within one panel...

... you apply the same left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading order...

... to the panels themselves!

"hee hee!"

You even use the same rule for actions within a panel.

BOO!

AAAAUGH!

HERE ARE SOME REMINDERS OF GRAPHIC NOVEL BASICS

# ANATOMY OF A COMIC:

- **Panel:** A panel in a comic book is one of the individual pieces of artwork that make up a single page in a comic book or graphic novel. When placed together on a single page, individual panels tell a story, or a portion of a story, in sequential order.
- **Caption:** Captions are used in comics and graphic novels to narrate the story or to share characters' thoughts. Often, captions are presented in box or consistent, separate shape that distinguishes them from the rest of the panel. Captions are not speech balloons or bubbles.
- **Onomatopoeia:** Sound effects. Sometimes represented in unique text styles
- **Speech Bubble:** Speech bubbles are a graphic convention used most commonly in comics and graphic novels to represent speech of a specific character.
- **Emanata:** Lines to indicate shock/surprise
- **Gutter:** The space between panels on a page of comics. Gutters account for time, space, and rhythm of moments in sequential art/comics. Readers of comics make closure of these moments suggested through the "pause" of each gutter.
- **Closure:** Connections readers makes to fill in information between panels or other content. Such connections are based on reader experience and imagination.
- **Splash:** A full-page image.
- **Spread:** A single image that continues across more than one page.
- **Page:** The entire single page of a comic or graphic novel.

## ***SOME RESOURCES FOR YOU:***

***[HTTPS://WWW.CANVA.COM/CREATE/COMIC-STRIPS/](https://www.canva.com/create/comic-strips/)***

***[HTTPS://WWW.PIXTON.COM/](https://www.pixton.com/)***

***[HTTPS://WWW.STORYBOARDTHAT.COM/STORYBOARD-CREATOR](https://www.storyboardthat.com/storyboard-creator)***

***[HTTPS://MAKEBELIEFSCOMIX.COM/](https://makebeliefscomix.com/)***


***[HTTPS://PICKLEBUMS.COM/FREE-PRINTABLE-COMIC-BOOK-TEMPLATES/](https://picklebums.com/free-printable-comic-book-templates/)***

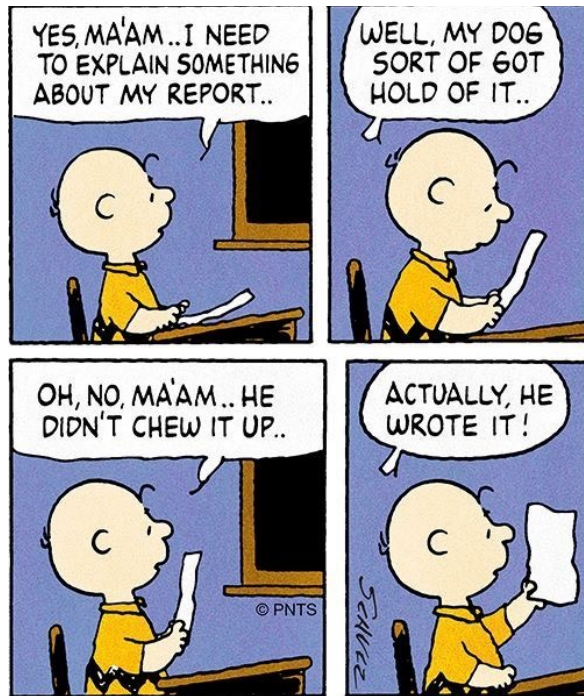
***[HTTPS://REALLYGOODDESIGNS.COM/COMIC-STRIP-TEMPLATES/](https://reallygooddesigns.com/comic-strip-templates/)***

***[HTTPS://WWW.PRINTABLEPAPER.NET/CATEGORY/COMICS](https://www.printablepaper.net/category/comics)***



# RUBRIC:

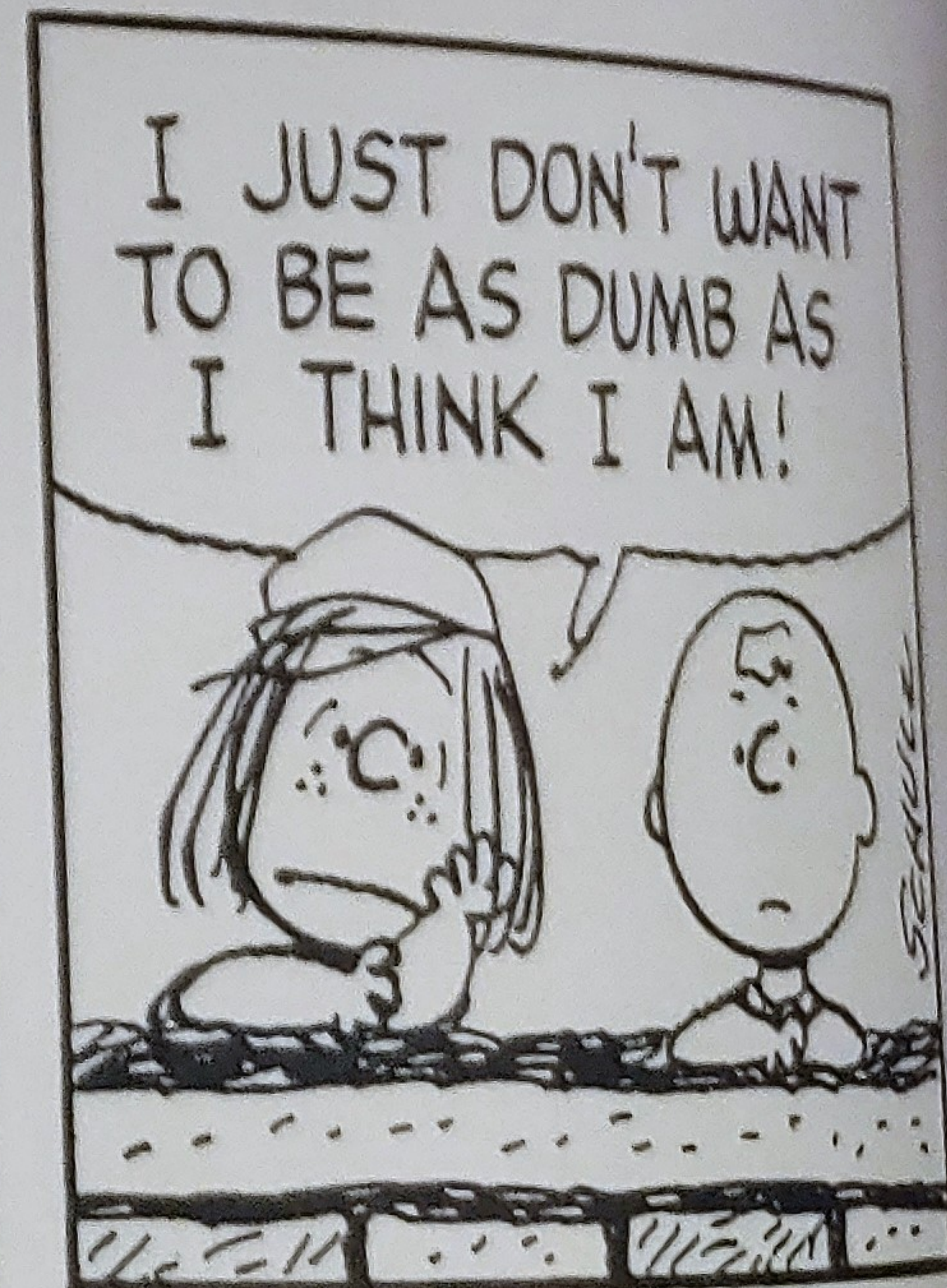
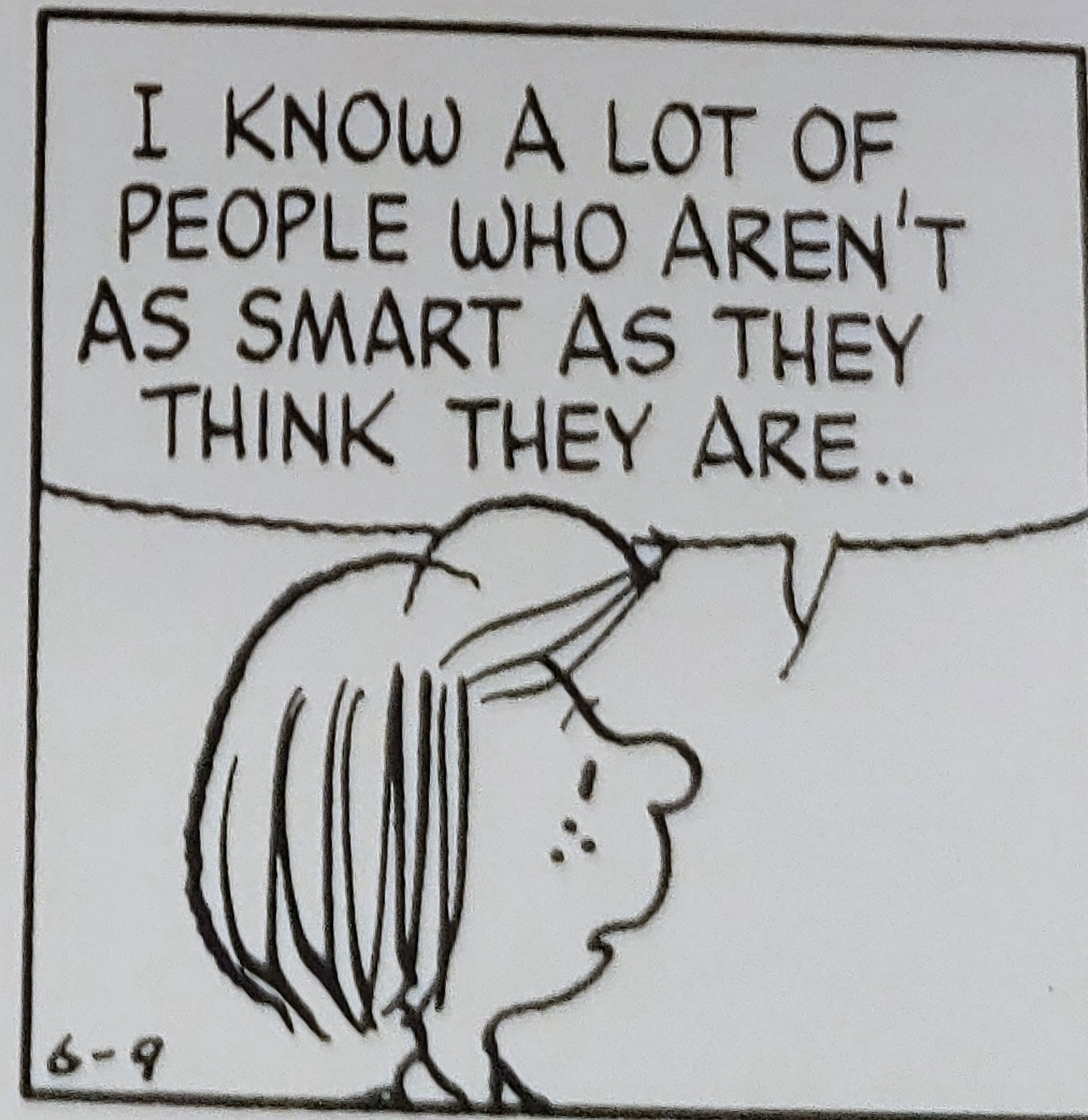
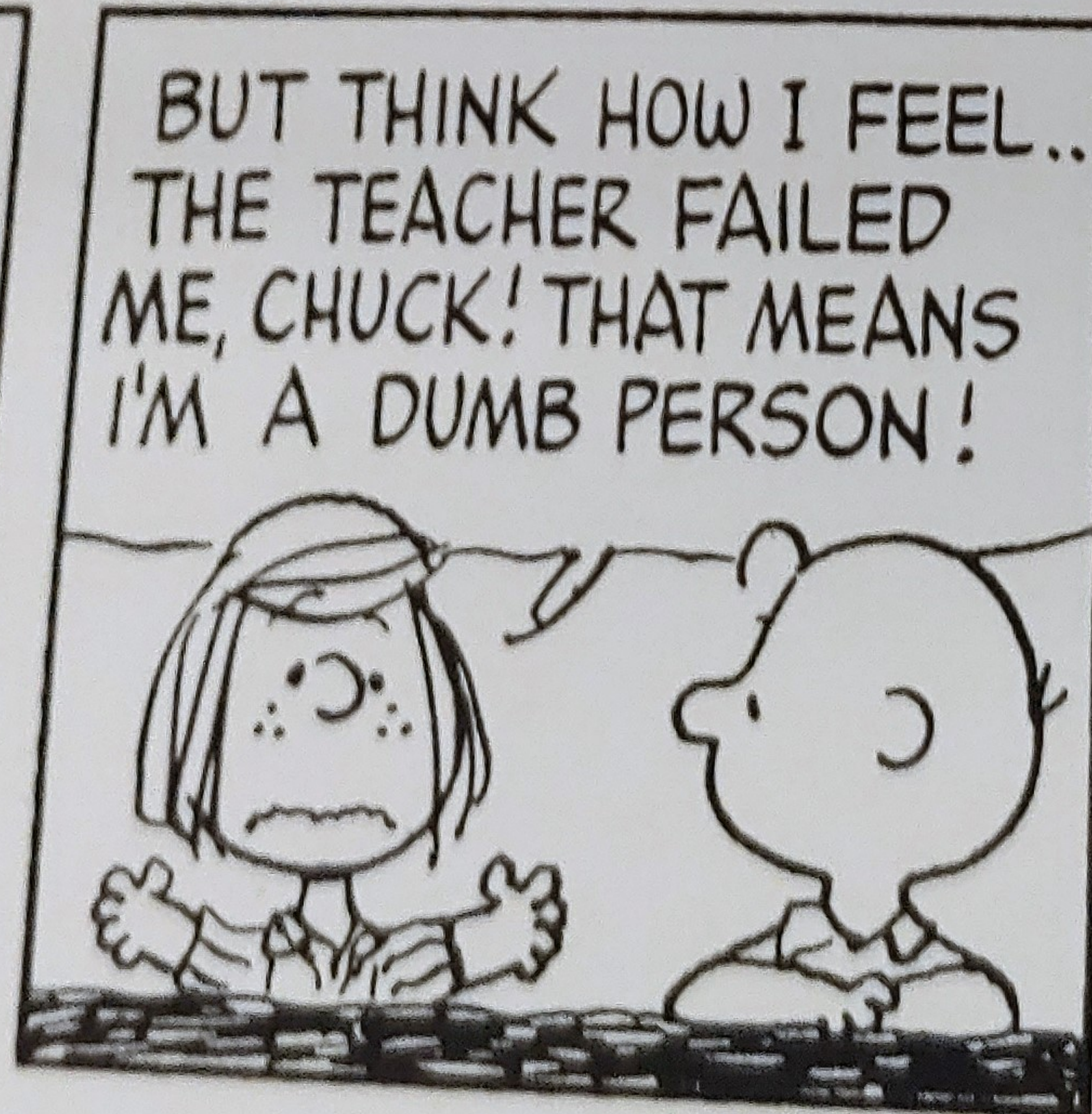
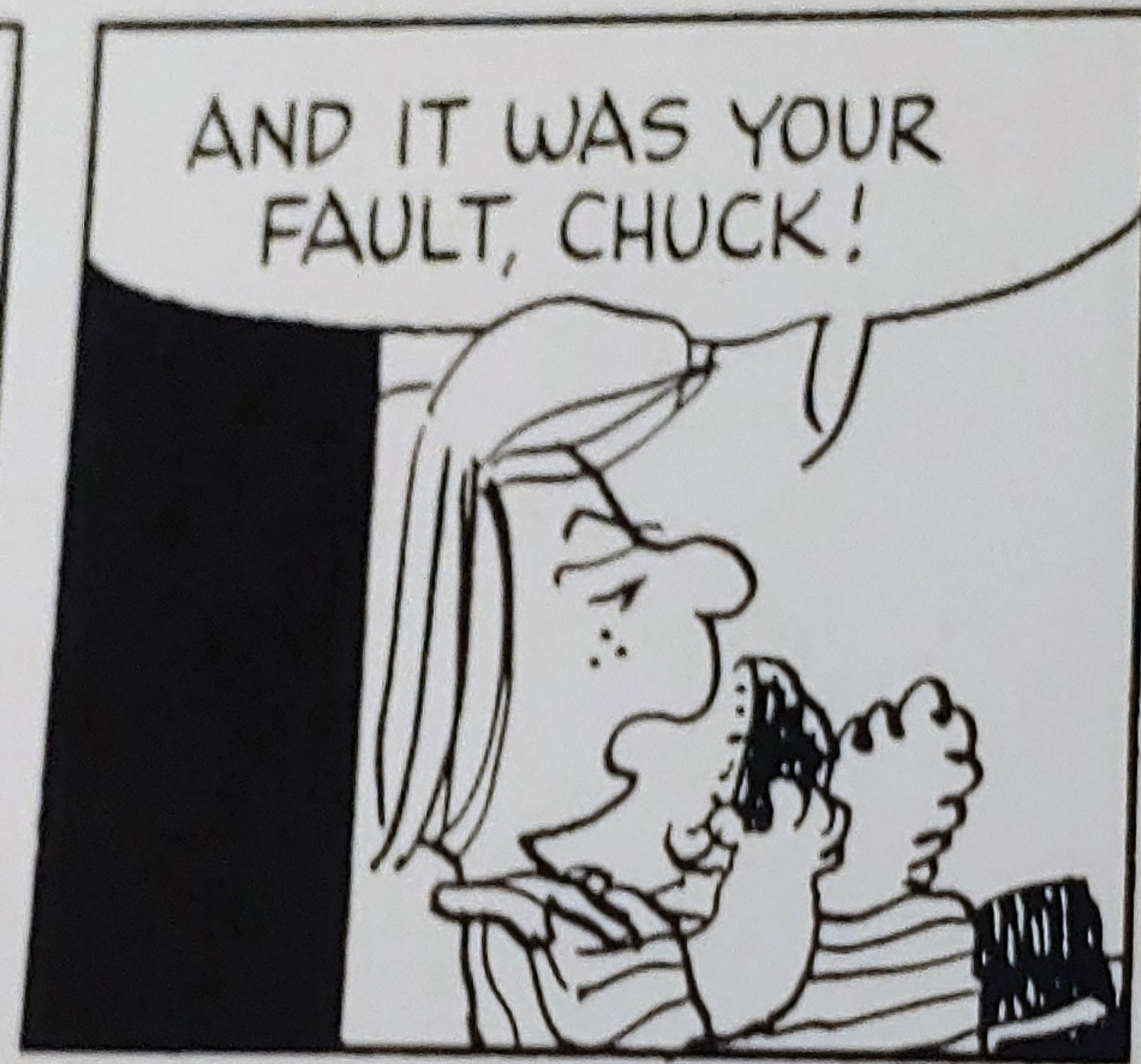
Category	Basic (1-5)	Developing (6-7)	Excellent (8-10)
Content	Story gives us basic details of the author's story.	Story gives us some details of an important event the author experienced.	Story gives us a detailed view into the author's life. The reader can infer how this event/moment changed the author as a person..
Mechanics	Writer makes 3+in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.
Story structure/ Sequencing	Ideas and scenes seem to be randomly arranged.	The story is fairly organized. One idea or scene may feel out of place. Transitions are used.	The story is very well organized. One idea or scene follows another in a logical sequence with clear transitions.
Use of Dialogue	Focuses on Narration rather than dialogue.	Includes limited, basic dialogue along with narration.	Graphic Novel is made up of mostly detailed dialogue with minimal narration.
Use of Creative Panel Layout	Uses a basic panel layout throughout their Graphic Novel such as 2x2 or 3x3.	Mostly uses a basic panel layout but incorporates more dynamic layouts where it makes sense with the action of the story.	Uses many different dynamic layouts that tell the story in a creative way. The use of layout helps to draw attention to the mood or action of the scenes.
Use of Color/images	Color and images are used throughout the story. 	Color and images are used throughout the story and used in some places as a way to create a mood or emotion that goes with what is happening in the story.	Color and images used all over the story in a way that helps to emphasize important aspects of the story as well as to create a specific mood for different scenes within the story.
Total:			/60

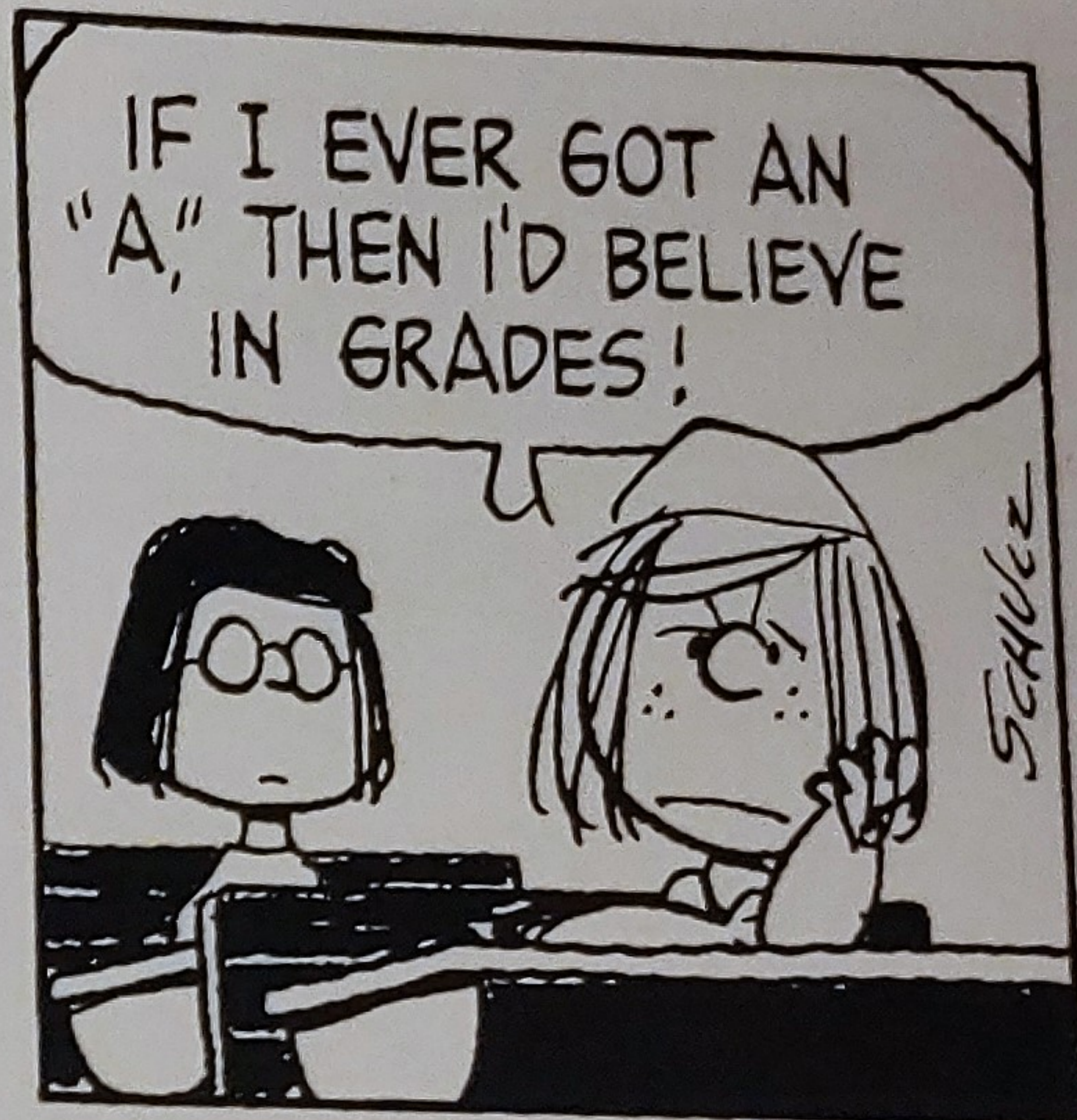
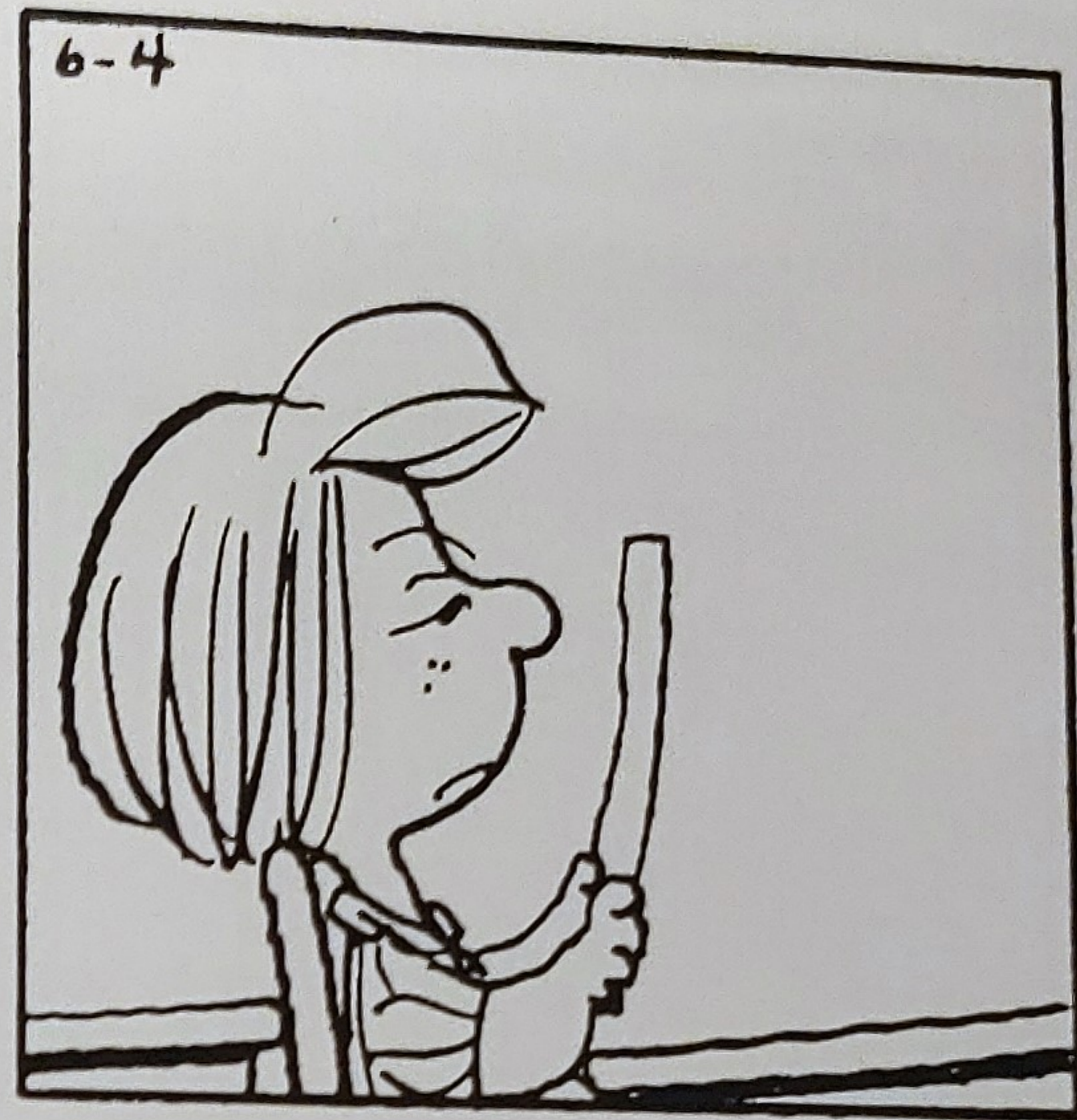
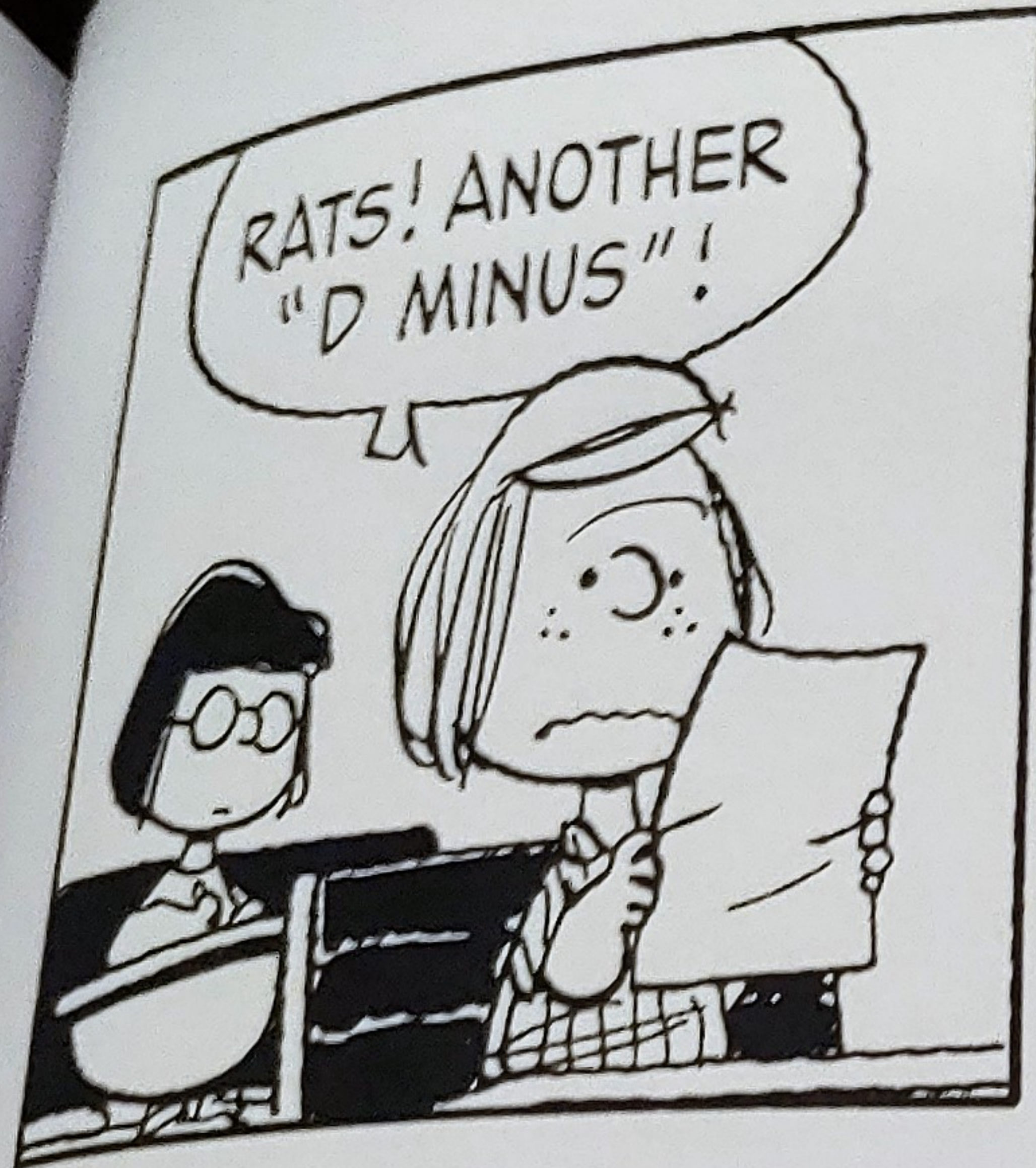


**ANY**  
**QUESTIONS?**









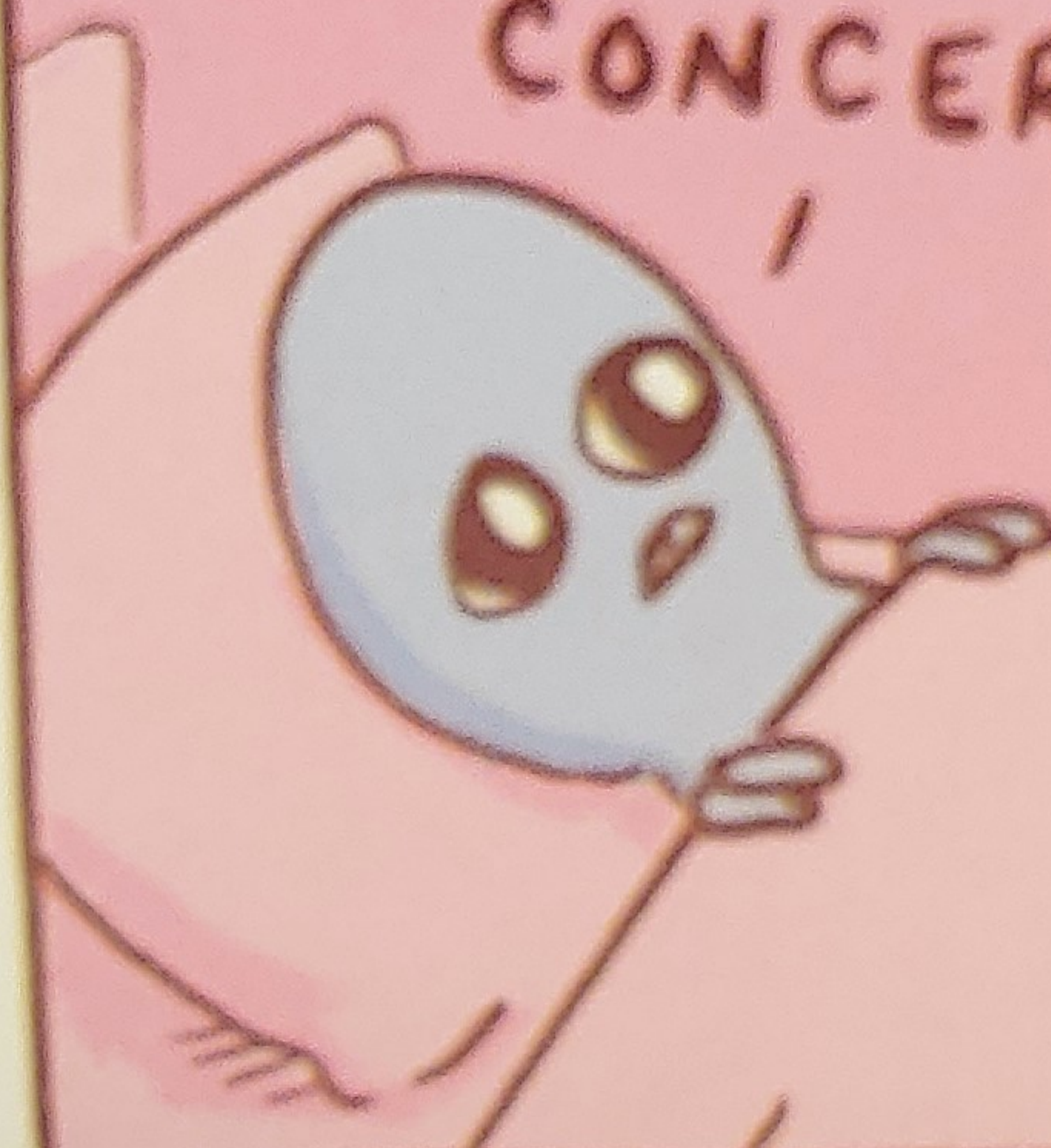
WHAT DO WE SAY?

I'M CONCERNED A HOSTILE CREATURE WILL SUDDENLY APPEAR



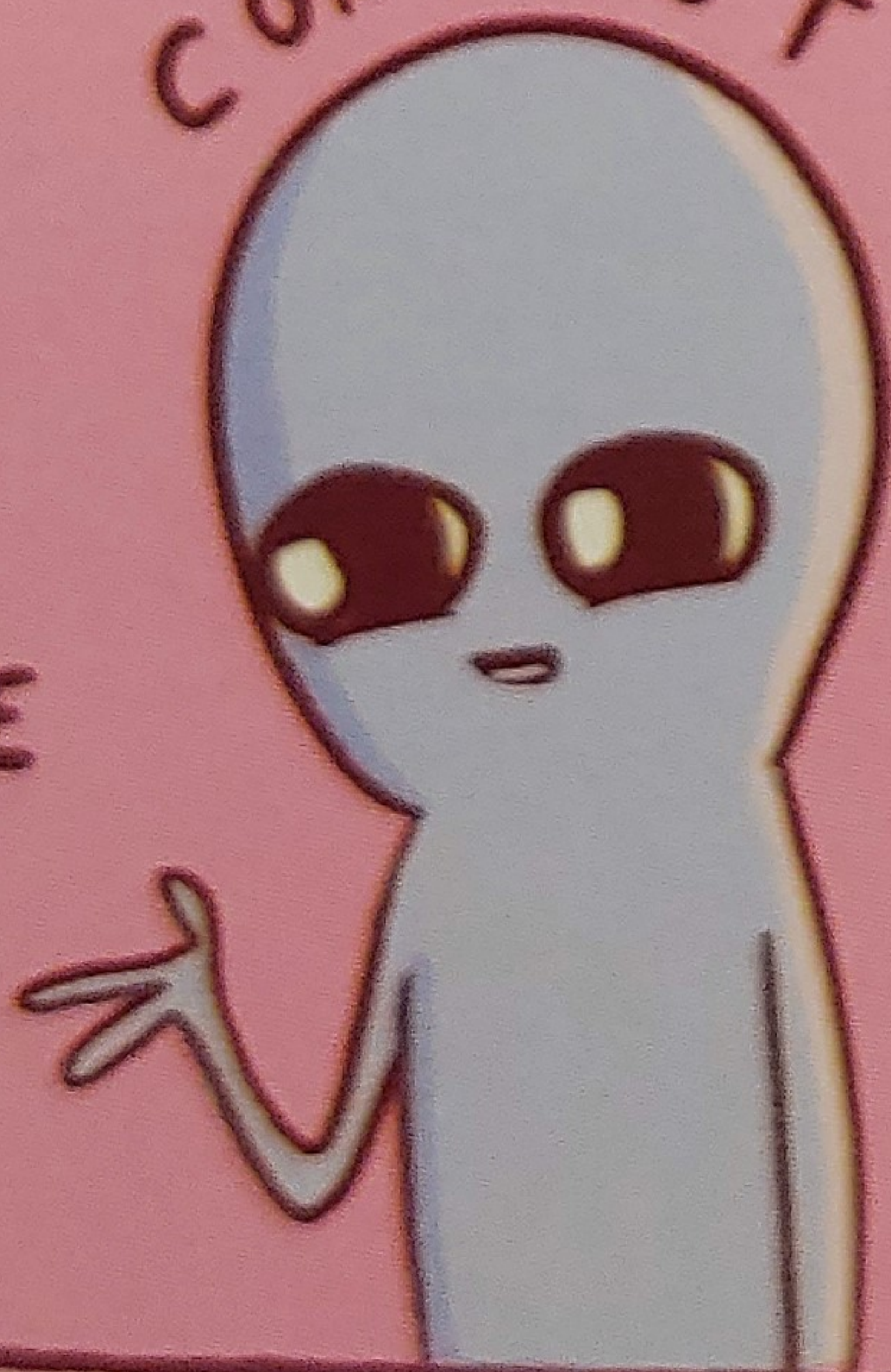
THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS CONCERN

... BUT



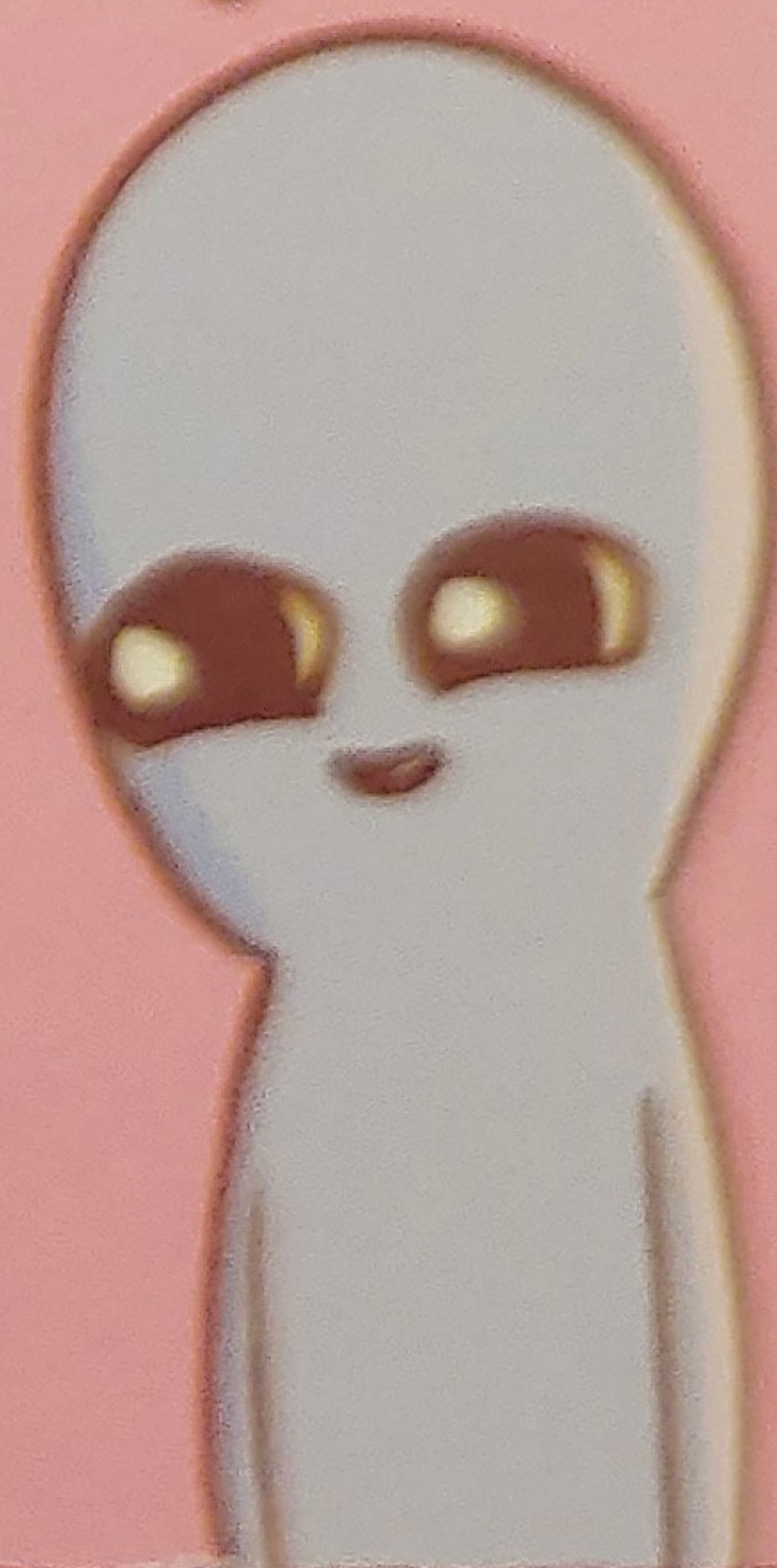
CORRECT

... IF I GATHER NEW EVIDENCE WE COULD REVISE OUR CONCLUSION

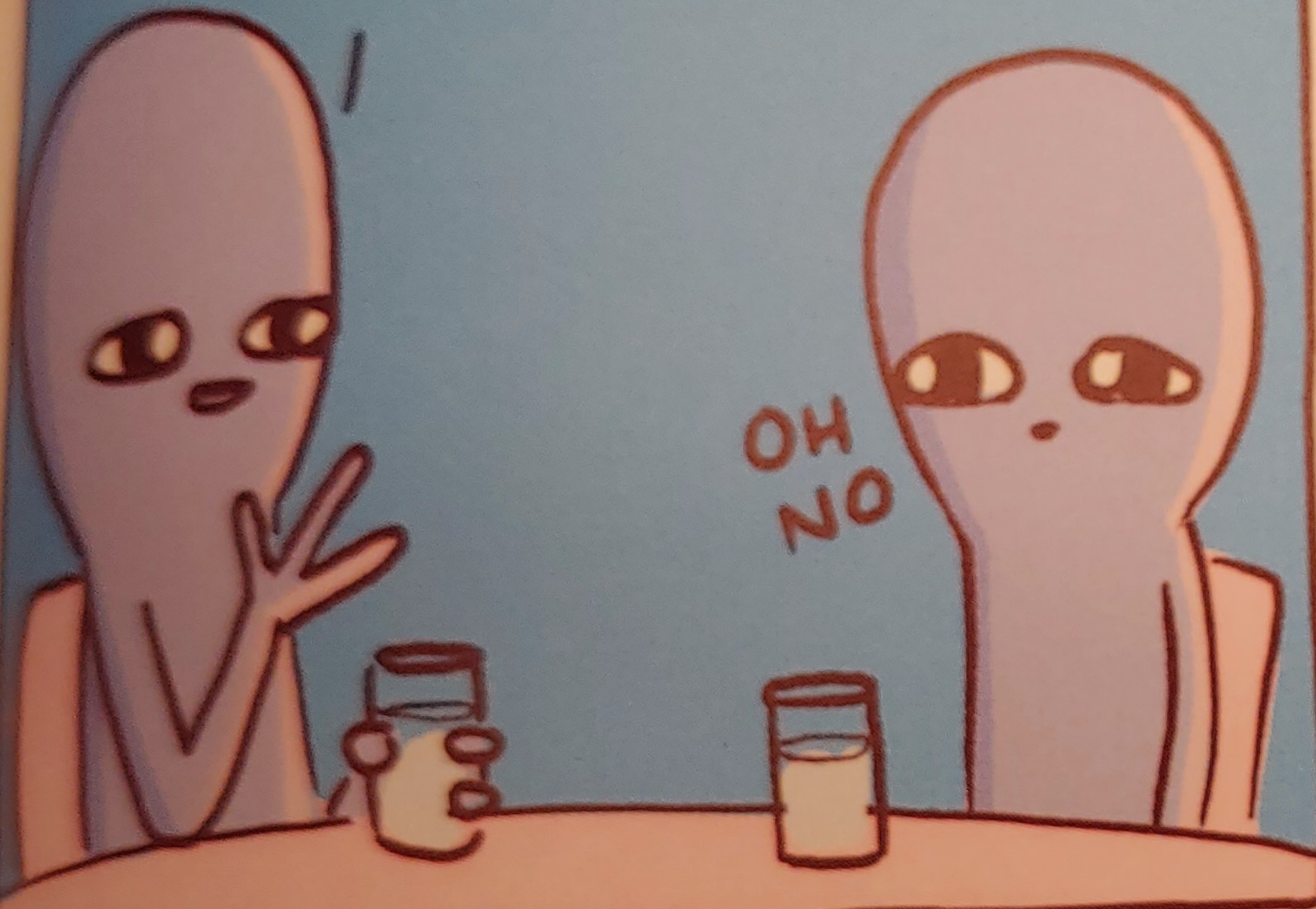


WILL YOU REINFORCE SHEET TENSION

OK

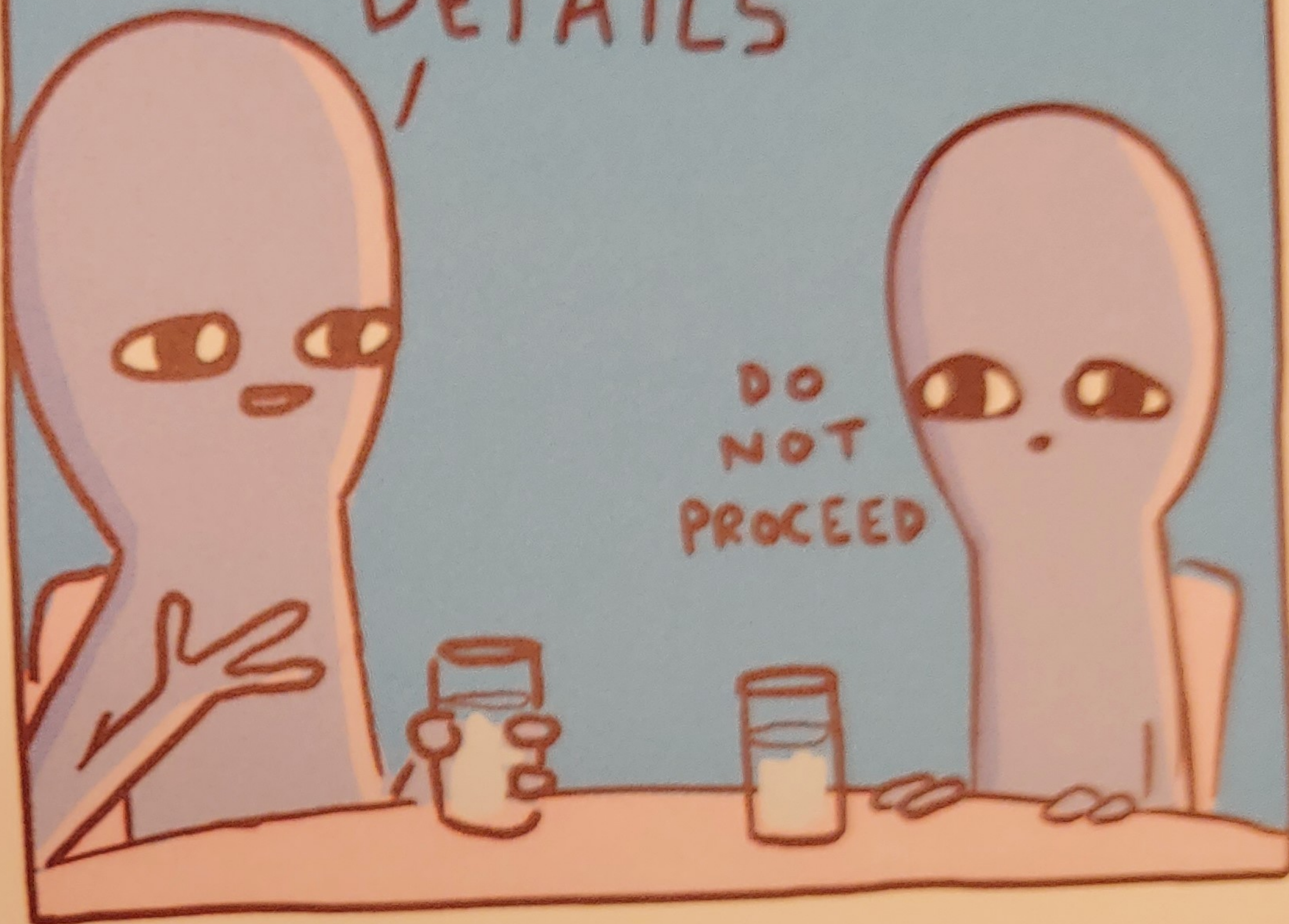


I WILL NOW  
RELAY AN  
ANECDOTE



OH  
NO

I WILL ATTEMPT  
TO RECALL ALL  
DETAILS



DO  
NOT  
PROCEED

EVERY DETAIL  
IS CRUCIAL



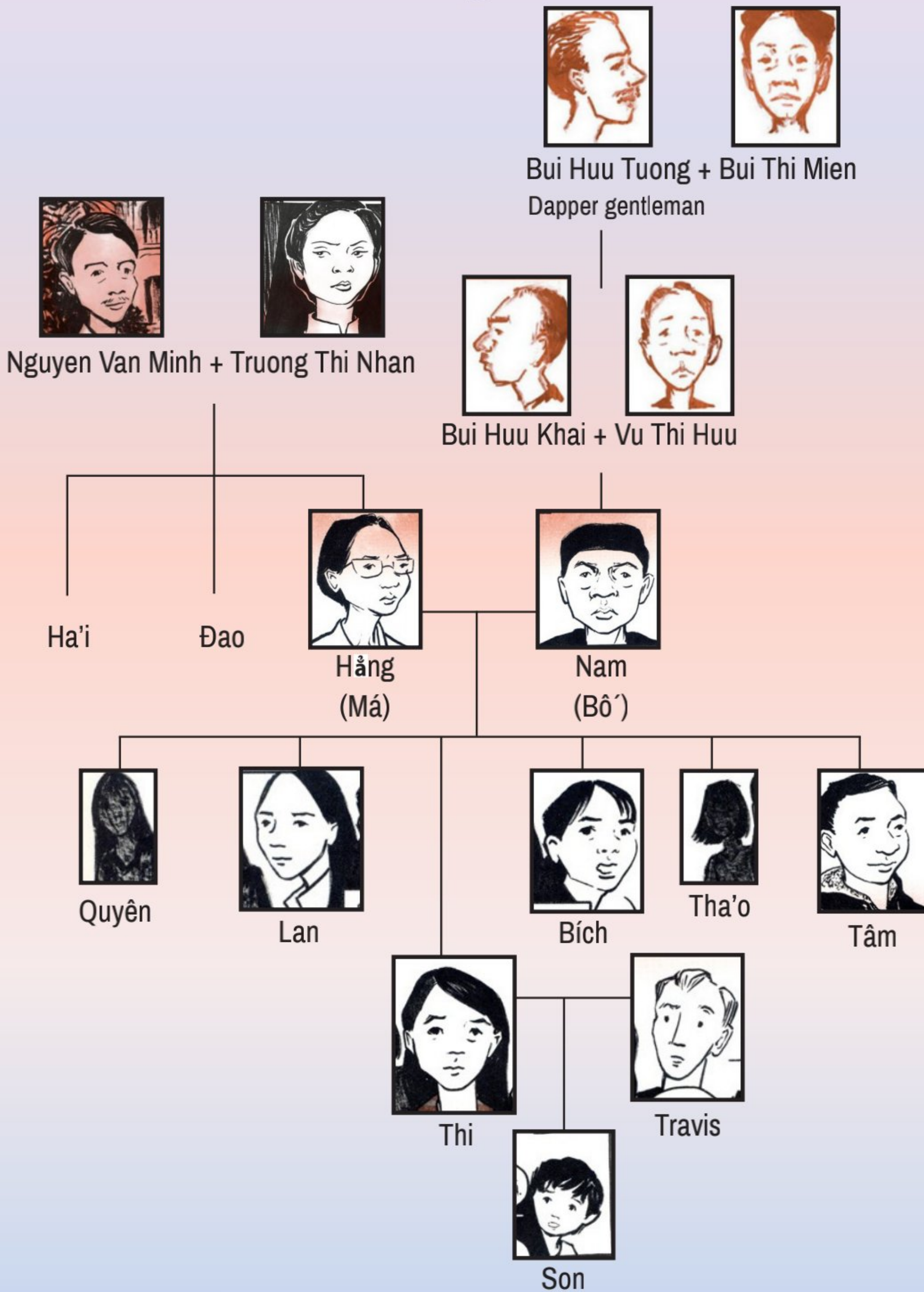
THIS  
IS NOT  
TRUE

THIS OCCURRED A FEW  
REVOLUTIONS AGO.  
IT MAY HAVE BEEN THREE  
REVOLUTIONS BUT MORE  
LIKELY IT WAS FOUR.



INCONSEQUENTIAL

# Family Tree



# Discussion Questions

## Family (questions from the [publisher](#))

1. "Family is now something I have created and not just something I was born into"(pg. 21). What does the author mean by this statement? What is the difference between "created" and "born into"? What is similar?
2. Bô' states, "You don't have a sister named Bích anymore. She is dead to us" (pg. 27). What events caused Bô' to say this about his daughter? If you were Thi or Tâm, how would you interpret this statement?
3. On page 29, the author draws portraits of her parents and siblings. In the second panel, Quỳên and Tha'ò are shadows. What was the artist's purpose for blurring these two siblings? Was it effective to use an image instead of words? Explain

## Additional Family Questions

4. When talking about becoming closer to her parents, Thi says, "...I recognize what it is NOT, and now I understand - proximity and closeness are not the same." What is she referring to? (pg. 31)
5. Thi illustrates and details her mother's Six (6) childbirths, even the children that did not survive. She does this in reverse chronology. Why is it important for Thi to set this painful part of her family's history in such detail? (pg. 42-55)

6. Thi makes it clear that her relationship with Ma changes when she becomes a mother. On page 310 she illustrates a discussion the two had when her newborn was kept in the hospital. How does their relationship change in this section? Do any statements showcase her newfound understanding of “parental sacrifice”

## Culture & Identity (questions from the [publisher](#))

1. “And imagine each block, each day turned us a little more American” (pg. 65). “I learned about America mostly through books and TV, and from what my sisters learned in school” (pg. 67). If you were going to mentor a new classmate from another country, how would you share and explain what it means to be “a little more American” to your new classmate? What books, television shows, or other media would you use to demonstrate your ideas? What elements in your everyday environment shape your national or cultural identity?

2. Examine the panels where someone spits on Bô´ on page 67. What is meant by “there were reasons to not want to be anything other?” How would you have reacted if you were Bô´? How would you react if you saw someone spit on another person? What might motivate one person to react to another in that way?

Can you think of similar hateful actions and tensions you’ve seen or read about throughout history or on the news?

3. “Don’t be such a REFUGEE!” (pg. 285). What is meant by this comment? When you hear the word “refugee,” what do you think of? How do perceptions of refugees affect their experience?

## Additional Identity Questions


4. “...In which my parents placed the essential pieces of our identity” This line refers to a file folder with vital documents the family kept (pg. 297 and 298) for each member. What do you think of this as a survival coping strategy? How does this coping strategy compare or contrast to strategies in your own childhood?



## Conflict & History (questions from the [publisher](#))

1. Using examples from the book, how did class differences affect people's experience of war and their decisions about which side to take?

2. How did certain features of geographic location affect people's experience of war? Cite specific examples from the book.



3. Thi's family escapes to Việt Nam on a boat bound for Malaysia. They face many hardships—little food (pg. 235), tight sleeping arrangements (pg. 236), possible pirates (pg. 242), bad potable water (pg. 244), etc. If you were aboard a boat headed toward freedom, what five items would you want to bring on the boat to survive? What would you have to leave behind? Share your list of items with a partner, and then narrow your list to three items for the two of you. What similar stories of escape have you read about throughout history or on the news?

4. On page 267, Bui incorporates her family's real refugee camp identification photographs into the graphics. What was Bui's intention in doing so? Was it effective?





# THE BEST WE COULD DO - REVIEW



Answer the questions below and be prepared to share out.

- "Family is now something I have created and not just something I was born into" (21). **What does the author mean by this statement?** What is the difference between "created" and "born into"? What is similar?
- Bo states, "You don't have a sister named Bich anymore. She is dead to us" (27). What events caused Bo to say this about his daughter? **If you were Thi or Tam, how would you interpret this statement? How does this compare to An-Mei's experience with her mother "being a ghost"?**
- On page 29, the author draws portraits of her parents and siblings. In the second panel, Quyen and Tha'o are shadows. **What was the artist's purpose for blurring these two siblings? Was it effective to use an image instead of words? Explain.**



## THE BEST WE COULD DO - REVIEW

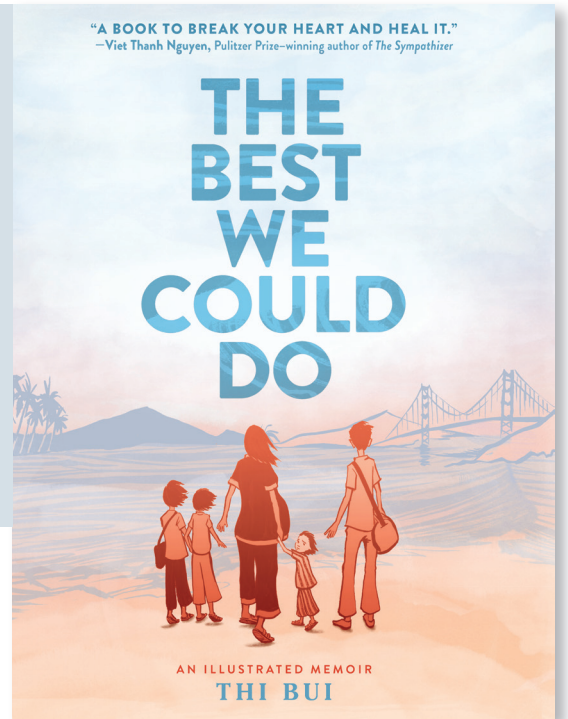
### Discussion Questions

- "-and imagine each block, each day turned us a little more American" (65). "I learned about America mostly through books an TV, and from what my sisters learned in school" (67). **If you were going to mentor a new classmate from another country, how would you share/explain what it means to be "a little more American"?** Is there a term for this? What books, television shows, or other media would you use to demonstrate your ideas? What elements in your everyday environment shape your national identity?
- Examine the panels where someone spits on Bo on page 67. **What is meant by "there were reasons to not want to be anything other"?** How would you react if you were Bo? Or an bystander? Can you think of similar hateful actions you have either witnessed or seen in the news?
- **The concept of shadows is seen in both novels. In JLC:** "Over the years, she told me the same story, except for the ending, which grew darker, casting long shadows into her life, and eventually into mine" (Tan 7). **How do the quotes below from TBWCD compare to those in JLC?** "And though my parents took us far away from the site of their grief... certain shadows stretched far, casting a gray stillness over our childhood..." (Bui 59) "each of Bo's stories has a different shape but the same ending" (100).



# TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE BEST WE COULD DO

BY THI BUI



## CURRICULAR RATIONALE

*The Best We Could Do* addresses identity, displacement and assimilation, race, decolonization, and political and historical movements and their impact on people, with advanced vocabulary, similes, idioms, and historical context and culture. While blending the written word with images, it promotes critical thinking through a coming-of-age memoir laden with issues of cultural and self-identity, and intergenerational trauma and endless sacrifice within a family. Using the graphic novel format, this book serves readers through verbal and visual storytelling that supports multimodal teaching. Primarily told as a memoir, *The Best We Could Do* also includes major historical events. This text is ideal in reading lists in both college and college-preparatory history or English classes. The intent of this brief guide is to provide flexible teaching options that educators can adapt to their needs and those of their students.

## About the Author

**Thi Bui** was born in Việt Nam and came to the United States as a child with her family. They were part of the “boat people” wave of Southeast Asian refugees. She studied art and legal studies and thought about becoming a civil rights lawyer, but became a public school teacher instead. Bui lives in Berkeley, California, with her son, her husband, and her mother. *The Best We Could Do* is her debut graphic novel.



## As you Read: A Pronunciation Guide

Some of the names and words that appear in this story may be unfamiliar to students. Please visit [www.abramsbooks.com/thebestwecoulddo](http://www.abramsbooks.com/thebestwecoulddo) for a list of approximately 100 names and terms in Vietnamese, French, and Malay, along with recordings of their appropriate pronunciations.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

### Good, Better, Best

What is the difference between these three words: good, better, and best? Why might the author have chosen the latter word as part of the title? What is the significance of the verb tense? Who do you think is implied by “we” in the title, *The Best We Could Do*?

### Family

How do you define a family? What are the bonds that make up your family? Who are the people you would go to for help if you were ever in trouble?

### Historical Events

The author references events in the world as she describes her family members’ lives: France surrendering to Nazi Germany (p. 102), U.S. dropping atomic bombs (p. 115), First Indochina War (p. 157), Geneva Accords (p. 167), Vietnam War (p. 200), Fall of Sài Gòn/Liberation Day (p. 211), and Vietnamese boat people exodus (p. 267) are a few examples. In groups or individually, research these topics and make a rough timeline; include a short description of each event.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### On Family

“Family is now something I have created and not just something I was born into” (p. 21). **What does the author mean by this statement? What is the difference between “created” and “born into”? What is similar?**

Bô’ states, “You don’t have a sister named Bích anymore. She is dead to us” (p. 27). **What events caused Bô’ to say this about his daughter? If you were Thi or Tâm, how would you interpret this statement?**

In the set of panels on page 28, the family avoided ever talking about the incident to the point that Má thought that Thi didn’t remember. Thi exclaims, “I was there! How do you think I could forget something like that? Almost thirty years later, I didn’t know I was still angry.” **Why would this memory still make Thi angry? How would you feel if you were Thi? What might cause a family to avoid discussing a difficult situation?**

On page 29, the author draws portraits of her parents and siblings. In the second panel, Quỳn and Tha’ are shadows. **What was the artist’s purpose for blurring these two siblings? Was it effective to use an image instead of words? Explain.**

The author desires to be closer to her parents as an adult and realizes “proximity and closeness are not the same” (p. 31). **What is your definition of proximity? Closeness? How do these two words differ? Which of the two words would you rather use to describe your relationship with your parents?**

The births of the six siblings are told in reverse chronological order (pp. 42, 46, 47, 48, 50, and 52). **What was the author’s purpose in using this storytelling element? Is it effective?**

“Home became the holding pen for the frustrations and the unexorcised demons that had nowhere to go in America’s finest city” (p. 68). “In my sleep, I dreamt of how terrible it would be to not find my way home” (p. 83). “And then I came home to a tiny hovel” (p. 186). “My parents built their bubble around us—our home in America” (p. 294). **What does home mean to Thi and her family members? Does her definition of home change as the story progresses? How? What does home mean to you? What is the difference between a home and a house?**

### On Culture and Identity

“And imagine each block, each day turned us a little more American” (pp. 65). “I learned about America mostly through books and TV, and from what my sisters learned in school” (p. 67). **If you were going to mentor a new classmate from another country, how would you share and explain what it means to be “a little more American” to your new classmate? What books, television shows, or other media would you use to demonstrate your ideas? What elements in your everyday environment shape your national or cultural identity?**

Examine the panels where someone spits on Bô’ on page 67. **What is meant by “there were reasons to not want to be anything other?” How would you have reacted if you were Bô’? How would you react if you saw someone spit on another person? What might motivate one person to react to another in that way? Can you think of similar hateful actions and tensions you’ve seen or read about throughout history or on the news?**

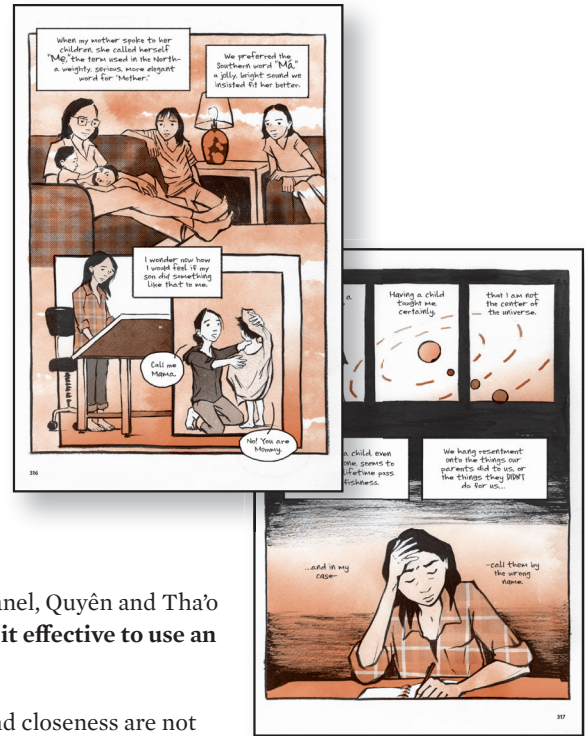
On page 187, Bô’ reminisces about the books, music, and movies that influenced him as a teenager. **Compare his influences with your own. How have your tastes shaped you as a person?**

“Don’t be such a REFUGEE!” (p. 285). **What is meant by this comment? When you hear the word “refugee,” what do you think of? How do perceptions of refugees affect their experience?**

**What is the difference between leaving a country voluntarily and being forced to leave your homeland? What are some positive and negative effects of a dislocation?**

When Thi and her siblings go to school (day care, elementary and middle schools), all three are treated differently (p. 287). Explore how Bích, Lan, and Thi could have been more supported by their peers and teachers.

**How did French colonialism influence Thi’s parents while they were growing up? Cite specific examples from the book that show that impact. How might a French colonist’s description of this influence differ from a Vietnamese nationalist’s?**



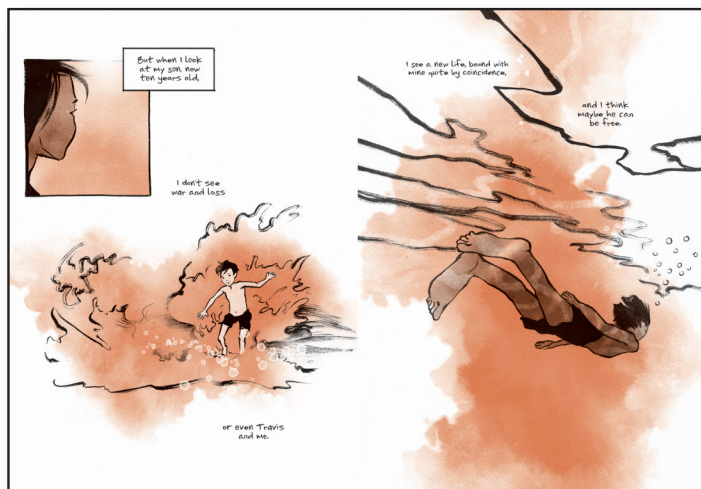
On **page 41**, Bui states that she was seeking “an origin story . . . that will set everything right.” **Does she find what she was looking for in the pages of this book? Why or why not?**

## On War and Conflict

Using specific examples from the book, how did class differences affect people’s experience of war and their decisions about which side to take?

How did certain features of geographic location affect people’s experience of war? Cite specific examples from the book.

As explored throughout the book, war can have immediate and lasting impacts on the people experiencing it. Find specific examples in the book that show the direct or implied impact of war on children and families.



**What factors contributed to Thi’s parents’ decision to leave Việt Nam after the war ended? What would you have done in their place?**

Describe the various authorities that the Buis encounter during their refugee experience. **Who are they and from where do they derive their power to make decisions about refugees? Consider our national discussion on refugees today. How is it similar to the Buis’ experience? How does it differ?**

## On History

**Page 66** refers to California’s Proposition 187, which voters passed in 1994 but was subsequently struck down in a federal court. **What were the arguments for and against this law? What similarities do you see to debates today on immigration?**

“I had never, before researching the background of my father’s stories, imagined that these horrible events were connected to my family history” (p. 116). **How would you feel if you were Thi? What historical events are tied to your own family history? How and when did you learn about them?**

**What factors contributed to Bô’s decision to leave North Việt Nam in 1954? Cite specific events and context clues from the book. What would you have done if you were in his position?**

Examine the four panels on **pages 128 and 129**, and the quote “I had no idea that the terror I felt was only the long shadow of his own” (p. 129). Compare Bô’s upbringing in Việt Nam to Thi’s upbringing in San Diego. **How are they similar? Different? What is meant by Thi’s quote? How is trauma passed down between generations?**

Thi’s family escapes to Việt Nam on a boat bound for Malaysia. They face many hardships—little food (p. 235), tight sleeping arrangements (p. 236), possible pirates (p. 242), bad potable water (p. 244), etc. **If you were aboard a boat headed toward freedom, what five items would you want to bring on the boat to survive? What would you have to leave behind?** Share your list of items with a partner, and then narrow your list to three items for the two of you. **What similar stories of escape have you read about throughout history or on the news?**

On **page 267**, Bui incorporates her family’s real refugee camp identification photographs into the graphics. **What was Bui’s intention in doing so? Was it effective?** Find another page where real photographs could enhance the storyline.

In **Chapter 6**, Bui suggests that she is making up for not having memories of her own by doing a lot of research. **What is the difference between personal knowledge and relying on secondary sources? What can be gained from interviewing primary sources? What could be tricky about interviewing primary sources?**

## ADDITIONAL EXERCISES AND RESOURCES

### Family History

“I began to record our family history . . . thinking that if I bridged the gap between the past and the present, I could fill the void between my parents and me” (p. 36). Explore your family history. Find out about your ancestry by interviewing family members. Ask your parents or other family members about their courtship stories. How did they meet? Where did previous generations come from or move to? What did they hope for? What challenges did they encounter in raising a new generation? List family members and important dates.

## Gender Roles

Consider the perspectives of the women in the stories of Thi's parents and grandparents. Retell a story from their point of view. Cite specific examples from the book to support your retelling.

## Graphic Novels

Have you read other graphic novels? How did those graphic novels compare to *The Best We Could Do* in how they told a story? Visually speaking, what elements appealed to you in this graphic memoir? Share a particular layout or panel that best demonstrated these features. How do you think the graphic novel format of this memoir affected its message and potency?

## Literary Scavenger Hunt

Throughout *The Best We Could Do*, Bui infuses her story with rich, figurative language and beautiful panels. Embark on a literary scavenger hunt to locate your favorite phrases or quotes. Create a shareable quote card image to be published on the social media site of your choice (remember to attribute appropriately).

## Finding and Using Related Sources

Compare and contrast the ways in which Vietnamese people are represented in different accounts, fiction and nonfiction, of the Việt Nam War. What factors could affect these differences?

Create a timeline of Việt Nam's transition from feudalism to colonialism to nationalism to full independence. Use online research to find dates. Select key moments from the book and plot them on your timeline. How does your relationship with the characters affect your understanding of the history?

Pages 205-209 discuss Nguyễn Ngọc Loan, the former chief of National Police in South Việt Nam, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of him, titled, "Saigon Execution." Why is Thi confused about what her father thinks of him? Compare the accounts in this book with other descriptions of the photograph or the incident. How does one's perspective influence one's opinion about what the photograph represents?

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Below are the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards that can be met by extending *The Best We Could Do* with these questions, prompts, and activities.



### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3

Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, 11-12.2, 11-12.3

Key ideas and details: Citing textual evidence, determining a theme or central idea, describing how a plot unfolds, analyzing how particular elements of the story interact; analyzing how particular lines of dialogue or incidents of a text reveal aspects of a character or provoke a decision; and analyzing how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4, 9-10.5, 9-10.6 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4, 11-12.5, 11-12.6

Craft and structure: Determining the meaning of words and phrases including figurative and connotative meaning; analyzing how particular sentences, chapters, scenes, or stanzas fit into the overall structure of a text; explaining how a point of view is developed; analyzing how a text's structure or form contributes to its meaning; analyzing a particular point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9

Integration of knowledge and ideas: Comparing and contrasting texts; distinguishing among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text; analyzing how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works describing how the material is rendered new; analyzing how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific way.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.10

Range of reading and level of text complexity: Reading and comprehending literature, including stories, dramas, and poems; in the grades 6-8 and in the grades 9-10, text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range, with independence and proficiency.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3

Knowledge of language: Using knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening; applying knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4, 9-10.5, 9-10.6 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4, 11-12.5, 11-12.6

Vocabulary acquisition and use: Determining the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases; demonstrating understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings; and acquiring and using accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Comprehension and collaboration: Engaging effectively in a range of collaborative discussions building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4

Presentation of knowledge and ideas: Presenting claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes.

This guide was created by Gregory Lum, Library Director at Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon, and an adjunct instructor at Portland State University, along with author Thi Bui.

**Instructors:** Enjoyed using this guide, or have feedback for us? Please take our brief 5-minute survey to help us improve our guides: <http://bit.ly/ABRAMSTeachingGuides>

***MY STORY -  
A GRAPHIC NOVEL***





# ***INSTRUCTIONS:***

- You will be creating your own 2 – 4 page graphic novel spread.
- Choose a event/moment that was significant in your life. Now retell this story through a mini graphic novel.
- Don't panic if you feel like you are not an artist or comic book enthusiast. There are multiple programs you can use and the most important part is telling your story.

## Requirements:

- Must have a title (can be it's own panel or at the top with your name)
- At least a two page spread. At most four.
- Must reveal something important about you/your life story so far
- It does not need to be funny. It also does not need to be super serious. (The content is up to you)
- Must be colored in (whether physically drawn or printed) yes black and white are ok as a stylistic choice, but NO Pencil!

***BEFORE YOU  
BEGIN...***



## Q. What is a "graphic novel"?

A. Graphic novels have a few defining characteristics. But first and most importantly, they are long comic books. (I'll get back to the rest.)

## Q. What is a "comic book"?

A. You may think you know the answer to this one, but stick with me a few minutes: A comic book is a magazine or bound book that contains "comics" (also known as "comix."). Comics is a medium for expressing information and/or artistic ideas that is defined by



... and that's it. However, comics also often feature such things as

"word balloons..."

... and sometimes, "thought balloons."

It's also common to have the sequential images delineated by "panels," which are surrounded by lines called "panel borders."

These techniques aren't necessary to make comics, but they are quite common. There are other common, familiar, but even more optional elements of many comics, such as certain kinds of characters, like funny animals or licensed characters. But I'll get to that in a minute.

Here's how to read a comic:

1. Just as in our written language, you read the elements of a comic starting with...

2. ... the upper-left corner of a page, and then you read across to the right...

3. ... before proceeding down to the next row...

4. ... and then the next.

comics are a nested system.

when you finish reading...

... everything within one panel...

... you apply the same left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading order...

... to the panels themselves!

"hee hee!"

You even use the same rule for actions within a panel.

BOO!

AAAAUGH!

HERE ARE SOME REMINDERS OF GRAPHIC NOVEL BASICS

# ANATOMY OF A COMIC:

- **Panel:** A panel in a comic book is one of the individual pieces of artwork that make up a single page in a comic book or graphic novel. When placed together on a single page, individual panels tell a story, or a portion of a story, in sequential order.
- **Caption:** Captions are used in comics and graphic novels to narrate the story or to share characters' thoughts. Often, captions are presented in box or consistent, separate shape that distinguishes them from the rest of the panel. Captions are not speech balloons or bubbles.
- **Onomatopoeia:** Sound effects. Sometimes represented in unique text styles
- **Speech Bubble:** Speech bubbles are a graphic convention used most commonly in comics and graphic novels to represent speech of a specific character.
- **Emanata:** Lines to indicate shock/surprise
- **Gutter:** The space between panels on a page of comics. Gutters account for time, space, and rhythm of moments in sequential art/comics. Readers of comics make closure of these moments suggested through the "pause" of each gutter.
- **Closure:** Connections readers makes to fill in information between panels or other content. Such connections are based on reader experience and imagination.
- **Splash:** A full-page image.
- **Spread:** A single image that continues across more than one page.
- **Page:** The entire single page of a comic or graphic novel.

***SOME RESOURCES FOR YOU:***

***[HTTPS://WWW.CANVA.COM/CREATE/COMIC-STRIPS/](https://www.canva.com/create/comic-strips/)***

***[HTTPS://WWW.PIXTON.COM/](https://www.pixton.com/)***

***[HTTPS://WWW.STORYBOARDTHAT.COM/STORYBOARD-CREATOR](https://www.storyboardthat.com/storyboard-creator)***


***[HTTPS://MAKEBELIEFSCOMIX.COM/](https://makebeliefscomix.com/)***

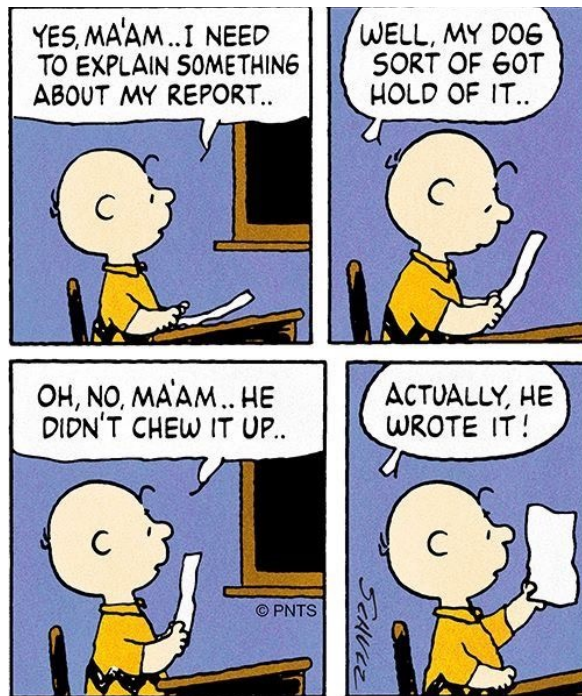
***[HTTPS://PICKLEBUMS.COM/FREE-PRINTABLE-COMIC-BOOK-TEMPLATES/](https://picklebums.com/free-printable-comic-book-templates/)***

***[HTTPS://REALLYGOODDESIGNS.COM/COMIC-STRIP-TEMPLATES/](https://reallygooddesigns.com/comic-strip-templates/)***

***[HTTPS://WWW.PRINTABLEPAPER.NET/CATEGORY/COMICS](https://www.printablepaper.net/category/comics)***

# RUBRIC:

Category	Basic (1-5)	Developing (6-7)	Excellent (8-10)
Content	Story gives us basic details of the author's story.	Story gives us some details of an important event the author experienced.	Story gives us a detailed view into the author's life. The reader can infer how this event/moment changed the author as a person..
Mechanics	Writer makes 3+in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.
Story structure/ Sequencing	Ideas and scenes seem to be randomly arranged.	The story is fairly organized. One idea or scene may feel out of place. Transitions are used.	The story is very well organized. One idea or scene follows another in a logical sequence with clear transitions.
Use of Dialogue	Focuses on Narration rather than dialogue.	Includes limited, basic dialogue along with narration.	Graphic Novel is made up of mostly detailed dialogue with minimal narration.
Use of Creative Panel Layout	Uses a basic panel layout throughout their Graphic Novel such as 2x2 or 3x3.	Mostly uses a basic panel layout but incorporates more dynamic layouts where it makes sense with the action of the story.	Uses many different dynamic layouts that tell the story in a creative way. The use of layout helps to draw attention to the mood or action of the scenes.
Use of Color/images	Color and images are used throughout the story. 	Color and images are used throughout the story and used in some places as a way to create a mood or emotion that goes with what is happening in the story.	Color and images used all over the story in a way that helps to emphasize important aspects of the story as well as to create a specific mood for different scenes within the story.
Total:			/60



**ANY**  
**QUESTIONS?**



Name: \_\_\_\_\_


G.N. Title: \_\_\_\_\_

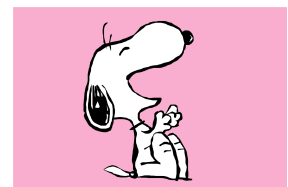


# Writing a Graphic Novel

## Grading Rubric

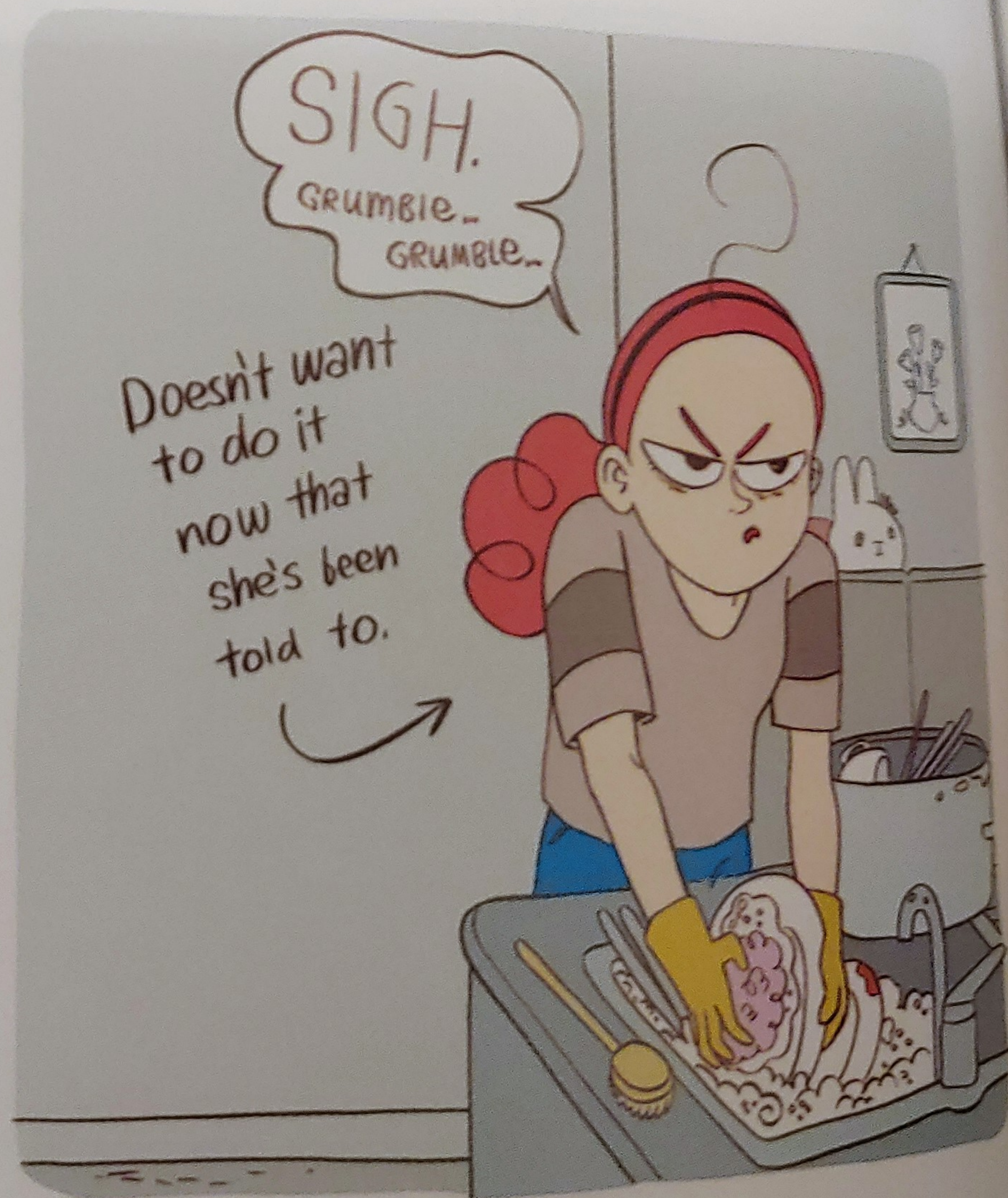
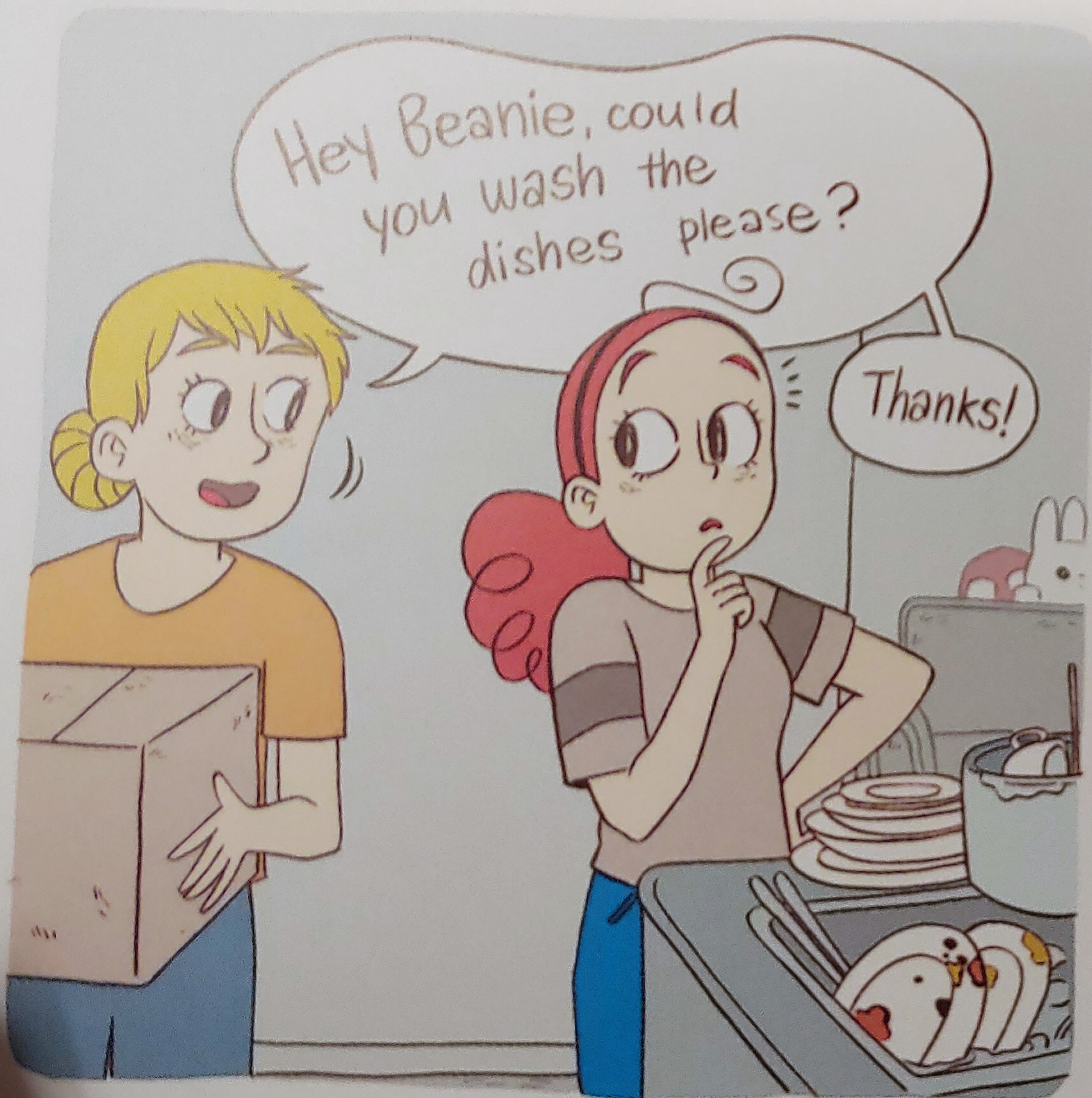


Category	Basic (1-5)	Developing (6-7)	Excellent (8-10)
Content	Story gives us basic details of the author's story.	Story gives us some details of an important event the author experienced.	Story gives us a detailed view into the author's life. The reader can infer how this event/moment changed the author as a person..
Mechanics	Writer makes 3+in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.
Story structure/ Sequencing	Ideas and scenes seem to be randomly arranged.	The story is fairly organized. One idea or scene may feel out of place. Transitions are used.	The story is very well organized. One idea or scene follows another in a logical sequence with clear transitions.
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Gra Total:			<b>/60</b>

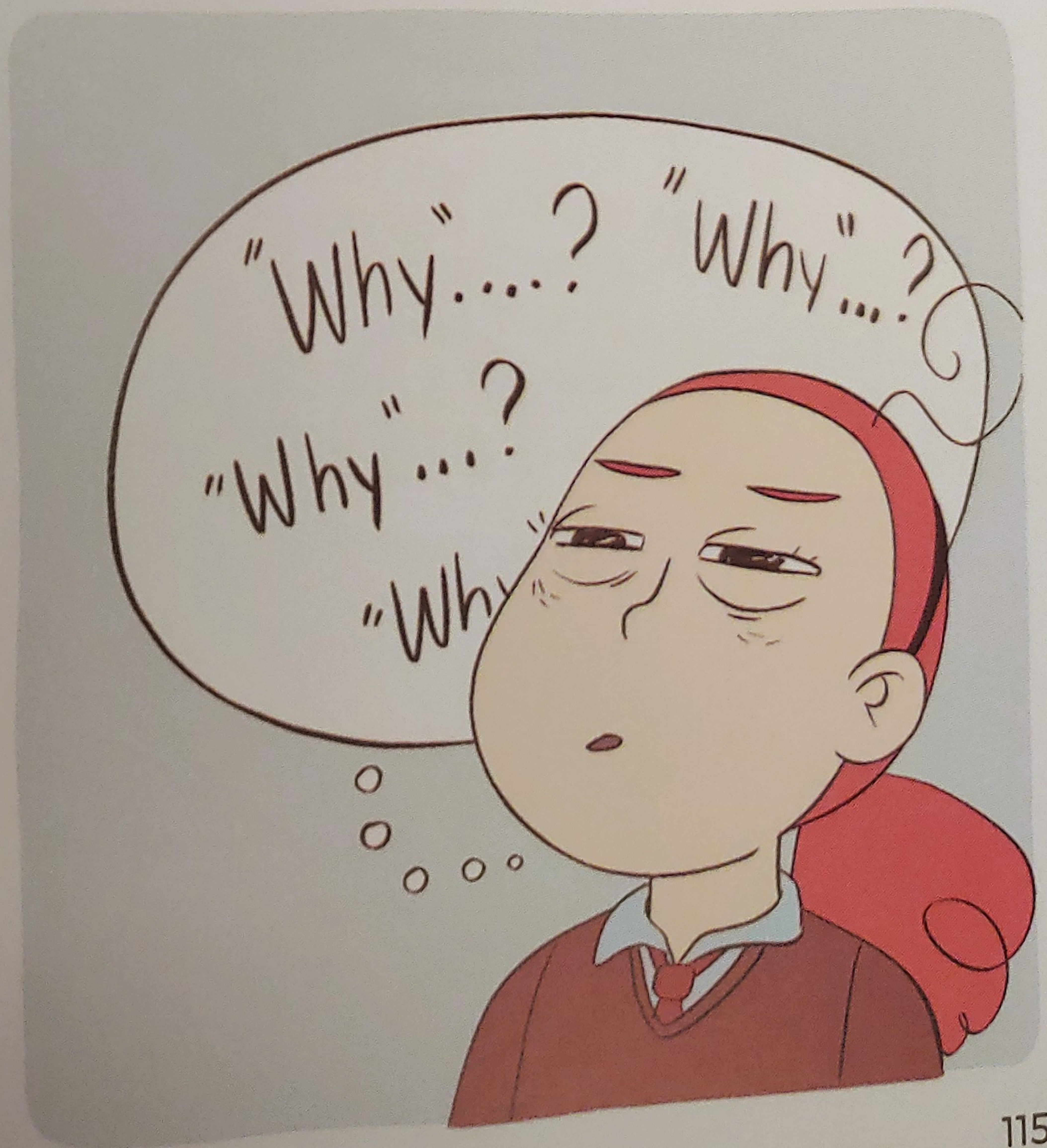


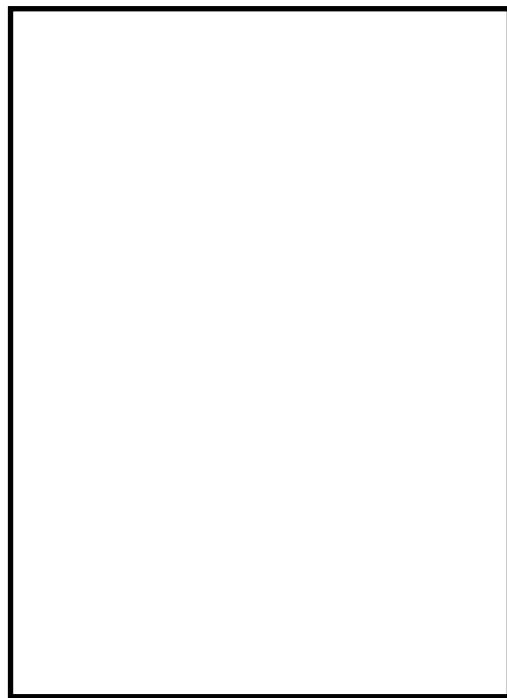
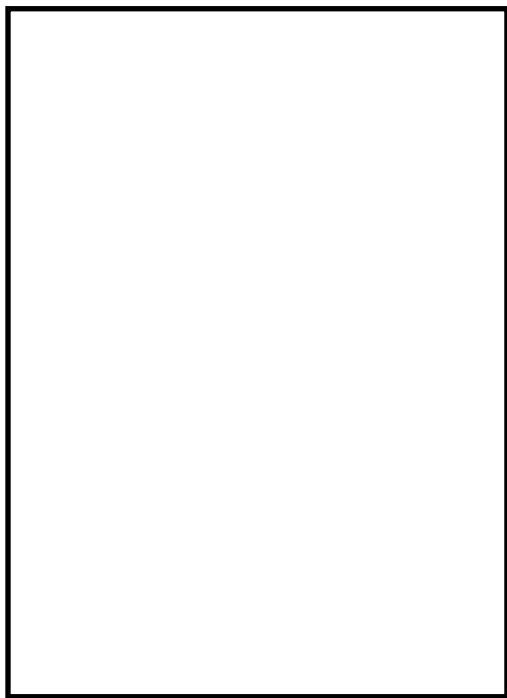
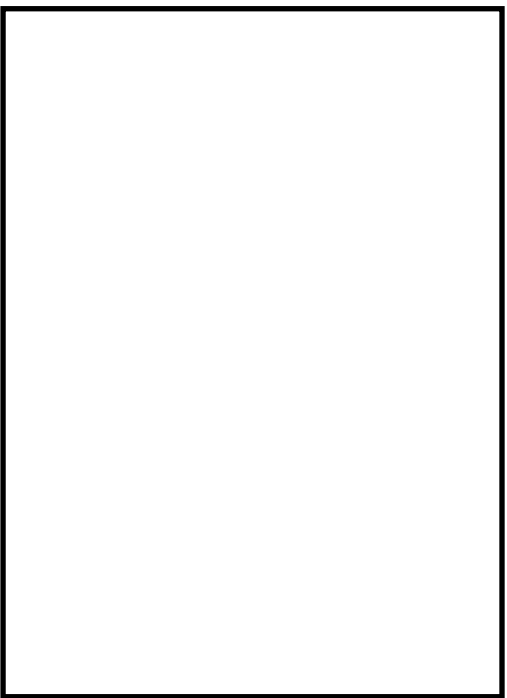
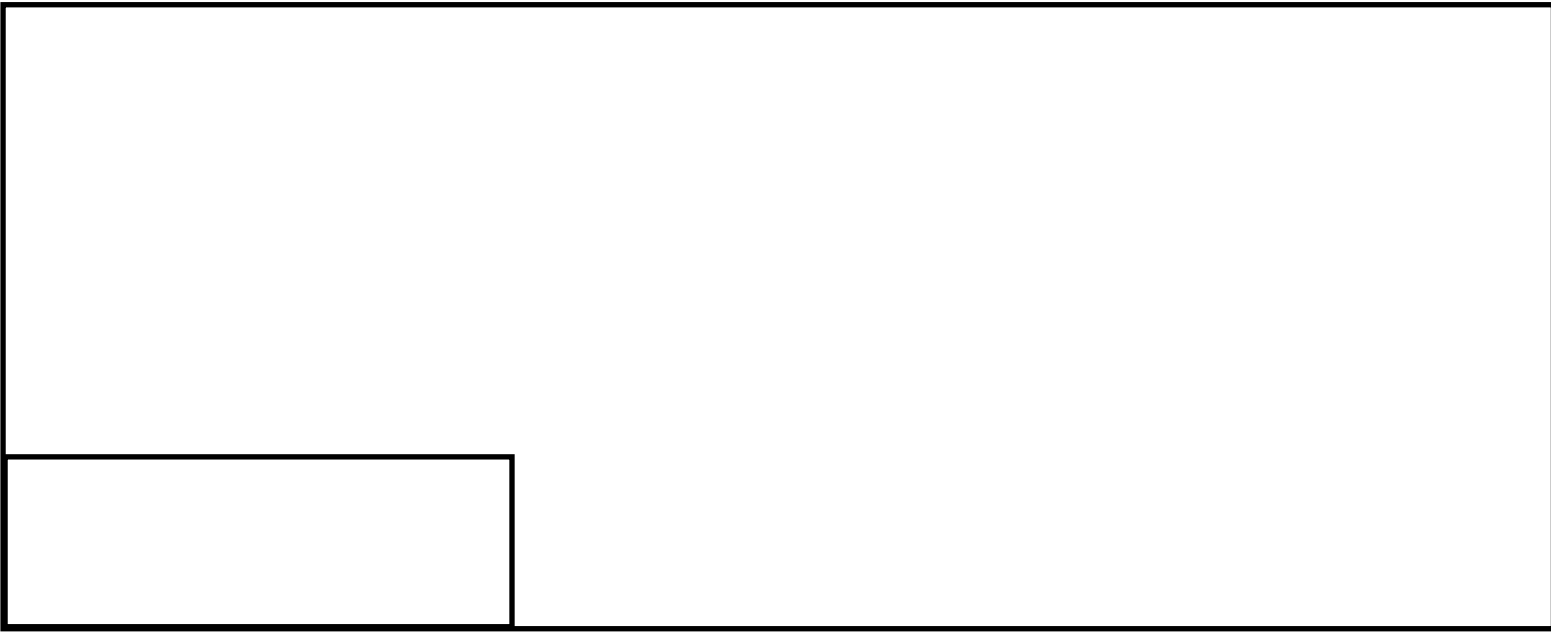
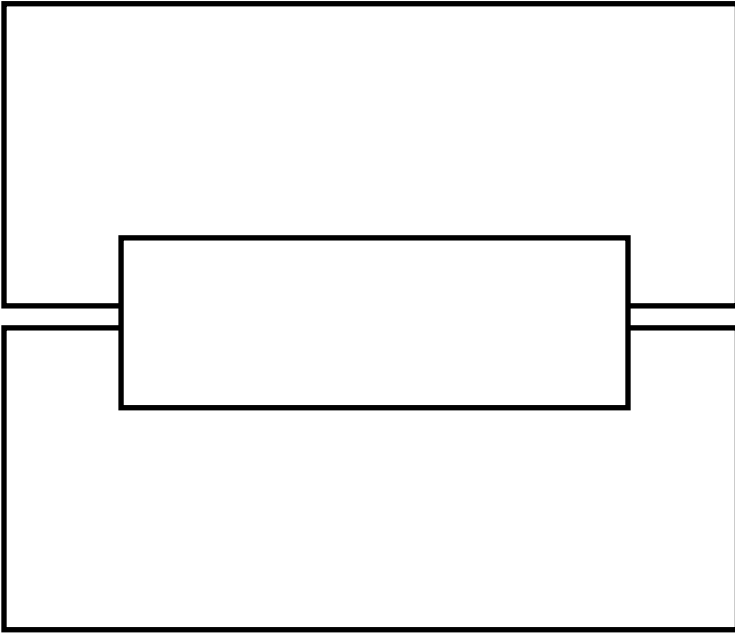
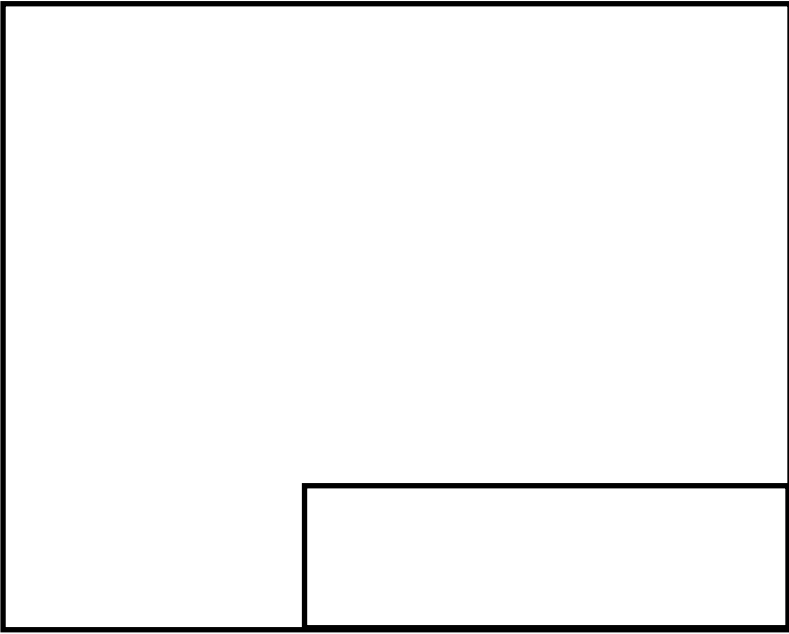


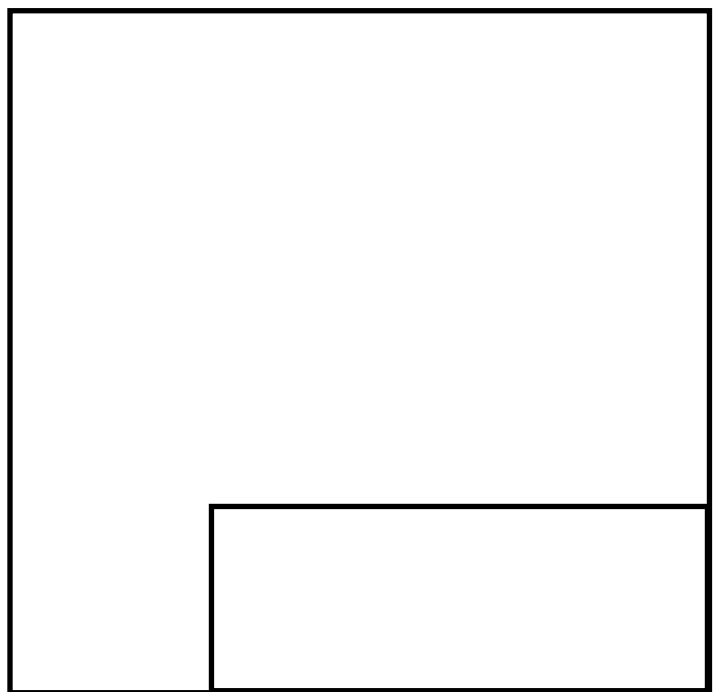
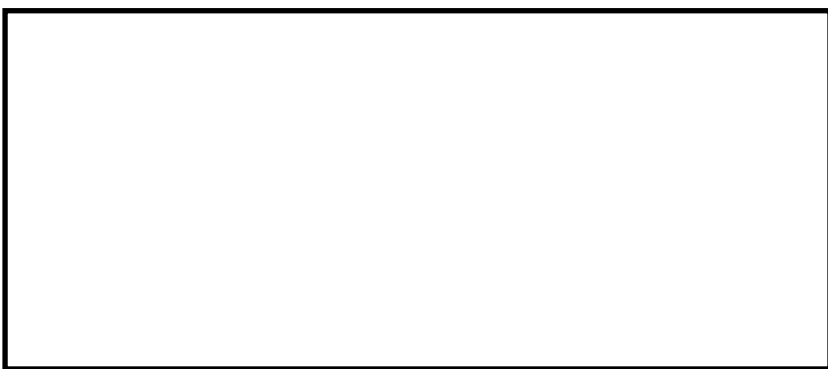
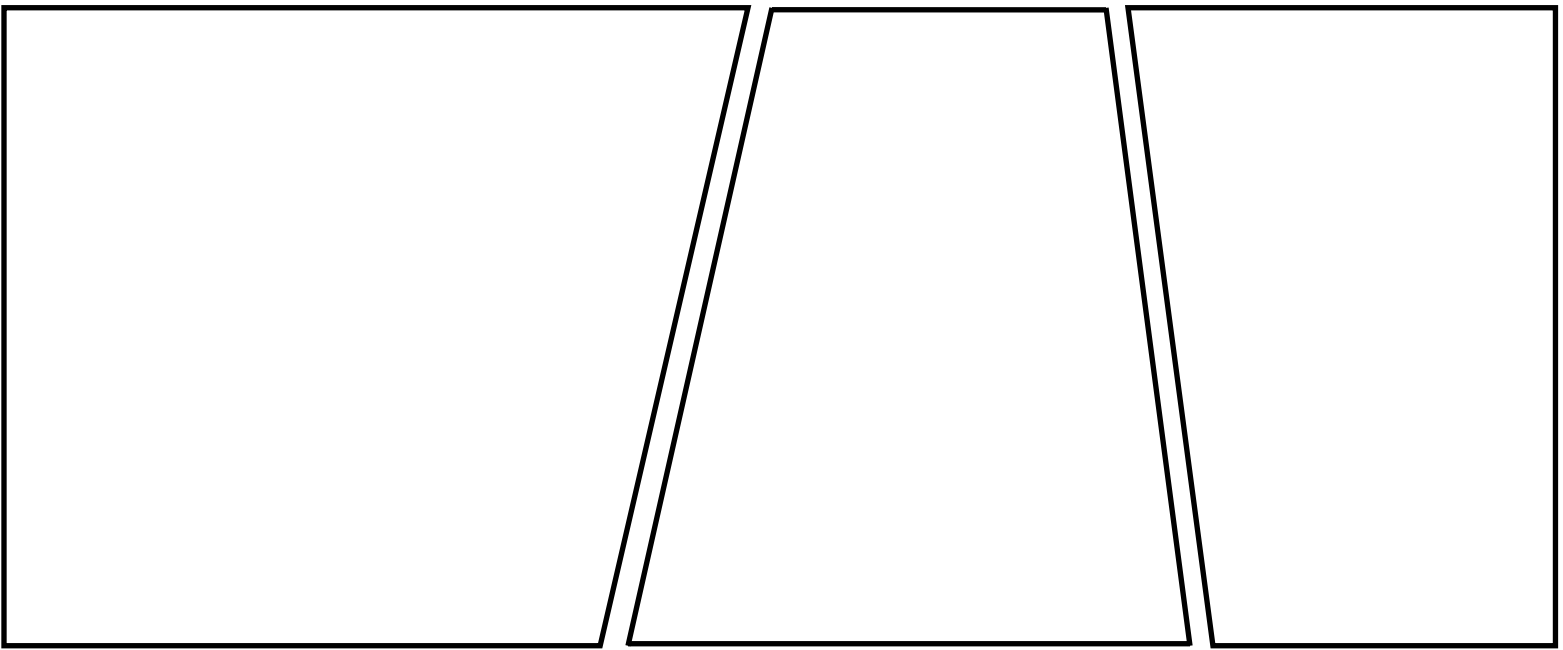
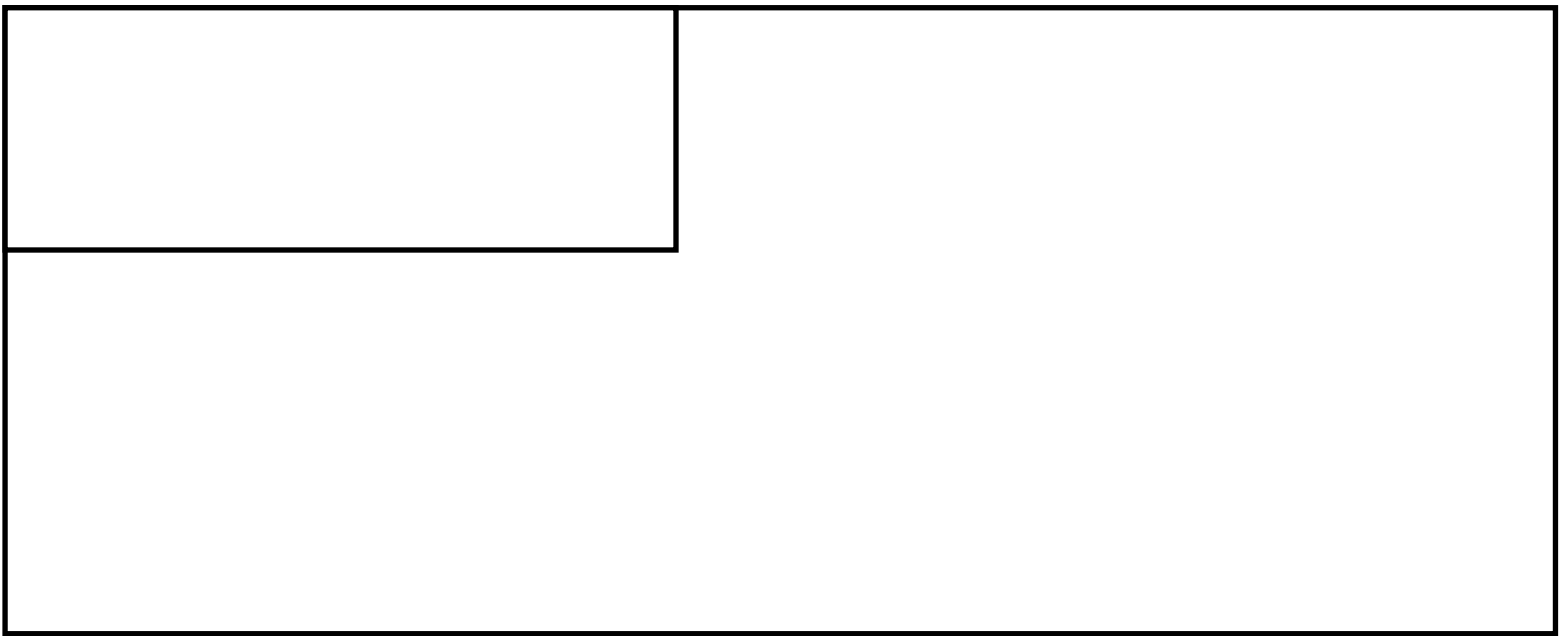
# Washing Dishes

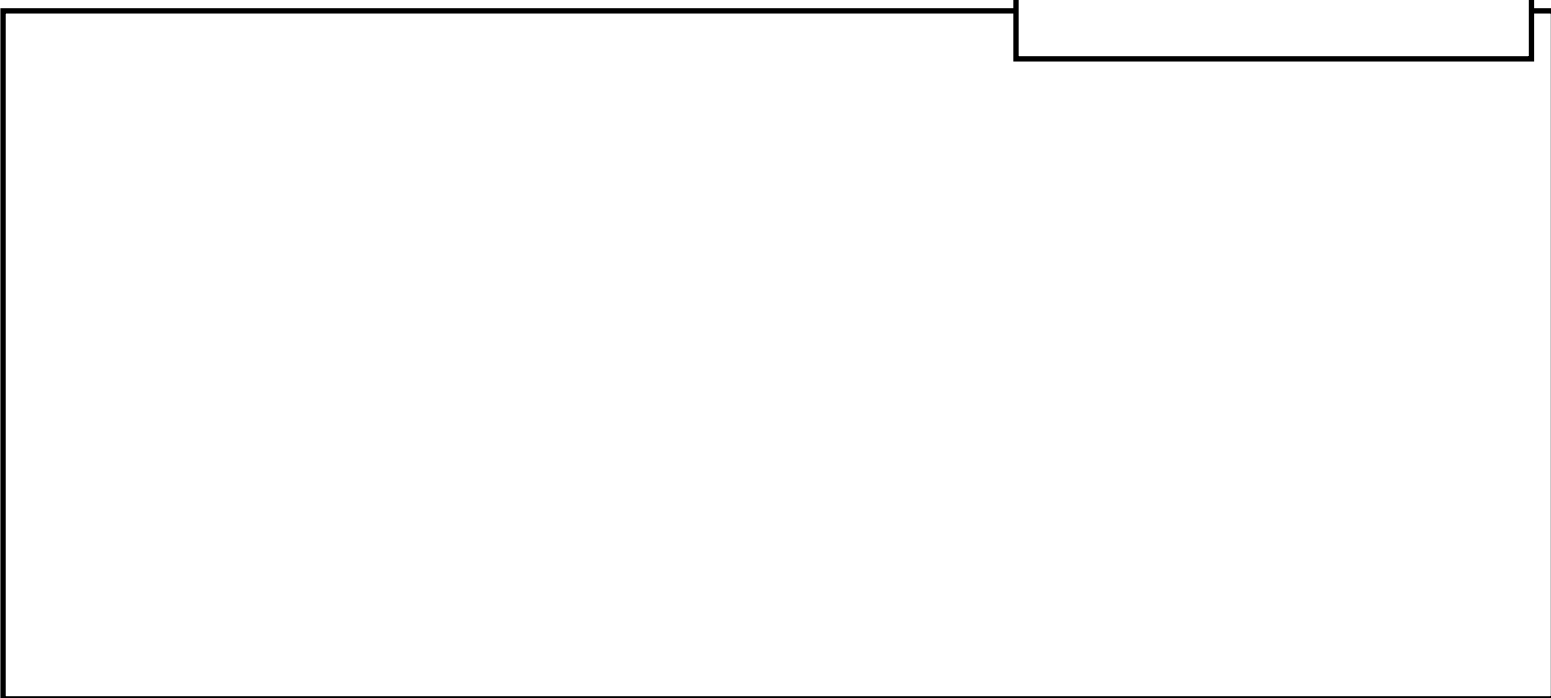
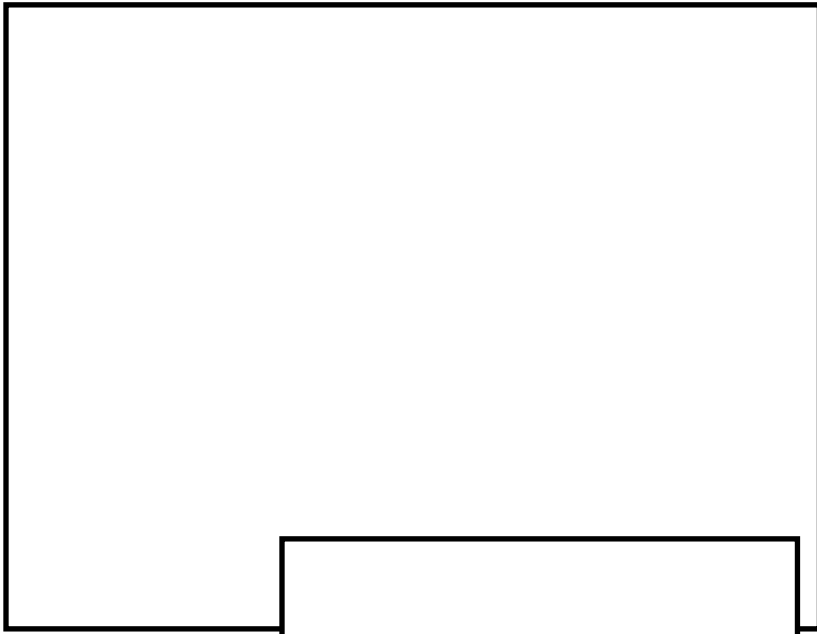
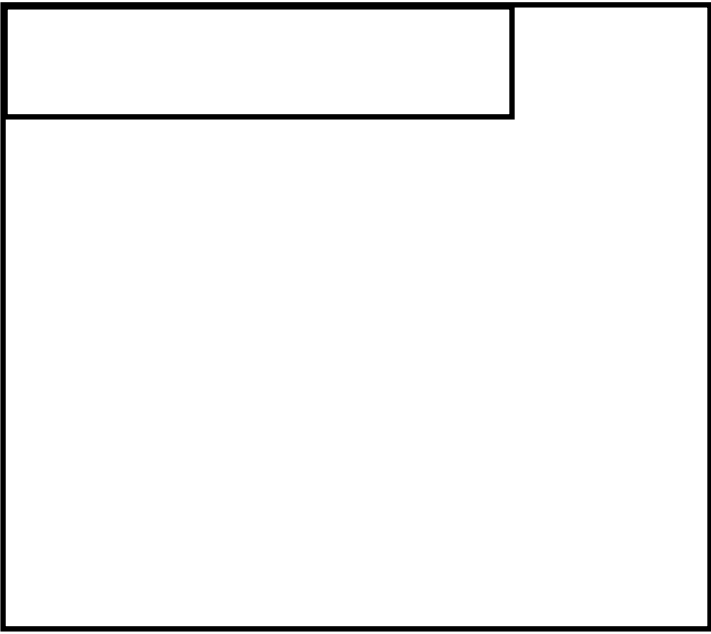
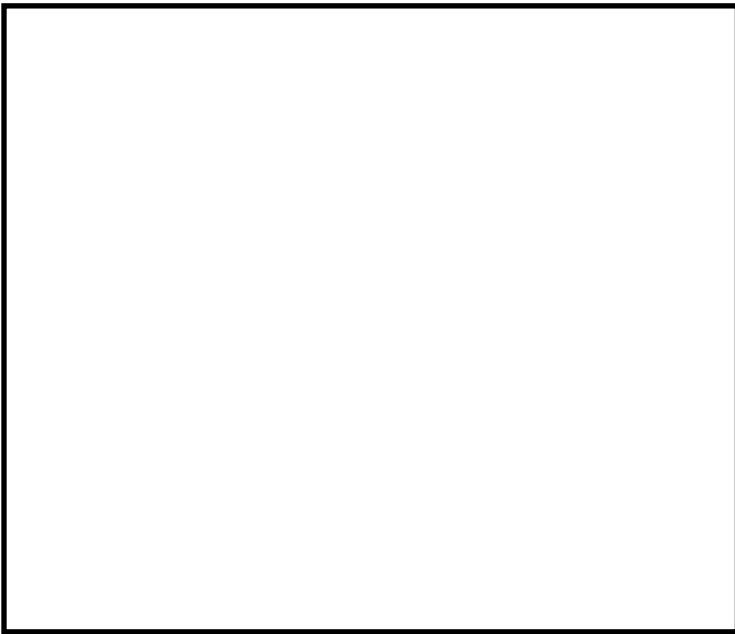
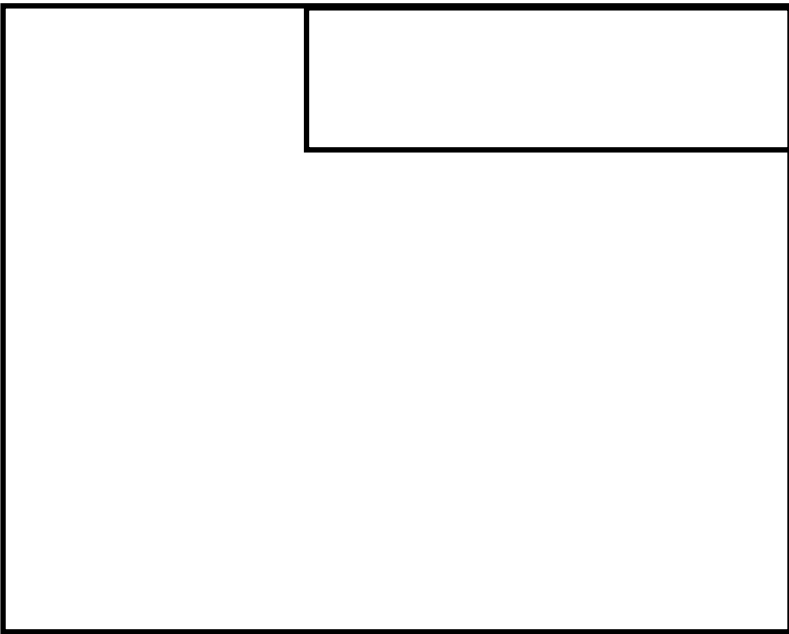


# Speaking English











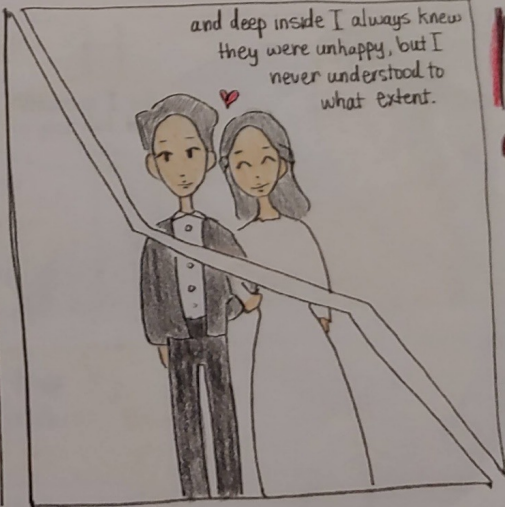
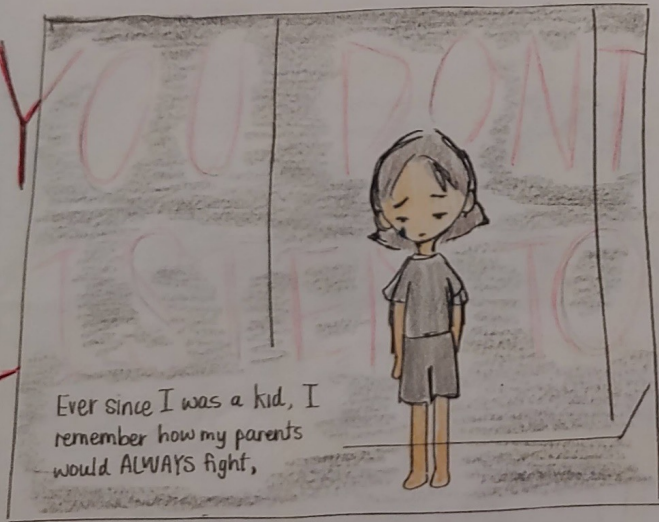
GRAPHIC NOVEL  
EXAMPLES!



SHATTER



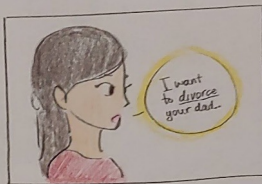
Dream vs. Reality  
Graphic Novel by Minh-Anh Cao ^^



Earlier this summer, my parents got into a HUGE fight.

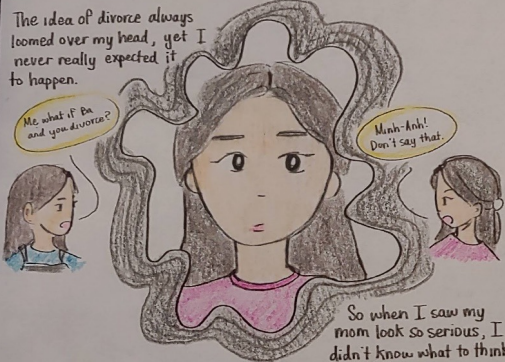


It was during a family trip, and after it, my mom wanted something younger me would deem a NIGHTMARE:

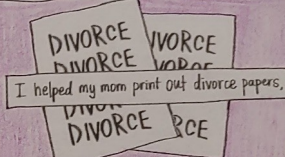


The idea of divorce always loomed over my head, yet I never really expected it to happen.

Me: what if Pa and you divorce?



So when I saw my mom look so serious, I didn't know what to think.



I helped my mom print out divorce papers,

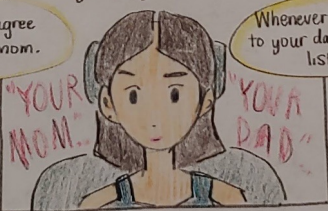
but the divorce never happened.

My dad refused to get a divorce, and instead, I learned three things about my parents:



I never agree with your mom.

1. I don't think they'll ever get along.



Whenever I talk to your dad, he doesn't listen.



2. They are unhappy.



3. & Despite disagreements, they both think I'm old enough to know about the truth.

They are sacrificing their happiness for my sisters and I.



While I know I should be grateful, sometimes I think things could be better if circumstances were...

different.

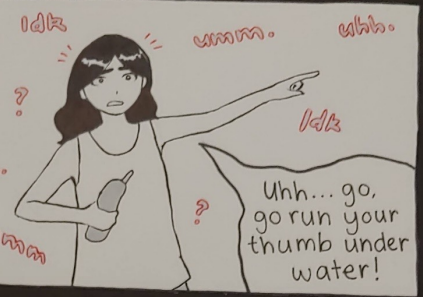
End.



THUMB



My mind was blank.



Hello?  
Mum?  
Nishad cut his thumb.  
I don't know what to do.

What! We're coming, okay?  
We're only 15 minutes away...

... How did it happen...

We called thump...

Okay.

There was a lot of blood. SO, to make up for my confusion...



I cleaned it all up.

JING DONG



Your mum called us to stay with you two.

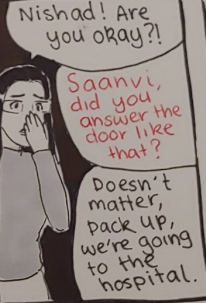
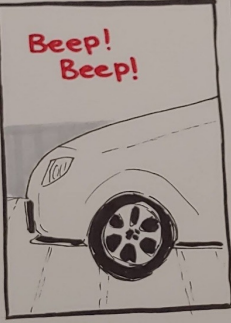
Oh my god!  
That's really bad!



Run and get me a cloth to put on his thumb.



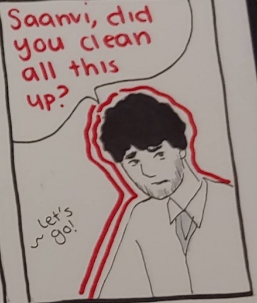
Beep!  
Beep!



Nishad! Are you okay?!

Saanvi, did you answer the door like that?

Doesn't matter, pack up, we're going to the hospital.



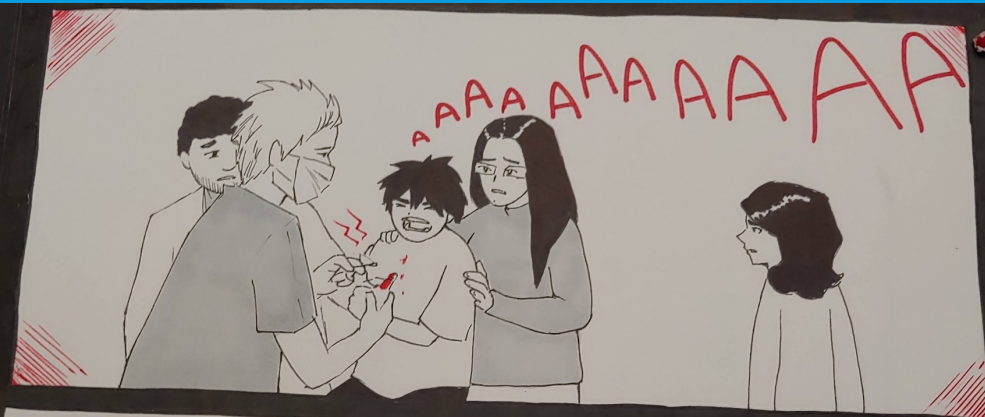
Saanvi, did you clean all this up?

Let's go!

I saw a lot of blood, Saanvi, you know you're supposed to **STOP** the bleeding.



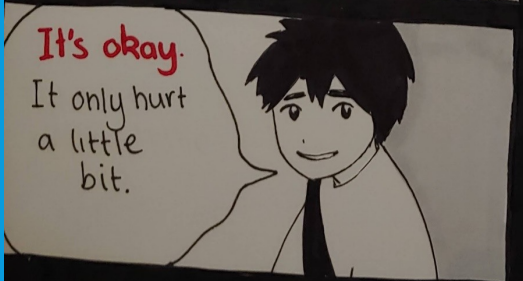
Nishad said you told him to run it under water. Next time, please remember to put pressure on it!



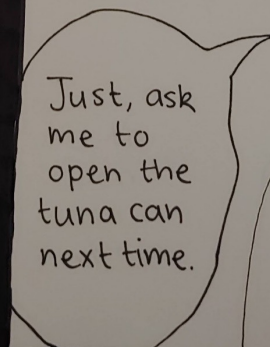
Later...



Hey Nish, I'm sorry I made things worse ...



It's okay. It only hurt a little bit.



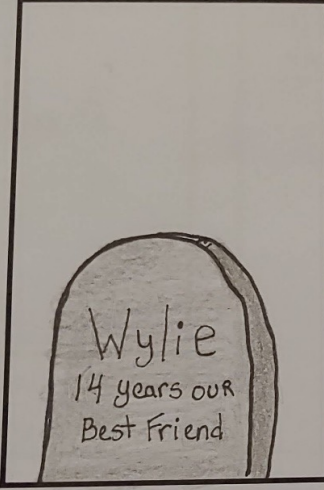
Just, ask me to open the tuna can next time.



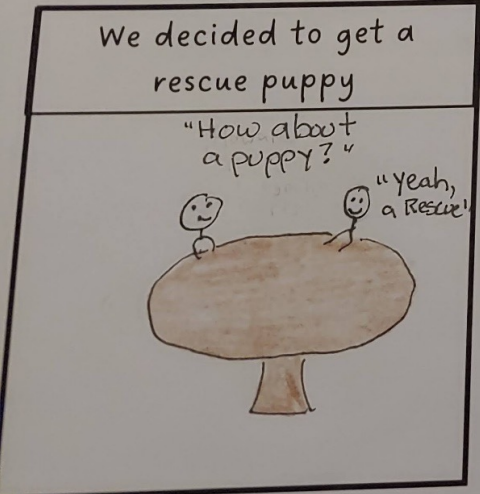
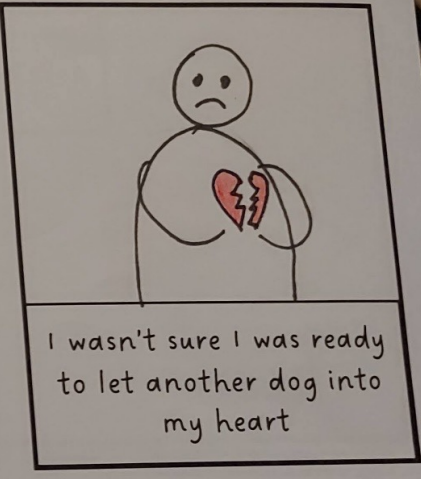
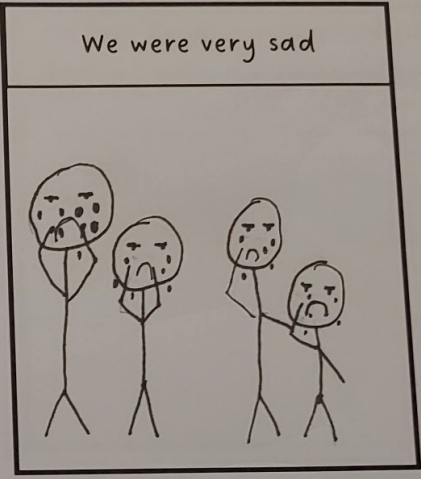
what I meant was... I'll take better care of you.

My Life with  
Sal

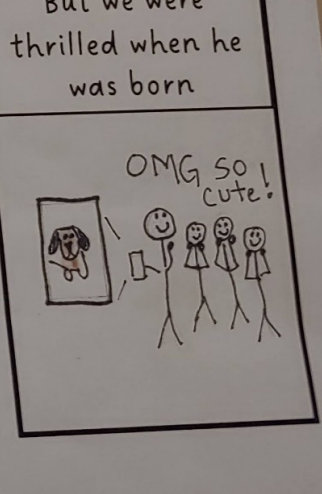
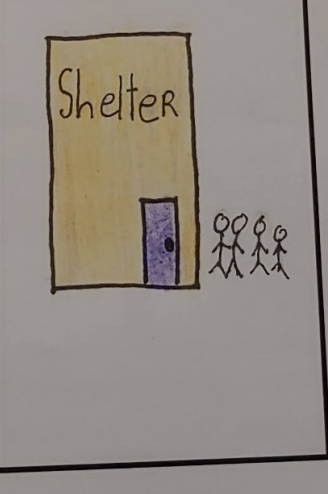
By Jack  
Giampaoli

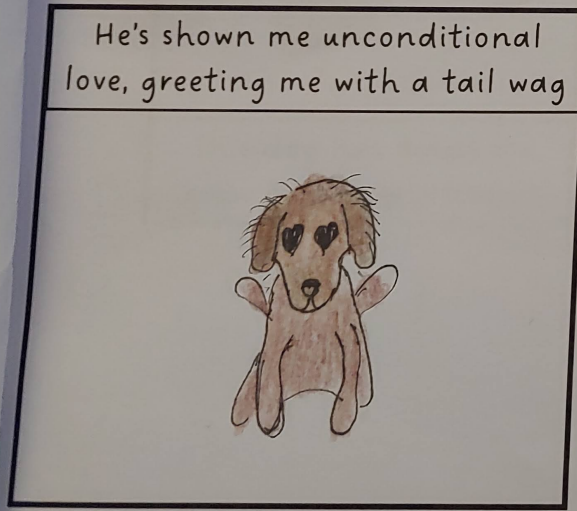
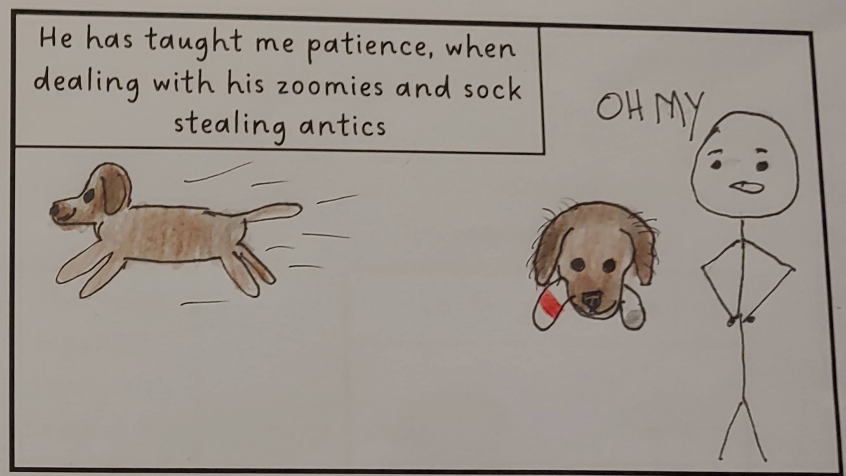
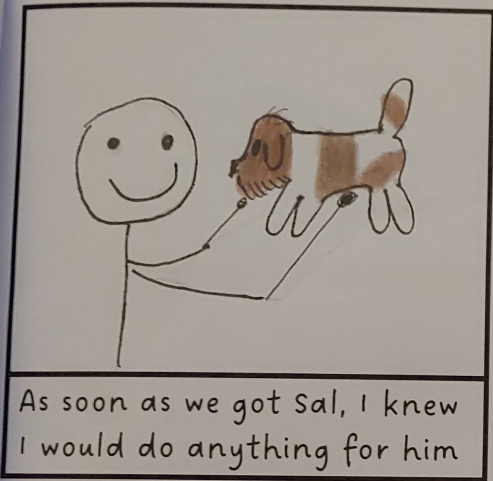


After our previous  
dog passed, we  
weren't sure we  
wanted another  
dog



We interviewed at  
a shelter, but we  
weren't picked, so  
we went with a  
breeder







This dog has made me  
grow in numerous ways



The most  
important  
thing he's  
taught me  
is to find  
the  
everyday  
joy



So, thank you Sal



***MY STORY -  
A GRAPHIC NOVEL***



# ***INSTRUCTIONS:***

- You will be creating your own 2 – 4 page graphic novel spread.
- Choose a event/moment that was significant in your life. Now retell this story through a mini graphic novel.
- Don't panic if you feel like you are not an artist or comic book enthusiast. There are multiple programs you can use and the most important part is telling your story.

## Requirements:

- Must have a title (can be it's own panel or at the top with your name)
- At least a two page spread. At most four.
- Must reveal something important about you/your life story so far
- It does not need to be funny. It also does not need to be super serious. (The content is up to you)
- Must be colored in (whether physically drawn or printed) yes black and white are ok as a stylistic choice, but NO Pencil!

***BEFORE YOU  
BEGIN...***



## Q. What is a "graphic novel"?

A. Graphic novels have a few defining characteristics. But first and most importantly, they are long comic books. (I'll get back to the rest.)

## Q. What is a "comic book"?

A. You may think you know the answer to this one, but stick with me a few minutes: A comic book is a magazine or bound book that contains "comics" (also known as "comix."). Comics is a medium for expressing information and/or artistic ideas that is defined by



... and that's it. However, comics also often feature such things as

"word balloons..."

... and sometimes, "thought balloons."

It's also common to have the sequential images delineated by "panels," which are surrounded by lines called "panel borders."

These techniques aren't necessary to make comics, but they are quite common. There are other common, familiar, but even more optional elements of many comics, such as certain kinds of characters, like funny animals or licensed characters. But I'll get to that in a minute.

Here's how to read a comic:

1. Just as in our written language, you read the elements of a comic starting with...

2. ... the upper-left corner of a page, and then you read across to the right...

3. ... before proceeding down to the next row...

4. ... and then the next.

comics are a nested system.

when you finish reading...

... everything within one panel...

... you apply the same left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading order...

... to the panels themselves!

"hee hee!"

You even use the same rule for actions within a panel.

BOO!

AAAAUGH!

HERE ARE  
SOME  
REMINDERS OF  
GRAPHIC  
NOVEL BASICS

# ANATOMY OF A COMIC:

- **Panel:** A panel in a comic book is one of the individual pieces of artwork that make up a single page in a comic book or graphic novel. When placed together on a single page, individual panels tell a story, or a portion of a story, in sequential order.
- **Caption:** Captions are used in comics and graphic novels to narrate the story or to share characters' thoughts. Often, captions are presented in box or consistent, separate shape that distinguishes them from the rest of the panel. Captions are not speech balloons or bubbles.
- **Onomatopoeia:** Sound effects. Sometimes represented in unique text styles
- **Speech Bubble:** Speech bubbles are a graphic convention used most commonly in comics and graphic novels to represent speech of a specific character.
- **Emanata:** Lines to indicate shock/surprise
- **Gutter:** The space between panels on a page of comics. Gutters account for time, space, and rhythm of moments in sequential art/comics. Readers of comics make closure of these moments suggested through the "pause" of each gutter.
- **Closure:** Connections readers makes to fill in information between panels or other content. Such connections are based on reader experience and imagination.
- **Splash:** A full-page image.
- **Spread:** A single image that continues across more than one page.
- **Page:** The entire single page of a comic or graphic novel.

## ***SOME RESOURCES FOR YOU:***

***[HTTPS://WWW.CANVA.COM/CREATE/COMIC-STRIPS/](https://www.canva.com/create/comic-strips/)***

***[HTTPS://WWW.PIXTON.COM/](https://www.pixton.com/)***

***[HTTPS://WWW.STORYBOARDTHAT.COM/STORYBOARD-CREATOR](https://www.storyboardthat.com/storyboard-creator)***

***[HTTPS://MAKEBELIEFSCOMIX.COM/](https://makebeliefscomix.com/)***


***[HTTPS://PICKLEBUMS.COM/FREE-PRINTABLE-COMIC-BOOK-TEMPLATES/](https://picklebums.com/free-printable-comic-book-templates/)***

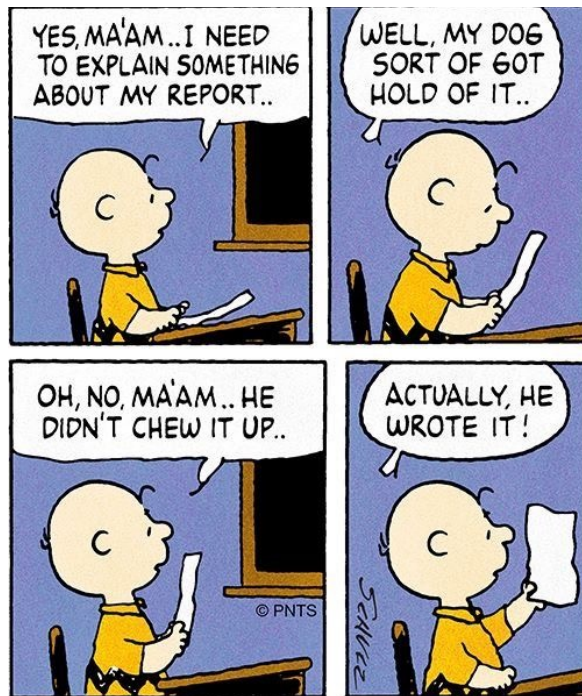
***[HTTPS://REALLYGOODDESIGNS.COM/COMIC-STRIP-TEMPLATES/](https://reallygooddesigns.com/comic-strip-templates/)***

***[HTTPS://WWW.PRINTABLEPAPER.NET/CATEGORY/COMICS](https://www.printablepaper.net/category/comics)***



# RUBRIC:

Category	Basic (1-5)	Developing (6-7)	Excellent (8-10)
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Total:			/60



**ANY**  
**QUESTIONS?**





Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## How to Analyze a Comic

---

*Instructions:* Read the comic you have been assigned ~~for a third time~~. On this read, respond to the prompts below to capture information that helps you analyze the text and visuals in the comic.

Comic Strip Title : \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. Analyze Illustrations

**Find two illustrations that show an individual character's response to an event or situation (examples: a facial expression, a body position, etc.). Either cut out the panels with these illustrations and paste them below, or jot notes directly onto the panels in the comic strip.**

What do these illustrations show about the character's emotions and experience at this moment?  
Zoom in to note as many visual details as you can.

### 2. Analyze Words

**Find two thought bubbles, word balloons, or pieces of first-person narration that show a character's inner thoughts and emotions. Either write key phrases from the text in the space below, or jot notes directly onto the panels in the comic strip.**

What do these words tell you about the character's emotions and thoughts at this moment?

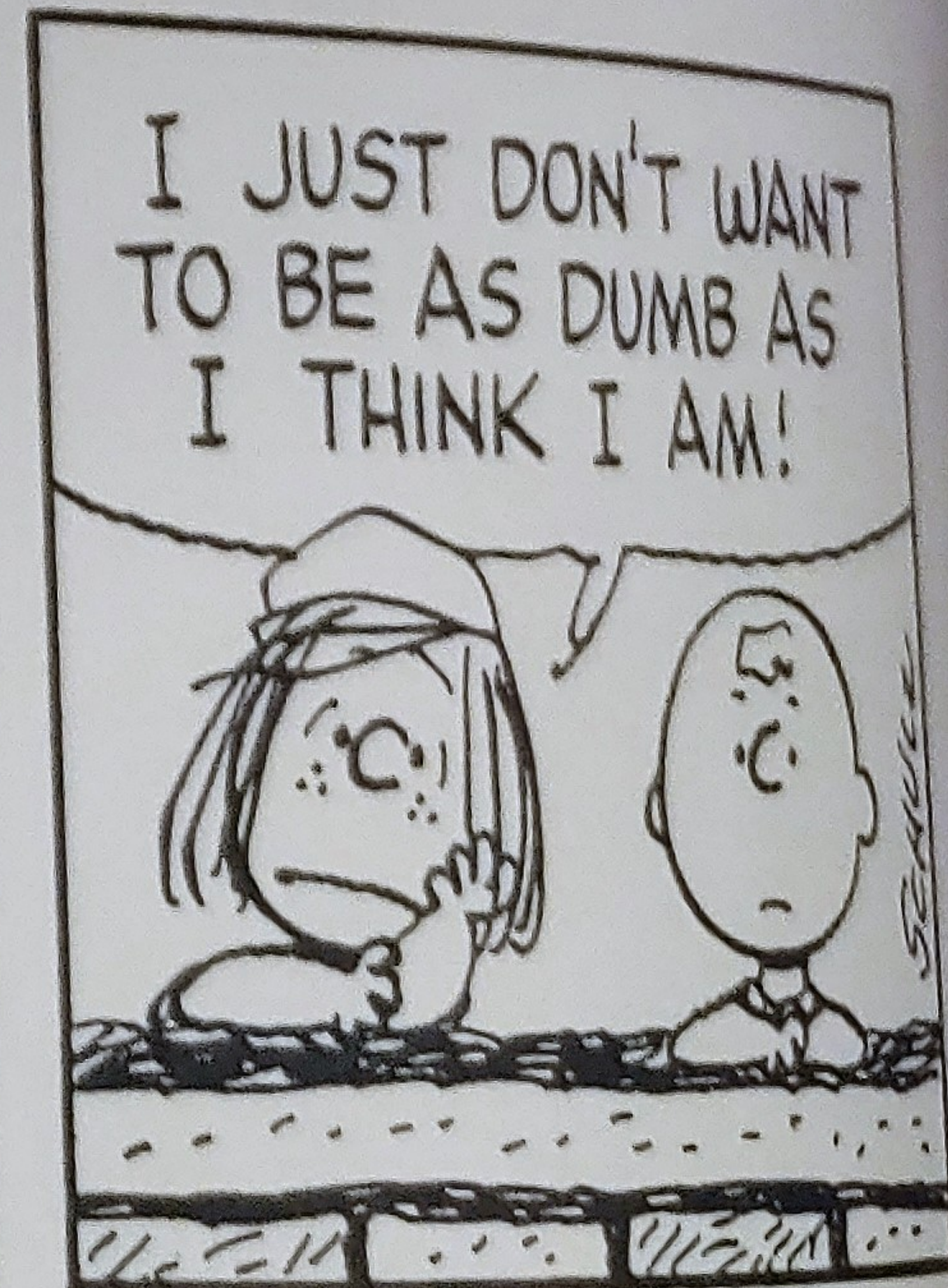
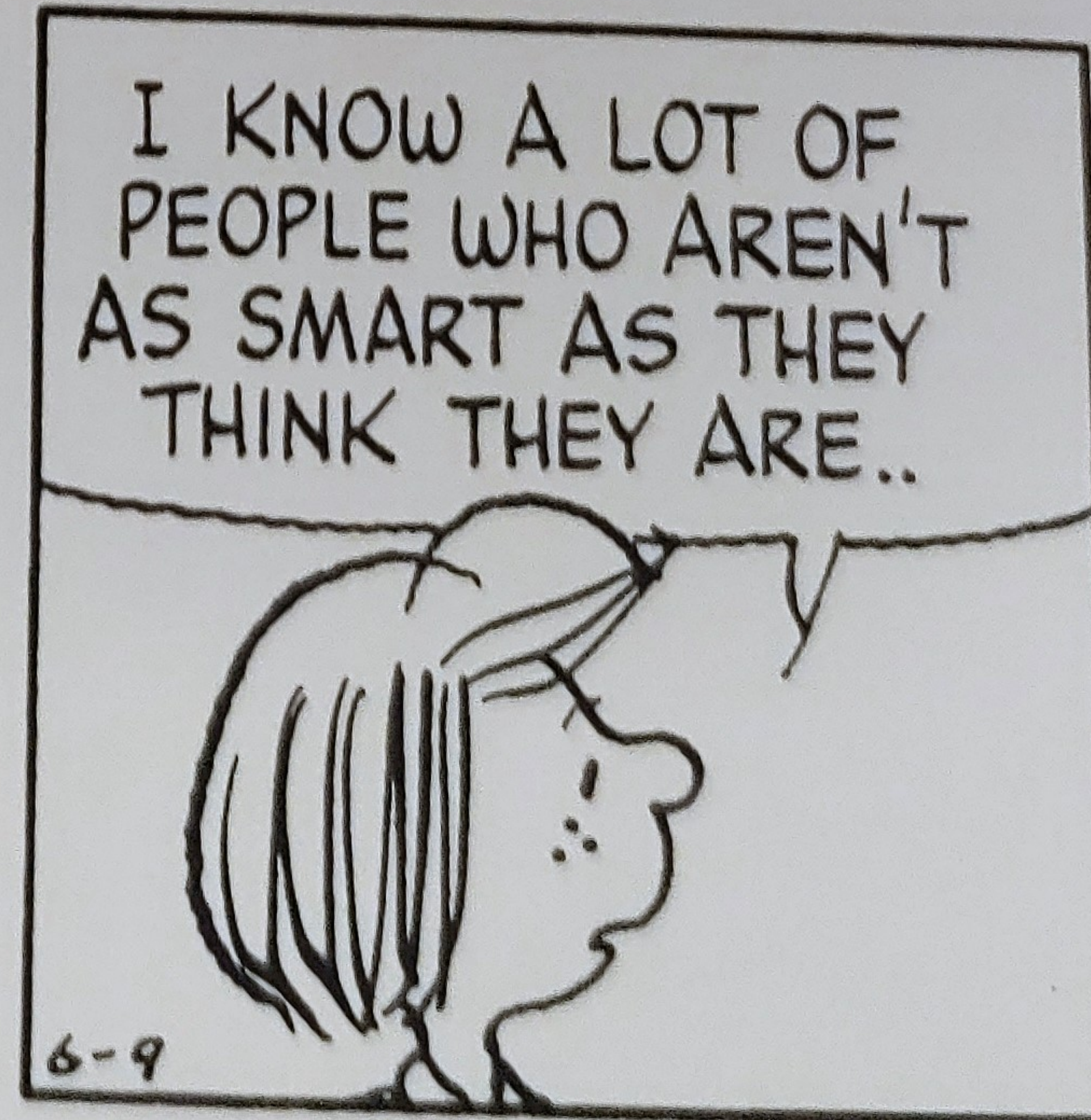
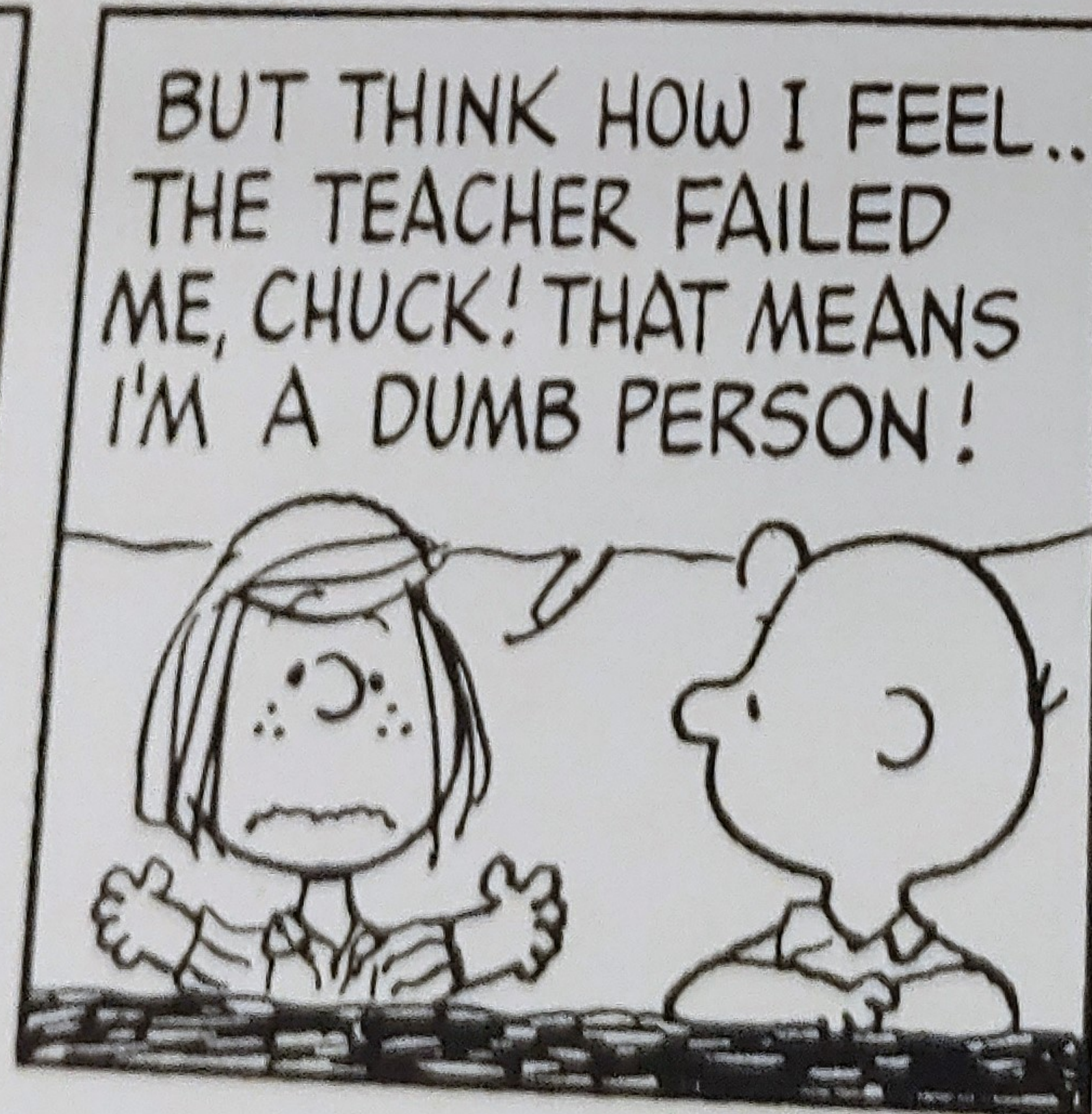
### 3. Analyze Tone

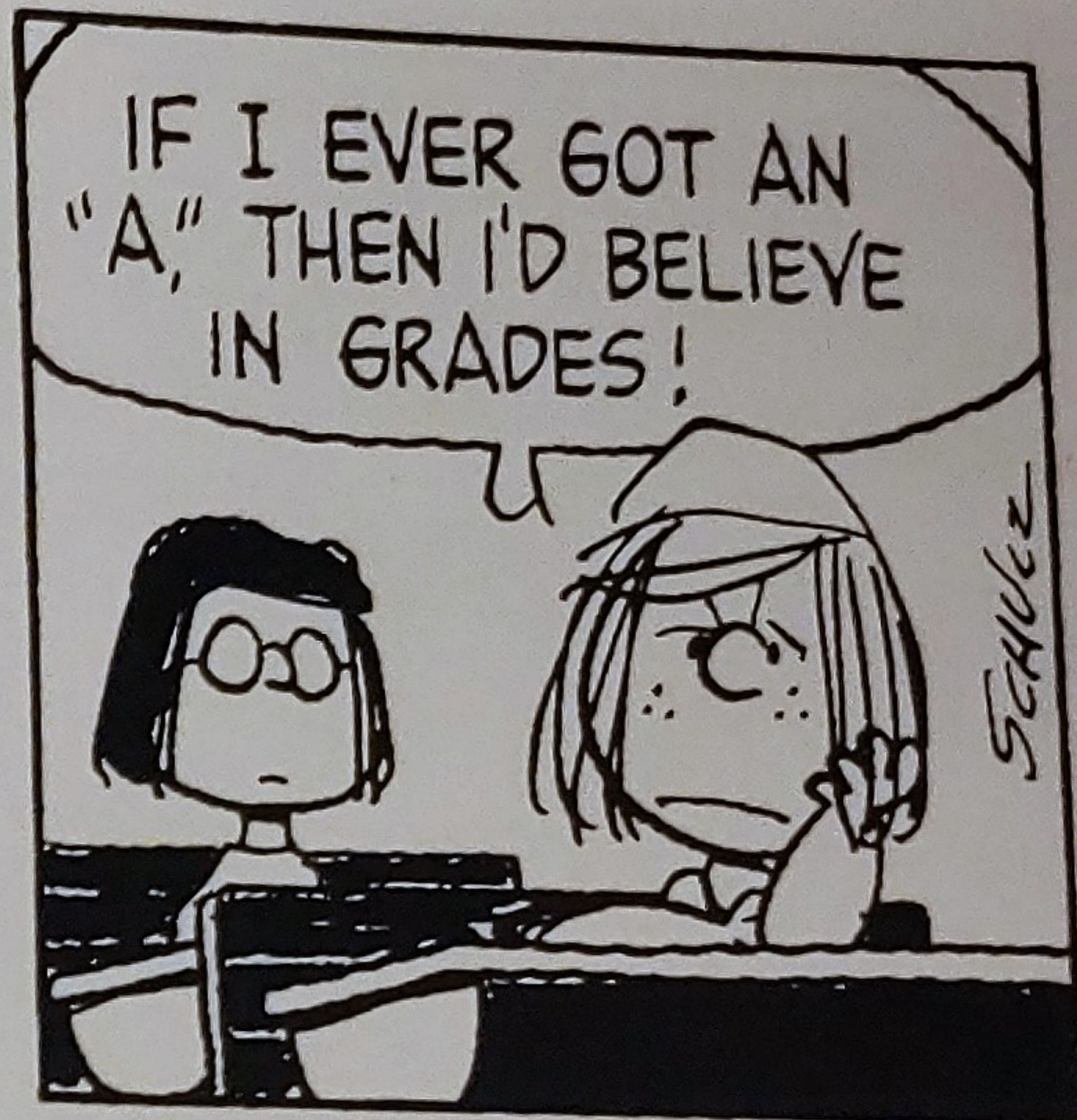
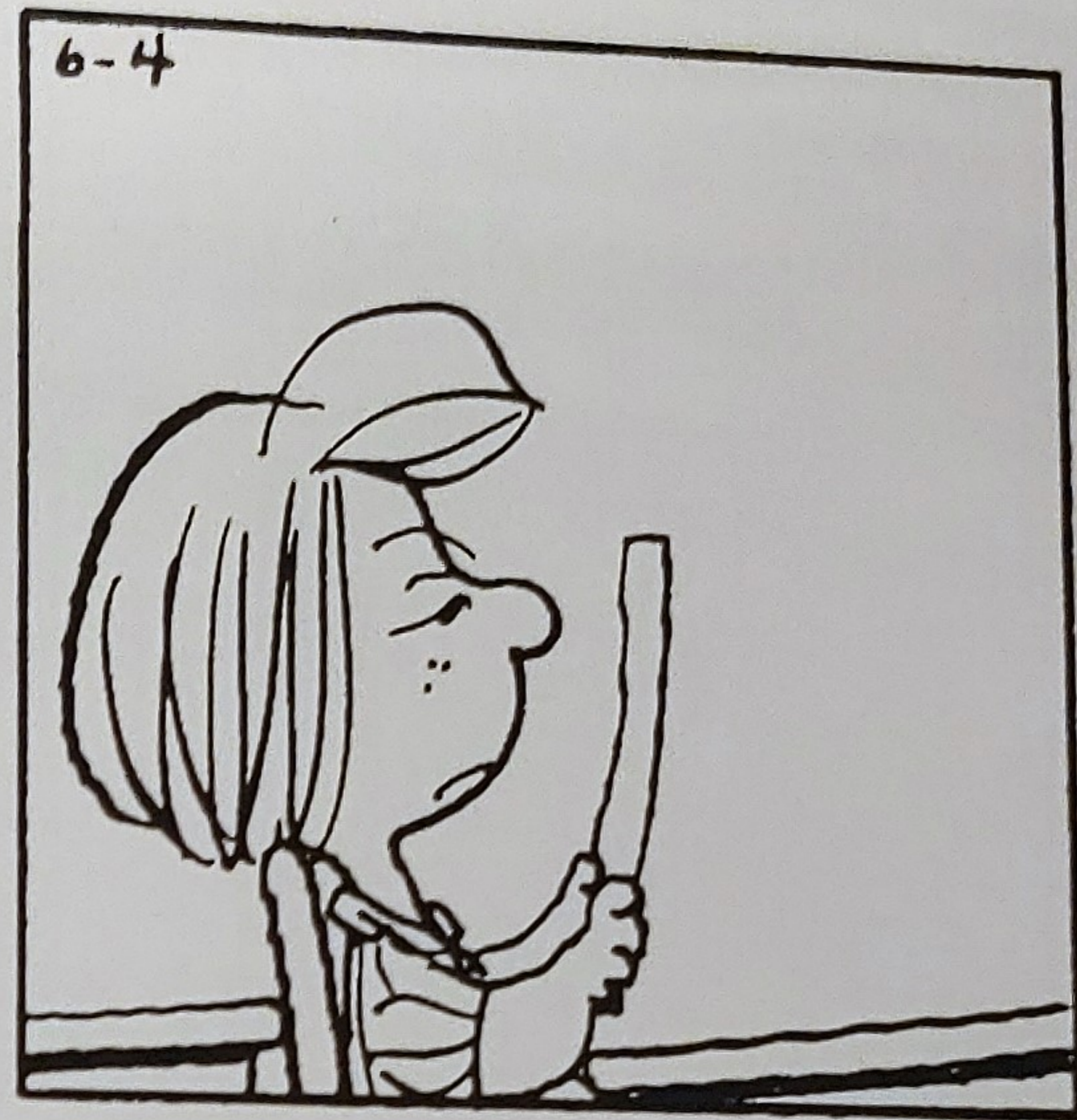
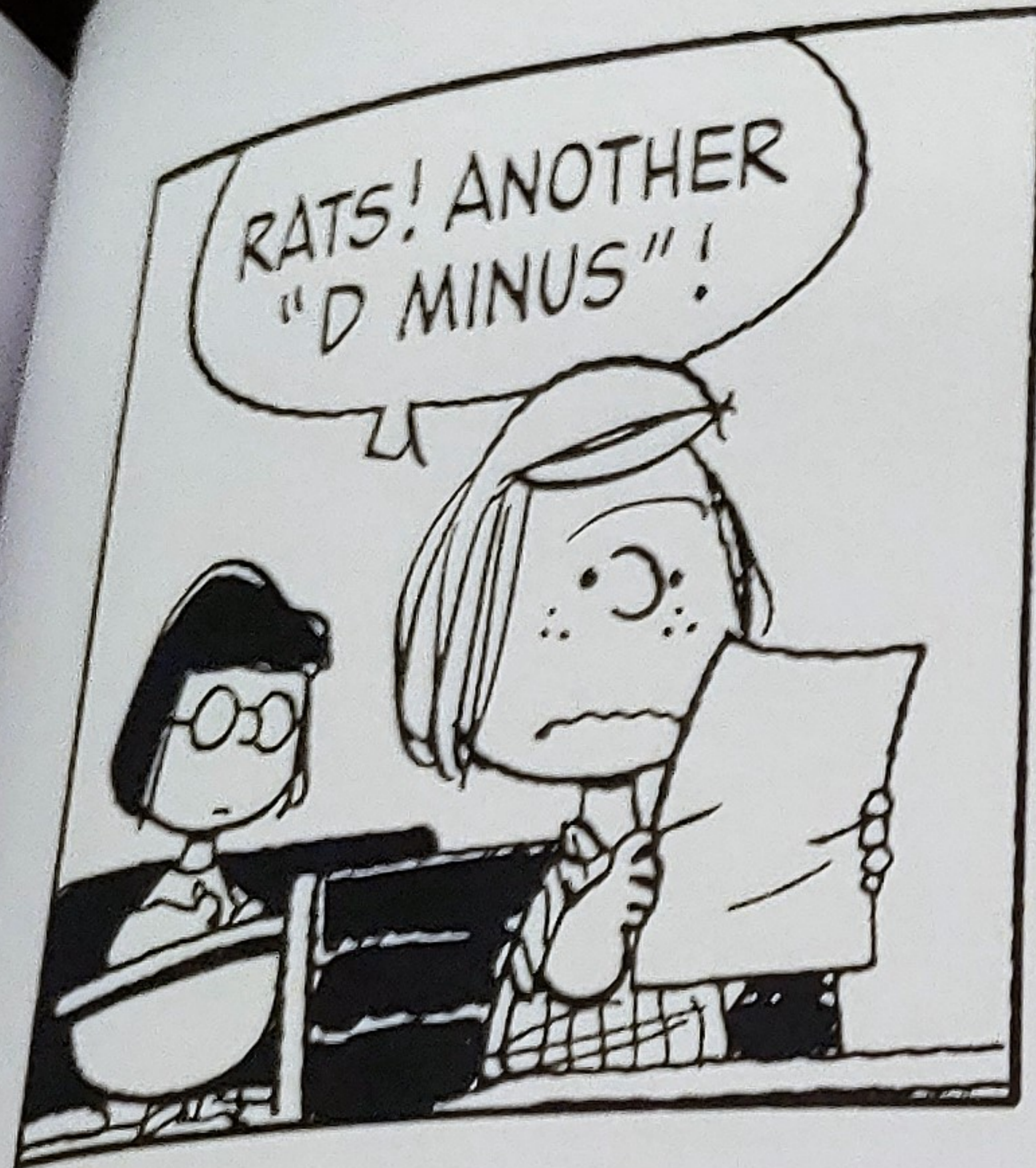
- a. **Identify the tone of the comic as a whole or of a certain part of the comic. Examples of words that describe tone include:** *hopeful, joyful, devastating, terrifying, uncertain, etc.*

The tone of this comic is \_\_\_\_\_.

- b. **Find elements of the comic that help create the tone you identified. Some elements to look for include:** *illustrations, shading, words, size and style of lettering, and lines that show movement or sound. Either cut out the panels with these elements and paste them below, describe the elements in the space below, or jot notes directly onto the panels in the comic strip.*

How do these elements help create the tone you identified?





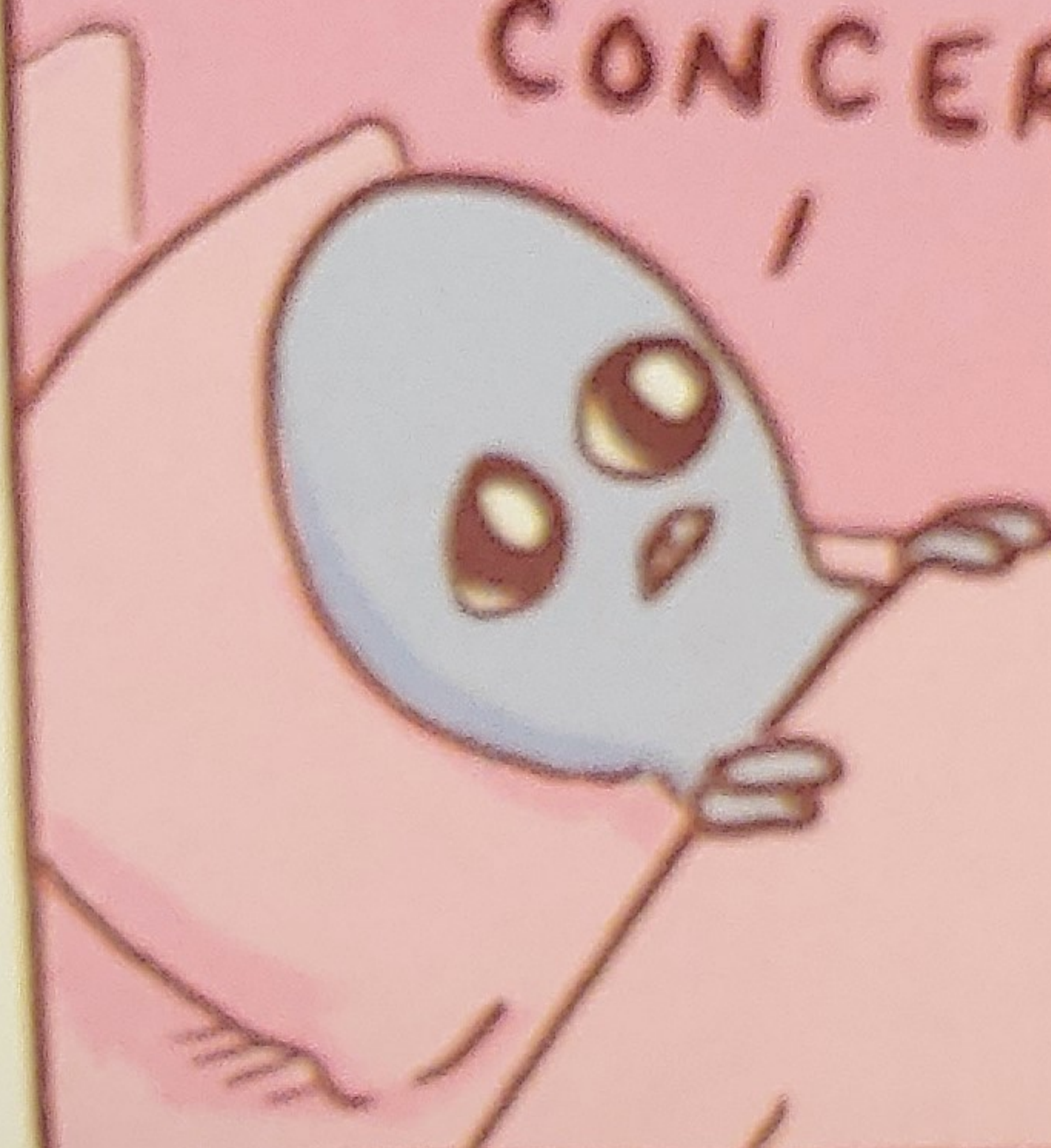
WHAT DO WE SAY?

I'M CONCERNED A HOSTILE CREATURE WILL SUDDENLY APPEAR



THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS CONCERN

... BUT



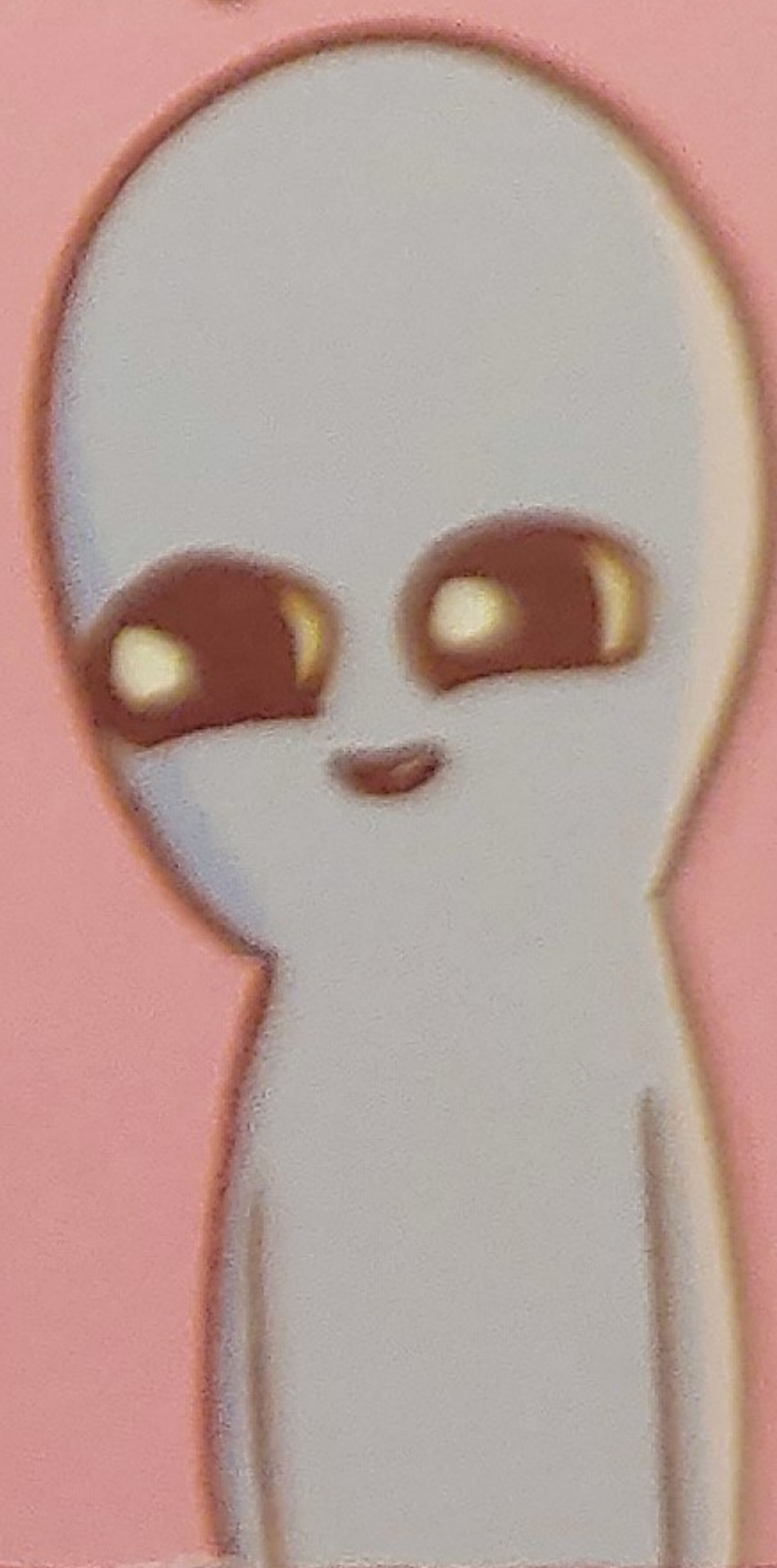
CORRECT

... IF I GATHER NEW EVIDENCE WE COULD REVISE OUR CONCLUSION

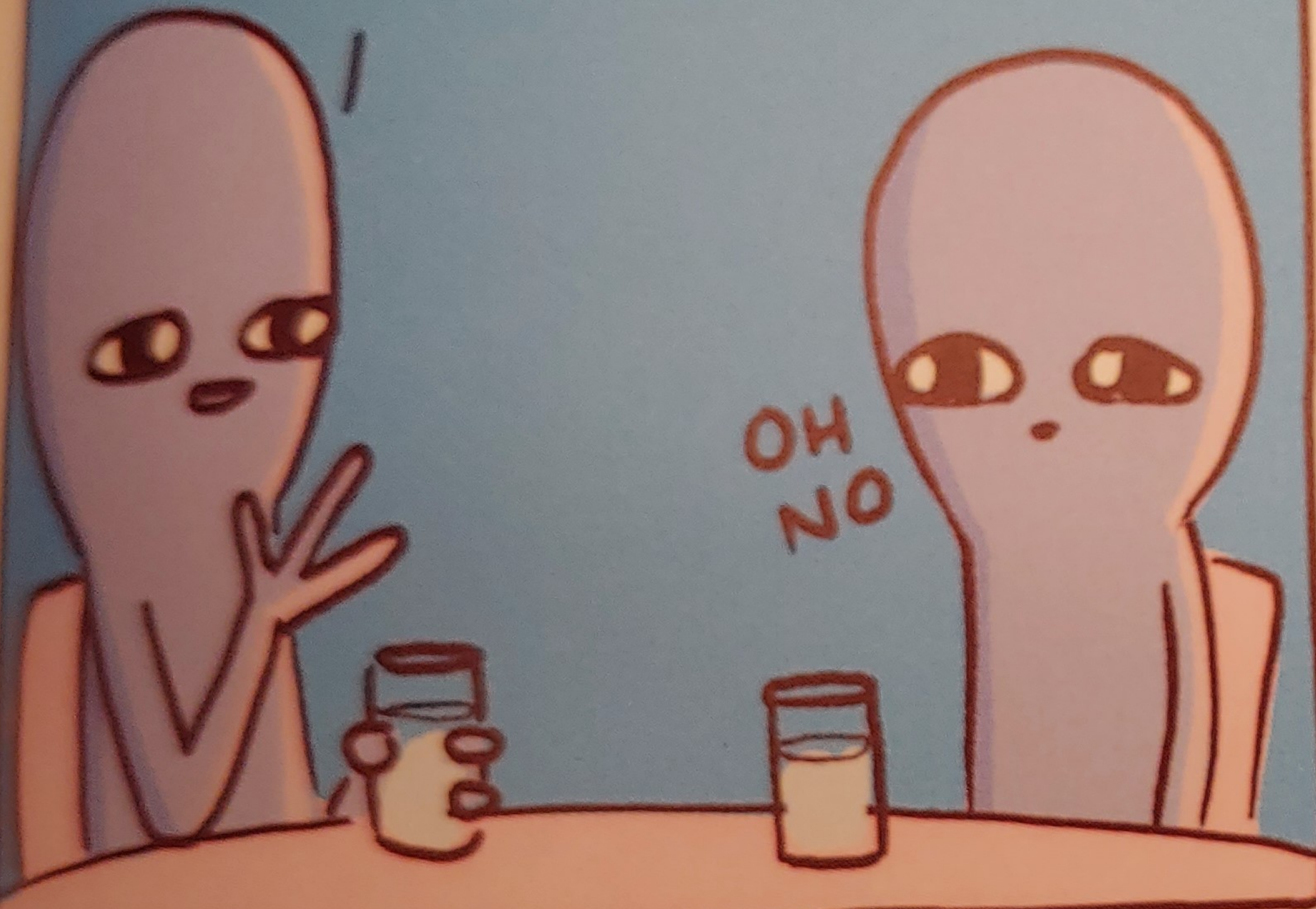


WILL YOU REINFORCE SHEET TENSION

OK

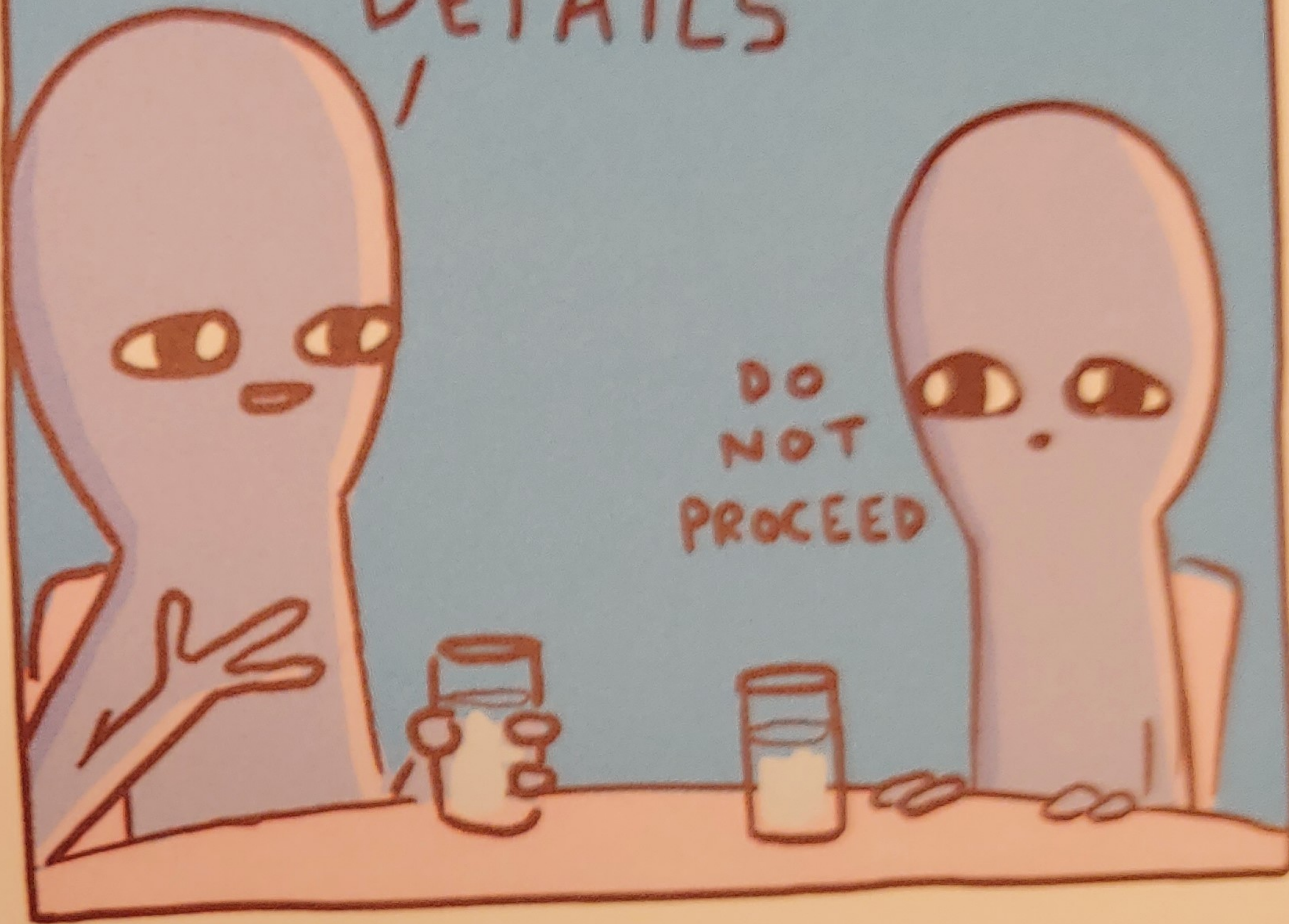


I WILL NOW  
RELAY AN  
ANECDOTE



OH  
NO

I WILL ATTEMPT  
TO RECALL ALL  
DETAILS



DO  
NOT  
PROCEED

EVERY DETAIL  
IS CRUCIAL



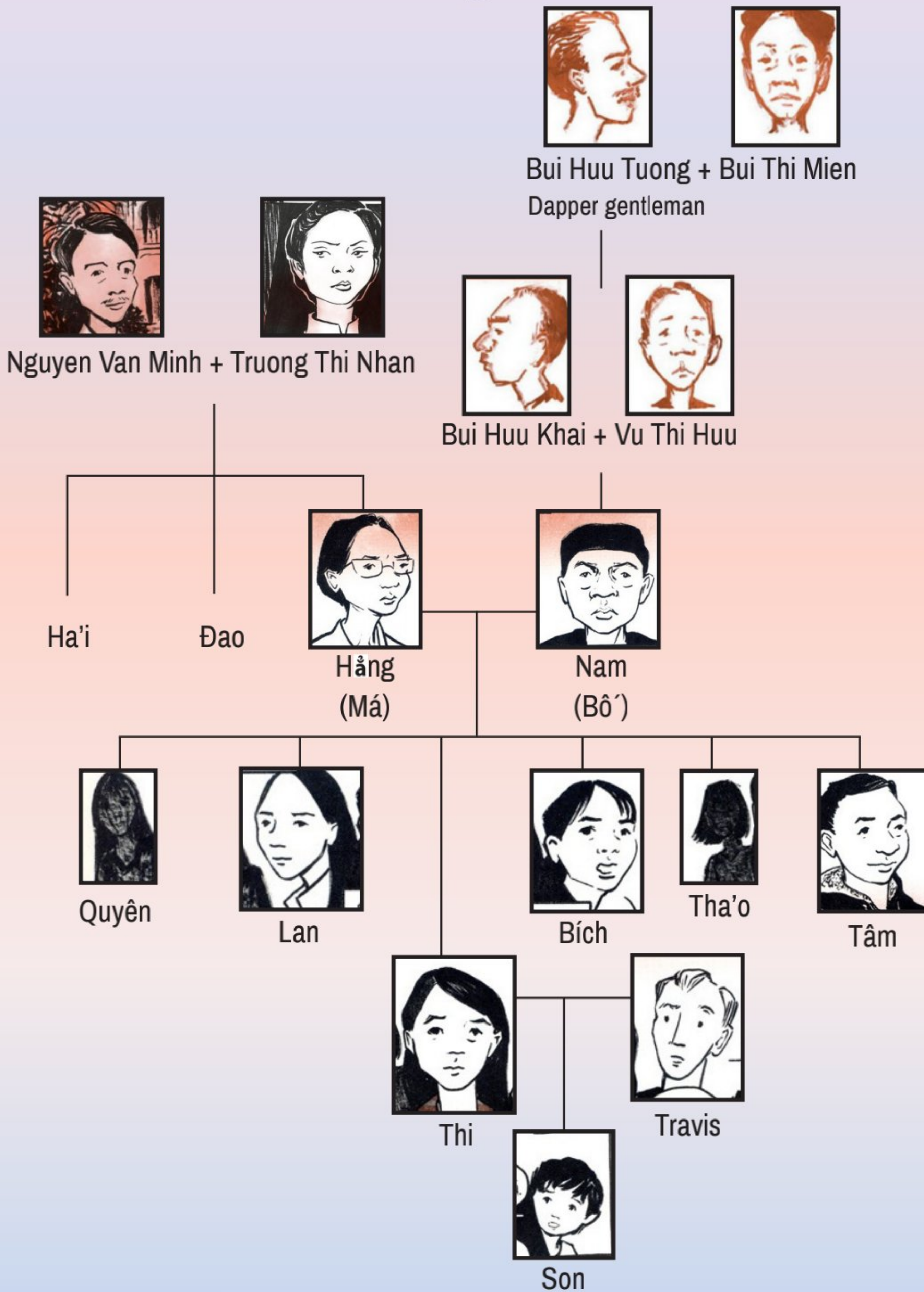
THIS  
IS NOT  
TRUE

THIS OCCURRED A FEW  
REVOLUTIONS AGO.  
IT MAY HAVE BEEN THREE  
REVOLUTIONS BUT MORE  
LIKELY IT WAS FOUR.



INCONSEQUENTIAL

# Family Tree



# Discussion Questions

## Family (questions from the [publisher](#))

1. "Family is now something I have created and not just something I was born into"(pg. 21). What does the author mean by this statement? What is the difference between "created" and "born into"? What is similar?
2. Bô' states, "You don't have a sister named Bích anymore. She is dead to us" (pg. 27). What events caused Bô' to say this about his daughter? If you were Thi or Tâm, how would you interpret this statement?
3. On page 29, the author draws portraits of her parents and siblings. In the second panel, Quỳên and Tha'ò are shadows. What was the artist's purpose for blurring these two siblings? Was it effective to use an image instead of words? Explain

## Additional Family Questions

4. When talking about becoming closer to her parents, Thi says, "...I recognize what it is NOT, and now I understand - proximity and closeness are not the same." What is she referring to? (pg. 31)
5. Thi illustrates and details her mother's Six (6) childbirths, even the children that did not survive. She does this in reverse chronology. Why is it important for Thi to set this painful part of her family's history in such detail? (pg. 42-55)



6. Thi makes it clear that her relationship with Ma changes when she becomes a mother. On page 310 she illustrates a discussion the two had when her newborn was kept in the hospital. How does their relationship change in this section? Do any statements showcase her newfound understanding of “parental sacrifice”

## Culture & Identity (questions from the [publisher](#))

1. “And imagine each block, each day turned us a little more American” (pg. 65). “I learned about America mostly through books and TV, and from what my sisters learned in school” (pg. 67). If you were going to mentor a new classmate from another country, how would you share and explain what it means to be “a little more American” to your new classmate? What books, television shows, or other media would you use to demonstrate your ideas? What elements in your everyday environment shape your national or cultural identity?

2. Examine the panels where someone spits on Bô´ on page 67. What is meant by “there were reasons to not want to be anything other?” How would you have reacted if you were Bô´? How would you react if you saw someone spit on another person? What might motivate one person to react to another in that way?

Can you think of similar hateful actions and tensions you’ve seen or read about throughout history or on the news?

3. “Don’t be such a REFUGEE!” (pg. 285). What is meant by this comment? When you hear the word “refugee,” what do you think of? How do perceptions of refugees affect their experience?

## Additional Identity Questions


4. “...In which my parents placed the essential pieces of our identity” This line refers to a file folder with vital documents the family kept (pg. 297 and 298) for each member. What do you think of this as a survival coping strategy? How does this coping strategy compare or contrast to strategies in your own childhood?



## Conflict & History (questions from the [publisher](#))

1. Using examples from the book, how did class differences affect people's experience of war and their decisions about which side to take?

2. How did certain features of geographic location affect people's experience of war? Cite specific examples from the book.



3. Thi's family escapes to Việt Nam on a boat bound for Malaysia. They face many hardships—little food (pg. 235), tight sleeping arrangements (pg. 236), possible pirates (pg. 242), bad potable water (pg. 244), etc. If you were aboard a boat headed toward freedom, what five items would you want to bring on the boat to survive? What would you have to leave behind? Share your list of items with a partner, and then narrow your list to three items for the two of you. What similar stories of escape have you read about throughout history or on the news?

4. On page 267, Bui incorporates her family's real refugee camp identification photographs into the graphics. What was Bui's intention in doing so? Was it effective?



## THE BEST WE COULD DO - REVIEW



Answer the questions below and be prepared to share out.

- "Family is now something I have created and not just something I was born into" (21). **What does the author mean by this statement?** What is the difference between "created" and "born into"? What is similar?
- Bo states, "You don't have a sister named Bich anymore. She is dead to us" (27). What events caused Bo to say this about his daughter? **If you were Thi or Tam, how would you interpret this statement? How does this compare to An-Mei's experience with her mother "being a ghost"?**
- On page 29, the author draws portraits of her parents and siblings. In the second panel, Quyen and Tha'o are shadows. **What was the artist's purpose for blurring these two siblings? Was it effective to use an image instead of words? Explain.**



## THE BEST WE COULD DO - REVIEW

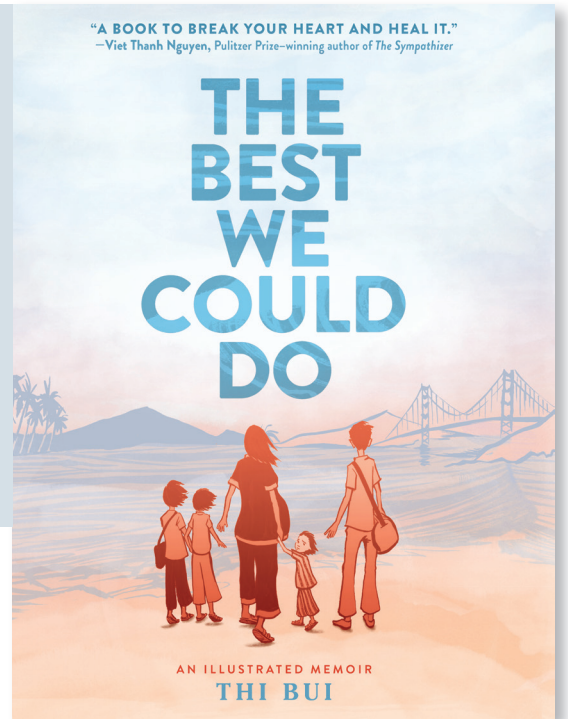
### Discussion Questions

- "-and imagine each block, each day turned us a little more American" (65). "I learned about America mostly through books an TV, and from what my sisters learned in school" (67). **If you were going to mentor a new classmate from another country, how would you share/explain what it means to be "a little more American"?** Is there a term for this? What books, television shows, or other media would you use to demonstrate your ideas? What elements in your everyday environment shape your national identity?
- Examine the panels where someone spits on Bo on page 67. **What is meant by "there were reasons to not want to be anything other"?** How would you react if you were Bo? Or an bystander? Can you think of similar hateful actions you have either witnessed or seen in the news?
- **The concept of shadows is seen in both novels. In JLC:** "Over the years, she told me the same story, except for the ending, which grew darker, casting long shadows into her life, and eventually into mine" (Tan 7). **How do the quotes below from TBWCD compare to those in JLC?** "And though my parents took us far away from the site of their grief... certain shadows stretched far, casting a gray stillness over our childhood..." (Bui 59) "each of Bo's stories has a different shape but the same ending" (100).



# TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE BEST WE COULD DO

BY THI BUI



## CURRICULAR RATIONALE

*The Best We Could Do* addresses identity, displacement and assimilation, race, decolonization, and political and historical movements and their impact on people, with advanced vocabulary, similes, idioms, and historical context and culture. While blending the written word with images, it promotes critical thinking through a coming-of-age memoir laden with issues of cultural and self-identity, and intergenerational trauma and endless sacrifice within a family. Using the graphic novel format, this book serves readers through verbal and visual storytelling that supports multimodal teaching. Primarily told as a memoir, *The Best We Could Do* also includes major historical events. This text is ideal in reading lists in both college and college-preparatory history or English classes. The intent of this brief guide is to provide flexible teaching options that educators can adapt to their needs and those of their students.

## About the Author

**Thi Bui** was born in Việt Nam and came to the United States as a child with her family. They were part of the “boat people” wave of Southeast Asian refugees. She studied art and legal studies and thought about becoming a civil rights lawyer, but became a public school teacher instead. Bui lives in Berkeley, California, with her son, her husband, and her mother. *The Best We Could Do* is her debut graphic novel.



## As you Read: A Pronunciation Guide

Some of the names and words that appear in this story may be unfamiliar to students. Please visit [www.abramsbooks.com/thebestwecoulddo](http://www.abramsbooks.com/thebestwecoulddo) for a list of approximately 100 names and terms in Vietnamese, French, and Malay, along with recordings of their appropriate pronunciations.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

### Good, Better, Best

What is the difference between these three words: good, better, and best? Why might the author have chosen the latter word as part of the title? What is the significance of the verb tense? Who do you think is implied by “we” in the title, *The Best We Could Do*?

### Family

How do you define a family? What are the bonds that make up your family? Who are the people you would go to for help if you were ever in trouble?

### Historical Events

The author references events in the world as she describes her family members’ lives: France surrendering to Nazi Germany (p. 102), U.S. dropping atomic bombs (p. 115), First Indochina War (p. 157), Geneva Accords (p. 167), Vietnam War (p. 200), Fall of Sài Gòn/Liberation Day (p. 211), and Vietnamese boat people exodus (p. 267) are a few examples. In groups or individually, research these topics and make a rough timeline; include a short description of each event.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### On Family

“Family is now something I have created and not just something I was born into” (p. 21). **What does the author mean by this statement? What is the difference between “created” and “born into”? What is similar?**

Bô’ states, “You don’t have a sister named Bích anymore. She is dead to us” (p. 27). **What events caused Bô’ to say this about his daughter? If you were Thi or Tâm, how would you interpret this statement?**

In the set of panels on page 28, the family avoided ever talking about the incident to the point that Má thought that Thi didn’t remember. Thi exclaims, “I was there! How do you think I could forget something like that? Almost thirty years later, I didn’t know I was still angry.” **Why would this memory still make Thi angry? How would you feel if you were Thi? What might cause a family to avoid discussing a difficult situation?**

On page 29, the author draws portraits of her parents and siblings. In the second panel, Quỳn and Tha’ are shadows. **What was the artist’s purpose for blurring these two siblings? Was it effective to use an image instead of words? Explain.**

The author desires to be closer to her parents as an adult and realizes “proximity and closeness are not the same” (p. 31). **What is your definition of proximity? Closeness? How do these two words differ? Which of the two words would you rather use to describe your relationship with your parents?**

The births of the six siblings are told in reverse chronological order (pp. 42, 46, 47, 48, 50, and 52). **What was the author’s purpose in using this storytelling element? Is it effective?**

“Home became the holding pen for the frustrations and the unexorcised demons that had nowhere to go in America’s finest city” (p. 68). “In my sleep, I dreamt of how terrible it would be to not find my way home” (p. 83). “And then I came home to a tiny hovel” (p. 186). “My parents built their bubble around us—our home in America” (p. 294). **What does home mean to Thi and her family members? Does her definition of home change as the story progresses? How? What does home mean to you? What is the difference between a home and a house?**

### On Culture and Identity

“And imagine each block, each day turned us a little more American” (pp. 65). “I learned about America mostly through books and TV, and from what my sisters learned in school” (p. 67). **If you were going to mentor a new classmate from another country, how would you share and explain what it means to be “a little more American” to your new classmate? What books, television shows, or other media would you use to demonstrate your ideas? What elements in your everyday environment shape your national or cultural identity?**

Examine the panels where someone spits on Bô’ on page 67. **What is meant by “there were reasons to not want to be anything other?” How would you have reacted if you were Bô’? How would you react if you saw someone spit on another person? What might motivate one person to react to another in that way? Can you think of similar hateful actions and tensions you’ve seen or read about throughout history or on the news?**

On page 187, Bô’ reminisces about the books, music, and movies that influenced him as a teenager. **Compare his influences with your own. How have your tastes shaped you as a person?**

“Don’t be such a REFUGEE!” (p. 285). **What is meant by this comment? When you hear the word “refugee,” what do you think of? How do perceptions of refugees affect their experience?**

**What is the difference between leaving a country voluntarily and being forced to leave your homeland? What are some positive and negative effects of a dislocation?**

When Thi and her siblings go to school (day care, elementary and middle schools), all three are treated differently (p. 287). Explore how Bích, Lan, and Thi could have been more supported by their peers and teachers.

**How did French colonialism influence Thi’s parents while they were growing up? Cite specific examples from the book that show that impact. How might a French colonist’s description of this influence differ from a Vietnamese nationalist’s?**



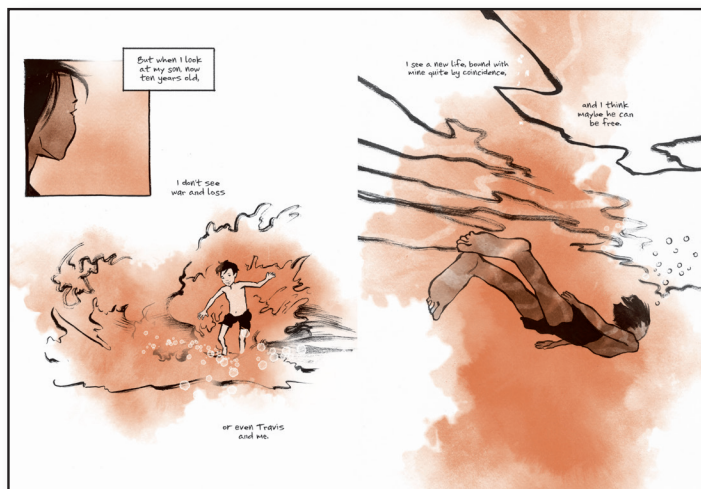
On **page 41**, Bui states that she was seeking “an origin story . . . that will set everything right.” **Does she find what she was looking for in the pages of this book? Why or why not?**

## On War and Conflict

Using specific examples from the book, how did class differences affect people’s experience of war and their decisions about which side to take?

How did certain features of geographic location affect people’s experience of war? Cite specific examples from the book.

As explored throughout the book, war can have immediate and lasting impacts on the people experiencing it. Find specific examples in the book that show the direct or implied impact of war on children and families.



**What factors contributed to Thi’s parents’ decision to leave Việt Nam after the war ended? What would you have done in their place?**

Describe the various authorities that the Buis encounter during their refugee experience. **Who are they and from where do they derive their power to make decisions about refugees? Consider our national discussion on refugees today. How is it similar to the Buis’ experience? How does it differ?**

## On History

**Page 66** refers to California’s Proposition 187, which voters passed in 1994 but was subsequently struck down in a federal court. **What were the arguments for and against this law? What similarities do you see to debates today on immigration?**

“I had never, before researching the background of my father’s stories, imagined that these horrible events were connected to my family history” (p. 116). **How would you feel if you were Thi? What historical events are tied to your own family history? How and when did you learn about them?**

**What factors contributed to Bô’s decision to leave North Việt Nam in 1954? Cite specific events and context clues from the book. What would you have done if you were in his position?**

Examine the four panels on **pages 128 and 129**, and the quote “I had no idea that the terror I felt was only the long shadow of his own” (p. 129). Compare Bô’s upbringing in Việt Nam to Thi’s upbringing in San Diego. **How are they similar? Different? What is meant by Thi’s quote? How is trauma passed down between generations?**

Thi’s family escapes to Việt Nam on a boat bound for Malaysia. They face many hardships—little food (p. 235), tight sleeping arrangements (p. 236), possible pirates (p. 242), bad potable water (p. 244), etc. **If you were aboard a boat headed toward freedom, what five items would you want to bring on the boat to survive? What would you have to leave behind?** Share your list of items with a partner, and then narrow your list to three items for the two of you. **What similar stories of escape have you read about throughout history or on the news?**

On **page 267**, Bui incorporates her family’s real refugee camp identification photographs into the graphics. **What was Bui’s intention in doing so? Was it effective?** Find another page where real photographs could enhance the storyline.

In **Chapter 6**, Bui suggests that she is making up for not having memories of her own by doing a lot of research. **What is the difference between personal knowledge and relying on secondary sources? What can be gained from interviewing primary sources? What could be tricky about interviewing primary sources?**

## ADDITIONAL EXERCISES AND RESOURCES

### Family History

“I began to record our family history . . . thinking that if I bridged the gap between the past and the present, I could fill the void between my parents and me” (p. 36). Explore your family history. Find out about your ancestry by interviewing family members. Ask your parents or other family members about their courtship stories. How did they meet? Where did previous generations come from or move to? What did they hope for? What challenges did they encounter in raising a new generation? List family members and important dates.

## Gender Roles

Consider the perspectives of the women in the stories of Thi's parents and grandparents. Retell a story from their point of view. Cite specific examples from the book to support your retelling.

## Graphic Novels

Have you read other graphic novels? How did those graphic novels compare to *The Best We Could Do* in how they told a story? Visually speaking, what elements appealed to you in this graphic memoir? Share a particular layout or panel that best demonstrated these features. How do you think the graphic novel format of this memoir affected its message and potency?

## Literary Scavenger Hunt

Throughout *The Best We Could Do*, Bui infuses her story with rich, figurative language and beautiful panels. Embark on a literary scavenger hunt to locate your favorite phrases or quotes. Create a shareable quote card image to be published on the social media site of your choice (remember to attribute appropriately).

## Finding and Using Related Sources

Compare and contrast the ways in which Vietnamese people are represented in different accounts, fiction and nonfiction, of the Việt Nam War. What factors could affect these differences?

Create a timeline of Việt Nam's transition from feudalism to colonialism to nationalism to full independence. Use online research to find dates. Select key moments from the book and plot them on your timeline. How does your relationship with the characters affect your understanding of the history?

Pages 205-209 discuss Nguyễn Ngọc Loan, the former chief of National Police in South Việt Nam, and the Pulitzer Prize–winning photograph of him, titled, “Saigon Execution.” Why is Thi confused about what her father thinks of him? Compare the accounts in this book with other descriptions of the photograph or the incident. How does one's perspective influence one's opinion about what the photograph represents?

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Below are the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards that can be met by extending *The Best We Could Do* with these questions, prompts, and activities.



### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3

Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.



### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, 11-12.2, 11-12.3

Key ideas and details: Citing textual evidence, determining a theme or central idea, describing how a plot unfolds, analyzing how particular elements of the story interact; analyzing how particular lines of dialogue or incidents of a text reveal aspects of a character or provoke a decision; and analyzing how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4, 9-10.5, 9-10.6 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4, 11-12.5, 11-12.6

Craft and structure: Determining the meaning of words and phrases including figurative and connotative meaning; analyzing how particular sentences, chapters, scenes, or stanzas fit into the overall structure of a text; explaining how a point of view is developed; analyzing how a text's structure or form contributes to its meaning; analyzing a particular point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9

Integration of knowledge and ideas: Comparing and contrasting texts; distinguishing among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text; analyzing how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works describing how the material is rendered new; analyzing how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific way.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.10

Range of reading and level of text complexity: Reading and comprehending literature, including stories, dramas, and poems; in the grades 6-8 and in the grades 9-10, text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range, with independence and proficiency.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3

Knowledge of language: Using knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening; applying knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4, 9-10.5, 9-10.6 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4, 11-12.5, 11-12.6

Vocabulary acquisition and use: Determining the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases; demonstrating understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings; and acquiring and using accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Comprehension and collaboration: Engaging effectively in a range of collaborative discussions building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4

Presentation of knowledge and ideas: Presenting claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes.

This guide was created by Gregory Lum, Library Director at Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon, and an adjunct instructor at Portland State University, along with author Thi Bui.

**Instructors:** Enjoyed using this guide, or have feedback for us? Please take our brief 5-minute survey to help us improve our guides: <http://bit.ly/ABRAMSTeachingGuides>

***MY STORY -  
A GRAPHIC NOVEL***



# ***INSTRUCTIONS:***

- You will be creating your own 2 – 4 page graphic novel spread.
- Choose a event/moment that was significant in your life. Now retell this story through a mini graphic novel.
- Don't panic if you feel like you are not an artist or comic book enthusiast. There are multiple programs you can use and the most important part is telling your story.

## Requirements:

- Must have a title (can be it's own panel or at the top with your name)
- At least a two page spread. At most four.
- Must reveal something important about you/your life story so far
- It does not need to be funny. It also does not need to be super serious. (The content is up to you)
- Must be colored in (whether physically drawn or printed) yes black and white are ok as a stylistic choice, but NO Pencil!

***BEFORE YOU  
BEGIN...***



## Q. What is a "graphic novel"?

A. Graphic novels have a few defining characteristics. But first and most importantly, they are long comic books. (I'll get back to the rest.)

## Q. What is a "comic book"?

A. You may think you know the answer to this one, but stick with me a few minutes: A comic book is a magazine or bound book that contains "comics" (also known as "comix."). Comics is a medium for expressing information and/or artistic ideas that is defined by



... and that's it. However, comics also often feature such things as

"word balloons..."

... and sometimes, "thought balloons."

It's also common to have the sequential images delineated by "panels," which are surrounded by lines called "panel borders."

These techniques aren't necessary to make comics, but they are quite common. There are other common, familiar, but even more optional elements of many comics, such as certain kinds of characters, like funny animals or licensed characters. But I'll get to that in a minute.

Here's how to read a comic:

1. Just as in our written language, you read the elements of a comic starting with...

2. ... the upper-left corner of a page, and then you read across to the right...

3. ... before proceeding down to the next row...

4. ... and then the next.

comics are a nested system.

when you finish reading...

... everything within one panel...

... you apply the same left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading order...

... to the panels themselves!

"hee hee!"

You even use the same rule for actions within a panel.

BOO!

AAAAUGH!

HERE ARE  
SOME  
REMINDERS OF  
GRAPHIC  
NOVEL BASICS

# ANATOMY OF A COMIC:

- **Panel:** A panel in a comic book is one of the individual pieces of artwork that make up a single page in a comic book or graphic novel. When placed together on a single page, individual panels tell a story, or a portion of a story, in sequential order.
- **Caption:** Captions are used in comics and graphic novels to narrate the story or to share characters' thoughts. Often, captions are presented in box or consistent, separate shape that distinguishes them from the rest of the panel. Captions are not speech balloons or bubbles.
- **Onomatopoeia:** Sound effects. Sometimes represented in unique text styles
- **Speech Bubble:** Speech bubbles are a graphic convention used most commonly in comics and graphic novels to represent speech of a specific character.
- **Emanata:** Lines to indicate shock/surprise
- **Gutter:** The space between panels on a page of comics. Gutters account for time, space, and rhythm of moments in sequential art/comics. Readers of comics make closure of these moments suggested through the "pause" of each gutter.
- **Closure:** Connections readers makes to fill in information between panels or other content. Such connections are based on reader experience and imagination.
- **Splash:** A full-page image.
- **Spread:** A single image that continues across more than one page.
- **Page:** The entire single page of a comic or graphic novel.

***SOME RESOURCES FOR YOU:***

***[HTTPS://WWW.CANVA.COM/CREATE/COMIC-STRIPS/](https://www.canva.com/create/comic-strips/)***

***[HTTPS://WWW.PIXTON.COM/](https://www.pixton.com/)***

***[HTTPS://WWW.STORYBOARDTHAT.COM/STORYBOARD-CREATOR](https://www.storyboardthat.com/storyboard-creator)***


***[HTTPS://MAKEBELIEFSCOMIX.COM/](https://makebeliefscomix.com/)***

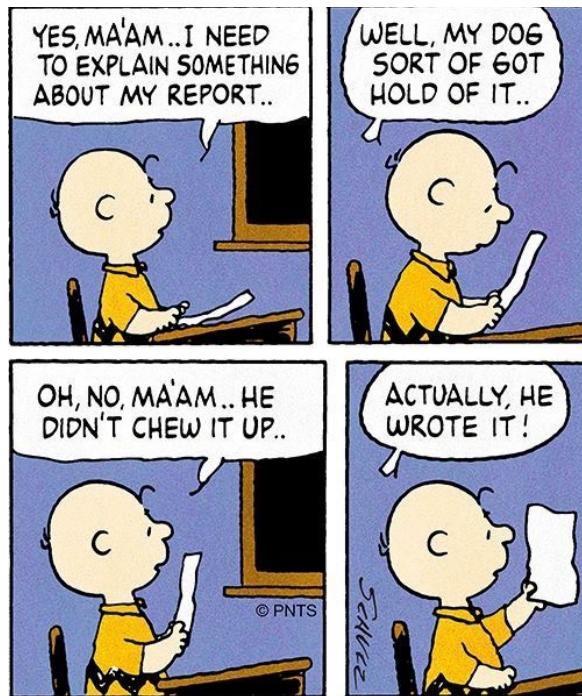
***[HTTPS://PICKLEBUMS.COM/FREE-PRINTABLE-COMIC-BOOK-TEMPLATES/](https://picklebums.com/free-printable-comic-book-templates/)***

***[HTTPS://REALLYGOODDESIGNS.COM/COMIC-STRIP-TEMPLATES/](https://reallygooddesigns.com/comic-strip-templates/)***

***[HTTPS://WWW.PRINTABLEPAPER.NET/CATEGORY/COMICS](https://www.printablepaper.net/category/comics)***

# RUBRIC:

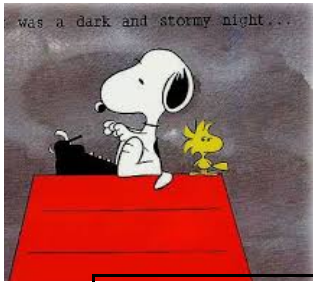
Category	Basic (1-5)	Developing (6-7)	Excellent (8-10)
Content	Story gives us basic details of the author's story.	Story gives us some details of an important event the author experienced.	Story gives us a detailed view into the author's life. The reader can infer how this event/moment changed the author as a person..
Mechanics	Writer makes 3+in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.
Story structure/ Sequencing	Ideas and scenes seem to be randomly arranged.	The story is fairly organized. One idea or scene may feel out of place. Transitions are used.	The story is very well organized. One idea or scene follows another in a logical sequence with clear transitions.
Use of Dialogue	Focuses on Narration rather than dialogue.	Includes limited, basic dialogue along with narration.	Graphic Novel is made up of mostly detailed dialogue with minimal narration.
Use of Creative Panel Layout	Uses a basic panel layout throughout their Graphic Novel such as 2x2 or 3x3.	Mostly uses a basic panel layout but incorporates more dynamic layouts where it makes sense with the action of the story.	Uses many different dynamic layouts that tell the story in a creative way. The use of layout helps to draw attention to the mood or action of the scenes.
Use of Color/images	Color and images are used throughout the story. 	Color and images are used throughout the story and used in some places as a way to create a mood or emotion that goes with what is happening in the story.	Color and images used all over the story in a way that helps to emphasize important aspects of the story as well as to create a specific mood for different scenes within the story.
Total:			/60





**ANY**  
**QUESTIONS?**




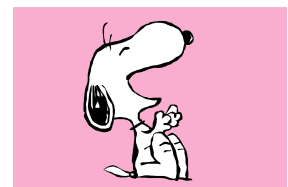


# Writing a Graphic Novel

## Grading Rubric



Category	Basic (1-5)	Developing (6-7)	Excellent (8-10)
Content	Story gives us basic details of the author's story.	Story gives us some details of an important event the author experienced.	Story gives us a detailed view into the author's life. The reader can infer how this event/moment changed the author as a person..
Mechanics	Writer makes 3+in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the story.
Story structure/ Sequencing	Ideas and scenes seem to be randomly arranged.	The story is fairly organized. One idea or scene may feel out of place. Transitions are used.	The story is very well organized. One idea or scene follows another in a logical sequence with clear transitions.
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Name: \_\_\_\_\_


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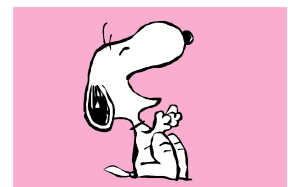


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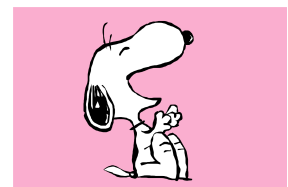


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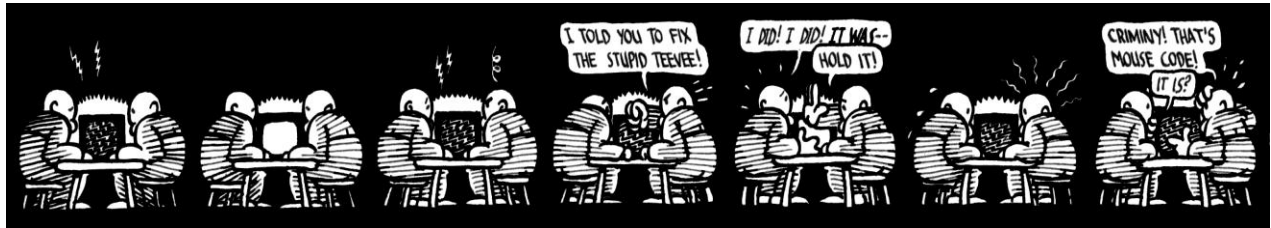
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### Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy Series



Whether in the Sunday paper or a critically acclaimed graphic novel, comics have been a staple of American culture since the turn of the last century. Only recently, however, have scholars begun turning any sustained attention to comics as an art form, a specific print medium, and a cultural artifact. For this reason, many of us are familiar with the basics of reading comics, but not with any critical vocabulary for deciphering or discussing them. This handout offers advice on how to approach the medium of comics.

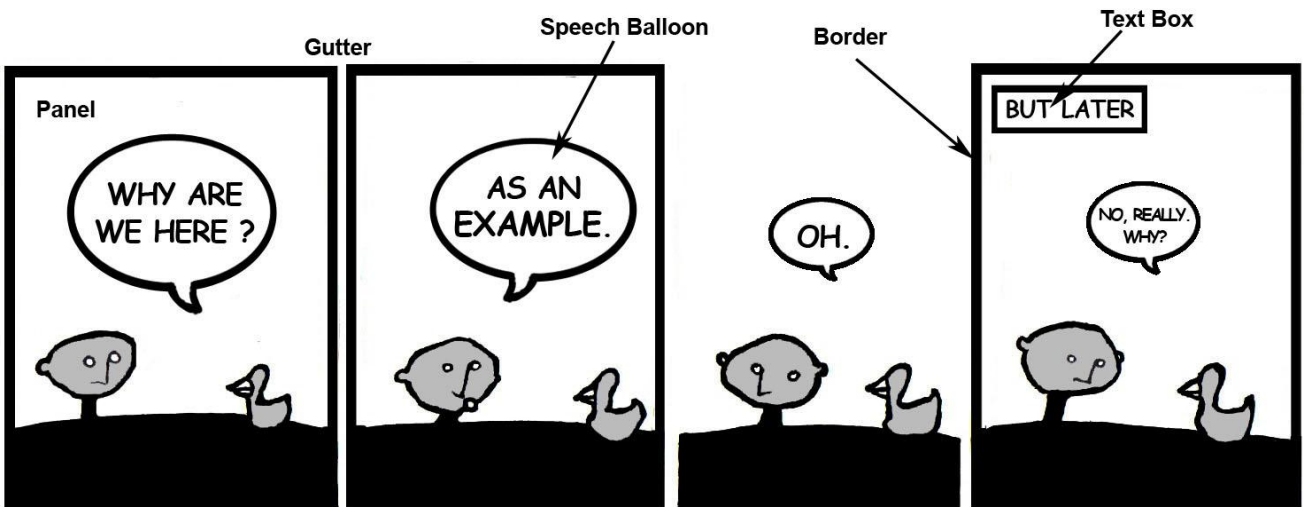
#### Overview: What are Visual Rhetoric and Visual Literacy?

The simplest definition for visual rhetoric is how/why visual images communicate meaning. Note that visual rhetoric is not just about superior design and aesthetics but also about how culture and meaning are reflected, communicated, and altered by images. Visual literacy involves all the processes of knowing and responding to a visual image, as well as all the thought that might go into constructing or manipulating an image.

#### What are Comics?

Comics are easy to recognize but difficult to define. Will Eisner used the term “sequential art” to describe comics, a definition later modified by Scott McCloud into “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence” (McCloud 9). The focus in each of these definitions is *sequence*: a string of images that are read one after another to produce meaning. Comics may or may not incorporate text, and differ from single cartoons by producing a more complicated pattern (most often narrative) through sequential spatial arrangement. This may sound unnecessarily complicated to describe what Popeye is up to this week, but such linguistic complication speaks to the difficulty of defining something that we often read intuitively rather than intellectually.

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When approaching sequential art, try to keep an open mind, since anything and everything on the page can contribute to the overall meaning. To make the task easier, you might try breaking the kinds of visual information you are getting down into their components: page layout, art and art style, and text/image interaction.

### Page Layout

With comics, as with most things, *how* narrative information is presented is often as important as *what* that information is. Page layout may seem entirely neutral; just remember, even this neutrality is an effect. Even if the page is comprised of uniform rectangles in an obvious and regular order, that layout was still chosen by the artist to create an impression. It might be a way of focusing your attention on what is happening rather than on how it is depicted; it may even reinforce a theme of conformity, repetition, or boredom. Alternatively, artists like Chris Ware often create ornate pages with arrows leading in multiple directions to create a sense of the complexity of personal history and memory. If the border of the first panel of the strip at the top of this page were a heart rather than a rectangle, how might that change the meaning of the strip?

When you approach a page, try asking yourself the following questions:

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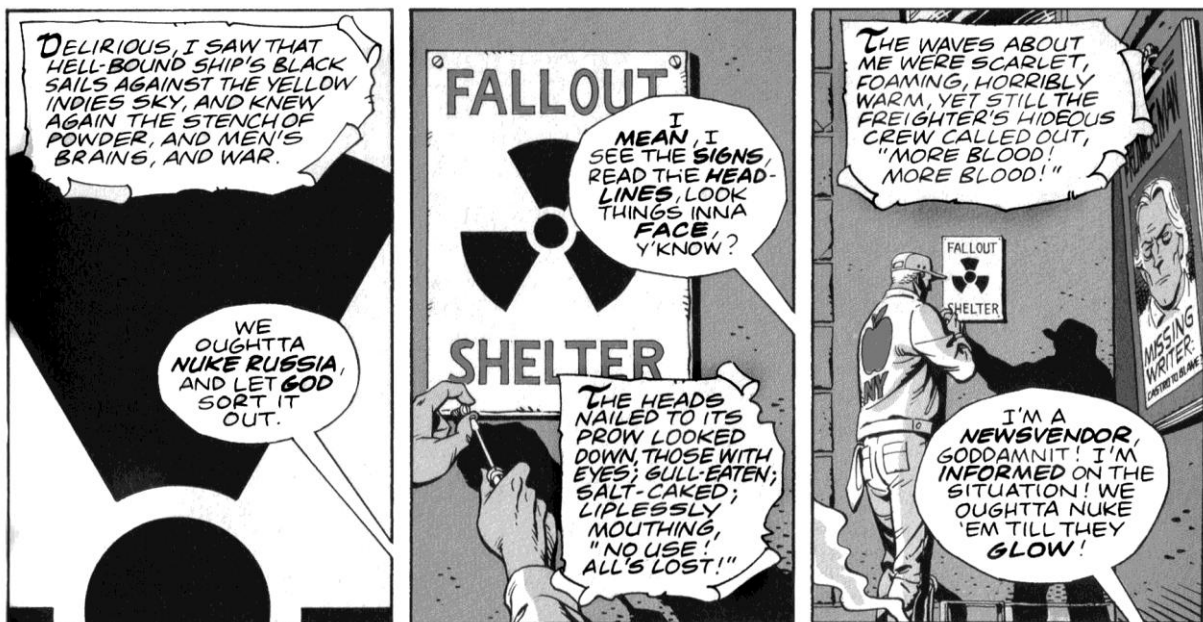
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These are the first three panels of the third issue of *Watchmen*. Without any text, the panels would simply depict a man hanging a sign, pushing back from the extreme close-up in panel one to a medium shot of the same action in panel three. With the text, however, the panels develop a complicated interplay of different elements. There are three distinct types of text here: the text boxes, the speech balloons, and the sign and clothing text.

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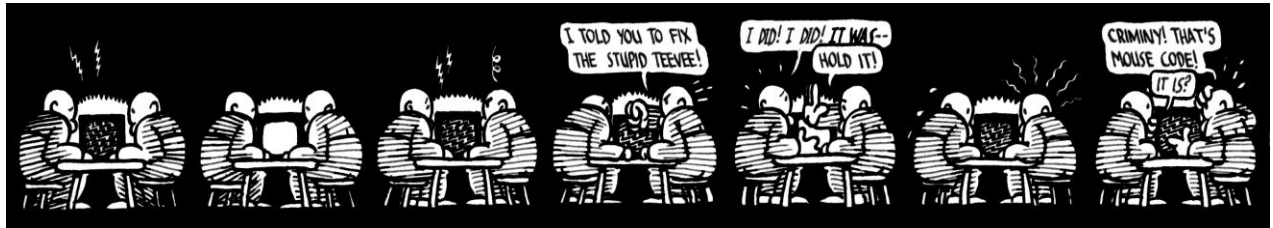


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Writing about Paintings  
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The banner image at the beginning of the handout is from Chris Ware, *Quimby the Mouse* (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2003), 14.

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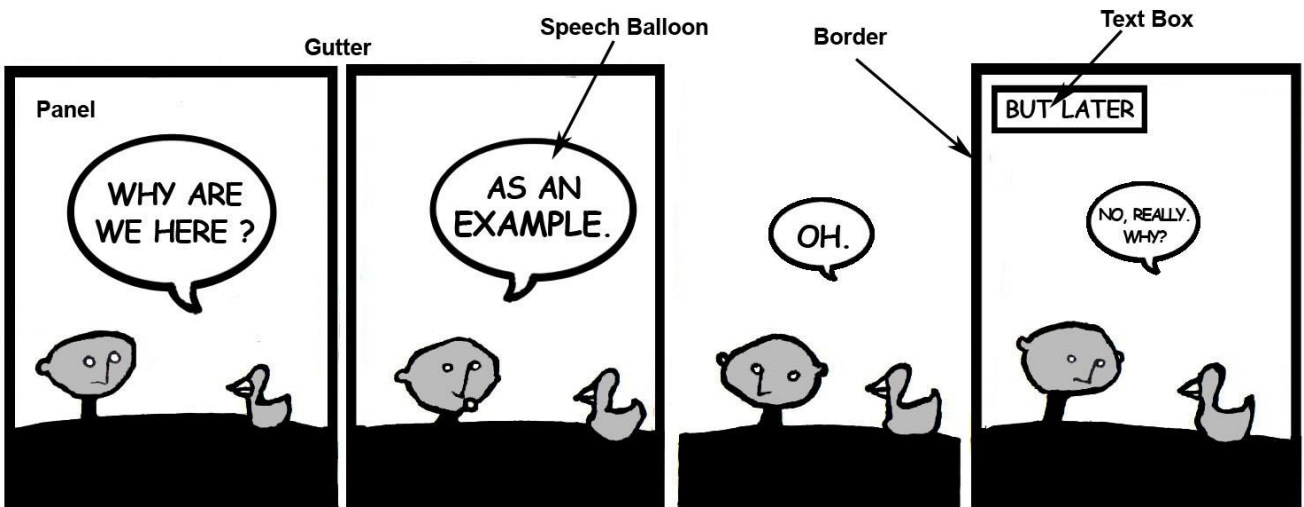
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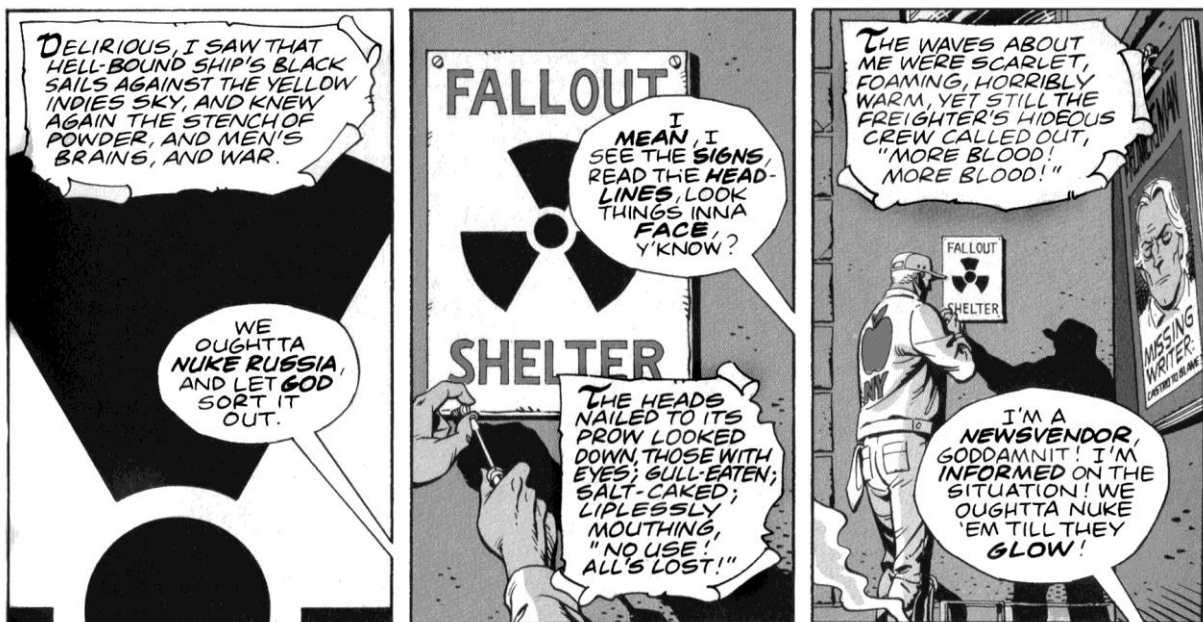
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