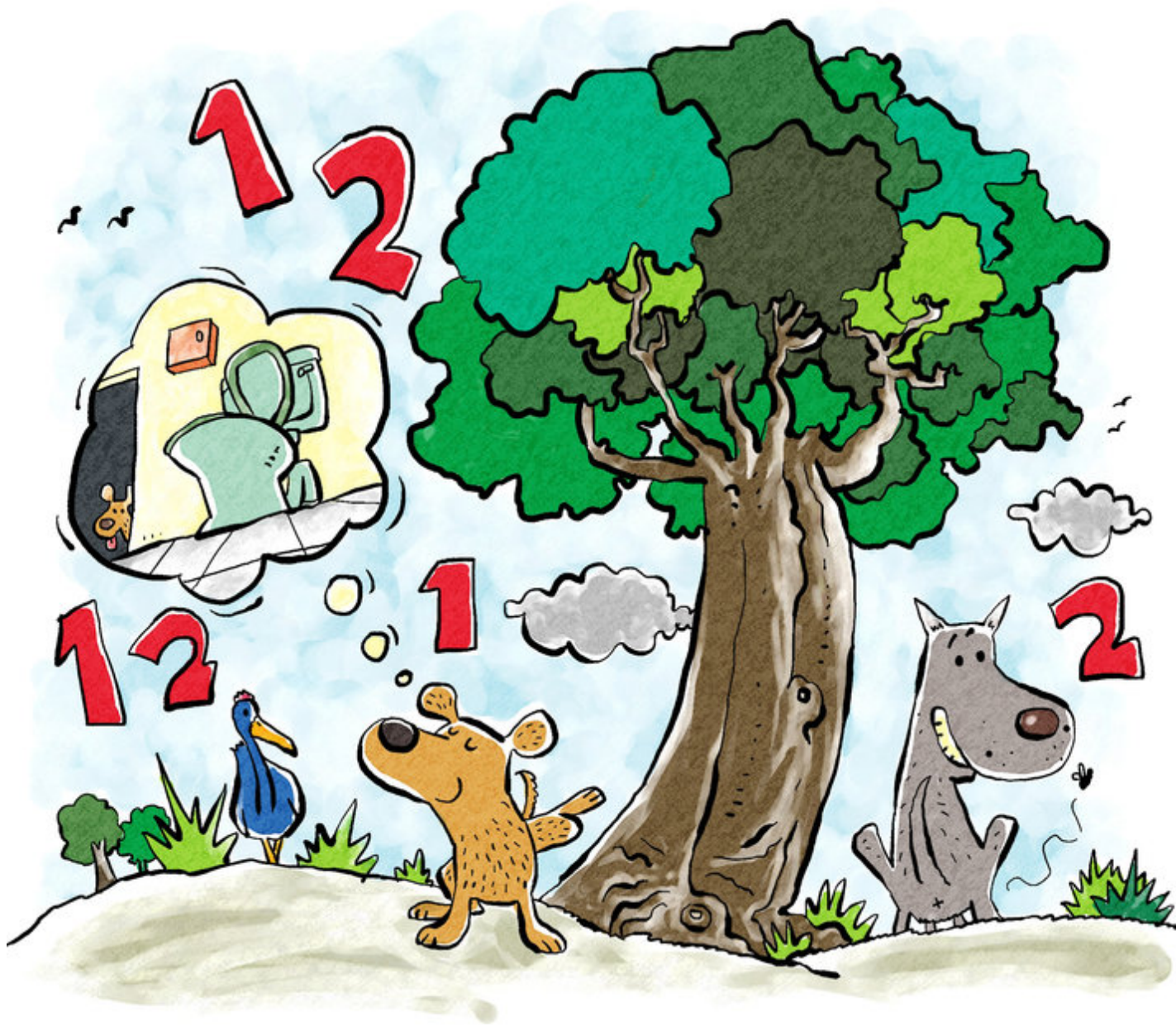




The Tale of the Toilet

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Illustrator: Greystroke



It's a big job, it's number one priority and number two is pretty important too, because you can never ignore nature's call. So when you gotta go, you gotta go!

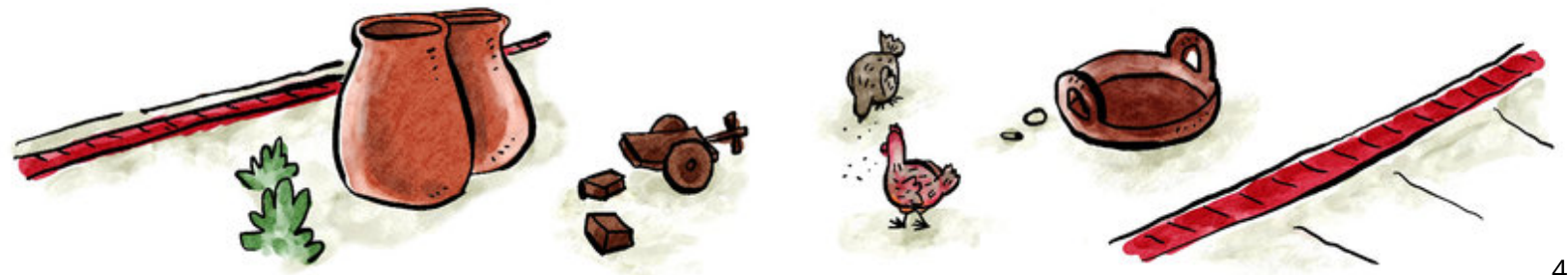
Some people can do this business inside their houses, some have to go outside. Some pour water after it's done, others need not. It's different in different parts of the world, just as it was different at different times in history.



Toilets of the past

A very long time ago, more than 3,000 years ago, the people of Indus Valley had beautiful houses with toilets built inside them. People could finish their business in privacy and pour a bucket of water which would flush the waste down a drain. This way, they managed to keep their houses and streets clean.

The Indus Valley, situated in present day Pakistan and India, is one of the three oldest civilizations that we know of, the other two being Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. From what we can see of the ruins today, the people of Indus Valley had great building skills, were good at making metal and ceramic products, and planned their city-wide drainage systems very elaborately.





Around the same time, similar toilet arrangements were present in other parts of the world. Homes in Egypt and Babylonia had toilets built in, and the ruins in Skara Brae in Scotland and the Minoan Crete in the Mediterranean show plenty of pipes leading out of what definitely seems like a toilet inside a house.

A little later, about 2,000 years ago in Rome, people used public toilets. A long slab of stone had keyhole-shaped cuts at intervals. People would sit on these openings and do their toilet business while having a friendly chat with the person next to them. I told you it was a “public” toilet!



How did they clean themselves, do you wonder? After I tell you, you might wish you had never wondered.

They took a long stick that had a sponge attached to one end and dipped the sponge into water, and then used it to wipe their backsides. After they felt clean, they simply handed the stick over to their neighbour, who dipped it in water and used it again. Let me give you a friendly tip here – if you ever find yourself in this place, make sure you pick the very first seat!

Not everyone had to poop in public in Rome. If you were super-rich, you would have a chamber pot at home into which you would do your business. Once done, you would simply empty the contents onto the street outside. And if someone happened to walk by at the time, well, too bad for them!

About 500 years ago, Queen Elizabeth of England had a toilet constructed inside her house. It had a pipe leading out into a sewage pit outside. But she never used it much because the stench from the sewer filled the toilet and she could not even breathe. So back to the chamber pot she went.

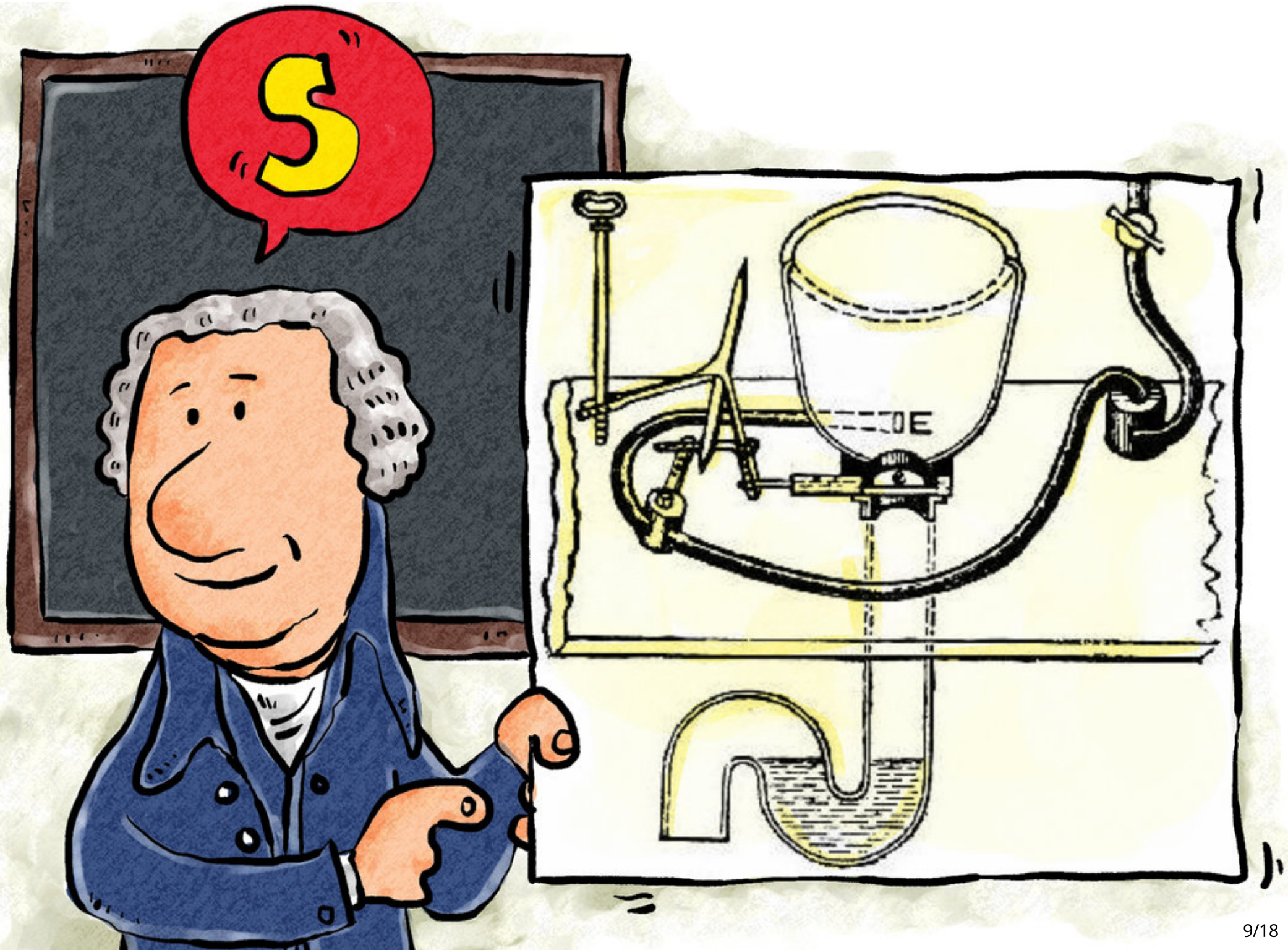




Toilets of the present

Toilets these days don't stink. How did they achieve that?

In 1775, the English inventor Alexander Cumming figured out a way. Instead of using a straight pipe to connect the toilet to the sewage line, he made it S-shaped. This made sure that while poop and pee and water can go down the drain, no smell can come back up. Have you noticed that a little water always stays in the toilet even after flushing? This is what creates the "seal" and prevents the foul smell from entering the room through the drain.





Just like olden times, different parts of the world today have different kinds of toilets.

Some places don't have toilets at all. Some toilets are made for sitting, some are made for squatting. Some have a bucket with water for flushing, others have a tank filled with water and a handle that releases the water. Some toilets have paper to wipe the backside, some have a tap or a bucket of water to wash up.

There are some toilets that don't use water at all. Like the ones on a plane. With all the turbulence, you certainly don't want any water in the toilet bowl! The waste is removed by a powerful vacuum and stored in a tank below. After the plane lands, the waste is disposed of.

There are also waterless toilets on the ground. They were designed and built for places without easy access to water, such as remote villages in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. They have been working well, so wouldn't it be a good idea to have such toilets everywhere? Because the less water we use, and the less sewage we create, the better for the planet, right?





Toilets of the future

How do you make a waterless toilet?

The first step is to make sure that you don't let the urine and the faeces mix. No it's not as gross as it sounds – it just needs the pot to be designed in a clever way. Like having a sloping bamboo mat act as a sieve that will allow the waste water to pass through, but can hold the poop and send it to a different pit.

Since urine by itself is not harmful (it's only the bacteria that collect on open urine that cause the smell and the hazard), it can be safely let into the ground or put to use. Here's how: Hydrogen can be separated from the urine and used to fuel a generator.

Urine also has nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium that are great ingredients for fertilizers.

Now that urine is taken care of, what do we do with the solid waste? Well, if it is properly mixed with ash and grass, and allowed to rest in a pit, millions of bacteria will break it down into perfectly useful compost for agriculture.





These toilets will help us build a world where there is no "waste." Instead it is turned into something of use.

If all houses in a city have such toilets, no sewage comes out of them, no expensive sewage treatment plants are necessary and no sewage will flow through the drains into lakes and rivers! What a great future for everyone!



On pg 18 is a board game. You'll need a few friends to play with and a die. Below are instructions on what to do if you land here:

At 3

Queen's chamber pot:

Illegal use of Queen's chamber pot.

Punishment: Banished into her toilet for 2 turns.



At 6

Roman toilet first seat:

Good for you! First use of sponge!

Move ahead 7 spaces.



At 9

Stuck in the toilet queue!

Move only if you roll a 2 or a 4.



At 12

Roman toilet last seat:

Yuck. Don't want to use that sponge? Okay, we'll let you kill the time. Lose a turn.



At 15

Mohenjo-daro:

Congratulations! You have entered one of the best toilets of all time! So you get to roll the die again. If you roll 2,4,6 move that many spaces forward. If you roll 1,3,5 you can pick any pawn on the board (other than yours) and move it that many spaces back.



At 19

Oops. Left the toilet dirty.
Move back 3 spaces.



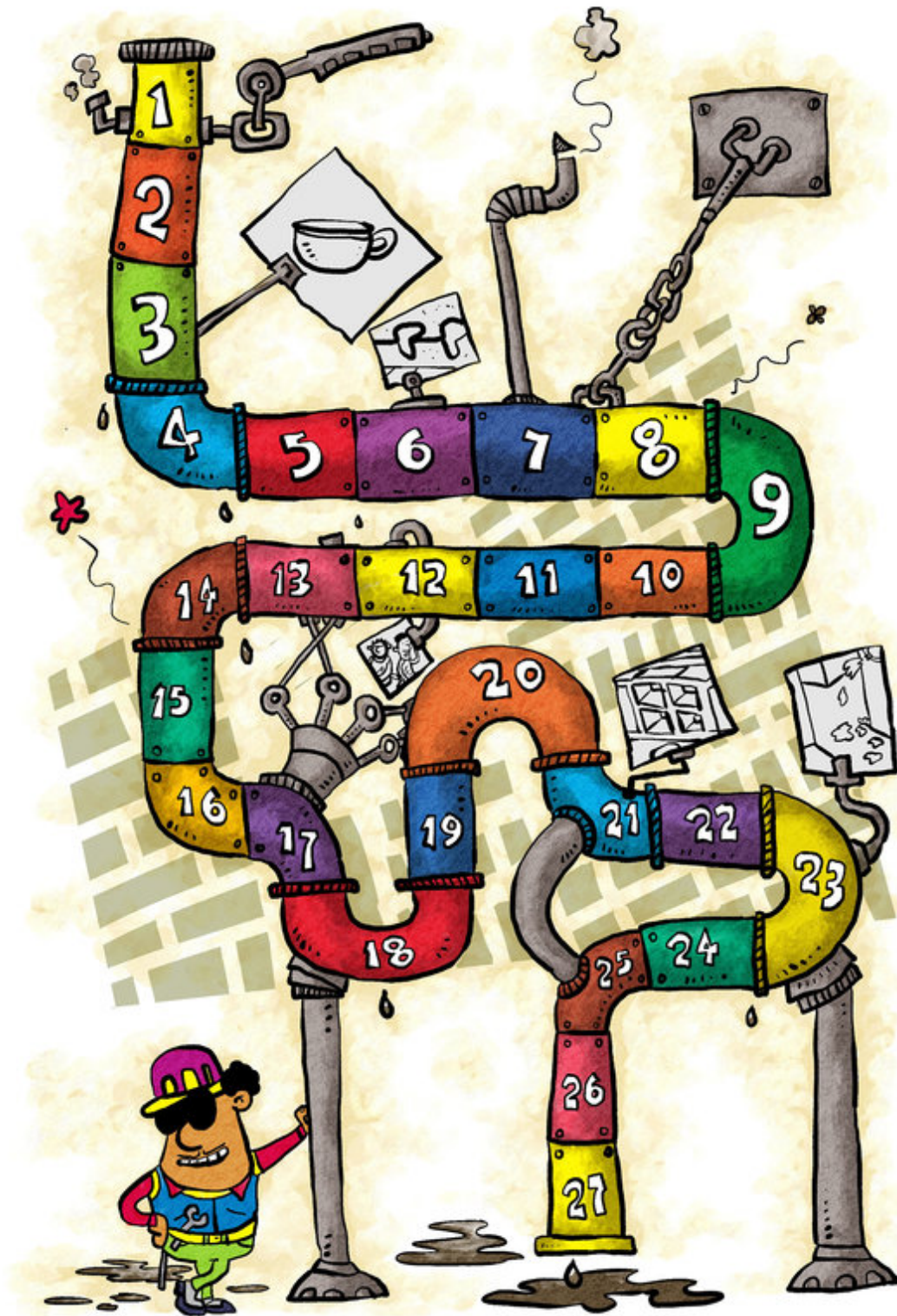
At 21

Waterless toilet:
Congratulations! You just used a waterless toilet!
Take the short-cut!



At 23

Flying waste!
Oh dear! You got hit by flying waste! Move only if
you roll a 1 or 6.



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The Tale of the Toilet

(English)

Number one or number two, they are always big jobs! But do you ever wonder what toilets looked like in the olden times? And are they different in other countries? Get ready to take a peek into toilets across space and time!

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.



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