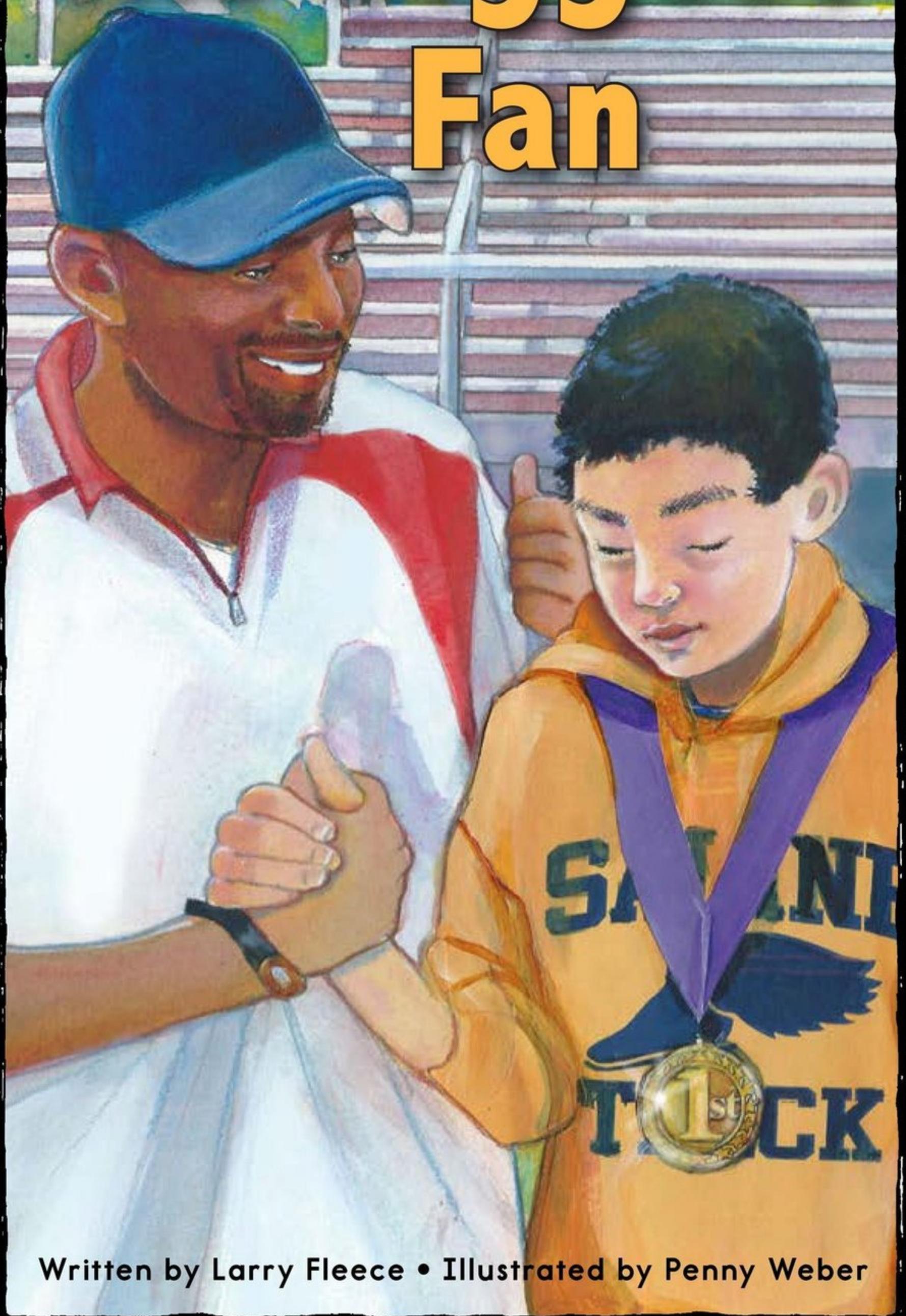


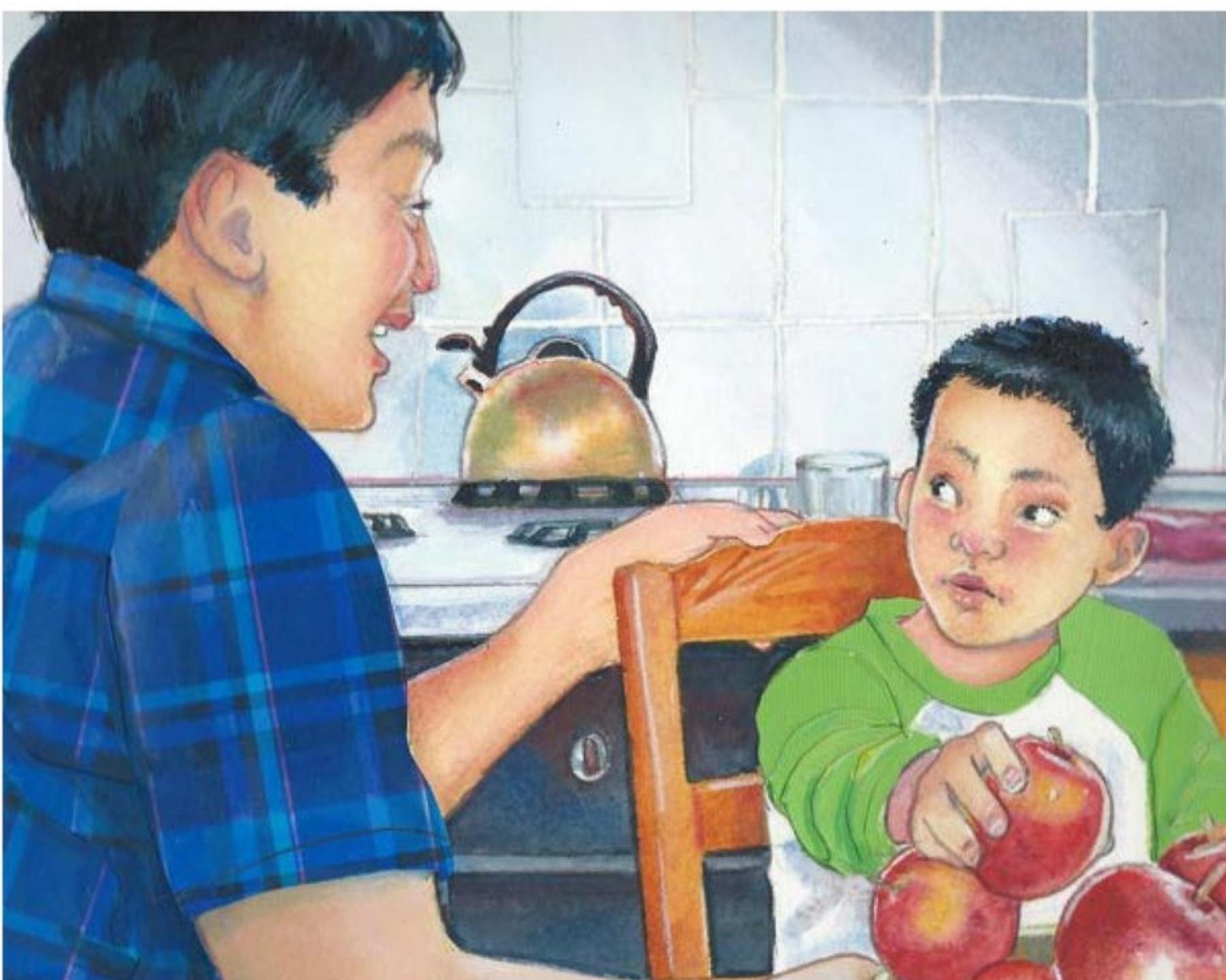
LEVELED BOOK • Q

His Biggest Fan



Written by Larry Fleece • Illustrated by Penny Weber

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Focus Question

How does it feel to become more independent as you get older?

Words to Know

accelerated
argument
concentrate
hesitate
nervous

qualify
regret
sprints
stride

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Level Q Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL Q	
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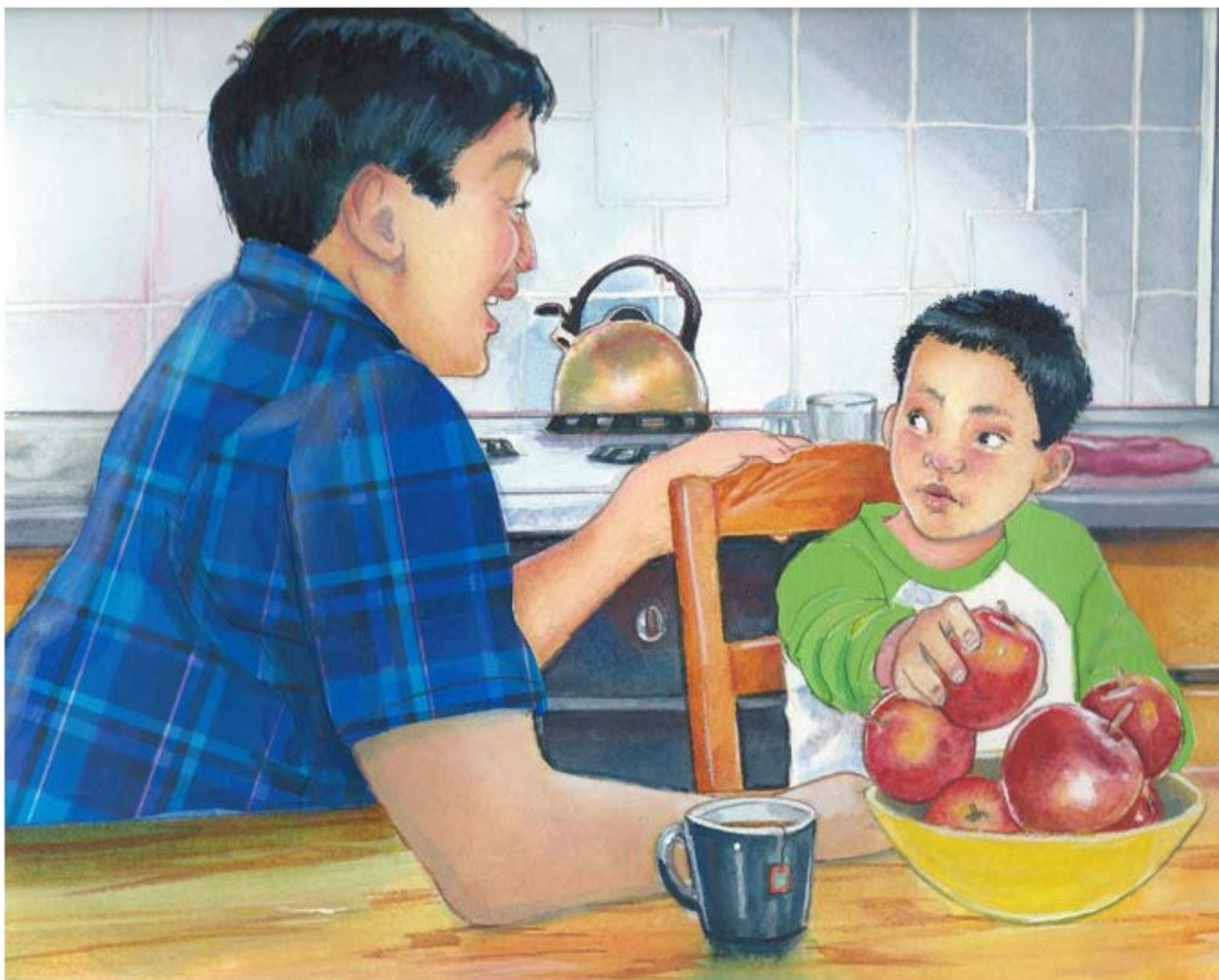
"Shoulders square, knees high, pump hard!" Kenny's coach recited each part of their race strategy as the moments ticked off till the starting gun. "Remember—don't run *to* the finish line, run *through* the finish line!"

Kenny heard every word from Coach Fisher, but he was having trouble staying focused. He tried to tell himself to **concentrate**. After all, this was the finals! It was the most important race of the year, the one he'd worked so hard to **qualify** for. It was an honor just to be here to represent his school against the very best in the state. He *had* to do well.

Kenny's mind was somewhere else, though. He sat on the infield, pulling the toes of his track shoes to stretch out his calf muscles. Kenny was surrounded by all of his teammates, by race officials and assistants, and by the fans up in the stands. Still, Kenny felt alone.



Kenny thought back to the **argument** he'd had with his dad the night before. His dad had been giving him advice, as usual. "Get plenty of sleep," his dad had said. "Eat light in the morning. Run two laps and three **sprints** before the race."



Kenny knew his dad meant well. *He's just trying to help*, Kenny told himself. He tried to be patient, but then his dad asked the question Kenny didn't want to answer.

"What time's your race?"

"Uh, I'm not sure," Kenny lied.

"Not sure?" his dad asked. "Then how are you going to be on time?"

"Oh, I, uh . . . I'm going on the bus," Kenny said. "They'll get me there okay."

"Well, actually, Kenny," his dad explained, "I wanted to know about your race time so I can get there."





Kenny's heart sank. This was the discussion he didn't want to have. He paused for a moment.

"Uh, Dad?" Kenny began. "Do you have to go?"

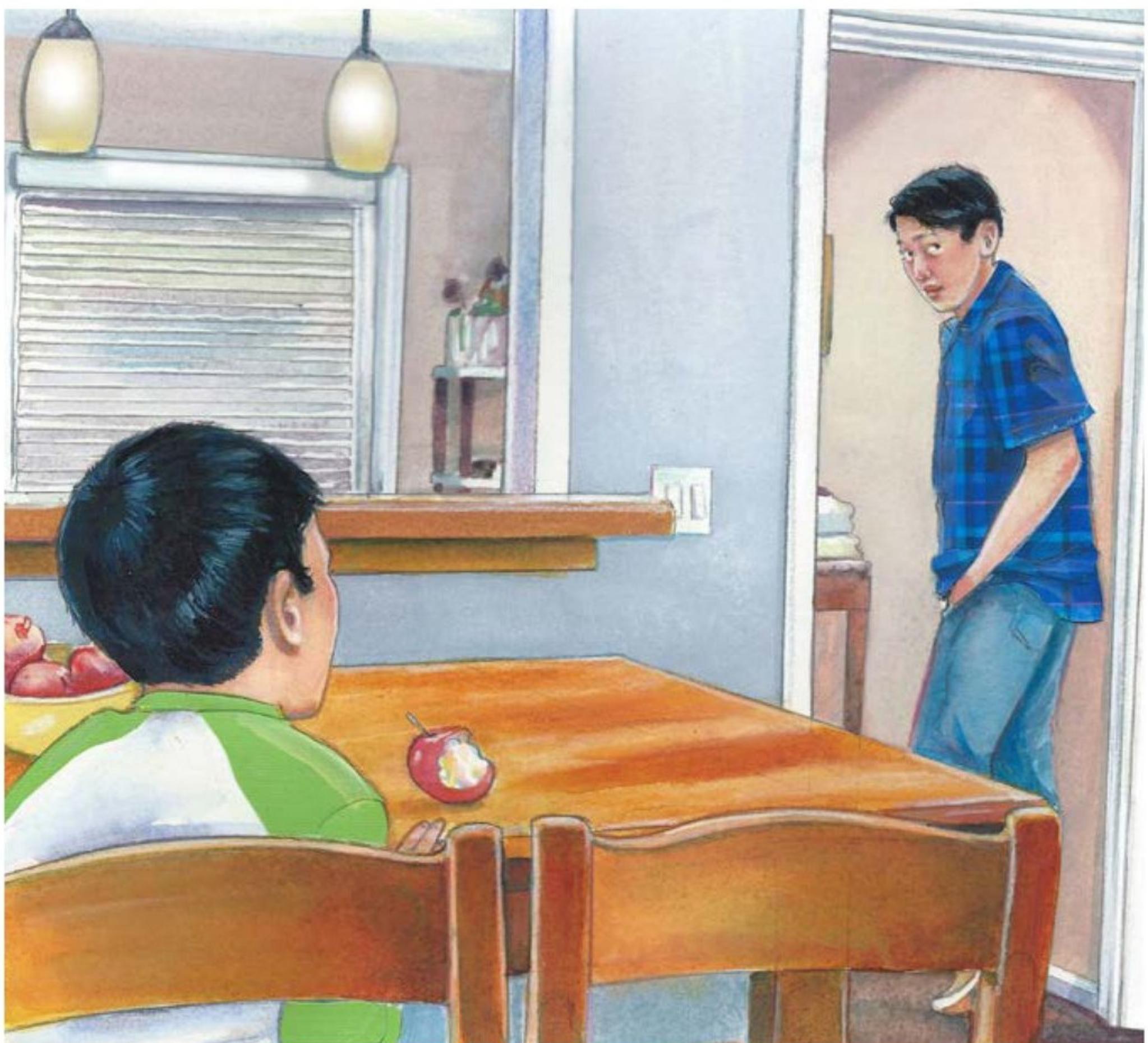
Now it was his dad's turn to **hesitate**.

"Well," his dad said slowly, "it's not that I *have* to. It's that I *want* to."

"Yeah, I know, but . . ." Kenny swallowed hard. "It's just that you make me **nervous**, Dad. I think I'll do better . . . on my own."

Kenny's dad turned away. Kenny caught a glimpse of his face and knew he'd made a mistake. He'd never seen his dad look that way.

"Sure. I get it," his dad said, walking away and leaving Kenny with his thoughts.





Kenny and the other runners moved into their lanes for his event: the 100-meter dash. Kenny shook his legs to keep them loose as he did a mental check on his condition. He'd gone to bed early, so he felt rested. He'd had a light breakfast, and he ran his two laps and three sprints, just as his dad had suggested.

Something still weighed on him. When he had boarded the bus earlier that morning, he felt a nagging **regret** about what he had said to his father. Now that he was settling into his starting blocks, about to run the race he'd asked his father not to watch, it felt wrong.

"Runners, on your marks!" the timekeeper said. "Set!" *BANG!*



Kenny had a good start with the gun and drove his **stride** hard as he **accelerated**. He didn't hear the cheers of the fans or the steps of the runners around him. His mind was a blur as he pushed his body to the limit. *Go, go, go!* he thought, in time with the rhythm of his stride. *Left, right, left, right*—the spikes on his shoes clawed into the track beneath him.



Harder, harder. Kenny's knees and elbows pumped like pistons. Every muscle strained. His feet pounded the track with so much force that it felt as if his heart would shake loose.



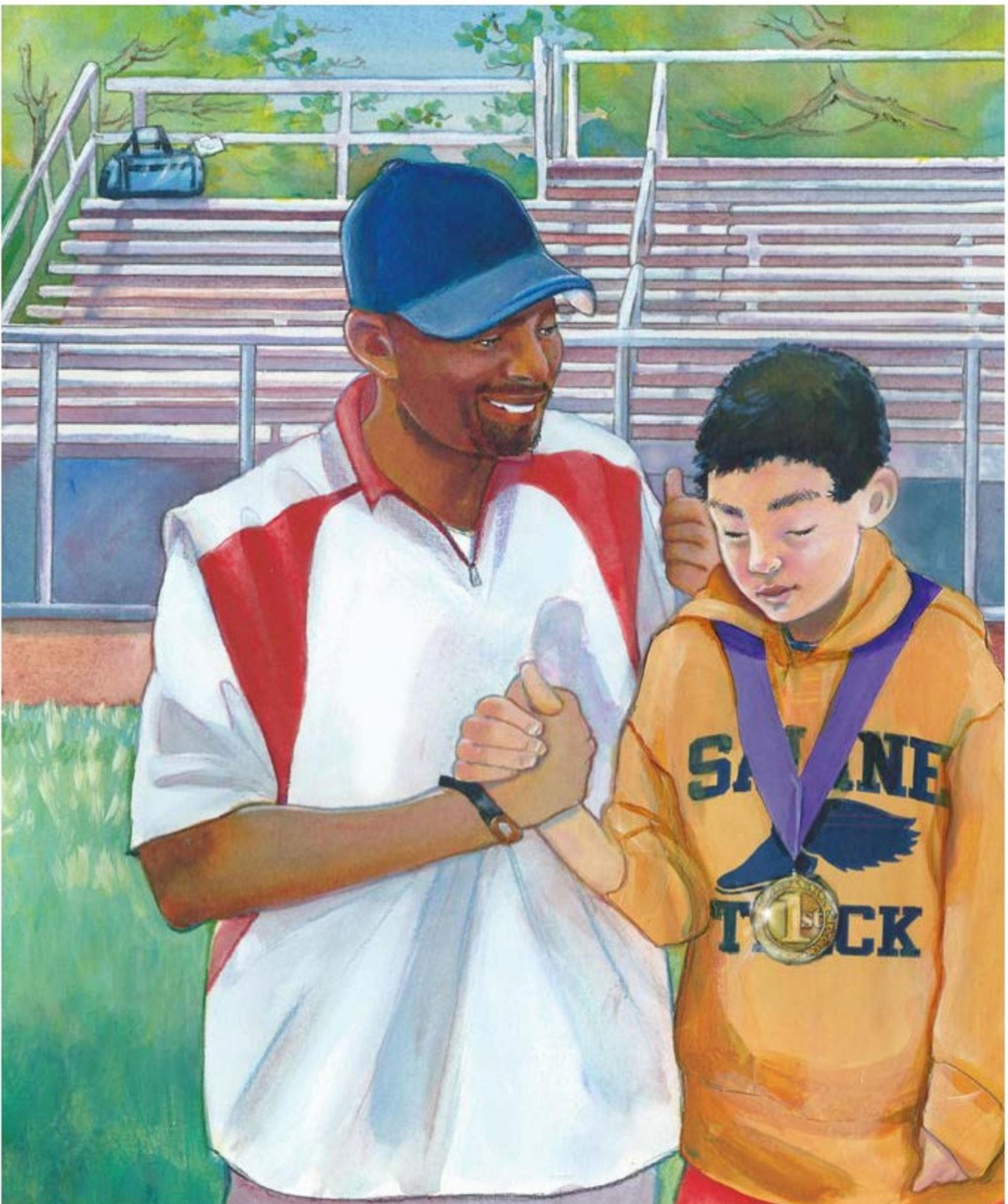
Now Kenny could see the tape stretched in front of him at the finish line. He felt as though he was flying. *Push, push, push.* Was he winning? He leaned forward. *Don't run to it, run through it.* Three final strides and he felt the tape snap across his chest. He'd done it! He'd won!

The other runners shook Kenny's hand as he took some long breaths and checked the timer's board. When his time finally went up, he let out a long sigh. It was a personal record—the best he'd ever run. It didn't feel as good as he hoped.

Kenny changed his shoes and shirt. At the award ceremony, an official handed him his first place medal. The round gold disk felt heavy and cool in his hand. He wanted to show it to someone . . . but that someone wasn't there.



The sun was setting behind the stadium as his team packed up their gear and headed to the bus. Coach Fisher came over and shook Kenny's hand.



"Nice race, Kenny," the coach said. "Oh, by the way, I left our team bag up in our section on the bleachers. Would you go grab it?"

Coach Fisher pointed up to the last bag. Kenny climbed the bleachers to collect it. Then he stopped.

There, at the top of the stadium, taped to the bar above the last row, was a small handwritten sign.

The sign said simply, *I was here. Nice job.*

Kenny smiled. He knew that handwriting.



Glossary

accelerated (<i>v.</i>)	went faster (p. 11)
argument (<i>n.</i>)	a disagreement (p. 5)
concentrate (<i>v.</i>)	to pay close attention to something (p. 3)
hesitate (<i>v.</i>)	to pause before doing something, especially because of uncertainty (p. 7)
nervous (<i>adj.</i>)	edgy or tense; afraid (p. 8)
qualify (<i>v.</i>)	to show enough skill to be allowed to compete in a difficult event (p. 3)
regret (<i>n.</i>)	a feeling of sadness or guilt about a past action (p. 10)
sprints (<i>n.</i>)	runs or races over short distances that are completed as quickly as possible (p. 5)
stride (<i>n.</i>)	the length or style of steps taken while walking or running (p. 11)

His Biggest Fan

A Reading A-Z Level Q Leveled Book

Word Count: 888



Connections

Writing

On a poster, write and illustrate what a runner should do to prepare for a race. Use ideas from the story.

Math

One lap around the track is 400 meters. If Kenny ran three laps around the track, how many meters did he run? Show your work in two different ways.

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