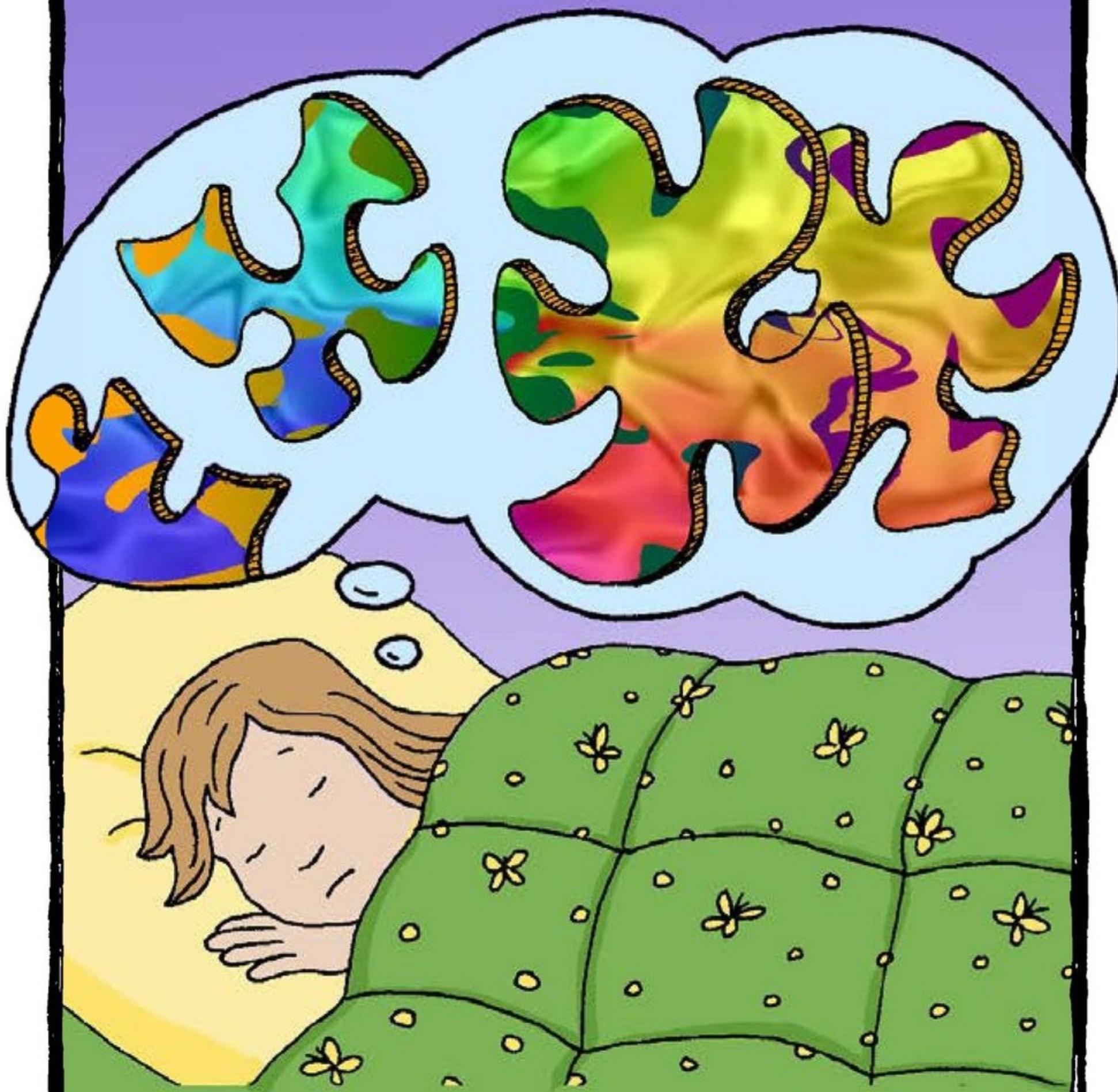


LEVELED BOOK • P

Becky's Puzzle Problem



Written by Mary C. Canavan
Illustrated by Laura Ferraro Close

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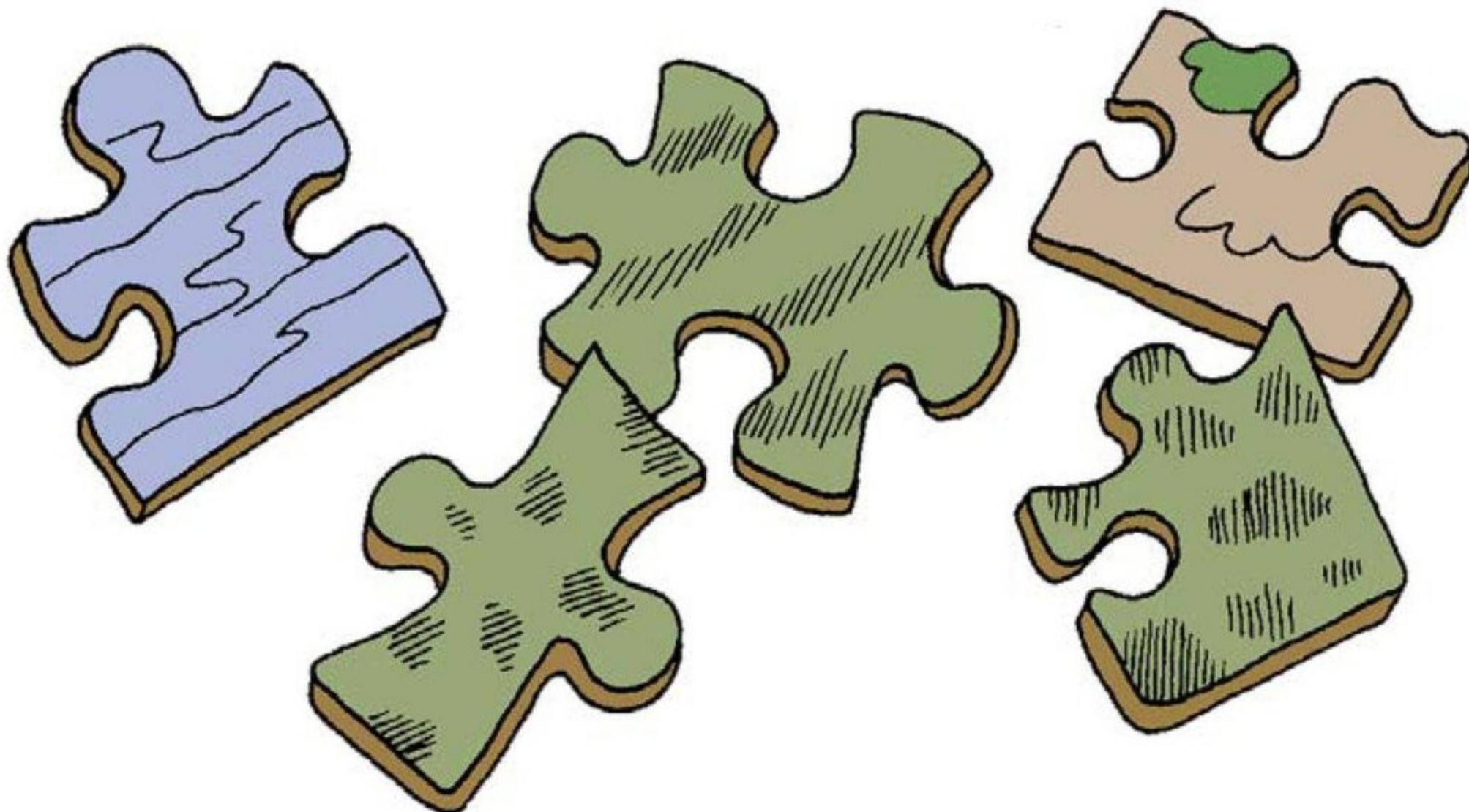


Table of Contents

Becky Finds the Perfect Puzzle	4
It's All in How You Look at It.....	7
Becky Hits a Snag.....	10
The Dream.....	12
Another Point of View.....	14
An Unexpected Problem.....	16
Dad to the Rescue.....	18
A Surprise Ending	19
Glossary.....	20

Becky Finds the Perfect Puzzle

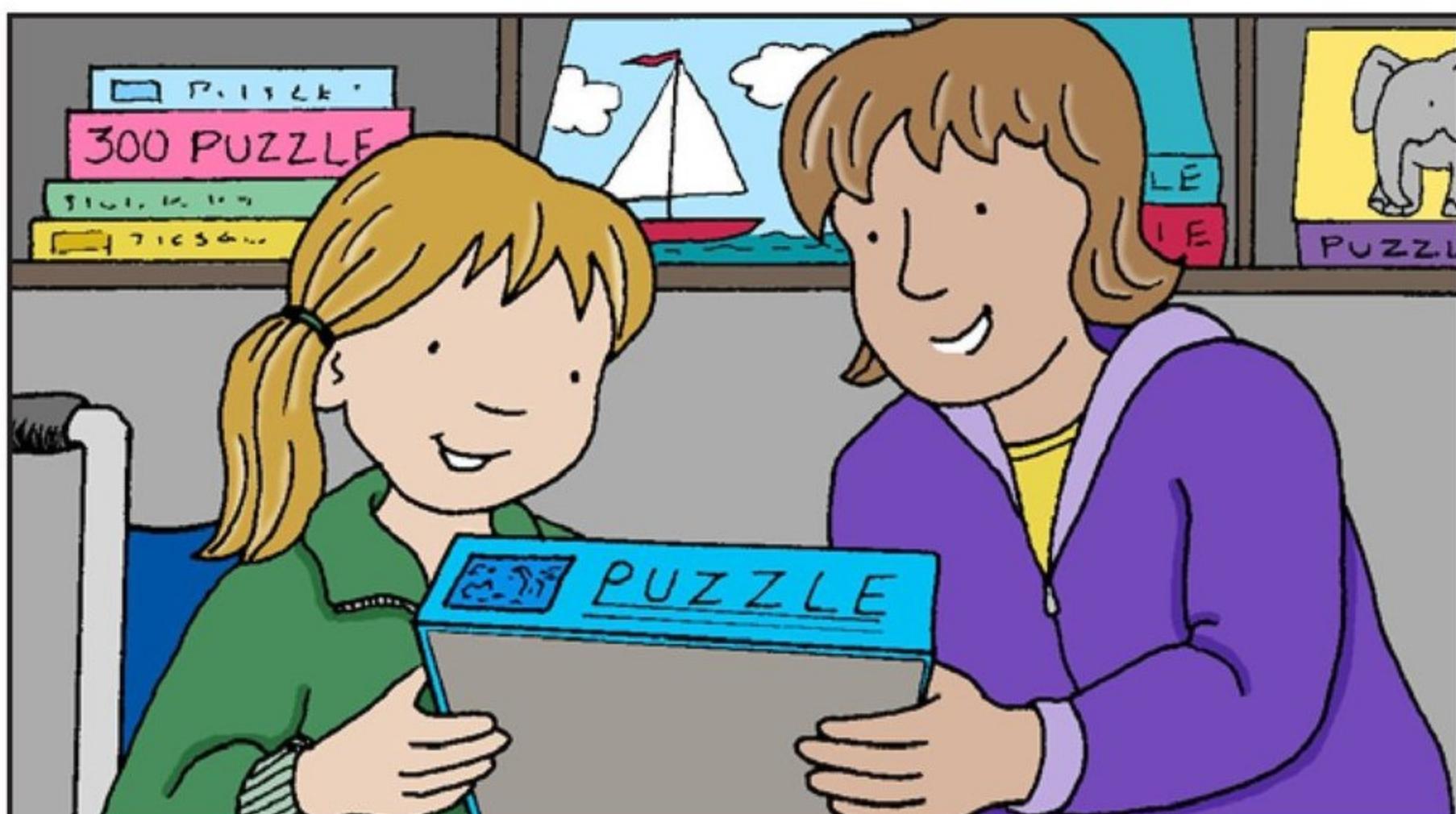
It was a gloomy, rainy Saturday, but even so, Becky was very excited. Today was the day she would be picking out a new puzzle—a birthday gift from Mom and Dad.

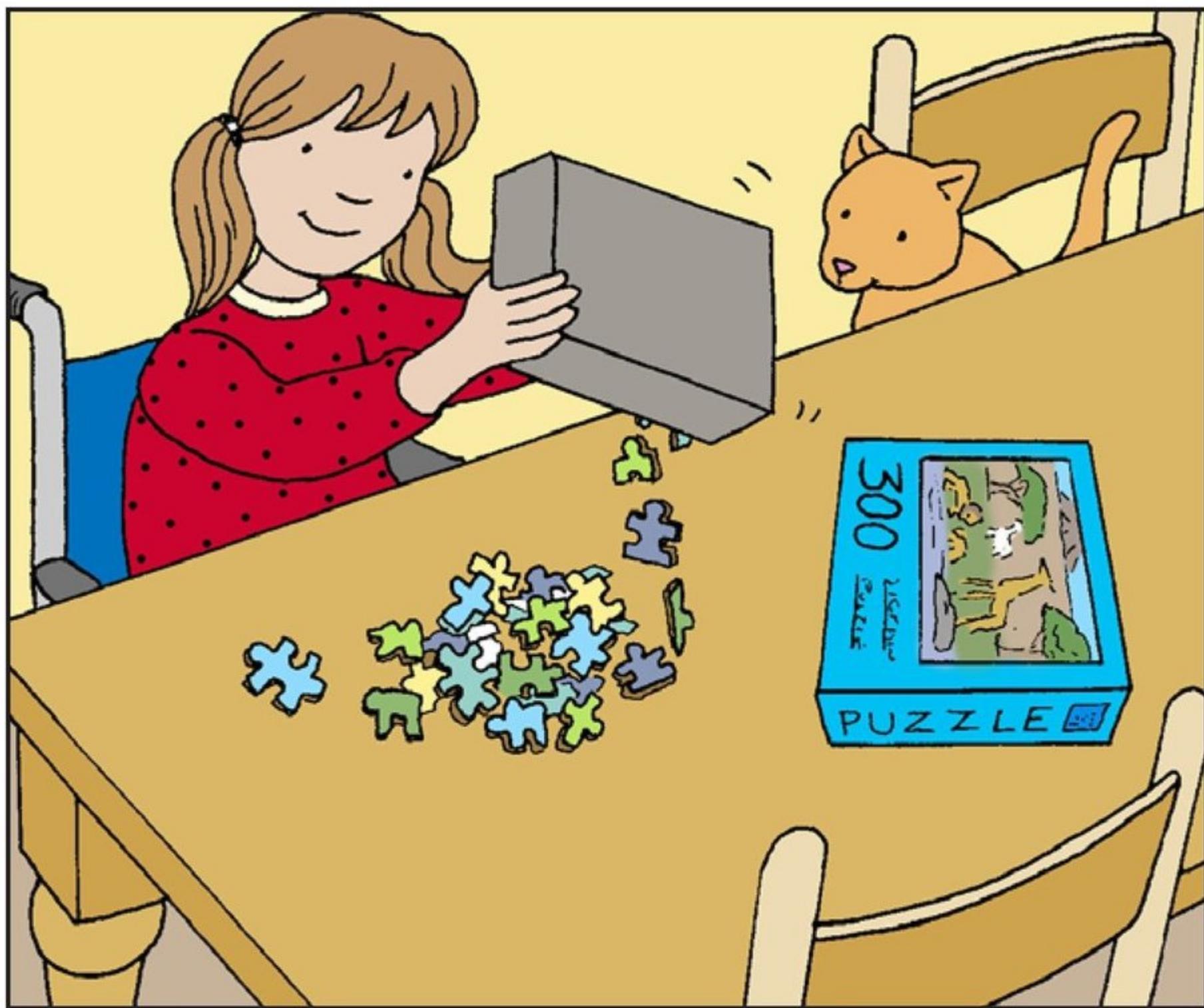
Becky was a “puzzle person,” or so her mom said. She had started with baby-size wooden ones, progressed to 50 pieces, then 100, and then 200. Now it would be a bigger challenge, her first 300-piece puzzle. And even better, she had a three-day weekend ahead to put it together.



At the toy shop, she was overwhelmed with the **array** of puzzles. Some had as many as 9,000 pieces! At last, she found the 300-piece puzzle section, and saw one she liked.

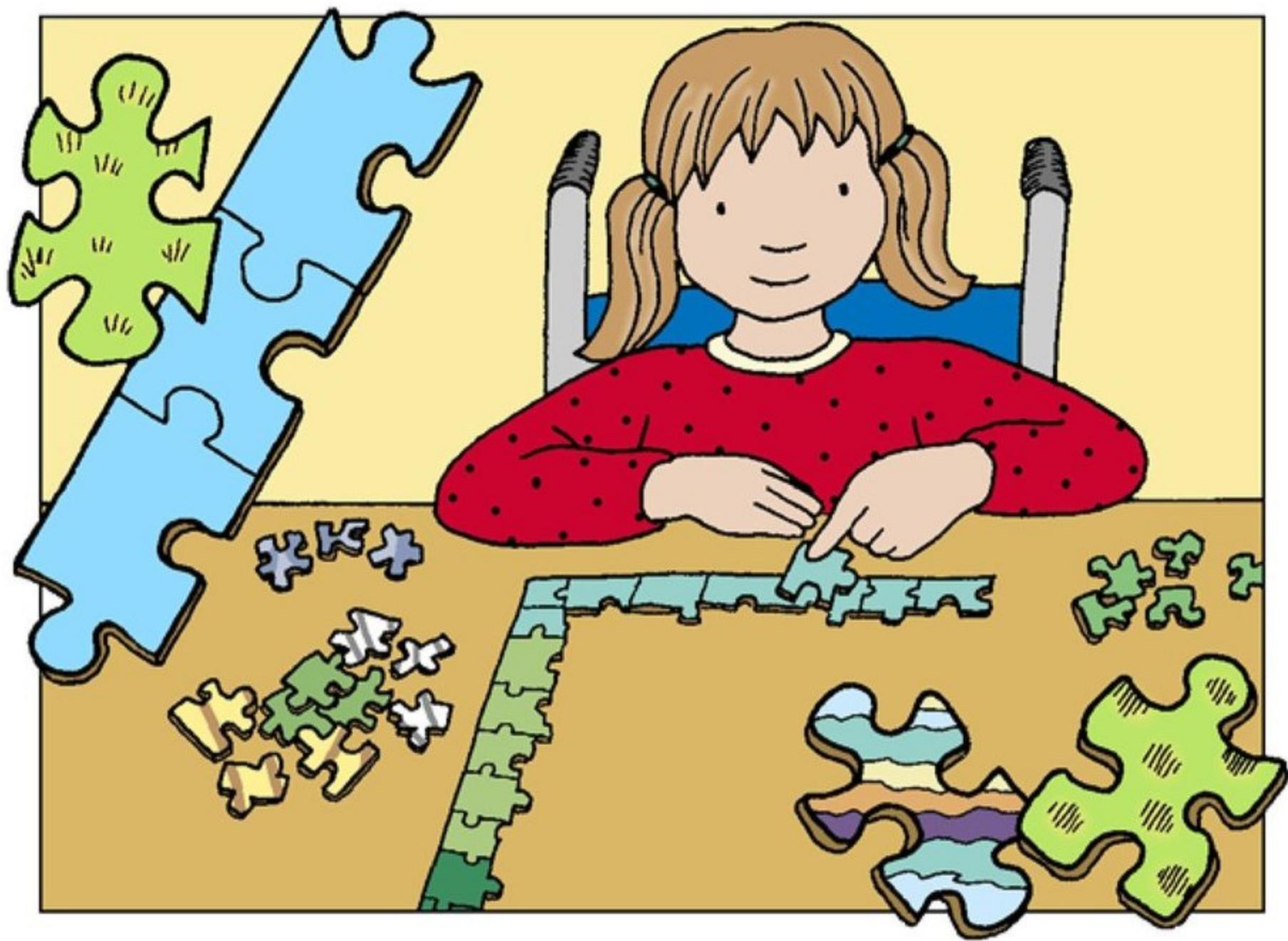
"Mom, I found it," Becky said. "Right here, the one with the animals." It was beautiful—a painting of African wild animals near a watering hole. A snowy mountain was in the background, and birds were flying around. "It's neat because you can see the whole picture in the water, too," she said. "It's like having two puzzles in one."





At home, she carefully cleared off the large dining room table and measured the area the puzzle would cover. The box said 16 by 24 inches.

Becky carefully dumped the pieces out onto the table and turned them over right side up. This took a little time, and she was **impatient** to get going. “This does look like a lot more pieces,” she said. In fact, there were twice as many pieces as the last puzzle she completed.



❖ It's All in How You Look at It ❖

First, she searched for straight edges to make a frame for the picture. Some of these pieces were easy to spot; others had just a teeny-weeny bit of a straight edge. Then she began to spot pieces that might go together . . . pieces of a tree . . . the zebra's stripes . . . the distinctive marks of the giraffe. Those pieces she put together in little piles off to the side. She was getting **organized!** By lunchtime, Becky had two sides completed.

Later that afternoon, her dad came and sat down next to her. “How’s it going?” he asked, as he picked up a piece.

“Okay,” Becky said, “but this is taking longer than I expected.”

“I always look for shape first,” Dad said.
“It’s a **trick** I learned from my father.”

Becky looked up at her dad. “Grandpa John?” Try as she might, Becky could not imagine her father as a little boy doing a puzzle with Grandpa.

Dad said, “I put all the ones with the loop out over here, and the long ones over here.” Well now, that was news to Becky! She had never considered shape as a way to **separate** pieces. He continued, “This way when you need one like this,” he held up a squarish piece, “it will be here in this pile.”

Dad pushed his piece in place, and said, “Got one!”



Becky Hits a Snag

Now things were moving along better; the giraffe's head was easy. But then Becky hit a snag—too many grassy areas that all looked alike. Even the shape trick wasn't working. She was getting tired, hungry, and a little **discouraged**. The day had gone by fast. The rain had stopped, and it was dark outside.

"Time for dinner, Becky," called Mom.

"Your favorite, mac and cheese."

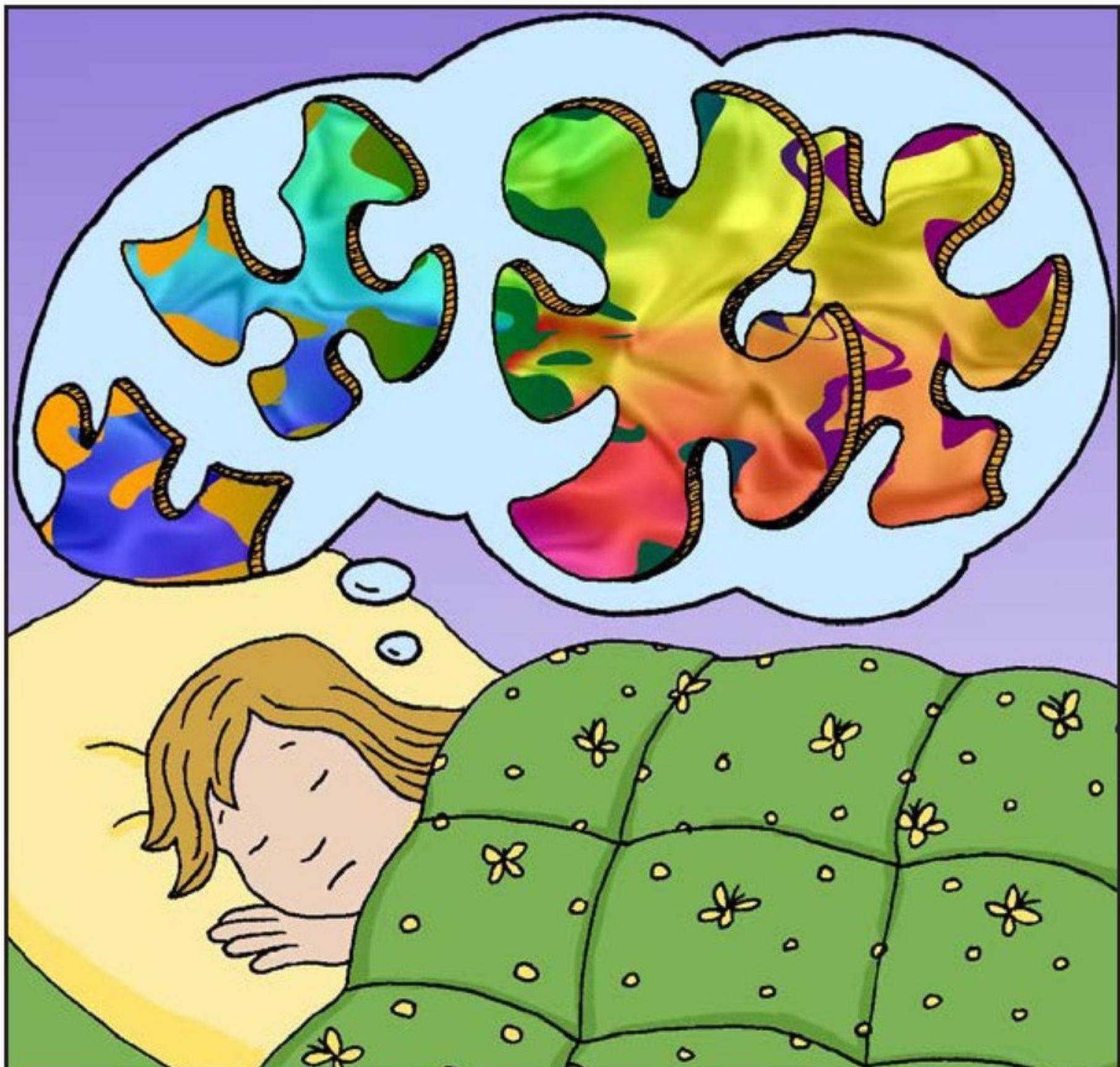


Mom looked at Becky closely. “You look unhappy, Becky. Something wrong?”
Becky admitted this puzzle was much harder than she expected. Her head hurt from working on it all day.

“Well,” Mom said, “after dinner, we’ll take a look at it together.”

After dinner, they pulled up another chair, and moved the table over a bit so they could all sit together. Becky was now looking at the puzzle upside down and immediately saw three pieces that fit! This was great! “Hey, look, just moving over here gave me a different way to see where the pieces fit.”





✿ The Dream ✿

That night, Becky dreamed about the puzzle. Big lopsided pieces were floating in space, and would NOT organize themselves! Straight edges, loops, and colors were all mixed up. She woke in the morning, feeling unsure about this whole puzzle thing. *Maybe I should just cool it for a while, she thought.*

That afternoon, they all went to the gym to exercise and swim laps in the pool. Becky swam as fast as she could, completing two laps to her parents' one. She was feeling very **energetic!** For a while, Becky completely forgot about her dream and the puzzle. When they all returned home, she was eager to start her puzzle again.



Another Point of View

On Sunday, one of Becky's best friends, Sara, came over to play. Sara was a good puzzler, too. "Becky, you need to get all these shades of blue over here, see?" Becky did see, but the blues were sky AND water. Still, Sara's idea was worth trying. And there were still lots and lots of pieces to go.

Now Becky and Sara had several ways to work: by straight edge (the easy one), by **design**, by shape, by looking at the puzzle upside down and sideways, and by color.

Even with all the puzzle tricks, there were times when the two of them couldn't find the right piece. Sara even tried standing on her head. And believe it or not, that worked, too!



 **An Unexpected Problem** 

By Monday morning, the puzzle was nearly complete. By Monday afternoon, less than ten pieces were left, and Becky was starting to celebrate! It was a beautiful picture . . . but wait . . . a piece was missing! MISSING! Becky looked on the floor, on the couch, even under the puzzle.

“Mom! Dad!” she hollered, “a piece is MISSING!”

They combed through every inch of the dining room and kitchen. They checked under the rug, in back of the bookcase, underneath the couch cushions—no puzzle piece anywhere.

Becky’s mouth was turned down. A **defective** puzzle! Who would have known? It wasn’t 300 pieces, it was 299!

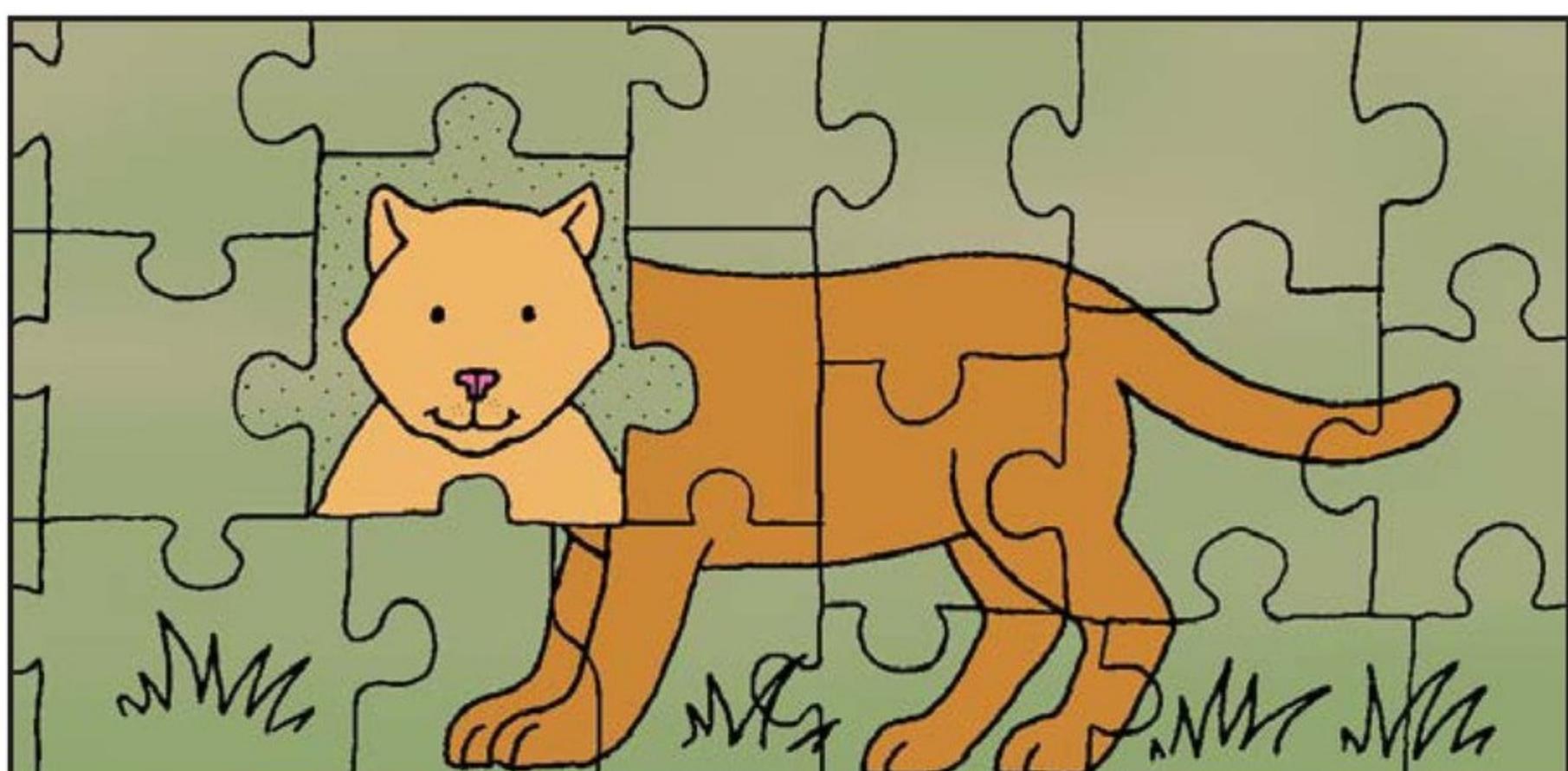
“Okay, Becky, I have an idea,” said Dad.



Dad to the Rescue

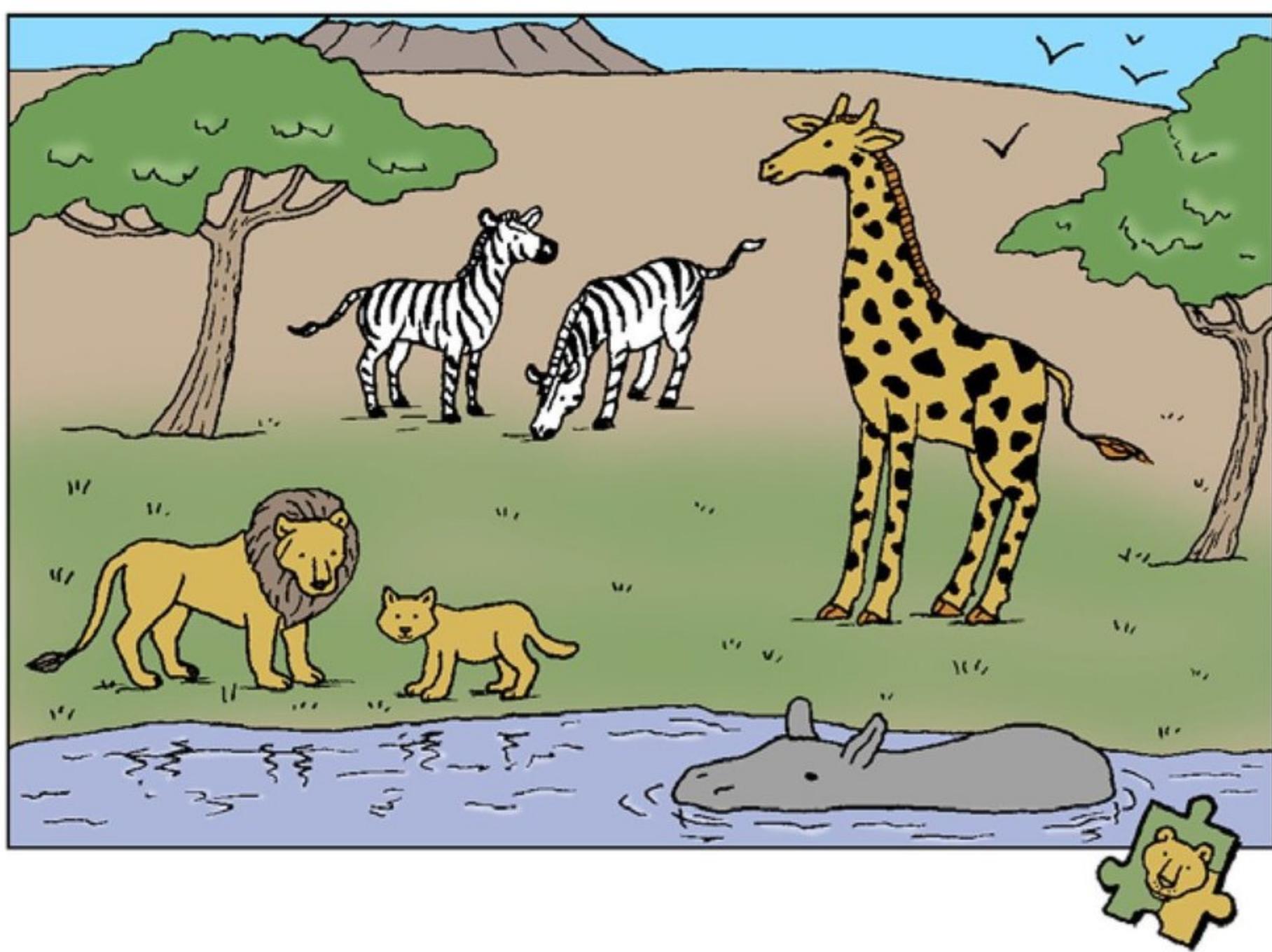
They carefully glued the finished puzzle onto poster board and hung it next to the other four in Becky's bedroom. The missing piece wasn't even noticeable. They had found a little picture of their cat, Snowball, and cut it into the shape of the missing piece. The face of Snowball peered out where the baby lion's face was supposed to be in the puzzle. Little Snowball didn't look nearly as ferocious.

So, it looked really neat, after all. And Becky was very proud of her dad for coming up with such a brilliant idea!



A Surprise Ending

On Tuesday, Becky was scrambling to get ready for school. She found the missing puzzle piece in the cuff of her jeans. Stunned, she looked at it. *Now that Snowball was in the picture, what should she do?* She quickly **compared** the two pieces and decided she liked her version better. She taped the missing piece to the edge of the finished puzzle. It was a reminder that sometimes creative puzzle solving is more than just getting pieces to fit.



 **Glossary** 

array (<i>n.</i>)	a large number or variety of things (p. 5)
challenge (<i>n.</i>)	a test of the ability to do something (p. 4)
compared (<i>v.</i>)	to have noticed how things are alike and different (p. 19)
defective (<i>adj.</i>)	not complete; having a flaw (p. 16)
design (<i>n.</i>)	a pattern of shapes and colors (p. 14)
discouraged (<i>adj.</i>)	feeling hopeless (p. 10)
energetic (<i>adj.</i>)	active and excited (p. 13)
impatient (<i>adj.</i>)	excited to do something and not wanting to wait to do it (p. 6)
organized (<i>v.</i>)	to have arranged things in an orderly way (p. 7)
separate (<i>v.</i>)	to set or keep apart (p. 8)
trick (<i>n.</i>)	a special skill or way of doing something (p. 8)

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Level P Leveled Book
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