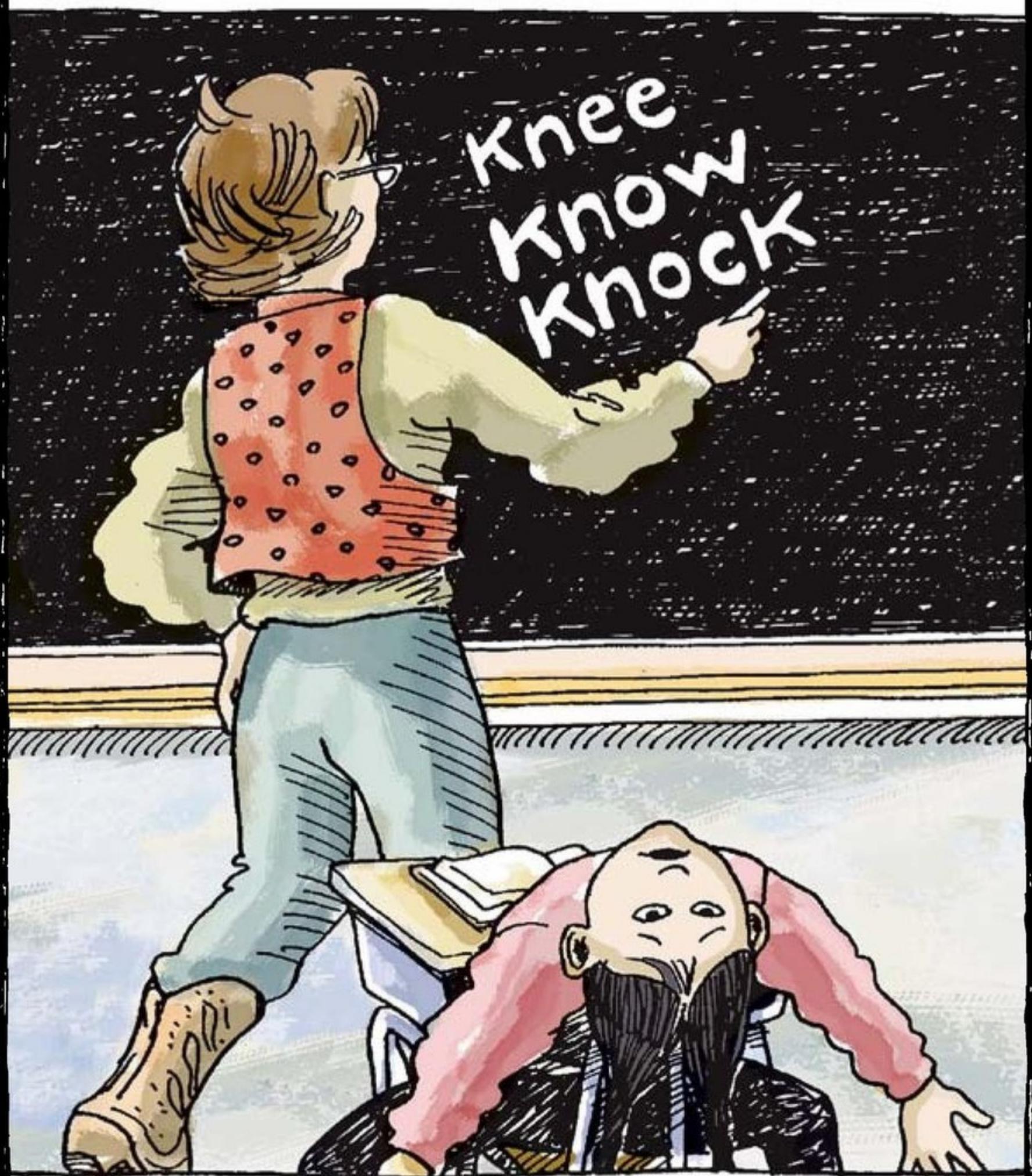


LEVELED Book • S

The Trouble with English



Written by Ned Jensen • Illustrated by John Kastner

The Trouble with English

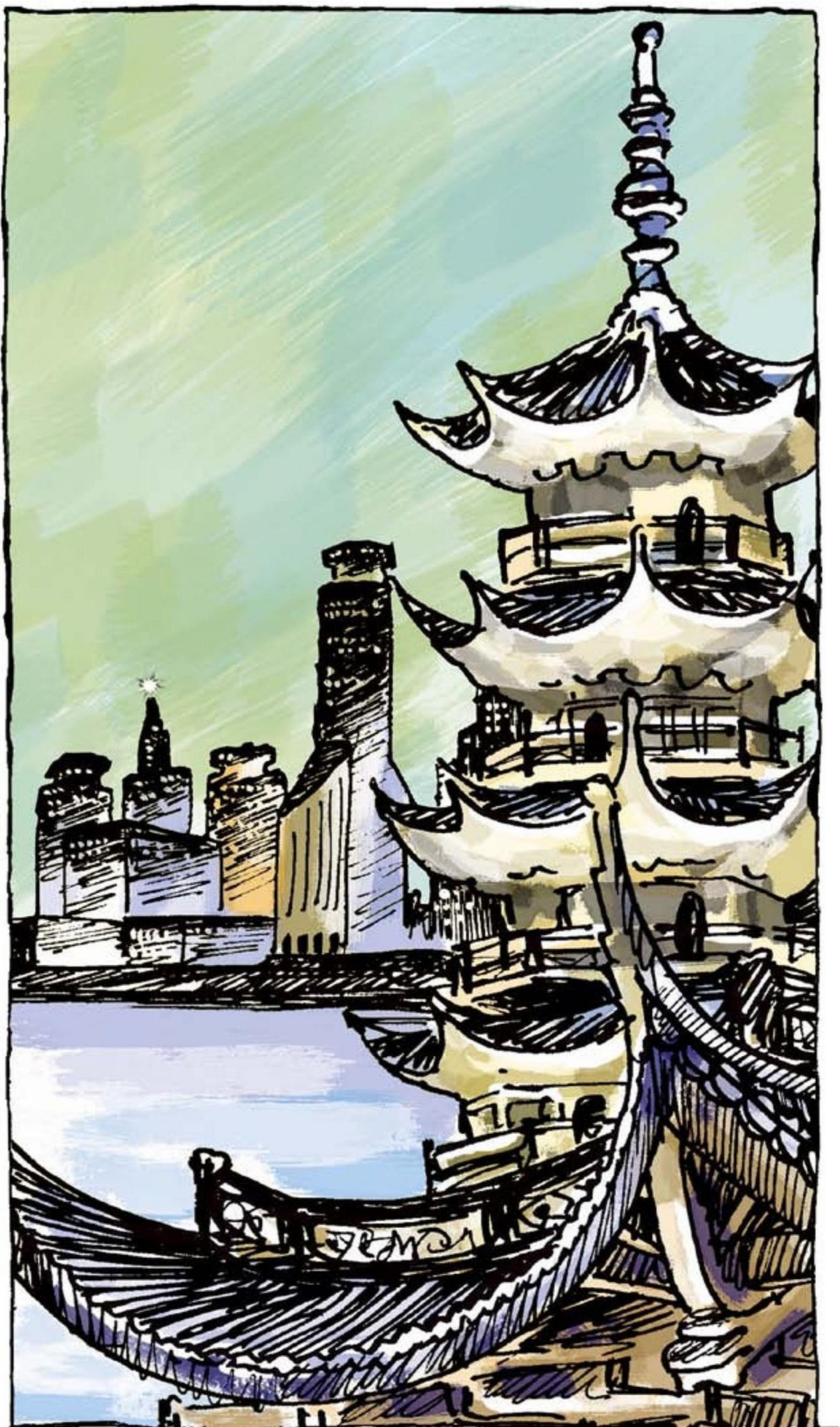


Written by Ned Jensen
Illustrated by John Kastner



Table of Contents

A New Country	5
A New Language	9
Weird Expressions.....	13
Reading and Writing	17
Oh, No—Spelling	25

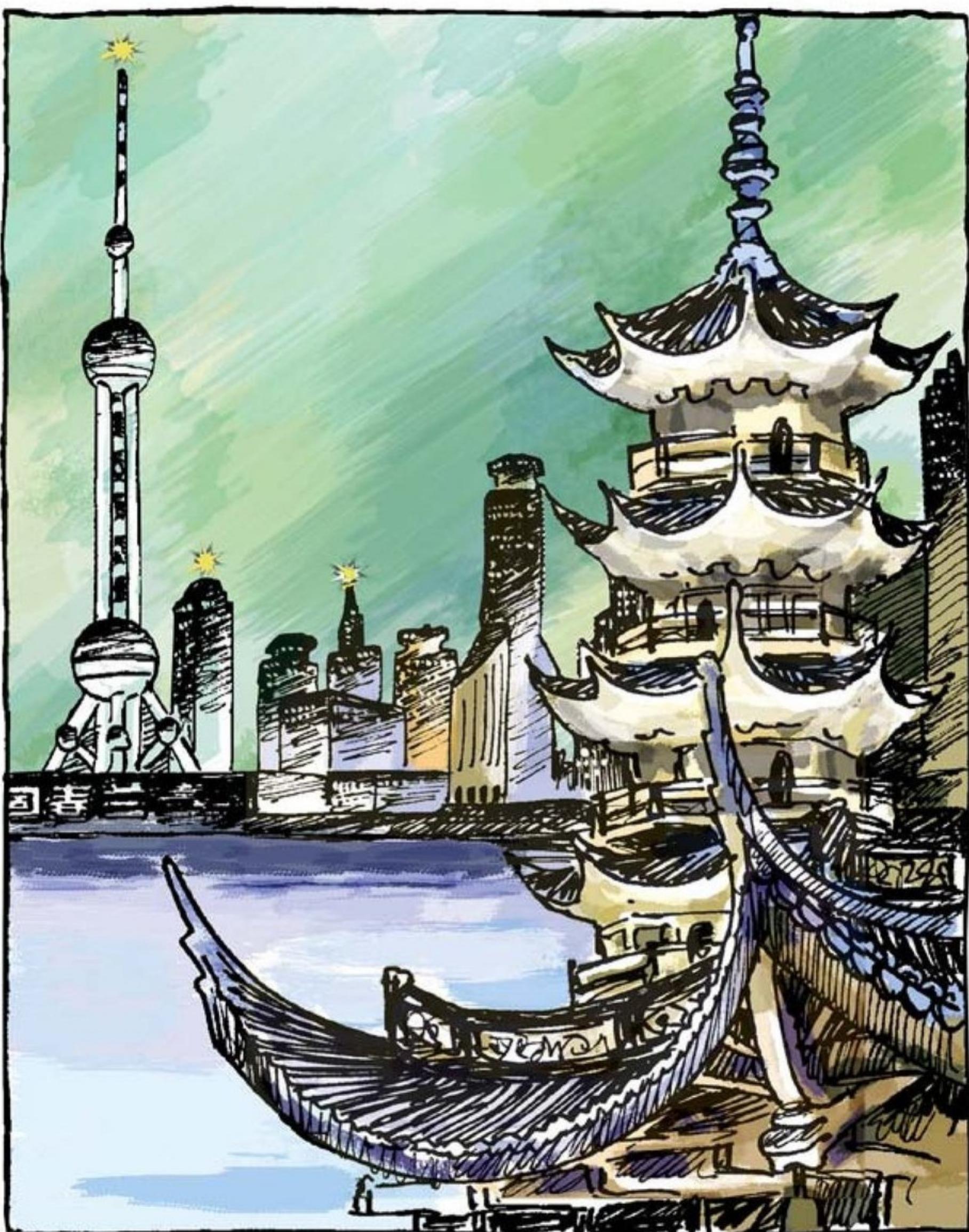




A New Country

My name is Ting Yao and I have been living in my new country for a little over two years now. I am nine years old, and I came here with my mom, dad, and little brother from Shanghai, China. It wasn't easy leaving behind my friends and all the things that I was familiar with. In fact, it was incredibly difficult.

Shanghai is the biggest city in China.
It is both very modern and very old.
It has many small and ancient buildings
sandwiched between sparkling new buildings
that reach high into the sky. At night,
they light up like giant Christmas trees.





I loved the busy streets with all the people scurrying here and there. I loved the smell of fresh-cooked food prepared by the sidewalk food vendors. They were everywhere. It was a city full of interesting smells. It was a city of many sights and sounds. It was a city full of energy. It was exciting.

I love my new country even though I still miss my friends, the games we used to play, and the foods I loved to eat. I especially miss the salted dried plums. They were my favorite snack food—a mixture of sweetness and saltiness. They were much better than the sweet candy and chocolate eaten by my friends here in my new country.

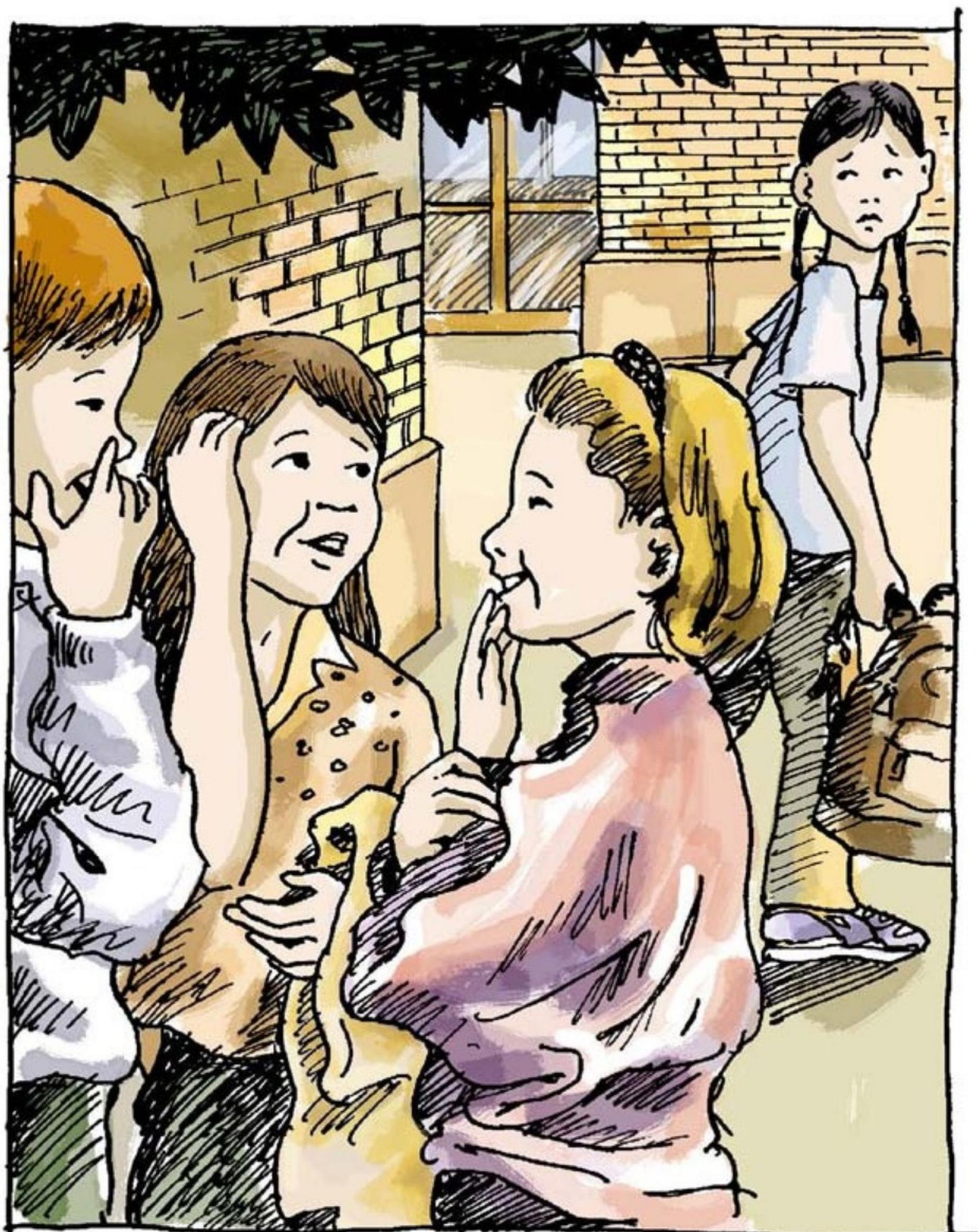


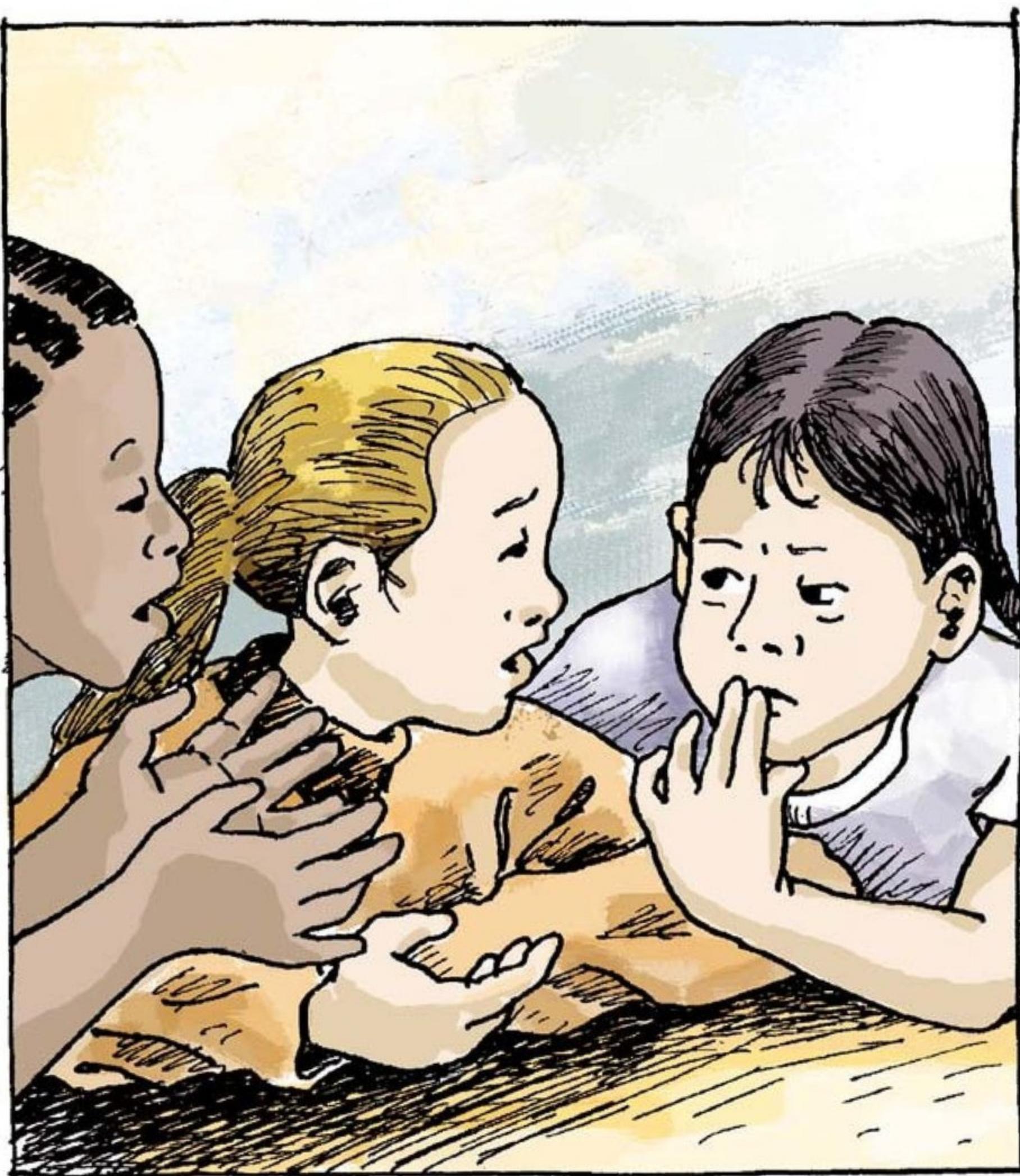


A New Language

But what I don't like about my new country is learning a new language, especially English. Everyone told me that English would be hard to learn but, for some reason, I refused to believe them. Besides, I had learned to speak Mandarin, and it is a hard language. I didn't think English could be any harder. But I soon learned that I was wrong and that they were right. English is hard. Sometimes it just doesn't make sense.

You can't imagine what it is like to live in a new land where everyone speaks a language you don't understand. I have yet to meet a single kid who speaks Mandarin. I wonder if dogs feel the same way when they are around a bunch of humans who don't speak dog.





Over the last two years, I have learned to understand most of the words my friends speak. But I still get confused now and then. I'm trying very hard to learn to speak well, but my Chinese accent makes some words I say sound different. Most of my friends understand how difficult it is, and they try to help me pronounce the words correctly.

But some kids are just plain mean. They love to make fun of the way I say certain words. They say I make an *R* sound as though it is an *L*. I probably do, but hey, I'm still learning how to speak English. I wonder how they would feel if they were in China and trying to speak Mandarin. They taunt me and say things like, "There goes the girl who "rikes flied lice." I don't find it very funny, and most of my friends don't either. They tell me that I should just ignore the mean kids, but that is easier said than done.





Weird Expressions

It is not just pronouncing words that causes me trouble. Sometimes it is very hard to understand what is meant by what someone says. English has a lot of crazy expressions. My teacher, Ms. Brickle, explained to me that these strange expressions are idioms. I thought that has to be a good word for them because idiom sounds like idiot. Only an idiot would make up idioms.



Let me give you some examples, and then maybe you can understand why I get so confused at times. There was the time one of my friends told me that Tommy Jackson was pulling the wool over my eyes and that he was just putting me on. Now Tommy Jackson has never been very nice to me, but he has never pulled any wool over my eyes nor has he ever put me on. Besides how can you put someone on? You put clothes on, not people.

Then there was the time our teacher, Ms. Brickle, yelled out, "Hold everything. Pull yourselves together. Don't get carried away. Stop beating around the bush and get on with it."



I didn't know what to do. I held onto my desk and books, but I couldn't hold everything. I got up to pull together with the others in class, but no one else got up. And I didn't see anyone being carried away so I'm not sure what that was all about. And I certainly wasn't beating around a bush. There wasn't even a bush in sight. For a moment I thought maybe Ms. Brickle had gone a bit crazy.

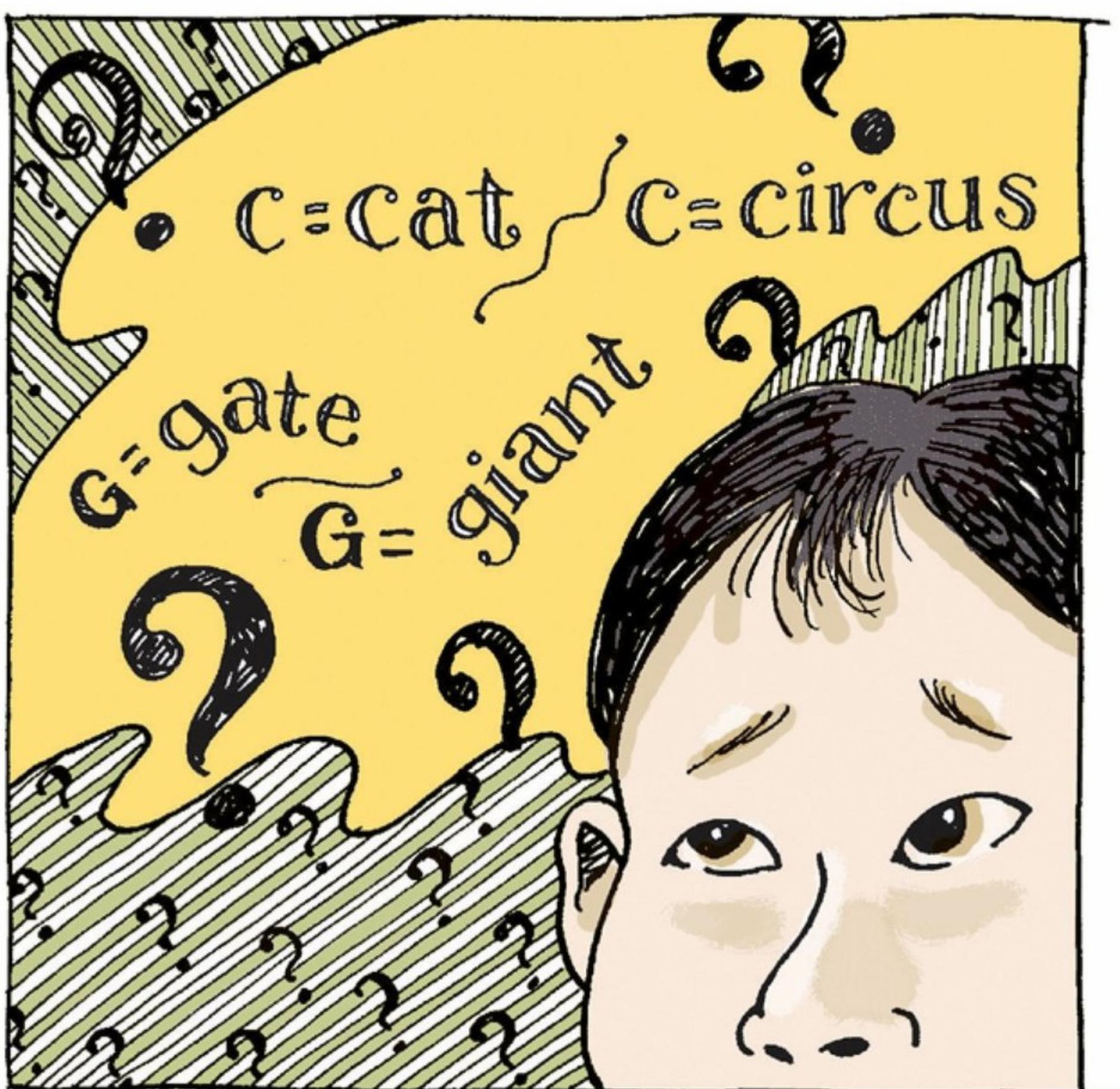


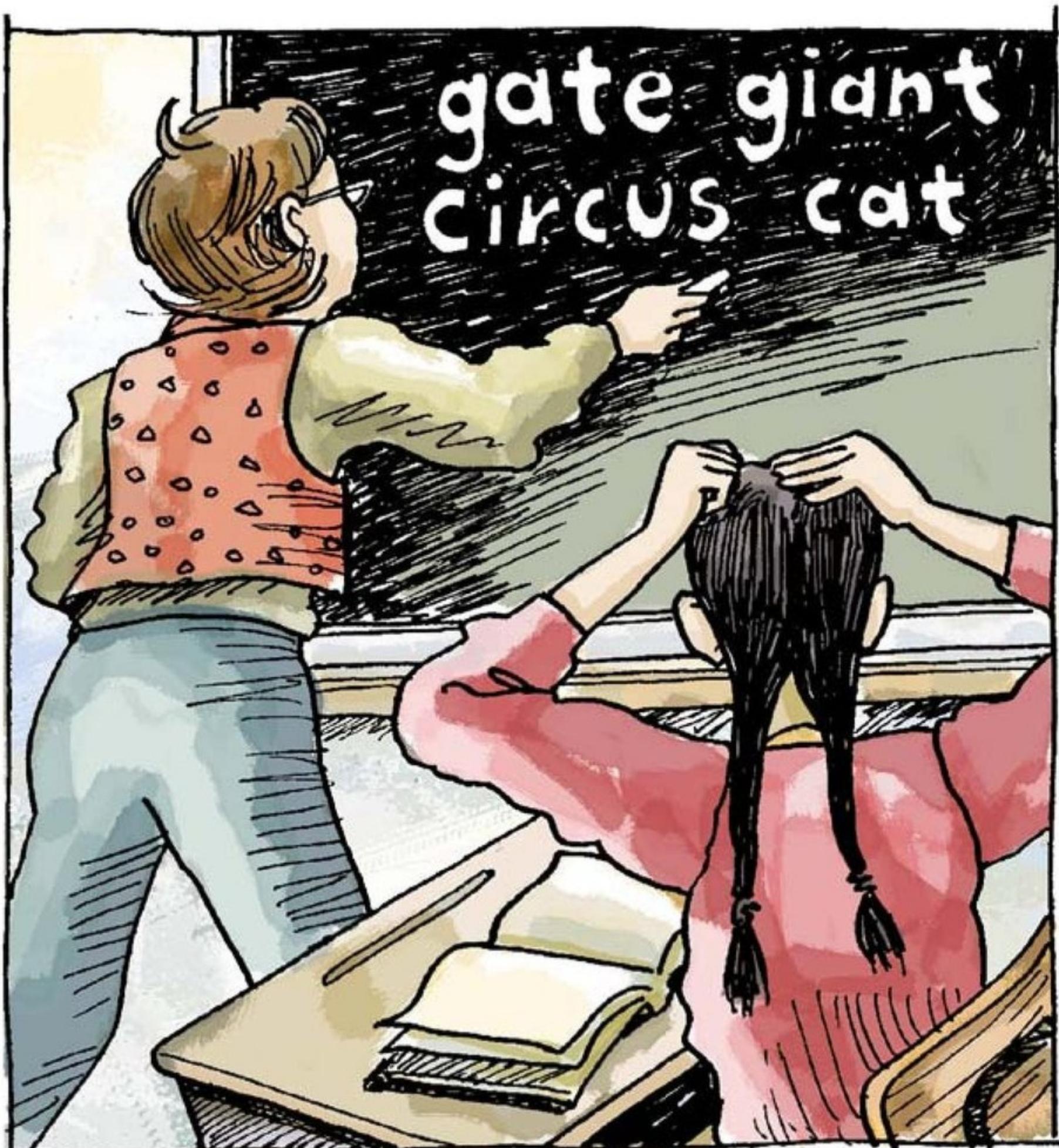


Reading and Writing

Sometimes I think it would be okay if all I had to do was learn to speak English. But I am in school and they are teaching reading and writing. And, of course, they are teaching it in English. Now, if you think speaking English is hard for someone new to this country, you should try reading it. At first it seemed nearly impossible.

In English, one letter can make many different sounds. For example, take the letter C. If C is the first letter of a word like *cat*, it makes a different sound than when it is the first letter of a word like *circus*. And think about G. If it is the first letter of a word like *gate*, it makes a different sound than when it is the first letter of a word like *giant*. How's a person supposed to keep all of this straight?



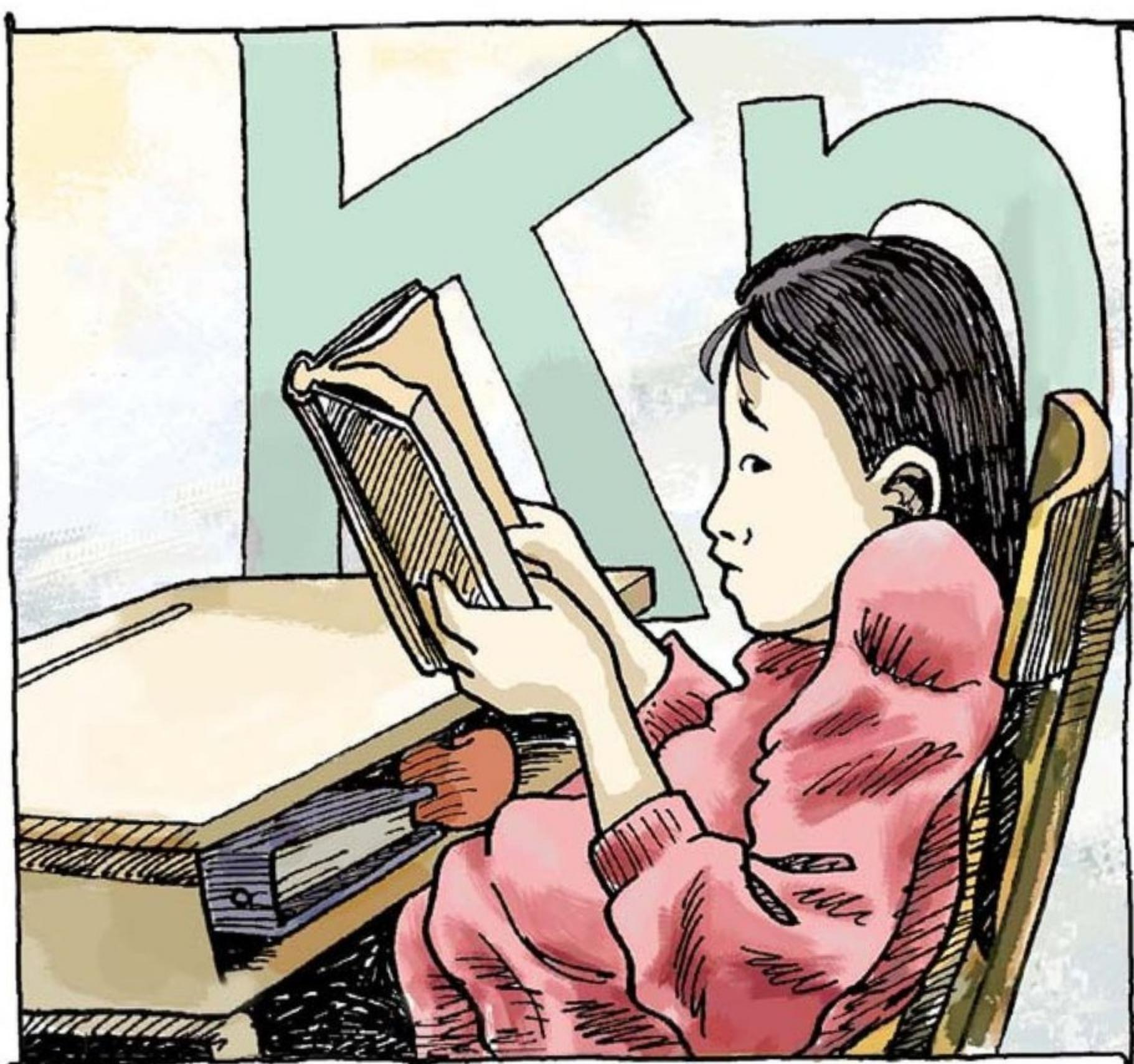


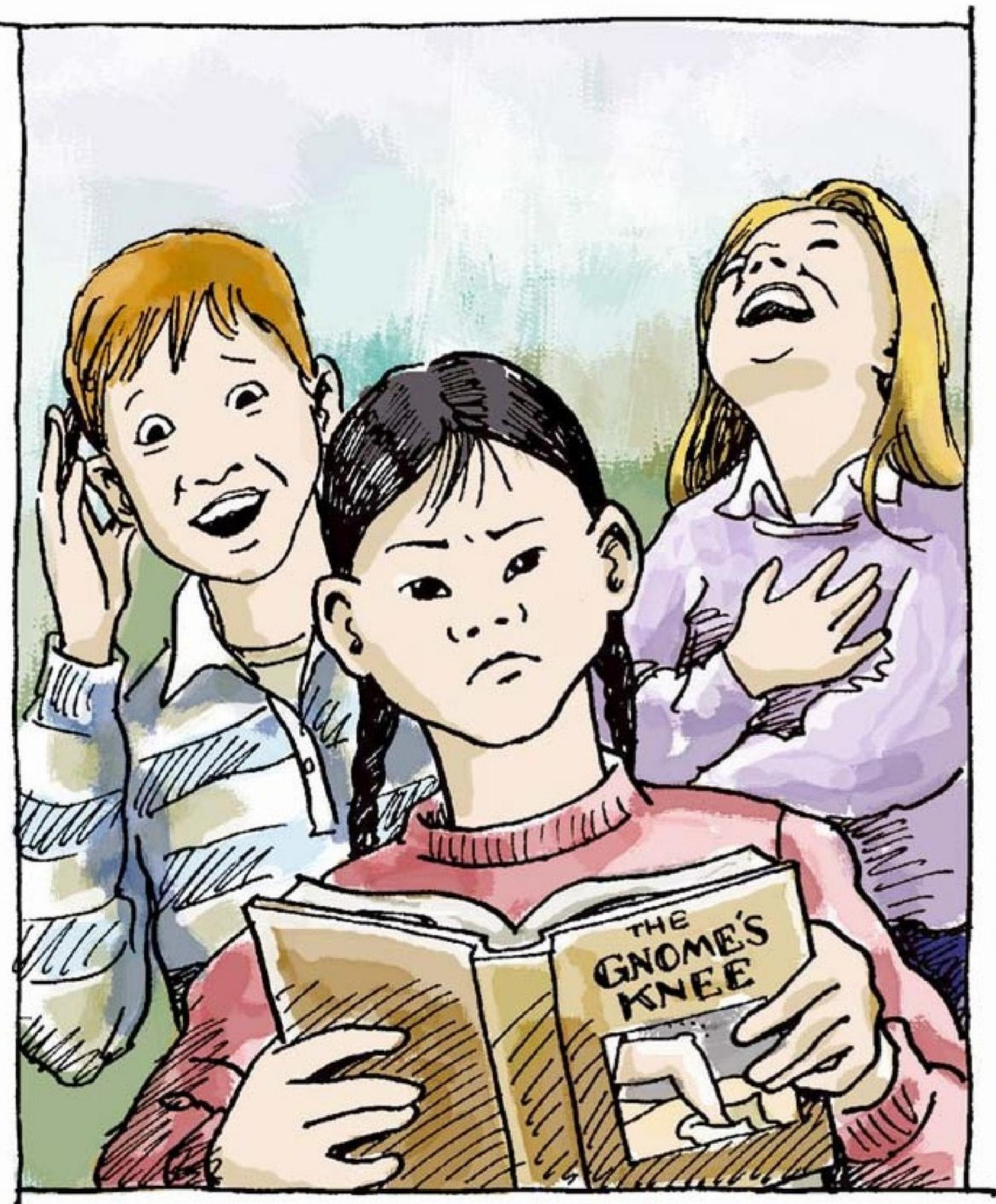
For a long time I would pause every time I came to a word that started with C or G. I would try to figure out which pronunciation was right. In the beginning I got it wrong as many times as I got it right. But in time I began to memorize the pronunciation of the C and G words. That was easier than trying to figure out why one word was different from another.



And there were the double letters? What a pain they were. When I read words like *happy* and *apple*, it sounded like I was stuttering. My teacher said when there are two of the same letters next to each other in a word that one of them is silent. She said that I should just ignore one of the letters. So I ask, why put two of the same letters together in the first place? It just confuses people like me who are trying to learn to read and spell in English.

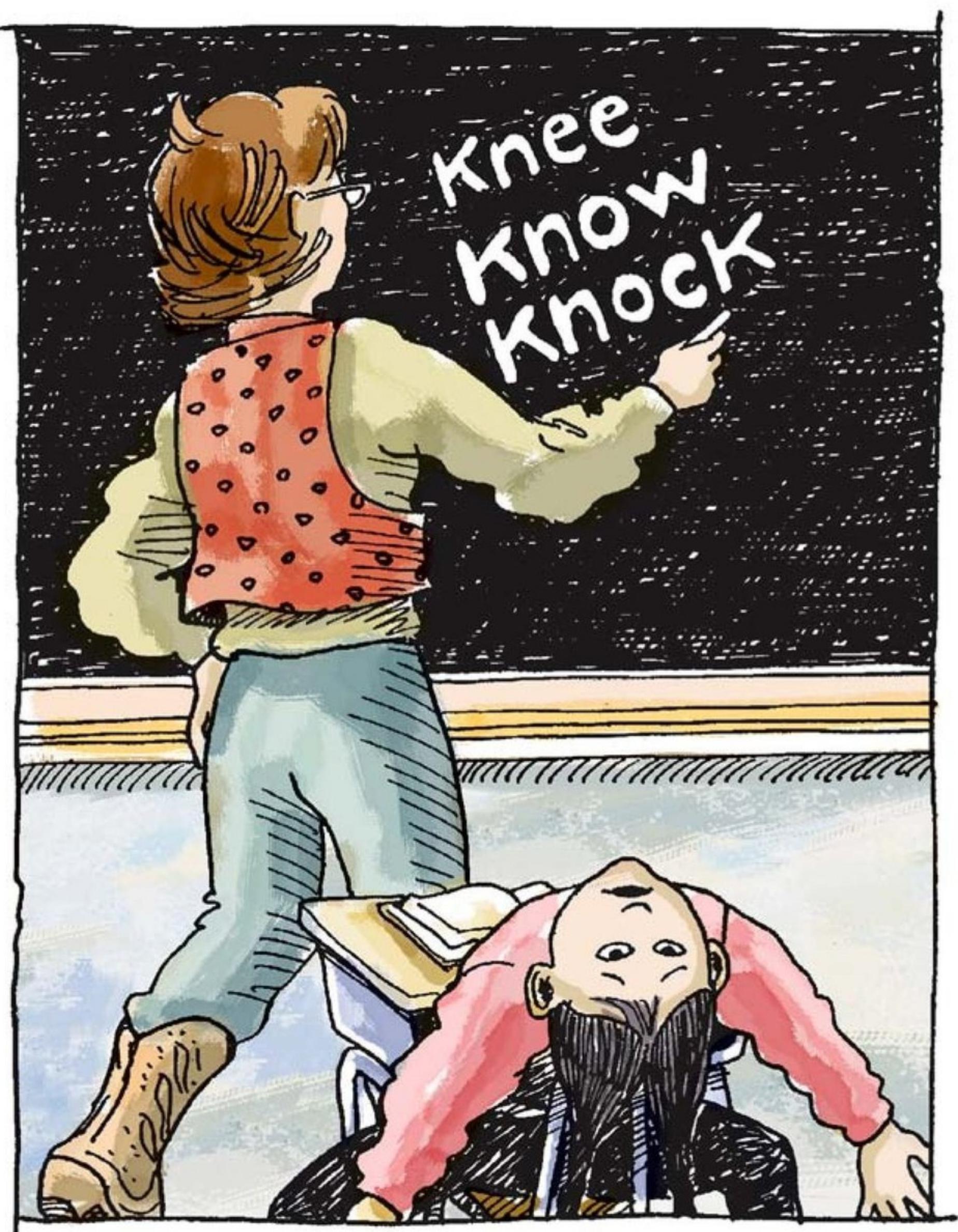
Then there is the whole thing about silent letters like *K* in the word *know*. First Ms. Brickle told me that the *K* makes a *k* sound like the *C* in *cat*. That was confusing enough. After all, why would you want two letters to make the same sound? So when I see *K*, naturally I am going to say the *k* sound. But then I find words like *know*, *knee*, and *knock* when I am reading. So during read-aloud time I messed up. I felt so embarrassed when I pronounced the *K*.





What made it worse is that some people laughed at me. But it is not just K. There are a lot of other letters that have some stupid special rules about being silent. W is one of the letters I used to mess up in words like *write* and *wrap* until I learned another stupid rule about it being silent, too.

I feel the same way about silent letters
as I do about double letters. If you're not
going to say them, why even put them in a
word? I vote for getting rid of all double and
silent letters in the English language. They
are worthless and useless and confusing.



Now that's just a few examples of the utter confusion I feel. Let me tell you more. The other day my class was reading about spraying a bug bomb on a honeybee comb. The book said that the bug bomb would kill the bees and the hive would become a tomb. Now I looked at *comb*, *bomb*, and *tomb* and thought they had to sound the same except for the first letter. Wrong. Each one was pronounced differently. Now I ask you, does that make a bit of sense? Of course it doesn't. But that's English. I was so confused that I wanted to slam my book shut, crawl under my desk, and hide.





Oh, No—Spelling

And spelling doesn't get any better. During a spelling test last year my teacher told us to spell *fish*. So I did. I spelled it *photi*. Ms. Brickle, my teacher, called me to her desk after she looked at my spelling paper and asked why on earth I would spell *fish*, *photi*? "Just sound it out," she said.

"But Ms. Brickle, that's what I did," I told her. The first sound is the *f* sound like in *phone*, so I wrote *ph*. The second sound is like the *i* sound as in *women*, so I wrote an *o*. And the last sound is like the *sh* sound in *lotion*, so I wrote *ti*.

Ms. Brickle just looked at me, shrugged her shoulders, shook her head, smiled and said, "Oh, I see."



But despite all the confusion and the embarrassing moments, I keep getting better the longer I am in my new country. Who knows, maybe someday I will speak English as well as if I were born speaking it. That's what my mom keeps telling me when I am feeling down in the dumps about the way I speak English. Now, wouldn't that be great?

The Trouble with English
Level S Leveled Book
© Learning A-Z
Written by Ned Jensen
Illustrated by John Kastner

All rights reserved.
www.readinga-z.com

Correlation

LEVEL S	
Fountas & Pinnell	O
Reading Recovery	34
DRA	34