

LEVELED BOOK • Q

# The New Soccer Ball



Written by Rebecca Hughes  
Illustrated by Abby Johnston

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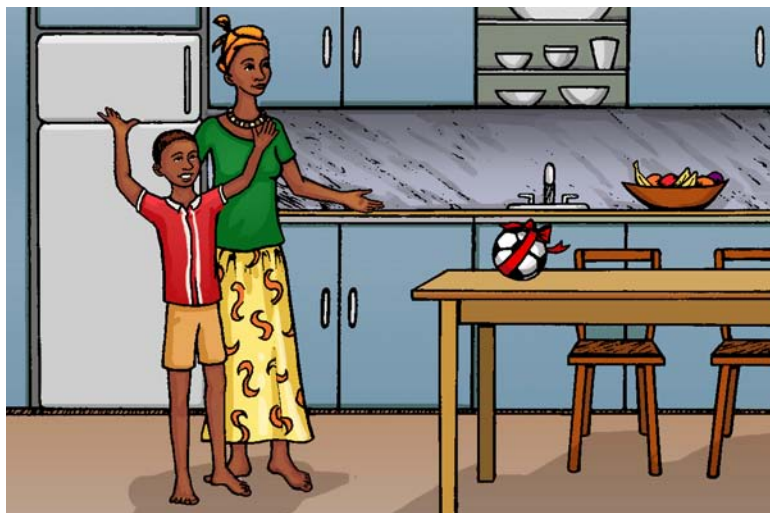
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## A Special Present

“David, it’s time for breakfast,” Mrs. Motangi called. “There’s a birthday present for you to open.”

David ran into the kitchen and saw a shiny new soccer ball on the table. He smiled and started jumping up and down with excitement.

“Can I take the ball to school with me, please?” asked David.

“Of course,” Mrs. Motangi said. “But you need to be careful with your first real soccer ball.”

At school, David immediately put his soccer ball under his desk. During the morning lessons, he kept quietly tapping the ball with his foot to make sure it was still there. Finally, it was recess time. David grabbed the ball and quickly ran outside. He **dribbled** the ball across the field to a group of students.

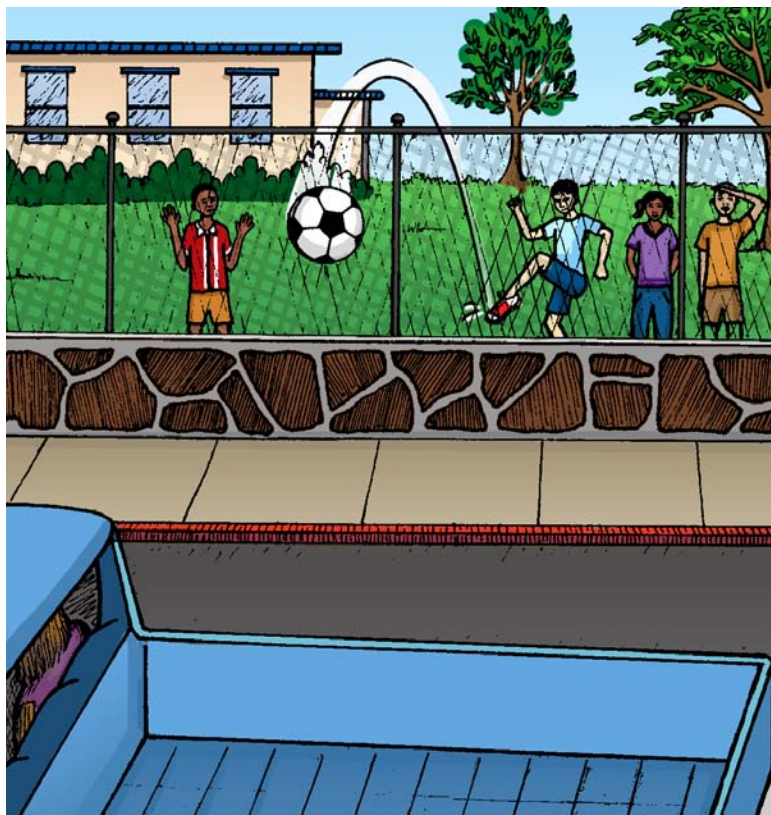
Soccer was David's favorite sport. Since he had arrived in the United States and started school two months ago, he had played soccer every day during recess. Recess was always his favorite time because he didn't have to speak English, a language that was still fairly new to him. When he played soccer, he could forget that he felt like an **alien** at this new school.

### No Game

"Look!" called David. "I got a new soccer ball. We can use it for our game today."

The other students **exchanged** glances and just stared at David. These were the most words David had ever spoken to them.

"We don't need your ball," said a tall boy, Jacob. "We already have one."



Jacob kicked David's ball with all his might. The ball **soared** over the school's high fence, bounced once, and landed in the back of a passing pickup truck.

"Goal!" screamed the other kids, jumping up and down and slapping Jacob on the back. David watched in **horror** as the pickup truck drove out of sight, taking his new soccer ball with it. What would his mother say?



David's eyes were as wide as saucers. As the reality of losing his new soccer ball sank in, David felt tears coming. He couldn't let his classmates, especially Jacob, see him crying, so he turned and sprinted into the classroom.

David's teacher, Mrs. Marquez, followed him inside. She found him hiding behind the writing center with tears streaming down his face.

"What happened, David?" Mrs. Marquez asked gently. "Are you all right?"

"My ball. I lost my new ball," cried David. "I've never had a real soccer ball before, and now it's gone."



Mrs. Marquez replied, "I know it's difficult to lose something. It's even harder when you're at a new school in an entirely different country and **continent**. I think the students would understand how you feel if you told them about your life in Africa."

"I don't think they care," said David.

"We'll see," said Mrs. Marquez. "Tomorrow I want you to bring in a few drawings, photos, or special objects to show us what your life was like in Africa."

### **Stuck!**

Later that day, David sat down at the kitchen table to draw a few pictures. He was staring at the paper when his older sister, Ruth, arrived home from high school.

"Help me, Ruth!" David called out. "I don't know what to draw. I'm supposed to explain how my life here is different from my life in Africa."

"It's like comparing melons to bananas," Ruth said, smiling.





### My Sister's Memory

"For one thing," Ruth explained. "Here, in America, we live in a big brick apartment building in a city. In Africa, we lived in a one-room cement block house in the Tongogara **refugee** camp in Zimbabwe."

"How can I explain what a refugee camp is to my classmates?" asked David.

Ruth answered, "Tell them that a refugee camp is a place that protects people who have to leave their homes because of war. You were born in the camp, but I was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We left our village in the Congo and traveled to the camp because of the fighting. It was too dangerous to stay, and many of us left the village at the same time."





“Our family was lucky to make it to the camp,” said Ruth. “We walked many miles to find a bus to take us to Zambia. There we found a friend to drive us to Zimbabwe.”

“I remember our home at the camp and how we slept on blankets on the floor,” said David. “Mother hung a sheet from the ceiling to divide the house into two sleeping areas and a kitchen area.”

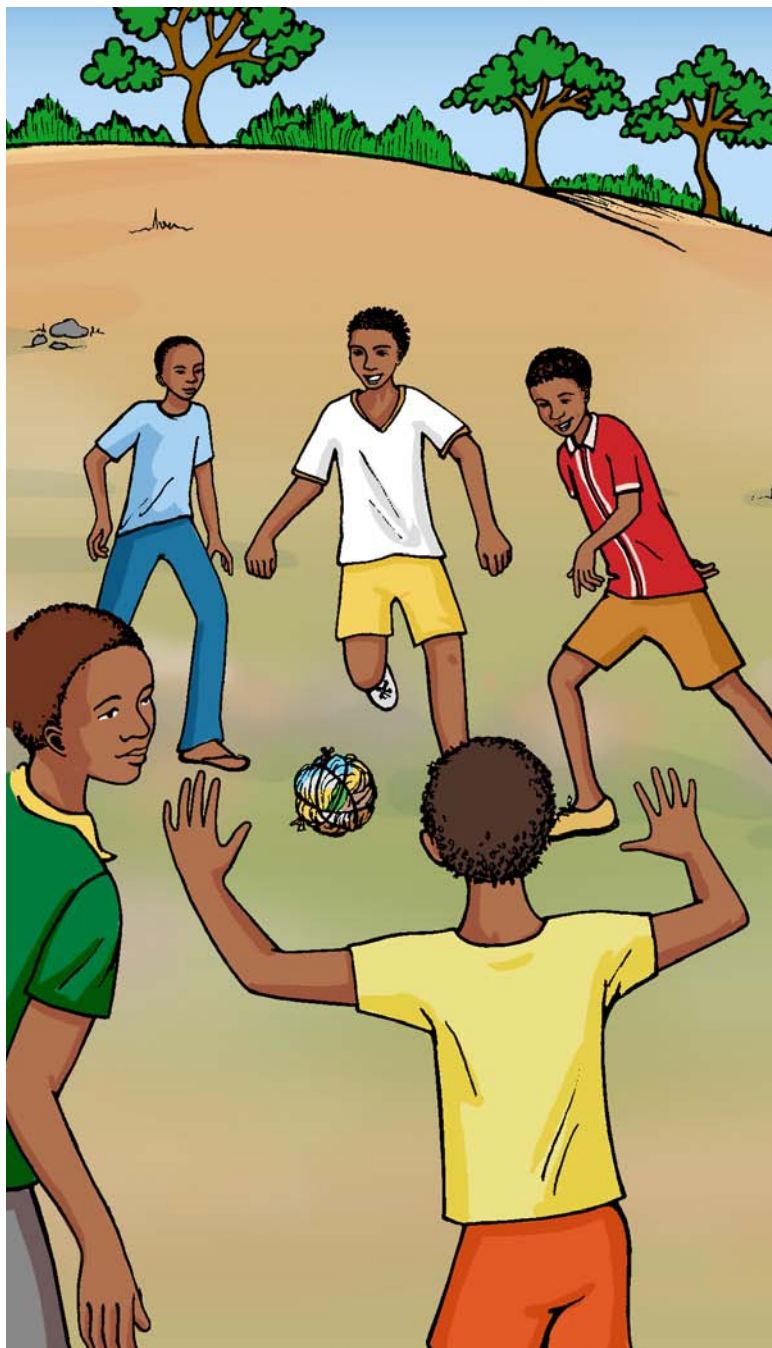
“Yes, that sheet was as colorful as a beautiful sunset,” recalled Ruth. “We had a couple of lightbulbs hanging on either side of the sheet, but the electricity hardly ever worked. We had one sink, but we couldn’t drink the brown water that dripped from it. Do you remember when the frog popped out of the **faucet** and jumped out of the sink?”

David laughed, “That was funny! My friends and I tried to catch many frogs. I miss my friends.”

“I miss my friends, too,” said Ruth. “I wonder if they are still in the camp. What else do you remember that was different?”

“I know my soccer ball was different,” David said. “Do you remember the soccer ball that my friends and I made out of lots of plastic bags tied together with string? That’s the only ball we had, but we still had fun playing soccer in the dusty dirt fields at the camp.”

David paused for a moment. “Sometimes I wish we still lived there,” he said.





## Lucky

“We had some good times, but the camp was not an easy place to live,” explained Ruth. “Our parents didn’t have work, and sometimes we didn’t have enough food. We usually only had rice and beans to eat.”

“I never want to eat rice and beans again!” laughed David.



“Also, we often couldn’t go to school,” explained Ruth. “The school was far from our house, and there was no bus. It took us over an hour to walk to school, and sometimes when we arrived, there were no teachers. Our parents brought us here to go to school and have a better life.”

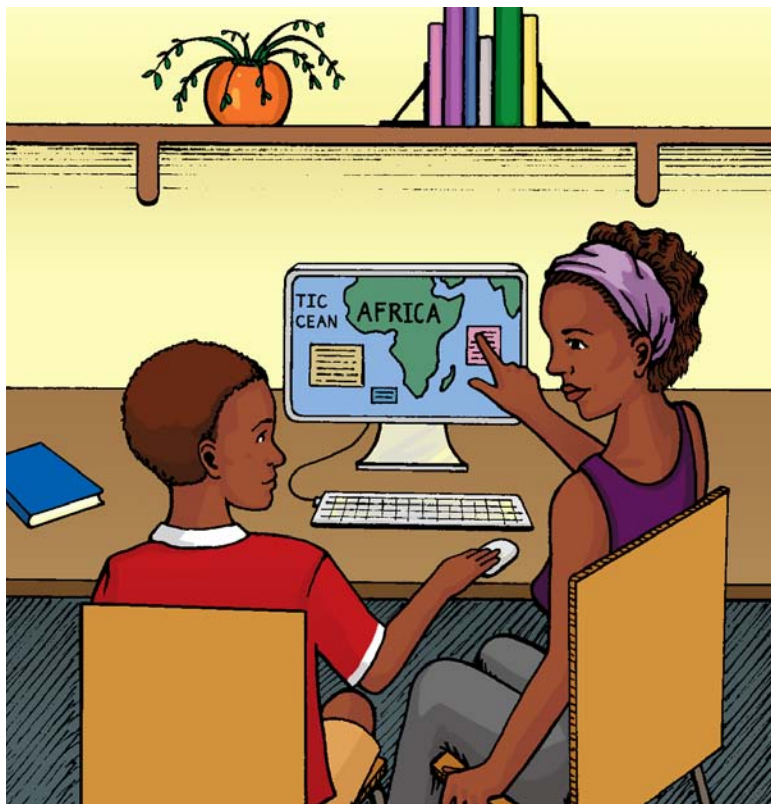
“Thanks for helping me remember,” David said. “I think I know what to take to school so the students will understand about where we came from. But they might think that we are really strange,” he said worriedly.

Ruth thought for a moment and then answered, “It’s important for your classmates to know that people are from different places and have had different **experiences**. It’s especially important for them to know why we feel lucky to live here.”

“I don’t feel very lucky right now,” said David with a frown, thinking about his lost soccer ball. But after a moment, he went on, “I guess we are lucky to have electricity all the time. We are also lucky because father has a job here, so soon we can get a car and maybe

a computer. I really like having a bed to sleep in and a TV to watch. The best part is we don't have to eat beans anymore, and we get to eat my favorite food, **foo foo**, all the time."

"Mother's foo foo is the best! Now you're making me hungry," Ruth said. "Come on. Let's go to the library. We can use the Internet on the computers there to get pictures for your **presentation**."





## David's Project

The next day, David brought a large box to school. He told his teacher that he was ready to share about his life in Africa. First, he took out a map of Africa. He showed the other students where his family was from and where they had moved to. He held up pictures showing all the differences between his life in Africa and his life in America. Finally, he pulled out of the box a ball made from plastic bags and string.

"What is that thing?" Jacob asked. "And what's it for?"

David told his classmates how he had played soccer almost every day with this kind of ball. He told them how they didn't have places to buy real soccer balls. Another student said, "I wish I lived in Zimbabwe. Then I wouldn't have to go to school. You were so lucky."

David explained, "No, you are all lucky to be in school. At the camp, we got to play soccer, but we didn't have money to buy new books or games. We could never leave the camp because it wasn't safe. I am really happy to live here now."

After David's presentation, the other students applauded, and Mrs. Marquez announced that it was recess time. As David was walking out the door to the playground, he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned and saw Jacob holding out a shiny soccer ball. "Here," Jacob offered, "you can have my soccer ball."

"Thanks," smiled David. "It's perfect!"

"C'mon, let's play!" called Jacob as he raced out the door.



## Glossary

<b>alien</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a being from a place other than Earth; an outsider (p. 5)
<b>continent</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	one of the main divisions of land on Earth, including Africa, Antarctica, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America (p. 8)
<b>dribbled</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	quickly moved a soccer ball forward using repeated taps with the feet (p. 5)
<b>exchanged</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	traded (p. 5)
<b>experiences</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	anything that happens to a person (p. 15)
<b>faucet</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a valve at the end of a pipe, where the flow of a liquid or gas can be controlled (p. 12)
<b>foo foo</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a thick, pasty food from West and Central Africa, usually made by boiling and pounding cassava and yams (p. 16)
<b>horror</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	intense fear, shock, disgust, or other distress (p. 6)
<b>presentation</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a show or demonstration put on before an audience (p. 16)
<b>refugee</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a person who flees war, famine, persecution, or natural disaster with no definite place to go (p. 9)
<b>soared</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	flew high in the air (p. 6)



Special thanks to Ruth Kunduyi and Deborah Kunduyi, whose immigration story helped shape this one.

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