

SUMMER DIY

Make your own
pop-up books!

pg 30

STORY
WEAVERS

Black Hair

COMICS
TRAVEL

Sports





Issue No.21

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Hello BGM readers

Summer is upon us and with it, a great lineup of reading for you from our young writers. But wait... do you have plans for the summer? Whether you do or don't, Kosi [12] has a great DIY project for you that is both exciting and suitable for everyone - creating your very own pop-up book. Okay, here's the idea: if you are travelling, going on a road trip, visiting family, staying home, or going to the beach this summer, decide on a theme like, animals [could be farm animals], foods [at your local supermarket or farmer's market], or water creatures [whatever lives in the sea], and create a pop-up book, or two! Maybe three. You can even choose to create some for your friends or siblings [or anyone you like - mom, dad] using their favourite things, and surprise them. Is someone's birthday coming up? Well, you get the idea. So check out Kosi's step-by-step instructions on how to create your very own pop-up book!

But that's not all. BGM girls have stories to tell you and special features on our culture. For the sports fans or those interested in understanding a little about a sport, Ruth [13] indulges us into a little history of ice skating, a sport she herself has mastered.

I wish you happy reading and a wonderful summer, until next time.

Annette



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Indigenous land acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that Black Girl's Magazine is situated in the Territory and Treaty Thirteen lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. We recognize the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee, and acknowledge our shared responsibility to respect and care for the land and waters.

We thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land for thousands of years. Long before today were Aboriginal peoples who have been the stewards of this place. We recognize and deeply appreciate their historic connection to this place. We recognize the contributions of Métis, Inuit, and other Indigenous peoples have made, both in shaping and strengthening this community in particular, and our province and country as a whole.

*Photo credit:
Colin + Meg Unsplash*



Black Culture

Play with Purpose

By Lauryn A., 13 | Ontario, Canada

In every community, some games reflect its culture. In Black communities, these games are more than just something to do for fun; they are ways of sharing history, creativity, and identity across generations. These games are passed down from parents, and by watching others and joining in, which helps build strong connections, while still allowing everyone to add their own unique style.

One well-known game is double-dutch. This game involves two ropes turning in opposite directions while one or more people jump in between them. It takes teamwork, timing, and practice, which is part of what makes it so fun. Double dutch often includes chants and creative footwork, allowing people to express themselves through rhythm and movement. This connection to rhythm is deeply rooted in African traditions, where dance and movement are important forms of expression. My mother and aunt taught me double dutch rope skipping when I was younger. It was so much fun, but it took me a while to learn how to jump in. Even though I don't get to play Double Dutch as often as I would like, whenever I do, it's always exciting, whether at school or just with friends.

Another important part of childhood games that I was also taught is hand-clapping games. These usually involve two people clapping in a pattern while singing a rhythmic chant. The goal is to stay in sync or go faster without making a mistake. Games like "Miss Mary Mack" and "Stella Ella-Ola" are passed down from generation to generation and often change over time; the words may change in the song, but the hand movements stay the same.

I noticed this when I was talking to my mother about the games she used to play. When we tried one together, I realized that I heard a different version of the same rhyme. This shows how these games can change over time while still keeping





the same meaning and fun.

Did you know that Hand-clapping games are also connected to Black musical traditions? They use rhythm, repetition, and call-and-response, which are also found in music styles like gospel and hip-hop. Even without instruments, the clapping and timing create music. In a way, your body becomes the instrument. These patterns come from African traditions where music, movement, and storytelling are all connected.

These games became especially important in Black communities because they do not require money or equipment. When resources were limited, children created their own ways to have fun. Games like Double Dutch and hand-clapping games bring people together, show creativity, and give everyone a chance to join.

These games must continue to be passed down so they are not forgotten. When older generations teach younger ones, they are not just teaching a game; they are passing down culture and shared experiences. These moments help build stronger relationships within the community.

At the end of the day, games like Double Dutch and hand-clapping games are more than just childhood activities. They are traditions that bring people together and keep culture alive. By continuing to play and share them, we make sure they are never lost.

THE AMAZING GRACE OF
Sister Rosetta Tharpe



How Black People Have Shaped Music Today

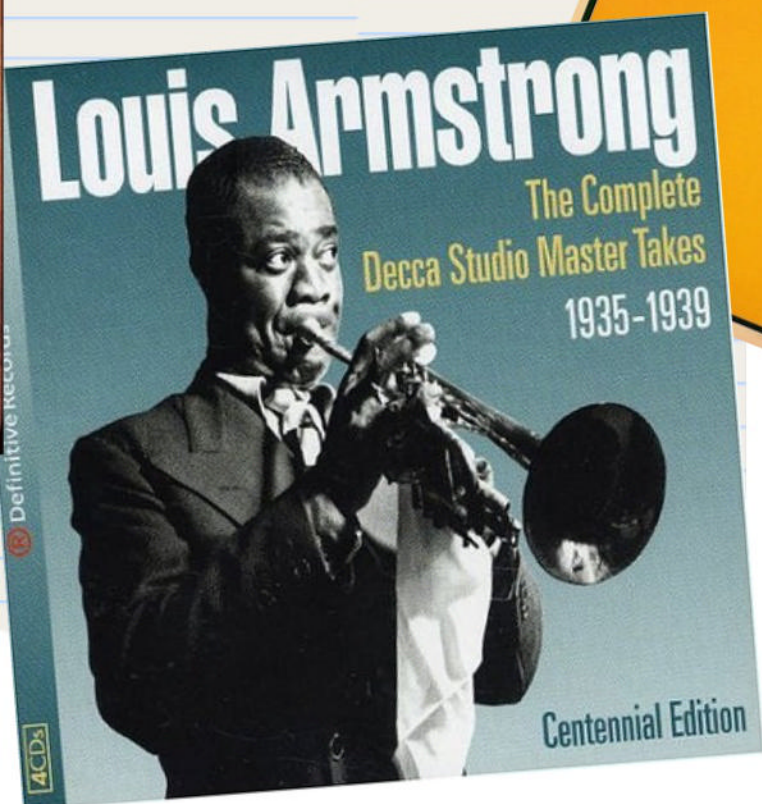
By Lauryn A., 13 | Ontario, Canada

Music is something listened to every single day, either intentionally or unintentionally. You listen to music in the car, when you go to the mall, when you're going for a walk, and even in your home. But have you ever wondered where music comes from? Music has many genres, such as rock, R&B, classical, jazz, pop, and a lot more. But do you know where they originate from or even who made the genre popular? Well, let's take a deeper look into music and where some of your favourite genres were created.

Music dates back really far in history, but the first instrument was the human voice, and one of the oldest instruments

found was a flute made of bones. It's hard to find remnants of these types of instruments as they start to break down after a while because of the materials they were made of. Eventually, music developed so much that we have entire music industries and so many different genres to listen to and enjoy. But not everyone knows why some genres exist and who started them.

A lot of genres today were either heavily inspired by Black people or Black culture, or even created by Black people! Some genres that might come to mind are R&B, afrobeats and different types of jazz. One genre that I was really surprised to learn was inspired by and created by Black people is Rock and Roll. Rock and Roll is one of the most influential music genres, helping so many others flourish. One thing many people don't know



about the genre is how heavily influenced it is by the blues, R&B, and gospel music. Artists like Muddy Waters not only had a huge impact on the blues, but was one of the greatest influences in Rock and Roll. Since R&B had such a strong impact on rock and roll, these genre names were used and switched around for a certain amount of time. Artists like Little Richard and Chuck Berry played a huge role in developing and blending elements of blues and jazz that blended into the making of rock and roll.

That's only one example, but if you didn't notice, Black people have impacted music for many years. Blues, Jazz, Gospel, Soul, House, Disco, Hip-Hop and Rap, Techno, Reggae, Afrobeats,

Trap, Drill, Rock & Roll, R & B, Jersey and more are all inspired by Black musicians, their cultures, and traditions.

Some prominent Black artists from the past and present are Sister Rosetta Tharp, Louis Armstrong, James Brown, Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Lauryn Hill, Beyoncé, and Kendrick Lamar. You might recognize a couple of the names up here, and you might be wondering how some of these people have influenced music. They paved the way for developing genres like Blues, made music so much more impactful with their messages. They inspired other Black people proving that they too could dominate the charts in the music industry! One person who proves this is Michael Jackson who ruled the music scene in his era, winning eight Grammys in one night - a very prestigious music award. His nickname, known around the world, is literally the "King of Pop". By the time this article comes out, there should even be a movie about him!

This is the reality of how some types of music came to be - by Black people expressing themselves, standing up for themselves and showing the world what they can do. I encourage you to do some research on this topic, as well. I found it very interesting that many genres you might listen to may be influenced by some history you might not even know about!



CHECK UP

By Ruth McDonald, 13 | Ontario, Canada

I have a website in the making called HerMed4Blacks. On this website, young Black girls and others will be able to find inspiration as they read about changemakers in the medical field. I made this website because oftentimes people need inspiration to become what they want to be, so I hope that this will be their inspiration.

Today, I am featuring the amazing Nigerian cardiologist, **Elizabeth Ofili**. I am writing about her because I have always wanted to be a cardiologist, so she is my inspiration. A cardiologist is someone who studies the heart.

Elizabeth Ofili is a physician, scientist, educator, and tech innovator. She became a cardiologist to study how cardiovascular diseases affect Black people.

Dr. Ofili went to John Hopkins to complete her Master of Public Health in Epidemiology and Clinical Trials in 1994 and became a full Professor in 1999. She also co-led the African-American heart failure trial and conducted pioneering research about the cardiovascular system with NASA.

HerMed for BLACKS



Now, Dr. Ofili is a Professor of medicine at the Morehouse School of Medicine. She is also a practicing Cardiologist with Morehouse Healthcare in Atlanta. In 2000, she became the first Black woman president of the Association of Black Cardiologists. Dr. Ofili is the founder and Chief Scientific Officer of AccuHealth Technologies Inc. Her patented creation, the Health 360x platform, empowers patients to manage chronic illnesses through personalized digital care.

If you think that was impressive, then you'll be even more astonished to learn about the number of awards that Dr. Ofili has won. She holds over 20 national and international awards, including the Daniel Savage Memorial Science Award, America's Top Doctors by Black Enterprise Magazine and 100 Most Influential Healthcare Leaders by Atlanta Business Chronicle.

I hope you get inspired by this amazing cardiologist, and who knows, maybe one of you might become a cardiologist in the future! Please check out my website, HerMed4Blacks, so you can learn more about phenomenal Black women.

THANK YOU!

Photo credit: Morehouse School of Medicine

https://www.msm.edu/about_us/FacultyDirectory/Medicine/ElizabethOfili/index.php



BOOK

Review

A Book Review by Kosi O.12 |
Ontario, Canada

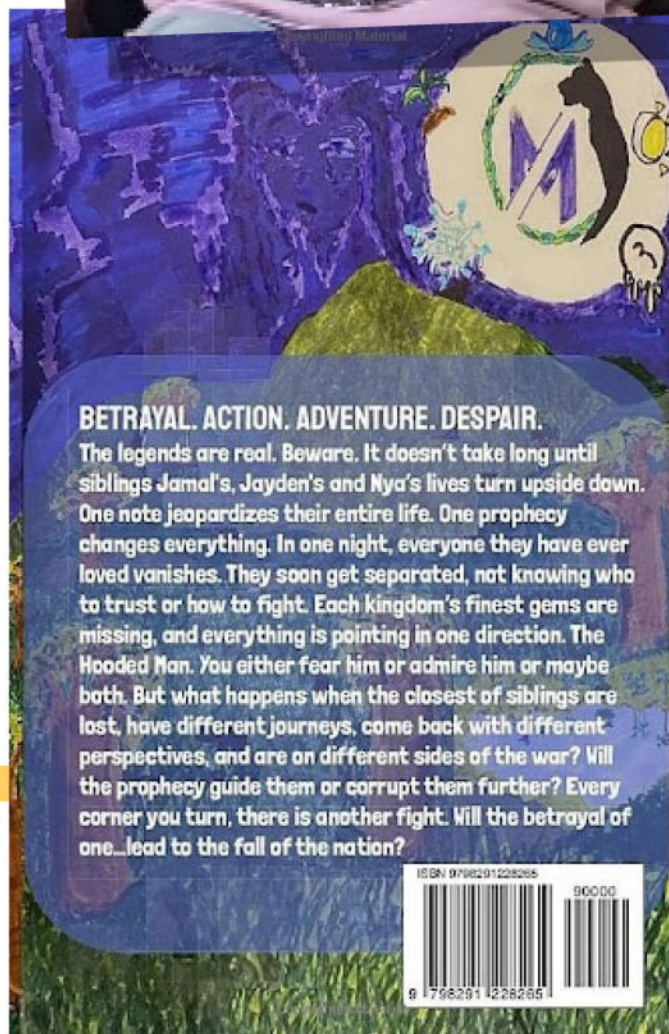
Midnight Warriors: *The Last Breath*

Author: Naomi McDonald

"The legends are real." This is a part of the prologue of the newly published book, 'Midnight Warriors: The Last Breath,' an excellently written fantasy novel by first-time author and BGM teen writer Naomi McDonald. It is the first book in an expected trilogy. The book focuses on Kenyan siblings, Jamal, Nya, and Jayden, navigating their world as they find themselves on different sides of a mythical war that could change the world. This book's action-filled plot and suspense-filled mysteries will leave you further on the edge of your seat on every page.

The characters of Jamal, Nya, and Jayden are the pieces of this fast-paced novel who really hold the story together. Throughout her debut novel, Naomi delves deeper into each character's personality, using techniques like first-person perspective. Each sibling is beautifully developed and portrayed in every chapter, and their detailed personal journeys and realizations help the reader connect to each of the characters in some way. Another thing that the book does well is transporting the readers into the fantastical world the author creates. As I read this book, Naomi's vivid descriptions of several of the different kingdoms really made me feel as if I was one of the siblings, just trying to save the world and my family. The supporting characters in the novel were also key to the story, though a few left me with unanswered questions that I hope will be addressed in later books.

Ultimately, 'Midnight Warriors: The Last Breath' is a thrilling and truly captivating novel that almost flawlessly blends fast-paced action with YA fantasy. Though some readers might argue that the slow-moving beginning of the book is a bit too subtle, I believe that its well-thought-out plot and suspenseful mysteries fully compensate for this. This book is a perfect fit for readers who are fans of fantasy novels, books based on legends, or any type of action-filled novels. Naomi McDonald has done an excellent job of writing an unputdownable start of the Midnight Warriors trilogy. Until the next books are released, I will be counting the days in anticipation to join the Muriuki siblings on their next amazing adventure. 4.9/5 stars.





Still Proud My Hair Journey

By Lauryn A., 13 | Ontario, Canada

Let's talk about Black hair. The process, the time, the result. My Black hair journey is a world of adventures. Let me take you back to when I was little. It took me a while to get some hair on my head. I can remember a lot of people telling my mom that I was going to have nice, long hair. That's why it taking so long for it to grow. I started to wear little cute headbands because I had fuzzy hair, but when it started to grow in, about age 2, it was in tight curls. It was nice and beautiful, not much prep required, but as my hair started to grow in, it got longer, thicker, and the texture started to change. My hair became so thick and curly that it was difficult to manage. I did not want to comb my hair;

it hurt. It was very curly or coily, and it looked fuzzy at the ends.

I hated my hair. Just to wash it, detangle it, and comb it in a nice protective style was a headache for me. It was also hard for my mom and anyone else around to hear me cry, scream, and holler. It took a whole day to wash and style my hair as I needed to take a lot, and I mean a lot, of breaks. I was told that my hair was beautiful and that I should be proud of my thick and well-bodied hair, but I wasn't. No one could understand the pain that I felt. My grandmother was so worried, and I think she felt my pain,



but at the same time she was telling me I had beautiful hair. I did not believe her. My grandmother had long hair and she said she used to cry too for a long, long time, when as a young child she had her hair braided. Being as it was, I was still not impressed. Even though my mom made my hair look nice, the process to get there was not enjoyable. I have also noticed that the texture of my hair has changed now that I am older.

I know that a lot of Black girls can relate and have stories of their own. I know that hair is our beauty. Black girls' hair is unique; we can do so many styles with our hair, and it's amazing. I know our hair is special when people at school or when out in public, people want to touch it, when they ask us questions about how our hair looks or feels, or want to know how we created such complex hairstyles.

Why did I not like my hair? At a very young age, I believe we were either praised for our hair by friends, family members, and other Black people who cared, or put down by dissenting voices in society. I would often overhear people saying how nappy and ugly our hair was. Many people

also ask questions about why our hair is not straightened or why we put in extensions, especially if you grew up in a neighbourhood where few people looked like you. As a Black girl going to school, I was bullied for not having straight hair and could not play with some of the girls in my class. This made me feel ashamed of my hair and I wanted to change my hair to feel accepted.

Negative comments can make Black girls feel self-conscious about their hair. I think it comes from the media and other stigmas that people hold about Black hair, and the way others view Black hair. I think this makes Black girls feel insecure about themselves and that our hair has to be a certain way to be accepted by others.

I am still learning about the struggles of Black hair and understanding how other Black girls feel about their hair journey. I have come to realize that we may have struggles and carry the trauma from negative comments about our hair. However, we can still feel a sense of joy, pride and acceptance knowing that our hair is beautiful, no matter what anyone has to say.

art

art



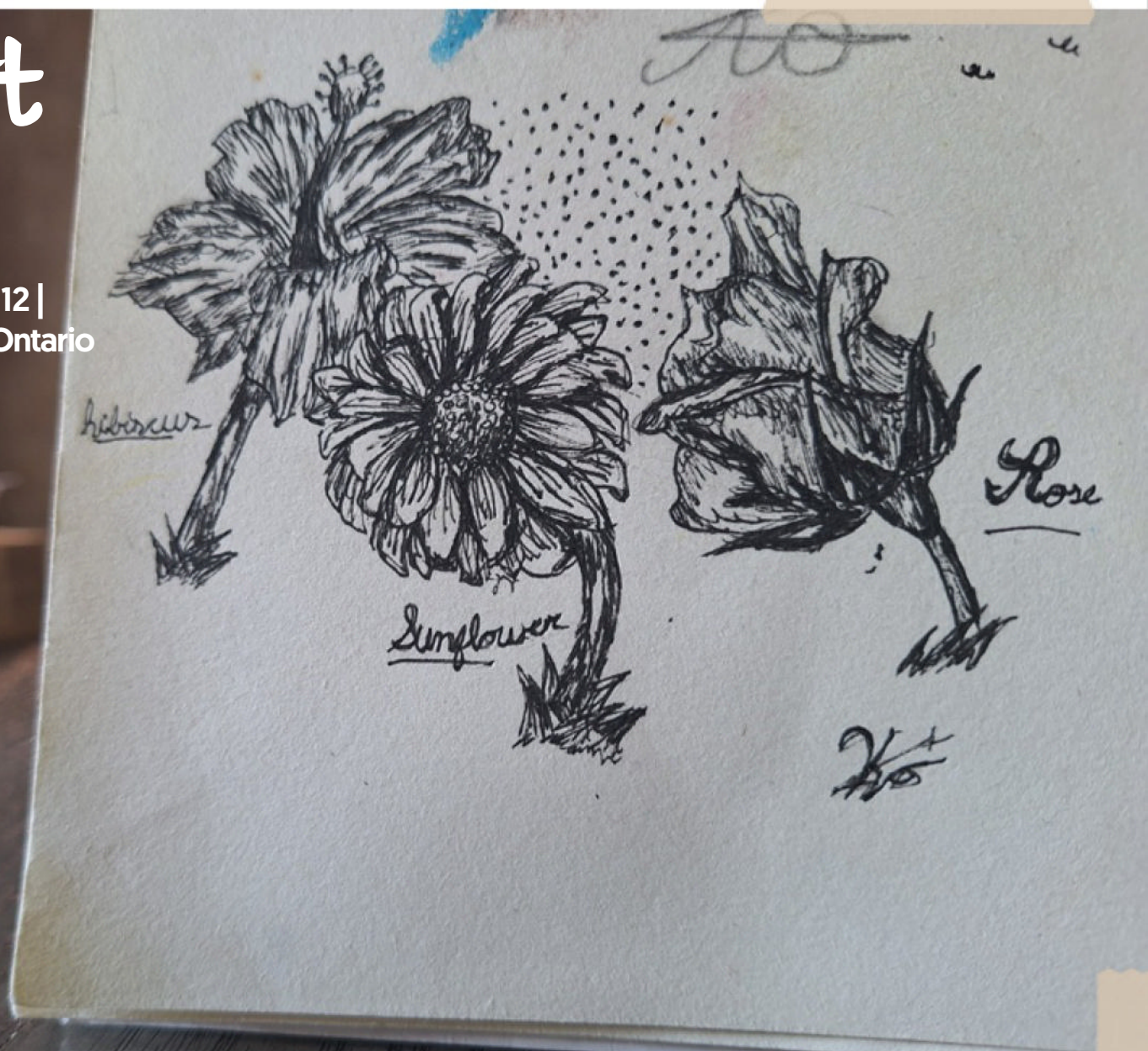


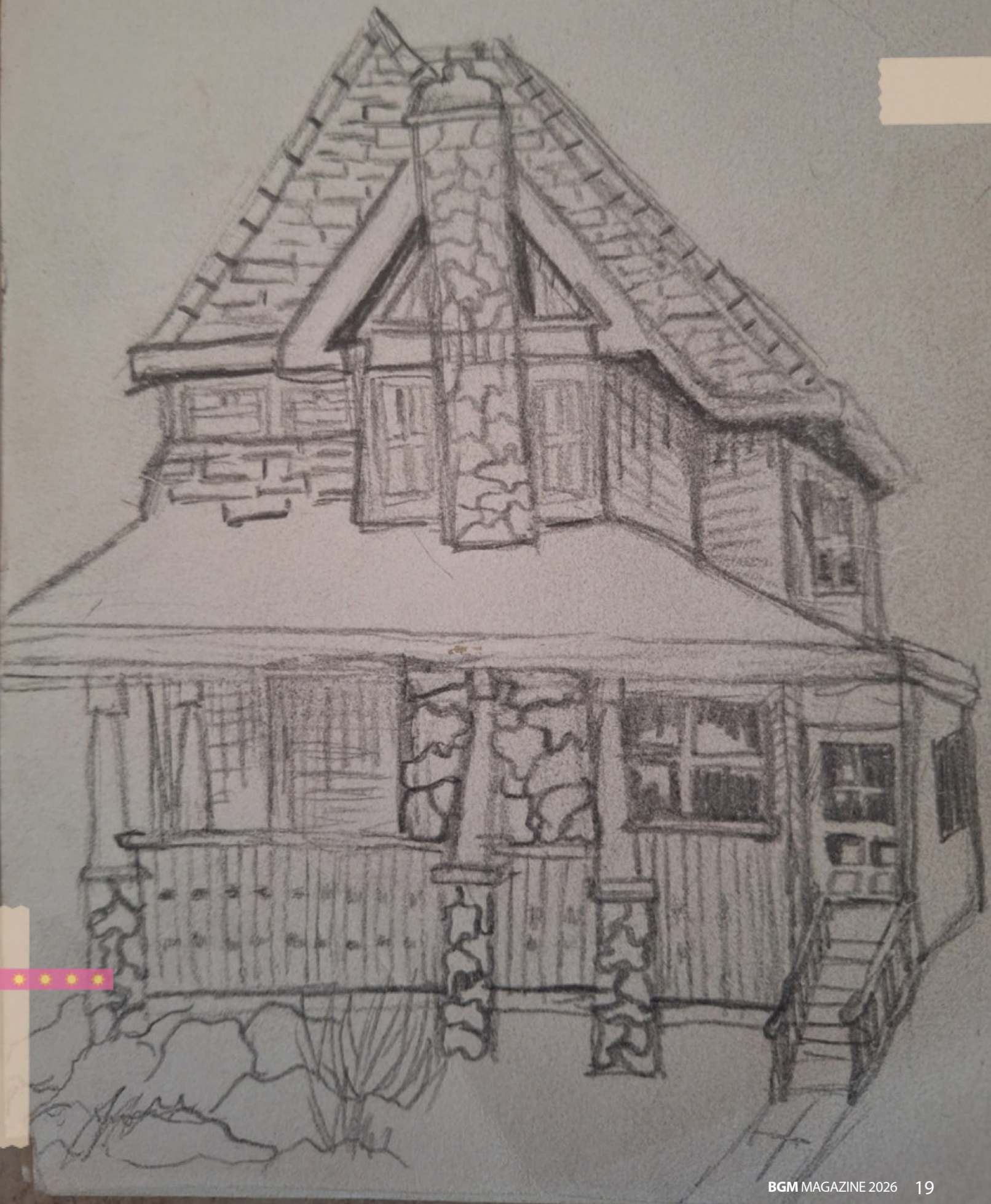
art

kosi's sketch

Art

by Kosi, O. 12 |
Vaughan, Ontario



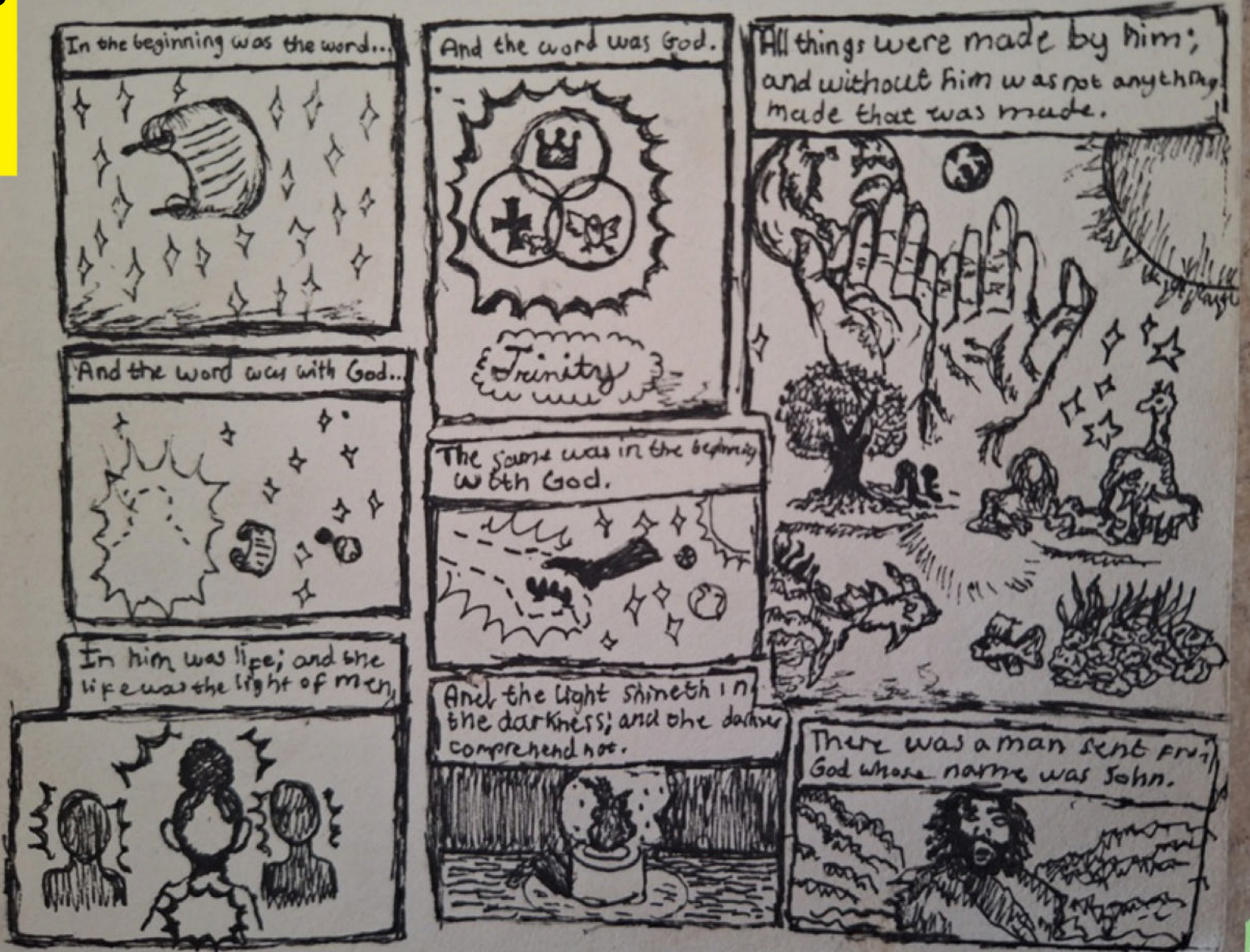






by Kosi, O. 12 |
Vaughan, Ontario

John 1



by Kosi, O. 12 |
Vaughan, Ontario



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My trip to

Nigeria

By Ifeoma E., 11 |
Ontario, Canada



Last Christmas, I went to Nigeria with my family, and I was really excited because I hadn't been there since I was really young. We left on my birthday, December 14, with my mom and my older sister. My dad had already gone a few days before us, and my oldest sister came later after her exams.

The trip was about 16 hours long with a stop in Egypt. I actually liked the airplane food; it was really good. When we got off the plane, the heat hit me right away. It took forever to find my dad and get all our luggage into the cars. I was so hot I felt like I might faint. When we finally got to the car with air conditioning, I felt so much better.

We drove to Victoria Garden City, in Lagos, where we stayed for about a week. It was late, but I had slept on the plane, so I wasn't too tired. When we got there, we ate dinner and went to bed.

The next day, we mostly rested. Later that night, we went to a restaurant by the water. The view was really nice, and the food was good, too.

While we were in Lagos, we did a lot of fun things. We spent time by the pool and went out to explore. One day, we got ice cream, which was perfect because of the heat. We also went to an upside-down house, which was really fun. We visited a busy market and bought clothes and jewelry. Another day, we went to the mall and watched the movie *Wicked: For Good*. At night, I liked looking at all the Christmas lights.

After a few days, we flew to Owerri and met up with my oldest sister. One of the first things we did was get our hair done. We stayed in an apartment and spent time with our cousins, which made me really happy since I hadn't seen them in years. But on the first night, there was no AC, and I was sweating the whole night!

For Christmas, we went to our village for my dad's Ozo ceremony. It's an important event in Igbo culture and signifies that someone has become a respected leader in the village.

After that, we went back to Owerri for a few more days and spent time with family. Then we travelled to Abuja, Nigeria's capital. On our first night, we went to a fun restaurant and had a great time. But after eating spicy wings, I got really sick and had to go to the hospital. I had a stomach infection and malaria.

While I was in the hospital, my family spent time with our cousins, then came to visit me, which made me feel better. They also tried suya, which is grilled, spicy meat.

On our last day in Abuja, we just relaxed and packed. After two long flights, we flew back to Canada. My dad stayed in Nigeria a bit longer.

Overall, the trip was really fun and I was happy to see my family again.

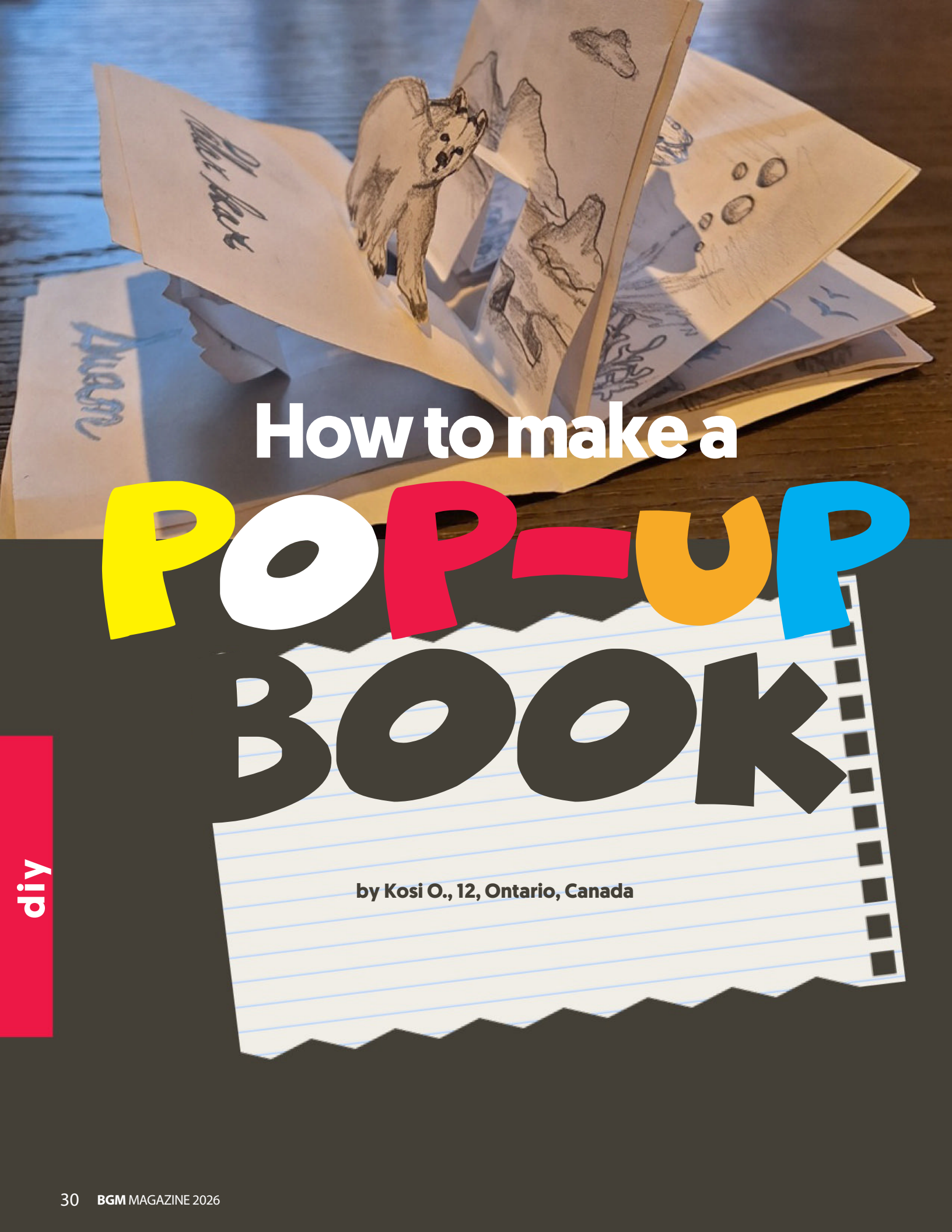


SUMMER

DIY







How to make a

POP-UP BOOK

by Kosi O., 12, Ontario, Canada

diy

Have you ever seen a pop-up book or card in a store or online and wondered how to make your own? Well, now you can, with my simple DIY pop-up book instructions!

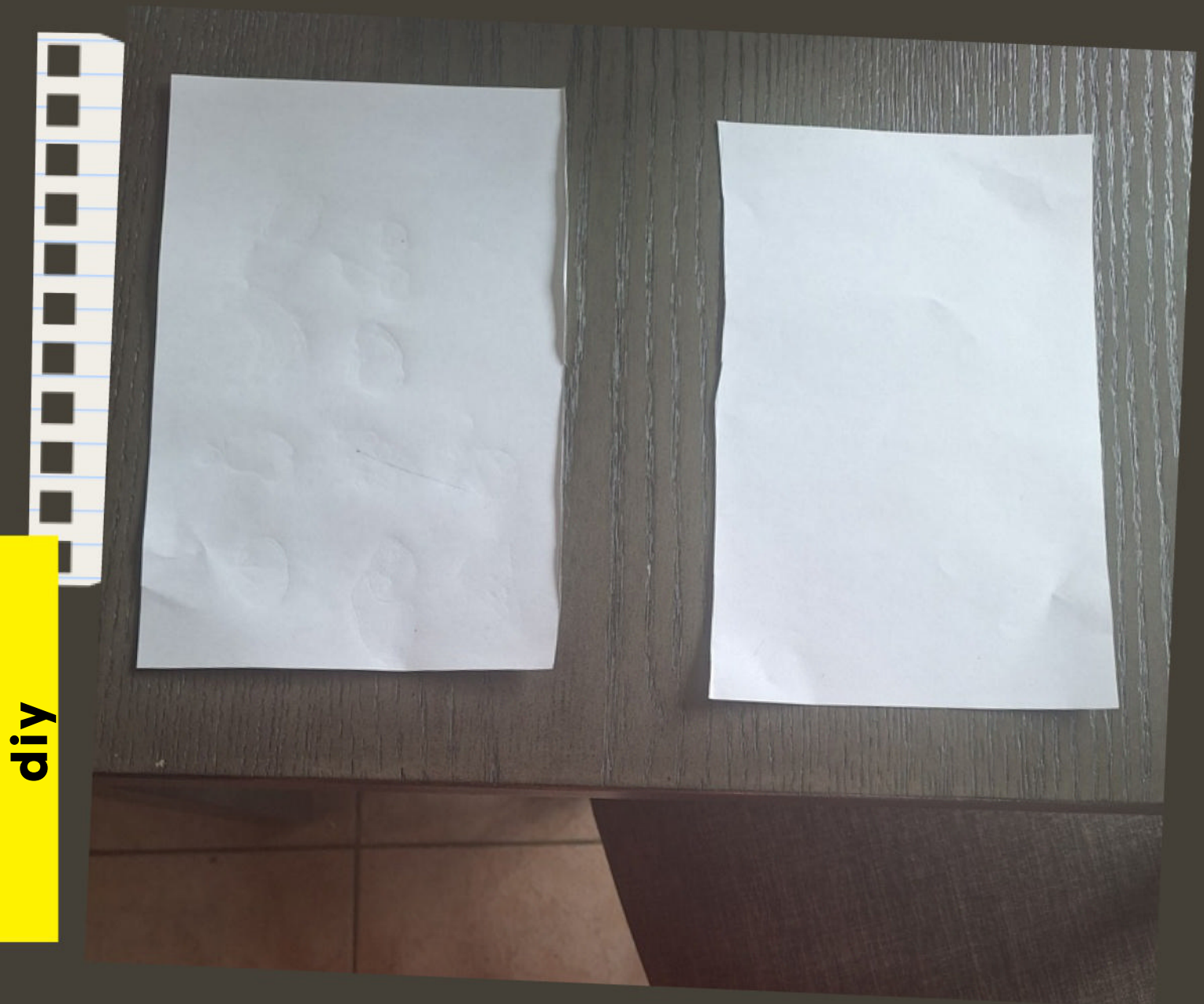
MATERIALS:

- 4-6 pieces of paper
- pencil
- scissors
- ruler
- glue stick
- pencil crayons (optional)

1. Pick a theme. Your theme can be anything from space to cats. For example, I will show you how simple it can be to make a book by making a fruit book! When you pick your theme, on a separate piece of paper, draw 5-10 different graphics related to your theme, depending on how long you want your book to be (colouring them is optional).

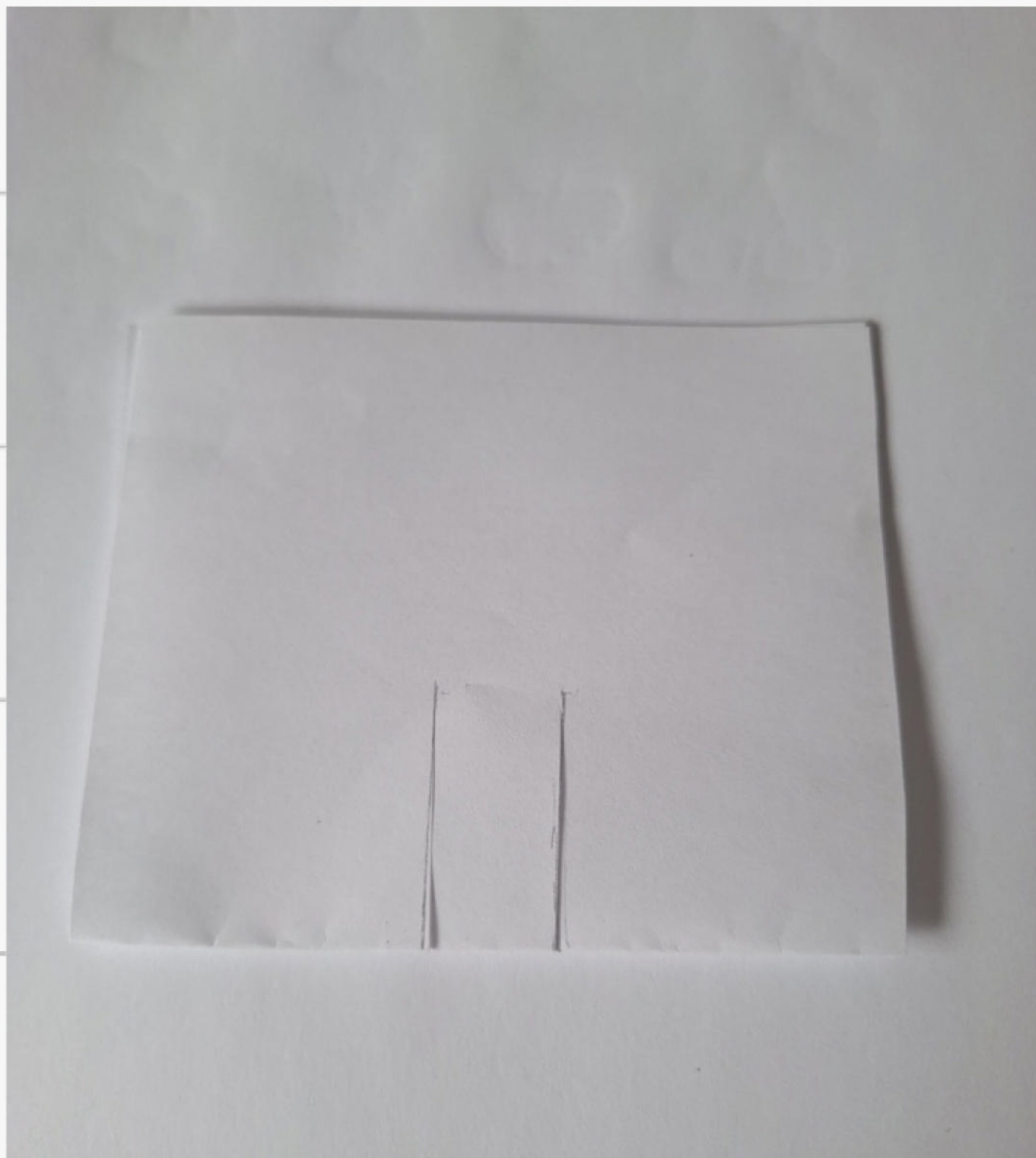


2. Next, get another piece of paper and cut it in half so you have two pieces of paper. Take the number of drawings you have and divide them by 2; that is the number of pages you need to cut in half for your pop-up book. For example, since I have 10 drawings of fruit, I need to cut 5 pages cut in half.



diy

3. Then, when you've cut out all your pages, fold them in half once more and make two cuts on the edge of the paper towards the middle about 2 cm apart and about 4 cm in length.

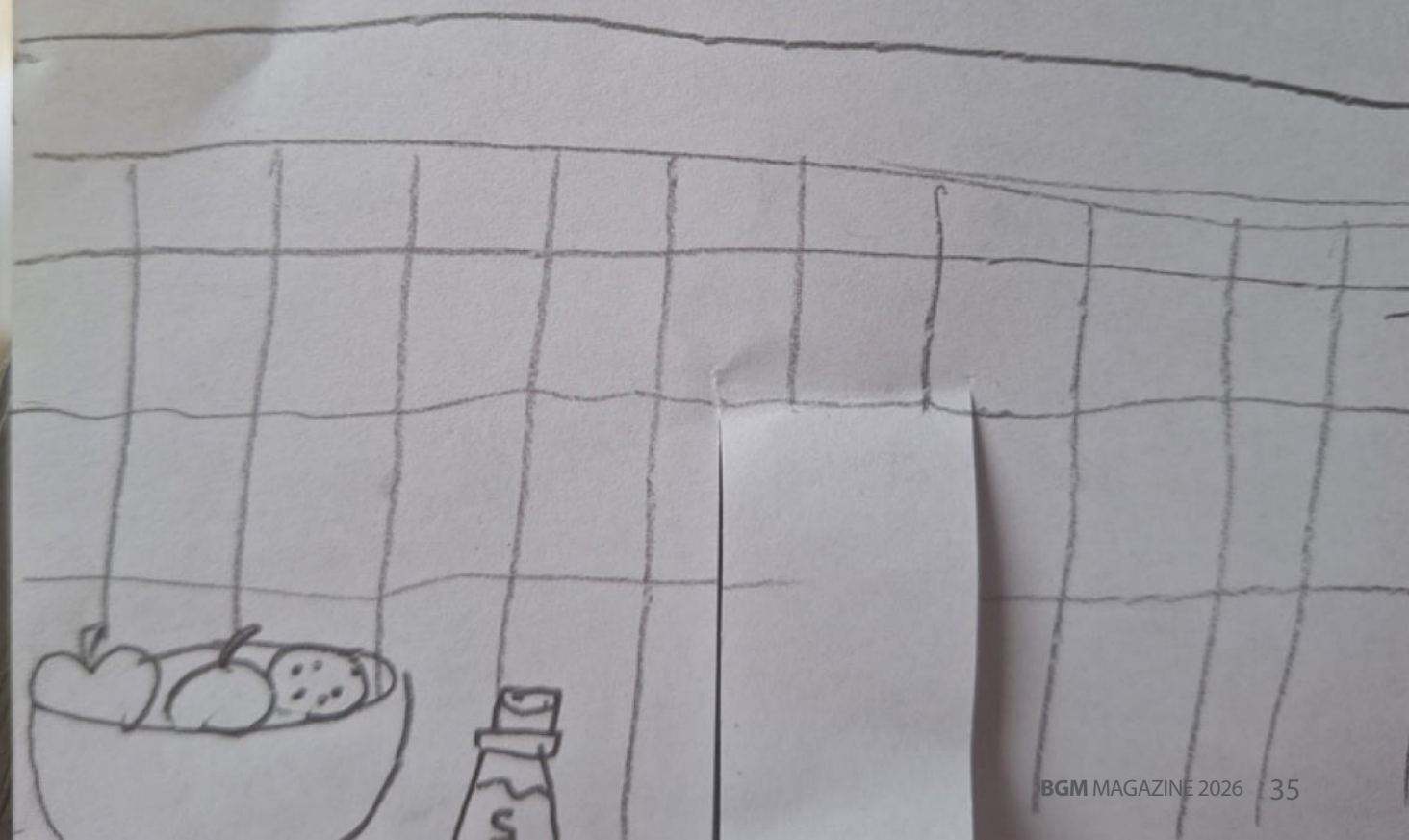


4. Open the paper and push out the flap.

5. Cut out your graphics and glue them to the flaps.



6. Decorate the backgrounds! You can draw whatever you want. In my case, I made mine look like a kitchen!

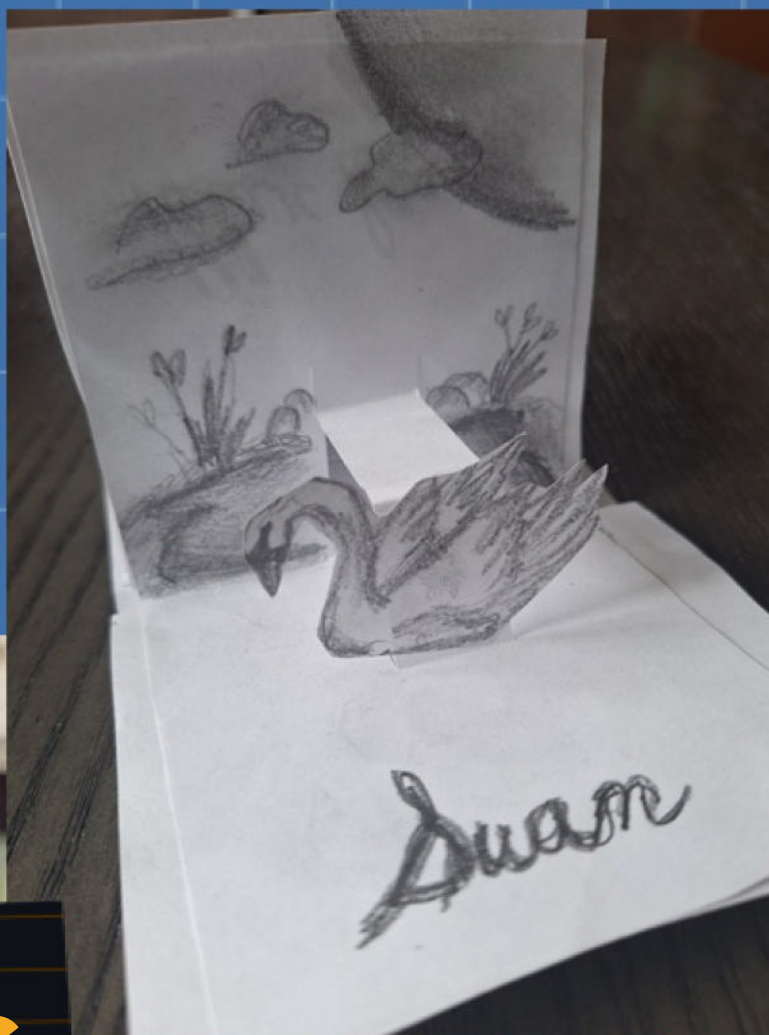




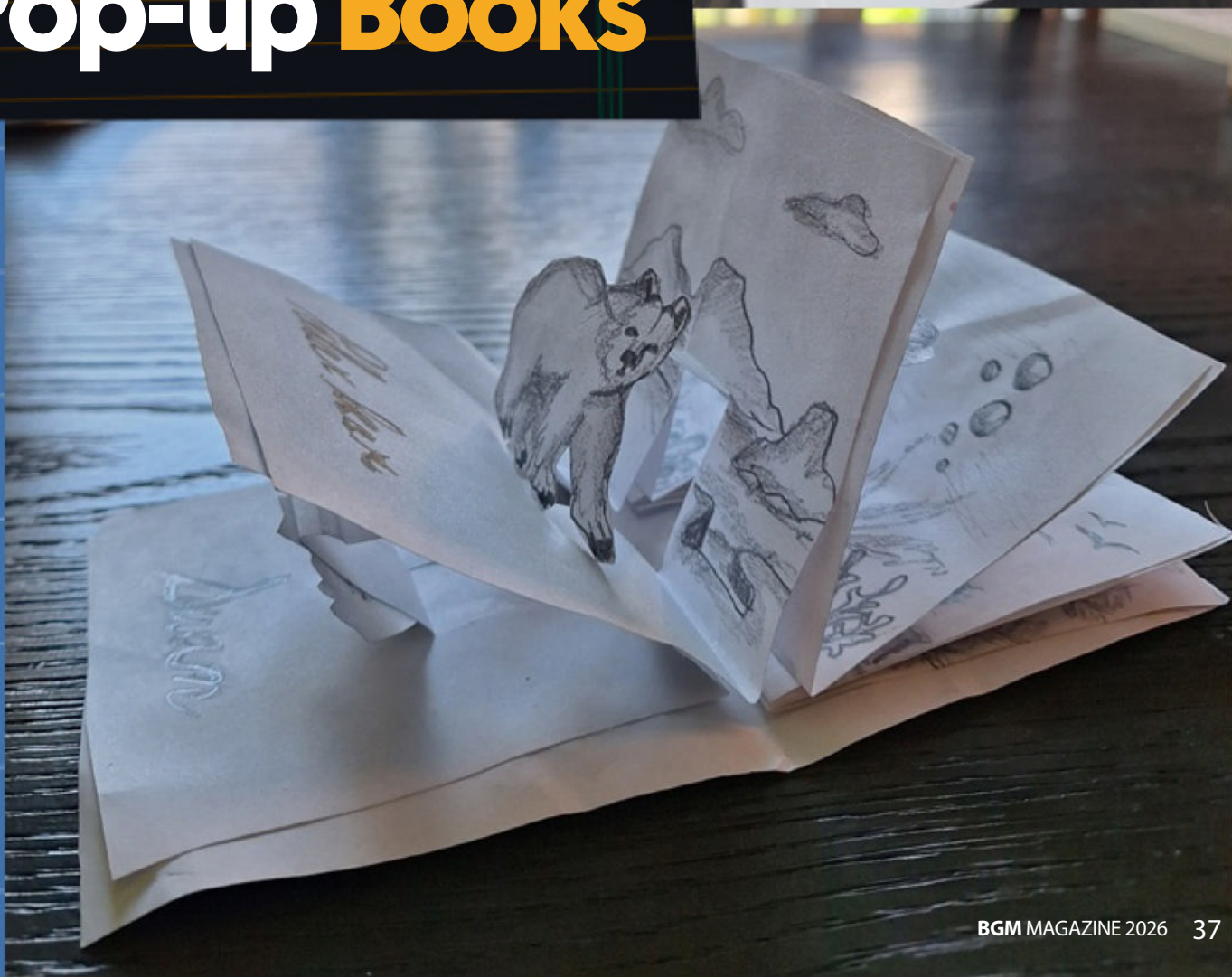
One of My Completed

diy





Pop-up Books



How to make

GOLDEN APPLE JUICE

By Ruth M., 13 | Ontario, Canada

In October of 2025, I went to St. Lucia. During that trip, I went to my aunt's house. My aunty loves to bake and cook, and most of her food is home-made, and all of it is as healthy as she can make it. While I was there, she taught me how to make Golden Apple Juice and even made it for me!

Golden Apple Juice is a very popular drink in the Caribbean and it's the national drink of Grenada. In St. Lucia and Barbados, it is called Golden Apple, in Jamaica they call it June Plum, and in Trinidad they call it Pommecythere.

Ingredients:

Golden Apples

Sugar

Water

A Blender

A strainer (for liquids)

Recipe

It's always important to stay clean, so make sure you wash the golden apples thoroughly.

For some fruits, you may have to remove the skin, but for golden apple juice, you don't peel. After washing, cut the golden apples into small pieces around 1-inch-high.

Fill half of the blender with the golden apples and fill the other half of the blender with water. If

your blender has this ability, set it to puree, and mix until the mixture becomes liquid. If this liquid is too thick, add some water into the blender to get your desired consistency.

Using a strainer, pour the liquid from the blender through the strainer into a jug.

Add sugar to taste, but don't add too much sugar, so it's not too sweet. Give it a taste test, and if you think it needs more sugar, add more. Remember: it's better to put in less sugar, because you can always add more - but if you put too much sugar, you can't take it out!

Keep the juice refrigerated, before serving.

Enjoy!



girl power

COMICS

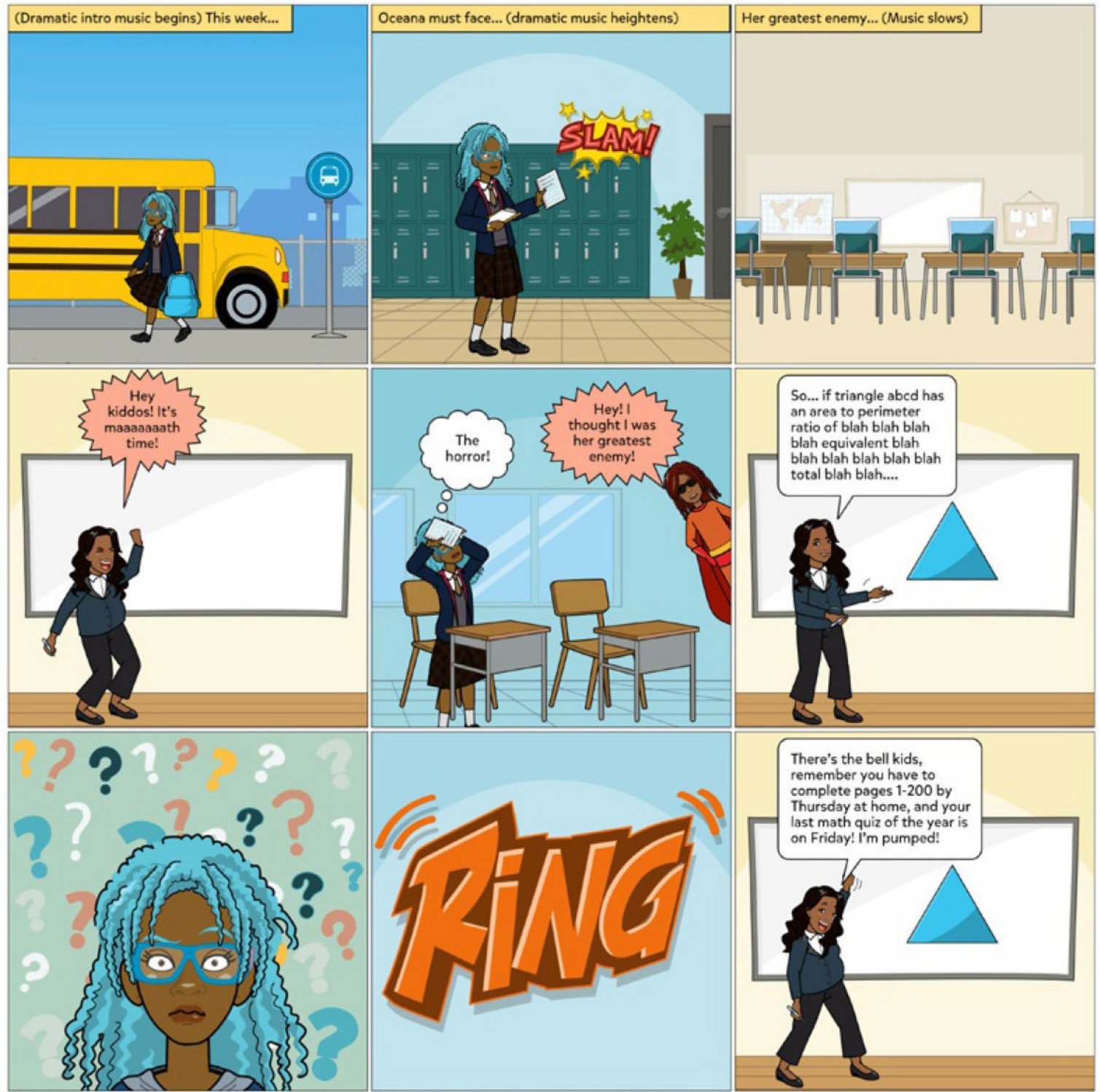


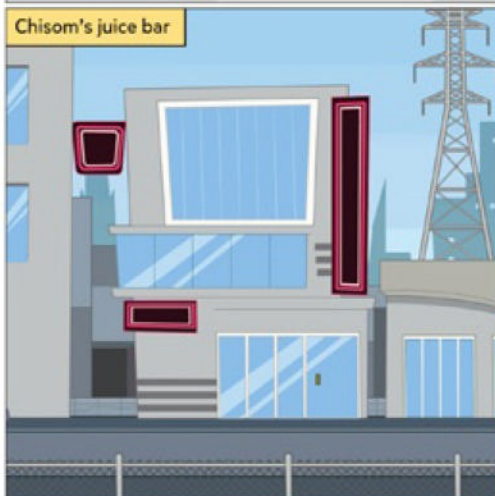
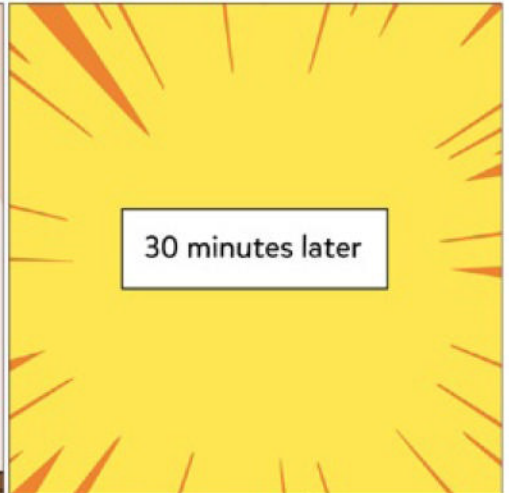
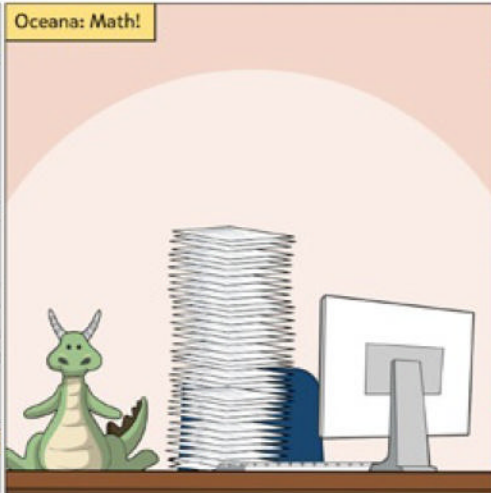
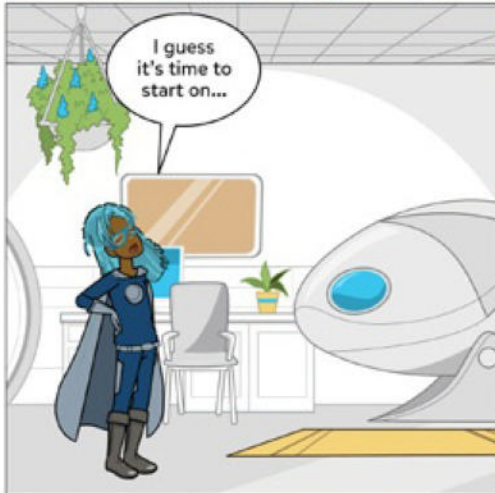
Let's
DO
THIS

OCEANA SNOWFALL

AND THE BIG MATH MELTDOWN

BY KOJI O., 12 - VAUGHAN, ON.





Oceana: Only the best magazine ever!



It's where I learn my best power moves...

and witty remarks.

What witty remarks? You make witty remarks?

I have the perfect solution!

CLICK

On Tv

Hey Kids! Need Math help? Come to Chisom's newly opened Math Emporium! Where the math never ends!

Oceana?!

THUD!

1 hour later

You alright Oceana? You were out for a pretty long time. J'étais inquiet*.

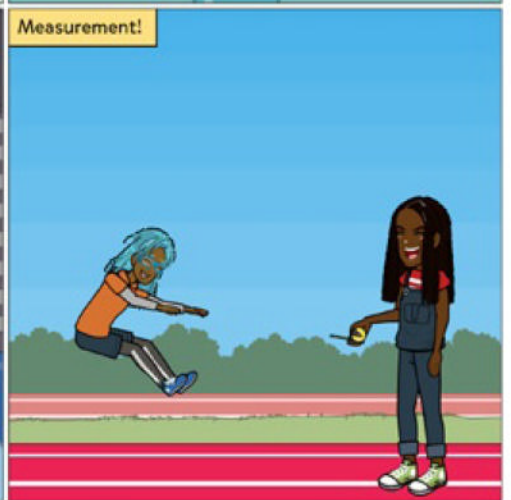
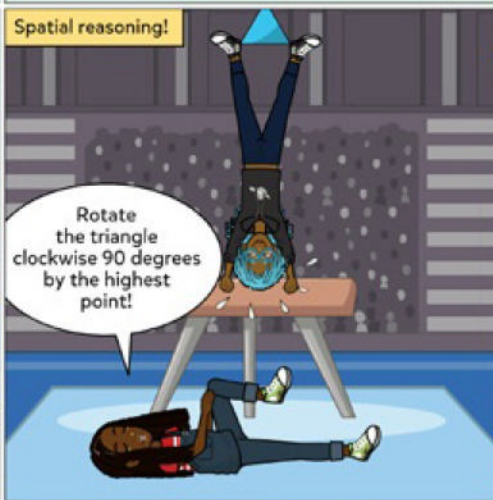
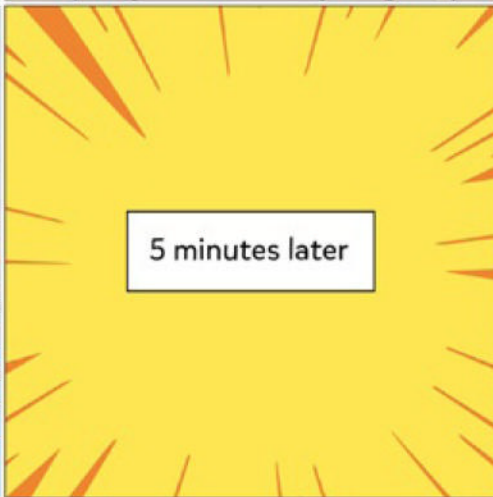
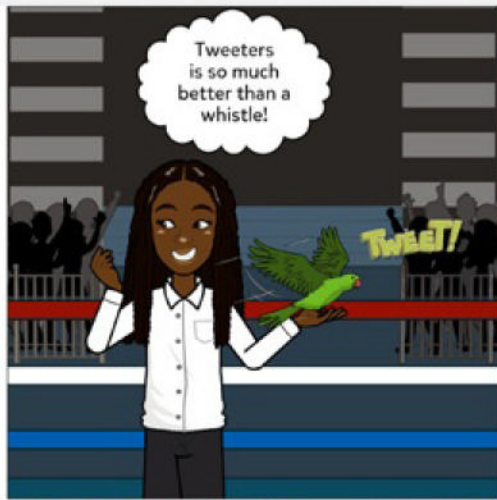
* I was worried

Chisom? Why are we in a gym and why are you dressed like a fitness coach?!

Welcome to Chisom's math emporium! Get your stuff on and then we'll get started.

Welcome to sensitivity training! The first step to becoming good at math is getting to know it. Oceana, meet Mr. Math a.k.a Mr. Possum Math.

That Possum gives me the creeps!



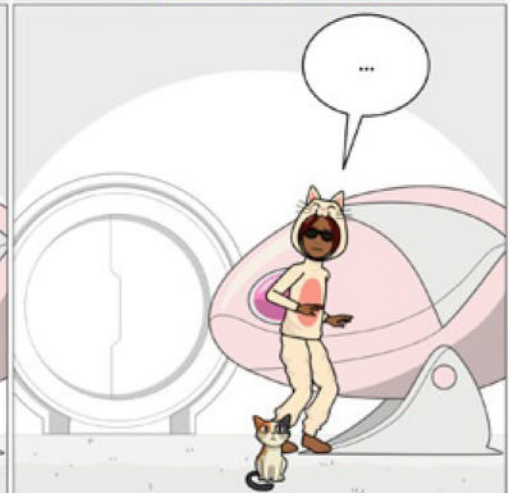
And more!

Monday



Oh wait..

Lavania's lair, I mean house.



Lights out.

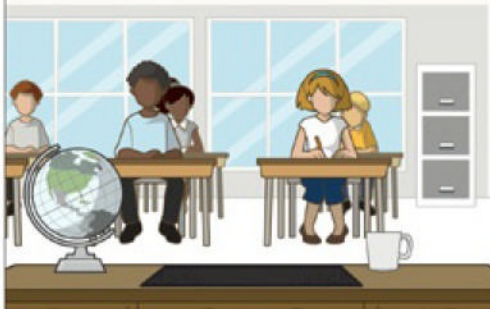


The end!

LOCKER 247

BY BELLA B., 12 - VAUGHAN, ON.

At this school...



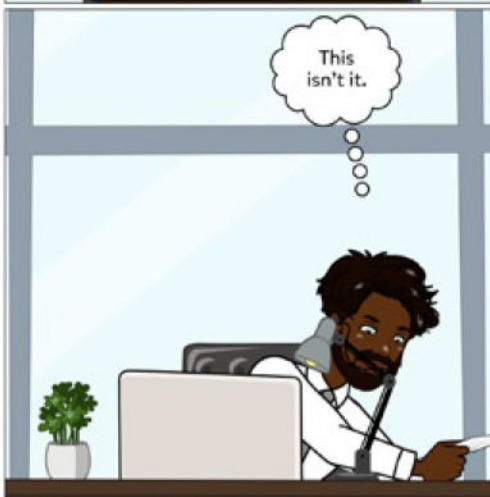
though I didn't say that this school was normal...

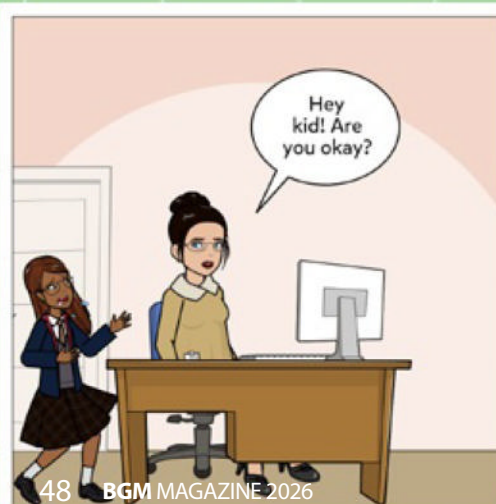


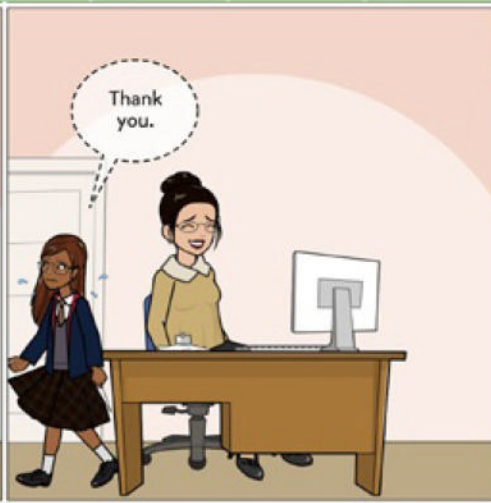
especially not locker 247.



Whenever this locker is closed, something from another dimension appears in the school hallways.







So... Yeah. Her life kinda sucked now.

Must...

Get...

Home!!!

And since that day...

nobody has ever been assigned locker 247 again.

Until...

Jhon came along...

So this is locker 247!

The End

At least I think this is the end...

THE FABULOUS FOUR BOOK 4

THE NEW NEIGHBOURS

BY KOSI O., 12 - VAUGHAN, ON.

Driving



ooooou!
hee hee!!



The New Neighbors



Hey Guys!

Gurgle
gurgle
gurgle



Huh?

Gurgle
gurgle
gurgle
...oops!



Sorry about
that. Eniola is just
telling us about her
new neighbors!



Cool! But how? She's wearing a snorkel.

Yesterday, when you
were visiting your
friends at BGM
Academy, we became
fluent in gurgle.



Now
come on! Put on
your stuff, we're
going diving!



GURGLE,
GURGLE,
GUUUUUURGLE!!

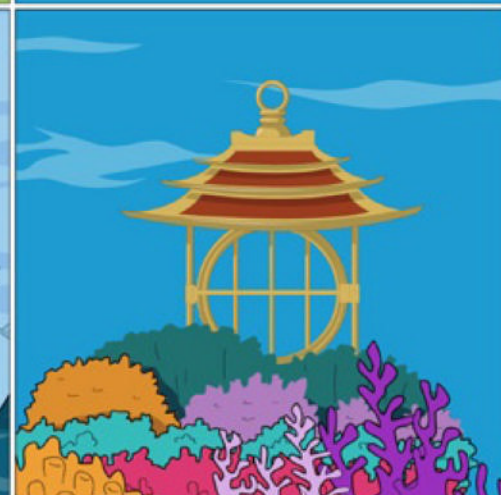


Gurgle,
guuuuurple,
gurgle**

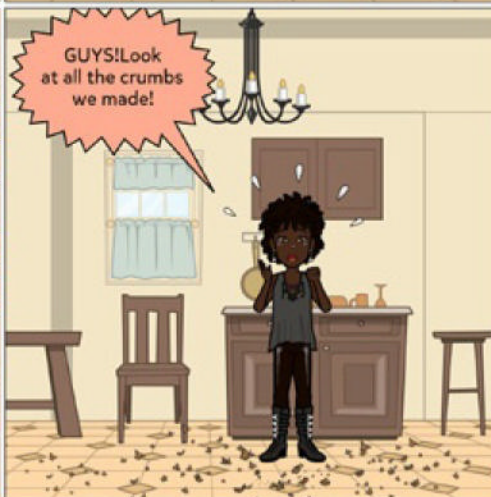


**Evil chinchillas are holding spatulas.

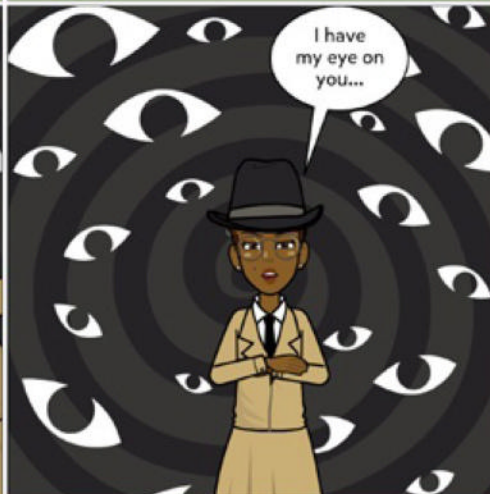
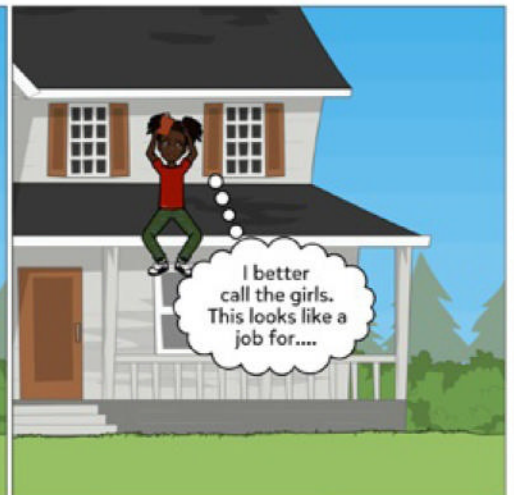
**Sorry, I meant, I found something cool.

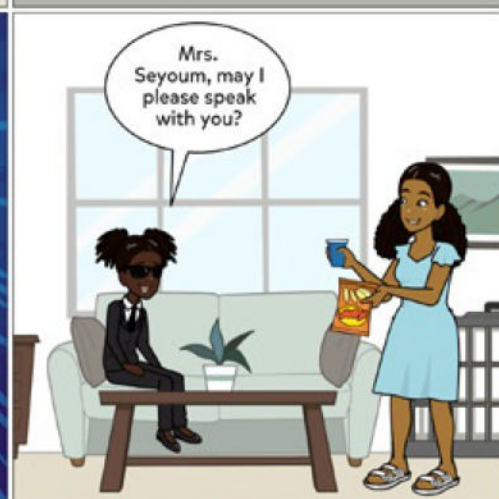
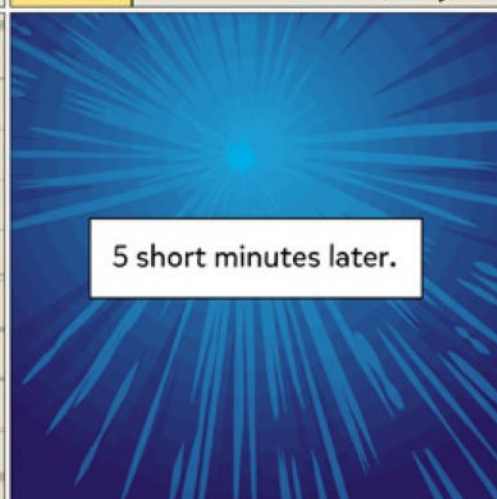
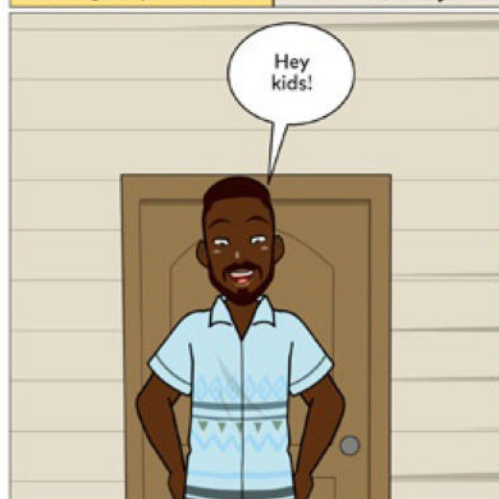


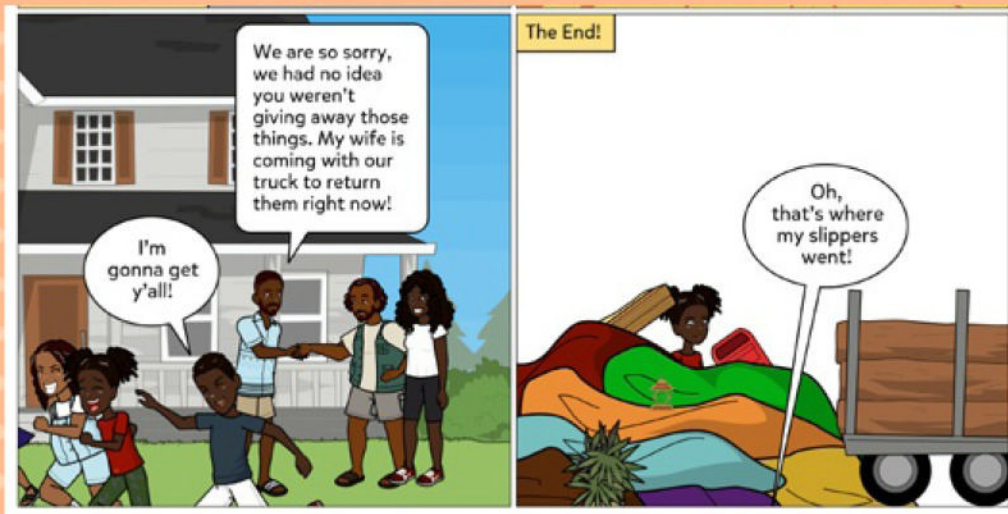
(Back on land) Woah! That is a beauty! *cue angelic chorus*



Later that day







The end!

STORY

WEAVERS



Arlanger



Academy School FOR SPIES

Pt. 2

by Kosi O., 12 | Vaughan Ontario

CHAPTER 1: Let us begin

Mrs. Marino clears her throat menacingly, “The fun is over now. Done. Finito. Fini.” I hear Manuela gulp, and I know she’s just as scared as I am, “This is not a game, so do not conduct yourselves as if it were. By the end of this summer program, I expect you to push yourselves beyond your limits. Any questions?” The training area is so silent and still that you could hear a mouse scurrying. “Good. Now report to Room 206, in 5 minutes on the dot,” and with that, she turns on her thick black heels and clomps out of the room.

Mr. Smith, as Mrs. Marino would say (or tangerine-glasses-boy, as I would call him), dares to snort as we enter the hallway.

“That lady could scare the living daylight out of a lion,” he muses. Manuela laughs at his remark. I’m still too shaken up to even give a meek giggle. Mucyo informed me about Mrs. Marino, about how nice she really is once you get to know her, but after meeting her, I’m not so sure. Her voice is pointy, but sharp and extremely serious, her gaze makes her hazel eyes seem as cold as ice, and when she glares at you, it’s like glacial daggers plunging into your very soul.

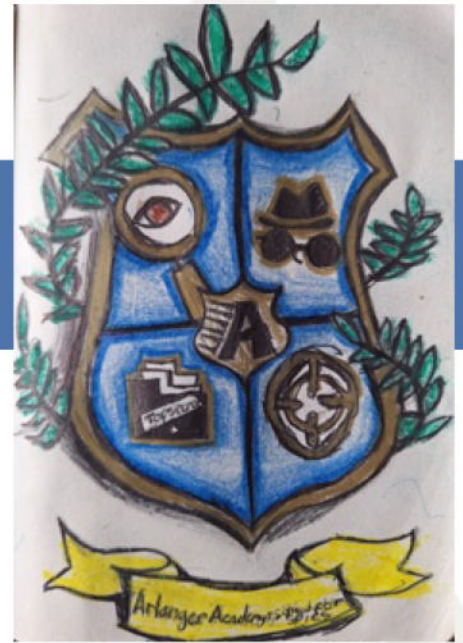
Manuela must see the frigid look of horror on my face because she stops laughing and frowns as she looks at me, “Keza, are you ok? You’ve been so quiet.”

I open my mouth to reply and to tell her I’m fine, but as soon as I do, the four of us come face to face with a tall green door reading, Room 206, Junior introduction room.

“Hmm, interesting,” I think.

We all step in and are thoroughly disappointed; this room is definitely not as high-tech as everywhere else in the school; it pretty much looks like a normal classroom. A lady who doesn’t look old enough to be out of high school is at the front of the room, and she looks just as normal as everything else there: her dark dreads are held back in a messy bun that sticks out in interesting places; her circular wire-framed glasses are comfortably at the top of her head; and she’s wearing a floor-length blue skirt and white blouse. On the contrary, her hazel eyes sparkle and smile at you, even though her lips are pressed tightly together into a brown line as she shuffles through papers.

She seems startled as she sees us sit down in the front row, “Oh! Sorry guys. Welcome to the junior introduction room, where you’ll start every day. I’m Ms. Marino, not to be confused with my mom,” her mouth twists into a small smile as she says that. I’m in shock! How could this sparkly-eyed woman be related to the frosty-eyed one I’d met just a few minutes ago? Ms. Marino’s voice snaps me back to reality, “to start, let’s get introduced. We’ll play a game. It’ll go like this: on a piece of paper, I want you to write down your name, how old you are, and what you’re most excited to do here. Then, when I say go, you’ll crumple the paper up, close your eyes, and throw it in any direction as far away from you as possible, and when I say open, you’ll open your eyes and pick up the snowball closest to you and read it aloud.”



As she hands out the pieces of paper, I think about what I'm going to write. I love science, so I guess I'm excited for the gadgets and gizmos course. I quickly scribble that onto the paper and crumple it up.

I gaze around the room to observe what everyone else is doing. Tangerine-glasses-boy is just finishing, and Manuela, who's sitting in the chair next to me, is muttering something from Shakespeare under her breath. I'm guessing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the sound of it. The girl with the egg-plant coloured tights is looking around too - our eyes meet, and I smile, but she shrinks down into the plastic chair she's perched on. Did I do something wrong?

I contemplate this until Ms. Marino's soft voice rings out, "Ok, everyone! Time to launch your balls...now!"

As soon as the words roll off her tongue, balls start flying. I pluck one flying towards me out of the air like a cherry. I smooth the paper out, and in handwriting so neat and tiny that it makes me envious, it reads: James Smith, 13, cracking codes and passwords.

"Cool," I think as Manuela's skinny, long arm shoots up in the air.

"Can I share what mine says first?" she inquired, opening her eyes as wide as she could. She always does that when she's begging for something; she says it makes her look more convincing, but I disagree completely.

"Course darling, go on," Ms. Marino encourages, eyes gleaming like pools of brown-and-green gems.

Manuela clears her throat as the rest of us watch her expectantly, "Matondo Llunga, 11, physical training."

Ms. Marino nods approvingly and then nods in Matondo's direction. We all peer at her keenly, but she says nothing and keeps her wide eyes on the piece of wrinkled paper in her small hands. Minutes pass, and finally, in a voice barely above a peep, she speaks, "Keza, 12, gadgets and gizmos." I can see the sweat running down her dark brow as she speaks, and as soon as she is done, she buries her head in her arms. Ms. Marino goes over to her and whispers something. I see

her back straighten and she faces forward.

"Keza?" Ms. Marino calls. I look up at her and she nods encouragingly at me.

My gaze flickers down to the crumpled page in my hand. I clear my throat as Manuela did, and begin to read, "James Smith, 13, cracking codes and passwords."

Ms. Marino's observing eyes move past me and onto James as he reads something about Manuela and her passion for disguises and aliases. I don't actually listen as he reads. Thoughts fill my mind, clouding reality. Manuela is my best friend, and I know her extremely well. Ms. Marino starts talking about herself after that, and I feel terrible for not listening, but all I can think about is how I need to excel at spy school. Finally, I pull myself out of the deep void of my mind and rise from my seat along with everyone else to head to a class that I do not know.

I stumble out the door and match my step with my best friend's. "This is awesome!" she exclaims, "Aren't you so excited that we have disguises and aliases first?" She grabs my hand in her cold palm.

I shrug, "you know how I feel about acting."

"I do not understand you, Kez. Acting is the best thing in the world!" She releases my hand and skips around the pristine hallways. The floor tiles are so shiny and clean that they resemble black slabs of ice. "Acting is a way for you to change your world. You can see whatever you want to see, be whoever you want to be." Her dark eyes fog over dreamily as she says this.

"Sorry, girl, I just don't get it. Why would you want to pretend to be someone else?"

James nods, rudely butting into our conversation. "Yeah, I'm so amazing that if I were someone else, I'd want to pretend to be me."

She sighs as if irritated by our collective lack of thespian

traits. "You guys are imagination-deficient." Manuela shakes her head, dark curls bouncing, and skips over to Matondo, throwing a caramel coloured arm around her shoulder. She's amazing at making friends. I envy her in that sense.

"Come on, we're going to be late, pick up the pace, guys," James orders us, and we do, running and sliding across the shiny hallways until we reach a large room labelled Room 213 - Junior Alias and Disguise Room.

CHAPTER 2:

Your Inner Thespians!

As the 4 of us stroll into the class, I take a long, deep breath. It smells good in here, like the flowery perfume my mother uses on Sundays. The room itself reminds me of the drama room at school. If the drama room at school had professionally designed costumes and so many props, it could rival a Hollywood set. A tall lady in fire-engine red heels that made her look even taller wooshed dramatically into the room, on her neck a hot pink feather boa that ruffles as she walks, a long black dress with long flowy sleeves, and her thick black box braids highlighted with brown towered upon her head like a winding serpent.

"Welcome, my pupils." She says with an air so dramatic that it gives me goosebumps, "Part of being a spy is learning to wake up your inner thespian." I could hear Manuela smiling without even looking at her. "Imagine this, you are at a dinner party where you must find and apprehend an important guest who is going to disrupt the cycles of our world. You must make up a character and act. You must be the character!" She sinks into a plush red velvet chair. "I am Mrs. Kebede, and I will be teaching you this summer how to create the perfect alias for every situation, and how disguises play into all of this," she sighs dramatically. "Now, we must begin!" she clapped her cocoa-coloured hands, her long sharp scarlet nails clacking together rhythmically. She turns towards her large, old-fashioned mahogany desk, the most normal object in the room; her dark dress swooshing brilliantly as she reaches down and delicately picks up four large manila folders in her thin hands.

"One for each of us," I think to myself.

As lightly as she picks them up, she places the files into our outstretched hands. "Now, inside each of these precious folders are two pieces of paper with crucial information. One contains information such as the name, personality, etc., of a made-up villain, and the second contains an alias. For the next half hour, you must work on becoming your character. You will have full access to the costume closet and at the end of class, you will engage in a little one-on-one questioning with me at my desk where I will ask you three questions you will have to answer as your alias... now begin! "

I open my file and examine the papers inside:

Villain: Vladimir Valinsky

Personality: Selfish, cold, and unfeeling. Loves only his daughter, Vanda.

Mission: Wants revenge on the government for unjustly imprisoning Vanda as a teenager.

I read the next page:

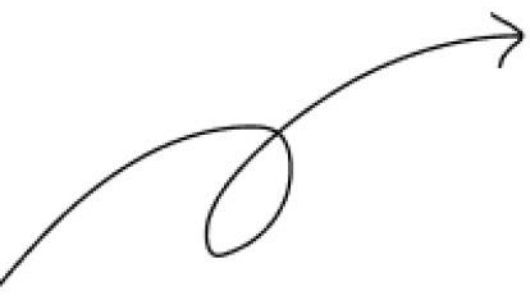
Alias: Melissa Hill

Lives: In an apartment above her mother's bakery.

Personality: Rough, but sweet when she wants to be.

Story: Mother was kidnapped by the government. Use this to make Vladimir think you're on his side.

I try my hardest for the rest of the time to prepare myself, but I can't figure out how to do so. I'm nothing like Melissa, whatever-her-name-is. The more I practice, the less confident I become. I look around the large room, searching for Manuela, who is on the other side. A large, black, faux animal fur cowboy hat sits atop her messy, brown curls, and she's practicing with so much gusto I just know she's going to ace this. I heave a deep sigh. I'm doomed.



CHAPTER 3:

Buried hopes

Clap, clap

The sound of Mrs. Kebede's claps rang throughout the large room, "Time is up!" Mrs. Kebede's melodious voice called, "Keza, you're up first!"

As I stepped up to her ginormous desk, my heart hammered against my ribs like a bighorn sheep crashing into another. I anxiously wiped my damp hands on my tights.

"Begin when you are ready." A leather-bound notebook with gold edges lies open in front of Mrs. Kebede. She clutches a large red wooden pen in her hand.

My heart is practically in my throat by now. I open my mouth to speak, but all that comes out is a weak groan. Before I can get another word out, my throat begins to burn, and my stomach twists violently. My mouth fills with an acidic, metallic taste. I lean forward violently and tremble, my throat tightening and giving way to a sludgy, greenish-yellow liquid that gushes on the luxurious desk. My instructor's eyes widen unnaturally in pure horror, her hand grasps her chest. She is clearly upset. My eyes water and burn. I run, push open the door and look up and down the hallway; no one's around. My vision is blurred by flowing tears. I rush toward the "lavatory" sign and into the bathroom and fall in a heap on the marble floors, sobbing uncontrollably. I hear quiet footsteps in the distance and curl up in a perfect ball of misery. The footsteps get louder and suddenly stop. I look up and two heads are looking down at me. I sit up and wipe my eyes. My vision clears, revealing Manuela and... Matondo?

CHAPTER 4:

A second impression

Matondo offers her hand and pulls me up. I wipe my clammy hand on my dark jeans. "Thanks," I stammer, my voice hoarse from crying.

"No problem," she mumbles shyly. I use the back of my hand to wipe my eyes and look up into the shiny mirror. My cheeks are tear-streaked, my eyes are a bloodshot red, and my thick dreadlocks are all over the place with locks sticking out in all directions. A shrill gasp escapes my throat. I've never looked worse!

"You ok?" Manuela asks with concern in her voice.

I shake my head violently, and my eyes begin to fill with liquid once more. "I'll never be a spy," I cry. "I couldn't even act out a simple alias without throwing up."

"Oh come on," Manuela says irritably. "Listen to me, you will be an amazing spy. One class on the first day of spy school does not define you."

"But yours was probably amazing," I croak, fiddling with the tissue Matondo hands me.

"I love acting, Keza. I've practiced acting every day for hours since I was 7 years old. You just need to practice, and you'll be awesome."

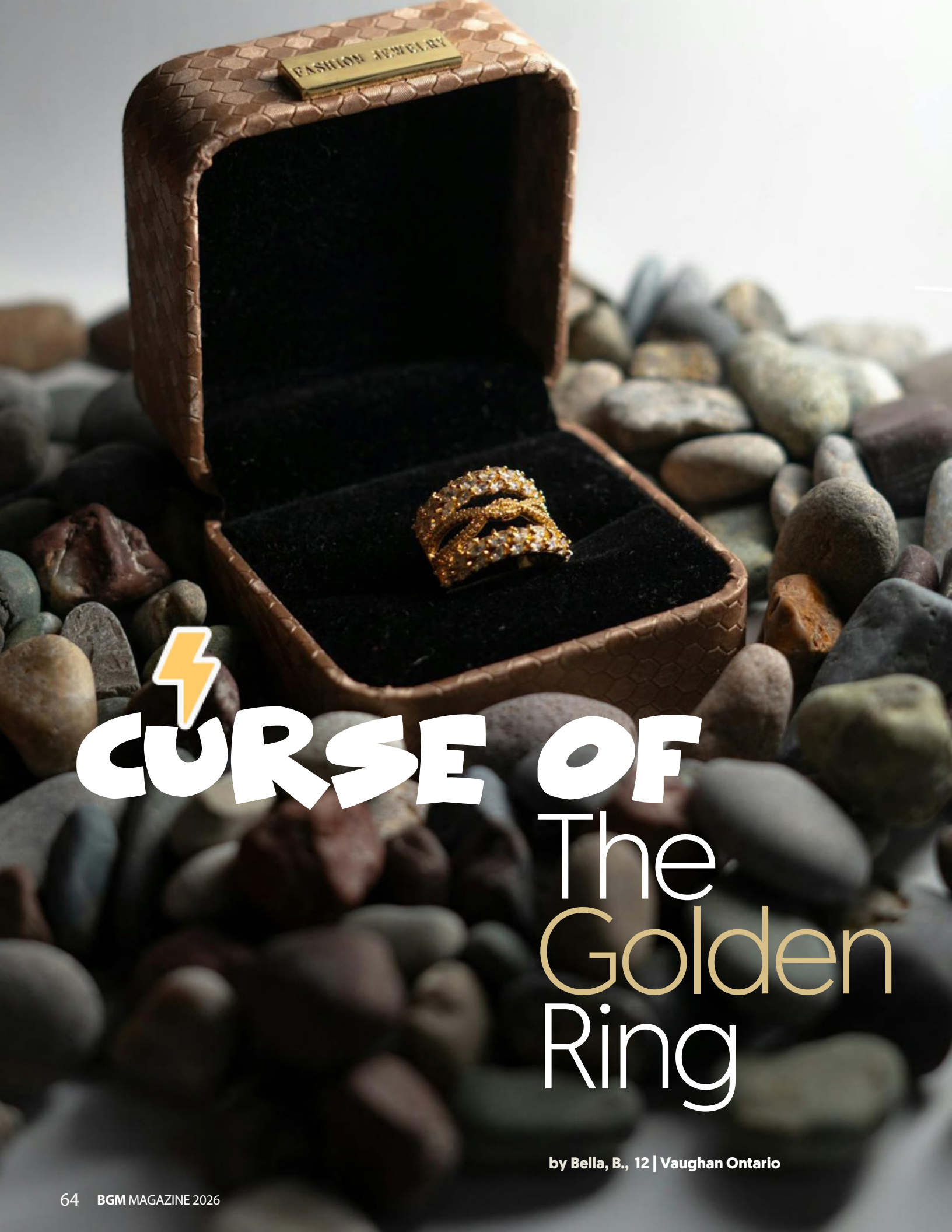
Matondo's soft, silky voice cuts in, "If it makes you feel better, I'm not very good at acting either, maybe we can practice together."

My face brightens and I run the back of my hand across my face, wiping the tears as I nod.

"Everything will work out," Manuela encourages. "I suggest we go to physical training before Mrs. Marino kicks us out of spy school for shenanigans on the first day," she snorts as she lets out a laugh. I grin from ear to ear, and together with a new friend and an old one, I step out into the high-tech hallways once more. The cool, bluish luminescent light panels overhead shine into my eyes. I hold up my hand to block the light. Only then do I hear it. My head whips back and forth as I scan the hall. The ominous crackling sound heightens in the background.



TO BE CONTINUED...



CURSE OF The Golden Ring

by Bella, B., 12 | Vaughan Ontario



CHAPTER 1: Trust

Many years ago, when the world was newly created, the powerful Greek gods Gai and Zeus had a son named Eros (also known as Cupid), the god of love. He was mighty and grew up to have many friends. One of those friend's names was Hephaestus, the Greek god of fire.

One day, Hephaestus recommended that he and Eros would add fire to the world. Eros stuttered but agreed, even though the Greek gods were against it.

In the middle of the night, Hephaestus and Eros traveled to the end of the world. Hephaestus gave Eros a fire blaster and confidently, they added fire to the world, together.

The next morning, the Greek gods woke up to a terrifying sight! The earth had fire! At that moment, they knew all of what had happened. However, they needed to be more

knowledgeable about the punishment for this matter. At last, they thought of the perfect punishment, but it would involve Prometheus, the Greek god of clay sculptors, to make a woman out of clay.

Present Time...

Eros is playing in his room when he hears a knock at the door. As he got up from his bed and opened it, he saw a man holding a big, brown box. Instead of kindly handing Eros the box and telling him who it was from, he dropped the box on Eros's foot, slammed the door, and ran away.

CHAPTER 2: A Woman

As Eros brought the package into his ginormous house, he thought about how rude that young man was. However, what Eros didn't know was that the man he encountered was Prometheus himself. When he opened the box, he was surprised to find a beautiful woman made of clay inside. Instantly, he knew that this was his punishment from the gods, but kept wondering how a lovely lady like her could be a punishment. But before he could wonder for any longer, Eros suddenly fell in love with this woman.

As he started to admire this young woman, he noticed a tag fall from the box. He picked up the tag on the box and noticed that it said "The lady's name in this box is Dione. Love her with all your heart, and a magical surprise will occur." This made Eros feel special and started to admire her for another hour.

When Eros thought he couldn't admire her any longer, the clay woman suddenly turned into the most beautiful woman Eros had ever seen.

CHAPTER 3: A Taste From Home

After a couple of days of living with Dione, Eros invited her to a fancy Italian restaurant called "Le Bella Roma,"



owned by his friend Maxwell (they got a discount on the food) because he wanted Dione to go to a new type of restaurant for once instead of the Greek ones. However, Dione was not Greek, but Italian. She was also very fluent in Italian and was familiar with the restaurant.

When they got there, Opera musicians welcomed them to the restaurant with an Italian song as the salsa dancers danced in the background.

"So, how do you like it?" Eros asked Dione once they were seated at the best table in the house. "As always" Dione replied with a bored expression on her face. After saying this the waitress came with the menu but Dione didn't need it and ordered their meal on the spot without asking Eros.

In the middle of their meal, Dione got up and said, "Devo andane in bagno, torno subito," and left Eros stranded without any idea what she just said but used it as a time to get ready for something that he would never forget.

After she left, Eros adjusted his bow tie, took a ring from his pocket and polished it as the orchestra tuned their instruments.

Dione walked back a couple of minutes later with a piece of toilet paper stuck to her shoe, when the orchestra started to play "Canon in D Major." Eros bent down on one knee, asking for Dione's hand in marriage.

CHAPTER 4: The Wedding

Dione hid behind the shiny, white curtain, ready to walk down the aisle. "Do I look good enough to you?" she asked her bridesmaids. "Great like always, Ms. Smith" they cheeped. "Well, soon to be Ms. Smith, that is."

The wedding music started as everyone "ooohed" and "aaahhed" when the curtains opened. Dione quickly walked to the front of the aisle, said her "I do's," and kissed Eros.

After the wedding, Dione and Eros got together to open their gifts. Nothing looked strange until they came upon a small box. This box was addressed to Dione from the Greek gods.

She tore open the box to find another small box. Curiously, she opened three more boxes. And then, when she thought she couldn't open any more boxes, she opened the final box to reveal a golden ring with a shiny diamond in the center.

As she put on the ring, she noticed that a little piece of brown paper fell out of the box and onto the floor. As she picked it up, she saw that it was a warning from the Greek gods about the ring. Terrified by this, but also determined to find out more about this mysterious ring, she read the warning. It said, "WARNING: This ring releases a very poisonous gas if

the two buttons on either side are pressed at the same time. Thank You!”

After reading this, she felt more calm about the ring. However, more than ever, she wanted to touch the buttons.

CHAPTER 5: *Poof!*

Dione is reading a book in her room when the ring that she was given started to glow from its box. As Dione walked towards the ring, she noticed that it was just a beam of light coming from the sun, bouncing off the diamond.

She sat back down on her bed and thought about the warning. “What would happen if I touched it? What type of gas would it be? Would it hurt someone?” As those questions came through her head, she kept on wondering, pondering, thinking about the ring.

Dione thought that the warning was just to scare her. I mean, like, how could a ring be dangerous, and come with a warning, Please!

Dione picked up the ring and put her two fingers on the two buttons. She closed her eyes and started to count to three. “One, two, the...” *Poof!* Just as soon as she pressed the buttons, the ring opened up and let out stardust into the air.

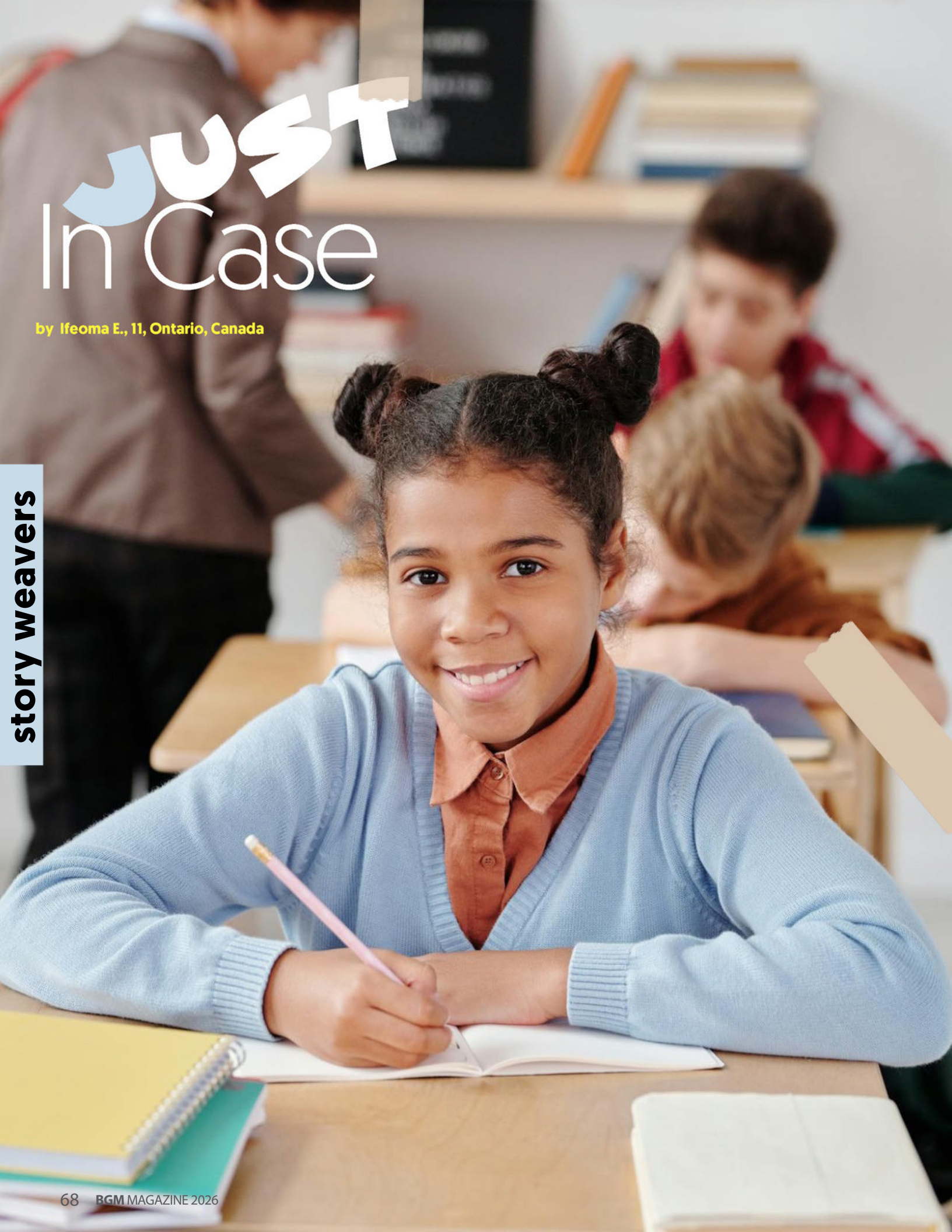
As the dust started to clear, she wondered about how stardust could be dangerous. Then she heard a scream and a loud *bang!* that came from the dining room.

Dione ran into the dining room to find her true love, Eros, laying there on the floor, dead.

CHAPTER 6: All Alone

Dione is in her bedroom packing all of her favourite activities, books, and two-player games into her ugliest suitcase. She walked back into the dining room, kneeled by Eros, and said her final goodbyes, when she noticed a beautiful scent that quickly increased and spread to the whole world. Dione realised that the scent was the love that Eros released to the world.





JUST In Case

by Ifeoma E., 11, Ontario, Canada

story weavers

Serina didn't notice it at first. Or maybe she did and just didn't have a word for it.

At school, teachers always sounded surprised when Serina answered questions. Like, "wow, you actually know that." One teacher told her she spoke "so well." Serina said "thank you," but later she wondered what her teacher thought she sounded like before. In group work, people talked over Serina a lot. If she said an idea and nobody reacted, someone else would say the same thing five minutes later, and everyone would agree. Serina didn't say anything about it. She didn't want to be dramatic. At the mall near her house, the shop keepers watched her movements the whole time. They didn't pay that much attention to her friends like that. Just Serina. She made sure not to touch anything unless she was going to buy it. Serina kept her hands in her pockets.

"Why do you always keep the receipt?" A friend asked.

"Just in case," she would always reply. But Serina knew if there wasn't proof of purchase, the security guards would think she had stolen the item. When she got home, she told her mom. She didn't look surprised. She just listened.

Then her mom said, "some people see you before they know you." Serina didn't really like that answer, but she knew it was true. The next day in class, Serina raised her hand again. Her heart was beating really fast, but she talked anyway. Her voice cracked, and the boys laughed. But to Serina, nothing was funny. The next day, they had a substitute teacher. A black-haired woman who was shorter than most of the students. Serina froze as the teacher pulled out a thick binder: the attendance binder. Serina's real name was Somadina, but she went by Serina to make it easier for everyone to pronounce her name. What was listed on the official page was 'Somadina Eze'. The teacher read the names aloud, Emily Carter, Michael Dun ... quite easily. But her face twisted when she read Serina's name. "I apologize if I got this wrong," she said. Serina cringed. The teacher had completely butchered her name.

"I just go by Serina, ma'am," she mumbled. But it was too late. The class laughed like it was the funniest thing they had ever heard. Serina's face went hot, but she laughed with them; it was just a joke, right? People started repeat-

ing her real name over and over. Every time something like this happened, she made fun of herself so people wouldn't think she was weak. The substitute raised her hand. The room slowly settled, laughter fading into awkward coughs. But suddenly, Serina was done. How long could she mock herself? How long could she show the cashier the receipt proving she wasn't a thief like the pale boy that once walked by with a candy bar but that he definitely hadn't paid for? Serina snapped.

"No," she said blandly. "That's not funny."

The teacher looked at Serina again. "Did I say it wrong?" Serina hesitated. Her throat felt dry. But then she remembered her mom's voice from the night before. 'Some people see you before they know you.'

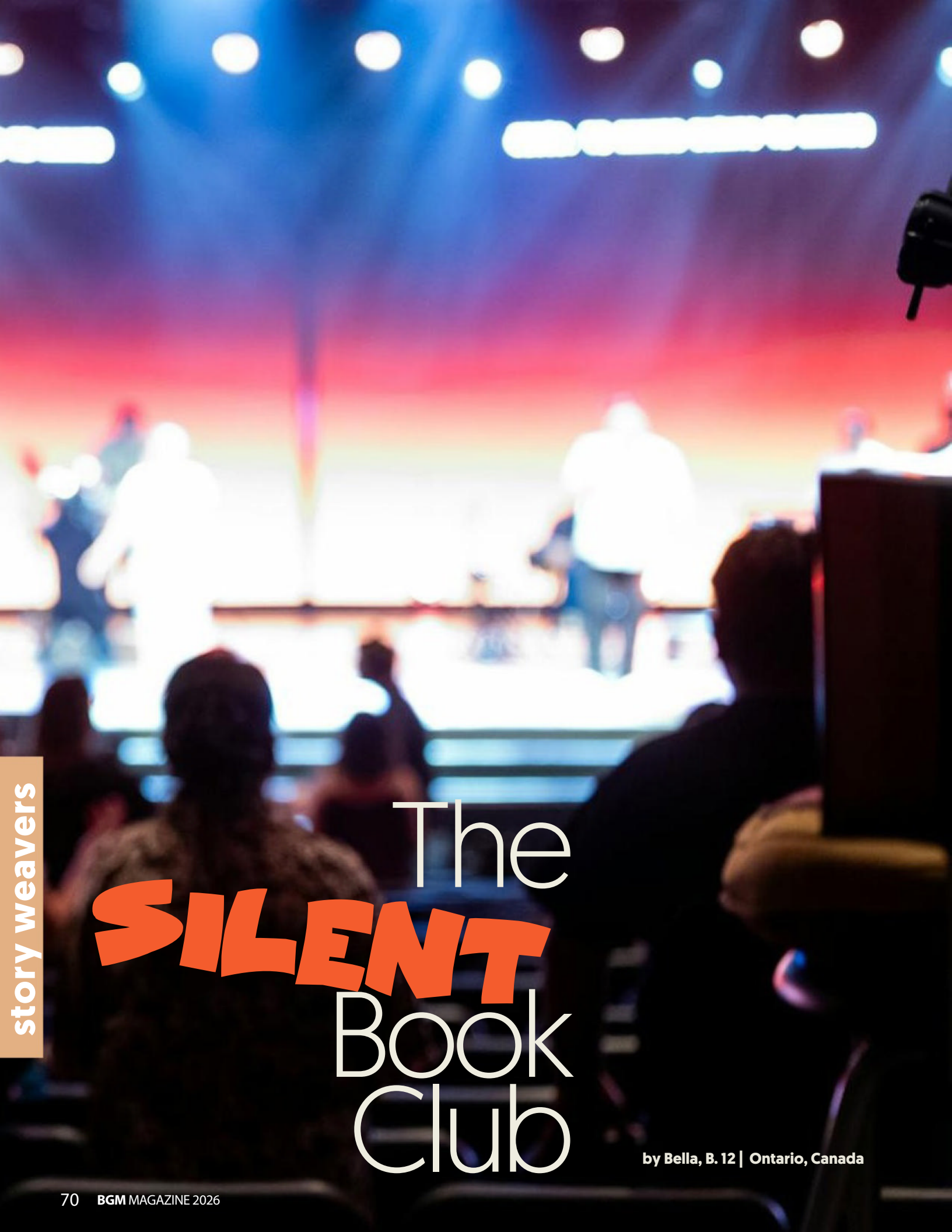
"It's pronounced So-mai-dee-na," she said. Her voice shook, but it didn't stop. The teacher nodded, as if that mattered.

"Thank you for correcting me, Somadina." Then, softer, "that's a beautiful name." The class didn't clap or anything dramatic like that. A few people still snickered. But something shifted. The teacher moved on. The moment passed. At lunch, one girl from her science group sat next to her.

"Hey," she said, not looking directly at her, "your idea yesterday was actually really smart. About the experiment. You were right."

Serina blinked. "Oh. Thanks." Later that week, she stopped keeping her hands in her pockets at the mall. She still kept the receipt, but this time, she folded it neatly into her bag instead of gripping it like it was life support. Things didn't magically get better. Teachers still sounded surprised sometimes. People still talked over her. But Serina started raising her hand anyway. She stopped laughing at jokes that hurt. She started going by her real name. She started correcting people when they got her name wrong. Not every time. Just sometimes.

JUST IN CASE.



story weavers

The **SILENT** Book Club

by Bella, B. 12 | Ontario, Canada

PART ONE: The Invite

‘Bayview Boulevard, a place in time. Something that fancies your fancies and knots your knots. Something that fills in the blanks and covers up your mistakes. Something that’s irreplaceable, or impossible to replace. Something that’s home to the silent book club, the perfect place for you.’

“Honey, I’m not too sure about this book club, Kamaria dear,” Mama says gently to her daughter.

“Mama, you have to go! You were the fanciest woman back in Nigeria! Even in Jamaica, boy, the way you made those men jealous! Oh, boy! Do you ever give up on them, you little resilient mama, you!” Kamaria tells her mother, seemingly very intent on convincing her mom to go.

“Sweety, you know what? Sure. I mean, it can hurt.” Mama says to Kamaria.

As Kamaria silently celebrates on the couch, Mama gets changed to go to the silent book club. It couldn’t hurt, could it?

Soon, Mama is ready to leave the house. As she places her books into her colourful, vibrant book bag, she remembers that she forgot the invitation. Mama heads into the kitchen, her sandals squeaking against the pristine waxed floor. Everything seems normal, except for the invitation.

What used to be a formal letter on a tough piece of cardstock has turned into a beautiful, glowing, 3D map displaying Wanistasian Willows. A glowing, dotted red line stands out across the map. As Mama looks closer, she imagines herself inside the map, in the forest. More importantly, Mama imagines the future.

She loved to look at the invitation. It gave her a chance to stop worrying about the past and to concentrate on the present. More importantly, it gave Mama a chance to be free.

Before long, Mama awoke from her imagination and focused on the present. She looked at the clock: 5:15 pm. “Oh no!” Mama cried. “I’m gonna be late!”

As Mama hurried out the door, she picked up her book bag and whooshed away. However, this whoosh didn’t just whoosh her away; it whooshed away the letter, too! As the card floated to the ground, it flipped over. On the back, it read, ‘For the ludicrous, and that’s putting it nicely.’ Oh, poor mama. What has she gotten herself into this time?

PART TWO: The Realization

Soon, Mama arrived at the front door of a large, beautiful library in the village. “This seems like the right place,” Mama said out loud to herself. “Let me just check the map on the back of the invitation to make sure.” As she fumbles in her bag looking for the map, the library doors slowly open, revealing the beautiful modern architecture inside.

“Welcome to the Bayview Bookavard, this town’s one and only library. We have something for everyone! How can I help you today, Ms.?” A young lady, about the age of 21, opened the door to the library, inviting Mama in.



“Hi there!” Mama said to the lady, climbing up the library stairs to shake her hand. “I’m here for the Silent Bookclub meeting! Could you please point me in the right direction?”

At the mention of the book club’s name, all of the colour drained out of the young lady’s face. “Ms., we offer many programs here for you to join. Are you sure this is the one for you?” the lady said between shivers, clearly overtaken by fear. “Yes, Ms.,” Mama says. “This is the one my dear daughter, Kamaria, suggested I join.”

“Oh. Well, I guess you’ve made up your mind,” The lady says, clearly disappointed that her distracting tactics failed. “Follow me.”

The librarian motioned for Mama to follow her as she led her down the hall and to a metal door marked, ‘Basement’. “Have fun,” the librarian said, motionless and seemingly traumatized as she held open the door for Mama. Mama headed down the dark, creepy stairs, and into the basement as the metal door slammed shut behind her, leaving her in total darkness. She slowly ascended through the hallway, listening to the water droplets falling from the ceiling. Before long, Mama made it to a room at the end of the hallway. As she opened the door, eight people dropped the books that they were reading and turned to face Mama.

“Look, Theodore. A new sna... I mean guest,” a bald man with a torn yellow and black striped shirt said as he approached Mama, “welcome to the Silent Bookclub.”

Mama suddenly felt terrified, clearly not welcomed in this new atmosphere. Slowly, she tried to open the large metal door, but no matter how much she pushed and shoved, it wouldn’t budge.

“Going somewhere?” The bald man asked as he and the book club members approached Mama.

“Do you know why it’s called the silent book club?” The man asked as Mama slowly shook her head no. “It’s because this is a secret society,” the man said. “You can never repeat what you see here today,” said another in flannel pants with one pant leg longer than the other. “And you can never repeat what you hear today,” said a woman with one half of a long green dress and the other half a short blue dress. “And you cannot unsee what you see today, a mysterious voice came from behind mama making her jump in fright. It was the voice of a woman with big hair, one brown eye and one grey eye, wearing shredded plastic bags all over her body. She stood at the large metal door that would not open, except, it was now wide open. Behind her was the most amazing scene Mama had ever seen. A scene she had only ever imagined. The stage was a marvel of colorful and vibrant lights, with music carrying a somber mood that brought back memories of her acting years... many years ago... when she graced international stages with her powerful soulful voice.

“Happy birthday!” Everyone shouted as confetti fell from the ceiling.

“Happy birthday, Mama,” said Kamaria, suddenly appearing on stage.

Now I can’t tell you what happens next except that Mama’s life changed forever after that.





The First Time I Did a Stage Performance

by Ifeoma E., 11 | Ontario, Canada



The first time I did a stage performance was in the winter of 2023, in a small school Christmas play for young kids. It was not a big production or anything, just something simple that our school put together, but it still felt important to me. Before it started, I remember waiting and feeling nervous because I did not really know what to expect.

When it was my turn, I was still nervous. But once I started acting, it got easier. I just focused on what I was supposed to say and do. By the end of the play, everyone clapped and I felt really proud of myself. It was not a huge moment, but it meant a lot to me. That was when I realized I actually liked acting.

Because of that, in the summer of 2024, my mom signed me up for a theatre program. It was for kids who were ten and older, but because I had a late birthday, I was still nine. It took a long time before my mom could convince them to accept me into the program. That made me feel like I had to do my best and prove I deserved to be there.

The program ran for one week and we had to put together a whole show in that short time. We practiced almost every day, all day. We worked on our lines, learned where to stand, and practiced scenes over and over. Even though I was not the main character, I still felt stressed about remembering my lines because I did not want to mess up.

At lunch, we all ate in a big hall. At first, I sat alone because most of the other kids already knew each other. They were talking and laughing, and I just stayed quiet. It felt a little awkward. After a few days, some girls invited me to sit with them. We started talking about the play and helping each other practice, and it got a lot better after that.

When it was finally time for the performance, I felt really nervous. My stomach even hurt. But when I started acting, I stopped thinking about being nervous and just focused. I remember getting distracted by the props and almost missing my cue because I was just looking at them.

Then, in the middle of the show, it was time for my scene. I heard my cue line, but when I started talking, I forgot what came next. I started stuttering and felt really embarrassed. It felt like a long moment, even though it probably was not. But I kept going, remembered my lines, and finished the scene.

The surprising part was that no one noticed my mistake. The play just kept going like normal. At the end, I felt really relieved and also proud that I did not give up. After the performance, I got a bouquet of red roses. That made me feel really happy.

These experiences were my first real performances, and they showed me how much I enjoy acting. Even though I made a mistake, I still had fun, and it made me want to keep doing it.







arts

Photo credit: time.com



ICE SKATING

THE NEED FOR SPEED

By Ruth McDonald, 13 |

Ontario, Canada



Image credit: Swedish History Museum
<https://nspirement.com/2022/02/13/vikings-ancient-winter-sports.html>

Are you fast, and do you have an interest in ice skating? Well, speed skating would be perfect for you! I do speed skating, and trust me, it's nothing like figure skating or any other skating sport.

FUN FACT:

in the Olympics, Team Canada is more successful in speed skating than hockey!

How did speed skating start?

Speed skating started in Scandinavia and the Netherlands as early as the 13th century. Originally, they used animal bones for blades, then they switched to iron blades with wood. Currently, skates use steel alloys. They keep improving speed skates to be thinner, more efficient, sharper and faster. The earliest dated race was in 1676, but the earliest official tournament started in Oslo, Norway, in 1863.



Leather and bone skates, the Jorvik Viking Centre, York England
<https://www.thecollector.com/viking-jorvik-discoveries/>

THE BASICS

To speed skate, you need balance, agility and endurance, for starters. Whenever you skate, you have to get low because of the air resistance from standing up and your center of gravity shifting, making it easier to fall. For example, the really fast skaters bend down so low that they touch the ice to keep themselves balanced. There are two types of skating: long track and short track. For short track, each lap around is 100 meters, but for long track, each lap around is 400 meters. I do long track speed skating.

GEAR

As a speed skater, you wear a helmet, a neck guard, glasses, shin guards, kneepads, Kevlar ankle guards, obviously skates, and a skin suit. Elite speed skaters wear a Kevlar under suit for added protection. You may be wondering why speed skating has helmets and figure skating doesn't. In speed skating, you go around the track at over 60 kilometers an hour, so it is dangerous if you fall as it may lead to a concussion. You also wear a skin suit, which is tight on your skin for less air resistance. If you were to wear something like a sweater, that alone would slow you down.

Have you heard of these Black speed skaters?

Renee Steenge

At 8 or 9 years old, Renee Steenge started her skating career in the Brampton Ontario Speed Skating Club (which I am currently a part of). As she improved and gained more experience, she went to the Toronto Speed Skating Club for extra practices. In 2013, she received the Female Skater of the Year award from the Ontario Speed Skating Association, where

she won five medals at the Canadian Nationals in Halifax and placed second overall. The Skater of the Year award is a prestigious award that the Ontario Speed Skating Association (OSSA) grants to the highest achieving and performing skaters.

She trained in Calgary and Montreal and her practice paid off, as she finished third overall at the 2022 Canadian Short Track Championships! She also won World Cups in 2022-2023, and became a member of the relay team. She has 7 World Cup medals, two of which are gold, and she won a bronze medal in the 3,000m relay at the World Championships!

On top of all her fabulous skating commitments, Renee is also a high-achieving engineering student. She is currently studying Civil Engineering at McGill University in Montreal. What does that tell you? That you can be both an athlete and go to university to prepare for another career. It is always important to have a backup plan in sports. In recognition of her ability to balance sports and academics, she received the Peter Williamson Memorial Bursary for the 2022-2023 season. Not only does she do well in speed skating and academics, but she also loves creative outlets like building wooden house models and playing ultimate frisbee. Talk about multitalented!



image credit: Renee Steenge, Speed Skating Canada
<https://speedskating.ca/athletes/renee-steenge/>



Me (Ruth) on the left, with Renee Steenge.



Image credit: The Canadian Press/Graham Hughes

Renee (helmet 21) skates 1000m in the quarter finals at the ISU World Cup in Montreal.

<https://olympic.ca/2024/02/20/jordan-pierre-gilles-and-renee-steenge-have-big-goals-as-they-skate-into-canadas-short-track-spotlight/>

William Dandjinou

William Dandjinou is a 4-time World Champion and a 2-time back-to-back Crystal Globe award winner, which is a prestigious award for high-achieving athletes who participate in winter sports. He was dubbed the overall top male skater. It all started when William was 3 years old and played hockey. When he was 6 years old, he switched to speed skating. Watching Shani Davis, another phenomenal Black skater perform in the 2006 Turin Olympics, inspired him. William is 6'3", which is unusually tall for a short track speed skater, but he didn't let that stop him. He has been a member of the short track speed skating team since 2019.

William was serving as an alternate for the 2022 Beijing Olympics, which devastated him and made him consider quitting the sport. But he didn't and returned to the Olympics in Winter 2026. If you ever watch him skate on TV, you will see that he has a signature move, his eagle wings, to show his passion on the ice.



image credit:

William Dandjinou, Speed Skating Canada

<https://speedskating.ca/athletes/william-dandjinou/>



Erin Jackson

Erin Jackson was born on September 19, 1992, in Ocala, Florida. Jackson was an elite rollerskater and inline skater at the age of 10. In 2017, she switched to speed skating, and her success has been upward since then, as she entered the Olympics just 4 months later. Erin is the first Black woman to win a gold medal in an individual event (500m) at the Winter Olympics [2022] since 1994. She didn't make that win alone. During the tryouts for the Olympics, she fell, but her fellow skater, Brittany Bowe, gave up her spot so that Erin could compete.

On top of her wonderful skating, Erin also has a university degree in Materials Science & Engineering from the University of Florida. Additionally, she works with Edge Outdoors, an organization that prioritizes helping women of colour enter winter sports. On February 3, 2026, Erin had the privilege to serve as the U.S flag bearer for the 2026 Milano Cortina Winter Olympics opening ceremony.





Ruth McDonald (no. 5) at speed skating meet.



Photo credit: Boris Streubel/Getty Images.
Erin Jackson, ISU World Cup Speed Skating competition, Poland, December 2018.
*sources: www.ontariospeedskating.ca
www.olympics.com*

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for all girls



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