PRATHAM BOOKS
A Book in Every Child's Hand

Level 3

The Right Way School

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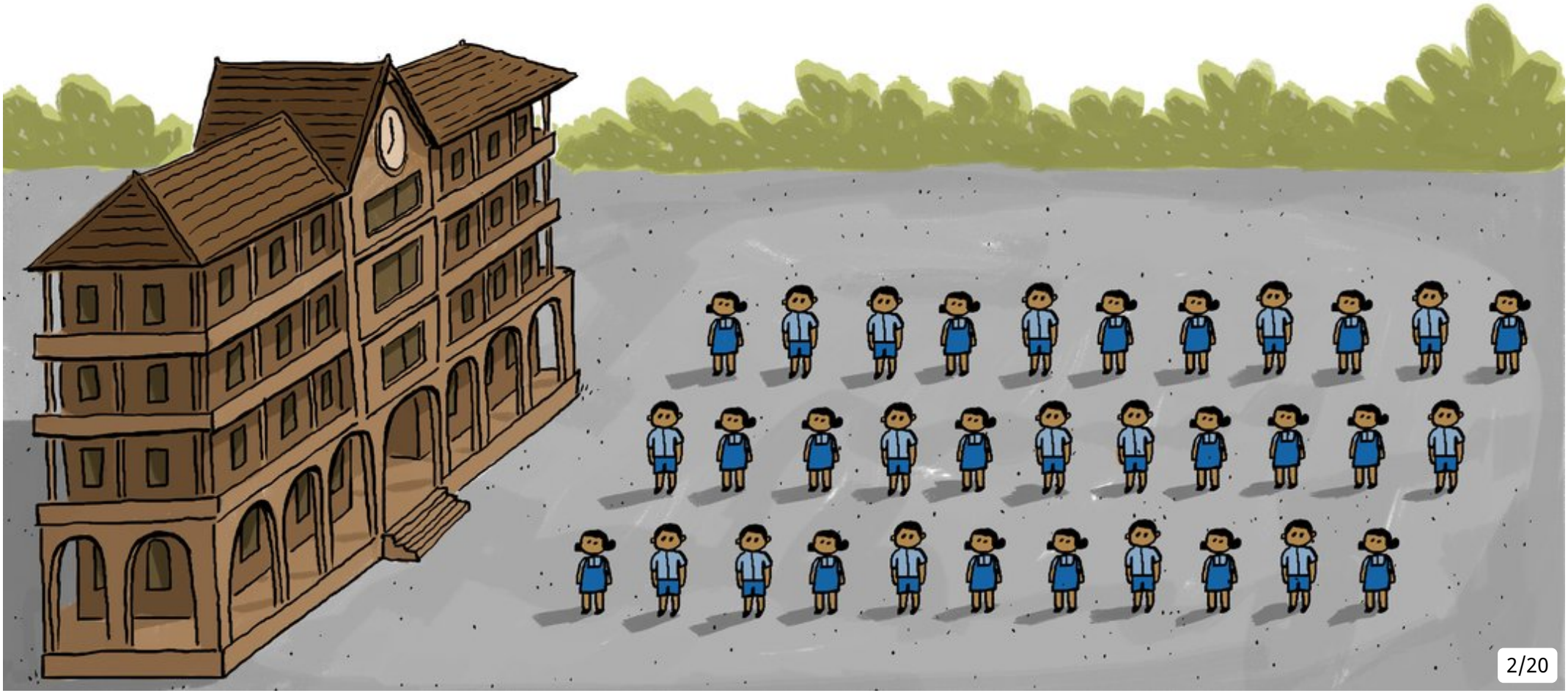
Illustrator: Fahad Faizal

The Right Way School was a brown building in a grey compound. Sometimes, the grey compound was filled with straight rows of students in dark blue uniforms.

The Right Way School believed that there was
a right way to study
a right way to dress
a right way to stand in rows.
This is what it taught its students.



More than anybody in the school, Mrs Gambhir believed in doing things the right way.

Mrs Gambhir was the class teacher of Std 3. In Hindi, Gambhir means serious. It was the perfect name for her.

Every day, Mrs Gambhir would write with white chalk on the black board.

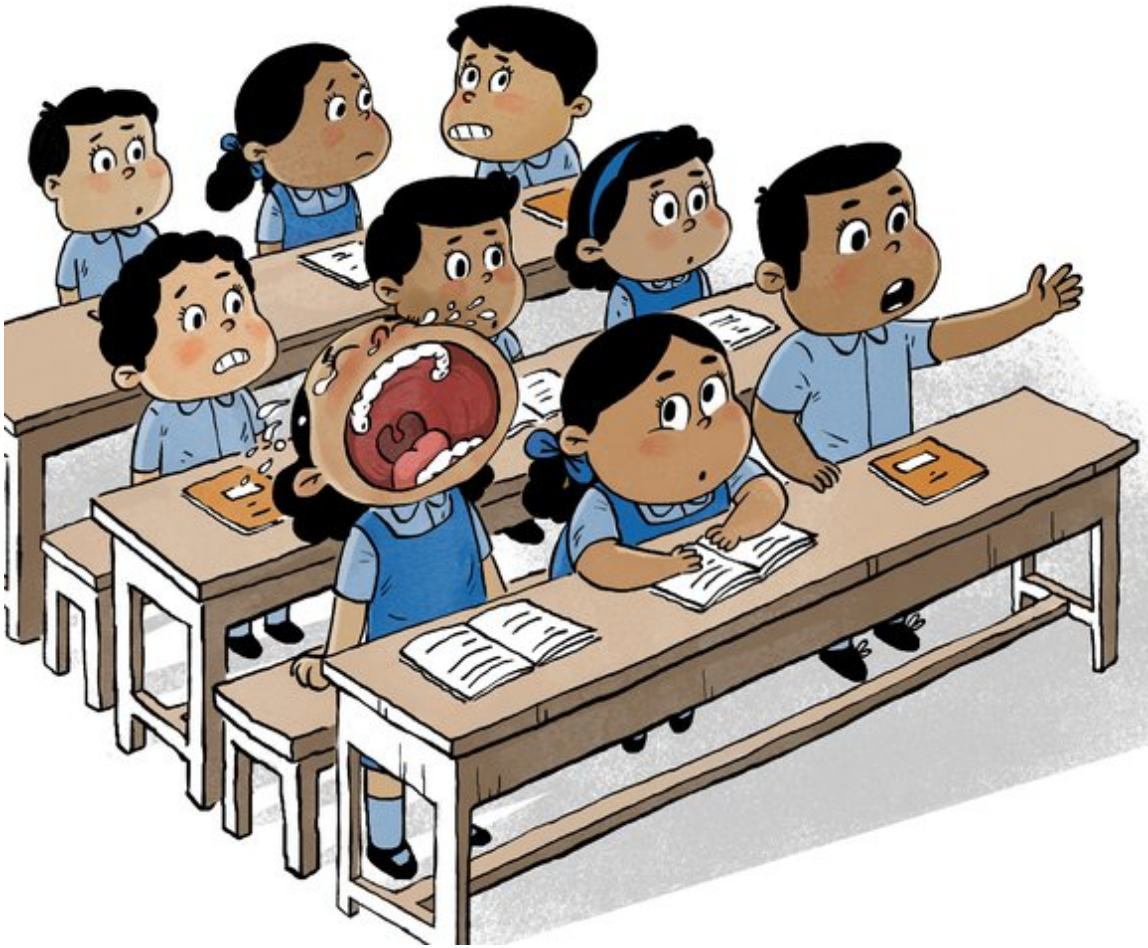
One Thursday afternoon, she wrote:
The root of a plant is buried under the soil and takes in water and nutrients.
“Now copy and learn,” she said.

“But miss,” Rohit asked, “what are nutrients?”

Mrs Gambhir ignored him. Questions and interruptions were not the right way.

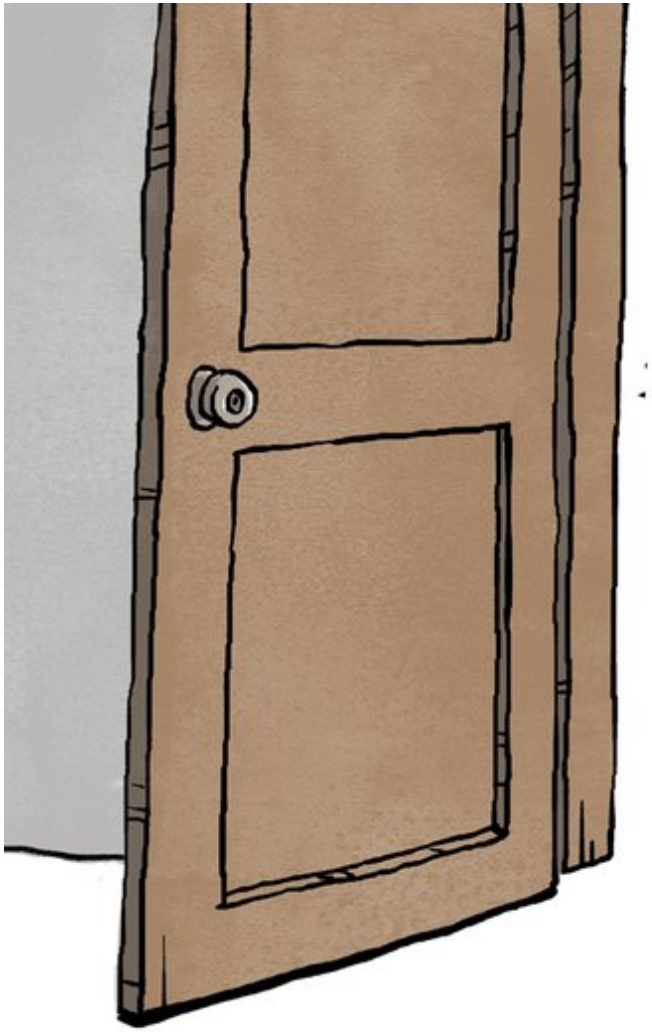
Mrs Gambhir asked, “Meera, what is the root of a plant?”
Meera’s hands turned cold. Her mind went blank.
Mrs Gambhir said “Tchhht tchhht”. Meera began to cry.

Mrs Gambhir asked Rohit, “What is a root?”
“The part under mud and it takes water and…”
Mrs Gambhir said “Tchhht tchhht tchhht” and took away his chocolate biscuits.



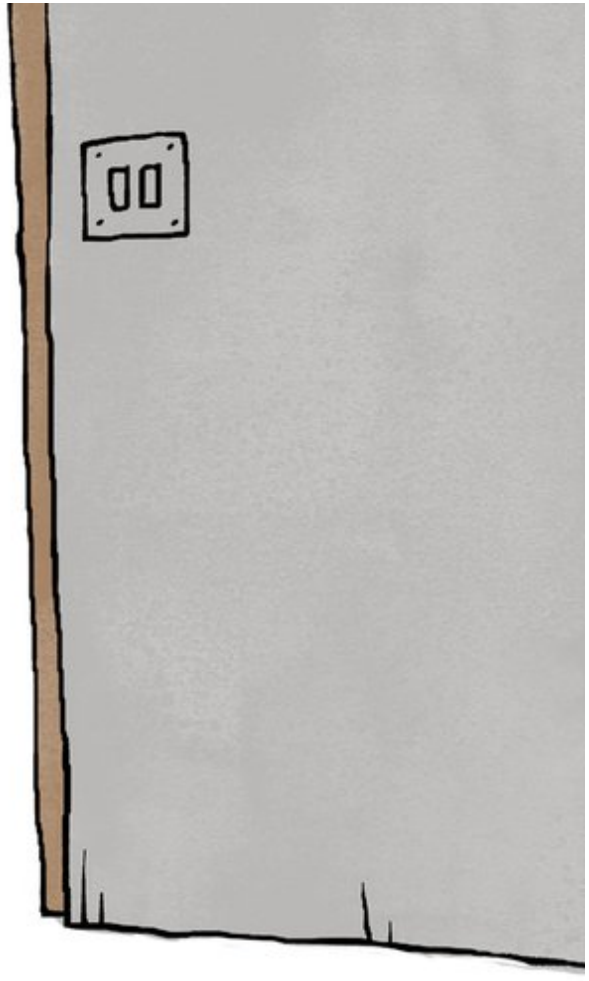
When Mrs Gambhir was angry, she said, “tchhhht tchhhht”.
When she was furious, she snarled, “tchhhht tchhhht tchhhht”.
Everybody wondered what would happen the day she said, “thchhht tchhhht tchhhht tchhhht”.

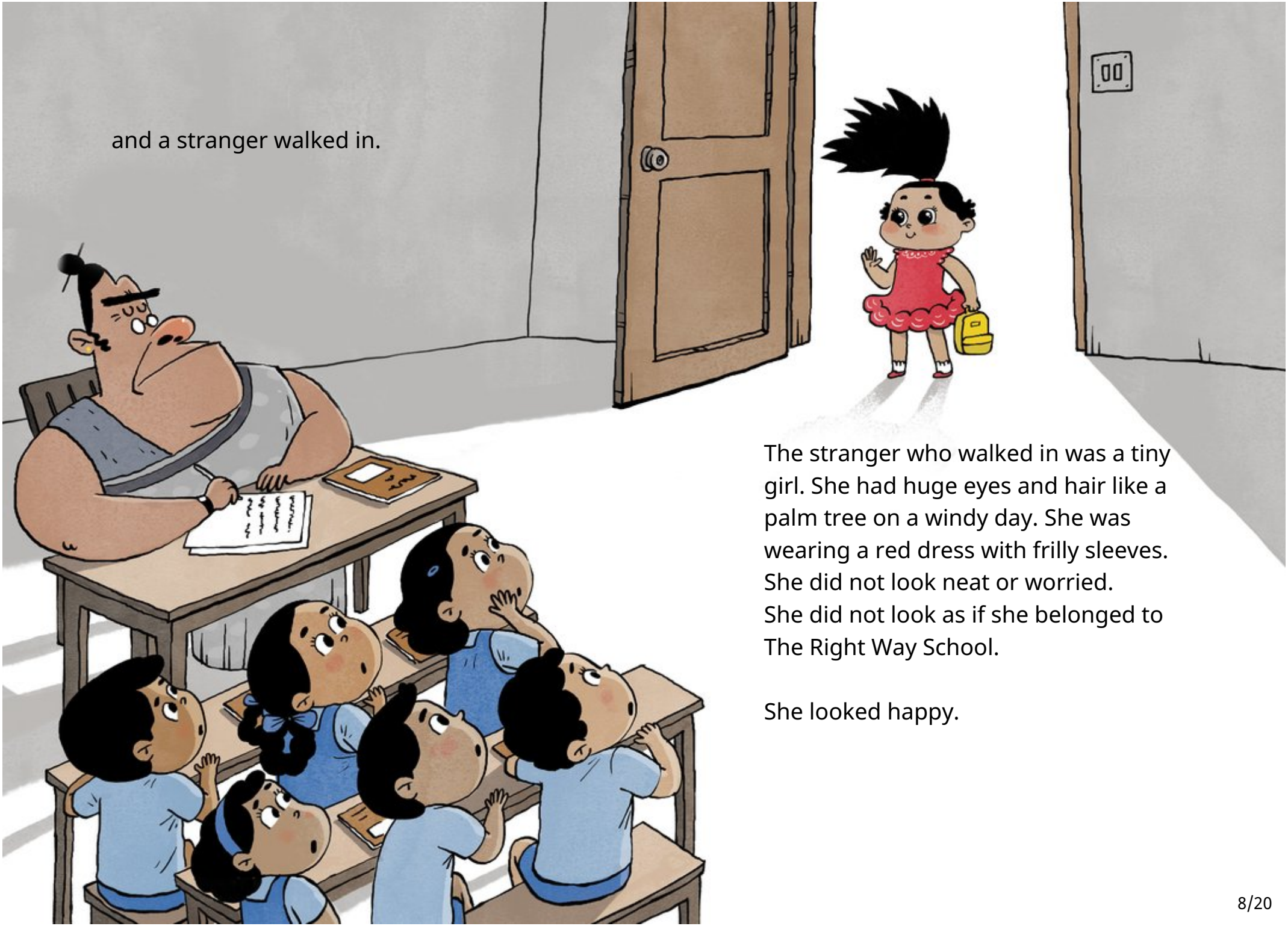
In History, Mrs Gambhir made the class learn dates.
In Art she made her students draw a blue river, green mountains and yellow sun.
If anybody added an apple tree or a cottage, Mrs Gambhir said, “tchhht tchhhht tchhhht”
and tore the paper.



Naturally, Std 3 tried to do things the right way.

Till one Monday morning, the door of the classroom opened...



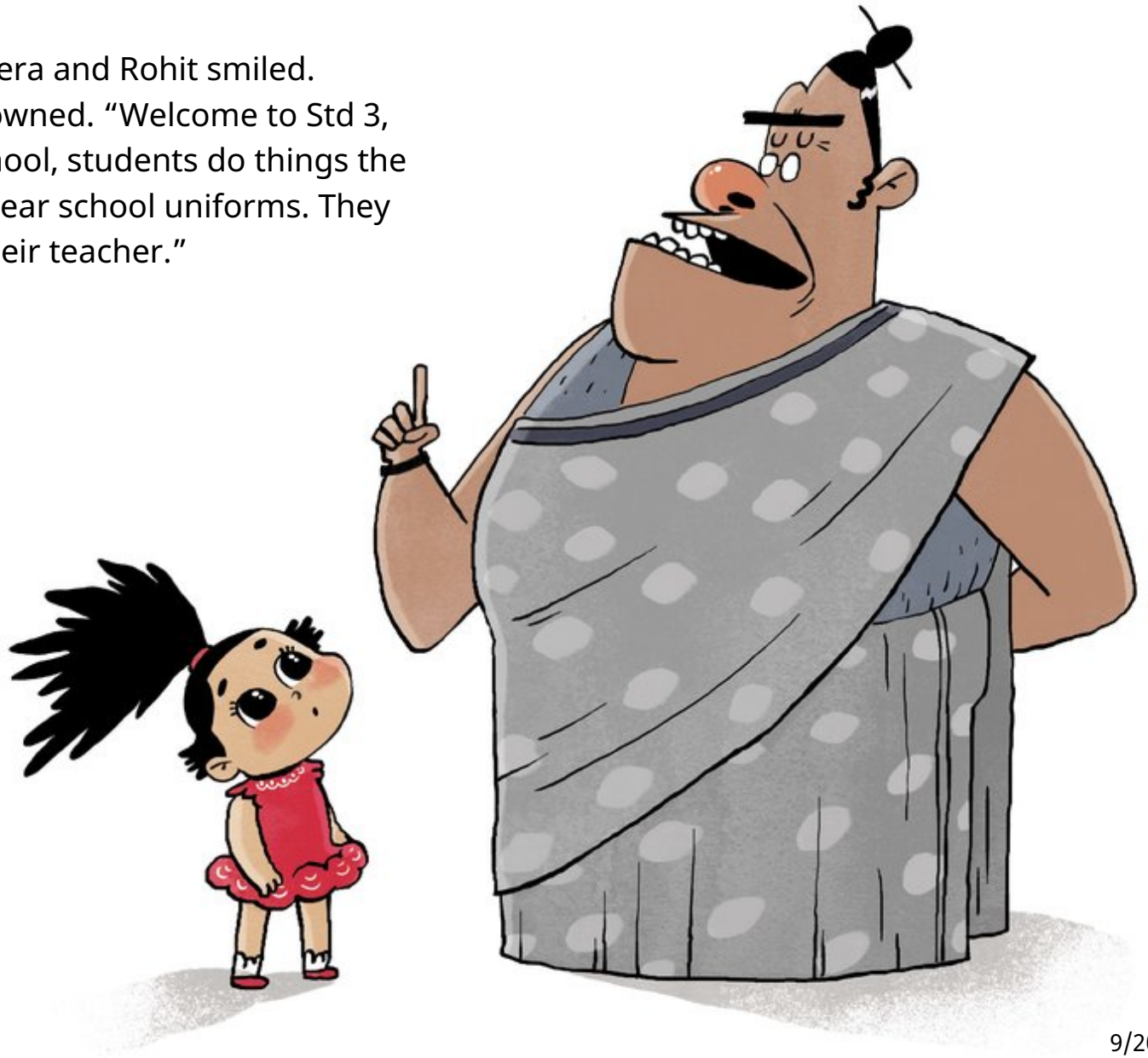


The stranger who walked in was a tiny girl. She had huge eyes and hair like a palm tree on a windy day. She was wearing a red dress with frilly sleeves. She did not look neat or worried. She did not look as if she belonged to The Right Way School.

She looked happy.

“Yes?” Mrs Gambhir asked in a forbidding voice.
“I’m the new girl. Laila,” the tiny stranger replied in a voice as noisy and merry as the horn of a bus.

The students of Std 3 blinked. Meera and Rohit smiled.
Mrs Gambhir didn’t smile. She frowned. “Welcome to Std 3, Laila,” she said finally. “In this school, students do things the right way. They talk softly. They wear school uniforms. They keep their hair neat. They obey their teacher.”

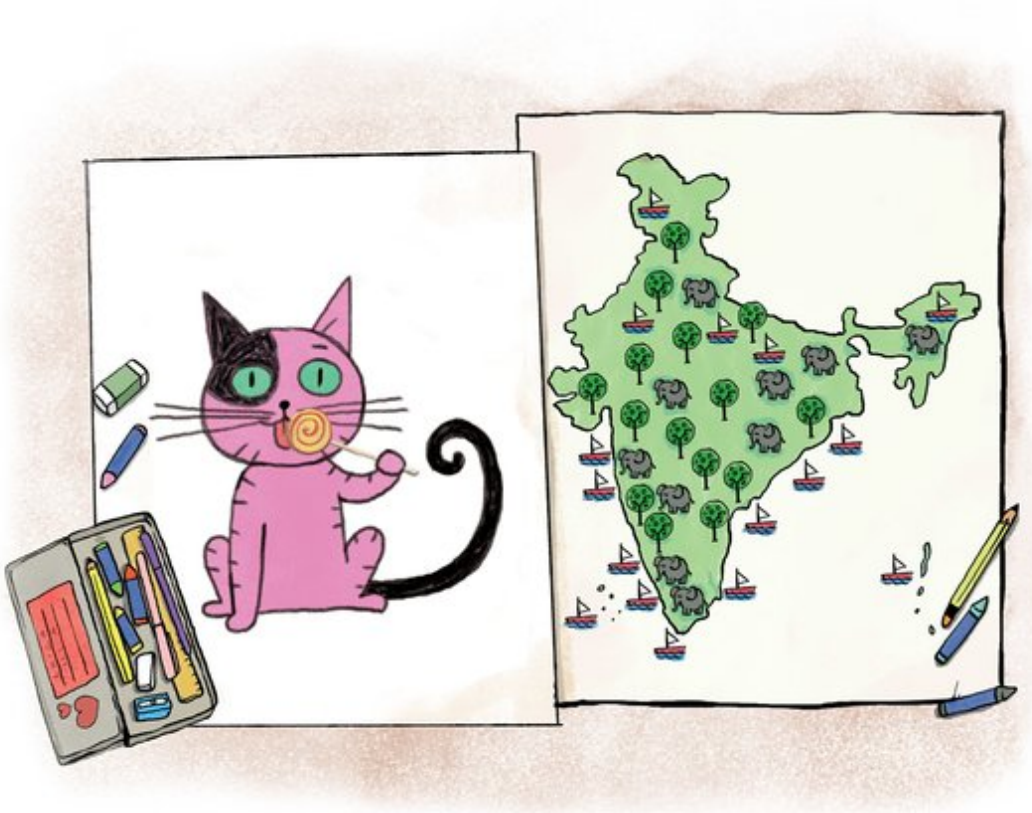


At lunchtime, the students of Std 3 surrounded Laila.
Rohit asked questions.
Lavanya gave advice.
Meera held Laila’s hand. “Be careful,” she whispered to her new best friend. “Mrs Gambhir is scary when she is angry.”

Laila tried not to make Mrs Gambhir angry. Every day, she wore her new blue uniform and tied her hair with eight clips and four rubber bands. Every day, Meera reminded her to be careful.

Still, Laila forgot. She couldn’t help herself. She drew a cat like everybody else. Except that her cat was pink and licking a lollipop. Mrs Gambhir hissed “tchhhht tchhhht” and tore the drawing.

Laila coloured the map of India like everybody else. But then she filled it in with elephants and boats and mango trees.



Mrs Gambhir spat “tchhhht tchhhht tchhhhht“ and made Laila spend her lunch break in the classroom.

However much Laila tried to be invisible, her questions popped out.
“How can a big tree fit in a small seed?”
“Why don’t fish make sounds?”
“Why don’t islands float away?”

Mrs Gambhir minded. She minded even more when Rohit began to ask questions. And Lavanya. And Amod.

“The next student to interrupt my class will spend the whole month in the corridor,” she shouted.

On Monday morning, Mrs Gambhir taught her class about weather. The class was behaving in the right way.

So the question that tumbled into Laila’s head and out of her mouth seemed loud. “Miss, are clouds like air or water or cotton wool?”
“TCHHHT TCHHHT TCHHHT…

TCHHHT," Mrs Gambhir exploded. Then she pointed at the door.

Looking sad and small, Laila stumbled out of the classroom.

Looking pleased, Mrs Gambhir wrote on the black board: *Rainfall is water falling in drops from vapour—*

A voice interrupted the teacher. A voice usually too scared to speak in class.

"Miss," Meera whispered bravely, "does a cloud feel like cotton wool?"
The class gaped. Mrs Gambhir shook as she pointed at the door.

Meera walked out of the classroom.

Then Rohit raised his hand. Then Lavanya.

Five minutes later, Mrs Gambhir was teaching an empty classroom about rainfall.

Well, not empty exactly. The desks and chairs were there. They did not interrupt and the teacher was happy.

Twenty minutes later, The Principal of The Right Way School walked past the Std 3 classroom.
She gaped.

In The Right Way School, students did not stand in corridors in noisy groups. They sat in classrooms in silent lines.

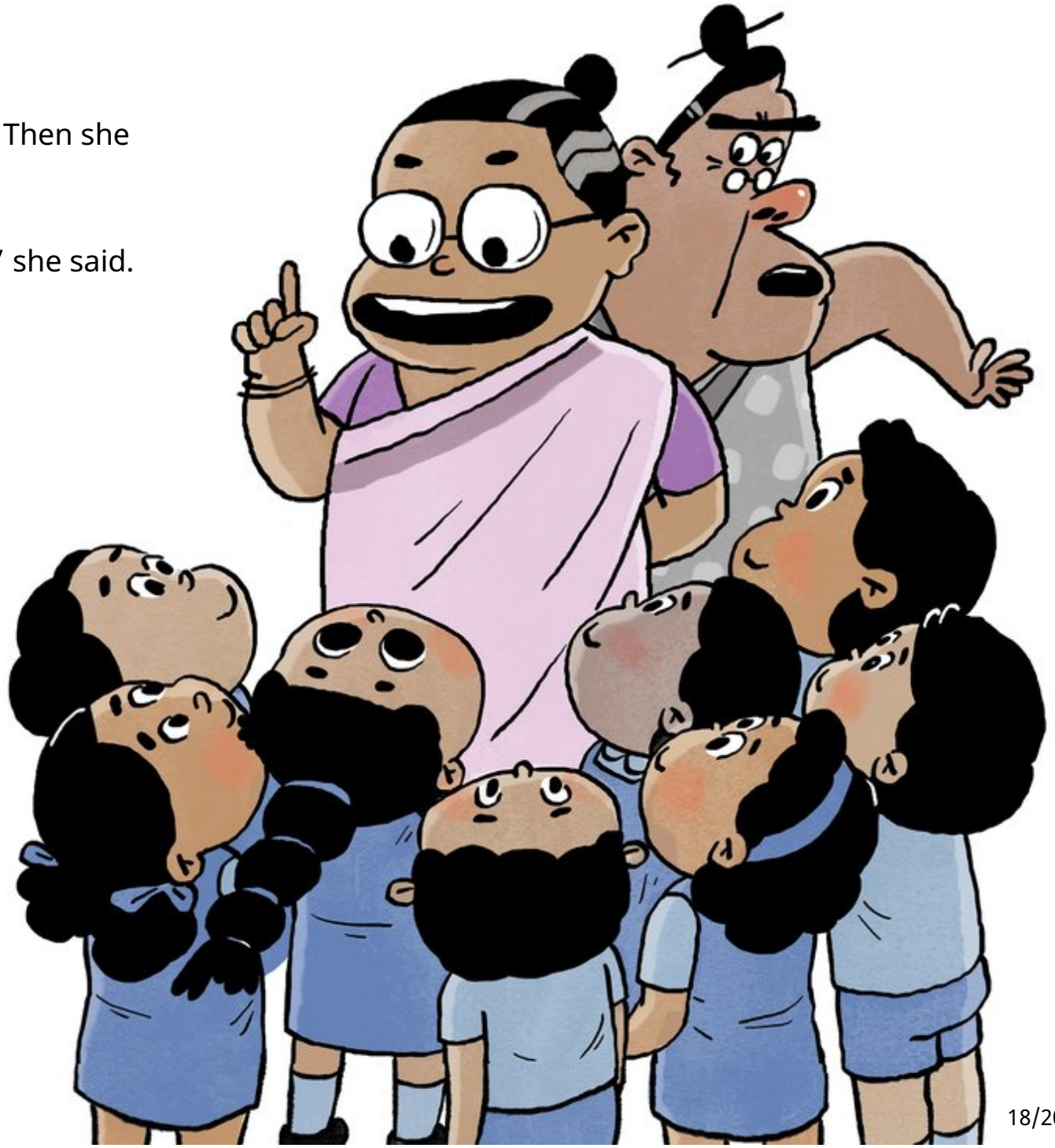
The Principal opened her mouth to shout. Then she closed it.

Instead, she opened her ears to listen.

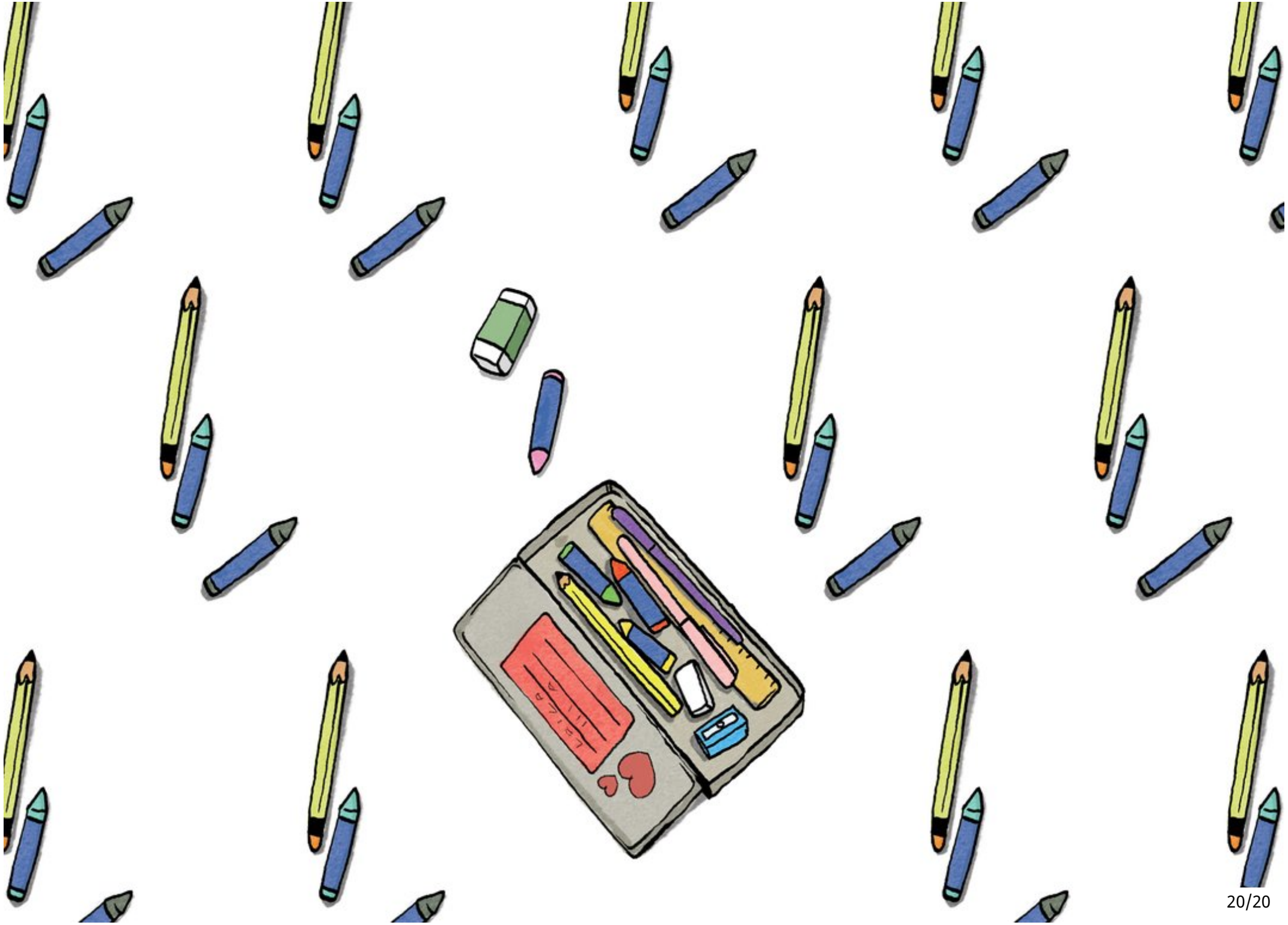
Laila and Amod and Meera and Lavanya and many others were talking about clouds.
“... look like cotton wool...”
“...then how can rain come out of them...”
“...how do clouds stay up in the sky... why don’t they fall down...”

The Principal cleared her throat. Then she clapped twice for silence.

“Let me answer your questions,” she said.



That was the day that The Right Way School changed the first of its many rules.
It decided that asking questions was the right way.
All thanks to a little girl with wild hair, a bus-horn voice and endless curiosity.



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The Right Way School
(English)

The Right Way School has only the right way of doing things and that’s how Mrs Gambhir teaches as well. Until one day a girl with wild hair and endless curiosity joins the school and stumps everyone with her questions, her merry voice, and her behaviour. What will happen next?

This is a Level 3 book for children who are ready to read on their own.

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