

Cayuga Island Kids

The Adventure of the Big Fish by the Small Creek



Story by
Judy Bradbury

Illustrations by
Gabriella Vagnoli

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A City of Light imprint

© 2021 Text by Judy Bradbury
© 2021 Illustrations by Gabriella Vagnoli

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A City of Light imprint



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*To Alice DeLaCroix, Marsha Hayles, and Vivian Vande Velde
for their support, wise counsel, humor, and sisterhood on the
writing journey.*

You have made all the difference.

~ Judy



The Cayuga Island Kids



LACEY



MAC

Other Cayuga Island Characters



MR. ESPOSITO



MRS. SCHIEBER



MISS LYNNE



JULIAN



MAYA



YOKO



VINCENT



ALICE

COLLEGE

CAYUGA IS

SULLIVAN
HOT LODG

LIBRARY

MY SCHOOL

JOLIET

GRIFFON

Miss LYNNE

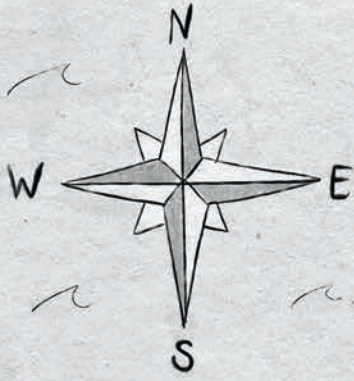
MAYA

HENNEPIN

MY HOUSE

CHAMPLAIN

JULIAN



ISLAND MAP

by MAC



Cayuga Island



Cayuga Island is a tiny island. It is just a few miles upstream from the mighty Niagara Falls, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. A narrow bridge leads on and off the island. It crosses where the churning Niagara River narrows to a gurgling creek.

Four streets run the length of the island. Three are named for explorers of the Niagara Frontier. The fourth street is named after the Griffon, a ship with mysterious history. Gravel alleys wind behind the houses.

But there are no schools or stores, no stoplights or movie theaters, or much of anything else on the island—except fun, adventure, and perhaps a bit of mystery, if you look for it.

The Cayuga Island Kids—Lacey, Mac, Julian, Maya, and Yoko—have already solved one mystery this summer, but they're eager for more adventure. Are you ready? Come along and join the fun!

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We are all part of someone else's journey

That's the way communities are built.

~ Mahogany L. Browne



CHAPTER ONE

The Cayuga Island Kids

It was the middle of summer vacation, and Lacey was eager to solve another mystery. The Cayuga Island Kids had puzzled over two mysteries so far this summer—and they had solved one of them. Lacey had marked the hunt for barking branches CASE CLOSED in her notebook.

The other mystery would take plenty of experts plenty more time to solve—probably even longer than the summer. After all, no one had cracked the case of the sunken ship, the

Griffon—built right here on Cayuga Island—in more than 300 years!

But that's history. That was the beginning of summer vacation.



This morning, Lacey was thinking about where to hunt for a new mystery to solve. She curled and uncurled her toes. She liked to do that when she was just waking up.

Today, she and her friends would meet in the park. No mystery there. They met in the park most days during the summer. But where would they search for a mystery?

They could explore the alleys that weaved through Cayuga Island. There were seven. Lacey had counted them, and she intended to

investigate each one. After all, wouldn't an alley hold all sorts of secrets and clues?

They could crawl under Mac's porch and see what they discovered there.

Maybe they would visit the library to research what they found under Mac's porch.

Lacey could also borrow a few more mystery books.

Summer was the best time for mysteries.

Lacey stretched her arms and felt around the bookcase headboard for her notebook. It held her collection of clues and questions and notes.

Lacey knew that solving a mystery takes plenty of observing—looking and listening. It takes thinking and asking questions, too. Writing down clues is important. So is keeping notes on the answers to all the questions you ask. That's why Lacey took her notebook with her wherever she went, just as all good detectives do.

But instead of the springy spiral on the edge of her notebook, Lacey felt something cold and

wet in the bookcase headboard.

No mystery there.

It was Pesky's nose.

Lacey's dog liked to stay close to her. The clues were obvious. Every morning when Lacey woke up, Pesky was either on the covers beside her or nestled in the bookcase headboard. Now that it was summer, wherever Lacey went, Pesky went, too.

Lacey ran her fingers through Pesky's bouncy fur. She rubbed his ears. Pesky's tail wiggled.

Then he licked Lacey's hand.

That was a clue. Pesky was hungry.

Lacey threw back the covers. It was time for breakfast.

She padded to the kitchen. Pesky followed.

Lacey noticed that the recycling bin in the back hall was full. Pesky detoured to sniff a can and its lid, a flattened box, and an empty jar. They tumbled together with opened envelopes from yesterday's mail and Gram's yogurt container rinsed clean.

Lacey wondered if there were enough clues for someone to figure out what she and Gram had eaten for dinner last night. She smiled. The yogurt container might throw them off—unless they had seen Gram eating tacos. She liked to heap a scoop of plain yogurt across the top.

It was Lacey's job to empty the recycling bin into the tall, green-lidded container that sat outside the back door. Wheeling the container to the curb once a week was also on Lacey's list of chores. After breakfast, she rinsed the empty dog food can and added it to the recycling bin before she hauled it out.

She and Pesky were ready to set off for the park.



At Mac's house the hero-sized box of Pop-Pops was nearly empty. He peered inside. If he

didn't fill his frontiersman bowl to the brim, there would be just enough cereal for Sookie.

Mac also made sure to leave a little milk in the carton for his sister. Mac smiled to himself. He was being thoughtful.

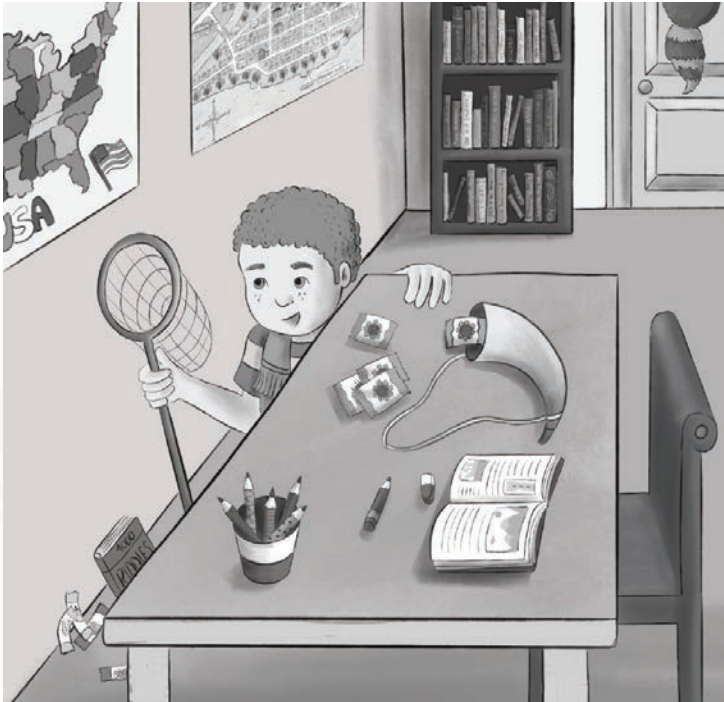
And he was saving time. It would be Sookie's turn to flatten the empty cereal box and milk carton and put them in the recycling bin. And it would be Sookie's job to write Pop-Pops and milk on the grocery list hanging from the pink hippopotamus clip on the side of the refrigerator. The pencil was missing from the string again. Whoever wrote the next item on the grocery list would have to hunt around for something to write with.

Mac stretched. The sun was shining, and it was summer vacation. That meant no school, no homework, and no lunch to pack. Instead, Mac could pack his powder horn with snacks for later and search for his fishing pole and net.

Mac and his friends were going to the park. They planned to fish and look for frogs and toads

and other wildlife around the creek. Most likely Maya would look for wildflowers.

Mac headed to his room to hunt for his fishing net. That's when he noticed his bed was unmade. *Stink bug!* He had forgotten about that chore. He rolled his pajamas into a ball, stuffed them under his pillow, and pulled up the sheet. Tug, tuck, smooth, done.



Mac found his fishing net behind the desk. He also discovered a riddle book and a few fruit roll wrappers, but he didn't need to bother with those now. He reached for his coonskin cap hanging on the hook behind the bedroom door. The furry tail dangling from the back swished as if waving hello. The cap wasn't really raccoon fur—Mac wouldn't like that. But he liked that it used to be his dad's when he was a kid, and now it was his.

Mac's coonskin cap and powder horn made him feel adventurous. And summer is the best time for adventure. He put on his cap. He slipped his arm through the strap on the powder horn and propped the net across his shoulder. Mac found his fishing pole leaning against his bike in the garage.



While Julian waited for Mac, he decided to read his *Junior Scientist's Word-of-the-Day* calendar.

Julian liked facts. Especially science facts. But this summer he realized he liked history facts, too.

He found out that the island he lived on was settled by fur traders in the 1600s. The streets on Cayuga Island were named after explorers and their ship. The Griffon sank hundreds of years ago, and it was never found. That fact made him curious about local history. And, of course, about the science behind searching for a sunken ship.

Julian flipped the page in the calendar. Each day's word was printed in large, bold letters. Above the word was the day and date. The definition was printed below the word. Today's word was

ECOSYSTEM
ALL THE LIVING ORGANISMS AND
THEIR NONLIVING ENVIRONMENT IN A
PARTICULAR PLACE

Julian was curious to know more. He reached for his tablet. He tapped. He swiped. He read.

LIVING ORGANISMS ARE PLANTS, ANIMALS, AND EVEN MICROBES, OR TINY BACTERIA. THEY ARE THE COMMUNITY IN THE ECOSYSTEM.

THE **NONLIVING ENVIRONMENT** OF AN ECOSYSTEM IS THE AIR, DIRT, AND WATER. THEY ARE NOT PART OF THE COMMUNITY.

Now Julian was even more curious.

He thought of a community as a group that lived, worked, or played together. Cayuga Island was a community. There was his school community and his church community. Maya's backyard neighbor, Miss Lynne, called the college where she worked a *higher-learning community*. Lacey's grandmother exercised at the senior citizen community center. Online communities played games together.

Now Julian knew that the living parts of an ecosystem are also a community. But Julian

wondered. Organisms need water, air, and even dirt to survive. So why aren't they part of the ecosystem community?

Julian was puzzling over this when he spotted Mac coming up the front walk. He tucked the tablet into his backpack. It would stay dry there. He reached for his fishing pole and net. He remembered the bait.

Now that he had learned about ecosystems and ecosystem communities, Julian was eager to explore the creek and the park. Summer was the best. He could spend his days on whatever made him curious.



Maya was eager to go to the park, too.

Her most favorite purple ballet shoes were clean and dry. After her feet landed in a mucky puddle beneath her swing, her mom had shared a

useful tip. Be patient. Let the mud dry, and shoes are much easier to clean.

Even the elastic and satin ribbons looked as good as new. Or almost. A few spots or a frayed ribbon didn't matter. Every ballerina knows worn shoes mean you are a real dancer.

Maya's most favorite purple leotard this week had a light purple ruffle around the neck. She had laid it across the back of her chair last night. She had chosen hair ribbons and clips. All that was left to do was choose one of her most favorite baskets to collect flowery weeds.

Mr. Esposito, a park volunteer and Maya's next-door neighbor, said it was okay to pick weeds in the park. No flowers, but flowery weeds were allowed.

Mrs. Schieber, the school librarian and Mac's neighbor on Hennepin Avenue, had a garden full of flowers, and also a few weeds. She had helped Maya research the kinds of weeds she might find in Cayuga Island Park.

Everyone knows what dandelions are. Clover, too. Its blooms reminded Maya of tiny raspberry sno-cones. She liked finding lucky four-leaf clovers. She had discovered two so far! Her mom helped her press them between sheets of waxed paper. She made bookmarks with them. She kept one. The other one she had given to Mrs. Schieber.

When Maya learned about shepherd's purse, she liked the weed's name even more than its flowers. It was safe, too—no prickles, no itches. She decided right then and there to hunt for it in the park.

Maya chose a wicker basket from the stack on the shelf. She noticed Sparky's bowl was empty, so she added some kibble for her cat.

Now she was ready!

Almost.

Maya dashed back to her bedroom. She needed a package of stick-on gems. She opened the long, deep drawer across the bottom of her

dresser. It was crammed with craft supplies. Maya searched for the most perfect jewels to add to a shepherd's purse necklace or a clover crown. The weed flowers were pretty on their own. Still, everything looks better with some sparkle.

Maya waited outside for her friends. She sat on the purple seat of her most favorite swing her dad had built for her. She swung slowly, careful of the patch of dusty dirt beneath the seat. Sparky dozed beside the purple sandbox with the purple-striped awning. Dad had built that, too. The purple collar Maya had made for Sparky glittered in the sun.

Summer was the best.

"Maya!" a voice called out. "Are you ready to go to the park?"

Sparky scampered beneath the bush. Maya turned to find Mac with his fishing net slung across one shoulder and his powder horn across the other. Mac's furry cap with its stripy tail sat on his head. Just like always.

Julian stood beside him. He had fishing gear, too. And his backpack. Maya guessed his tablet was inside. Julian always had his tablet with him. He was curious, and he liked checking facts.

“I’m ready!” Maya jumped from the swing. The sun was shining, and surely weeds were flowering in the park. It really was a most perfect day.



Yoko was ready for another day at the park to begin.

She opened the front door before her friends rang the bell.

“Time to go to the park!” Maya sang. She twirled, and her wicker basket spun right along with her.

The tail on Mac’s cap bobbed. His net wiggled. Something inside his powder horn rustled. “Adventures await!” he declared.

Julian stood behind Mac and peered inside the powder horn. Yoko knew he was curious about what was rattling around in there.

Yoko leaned against the door jamb. Thoughts bounced around her brain.

Three friends at your door on a summer day was like...

Last night Yoko decided she would try comparing one thing to a totally different thing. She got the idea from a mystery book Lacey had loaned her. The author's comparisons made pictures in Yoko's mind. Her favorite one was when the author described the candy burglar's face when he got caught by his younger sister. *It crumpled like a soda can at the side of the road.*

Since Yoko was already excellent at rhyming, she decided she would try making comparisons like that.

Maya practiced dancers' steps. Yoko practiced authors' tricks.

“Ready?” Maya nudged her friend out of her thoughts. “Lacey is meeting us at the park.”

Yoko reached for her sunglasses.

But she was still thinking.



Three friends at your door on a summer day
was like a triple scoop of ice cream.

Wait! Yoko's mind flashed.

Three friends at your door

is like a triple scoop of ice cream

on a waffle cone

on a hot and sunny summer day.

Yoko put on her sunglasses. Summer was the best. It was hot and sunny days. It was being with friends. And, she decided, it made her ice-cream-scoop comparison just right.

When she shared it with her friends, they loved it, too.

CHAPTER TWO

The Alley on the Way to the Park

Lacey and Pesky cut through the alley on the way to the park. It would take longer, but it was more mysterious. And that meant it was more fun. Lacey would hunt for a mystery on the way to meet her friends.

Pesky hunted, too. He sniffed, his nose close to the ground. He darted from one side of the dusty gravel path to the other.

“Yip!” Pesky yapped. Two stinky garbage cans! A heap of musty leaves! A rubbery tire!

“Yip! Yip!” Everything smelled terrific!

While Pesky snuffled, Lacey observed.

There stood the wooden trellis beside Mrs. Schieber's garden shed. Lacey knew her neighbor had been working in her garden because a wet trowel was drying in the sun near the rolled up hose.

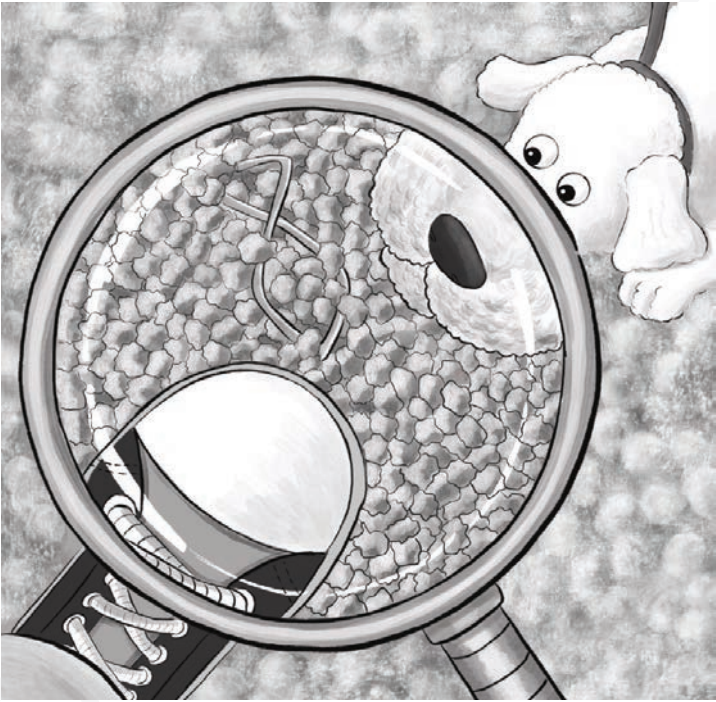
Timmy Winslow's rusty green tricycle rested beneath a trio of tired bushes. Lacey knew that Timmy hadn't ridden it for a while because a maze of cobwebs laced the wheels.

One squirrel chased another around a bale of wire leaning against the trunk of a maple tree. A knotted string of tiny lights lay across a woodpile at the other end of the yard. Were Timmy and his dad planning another project? Were they about to add to Timmy's treehouse?

Lacey sighed. She had seen all these clues before. She had hoped for something new. Something mysterious.

As Lacey continued down the alley, she spotted something shiny. She paused to investigate. With the toe of her sneaker, she

pushed aside some gravel. She pulled out her magnifying glass and leaned over to have a closer look.



The shape reminded her of something. If she turned her head to the side, it almost looked like a fish. Lacey laughed. That, she decided, was just her imagination. What she had discovered wasn't much of anything. It was just a piece of mangled

wire someone had carelessly thrown in the alley. It sure wasn't a clue worth writing in her notebook.

But a good detective doesn't give up. Even though Lacey tucked her magnifying glass back in her pocket, she kept observing on her way to the park.

Pesky kept sniffing. Just before they reached the end of the alley, he spotted a ball hiding behind a pail. It was faded and dusty, and it didn't roll when Pesky nudged it. He picked it up with his teeth. It was spongy! It squeaked!

Pesky shadowed Lacey. His ears perked. Would she let him keep it? He waited for a clue. When Lacey kept walking, Pesky's tail wagged. He could keep the ball!

Up ahead in the park, Lacey spotted Julian and Yoko near the edge of the creek. They were looking at something in the water. Mac and Maya were behind them. Lacey could see Mac's fishing gear, but he wasn't about to catch anything. The pole and net lay on the ground.

That wasn't the clue that made Lacey hurry along.



Maya stood on her tiptoes peering over Yoko's shoulder. She had her hand over her mouth.

That was a bigger clue.

Something was wrong.

CHAPTER THREE

A Six-Ring Problem

Lacey heard the squawking as soon as she crossed into the park.

She raced to her friends. Pesky dropped the ball and bounded ahead. Yoko bent to give Pesky a pat, but her eyes stayed on the creek.

The other kids didn't even seem to notice Pesky.

That was the biggest clue that something was wrong.

"What's going on?" Lacey asked.

Julian moved aside to make room for Lacey.

A duck in the water was quacking loudly.

Maya was worried. "It sounds afraid."

The duck rose slightly in the air before landing back on the water.

"It's flapping its wings," said Mac. "But it's not flying away."



"Look!" Lacey cried. "It's caught in a plastic ring!"

One of six clear rings—the kind of rings that form a rectangle to hold together a pack of bottles or cans—circled the mallard's leg.

Julian pointed. “Another one of the rings is caught in the reeds. The duck's trapped!”

The mallard was trying to escape, but its webbed foot was wider than its twig-thin leg. And that was keeping the ring from slipping off and setting the duck free.

Each time the mallard flapped its wings, the reeds swayed. But the ring held tight.

Another duck across the creek began quacking, too. It seemed to sense that something was very wrong. Could it see the plastic rings? Was it warning its duck friend about the kids? *Watch out! Too close! Beware!*

The Cayuga Island Kids wouldn't hurt the duck, of course, but those plastic rings could. The mallard was in a panic. And that was dangerous. The duck could injure itself trying to get free.

Maya shook her hands when the duck's quack grew more frantic. "What can we do?"

Mac looked around. There must be a way they could help!

CHAPTER FOUR

Net Results

Mac set down his powder horn and picked up his fishing net. He climbed onto the biggest of the rocks near the reeds. He was careful to keep as far away from the duck as possible while still being within reach of the reeds holding fast to the plastic rings.

Mac knelt on a patch of stone clear of any moss or slime. He didn't want to slip into the creek. Usually, Mac welcomed a chance to wade in the shallow water along the bank—it was an adventure! But right now he had something more important to do.

Holding the net tightly with both hands, Mac slowly raised his arms over his head. He paused and took a deep breath. Then he swung the net out over the reeds and flicked his wrist.

The net whistled as it came down.

Whap! It hit the reeds and flattened them into the creek.

Water splashed. A frog jumped. A dragonfly flew up from the creek bank.



And the plastic ring came free of the reeds.

The mallard quacked. It flapped once, and then again.

Up into the air and across the narrow creek it flew.

And as it did, the ring slipped from its leg.

The Cayuga Island Kids cheered as the plastic drifted down. It hit the water and rocked on the surface. Gradually it sank out of view.

Maya cheered. "Yay, duck! Yay, Mac!"

Mac jumped off the rock. He was wet from head to sneakers. He straightened his shoulders and tugged on his cap. "What an adventure!"

Julian grabbed Mac's net before it fell into the creek. Then he clapped his friend on the back. "That was quick thinking."

Yoko watched as the mallard lowered itself and skimmed the water. It flapped its wings as it came to rest beside the duck across the creek. It quacked, but this time the sound was smooth and rich, as if the duck were relieved. It bobbed

and dipped its head. It ruffled its tail feathers.

“That duck is as happy to be free as a kid on the last day of school,” Yoko declared.

Julian’s eyes crinkled. “That’s funny!”

“And true,” added Mac.

Lacey pointed at the grassy area stretching between the path and the creek. “Have you noticed this before?”

The kids turned. Shreds of paper lay in the grass. A torn plastic bag was snagged on a twig. Bottle caps, candy wrappers, and cigarette butts had been tossed on the ground.

Bits of litter lurked along the creek bank.

And it was in the creek, too. They had watched the plastic rings sink.

Litter might have seemed only sloppy and careless before. But now the Cayuga Island Kids knew that it can be more than messy and thoughtless.

It can be harmful and dangerous.

Julian recalled what he had learned about

ecosystems and communities and how they work together. He untangled the plastic bag and placed it in the bin alongside the path.

Maya put down her basket and picked up a squashed juice box. She was about to toss it in the recycling bin when suddenly two kids on bicycles appeared out of nowhere. They sped down the narrow path, straight toward the group of friends. They were shouting and laughing. They were popping wheelies. And they weren't paying attention to where they were going.



Yoko grabbed Maya's arm and pulled her out of the way just in time. The boy swerved. He spun off the path and rode right over Maya's wicker basket.

"Sorry!" he yelled, slowing down.

But the girl sped up and bumped his back tire. "Not sorry!" she shouted. "What's that dumb basket doing there, anyway?"

She was riding a bright orange bike with mag wheels and high handlebars. She zoomed ahead of the boy and cut sharply in front of him. Her back tire spun out as she rounded the recycling bin. She kicked her legs out as she careened back onto the path. Both of the kids hooted.

As they pedaled off, she threw a plastic bottle into the creek.



CHAPTER FIVE

Bird Brains

“**H**ey!” Lacey called after the girl. But both kids kept right on going. They wheeled around trees and bushes. They narrowly missed a park bench and nearly collided with each other. That only made them laugh louder. Their cackles trailed behind them as they rode out of sight.

Pesky stood beside Lacey and barked.

“Those two sound like chickens at feeding time,” Yoko declared, “and they ride their bikes like bird brains.”

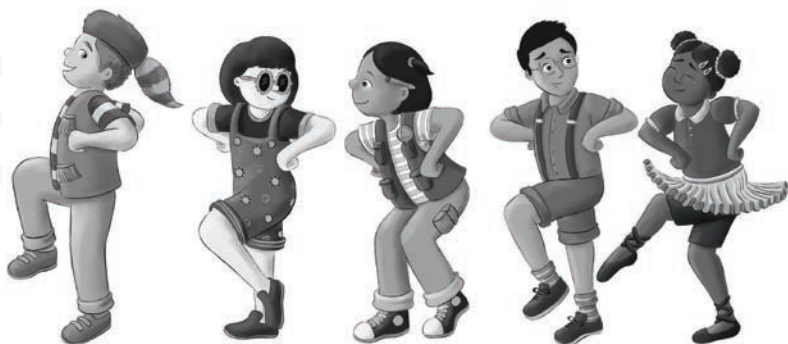
“Only a bird brain would throw a plastic bottle in the creek,” Lacey huffed. “There’s a recycling bin right there!” She took a deep breath.

“When my grandmother’s upset she says, ‘I’m as mad as a wet hen.’ That’s me right now!”

Mac looked at his shirt and pants. “I’m mad and I’m wet.” He tucked his hands under his armpits. He imitated a chicken flapping its wings. He strutted along the path. “Buk, buk-buk. Buk, buk-buk.”

Mac liked making his friends laugh—even if they had good reason to be madder than a barnyard full of wet hens.

Yoko giggled and followed Mac. She pulled Lacey along. “Let’s cackle till our hackles come down.” Even though she was concentrating on comparisons, Yoko still liked to rhyme.



The Cayuga Island Kids strutted like chickens in a barnyard until they were laughing so hard their sides hurt.

Mac sat on the ground and picked up Maya's basket. The handle had come loose on one side. Under a tree a few feet away, Julian found the piece that fastened the handle to the basket. It was cracked.

Lacey's face clouded. "There's a tire mark on the side of your basket!"

Yoko's shoulders drooped. "Oh, Maya. I'm sorry your basket is ruined."

Maya took a close look at her basket. "It's a little bruised. But I can nudge it back into shape." She rubbed at the black mark. "If my mom can get my ballet shoes clean, she'll have no trouble with this." She smiled at her friends. "And I can fix the handle with wire."

"We've solved two problems already today," said Julian. He put an arm around Mac's shoulder. "We saved a duck from being trapped

by trash...”

“Trash that should have been thrown in the recycling bin,” Lacey added.

“And,” Julian continued, “Maya figured out how to keep her basket from ending up in the recycling bin.”

Yoko pumped the air. “Two problems solved, and it isn’t even lunchtime!”

Mac realized he was hungry, even if it wasn’t lunchtime. He reached inside his powder horn and pulled out snack packs of sunflower seeds to share with his friends.

Lacey tapped her notebook with her pencil. “I wonder if we can figure out how to keep litter from being thrown around the park.” Her eyes darkened again. “And out of the creek.”

“Let’s think about that problem,” Maya suggested. She noticed Julian standing at the edge of the creek. He was probably hoping to get back to fishing. She understood. She was hoping to get back to gathering weed flowers.

But then she saw what Julian was looking at. So did the others.

The Cayuga Island Kids gathered beside Julian. Together they fished the bobbing plastic bottle out of the creek and placed it in the recycling bin.



The ducks watched from across the creek. They quacked. They dipped their heads. They wiggled their tail feathers. It was almost as if they were saying thank you.

CHAPTER SIX

An Idea to Share

The next morning, Lacey and Pesky stood on Yoko's porch. Lacey was about to ring the bell when the door swung open.

Yoko clapped her hands. "You have an idea!"

"How did you know I was at the door?"

Lacey peered at her friend. "And how do you know I have an idea?"

"You are making a detective out of me!" Yoko giggled. "Besides, I heard Pesky bark." She gave the pup a pat. "Your notebook is in your hand instead of your pocket," she added. "Plus, your cheeks are pink. Those are all clues."

Of course Lacey's friends knew that she

kept ideas in her notebook. But, Lacey wondered, what did Yoko mean that her cheeks were pink?

Yoko saw the puzzled look on Lacey's face. "Notebook..." She touched the side of her head, "...ideas." Then Yoko touched her friend's cheeks. "When you have something you can't wait to share, your cheeks turn as pink as the roses in Mrs. Schieber's garden."

Yoko smiled. She had just made a comparison!

"I do have an idea," Lacey confirmed, "for how to get rid of the litter in the park."

Yoko squealed. She grabbed her sunglasses, and the girls and Pesky set off. It was no mystery that they were on their way to find their friends. Lacey would share her idea with all of them at the same time. That was only fair.

In the park, Mr. Esposito was trimming bushes along the creek. Nearby, his golf cart was stacked with garden tools. The girls stopped to tell their neighbor about the mallard getting

caught in the plastic ring. They explained how Mac's quick thinking had set the duck free. They told Mr. Esposito about the plastic rings sinking into the water. And they told him how they fished the plastic bottle out of the creek.

"We never noticed until yesterday how much litter there is along the path." Lacey's shoulders sagged. "And now we know there's more in the creek."



Yoko pushed her sunglasses up higher on her nose. "Litter ruins shared spaces for everyone."

"Including the ducks," Lacey added.

Mr. Esposito reached for a paper bag under one of the bushes. "When people realize the problems litter can cause, they understand the importance of cleaning up after themselves."

Yoko tugged on Lacey's arm. "We are on our way to find our friends. Lacey has an idea that might help!"

"Mac and Julian are fishing. Maya is hunting." Mr. Esposito smiled and pointed. "For weed flowers."

"We'll let you know when Lacey's idea turns into a plan!" Yoko promised.

"I will look forward to that." Mr. Esposito saluted, and the girls sped off to join their friends.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Stack of Facts

Mac did not notice Yoko and Lacey hurrying down the path. He had just caught a sunfish and was reeling it in.

Nothing beat the adventure of fishing in the summer. Mac liked the bobbing of the line. He watched the circles widen when it met the water. His heart quickened when the line dipped. That meant he had caught something. He liked the *click-click-click* as he carefully reeled his catch out of the water. Mac knew a good fisherman had to be patient and still. He didn't like that part so much, but he was getting better at it.

Sometimes, though, it wasn't a fish Mac caught. Once he snagged an old sneaker. Another time it was a plastic bag with a soggy coffee cup and a fast-food box inside. He thought he had caught a really big fish that day.

Instead, he emptied the cup and the box and threw them in the recycle bin.

When he did catch a sunfish, Mac looked it over from head to tail before he set it free. He liked the shimmer and the scoop of the scales. He especially liked the gill flap. Most of all, he liked fish eyes. They reminded him of marbles.

Julian examined the fish he caught, too. He measured the length. He measured the width. He estimated how much they weighed. He kept a record of every fish he caught in a chart on his tablet.

Both boys knew it was important to quickly return the sunfish to the creek. Most everyone knows that fish can't survive very long out of water. Julian had read about why.

Fish gills work much like human lungs. The difference is that gills take oxygen from the water to help them breathe. When fish are out of water, they are soon also out of oxygen. Once, Mac and Julian had held their breath for as long as they could. After that, they thought they knew how a fish out of water might feel.



The boys were comparing the sunfish they had caught when Pesky scampered over to

investigate. Pesky liked squirming fish. He liked gushy worms, too. The boys were careful to keep their fluffy friend clear of the hooks at the end of their lines.

While Lacey admired Maya's weed flowers, Yoko leaned over for a closer look at the sunfish. They were flat and shiny and squirmy.

Yoko was squirmy, too.

"Lacey has an idea!" she announced.

"We can always count on Lacey for great ideas," said Julian. That was a fact.

Mac set the sunfish free. "An idea about what?" he asked.

Maya grabbed Pesky's leash before he could follow the fish into the creek.

Yoko was bursting with anticipation. *The litter!* she wanted to shout. But it was Lacey's idea, so she zipped her lips.

"I have an idea about how we might solve the litter problem," said Lacey.

"The litter in the park?" asked Maya.

“And the creek,” added Yoko. She could only zip her lips for so long.

Julian placed the cover on the bucket of worms.

Mac sighed. Their fishing adventure was over for now.

Lacey flipped open her notebook. Her finger moved down a page of squiggles. Her friends waited.

Yoko shifted from one foot to the other. She adjusted her sunglasses. She scratched an itch on her arm. *I'm as wiggly as the worms in Julian's bucket*, she thought.

“First, let's go over what we know. The problem. The facts.” Lacey pulled the pencil from behind her ear. “Then we can share ideas.”

Mac's shoulders drooped. “I don't have an idea.”

“Not yet,” said Maya. “But you will. Remember what Mrs. Schieber says. Put on your thinking cap.”

“Mrs. Schieber also says, ‘More ideas lead to a better idea,’” added Lacey.

Yoko nodded. Mrs. Schieber had a house full of books and a garden full of flowers. She also had a head full of good advice. Yoko stopped wiggling and started thinking.

Julian liked facts. He also liked finding solutions to problems. He would get things started. “We have litter in our park and the creek.”

“That’s a problem and a fact,” said Yoko.

Lacey wrote in big letters at the top of the page.

Problem: litter in the park and creek

Maya thought about the plastic bag tangled on the bushes. She remembered the gum wrappers stuck between the flowers. “Litter is ugly,” she said. “It makes our park less beautiful.”

Mac thought about the time he caught the sneaker, and the other time he caught the fast-food boxes instead of fish. “Litter clogs up the creek,” he said.

“Litter is dangerous to the ducks,” added Yoko. She was thinking of yesterday.

“It’s harmful to many living things in the creek, and in the park.” Julian was thinking of the big picture.

Yoko looked at Lacey’s list. “That’s a stack of facts,” she declared.

The friends grew silent. Lacey knew that was a clue. They were ready to share ideas.

But first, she had one more fact to add.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Pesky Plan

Lacey read the list aloud. She had placed an exclamation point after the last fact she had added because exclamation points show emotion. She read that fact a little louder. With oomph.

Problem: litter in the park and creek

Facts:

Bottles, bags, and other trash thrown in the creek and along the park path.

Litter makes our park less beautiful.

Litter clogs the creek.

Litter is dangerous to creek life.

Litter is dangerous to park life.

There are trash and recycling bins in the park,
BUT some people are not using them!

“Litter in the park and creek is a big problem.”
Maya’s voice was quiet. “Can we solve it?”

Max slumped. “We’re just five kids.”

“We can try,” said Julian.

Yoko shoved her hands in her pockets. “We don’t litter, and that’s good.” She paused. “But the litter problem in Cayuga Island Park is bigger than the five of us.”

“Making a difference can catch on. One person becomes two and two becomes four,” said Julian. “Pretty soon one becomes too many to count.”

Mac stood a little taller. He hadn’t thought of it that way. “We’re five strong already,” he said.

Yoko wiggled. “Let’s share ideas.”

“Lacey, you go first,” Mac suggested. He needed a little more time to think of an idea.

“I kept wondering,” Lacey began. “Why don’t people use the trash and recycling bins? They are right there along the path.” She looked toward

the bins. "I thought and thought about that. And then, when I was training Pesky, it came to me."

What did training Pesky have to do with getting people to recycle? Mac wondered.



"Maybe people aren't using the bins because they aren't paying attention to them," Lacey continued. "When I train Pesky, he pays attention better if I make it fun. After doing something a bunch of times, it becomes a habit."

"If recycling in the park is fun, people will do it." Julian said slowly. He snapped his fingers. "And if they keep on doing it, recycling will become a habit."

"A good habit!" exclaimed Maya.

"So we should make recycling in the park like a game?" asked Mac.

“Sure. That would work,” said Lacey. “A game everyone would enjoy.”

Mac felt his cheeks grow warm. He had come up with an idea without even realizing it!

Yoko’s eyebrows flew above her sunglasses. She recycled because it was the right thing to do for the environment. Could it also be fun?

“Maybe we could make the game into a contest,” suggested Maya. “We could include facts about litter to get people thinking.”

Julian liked that.

Yoko recalled what Mr. Esposito had said. “When the contest is over, people might not go back to littering if they learn about the harm it can do,” she said.

“We need a prize,” said Mac. He had never heard of a contest that didn’t have prizes.

“I could make a prize,” offered Maya.

“We also need rules,” said Julian. He had never heard of a contest that didn’t have rules.

Lacey giggled. “First we need to figure out what the contest is going to be.”

“But we have a plan, thanks to Pesky!” Maya clapped her hands.

Pesky ran in circles around her and then sat tall.

The kids laughed. Pesky knew that if he sat tall when Lacey said his name and clapped, he would get a treat.

Lacey had made it fun for Pesky. And now it was a habit.

The Cayuga Island Kids would make it fun to recycle in the park.

But first they had another problem to solve. They needed a treat for Pesky.

CHAPTER NINE

Nurdles

The kids knew that turning a plan into action takes more than just a good idea. It takes gathering information, brainstorming, and solving problems.

They got busy. They would make this happen.

First the kids visited the library. They looked up pollution of public waters—oceans, lakes, and rivers.

They checked more than one book. Julian also searched on his tablet. The kids wanted to be sure the information was factual and up to date.

They read about recycling, too.

Much of the litter in the park and creek was plastic.



Yoko learned that birds and fish often mistake plastic for food. “When animals eat bits of soda bottles, plastic bags, and stir sticks,” she explained, “it ends up in the food humans eat.”

Julian enlarged a photograph on his tablet. “I didn’t know that herring fish eggs look like nurdles.”

Mac looked over Julian’s shoulder. “I didn’t know that a nurdle is a small piece of plastic.”

“I didn’t know that most of the plastic we use is made of nurdles,” said Lacey.

“I like the way the word *nurdles* sounds,” said Maya. “But I don’t like that birds and fish eat bits of plastic.”

“Blahk!” said Yoko.

Mac’s mouth soured. A plastic pellet wouldn’t taste good, or feel good in his stomach, and he was much bigger than a fish or a bird. Well, he was bigger than most birds. He wasn’t bigger than an ostrich. Or an emu. Mac was thinking about big birds when Maya caught his attention.

She was pointing to a page in the book in front of her. “Of the 8.8 million tons of plastic that enter the oceans each year, about half comes from rivers,” she read.

“The creek in our park is part of the Niagara River, and that leads right to Niagara Falls,” said Julian.

“Nobody would want to pollute one of the natural wonders of the world!” cried Yoko.

“Especially one that’s a few miles from where they live,” added Lacey. She wrote down the title, author, and page number of the book in case they needed to check it again.

The more they learned, the more determined the kids became. They would get their community thinking. Once people understood, they would keep their park—and other places—free of litter.

Finally, the kids gathered in the Discussion Den in the back corner of the library. It was time to figure out the contest.

“People could make colorful signs reminding everyone to recycle, reuse, and reduce,” suggested Maya.

Lacey nodded. “We could ask Mr. Esposito for permission to post the signs around the park. Everyone could vote for their favorite one. The person whose sign gets the most votes wins.”

“What happens to the signs once the contest is over?” asked Yoko. “We don’t want to add to

the litter.”

“We could advertise a clean-up day at the park on the neighborhood website instead,” suggested Julian.

“Everyone who pitches in could be entered to win a reusable water bottle.” Maya imagined the most perfect purple water bottle. Who wouldn’t want to win that?

“The winner could be interviewed on the radio or TV.” Lacey imagined being interviewed about why recycling is important. But of course she couldn’t win her own contest. Maybe she would write a letter to the editor instead.

“I could ask Miss Lynne if she’d like to help,” Maya volunteered. Miss Lynne was her neighbor and a Communications professor at the college. She taught students all about getting the word out.

Mac liked all of his friends’ ideas. But there were two things they still needed to figure out.

“How can we make recycling fun?” he wondered aloud. “And how can we make it a habit?”



CHAPTER TEN

Planning the Contest

The next morning the kids gathered at Yoko's house. Julian was the first to arrive. Next came Lacey and Pesky. Maya was close behind.

When Mac arrived, they would begin brainstorming.

Yoko placed a dish—a glass dish—of fish-shaped crackers in the center of the table. She had chosen the snack especially for Julian and Mac because they loved to fish in the creek.

“I hope there are no nurdles in there,” joked Julian.

Mac hurried into the kitchen as Yoko set a tall pitcher of water and five glasses on the table. No bottled water.

“I couldn’t find my hat!” Mac slid into the open seat.

“It’s on your head.” Maya’s dimples deepened. Mac rolled his eyes, but he grinned.

Yoko poured a glass of water for each of them. “My dad found this ceramic pitcher in the back of the cupboard. These glasses and this dish are made from recycled glass.” She held her arms wide. “This is a no-plastic meeting!”

Yoko’s friends waited. They could tell she had more to say.

“We could plan a no-plastic-for-a-day-contest!” Yoko explained. “Everyone who enters the contest tells how they kept their day plastic-free.”

Maya held up her glass. “I like that!”

“Plastic is found in plenty of things,” Julian reminded his friends. “There’s plastic in my tablet.

There's even plastic in your hoodie." He pointed to the jacket hanging on a hook at the door.

Mac looked around the kitchen. "The blender is made of plastic. So is the dish detergent bottle."

The kids noticed picture frames, lamps, chairs, and phones.

Maya wiggled her toes. "My flip-flops are made of plastic."

Yoko slid down in her chair. "My idea is about as good as cold French fries."

Lacey disagreed. "Your idea just needs more thought."

"Maybe we plan a no-*single-use*-plastic-for-a-day contest," Julian offered.

Yoko sat up. She liked that. "No straws, no plastic forks or spoons, and no single-use bottles of juice or water."

"That will get people thinking," said Maya.

"And it would be a challenge," added Yoko, "like trying not to step on the lines on the sidewalk."

“That *is* a challenge,” agreed Mac. So was finding the pack of fruity gum he had stashed in his powder horn. He felt around and finally found it wedged in the tip. He pulled it out and offered a piece to each of his friends.

Maya bounced in her chair. “Yesterday I read that there’s plastic in chewing gum. No gum on no-single-use-plastic day!”

Mac’s brow wrinkled. *Plastic in gum?* He dropped the pack into his powder horn. He reached for a handful of cheesy fish crackers instead.

“We have our contest!” Lacey high-fived Yoko.

“Our community will learn while completing a challenge for a prize,” said Julian. “Challenges are always fun!”

“So is winning a prize,” said Mac.

“I’ll work on the title,” Lacey volunteered. “It will be short and snappy and make people curious.”

“Every good contest has a slogan. I’ll work on that,” offered Yoko. Ideas were already popping into her mind.

Maya raised her hand. "I'll work on the prize."

Julian hunched over his tablet. "I'll make a list of rules." *Five would be good*, he thought.

Around the table, the kids set off on their tasks.

Julian began typing.

1. EXPLAIN HOW YOU CELEBRATED...

Julian would fill in the title of the contest once Lacey figured it out.

2. WRITE YOUR NAME AND PHONE

NUMBER ON YOUR ENTRY.

3. GIVE YOUR ENTRY TO MR. ESPOSITO,

CAYUGA ISLAND PARK VOLUNTEER

Julian made a note to talk to Mr. Esposito.

4. ENTRIES DUE BY 6:00 P.M. ON AUGUST 1.

Julian looked at the list. It was clear and simple. It covered the details. Maybe four rules were enough.



Meanwhile, Lacey jotted in her notebook.

She wrote. She crossed out. She turned the page. She wrote and crossed out some more. She flipped back to the previous page and read it again.

A good title sparks interest, she thought. Something was missing.

Scribble, scratch, scritch, scribble.

Across from Lacey, Maya doodled designs for the most perfect reusable water bottle. *What material should it be?* she wondered. Plastic didn't seem right. Stainless steel? Aluminum? *What color would be best?* Green for the environment? Light green or dark green? *Where would they get the bottle? Or the money to buy it?* Maya didn't have enough allowance saved up for that. *Would Mom take her to the craft store to shop for stickers to decorate it?* Suddenly, Maya laughed. She imagined her mom telling her to "shop" in her craft drawer. It was brimming with stickers, and more!



Yoko's brain was bubbling. An idea would pop up. She'd think it was great! For about two seconds. Then she would decide that it wasn't.

*Contest slogans can be catchy, she thought.
But the message must be clear.*

Make a change.

Be the change.

Make a difference.

Recycling matters. Make it happen.

Make a change. Make a difference. Make it happen.

Yoko sighed. She was as stuck as oatmeal left in a bowl.

That comparison made her smile.

And it gave her an idea.

The contest slogan could be a catchy comparison.

Now she just needed to come up with one.

Yoko's legs swung beneath her chair.



Mac rested his head on his hand. He wondered if there would be time to go fishing later—after they were done working on the contest, of course.

Mac watched his friends. They were doodling, scribbling, and dreaming. Julian was typing-swiping-reading. Yoko's legs were swinging. Maya laughed to herself.

Mac's friends had figured out the fun part. They would have a contest.

They had figured out the *get people thinking* part. No single-use plastic for a day.

But, Mac thought, the contest was only for one day.

They needed to figure out the *make recycling a habit* part.

And what about the *cleaning up the park and creek* part? Wasn't that how all this had started?

Mac tugged on the tail of his coonskin cap. He smoothed the fur edges just above his ears. He imagined his hat was a thinking cap. He told his brain to get busy.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Snacking on Ideas

While the Cayuga Island Kids worked, Pesky snuffled in his sleep at their feet. Mac tugged on his coonskin hat/ thinking cap until it met his eyebrows.

No ideas came to him.

Thinking is hard work, he thought. Mac reached for the bowl of cheese crackers. In the middle of the fistful, he spotted a smiley fish. *Lucky!* He decided to save that one for last.

Mac looked at the crackers. They were a fun color and shape. And it was fun discovering a smiley fish in a handful of plain fish. No wonder when he went grocery shopping with his dad, Mac reached for a bag of these crackers instead

of others. Cheesy fish crackers didn't taste any better than other cheesy crackers, but they were more fun.



Mac thought about that as he passed the bowl to Lacey. It gave him an idea.

If the recycling bin were a fun color or shape, people would notice. They would be more likely to toss their recyclables there instead of along the path or in the creek.

Mac twirled the tail on his coonskin hat/ thinking cap. He ate one cracker, then two, and then another. He ate them all except the smiley one.

Mac's first idea led to another idea. He was pretty sure it was a good idea, too. He would use the smiley fish cracker to explain it to his friends.

Mac cleared his throat. But before he said a word, the doorbell rang.

Pesky scrambled to his feet and barked his way to the door. Yoko looked through the side window. “It’s Vivian Ventrano with my dad’s dry cleaning,” she announced.



Yoko opened the door and greeted the teen in the green-striped uniform. In exchange for a reusable garment bag filled with clean shirts on hangers, Yoko handed Vivian a lumpy canvas bag. It was stuffed with shirts that needed to be washed and pressed. She also handed Vivian a triangular cardboard box especially made to hold a stack of wire hangers.

“Wait!” Yoko hurried to the kitchen and pulled a small brown bag from the drawer. She scooped up some fish crackers and piled them in. Back at the door, she offered the bag to Vivian. “Here are some crackers to snack on.”

“Thank you!” Vivian peeked inside the bag. “These are my cousin’s favorite. He’s riding along with me today.” She patted Pesky before trotting back to the green van with Verde Dry Cleaners and a picture of Earth on the side. Yoko waved and Vivian *beep-beep-beeped*.

“I like that box for the hangers,” said Maya.

“When my dad gets a clean shirt from the closet, he puts the hanger in the box. When it’s full, we return them,” explained Yoko. “Verde Dry Cleaners is green. They use safer cleaning solutions. They also reuse hangers and recycle damaged ones.”

“We collected hangers when we made mobiles with the preschoolers at summer camp,” Maya recalled. “They got all tangled up. We could have used boxes like that.”

“Last year our class made Valentine’s Day wreaths from hangers for the nursing home,” said Lacey. “They were easy to shape. But you’re right. They got tangled when we were collecting them.”

“My dad likes to have a few wire hangers around for fishing something out of a hard-to-reach spot or for unclogging a drain.” Julian laughed. “Once, a hanger made him a hero. He used it to unlock my uncle’s vintage car door when he left the keys inside.”

Mac couldn't wait any longer. He sprang from his chair, which got Pesky scrambling all over again. "I have an idea!"

His friends turned toward him.

"For using a hanger?" asked Julian.

Before Mac could answer, the doorbell rang again.

"Hold on!" Yoko hurried to the door.

Mac groaned. He rubbed his cheeks so hard his hat nearly fell off.

Yoko peeked through the window. "Hey, guys." Her voice was whisper low. "You won't believe who's at the door."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Ring...Ring...Ding

By the time Yoko swung the door open, all of her friends were crowded behind her. Even Pesky, who had wiggled between Lacey's legs.

Standing on the porch with an empty hanger box was the boy from the park the other day.

The boy on the bike.

The boy who had said, "Sorry!" about Maya's trampled basket, but then laughed.

The boy whose friend had snarled, "Not sorry!" and then threw the plastic bottle into the creek.

He stared at the Cayuga Island Kids. They stared back. His cheeks flamed. He coughed.



“Um,” he mumbled, “Vivian forgot to give you this.” He thrust the box toward Yoko and hopped off the porch, taking two steps at a time.

Vivian waved out the open window as she *beep-beep-beeped* her way down the street for the second time.

Yoko turned. Her eyes were as big as sandwich cookies. “Vivian’s so friendly! That mean kid is her cousin?”

Julian crossed his arms. "His friend is even meaner."

"Every time I think about her throwing that plastic bottle in the creek..." Lacey's face reddened.

"Our contest is going to make people think about recycling." Maya was sure of it.

"I have an idea!" Mac reminded his friends. He had waited so long. He had been patient. Now was the time! Besides, the smiley cracker was going to crumble into cheddar dust if he held it in his fist much longer.

"Let's hear it." Julian put his arm around his friend's shoulders and the kids walked back to the kitchen.

Mac opened his hand and held out the smiley fish cracker. "This gave me an idea."

Julian peered into his friend's palm. "A cracker?"

"A fish cracker," amended Lacey. That detail might be a clue.

“A smiley fish cracker!” Maya noticed things like that.

“I’m as curious as...” Yoko paused. “...Sparky chasing a laser pointer.” The comparison tickled Yoko. She was as pleased as...

She’d think about that later. Right now she would focus on Mac. She’d be as focused as...a laser pointer! Yoko giggled, and then she cleared her throat. Mac had placed the smiley fish cracker in the center of the table. Yoko leaned on the palm of her hand and zeroed in.

“So,” Mac began.

Just then the doorbell rang again.

“Hold on!” Yoko jumped up and ran to the door.

Not again! Mac put his head down on the table.

Julian’s tablet dinged as the doorbell chimed again.

“Oops.” Julian stood. “That’s my reminder. I have a dentist appointment.”

“But, but...!” Mac stammered.

Yoko returned to the kitchen. She held up an envelope with Verde Dry Cleaners printed in the left-hand corner. She read what was written on the back.

“I’m sorry about that basket. I can fix it.”

Yoko turned the envelope sideways and kept reading.

“I can make the handle as good as new. With a wire hanger.”

She turned the envelope again and read, “Signed, Vincent.”

Maya smiled. “He’s right. That would work.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Brains Storming

Lacey picked up the fish cracker and handed it to Mac. “Let’s meet in the park later,” she suggested. “We can hear Mac’s idea and keep working on the contest.”

Mac groaned. His thinking cap had worked! He remembered a word he had learned during pair and share in Mrs. Schieber’s library class. *Stupendous*. At first, it sounded a little like *stupid*, but he could tell by the way Mrs. Schieber used it, that it meant the opposite. He liked the bigger, better, happier word right away.

His idea was stupendous! But now he had to wait to share it. *Stink bug!*

Maybe he could pair and share with Julian. Then, while Julian was in the dentist's chair, he could think about Mac's idea instead of the whirring tool in his mouth.

No, Mac decided. He would share his idea with all of his friends at the same time. It was only fair. Even if it felt unfair that he had to wait.

In the meantime, Maya would keep thinking about designs for the water bottle. She planned to talk to her mom, too. "We will have the most perfect prize for our contest," she promised.

Yoko promised to keep thinking about a slogan. "It's up there somewhere in my brain, like a lost sock in the dryer!" She tugged on her bangs and her sunglasses slipped down.

On the walk home, Lacey pondered the name of the contest. Nothing seemed just right.

Why is this so hard? she wondered.

Suddenly, it came to her. She needed more information.

Lacey knew the name of the contest should

connect to the slogan. Yoko was working on that.

If she needed more information, so did Yoko. The contest name would help.

More information would also help Maya choose a design for the water bottle.

Finally, Lacey's thoughts landed on Mac. They all needed to know what a smiley fish cracker had to do with the contest.

Lacey felt as if she was going in circles when she heard a bell ringing. She looked up.

"Hello!" Mrs. Schieber was pedaling toward her. A burst of flowers climbed up one side of her bright yellow bike helmet. It reminded Lacey of her neighbor's garden.

Mrs. Schieber pulled over to the curb. She reached for her water bottle, and Lacey noticed it was metal. A few days ago she probably wouldn't have paid attention to that. But she did now, after what happened in the park, and after learning about single-use plastics.

Mrs. Schieber took a sip from the bottle.

“You have thoughts brewing,” she said.

Lacey laughed. Mrs. Schieber was one of those teachers who knew about—and cared about—each of her students. She was that kind of neighbor, too.

“I was thinking about a contest my friends and I are planning, and also about how your water bottle is reusable.”

It was Mrs. Schieber’s turn to laugh. She pulled her bike off the street and parked it. She unbuckled her helmet and sat on the grass. Pesky romped around Mrs. Schieber until she was settled. Then he dove into her lap and got settled himself.

“Details.” Mrs. Schieber patted the ground.

Lacey sat beside her. She told Mrs. Schieber all about the past few days. She told her about the ducks, the plastic bottle, and the litter in the park. Finally, she explained the idea for a contest that would get the Cayuga Island community thinking about recycling.



When Lacey was finished, Mrs. Schieber sat for a moment, thinking.

“Organizing a community contest is a big job,” she said. “But I know you and your friends can do it.” Her eyes were bright. “How can I help?”

“We brainstormed ideas,” Lacey began.

“Excellent!” Mrs. Schieber took another sip of water. “Brainstorming is the first step in teamwork.”

“We agreed on a plan. We divided up the tasks,” Lacey continued. “Each of us is working on a part of the contest.” Lacey sighed. “But we seem stuck.”

“Splitting up the work on a project makes sense.” Mrs. Schieber replaced the cap on her water bottle. “But working together keeps your brains storming.”

Brains storming. Lacey liked the sound of that.

“Teamwork makes the dream work,” Mrs. Schieber patted Lacey’s shoulder. “I read that somewhere, and I never forgot it.”

Teamwork, Lacey thought. *Five brains storming are better than one.*

She reached for her notebook.

Mrs. Schieber stood and stretched. She handed Pesky’s leash to Lacey. “Getting stuck is a sign. Come together. Consider the big picture.” She pointed to the four-way stop at the corner. “Look all ways. Maybe look in a new direction.”

Lacey thought for a moment. “It’s like solving a mystery,” she said.

“Exactly!” Mrs. Schieber swung her leg over the bike and snapped her helmet strap in place. “Get your brains storming, and you’ll be ready to pedal off again!” She waved and rode down the street.

Lacey opened her notebook. The Cayuga Island Kids would look at the big picture. Maybe they would look in a new direction.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Sorry, Not Sorry, Very Sorry

As soon as she got home, Maya explained the contest and her most favorite idea for a prize to her mom. Well, first she gave Sparky a treat. She stroked the cat from her ears to her fluffy tail. Then she talked to her mom.

Maya's mom agreed to take her to the store the next day to shop for a reusable water bottle. Even better, she offered to "donate to the cause." That meant she would pay for the bottle!

But just as Maya expected, her mom declared, "No new craft supplies." She pointed to Maya's dresser.



Maya poked through piles of possibilities in the long, wide drawer.

Stacks of stickers.

Packets of gems.

Glitter.

She dug deeper.

Holiday stamps.

Markers.

Pots of puffy paint.

Maya sighed. The decorating-the-bottle part of the promise she had made to her friends might be a challenge.

It wasn't because she didn't have enough supplies.

And it wasn't because she didn't know *how* to decorate the bottle. The problem was she couldn't decide *what* to use.

Which beads? Which ribbons? Which words fit best with the contest?

Across the room, the wind chime danced in the window.

The wind chime Maya had made it in art class from wire hangers.

Maya read the note again from sorry—not sorry—very sorry Vincent.

She fingered the crushed basket.

Vincent had offered to fix it with a wire hanger.

Maybe, thought Maya, sorry—not sorry—very sorry Vincent might be willing to do more than fix her basket.

Maybe, just maybe, Vincent could help with the contest.

Vincent's uncle owned Verde Dry Cleaners.

Dry cleaners have plenty of wire hangers.

And there are plenty of things you can do with wire hangers.

Maybe instead of one prize, everyone who entered the contest could receive something that would remind them to recycle.

Something made from recycled hangers would be perfect.

Maybe Vincent could help with that.

And maybe, just maybe, Maya could be the one to convince him to help.

Maya lifted the basket from her craft table. It was a good thing she hadn't had a chance to fix it herself.

Maya tucked the note from Vincent into the basket and set off.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Blueberries

Yoko reached into the refrigerator for a handful of blueberries. She held them in her palm. They were plump and cold. As she rinsed them, she decided they were more purple than blue.

Purpleberries. Yoko smiled. If blueberries were called purpleberries, they would be Maya's most favorite fruit.

Plumpberries. That would be a yummy name, too.

Yoko chose the plumpest berry. It was juicy and tart.

Blueberries. Yoko decided that was a good

name after all. Blueberries taste like a burst of summer sky.

The notion came to Yoko as swiftly as a shooting star.

If only a slogan for the contest would come as easily, Yoko thought.

She popped another berry in her mouth.

And another thought popped into her head.

Yoko needed a *something* to connect to their contest.

If she figured that out, Yoko was certain she could come up with a slogan.

She closed her eyes. And there it was.

The recycling bin in the park!

That was an obvious *something* to connect to the contest.

But the recycling bin had been in the park for a long time. It was rusty and fusty. And, with all the litter in the park, it was obvious that people weren't always using the recycling bin. Yoko knew it would not be the best *something* to

connect to the contest slogan.

A lone blueberry remained in Yoko's hand. It reminded her of Mac and the cheesy fish cracker. What was his idea? He had been itching to share.

Now Yoko was itching to hear. Mac's idea might be the *something* she needed. Yoko felt as itchy as... *a hiker in a swarm of mosquitoes.*

Yoko shooed that image out of her mind. It made her feel itchy in a twitchy kind of way.

Yoko tucked her sunglasses into the hair on top of her head. She was ready to meet up with her friends. But first, she reached back into the refrigerator for one more handful of summer sky.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Fishy Idea

Mac waited in front of the recycling bin as Maya hurried up the path. *Finally!* All of his friends were here.

Mac didn't waste any time. He wanted to share his idea before there were any more interruptions.

"We decided on a contest to get people thinking about recycling. We're working on making it fun. But," Mac shrugged his shoulders, "we haven't figured out the how-to-make-it-a-habit part."

"Or the slogan," added Yoko.

"Or the name of the contest," said Lacey.
"We are stuck."

Mac pulled the cracker from his pocket. A bit of the fish's tail had broken off, but its smile was still there. "What happens when you find a smiley fish in a bowlful of these crackers?"

"It makes *me* smile," said Yoko.

Maya nodded. "Sometimes I leave it in the bowl for someone else to find."

"I wonder how many more there are in the bowl," said Julian.

"I never thought about that." Lacey tilted her head. "Now I'm wondering how many there are in a bag."

"Do you think every bag has the same number of smiley fish?" Julian knew how to find out. He reached into his backpack for his tablet.

But when he noticed that Mac was fidgety, his hands fell to his side. "Anyhow," he said, "what's your idea, Mac?"

"If we make this fun to look at, people will notice it." Mac patted the side of the recycling bin, and it made a hollow sound.

“If they notice it, maybe they’ll use it.” Yoko hoped so, anyway.

“And,” added Lacey, “the more they use the bin, the more recycling will become a habit.”

Mac could tell his friends liked his idea. But they needed a plan. “We have to come up with a contest for making the bin fun to look at,” he said.

Lacey opened her notebook. She hoped they weren’t going to get stuck again.

There were Mrs. Schieber’s words. *Look all ways. Maybe look in a new direction.*

“I wonder,” she said slowly, “if a contest is the best plan.” Lacey was about to explain when she noticed Maya staring at the recycling bin. She was cradling her limp basket. That made sense because the handle was still broken. But Maya wasn’t twirling or dancing or practicing a curtsy. She was standing perfectly still. That didn’t make sense at all.

“Maya?” said Lacey. “What are you thinking?”

Maya sprang onto her toes. “What if we plan a community project instead?”

“A community project,” echoed Julian. “I like the sound of that.”

Yoko did, too. “Our community can work together to make the recycling bin fun.”

“If they help make it fun,” Mac said, “they will want to use it.”

“Our community could team up to paint the recycling bin a bright color,” Lacey suggested.

“We could paint smiley fish on it,” said Mac, “since the bin is beside the creek.”

“How about bright orange smiley fish?” Yoko pictured it in her mind.



Julian typed the words FUN RECYCLING BINS and FISH in the search bar on his tablet. In seconds, colorful images flooded the screen.

The friends huddled as Julian swiped through pages of pictures of fishy recycling bins.

Some were placed in offices. Some were made for classrooms. One was displayed behind ropes in an art gallery!

Suddenly, Maya gasped. She pointed to an image.

It was a big fish. Tall and wide and made of wire. It was on a beach.

And it was full of plastic bottles.

It was perfect!

Lacey whooped. The Cayuga Island Kids had looked in a new direction.

But would teamwork make their dream work?

They could try!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Community Project

The Cayuga Island Kids sat under a tree near the creek. Their brains were storming.

“Mr. Esposito could announce the project in the community newsletter,” Lacey began.

“Miss Lynne might help us contact the radio and TV stations,” said Maya.

“My sister can text her friends,” said Mac.
“Sookie has tons of friends.”

Lacey nodded as she wrote. Her eyes shone.

“Hold on!” Julian wiped his forehead. “First we need to figure out what materials we need.”

He enlarged the photo on his tablet.

“And,” said Mac, “who can help us.” The gigantic wire fish would get everyone’s attention. But it would take an army of volunteers to build it. “This is way harder than any Scout project. That fish is as big as a whale.” The smiley fish cracker in Mac’s hand crumbled a little more.

“That’s what makes it so fun!” Yoko declared. But her shoulders drooped. Mac was right.

Julian looked from one friend to another. “We won’t know if we can do it if we don’t try.”

Mac high-fived with Julian. He was ready. He pointed to Lacey’s list. “Besides a bunch of metal, we need tools and paint and brushes.”

“My dad can help with that,” Maya said brightly. “And here comes someone else who might be able to help us.”

Riding toward them on the path was Vincent.

He jumped off his bike before it stopped rolling.

Lacey noticed a wire hanger dangling from the handlebars. It was a clue, but there was no mystery. Vincent had offered to fix Maya's broken basket, and she had brought it to the park.

But why did Maya think Vincent might help with the community project? That was a mystery, and Lacey didn't have a clue.

Maya seemed to read Lacey's mind. "I told Vincent about our contest."

Vincent nodded.

"I wondered if we could use hangers to make something for everyone who enters the contest," Maya continued.

"Like a party favor," said Mac.

"It would be a reminder to recycle." Maya's eyes sparkled. "I asked Vincent if he had any ideas."

Vincent nodded again.

"Right away, he pulled out a hanger and straightened it. Then he bent it into a shape," Maya explained. "When I saw what he made, I

wanted you to see it. So I invited him to meet us here.”

She turned toward Vincent. “Would you show them?”

Vincent pulled not one, but a trio of metal shapes from his back pocket. The first looked like a cat.

Mac pointed to the second one. “Is that a... chicken?”

Finally, Vincent spoke. “Yes, it *is* a chicken!” He bounced on his toes. He was glad it was obvious.

A grin spread across Julian’s face.

Lacey started laughing.

Then Maya.

Then Yoko. Laughing with her friends was like playing Frisbee. First one friend caught it then another, then another.

Mac tucked his hands under his armpits. He strutted down the path. He cackled like a chicken. “Buk, buk-buk. Buk, buk-buk.”

His friends followed, cackling and laughing.

Vincent's mouth fell open, and that made the Cayuga Island Kids laugh even harder.

"Sorry," said Julian. "We're not laughing at you."

"Not sorry," said Lacey. A giggle bubbled up. She was kidding, of course. She extended her hand and they fist-bumped.



"Busted," said Vincent, and then he was laughing, too.

"What's that one?" asked Mac, pointing to the third metal shape.

When Vincent showed him, Mac's eyebrows shot up. "It looks like a smiley fish!"

Vincent nodded. "We could make a fish for everyone who enters the contest."

Maya noticed he said *we*.

"Instead of using the hangers to make a school of small fish, do you think we can use them to make one big fish?" she asked.

The look on Vincent's face started the kids laughing all over again.

Then they explained how the contest had turned into a community project.



While they brainstormed ideas for the community project, Vincent repaired Maya's basket.

Maya plucked a handful of clover. She didn't check to see if any of it had four leaves. It didn't

matter. She was feeling very lucky already.

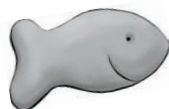
Ideas fired like sparklers in Yoko's head. She finally had a special *something* to connect to the slogan—the big fish recycling bin. The slogan she'd create would be great.

Lacey had taken pages of notes when Julian's tablet dinged for the second time that day. It was his reminder to help his dad with dinner. Tonight it was Julian's turn to set the table and choose the fruit for dessert.

Lacey tucked her notebook in her back pocket. She couldn't wait to get home and get started on a name for the community project.

Mac was eager to go home, too. He was hungry for dinner. But he was also looking forward to Supper Share. Each night everyone in his family shared something they had learned that day. Often, Mac had to think hard about what to say. But not tonight. He would tell his family all about the plans for the Cayuga Island

Park community project. Supper Share would be stupendous!



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Big Fish by the Small Creek

The Cayuga Island Kids were very busy over the next few weeks.

Julian and his dad met with the mayor. Julian showed her photos of litter in Cayuga Island Park. He chose a few of the most interesting recycling facts to share. Then Julian explained their idea for the Cayuga Island Park community project. He pulled up the image of the big fish recycling bin. The mayor agreed that it was certain to be noticed. It would help keep the park and creek clean. She shook Julian's hand.

She would provide the sturdy metal needed for the big fish's frame!

Vincent told his uncle about the community project. Mr. Ventrano offered to donate all the hangers he had intended to recycle. Vivian and Vincent showed the kids a safe and simple way to straighten the hangers. For three days they all worked together in the steamy back room at Verde Dry Cleaners. The hanger wire would form the body of the big fish recycling bin.

Mr. Esposito interviewed the kids about *The Big Fish by the Small Creek Community Project* for the community newsletter. Lacey's name for the project made Cayuga Island residents curious. It got people talking. They would help.

Inside the newsletter, The Como Deli, the public library, Sullivan's Hot Dog Stand, the college, Buzzy's Pizza, the senior citizen center, Verde Dry Cleaners, and the mayor all placed ads to show their support.

Yoko's slogan ran across the top of the page.

I AM JUST ONE PERSON, BUT...
LIKE THE BIG FISH BY THE SMALL CREEK,
I CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.
YOU CAN, TOO.

ENTER TO WIN A:
Reusable Water Bottle

crafted by Maya, one of the Cayuga Island Kids who organized the Big Fish Community Project!

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

	
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On Julian's raffle announcement, Maya had drawn a border of tiny fish. She also drew a picture of the reusable water bottle she had

crafted. Her friends said it was perfect. A lucky winner would be chosen at the end of the day.

Miss Lynne helped the kids get the word out to the local newspaper and the radio and TV stations. They made phone calls. They sent letters and emails.

A crew from the TV station planned to film the big fish as it was being constructed. A reporter from the newspaper would interview community helpers for a feature story.

Sookie and her friends posted reminders on social media with the help of Miss Lynne's students.

Finally, the day was here!

Yoko took one last look at the Cayuga Island online newsletter before clicking off the family computer. She had planned to print a copy. But then she remembered it takes trees to make paper. She decided to save the newsletter on the computer instead. She could look at it whenever she liked, and it wouldn't get wrinkled or lost.

Yoko's dad was so proud of what the kids had accomplished that he had made a screen shot of the newsletter. He used it as the wallpaper for his work computer.

That was way better than a paper copy!

Yoko skipped down the steps of the front porch. Today she would meet her friends on the sidewalk. She wouldn't wait until they rang the doorbell!

Julian and Mac were coming her way. Mac was wheeling a wagon. It was piled with plastic bottles. His powder horn looked as if it was grinning as it bounced against his chest. Yoko began guessing what was inside.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Back in the Alley

Lacey and Pesky cut through the alley on the way to the park.

While Pesky sniffed, Lacey observed. That's what good detectives do, even on a big day like this.

A hose stretched alongside the garden in Mrs. Schieber's yard. But today, Lacey knew her neighbor was busy in the kitchen instead of the yard. The clue was the whiff of chocolate chip cookies.

Timmy Winslow's rusty green trike was still parked beneath the bushes. But the bale of wire was no longer resting against the trunk of

the maple tree. That was a clue. But there was no mystery. Lacey knew it had been donated to the community project.

Meanwhile, Pesky investigated a knotted length of rope. It lay across a forgotten planter half-filled with rainwater. Pesky yipped. He nudged the rope and it flopped to the ground. He picked it up with his teeth. It was musty! It was stringy!

Pesky shadowed Lacey. His ears perked. Would she let him keep it? He waited for a clue. When Lacey continued walking, Pesky's tail wagged. He could keep the rope!

Lacey studied the path as she neared the end of the alley. When she spotted something shiny, she paused to investigate. Lacey pushed aside some gravel with the toe of her sneaker. She leaned in for a closer look.

There it was. The tangled wire. The one she had spotted a few weeks ago.

It still reminded her of a fish.

Lacey laughed. This was not litter someone had carelessly tossed in the alley after all. It had been carefully shaped into an animal. And, she figured, most likely it had fallen out of someone's pocket.

When Lacey had first noticed it, she had thought it was nothing. Certainly not a clue to write in her notebook. Now she decided it was.

Lacey eyed the yard off the alley. Inside an open garage, she spotted a shelf piled with triangular boxes. Each had an image of Earth on its side.



Propped beside the garage door was a bike.

Lacey would know that bike anywhere.

She paused. Her friends and neighbors were already at work on the big fish. She was eager to join them. Pesky darted back and forth across the narrow alley with a piece of rope in his mouth. He seemed excited to get to the park, too.

Lacey thought about how the community project had started with a plastic bottle thrown in the creek. She thought about the heart of Yoko's slogan.

*I am just one person, but I can make a difference.
You can, too.*

Lacey walked through the yard. Just as she reached the back porch, the girl who owned the bright orange bike with mag wheels and high handlebars came around the corner from the side of the house.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Making a Difference

Lacey and Pesky arrived at the park just as Vivian was parking the Verde Dry Cleaners van. Vincent hopped out and waved. A team of neighbors gathered to unload the bundles of straightened hangers.

A reporter hopped out of a car parked behind the dry cleaner's van and approached Julian. Lacey knew he was a reporter because a photographer trailed behind him. And, they both wore shirts with the newspaper's name on the back. Julian was about to be interviewed! When Pesky spotted Julian, he dropped the rope and yipped.

Near the creek, Maya's dad and a team of Cayuga Island residents were constructing the metal frame of the big fish. They were following the plan Miss Lynne's friend from the college had drawn. She stood nearby with a cluster of students. Along with Sookie and her friends, they were taking photos of the activities.

Young children wiggled as they waited in line to have their faces painted by Lacey's grandmother. Mr. Esposito rode by Lacey in his golf cart. He had replaced the tools with a bright red flag. It matched his new hat. Today he was offering neighbors rides around the park to learn more about the trees and flowers planted there.

Maya and her mom sat behind a long table between two park benches. On it they had placed jugs of water and trays of Mrs. Schieber's chocolate chip cookies. Maya's basket, trimmed with weed flowers, sat in the center. She handed each volunteer a ticket for the raffle at the end of the day.

Lacey watched as Vincent's friend approached the table. She filled out a raffle ticket and dropped it in Maya's basket. She chose a cookie, and after taking a bite, she reached for a second one. She stood back and looked up at the big fish before making her way toward Vincent. His face brightened when he saw her. He handed her a length of wire and together they worked it into the side of the fish.

Mac's wagon squeaked as he pulled it across the grass toward Lacey. "Sookie and her friends collected these plastic bottles from around the park. They want to be the first ones to feed the Big Fish." He leaned toward Lacey. "I think they are hoping they get their picture in the newspaper or on Instagram," he whispered.

"The Big Fish by the Small Creek is a hit," Lacey said. "It's fun. People will notice it." She smiled at Mac. "Recycling in Cayuga Island Park is going to become a habit."

Mac looked across the park at all the helpers.

He remembered what Julian had said. *Making a difference can catch on. One person becomes two and two becomes four. Pretty soon one becomes too many to count.*

Suddenly he pointed. "Is that Vincent's friend over there?"

Lacey tucked her hands in her back pockets. "Her name is Alice. I invited her to help build the Big Fish."

"Stupendous idea!" Mac exclaimed.

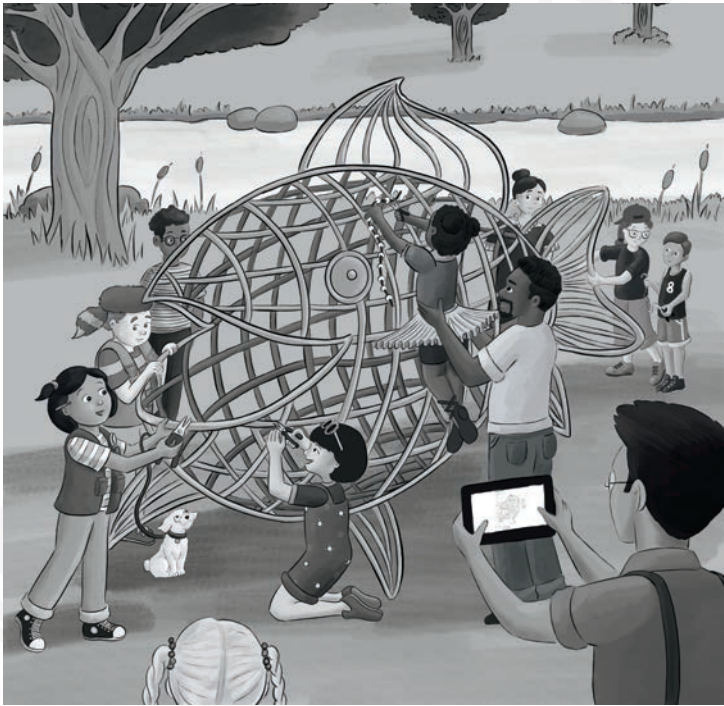
Lacey smiled. "I wasn't sure what she would say. Or what she would do." Lacey shrugged. "But I asked her anyway. She said yes right away. She jumped on her bike and sped over here."

Mac laughed. "I can picture that."

Yoko caught up with her friends just as she took the last bite of a hot dog. "Our community project is as popular as the state fair!"

Mac and Lacey agreed. And they didn't want to waste another minute, so they joined the mass of volunteers.

Moms and dads. College students and grandparents. Sisters, brothers, and cousins. Throughout the day, neighbors of all sizes and ages gathered to help. They were a community. Julian took photos with his tablet. He would label the collection The Big Fish Ecosystem.



Piece by piece, sturdy metal strips were bolted together to form the body of The Big

Fish by the Small Creek. It was tall and long. It had a wide, smiley mouth. Mac worked on that part. It would welcome plastic bottles and other recyclables. Its flippy tail was hinged so it would be easy to empty. Julian had measured it for the latch. It fit snug and tight.

Maya had threaded together rows of giant sparkly beads. Her father held her up and she placed them on the Big Fish exactly where gills would be.

By the time the mayor arrived, Mrs. Schieber's cookies and the piles of hot dogs donated by Sullivan's were gone. The camera crew from the TV station was filming the last of the wire being attached to the frame of the Big Fish.

The mayor shook hands with volunteers as she made her way to the edge of the creek. She stepped onto a smooth, dry rock clear of any moss. Mac was pretty sure it was the same rock he had climbed on to save the mallard. Across the creek several ducks gathered, as if they, too,

were pleased with the results of the community project.

The crowd quieted. The mayor was about to begin when a fish jumped into the air and then just as quickly returned to the creek. Laughter rippled and someone shouted, "Perfect!"

The mayor thanked the community volunteers for building the Big Fish. The TV station's camera crew panned the crowd as they whooped and cheered. The mayor motioned to Maya to bring her the basket filled with raffle tickets.

"Let me FISH one out!" The mayor winked, and the crowd laughed again. She handed a ticket to Maya who read the numbers into the microphone.

Stink bug! Mac had kind of hoped he would win Maya's reusable water bottle. But the number on his ticket wasn't even close

Lacey glanced at her ticket and gasped. Quickly, she moved toward Alice.

"Here," she said. "Take this."

Alice looked at the ticket. “Why?” Her voice was a whisper. “You won fair and square.”

“You made a difference today.” Lacey placed the ticket in Alice’s hand. “I think you’ll really like the reusable bottle.”

Alice’s hand closed over the ticket. Her eyes were shiny. “You made a difference, too,” she said.



Yoko, Mac, and Julian stood by Lacey as the mayor shook Alice’s hand.

“How did you find her?” asked Yoko.

“I discovered a clue in the alley,” said Lacey.

“Someday,” Yoko said, “you are going to be as famous as Sherlock Holmes.”

Lacey’s cheeks grew rosy. Yoko knew that was a clue.

She was right. Lacey liked being compared to a famous detective. She planned to add that to the rest of her notes about The Big Fish by the Small Creek Community Project.



Turn the page to see a real
Big Fish Project and take a sneak
peek at the next book in the

cayuga Island Kids

series!



Where Do You Get the Ideas for Your Stories?



Authors tend to be curious. They also tend to be excellent observers.

The **setting**, or where the Cayuga Island Kids series takes place, is real. The island is located a few miles upstream from the mighty Niagara Falls. I grew up there, and I often return to walk the park, breathe in the smells, and appreciate the changes in seasons. My observations, along with memories, help me form ideas for my stories.

The **characters** in the Cayuga Island Kids series are **fictional**. They are not real children or adults. However, I get ideas for what my characters do, say, think, and enjoy based on the actions of people I know or what I observe. I watch and I listen. There's also a bit of me in every character. Real people (and animals) often inspire fictional characters.

The **plot** is also **fictional**. The events in the story came from my imagination. Ideas for important elements in the story, however, came from my observations and experiences.

- Recycling is important to me. I reuse, repurpose, and recycle as much as possible. I try not to be wasteful. I encourage others to be respectful of our environment. The Big Fish in the story is based on an actual recycling structure I came upon when I visited the seaside in Portugal. I was so intrigued by that big fish! I took photos. I thought about the positive impact it has on the beach—

and on people's actions. Meanwhile, I was gathering ideas for this book. Gradually, the Big Fish found its way into my story.



- Verde Dry Cleaners is modeled after the dry cleaner I use in my community. It is a local, family-owned business mindful of the environment. They offer reusable dry cleaning bags and opt for safer cleaning methods.
- The Cayuga Island Kids want to make a difference in their community, but they run into snags and challenges. The **plot** of the story is based on experience. Working out

Where Do You Get the Ideas for Your Stories?

problems while planning takes determination. Solutions are not always easy. Not every idea works. Teamwork helps. Sometimes we need to brainstorm, rethink, or look in a new direction.

Want to learn more about recycling, nurdles, mallards, or planning a community project? Want to know how to make a fish from a wire hanger? I learned about all of that and more as I wrote this book. Research leads to ideas! Investigate topics of interest in your school or public library and on safe online sites, just as the Cayuga Island Kids do. Remember what Mrs. Schieber recommends. Always check more than one source. Make sure the information is accurate. Be a fact detective.

Be an idea collector, too. Observe. Pay attention when something sparks your interest. Soon, you will have plenty of ideas for *your* stories!

*Find Cayuga Island Kids activities and an educator's guide at
**www.judybradbury.com and on
www.CityofLightPublishing.com.***

Coming in Spring 2022!

Book Three

of the

**cayuga Island
Kids**

series



The Case of the Messy Message and the Missing Facts

Story by Judy Bradbury

Illustrations by Gabriella Vagnoli

At the park, Pesky was being pesky, so Lacey placed a treat for him on the ground. She held her hand up. “Wait,” she commanded.

While Pesky focused on the biscuit, Lacey turned her attention back to Maya.

“...So while Ms. Choi explained to the little kids how to make a greeting card, I passed out the supplies. I collected them at the end of the meeting. Ms. Choi and I were putting everything away when we noticed that two glitter pens were missing.”

“Missing?” Lacey leaned forward. This sounded mysterious. “Did you check under the tables?” she asked. “How about the trash can?”

Could someone have thrown them out because they were used up?"

Maya picked up a maple leaf that had fallen to the ground. "We checked the floor, the trash can, and even the chairs." She followed the outline of the maple leaf with her finger. "We didn't find them."

Lacey patted Pesky's head and pointed to the treat. "Okay!" His tail wagged as he pounced on the biscuit. She pulled her notebook from her pocket. At the top of the page in red ink, she wrote



She clicked to the blue ink. "Begin at the beginning. Tell me everything." She paused. "Give me the important details."

"I just did," said Maya.

Lacey's pen hung over the notebook. "How did you know that two glitter pens were missing?"

Maya looked up at the maple tree, thinking. "Ms. Choi had a check-in list. Before the kids came in, we counted out two glitter pens, one piece of cardstock, and a glue stick for each person." Maya snapped her fingers. "We also filled bowls with decorations. Two bowls for each table. The pieces were all different shapes and colors!" Maya paused. "But I guess that isn't important."

"Probably not," Lacey said. She waited for her friend to continue.

"While Ms. Choi showed examples of greeting card designs, I passed out the supplies. Except the paper towels." Maya tapped Lacey's notebook. "I forgot to tell you about those. They were for cleanup at the end of the meeting."

Maya took a breath. “Anyway, after Ms. Choi answered questions, everyone got busy.”

Lacey flipped to a new page in her notebook. “What happened after they made their cards?”

“We had Show and Tell. Then we put the cards in baggies so they’d be safe in backpacks.” Maya stood and stretched. She circled her head with her arms and twirled. When she noticed Lacey was waiting, she continued. “Everyone passed the glitter pens and glue sticks to me. Ms. Choi collected the bowls. I helped wipe down the tables. Little kids aren’t that good at clean up.” Maya’s head bobbed. “They hung up their aprons and then they left.” Maya stopped. “I forgot to tell you. Ms. Choi has aprons for the kids to wear so their clothes don’t get dirty. Little kids aren’t that good at crafts.” Maya bent her knees and straightened. Then she twirled again. “I’m pretty sure that’s everything.”

“How did you figure out what was missing?” Lacey asked.

“After the kids left, Ms. Choi and I put away the supplies. That’s when we realized glitter pens were missing. There were two empty spaces in the trays.” Maya sighed. “We looked everywhere. Ms. Choi even checked her apron pockets!”

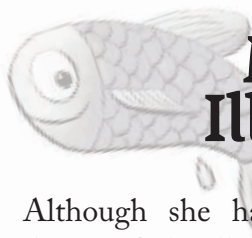
Lacey clicked from blue ink to green ink. In her notebook she wrote





Meet the Author

Judy Bradbury is an author, an award-winning literacy advocate and educator, and host of the popular Children's Book Corner blog. She is also a Cayuga Island Kid. Judy grew up on the island, which is located just a few miles upstream from the mighty Niagara Falls. In the summers, she rode the bicycle her father built for her across the island in search of mysteries to solve. Judy loves visiting schools and libraries to share her books with students, and frequently offers writing workshops.



Meet the Illustrator

Although she has always loved to draw, Gabriella Vagnoli became an illustrator via a circuitous route that allowed her to explore many other interests including theater, music, teaching, and languages. Her work in these fields all had a common thread: communication. And this is what she loves best about illustrating children's books—the opportunity to visually communicate a story in a way that will indelibly imprint it on young minds, just as she still has with her the illustrated stories from her childhood in Italy.



Cayuga Island Kids

Book Two

The Adventure of the Big Fish by the Small Creek

It begins with a plastic bottle and a couple of ducks and ends with a big fish and a couple of new friends.

How the Cayuga Island Kids go from fishing a plastic bottle out of the creek to bringing the community together to build a recycling bin big enough to hold plenty of plastic makes for a lively adventure.

Although we are each just one person,
together we can make a BIG difference.

**Join the Cayuga Island Kids
on their next adventure!**



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