

Stories of Kindness and Courage

Inspired by the Teachings
of Pope Francis

When We Stand Together



THINK
DIGITAL ACADEMY



Tessa was new to Maple Grove Primary. She wore a bright yellow headband and carried a lunchbox covered in tiny stars. On her first Monday, she walked into Class 4B with careful steps, like a dancer learning a new stage.

“Welcome, Tessa,” said Ms Santos. “We’re glad you’re here. Would you like to read the morning poem with us?”



Tessa nodded. Her voice was soft but clear. “The sun climbs up the - ” She paused on a long word.

“Hori... hor... ri... zon.”

A few kids snickered. One boy in the back, Dylan, whispered just loud enough for others to hear, “Hori-zon?

More like hori-zooooon.” Laughter rolled through the room like marbles on a floor.

Tessa’s cheeks turned the colour of ripe apples. She stared at the page, and her hand trembled.



Tessa's cheeks turned the colour of ripe apples. She stared at the page, and her hand trembled.

Lila, who sat two desks over, felt something twist in her stomach. She glanced at Karim - her friend from soccer and the helping-hands project and he looked worried too. Lila raised her hand. "Can I read with Tessa?" she asked.



Ms. Santos smiled. “What a kind idea. Yes, go ahead.”

Lila moved beside Tessa and whispered, “We’ll do it together. Ho-ri-zon.” They read the rest of the poem side by side, sounding out the tricky parts, and finished to a scatter of claps.

But Dylan’s grin stuck like a burr.

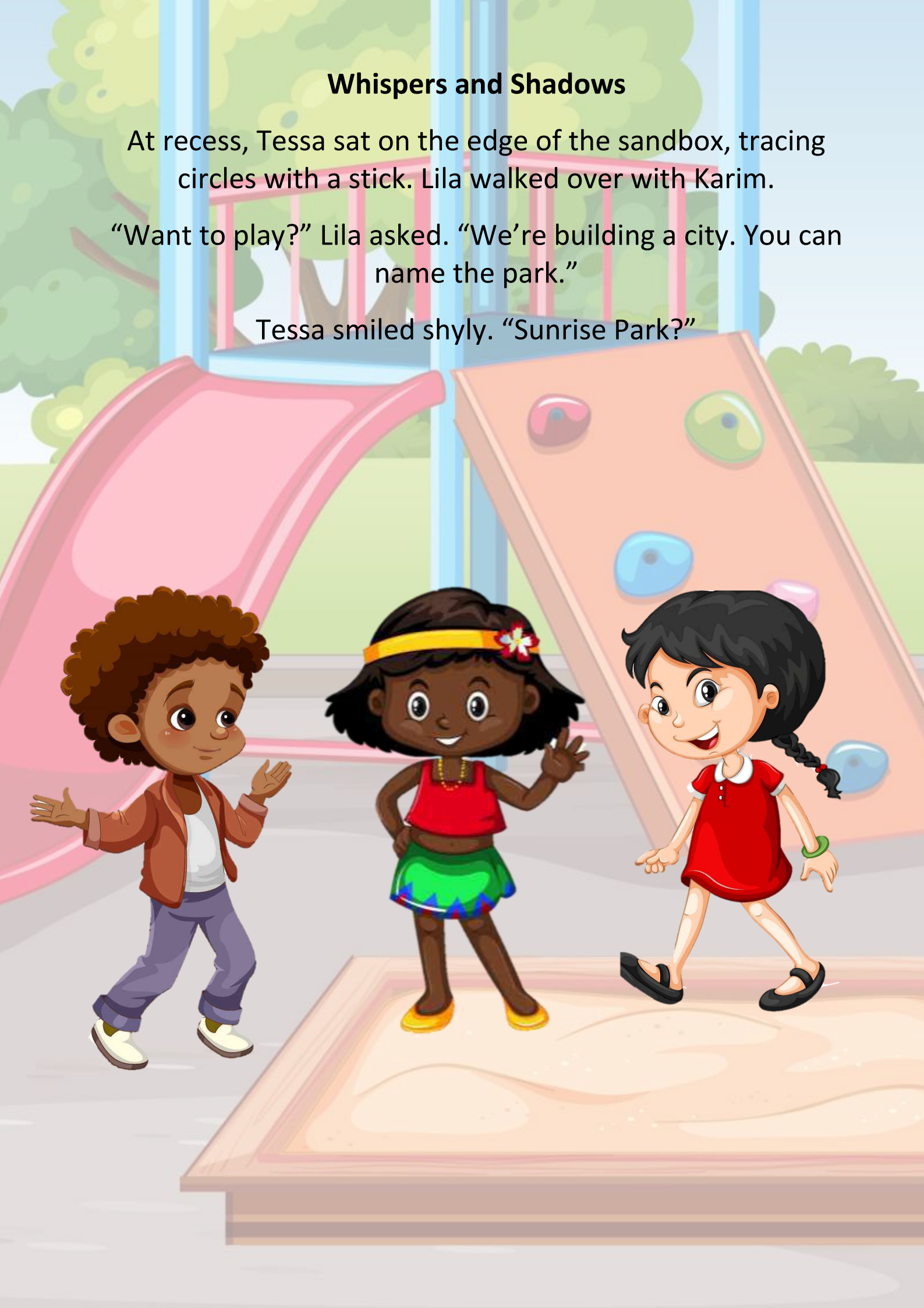


Whispers and Shadows

At recess, Tessa sat on the edge of the sandbox, tracing circles with a stick. Lila walked over with Karim.

“Want to play?” Lila asked. “We’re building a city. You can name the park.”

Tessa smiled shyly. “Sunrise Park?”



“Perfect,” Karim said, carving S-U-N-R-I-S-E into the sand with a ruler.

A group of kids ran by, and Dylan called, “Hey, sunrise! Watch the hori-zooooon!” More giggles. Tessa’s smile faded.



Lila felt a spark of anger. Why does he keep doing that? She wanted to shout, Stop it! but her words jammed in her throat. She remembered something their teacher had said the week before, when they'd made the Helping Hands chart: "We prepare for peace by practicing peace." Lila wasn't sure what to do, but she knew shouting wouldn't fix it.



After recess, a paper note appeared on Tessa's chair: a sloppy drawing of a person with a big headband and the words "HORI-ZOOON" in bubble letters. Tessa crumpled it quickly and shoved it into her desk. She blinked fast, like she was keeping tears from escaping.

Lila whispered, "Do you want to sit with me at lunch?"

Tessa nodded, eyes on her shoes.



The Peace Bench

At lunch, Lila and Karim sat with Tessa under the Jacaranda tree. Purple blossoms drifted down like tiny umbrellas.

“I’m sorry about the teasing,” Lila said. “It’s not okay.”

Tessa shrugged. “It’s fine. At my old school, people made fun of my headband.”

Karim tossed a blossom into the air and caught it. “I don’t get it. Your headband’s cool.”



Lila chewed her sandwich. “What if we use the Peace Bench?”

Maple Grove had a small wooden bench painted with doves and leaves. Ms Santos had explained it at the start of term: “If you have a problem, sit there. It’s a sign you want help, not a fight.”

After lunch, Lila led Tessa to the bench. They sat together while Karim stood nearby, like a quiet guard. Ms Santos noticed and came over.



“Want to talk?” she asked gently.

Tessa nodded, eyes on her lunchbox. “Some kids laughed when I read. And someone drew a mean picture.”

Ms Santos’s face softened. “Thank you for telling me. Building peace means shining light where there are shadows. Would you like to have a class circle this afternoon, to listen and solve this together?”

Tessa hesitated. Lila squeezed her hand. “We’ll be with you.”

“Okay,” Tessa whispered.



The Listening Circle

After math, Ms Santos moved the chairs into a circle. “Class 4B,” she said, “we’re going to have a Listening Circle. Here are the rules: One person speaks at a time. We listen, then repeat what we heard to be sure we understand. Then we repair together - find a way to make things right.”



She placed a smooth wooden talking piece - a palm-sized heart - on the floor. “When this heart is in your hands, you speak. When it isn’t, you listen with your whole self: ears, eyes, and heart.”

Ms Santos handed the heart to Tessa first.



Tessa held it like something fragile. “When people laugh... it feels like the air gets tight,” she said softly. “I’m new here. I want to do things right, but then I mess up, and it feels like everyone is watching.”

She passed the heart to Lila.



“When I heard the laughter,” Lila said, “my stomach hurt. I wanted to help Tessa, but I wasn’t sure how. I don’t want our classroom to be a place where people feel small.”



Karim took the heart. “Teasing can feel like a joke to some people,” he said, “but it lands like a rock for the person hit by it.”

The heart made its way around the circle. Some kids said they hadn’t realised the jokes were painful. A few admitted they had laughed because everyone else was.



When the heart reached Dylan, he tossed his hair and sighed. “I didn’t mean anything. It was just funny. She said the word weird.”

Ms Santos nodded. “Thank you for speaking honestly, Dylan. Now we’ll try something important. Lila, can you repeat what Dylan said, to show you heard him?”



Lila glanced at Dylan. “You didn’t mean to hurt anyone,” she said slowly. “You thought it was just a joke.”

“Yeah.”

Ms Santos turned to Tessa. “And Dylan, can you repeat what Tessa shared, to show you heard her?”



Dylan shifted in his seat. He looked at the heart in his hands, then at Tessa. "You felt... small. And like everyone was watching. And the notes and laughing made it worse."

Tessa nodded.

There was a hush. Something in the room changed - like the air finally remembered how to breathe.



Ms Santos set the heart down. “This is the Repair part,” she said. “How do we make this right and make our classroom safer?”

Hands shot up. “We could make a Welcome Wall,” said Mateo. “Everybody writes one kind thing about Tessa - or any new student.”

“We could set a rule,” said Priya, “that if someone messes up, we help them, not laugh. Like a code word. If someone says the code word, we stop.”

“Let’s make it a fruit,” Karim said, grinning. “Pineapple!”



The class giggled. Even Dylan smiled.

“And we could practice together,” Lila added. “Reading out loud. In a small group, where it’s okay to stumble.”

Dylan cleared his throat. “I can help Tessa practice, too,” he said, surprising himself. “I’m good at reading. I... didn’t think about how it felt.” He looked at Tessa. “Sorry.”

Tessa tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “Okay,” she said. “Thanks.”



The Welcome Wall

By Friday, a rainbow of sticky notes covered the new Welcome Wall:

- “Tessa is brave.”
- “I like your headband.”
- “You draw beautiful stars.”
- “Thanks for helping me in art.”



Ms Santos brought a stack of poems to the reading group: Tessa, Lila, Karim, and yes Dylan. They sat in a sunny corner near the window. When someone stumbled, Karim tapped the table twice - a secret Pineapple signal to pause and try again. Lila would whisper the syllables, and Dylan would say, "You've got this."



Tessa's voice grew steadier each day. She began to lift her head when she read, looking at the group with a small, confident smile.

One afternoon, Dylan showed Tessa a folded paper. "I used to get teased in Year Two," he said quietly. "I wore glasses and they felt huge on my face. Someone called me 'Bug Eyes.' So I guess... I do get it."



Tessa looked at him. "I'm sorry that happened to you."

He shrugged. "Me too. I forgot what it felt like. I don't want to forget again."



The Assembly

Two weeks later, Class 4B was chosen to perform at the Friday assembly. Ms. Santos asked them to pick a theme.

“Peace,” Lila said, before anyone else could speak. “Peace that we practice.”



They wrote a short play called The Bench and the Heart. In it, a new student gets teased, and the class uses a listening circle to repair the hurt. There was a pineapple puppet (made by Karim out of cardstock and googly eyes) that popped up whenever someone needed a pause. The audience laughed in the good way - the kind that feels like warm tea on a cold morning.



At the end, Tessa stepped forward and read a simple poem:

“When words are sharp,
we bleed inside.

When hands reach out,
we heal with pride.

A circle listens -
hearts grow wide.

When we stand together,
we stand on the side
of peace.”



The hall was quiet for a heartbeat, then filled with applause. Tessa's eyes shone. She bowed, and as she straightened, Dylan gave her a thumbs-up from behind the curtain.



The After

In the weeks that followed, little changes added up. Kids used the Pineapple code word sometimes - on the playground, during group work, even at soccer when arguments sparked. The Peace Bench became a place of courage, not defeat. The Welcome Wall changed names often, as new students arrived or someone needed extra kindness.



One afternoon, Lila found Tessa at the bench—not sad, but drawing. She was sketching a big circle filled with faces and hands.

“What’s that?” Lila asked.

Tessa smiled. “It’s our class. And this is the talking heart.” She shaded it carefully. “I used to think being new meant being alone. Now I think it means bringing something new to everyone else, too.”



Lila sat beside her. “You did. We all did.”

They watched purple blossoms drift from the Jacaranda tree and settle on the playground like soft stars. Across the yard, Dylan helped a younger student tie his shoe. Karim taught a first-year how to chip a soccer ball. Ms Santos stood by the door, writing something on a small card that would later join the Welcome Wall.

Lila felt that warm, humming feeling again - the one she now recognised as peace. Not a big, loud parade. A quiet, steady promise



When the bell rang, Tessa slipped her drawing into her folder and closed her star-covered lunchbox. “See you tomorrow,” she said.

“Tomorrow,” Lila echoed.

They walked back into Class 4B together, side by side.



Reflection Question:

If you hear teasing or see someone left out, what is one peaceful thing you can do right away?

Seed of Action:

Create a small “peace plan” with your friends: a pause word (like “Pineapple”), a listening rule (repeat what you heard), and one repair idea (a welcome note, a buddy invitation, or practicing together). Use it this week and notice the difference.





THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY