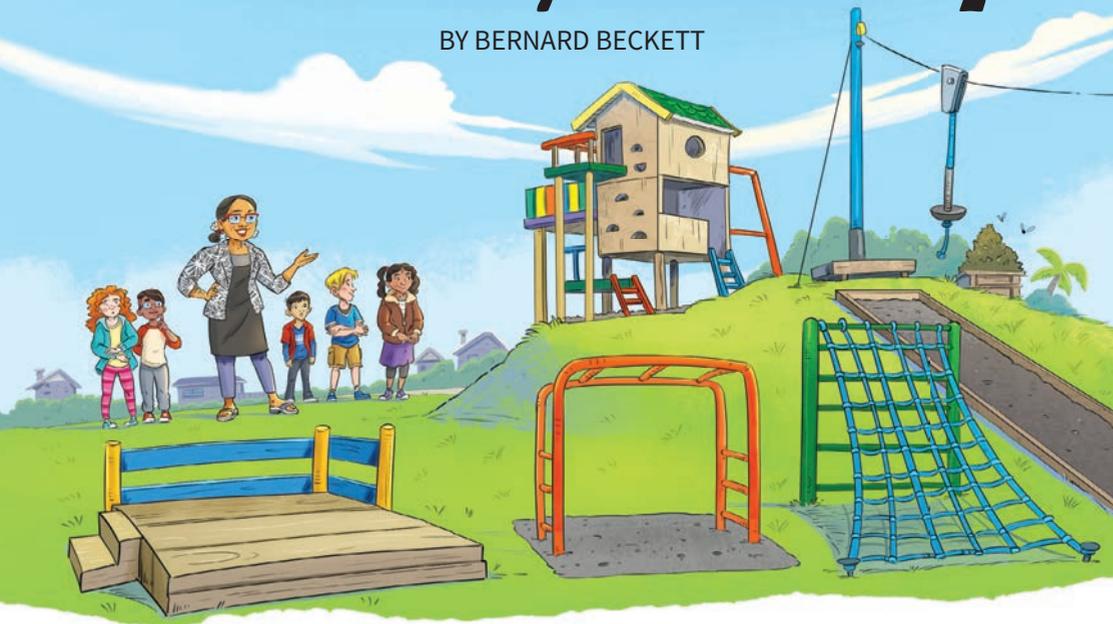


The Way to Play

BY BERNARD BECKETT



When Room 6 won the competition to design the school's new playground, they couldn't wait to get started. Ms Mapasua took the class outside to the old playground and asked them to go and stand in their favourite spots. Then she told them to think about what they liked most about that particular place.

Roland walked straight to the fort.

He liked to sit under it when it rained and watch the water splashing off the matting. He enjoyed digging his hands into the wet, sweet-smelling bark, down to the warm, dry layers underneath.



Crystal ran to the monkey bars. She loved swinging from them and having spinning competitions with her friends. Sometimes she sat at the very top, in the sunshine, pretending to be a monkey in the treetops.



Tama climbed the old cargo net. He and his friends liked playing there at lunchtime. They had a game where you had to climb to the top without being hit by a tennis ball.



Mathusha skipped to the old wooden stage and struck a pose. She and her two best friends always went there to dance. It was where they practised the moves that would one day make them famous.



Sam sat beside a pile of old grass clippings near the flying fox. He liked to search for worms and beetles. He kept careful sketches of them all in the back of his maths book.



“All right,” Ms Mapasua called.
“Now point at the thing you least like about this playground.” She waited until they were all pointing at something.
“Good. Think about why you don’t like it. OK? Now, let’s go inside.”

Back in the classroom, Ms Mapasua asked the students to discuss what they most liked and disliked about the old playground. “It will help us decide what we need to keep and what we need to change,” she explained.

Only, it didn’t quite work out like that. When Sam told his group about the grass clippings, Crystal screwed up her nose. “Yuk, that’s just compost. It’s smelly and disgusting.”

Tama began to tell everybody how cool his cargo-net game was, but Roland interrupted. “I don’t like the cargo net. I tried climbing it once, but I slipped and got rope burn.”

Mathusha explained how she liked the stage because it was great for dancing on. “But that’s not fair,” said Sam. “When people play music in the playground, it ruins the peace and quiet.”



“The space under the fort is good for sitting,” said Roland. “I like it because –”

“No way,” Tama exclaimed. “When I was in year 2, some older kids chased me under there, and I was scared.”

“The monkey bars,” said Crystal excitedly. “We’ve got to keep them so that –”

“No, we don’t,” Mathusha shouted. “Some people can’t climb them, and that makes them feel bad. We should get rid of the monkey bars.”

“Turituri!” called Ms Mapasua. “All right,” she said when the class was quiet. “In your groups, find one thing about the playground that you all agree on.”

Around the room, voices were raised again in disagreement. Everyone seemed to be talking at once. Ms Mapasua just smiled. “Well you all seem to have different points of view, but that’s a healthy thing. Different points of view make life interesting. They make us think, and they help us to imagine what it might be like to be somebody else. Tomorrow, we will sort this out and agree on the new design.”

But the students were still arguing as they walked out the door that afternoon. And they started arguing as soon as they got to school the next morning. Sorting it out seemed impossible.

Ms Mapasua walked round the room, handing each student a card. “These are your secret instruction cards,” she said. “They might help you to agree on the new design.”

Sam’s card said, “Take Crystal to the compost pile and show her the most beautiful beetle you can find.” Sam found one with brilliant green wings that flashed like little rainbows in the sunlight. Crystal thought it was amazing.

Mathusha took Sam to the stage and taught him her favourite dance move, just like the card told her to. Sam did it over and over, and then he made up a dance move of his own.

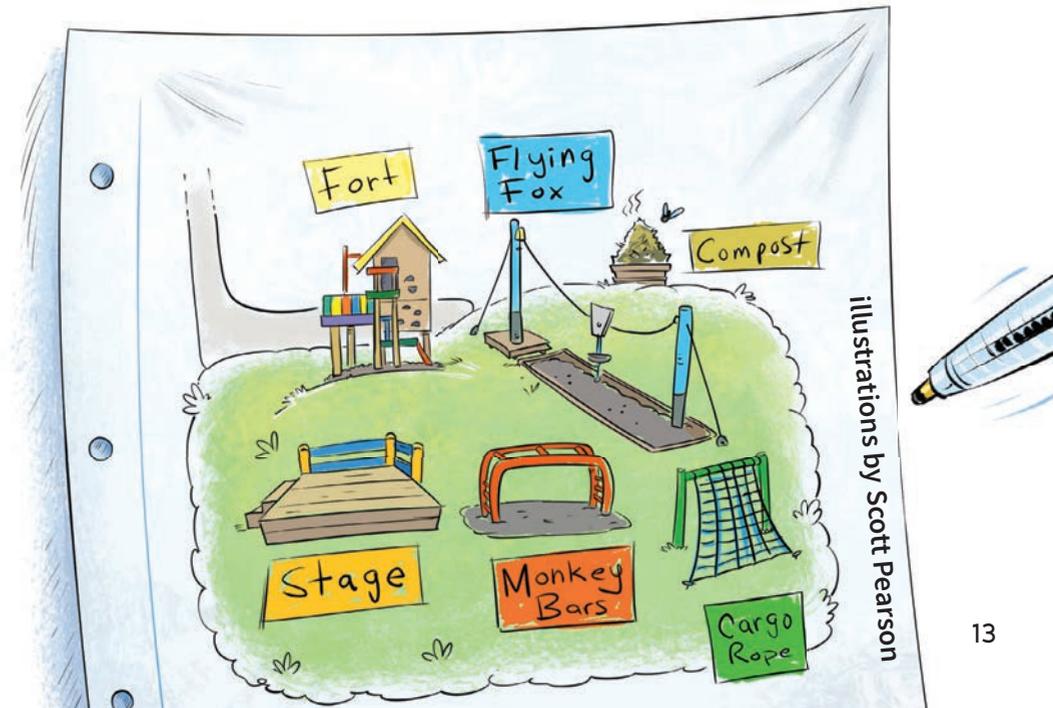
Crystal showed Mathusha how to reach the top of the monkey bars, using her own secret method. Mathusha asked if they could come back at lunchtime so Crystal could teach her how to spin.



Tama showed Roland how to climb the cargo net without getting rope burn. Roland showed Tama the secret place under the fort where he sometimes hid lollies so he would always have a special treat if he was feeling sad.



When the students came back inside, Ms Mapasua told them to sit quietly at their tables and draw a picture of their perfect school playground. Now, some people are good at drawing and other people aren’t, but that didn’t matter. On this particular day, a remarkable thing happened – everybody’s picture looked the same. Because everybody drew the old playground exactly as it was. And Ms Mapasua smiled.



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by Bernard Beckett

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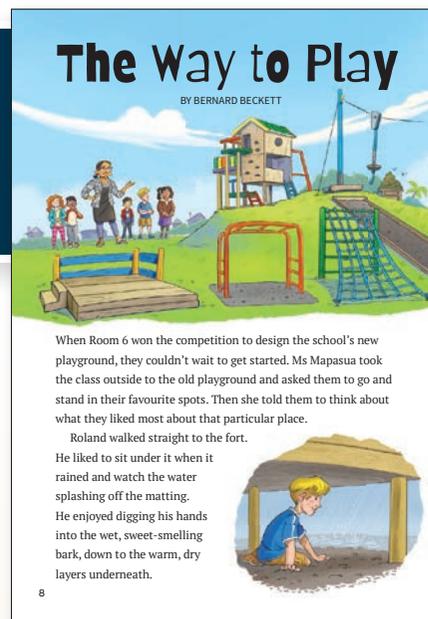
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