

New Friends!



By: Jay Patel and Nick Saba

Dedicated to Andrew Saba and the autistic youth community

"Good morning, class!" Ms. Honeysworth said to her third grade class.
"Good morning, Ms. Honeysworth!" they replied.



"Before we get started on our lesson today, I want to introduce you all to a new student! Bridget, could you come up to the front of the class for me, please?" A blonde girl slowly walked from the corner of the room up to the front of the class while looking down at her feet. "This is Bridget! She just moved here. Make sure to welcome her!"



"Can Bridget sit next to me?" asked a student named Alex. "Bridget is my friend. She just moved in next door to me."

"Of course!" replied Ms. Honeysworth. Bridget took her seat next to Alex.



Alex's father had told him that Bridget has autism. He explained that autism is a mental condition that makes people think and act differently. Bridget might have trouble making friends and be a bit different from the other kids, but she is still a child who wants to have fun with her friends.

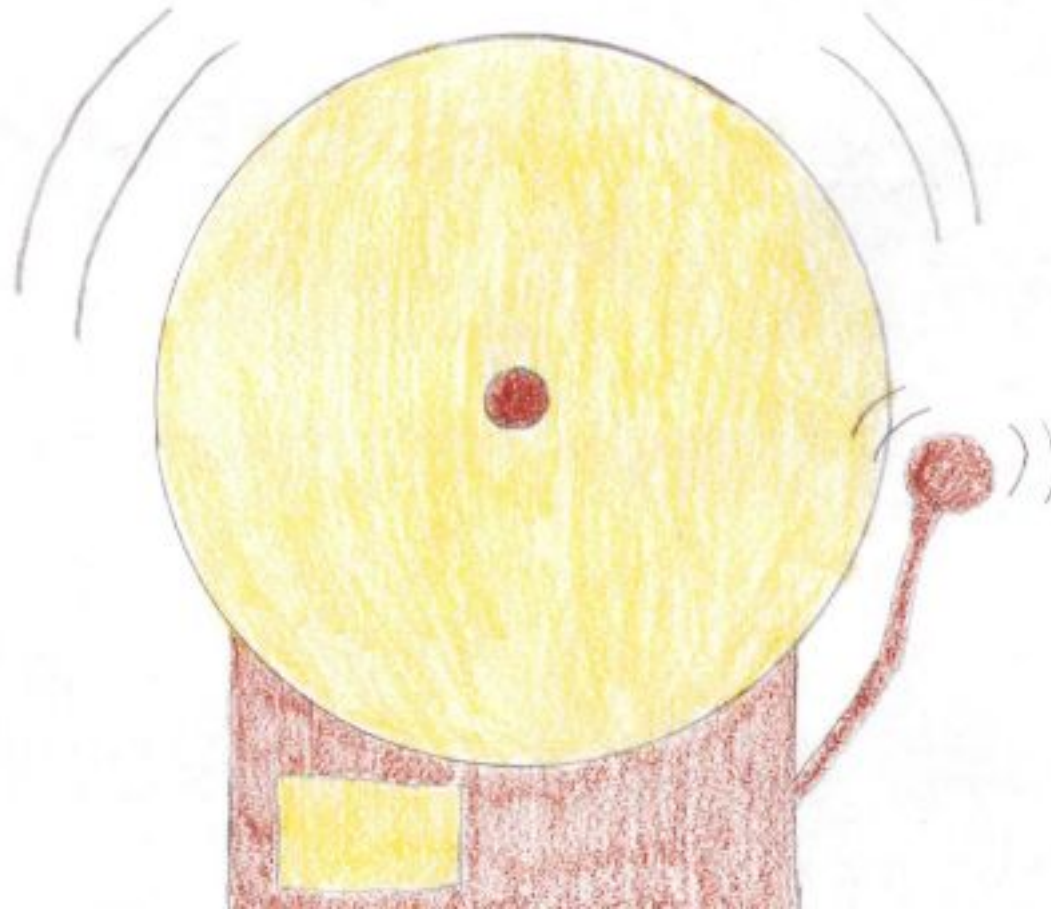
Alex leaned over to her and whispered, "At recess you can meet my friends. They are all really nice!" Alex noticed that Bridget seemed nervous about meeting his friends, so he reassured her: "Don't worry! I'm sure you'll get along with them!"



Alex smiled his nicest smile at her, but Bridget kept looking at her papers.

The morning passed quickly, and before they knew it, the bell was ringing to go to recess.

"Come on! Let's play!" Alex said.



Alex and Bridget walked outside for recess together. Alex told her all about the teachers and the school as he led her to a small group of students.

"These are my friends! Hey y'all, meet Bridget! She just moved into my neighborhood! Bridget, this is Cindy, Johnny, and Lily."



"Hi, Bridget! Nice to meet you!" said Cindy, who was wearing a really pretty green dress.

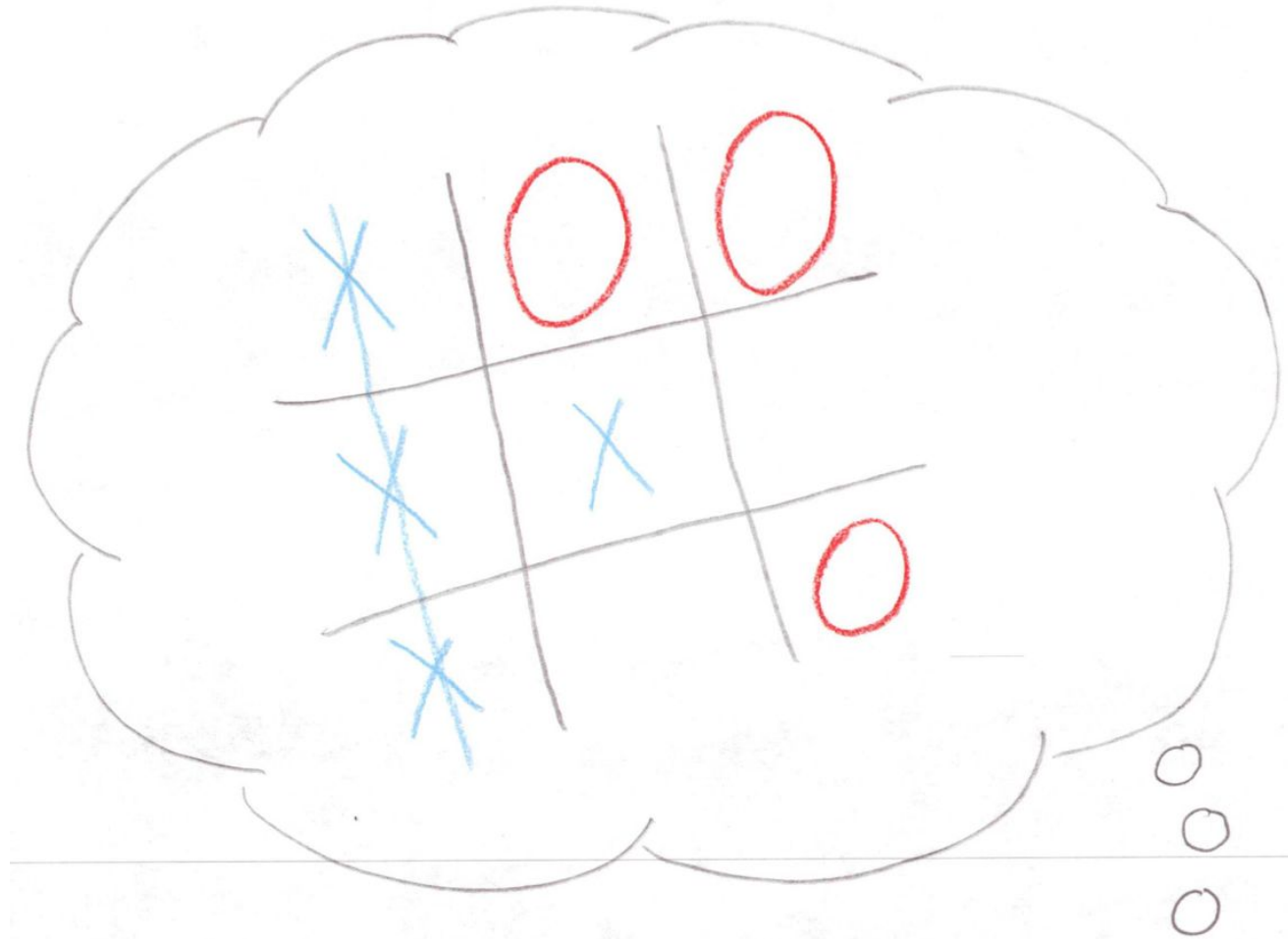
"Hey, Bridget!" said Johnny, who wore a cool hat.

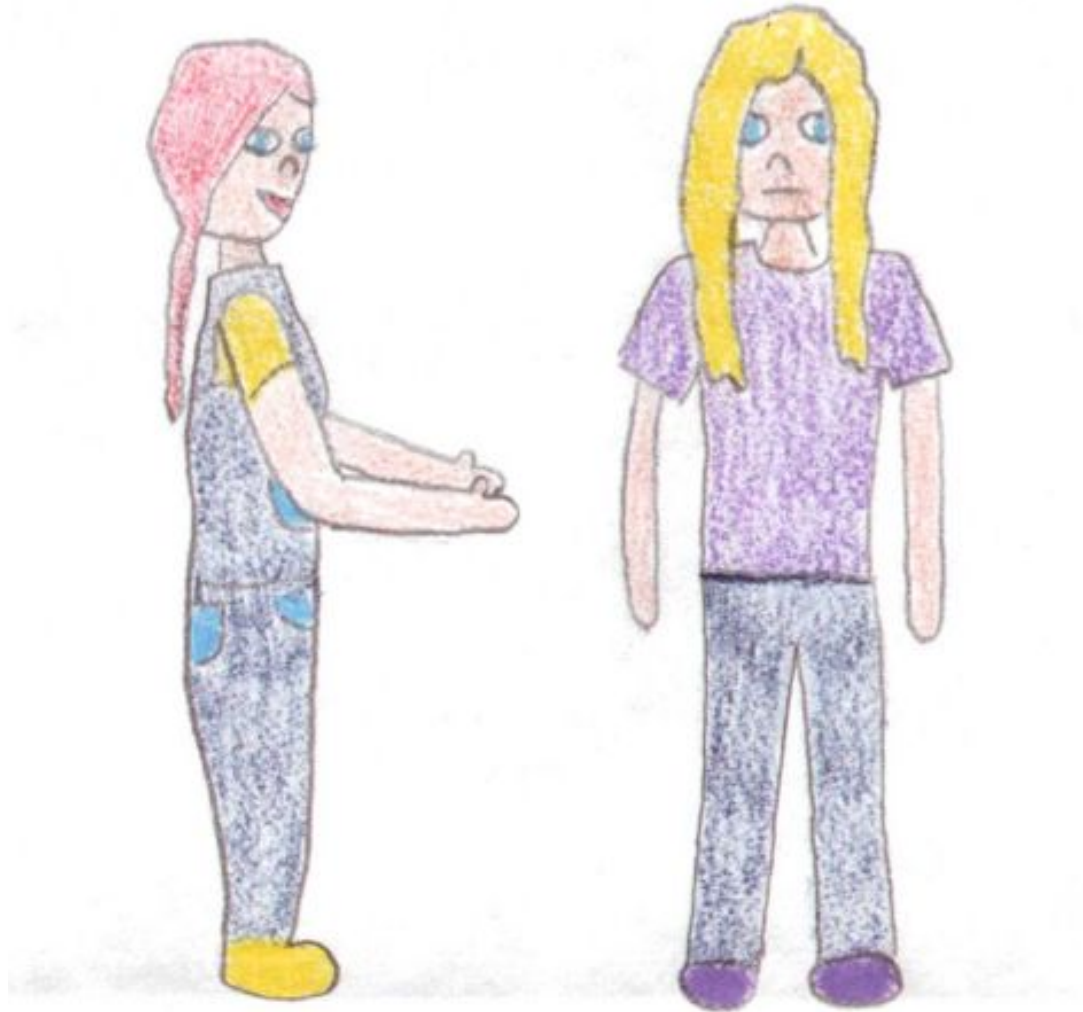
"Howdy, Bridget!" said Lily, who had hair as red as fire.

Bridget noticed that Johnny was in a wheelchair, and this surprised her. Seeing her surprise, Johnny explained, "I have a disability that makes it to where I can't walk, so I have to use a wheelchair to get around. But it doesn't stop me from having fun. Let's play a game!"



"Yes!" agreed the group. Lily held up a piece of chalk. "Can we play Tic-Tac-Toe?" she asked. The group smiled and nodded, eager to begin their recess.





"I don't remember how to play. Can you explain it, please?" Cindy asked. Lily explained how to play Tic-Tac-Toe to the group again, and everyone seemed to understand.

"Do you get it?" Lily asked Cindy.

"Yeah! I wanna play first!" Cindy shouted, "Do you want to play with me, Bridget?" But Bridget didn't respond. Lily saw that Bridget looked confused.

"Do you know how to play, Bridget?" she asked. Bridget continued to look confused. "Does she know how to play?" Lily asked Alex.

Alex replied, "Bridget has autism. That means that her brain works a little differently from ours. Sometimes, things need to be explained to her a little slower or repeated a couple of times. Try explaining it again, but slower this time." Lily nodded her head in understanding and went through the game again with Bridget but much slower.

Once Lily finished, Bridget's face brightened up, and she excitedly started playing with Cindy. Whenever Bridget would win a game, she would start humming loudly in excitement. At first, Lily thought this was weird.

But then Cindy won a game and exclaimed, "Yay!" while jumping up and down. Lily realized that Bridget humming wasn't weird. It was just her way of celebrating, just like how jumping was Cindy's way of celebrating.



"I want to do something else," said Cindy after a few games of Tic-Tac-Toe.

"Oh I know!" said Lily. "We can go play on the monkey bars!" The group all seemed excited, except for Johnny who looked sad.

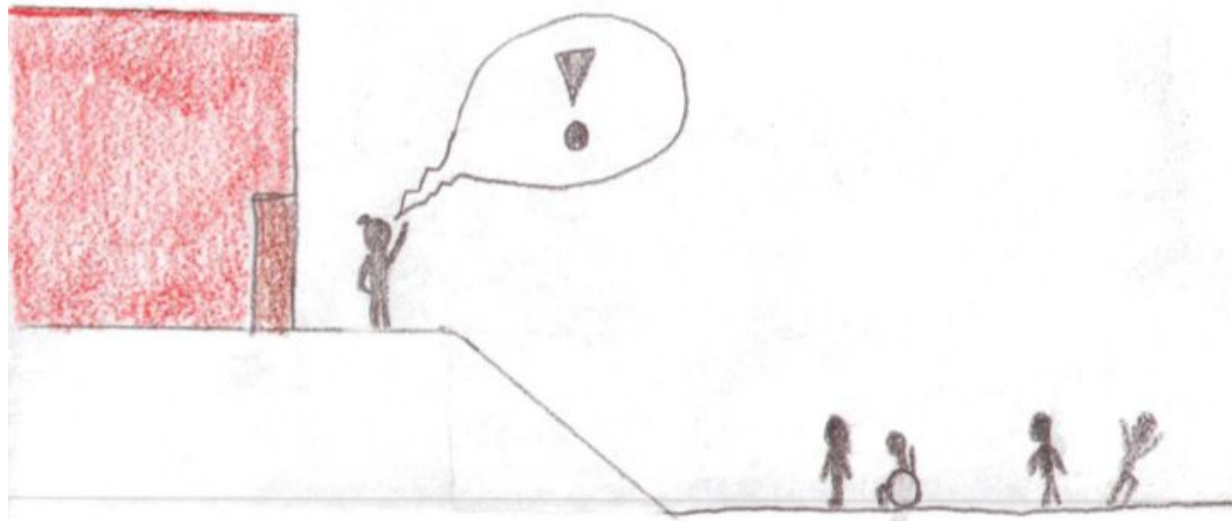
"You guys go ahead without me," said Johnny. "I'm just going to keep playing with the chalk." The rest of the friends then realized that Johnny could not play on the monkey bars because he was constrained to his wheelchair.

The group seemed unsure what to do until Alex said, "Let's go play in the flowers!" Johnny immediately perked up and agreed, so everyone went to a nearby patch of flowers. Bridget picked a dandelion and put it behind Johnny's ear, and giggled, "It makes you look pretty!" Johnny appreciated the gesture, and in return, he picked two dandelions and handed one of them to Bridget.





"Here, let me show you something really cool!" Johnny said. "If you take a dandelion and gently blow on it like this, the puffs fly away. Watch!" Johnny then blew on his dandelion and Bridget watched as the puffs flew away and started to giggle. "Now you try it!" Johnny said, so Bridget blew on her dandelion and happily hummed as the white dandelion puffs floated off into the wind.



"It's time to come inside for art class, kids!" called Ms. Honeysworth. Johnny noticed that Bridget seemed sad about having to go back inside.

"We get to go to art class next," said Johnny, "You will love it! We get to paint and draw and have tons of fun!" Bridget smiled. She liked to paint and draw.

"Come sit by me!" said Lily.

"We can all sit together! That way we can have TONS of fun!" exclaimed Alex.

ABC

Ms. Honeyworth



They all sat together, still laughing and smiling from the fun they had at recess.

"Hello again, class!" said Ms. Honeysworth cheerfully, "Are we excited for art class?"

"Yes!" the class responded.

"Lovely! Today we will be using a paint brush to paint a picture of ourselves," Ms. Honeysworth said. Bridget looked at the three globs of red, blue, and yellow paint that Ms. Honeysworth had put in front of her. She begin to mix and move the paint with her fingers.

"Remember, we can use our primary colors to make every other color." Ms. Honeysworth continued, "Does everyone remember how to make purple?" Hands shot up all over the room.

"Red and blue!" the students answered.

"What about orange?" asked Ms. Honeysworth. "Bridget, do you know how to make orange?"

Bridget did not answer. She was humming as she mixed and moved the paint on her plate. She liked the way it felt and the way the colors mixed. On her plate, she had painted a rainbow.



"Wow!" exclaimed Johnny, "Bridget knows how to make *all* of the colors!"

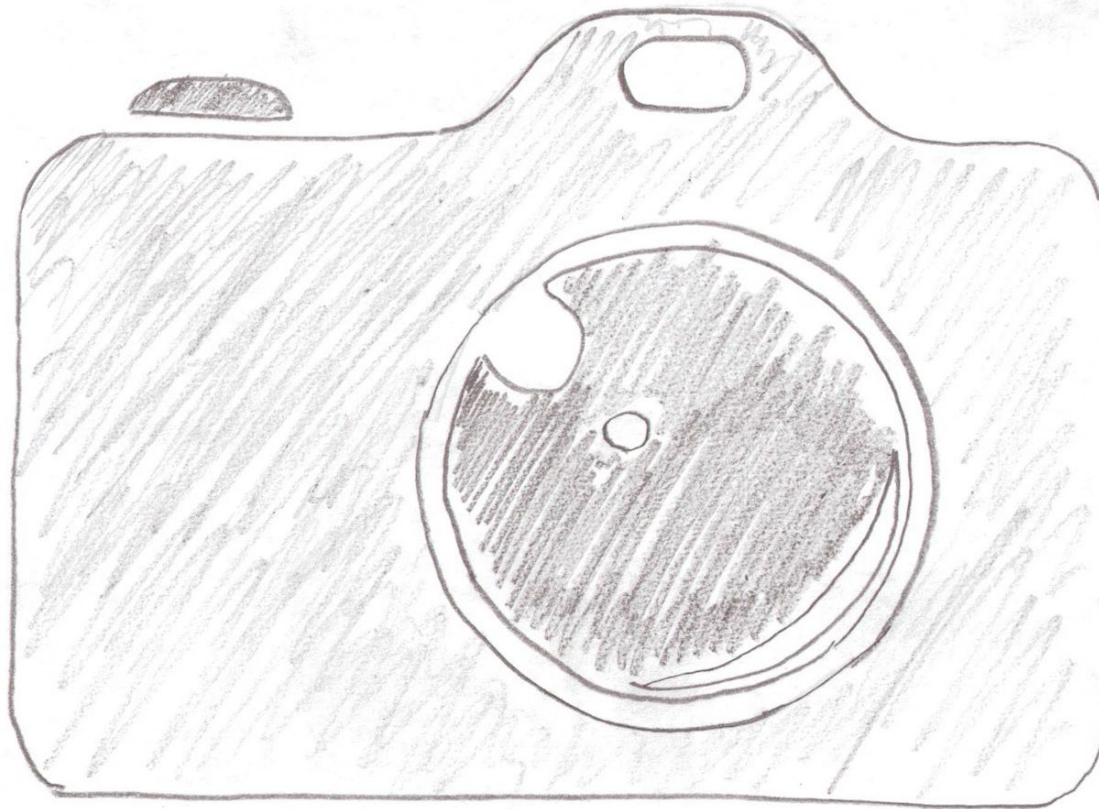
"That is wonderful, Bridget!" applauded Ms. Honeysworth. "You have a real talent for painting!"

"Can you help me do that?" Cindy asked Bridget.

"Yes! Yes!" she replied, laughing.



At the end of class, Ms. Honeysworth took a picture of each student holding up his or her self-portrait. Bridget held up her portrait and smiled from ear to ear as she hummed.



School was almost over, and all the students began to line up at the door.
"Ms. Honeysworth, can you take a picture of me and Bridget?" asked Alex.
"And me!" shouted Cindy.
"And me!" yelled Johnny.
"I want to be in the picture too!" exclaimed Lily.
"Everyone can be in the picture!" said Ms. Honeysworth.
Bridget hummed, "New friends!" she sang happily.

