

# That Left-Out Feeling

by Brinda Gupta



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"Awww, yeah, a BATTLE!" said Wyatt, pulling back his arm to give me a fist bump. "You see that, Rian?"

I looked up from my desk to see Ms. Chow writing on the board: "Battle of the Books!" She smiled while the class settled down and then said, "Are you ready to go into battle? Get prepared for this next month!"

"Is it a reading contest?" I was so curious that I forgot to raise my hand first.

"Good question, Rian!" said Ms. Chow. "It's not a race-you're not going to try to beat each other. We aren't going to see who can read the fastest or the most books, but you're going to be in teams of three, and you're going to set a reading goal for your team. Every team that meets their goal by the end of the month gets...wait for it...a prize!"

Even if the prize was something silly, that sounded pretty good to me. I turned to finally return Wyatt's fist bump, saying, "Teammates?"

"Oh, for sure!" he said. Wyatt and I liked a lot of the same books, so we could set a goal like reading every graphic novel in a series, or something like that.

The lunch bell sounded before Ms. Chow could explain any more rules, but as I gathered my things, Liya passed my desk and said, "Teammates?" to Wyatt and me. Liya was another good friend of ours. She and I took Hindi language class together and I knew she could read super-fast in both languages! If we set a goal like reading books by authors from different countries, she could help the team for sure.

"Yeah, teammates!" Wyatt chimed in, and I was both relieved and excited. I had my team, and we could spend lunch figuring out what we needed to do to get a Battle of the Books prize. We got to the cafeteria and quickly threw out a bunch of ideas at our table.

"We could read books with covers for every color of the rainbow," offered Liya.

"Or maybe start in alphabetical order and see if we can get all the way to an author whose name starts with H," suggested Wyatt.

I looked to our fourth friend at the lunch table, Kash. "Do you have ideas for us?" I asked him.

Kash picked at his bento box. "Why would I give you guys ideas?" he said gloomily. "I'll save that for my team.... whoever that is."

Wyatt blew air out of his mouth really fast while Liya muttered, "Oops...."

"Kash, come on," I said. "It's teams of three. If Ms. Chow said teams of four, then the four of us would be together, but she didn't."

"I see how I rank in the friendship lineup," Kash muttered.

"No, dude!" I felt awkward and frustrated. "Wyatt and Liya said something to me first. If you had, then it would be different."

"The three of you said something to each other pretty fast, huh?" Kash retorted. He scooped the rest of his lunch into his bag and stormed off.

"It's teams of THREE," I insisted to Wyatt and Liya.

"I know, but.... I can see his point," Wyatt said. "What if I'd been sitting next to Kash and the two of us formed a team right away? Or if you and Liya picked another kid you go to temple with? One of us would probably be pretty mad. You know that the four of us always do stuff together."

He was right. Not only would I think that I ranked last in that group, but I'd also be panicking about what team I *could* join. But in this case, I was on the inside and Kash wasn't. I felt like the only way to fix this would be if four people could be allowed on a team. So, as Ms. Chow walked by our table, I got her attention.

"Hey, Ms. Chow! Do you think we could have a team of four? We want Kash on our team too."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Rian," she quickly replied. "I didn't get a chance to say before lunch that I was going to draw names to assign random groups."

"UGHHH," I said as she walked away. "So Kash is mad at us for *nothing*?"

"It's not for nothing," Wyatt replied. "Even if Ms. Chow had let us form a four-person group with Kash, he knew that we had first teamed up without him."

"But that doesn't mean we don't like Kash," I protested.

"Yeah, but I bet that's what it looked like to him," Liya added.

As I thought about it, I knew we-especially I-had a lot of work to do to convince Kash that he was an equal friend.

"Rian, I feel like making this up to Kash is going to be a lot harder than any Battle of the Books," said Liya.

I agreed. But I really liked Kash, and I knew I wouldn't be able to enjoy any prize if one of my best friends felt bad about being left out.

That night in my room, as I read a graphic novel I had borrowed from Wyatt, I had an idea. I sat at my desk and got out my art supplies. Using the style of one of the graphic novels that all four of us had read and liked, I drew a few scenes of how I wished things had gone down that day. I finished with a panel of the two of us, Kash and me, with me saying that he was a special member of our group of friends, and the three of us were really sorry about the way we messed things up.

At the beginning of the next school day, I handed the pages to Kash in an envelope. He took it, looking surprised. I worried what he would think.

Later that day, Wyatt, Liya, and I were talking at our usual spot in the lunchroom. Kash came by, smiled, and said, "Hey, guys, is this seat available?"

# Tag--I'm It!

by W.M. Akers



"Tuesday. 12:45. Recess. The game is tag. The stakes are high. There is no time to waste," Ryan said this to himself under his breath, on the edge of the jungle gym where kids played tag.

A football fan, Ryan's favorite part of the game was the commentators. Their deep, serious voices made football seem like more than a game. They made it dramatic-like a gladiator fight from ancient Rome. Ryan thought gladiators were pretty cool.

When kids on his playground played tag, he pretended to be a commentator. In his deepest possible voice, he took the imagined audience through the ups and downs of the match.

"Around the corner comes Billy Watkins," he intoned. "Billy's having a strong season so far, and those who watch this sport closely think he might be about to step up to a higher level. If he fulfills his promise, his name could stand alongside the greats of the game-names like Shirley Tompkins and Judy Whitmore, Andy Tobin and George Francis."

As he came around the corner, though, Billy Watkins slipped in the mulch and fell on his face. He rolled back and forth on the ground, whimpering. No one showed sympathy.

"On the other hand," Ryan said, "Billy may disappoint us all."

Ryan knew something about disappointment. He had time to play commentator because nobody really wanted him to play tag. He'd never understood why, but when he joined the game, nobody would chase him. If he did somehow manage to become "It," nobody would run. But he didn't try to play; if he just narrated the game, he wouldn't be left out. He was still playing tag—he was just playing it in a different way.

"Hey kid!" said a voice behind him, a freckle-faced girl with frizzy pigtails named Angela. A newcomer to the game, Ryan thought to himself. A rookie hungry for respect. A-

"Why aren't you playing the game?" she barked, interrupting his reverie.

"I'm playing."

"No you're not! You're just standing over here being weird."

"I'm providing commentary, for, uh..." Ryan tried to think of anything to say besides "for the folks at home." He couldn't. "For the folks at home."

"What folks?! Are you on the phone or something?"

"Just leave me alone."

"I can't!"

"Why not?"

"Because I'm 'It!' Why aren't you running? I'm 'It', and that means you're supposed to run." Ryan shrugged. She poked him in the stomach. "Fine! Now you're 'It!'"

Ryan froze. He hadn't been 'It' for a long time. He didn't know what to do. The rest of the players stopped, too, and stared at him. If he moved, would they move too? Or would they stand there, waiting for him to quit embarrassing himself and get off the playground?

"Uh, weirdo!" shouted Angela. "This isn't freeze tag. Start running!"

So he ran the only way he knew how: with narration.

"Heart pounding in his ears, the frightened young commentator springs into action," he muttered. "He isn't sure how, he isn't sure why, but he knows one thing. He is going to get that girl with the pigtails."

"Quit talking to yourself, and run like you mean it!" said Angela.

"He races up the slide, and across the footbridge, his target in his sights just a few feet away. The bridge's wooden slats clatter under his feet, sending shockwaves up his spine and into his jaw. Ryan is undaunted. This will be his hour. He reaches toward his foe, stretches out his fingers, and-ow!"

Ryan's hands clutched air. He fell face-forward, off the jungle gym, landing where Angela had been just a moment before. She had slid down the fireman's pole. He had not been so graceful.

"Dazed and confused, the young competitor tries to get his bearings. He looks up and sees the face of his opponent staring down at him, looking concerned and curious about why Ryan is still talking to himself."

"I think you might have broken your brain," Angela said.

"Ryan's brain is fine. Angela is the one who needs to worry."

"Why?"

Ryan leapt to his feet and poked Angela in the stomach.

"Because Angela is 'It!'"

Ryan turned and ran, a happy gladiator, battling at last.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Use the article "That Left-Out Feeling" to answer questions 1 to 2.**

1. How did Kash feel when Wyatt, Rian, and Liya formed a reading group without him?
2. What did Wyatt, Rian, and Liya do to make up with Kash? Use details from the text to support your answer.

**Use the article "Tag--I'm It!" to answer questions 3 to 4.**

3. Why did Ryan usually play commentator during games of tag?
4. How did Ryan feel after Angela involved him in the game of tag? Use details from the text to support your answer.

**Use the articles "Tag--I'm It!" and "That Left-Out Feeling" to answer questions 5 to 7.**

5. Compare the way Kash is left out to the way Ryan is left out. Use details from both texts in your answer.
6. Compare the way Kash's and Ryan's feelings of being left out are resolved. Use details from both texts in your answer.
7. What message do the two texts send about how others can make someone feel included? Use details from both texts in your answer.