

The Truth About Teachers

Bradley and Miss Library sat side by side on the floor of the Big Book Building. Bradley opened the cover of *The Truth About Teachers*. The first page was familiar. It showed the Apple Island map that hung in the Teachers' Lounge back at school.

He flipped the page and began reading aloud.

All teachers, every single one of them, come from an island located far out in the Atlantic Ocean. It is named Apple Island. The island is divided in two halves. In the South, hard, sour crab apples grow. That is where the crabby teachers reside. Most of them live in the large, noisy urban sprawl, Teacher City. The North has pleasant pastures and forests of apple trees bearing delicious red apples. The kind teachers once lived in this part of the island, on farms and in the tidy village of Teacherville.

Bradley lowered the book. "I haven't seen a friendly teacher all day," he said. "And Teacherville is in ruins."

"Go on, go on," said Miss Library. "I wonder what happened."

Bradley turned the page. “Chapter Two might explain things. It’s called ‘The Squabble.’” He continued to read.

For centuries the entire race of teachers lived together in peace on Apple Island. Whenever an argument arose, I, Prince Apple, would solve it with my expert conflict-management skills.

No one knows how the squabble started or who was to blame, but it began during the annual tag tournament on the Grand Playground. Some teachers say the fight started when a teacher named Mr. Jump Rope from the South tripped Miss Recess from the North. Mr. Jump Rope said it was an accident, that he didn’t mean it, that if Miss Recess didn’t have such big feet she wouldn’t have tripped in the first place. But Miss Recess insisted he tripped her on purpose. One thing led to another until every teacher from the North was arguing with every teacher from the South. The Grand Playground became an ugly scene of name-calling, shouting, pinching, pushing, scratching, and sticking out tongues. The bickering became so bad that the island was on the verge of a full-scale civil war.

“My turn. My turn to read,” said Miss Library, and Bradley handed her the book. She pushed back her glasses and continued the story.

Five days of squabbling passed before the one thousand teachers who lived in the North held a meeting in the



Teacherville Gym. A teacher named Miss Lost-and-Found stood before the group and said, "Those southern teachers are getting crabbier and crabbier all the time. This island is no longer safe for us. It is time to leave." Next a teacher named Miss Globe

addressed the meeting. "I was in the Big Book Building yesterday and read about a land called America. It has spacious skies, amber waves of grain, and purple mountains from sea to shining sea. It sounds like a beautiful place to go."

"I make a motion that we build an ark to carry us to this place called America," called out Mr. Woodwork.

"All in favor of abandoning Apple Island to get away from the crabby teachers, raise your hand," said Miss Assignment. One thousand and one hands went up, including the two raised by Mr. Class Clown, who sat in the back.

"So the kind teachers left the island, leaving the crabby ones behind," said Bradley.

Miss Library thumbed through the book, scanning the pages as she went. "Well, listen to this," she said.

For the next month the northern teachers prepared for their journey. They built an enormous ark and named it Pedagog I. They painted it red and hung



a brass bell from the rafters of its peaked roof. The kind teachers loaded Pedagog I with bags of red apples, blocks of chalk, boxes of crayons, baskets of pencils, barrels of ink, bales of paper, bins of books, and all the other supplies they would need in the new land.

In the month of September they sailed from Apple Island. The journey was brutal. Fierce storms battered the good ship Pedagog I for nine months. Finally, one day in mid-June, the teacher on lookout blew her silver whistle and shouted, "I spy with my little eye . . . Land!" When the teachers reached shore they agreed to take a vacation. For the next three months they fished, swam, played baseball, and stayed up late at night.

Miss Library handed *The Truth About Teachers* back to Bradley. "The next chapter is called 'S.C.H.O.O.L,'" he said.

Upon arrival in America, the kind teachers discovered that many people lived there. Some of the citizens were tall like the teachers, but some were extremely short. These short people were called children.

In September, when the long vacation was over, the teachers held another meeting. First to speak was a lanky teacher named Mr. Tetherball Pole. "I find the small citizens interesting," he said. "They are fun and nosy and like to giggle. Too bad they don't know how to read books, write stories, or do math problems. I suggest we teach them how."

"Hear, hear!" called the others.

“We can build a large house where the small ones can come and learn each day,” suggested Mrs. Bulletin Board. “We can call it the House Of Official Learning—H.O.O.L. for short.”

“But we don’t want any of those tall people to come,” said Mrs. Scissors. “They are too boring. They’re always rushing off to meetings and worrying about something called money. I want to teach only the small citizens. We should call our new learning house the Small Citizens’ House Of Official Learning or S.C.H.O.O.L.”

“All in favor of teaching in a place called S.C.H.O.O.L., raise your hand,” said Miss Assignment. One thousand and one hands went up, including the two raised by Mr. Class Clown.

“My turn to read again,” said Miss Library. She took the book and flipped through the pages, stopping at a chapter called “Teachers Today.”

Although teachers enjoy teaching the small citizens, there is a good reason why they change classes each year. They do not want their students ever to discover a dark teacher secret. But I, Prince Apple, will tell it to you. Teachers never were young and never grow old. They always appear exactly the same as they did on the day you met them.

The kind teachers eventually built S.C.H.O.O.L.s all over the world. Unaccustomed to the manners and habits of the rest of the planet, however, they rarely venture off school grounds, day or night. If you are sneaky you might spy them

playing on the playgrounds late on moonlit nights. They'll be zipping down a slide or swinging on a swing to remind them of the carefree days back on Apple Island.

Miss Library slowly closed the book. "What remarkable things you learn by reading," she said.

"But there are still some mysteries," said Bradley. "Like how come my teacher, Mrs. Gross, is teaching in my school? She's the crabbiest teacher in the world. And I still don't know why the crabby teachers brought my class to this island."



Miss Library stood and studied the bookshelf above her head. "Voilà!" she said. She pulled out a yellow paperback called *The Truth About Teachers* (Revised Edition), written by Mrs. Gold Star, and she handed it to Bradley. He opened the book and discovered another map. This one showed only the southern half of Apple Island, including the enormous Teacher City. "With all the misteaching going on, I won't believe one word in this book," he said. "But there's no reason for this map to be incorrect." Examining the map, he found what he

wanted. Southeast of the Big Book Building was a black, L-shaped figure marked S.C.H.O.O.L.

“That’s where my class must be,” he said.

“Good chance,” said Miss Library. “There have been announcements on the intercom about a big assembly going on there this afternoon.”

The two remounted the motorladder. “Blast off!” said Miss Library, and away they rolled.

By the time Bradley could catch his breath, the ladder had stopped before the checkout counter. He gave Miss Library the paperback and she stamped the card inside.

“This book will be due in one hundred years,” she said. “Don’t forget that it is your responsibility to get it back on time.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Bradley. “But now I must hurry to S.C.H.O.O.L.”

Miss Library gave Bradley a hearty pat on the shoulder. “Good luck on your quest, young man,” she said. “You have quite a challenge ahead of you. But I believe with your courage and determination you will reach your goal. Adieu! Ciao! ¡Adiós! So long!”

Outside the Big Book Building, Bradley reopened *The Truth About Teachers* (Revised Edition). He studied the large L marked S.C.H.O.O.L. on the map.

“Miss Library is right,” he said. “That building is not going to be easy to reach. It’s smack in the middle of Teacher City.”