

The Specials



Books 1 Special Assignment



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He also wrote The Elevator Family, MVP: Magellan Voyage
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The Characters:



The Specials:

Jump Rope Student name: Jessamyn Robbins:

Expert at lassoing things with jump ropes

Ace+ Student name: Anthony Lane:

Math and science whiz

Spitball Student name: Sammy Newton

Excellent shot with spit wads

Noise Student name: Naomi Hornsby

Superb at imitating any sound

The Delinquent Specials:

Bad Student name Fulton Black

Can fly in raven outfit

Graffito:

Can turn the color of his surroundings to disappear.

Class Clown:

Can make anyone laugh at any time

Tease:

Can control animal behavior

OOO!--Out-of-Order!:

Expert compute hacker

1. Jump Rope



Jessamyn Robbins held the ends of her red jump rope.

"This time's the time," she said.

She raised her arms, and the rope twirled over her head in a wobbly arch. Her brown braid flipped outward, as she rose onto her toes. But before she could hop, the jump rope smacked her ankles, and she fell to the asphalt.

Laughter burst out across the school playground.

"Clumsy klutz!" shouted a boy by the swings.

"Good one!" called a girl. "Jessamyn couldn't jump over a crack without tripping."

Jessamyn untangled the jump rope from her legs and rose to her feet. She spotted Lisa Edward running toward her. The red-haired kindergartner cut through the swing set and stood by her side.

"Code Gold," Lisa whispered.

Jessamyn nodded. Without looking around, she quickly coiled up her jump rope and ran into the school. Inside the hallway, she tore past the office, the gym, and the lunchroom. She bound up the stairs, two at a time, and entered Room 4.

"Good, no teacher," she said, snatching her backpack off her chair.

She raced into the coat closet and reappeared ten seconds later. In place of her T-shirt and jeans, she now wore a red flannel shirt and pleated skirt. In place of her old sneakers, she wore white cowboy boots with silver stars on the sides. A red bandana circled her neck and a red cowboy hat covered her head. A red mask hid her eyes and nose.

The girl tied a lasso at the end of her jump rope. "First, a quick warm-up," she said. *"Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!"*

The lasso twirled over her head. Still revolving, it lowered around her shoulders, waist, and legs. With the rope circling inches off the floor, the girl hopped in and out of the revolving loop ten times, before drawing it above her head again.

"Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!" she repeated, and like a whip the jump rope shot toward the pencil sharpener on the wall.

Crack!

The sharpener cover flew off in an explosion of shavings.

"OK. Jump Rope is ready."

2. Ace+



By the foursquare court, Anthony Lane sat pretzel-style on the asphalt. He wore no shoes or socks and his zipper was open

Mrs. Mayday, the playground monitor, walked up to him. "Anthony, where in the world are your shoes and socks."

Anthony scratched his stiff, blond hair. "I forgot them in the classroom," he said.

The teacher peered at Anthony's pants. "And, Anthony, XYZ."

The boy looked down and pulled up his zipper. "I forgot that, too," he said.

A girl playing foursquare turned toward the teacher. "Anthony's always like that in class, Mrs. Mayday," she said. "He forgets things like pencils, lunch money, and homework."

"And he can't remember math facts or spelling words either," said a boy named Nathan.

"I'm sure Anthony tries his best," said Mrs. Mayday. "Don't you, Anthony?"

Anthony, however, hadn't heard this. His attention was on Lisa Edwards who was running toward him. The kindergartner detoured around the foursquare court and bent over to whisper in his ear.

"Code Gold!"

Even before Lisa had finished, Anthony was on his feet. He peeled into the school, down the hallway, up the stairs, and into

Room 4. Without stopping, he pulled his backpack off his chair. He was in and out of the coat closet in ten seconds flat.

He now wore a shiny blue jumpsuit with a white **A+** on back. A blue baseball cap with the **A+** logo and a blue mask completed the disguise.

"Mrs. Friendly said that a Special should never show off," he said, stepping to a desk in the third row. "But sometimes it's hard to resist."

On the desktop lay a math sheet. The boy in blue pulled a pencil from the back pocket of his jumpsuit and scrawled on the paper:

$$\mathbf{A=b}$$

$$\mathbf{A^2=ab}$$

$$\mathbf{a^2-b^2=ab-b^2}$$

$$\mathbf{(a-b)(a+b)=b(a-b)}$$

$$\mathbf{A+b=b}$$

$$\mathbf{2=1}$$

Salutations, Nathan

Ace+

3. Spitball



Ten students stood on the playground basketball court, choosing teams. The team captains, a fifth-grade boy and girl, studied the last boy to be picked, a fourth-grader with stringy black hair and a runny nose.

"You can have Sammy," said the girl captain

"Tough luck!" said the boy captain. "Your turn to choose, so you gotta take him."

Sammy Newton tipped from foot to foot. He ran a hand under his nose.

"But Sammy sucks. He's the worst shot in the world," the girl said. "He's so slow, I trip over him."

"School rules say whoever wants to play, plays," the boy replied.

Sammy picked up a basketball and stepped toward the silver pole supporting the backboard and hoop.

"I can shoot," he said, holding up the ball. "Watch."

The ball left his fingers. It hooked far to the right, missing the hoop by five feet.

The two teams exploded in laughter.

"That's what I call an airball," someone called out.

"Sam couldn't hit the side of the school," said someone else.

No one except Sammy saw Lisa Edwards run onto the court. She halted under the basket and mouthed the words, *Code Gold*.

Sammy took off toward the school. Once inside, he shot down the hallway so fast that notices fluttered on the walls. Seconds later, he enter Room 4's coat closet with his backpack and emerged sporting a yellow basketball uniform complete with yellow sneakers and yellow kneepads. A yellow headband held his slicked-back hair in place, and a yellow mask covered his eyes.

"Spitball is set," he said. "But first a practice drill."

The boy drew a gold tube, the width and length of a pencil, from the waistband of his shorts. He held the tube to his mouth, aiming it at the X in the alphabet pinned to the back wall. He blew twice.

Phoot! Phoot!

Two soggy paper wads shot from the tube. Both smacked the X dead center.

"Spot marks the X!" the boy in yellow said.

Heading toward the door, he grabbed an eraser from the chalk tray and tossed it over his shoulder.

Plunk!

The eraser landed in a wastebasket in the far corner. By then, however, Spitball was halfway down the stairs.

4. Mr. Whitherby



Jump Rope, Spitball, and AcePlus sat in the school office before the principal's desk.

Mr. Whitherby, the principal, looked grim. The armpits of his white shirt were damp and his bald head was shiny with sweat. "First, I must apologize for interrupting your recess," he said, squeezing his coffee mug like a sponge. "But this is a top school emergency. Code Gold, as Lisa told you. Quite frankly, Acorn Elementary School has a problem that neither the teachers or Mr. Slurry, our custodian, can handle."

"That's what the Specials are here for," said Jump Rope, slapping her rope against her plastic chair.

"What's the trouble this time?" asked AcePlus. "Are the fifth-grade bullies acting up again? Are more books missing from the library?"

Mr. Whitherby shook his head. "No, you Specialists solved those problems especially well. This crisis is far more serious." Here he leaned forward and said in a low voice. "This time it's *graffiti*."

The Specials exchanged looks.

Spitball twirled his gold tube like a baton. "Begging your pardon, sir," he said. "But graffiti isn't what we'd call a major school emergency."

The principal took a slug of coffee. "This graffiti is," he said. "Mysterious drawings and threatening phrases have appeared on walls all over the school. Mr. Slurry tries to scrub them off. But as soon as one picture is erased, another appears somewhere else almost instantly."

"What do the pictures show?" Jump Rope asked. "What are the words?"

Mr. Whitherby's cheeks burned red. "Quite frankly, it's embarrassing material," he said. "It's best for you three to see for yourselves. I've asked Mr. Slurry not to touch the latest graffiti in the girls' restroom."

AcePlus drew a notebook and pencil from his jumpsuit. "During lunchtime I'll work on an anti-graffiti paint in my lab," he said, jotting down notes

"We should have the wall scribbler tracked down by the end of recess," said Spitball.

"Excellent," said the principal. "As you know, the Special Force is an extra-curricular activity at Acorn School, along with the traffic patrol and chess club, that I strongly support. Quite frankly, the school budget is tight this year, but I'm glad that I found funds for your new uniforms and problem-solving gear. I know you'll soon solve this graffiti trouble and be back with your class in Room 5? Uh...Room 6?"

The Specials grinned.

"Still trying to guess who we are behind these masks, Mr. Whitherby?" asked Jump Rope.

"Sorry, our student identities must remain a secret," said Spitball.

"Only Lisa Edwards, the Special Messenger, can know even what classroom were in," AcePlus added.

Together, the Specials rose from their chairs. With a nod toward the principal, they ran out the office door.

5. Graffito



“Walk in the hall, Petey!” Spitball called to a first-grader, who came bolting around the corner.

The boy stopped in his tracks. He stared at the three Specials, who stood outside the Girls’ Room.

“Sorry, Spitball,” Peter said. “You guys on a case? Are you after some bad kids?”

“Special assignment,” AcePlus answered.

“Cooooool,” went the first-grader, and he continued down the hall in a fast walk.

The Specials entered the restroom. The door to the last stall was open. The trio stood outside the stall, studying the tiled walls and ceiling.

“Whitherby’s right, that’s not your every day graffiti,” Jump Rope said. “Check out those colors and detail! All drawn with felt pens.”

“The artist has special talent,” said AcePlus. “What a waste, Mrs. Friendly would say.”

“I count twenty monkeys, each one with the head of a teacher at this school,” said Spitball. “And there’s our principal swinging on the jungle gym.”

Jump Rope inspected a large raven drawn on the ceiling. “That black bird must have special meaning,” she said. “It’s reading the words those words.”

The words scrawled above the pictures read:

Bad times are coming!

The school will go Bad!

Set a Bad example!

Let the Bad times roll!

Graffito

Spitball checked his watch. "Eleven minutes until recess ends. We have that much time to catch this Graffito."

AcePlus went to the janitors cupboard and took out a spray bottle and sponge. "According to Mr. Whitherby, if I clean these tiles, the culprit will start drawing somewhere else."

"Got it!" Jump Rope and Spitball said together, and they raced from the room.

While Spitball searched the ground level hallways, Jump Rope sprang upstairs. She was passing Room 4 when a squeaking sound came from around the corner.

"Graffito and his felt pens" she said, sniffing the air. "I'll take him by surprise."

Jump Rope pressed herself against the wall. Holding her lasso at the ready, she crept to the corner.

"One, two, three," she said under her breath, and stepped forward.

A boy dressed in green bib overalls faced the wall. A green beret topped his head and a green fright mask hid his face. With a green felt pen, he was drawing a new graffiti masterpiece

"Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!" Jump Rope shouted, and the lasso sailed from her hand.

Before the rope was halfway to its target, however, the boy—*poof!*-- vanished. Just like that! One moment he was standing there grinning at Jump Rope, and the next he was gone. The lasso flopped to the floor where he had stood. Jump Rope held the other end of the slack rope as if she were walking an old dog.

Hearing the shout, Spitball and AcePlus flew up the stairs.

"No time for lariat practice," Spitball said, spying Jump Rope standing there alone.

Jump Rope looked wall-to-wall, ceiling to floor. "I had a clear shot at him. How could I have missed?"

AcePlus studied the fresh graffiti. "Check this out! Twenty beavers with teacher heads," he said. "And another raven on the ceiling."

Spitball read aloud the words written above the beavers. "*One Bad turn deserves another. Bad news is coming. Bad luck to you. Graffito.*"

"This Graffito is getting on my nerves," Jump Rope muttered.

6. Class Clown



Jessamyn Robbins, Sammy Newton, and Anthony Lane sat at their desks in Room 4.

Mrs. Washington stood before the white board. She was a serious teacher, who wore a serious pantsuit, serious shoes, and a serious expression on her face. She talked seriously about bicycle safety.

"Always use proper hand signals before making a turn," she said. "Who can demonstrate the hand signal for a left turn?"

Six students raised their right hands with the arm bent at the elbow. Meanwhile, Jessamyn in row two reached for her watch. She repeatedly pressed a silver button on the side.

Dit dit—dit dit dit—dit!

The watch sent out a high-pitched tone, a sound only a Special could hear. Short and long pings of Special code sailed throughout the classroom.

Dit dit—dit dit dit—dit!

Sammy and Anthony sat up in their seats. Grabbing their pencils, they began deciphering Jump Rope's message.

Graffito was short, male, first or second grader.

Anthony pulled up his sleeve. He pressed his watch button.

Dit dit—dit dit dit—dit.

I'll check the office files for new students.

A dog barked on the playground, as Sammy sent the next high-pitched Special message.

Dit dit—dit dit dit—dit.

So who's Bad? Or what's Bad?

At that moment, the classroom intercom crackled. Amid the static, a girl's voice called out, *"Hello, ladies and germs! Why did the math book look so sad?"*

All heads turned toward the speaker above the door. More crackling came out as the girl answered her own riddle, *"Because it has too many problems! Ha! Ha! Haaaaa!"*

Mrs. Washington stomped to the doorway and pressed the intercom call button.

"Office? What was that nonsense?" she said.

The girl's voice returned. *"Why did the teacher wear sunglasses?... Because her students were so bright! Ha! Ha! Haaaaa!"*

The teacher frowned. *"What's happening to this school? First we had graffiti on the walls. Now bad jokes on the intercom. Why aren't the Specials doing their job?"*

The lunch bell rang. As the students headed for the lunchroom, the hallway intercoms sent out more riddles.

"What did the teacher say when she gave her student a good report card?... Long time no C! Ha! Ha! Why did the teacher go cross-eyed?... Because she couldn't control her pupils. Ha! Ha! Haaaaa!"

The Specials knew they were needed. They returned to Room 4 and suited up.

"Someone has tapped into the school PA system," said Jump Rope, twirling her rope in a big O.

"That can be done at the circuit panel down in the boiler room," said AcePlus.

Waving his gold tube, Spitball headed for the door. *"So let's go stop that clown. I can't take much more of her lame humor."*

The door to the boiler room was located outside the school building. After AcePlus quickly picked the lock, the Specials stepped

down a stairway into warm, steamy darkness. The sound of drips, hisses, and rumbling furnaces greeted them.

AcePlus pointed toward small amber lights on the far wall. "Circuit board," he whispered.

Without a sound, the Specials crossed the cement floor. A blue flame beneath the water heater lit the way.

Soon the yellow lights revealed the outline of a girl, sitting on a stool before a panel of buttons and switches. She spoke into a microphone.

"Hello again, ladies and jellyfish!" she said. "What liquid won't freeze?"

Jump Rope started her rope spinning. Spitball held his tube to his mouth.

AcePlus reached for a light switch chord dangling in front of him. "Hot water," he called out, yanking down on the chord. "And that's what you're in right now."

The light bulb overhead went on. A disc of light danced upon the floor and wall. It lit up the girl sitting on the stool. She was dressed in an orange clown's costume. Her outfit included white clown's makeup, a round orange nose, big ears, and a frizzy orange wig. She smiled at the Specials with outsized orange lips.

"Jump Rope, Spitball, and AcePlus! What a special surprise," she called out. "Let me introduce myself. Knock! Knock!"

"Who's there?" the Specials said as one.

"Icy, Class Clown," said the girl.

"Icy, Class Clown who?" asked AcePlus.

"I see, Class Clown no more. Bye-bye."

In that instant, a plume of steam shot from a heating duct above the clown's head and engulfed her.

"Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!"

Jump Rope flung her lasso.

Phoot!

Spitball blew into his tube.

Both rope and spitwad smacked the wall. Class Clown was gone. A burst of light across the room told that she had escaped out the boiler room door.

Jump Rope stared at the limp rope in her hand. "Two misses in one day," she said. "Yippee-aye-boo-hoo!"

Spitball, still holding the tube to his lips, shook his head. "So now there's Class Clown to deal with."

"We have a lot to discuss with Mrs. Friendly this afternoon," AcePlus added.

7. Resource Room



Room 3C, formally a large storage closet, served as the resource room at Acorn Elementary School. Long and windowless, the room had a door at one end and a counter at the other.

In the center of the room, Mrs. Friendly, the special education teacher, sat at a jellybean-shaped table. She was a silver-haired woman who wore a black turtleneck sweater. Through black, rectangular-rimmed eyeglasses, she watched her three two o'clock students doing warm-up drills.

Jump Rope stood before a wooden rack attached to the wall. Hanging from the pegs was an assortment of jump ropes--long ropes, elastic ropes, barbed ropes, slender ropes braided from wire, and thick ropes with heavy steel handles.

Jump Rope chose a standard red jump rope and formed a lasso at the end. Spinning the loop above her head, she said, "New trick, Mrs. Friendly. I can tie up two troublemakers with one toss. *Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!*"

With a flick of her wrist, she doubled up the twirling lariat. The rope shot toward two pegs on the rack, lassoing both at once.

The special ed teacher clapped her hands. "Bravo, Jessamyn!" she said. "And, Anthony, what are you up to back there?"

AcePlus stood at his laboratory counter against the back wall. He swirled a blue liquid in a glass beaker.

"My *A+ Anti-Graffiti Formula* is finished," he announced. "If Mr. Slurry paints this Special solution on the school walls, any drawing Graffito does will instantly vanish."

For his part, Spitball knelt on the floor before a long opened leather case. It contained two-dozen tubes of various widths, lengths, and colors. He removed a two foot-long blowgun with holes drilled along its length like a recorder.

"Notice I've placed a milk carton in each corner of the room," he announced. "Now get this."

He held the tube to his lips and blew.

Phoot! Phoot! Phoot! Phoot!

Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!

All four milk cartons flung into the air.

Again Mr. Friendly applauded. "Enough practice, Specials," she said. "It's time for our debriefing."

Jump Rope, AcePlus, and Spitball sat around the jellybean-shaped table. One by one, they told the teacher about their encounters with Graffito and Class Clown.

"Their talents are extraordinary, Mrs. Friendly," AcePlus said.

"Either I'm losing my rope-tossing touch, or we're up against *especially special* skills," said Jump Rope.

The teacher shook her head. "What a waste. Those mischief makers sound like DS's."

The Specials exchanged glances.

"DS's?" asked Spitball.

"Delinquent Specials," Mrs. Friendly explained. "Students I've read about in textbooks, but never encountered at this school."

She looked toward the girl in the red cowgirl outfit. "Jessamyn, do you recall why you were first sent to special ed?" she asked.

Jump Rope nodded. "My kindergarten teacher said I lacked social skills. I overheard her tell my mom that I acted odd in class. I kept tripping over things and knocking over stuff."

"And you Samuel?" the teacher asked. "Why were you sent here?"

"Doctors said I had ADHD," Spitball replied. "I couldn't sit still in my seat. I couldn't pay attention to the teacher."

"How about you Anthony?"

"I flunked first-grade because I didn't learn my letters and numbers," AcePlus answered. "I was bored with school. During my second first-grade year I started coming here, because my teacher said I was so far behind."

Mrs. Friendly tented her fingers on the table. "Students come to this room for many reasons," she said. "However, over the years I've learned that they all, each and every one of them, bring with them a *special* talent. Every student is a specialist in something. Some can draw, play the piano, or run fast. Some are poor readers but great spellers. Some can't spell but have a great mind for math."

"You always made us feel special, Mrs. Friendly," said Jump Rope.

"Yes, and every so often I find students, such as you three, who have extraordinary specialties," the teacher went on. "As you know, special ed teachers call these *especially special* skills. With the proper encouragement, practice, and direction, these powers can be strengthened and put to good use."

"That's why you trained us and started the Special Force," said Spitball. "So we can use our skills to help kids at this school."

"Before coming here, I didn't think I could do anything right," said AcePlus. "I'd get mad when someone called me dumb."

The teacher lowered her head. "Yes, and I'm afraid there are students whose *especially special* talents are never recognized. These students can grow frustrated, bitter, and angry."

"*Delinquent Specials*," said Jump Rope."

The teacher nodded. "I'm guessing that Graffito and Class Clown have *especially special* powers. A trainer discovered their talents, but taught them to use them in mischievous ways. The mystery is who that trainer could be."

At that moment, Lisa Edwards burst into the room. She waved her arms until she caught her breath. "You guys, get to the playground!" she finally blurted out. "Code Gold and a half!"

In a flash, Jump Rope, Spitball, and AcePlus were out the resource room door.

8. Tease



Dogs were barking. Children were shouting.

The entire first-grade class was perched on the top level of the climbing structure. Below them, four Doberman pinschers wove in and out of the bars, snapping their pointed jaws and showing their slimy teeth.

A first-grade girl waved toward the school doors. "There they are!" she cried. "The Specials are coming!"

"Do something special, Specials," called a boy.

"Cooooool," called Peter, next to him.

Nearby, Mr. Whitherby clung to the top of a tetherball pole. The seat of his trousers was missing. A large German shepherd sat on the asphalt, snarling up at him.

"Step it up, Specials!" he called out. "I don't think I can hold on much longer."

"Where in the world have you Specials been?" cried Mrs. Mayday. Two pit bulldogs had the playground monitor pinned on top of the chin up bar.

Jump Rope, Spitball, and AcePlus charged across the playground.

In one swift motion, Jump Rope started four lassos, two in each hand, twirling. She hurled them around the necks of the four Doberman's.

"Come along, doggies," she called, pulling the dogs out the playground gate.

Phoot! Phoot! Phoot!

Spitball shot three spitwads from his gold tube. One wad smacked the German shepherd on the snout. The others stung the bulldogs' behinds.

"Bull's eye!" he shouted, as all three dogs took off across the soccer field.

"Hurrah for the Specials!" the first-graders cheered from the jungle gym.

Mr. Whitherby slid down the tetherball pole, holding a hand over his bottom. "My best pair of pants ruined," he said.

"What in the world were those dogs doing on the playground?" said Mrs. Mayday, jumping off the chin up bar.

In the meantime, AcePlus noticed something purple peering around the corner of the school.

"I think I spy another Delinquent Special," he told the other Specials. "I'll be right back."

At top speed, AcePlus sprinted around the school building in the opposite direction. Soon he was creeping up behind a tall boy dressed in a purple alligator costume. Leaning his purple snout forward, he was watching the playground action.

"Doggone, DS!" AcePlus called out.

When the alligator turned, the Special grabbed him and pinned him against the wall with his fist.

"Why did you bring those dogs here?" he snarled.

The boy shrugged his scaly shoulders. "The dogs weren't here to hurt the kids, just tease them," he said. "That's why I'm called Tease."

"Who's your trainer?" AcePlus asked.

"I can't talk now, Ace," the alligator replied. "I have more teasing to do."

At that moment, the leaves in a nearby tree rustled and a buzzing sound filled the air.

Buzzzzzzzzzz!

A swirling black cloud left the treetops. It rose over the playground and hovered above the students. Around and around the cloud spun as it lowered toward the asphalt.

Buzzzzzzzzzz!

"Yellow jackets!" Jump Rope shouted.

"Run for the school!" cried Spitball.

The black and yellow pests swarmed around the first-graders. They screamed. They waved their arms and ducked their heads.

"Help! Help us Specials!" they shouted.

Buzzzzzzzzzz!

Jump Rope tossed a lasso, but it only caught air.

Phoot! Phoot! Phoot! Phoot! Phoot!

Spitball's spitwads dropped five wasps, but thousands remained.

AcePlus let go of the purple alligator. "Later, gator," he said, and rushed back to the playground.

Buzzzzzzzzzz!

"Funny, the yellow jackets aren't stinging anyone," Jump Rope called out. "They're just buzzing around heads, teasing the kids."

"I believe a DS named Tease is controlling the insects," said AcePlus. He looked toward the corner of the school, but the purple alligator was gone.

The wasps kept buzzing, and the first-graders kept shouting, until suddenly, a new sound--*Quark! Quark! Quark!*--filled the playground.

"That sounds like seagulls!" Spitball shouted.

Quark! Quark! Quark!

"But there's no sea near here," AcePlus added.

Quark! Quark! Quark!

The noise had an immediate effect upon the yellow jackets. They regrouped and swarmed off over the treetops.

The Specials looked up, expecting to see white birds soaring over the school.

Instead, a tall girl stood on the roof. She wore a brown leotard. A band of brown feathers circled her head, and a brown mask disguised her eyes.

The girl's mouth opened.

Quark! Quark! Quark!
The seagull calls returned.
The girl waved and stepped out of sight.
“What just happened?” Jump Rope asked
“That girl saved the day,” said Spitball. “What better way to get
rid of yellow jackets than to make the sound of their enemy, birds.”
“She’s not a third *Delinquent Special*,” said AcePlus. “She’s one
of us.”

9. Noise



After school, Jessamyn, Sammy, and Anthony stopped by Room 3C.

“What a day it’s been,” Jessamyn told Mrs. Friendly.

“Who is that Special we saw dressed in brown?” asked Sammy.

“What class is she in?” Anthony asked.

The special ed teacher pushed back her rectangular eyeglasses. “Sometimes an answer is right under your nose,” she said. “But your nose gets in the way and blocks the view.”

As she spoke, Naomi Hornsby entered the room. Naomi was new to the fourth grade. So far, she had few friends and few fourth-graders knew much about her.

“How was your day, Naomi?” Mrs. Friendly asked.

“F-f-fine,” the girl answered.

“Anything *special* happened?” the teacher asked.

Naomi smiled. “A b-bit.”

Jessamyn, Sammy and Anthony knew Naomi came to Room 3C for speech therapy. So they weren’t surprised when she sat down with them at the jellybean-shaped table. They were surprised, however, when Naomi opened her mouth. Out came the sound of the school’s recess bell.

Sammy smacked his forehead. “You’re the girl on the roof!”

"And you sit in front of me in class, right under my nose," said Jessamyn.

"Your Special effect was fantastic," Anthony put in.

Naomi grinned. "Quite frankly, I feel I already know you," she said, without a stutter. Her voice was an excellent imitation of Mr. Whitherby's. "To be frank, I've listened to many of your Special code conversations in class."

"Soon after Naomi started coming to this room, I recognized her *especially special* gift," Mrs. Friendly explained. "I thought you Specialists might need an extra hand someday, so I started training her. She's a quick learner and her specialty, the ability to imitate sounds and voices, is uncanny."

In the voice of Mrs. Washington, Naomi said, "And I found out that I don't stutter when I'm using someone else's voice."

"So have you chosen a Special name yet, Naomi," asked Jessamyn.

Naomi nodded. "C-call me Noise."

Mrs. Friendly opened a laptop computer on the table. "Now, Specials, I'm afraid there's more bad news. Someone hacked into the school's computer and changed the report card grades. The hacker also left a message."

The teacher tapped on the laptop keyboard. A large, pink tongue appeared on the screen. Words below it read:

Special Delivery for the Specials.

From OOO!

"A fourth DS," Jessamyn groaned.

"And this one's in cyberspace," said AcePlus.

Naomi cleared her throat. "I-I know Triple-O!" she said. "Her name stands for Out-of-Order, and sh-she can hack into any computer anywhere. I also know Graffito, Class Clown, and T-T-Tease."

Mrs. Friendly looked surprised. "Go on, dear."

"A t-teenager named Fulton Black t-trained the DS's. He was also m-my trainer."

"Fulton Black?" said the teacher. "He's a former student of mine, a brilliant one. A notorious trouble-maker too."

Jessamyn turned toward Naomi. "Does that mean...?"

"Y-yes, I was trained to be a Delinquent Special," the girl admitted. "You see, ever since kindergarten, k-kids made fun of my s-stuttering. One day Fulton Black showed up at my old school. When he heard me imitate the fire alarm, he said that was wonderful. He told me to make rude noises in class. For the first time kids n-noticed something about me other than my s-stutter."

"And somehow Fulton arranged for all the DS's to be transferred to Acorn Elementary School," said AcePlus. "But why?"

"I-I don't know Fulton's plan," Naomi said. "He just instructed us to start making trouble on this day, April third. I-I never t-told you about this, Mrs. Friendly, b-because I hoped it wouldn't happen. I'm sorry."

Mrs. Friendly took an old Acorn School yearbook off her bookshelf. She showed the Specials a picture of a freckle-faced boy, who was sticking out his tongue.

"Fulton had at least five *especially special* powers," she said. "He was also angry and frustrated. Before I could help him, he left the school."

"Even if Fulton were here, I d-doubt we'd recognize him," Naomi explained. "He's a m-master of masquerade. At my old school, he disguised himself as the secretary, and our principal never suspected a thing. He also would disguise himself as a parent if he wanted to take one of us DS's out of school for the day. "

Mrs. Friendly removed her eyeglasses. "Well, Naomi, it's good that you decided to use your *especially special* abilities for the good," she said. "Just remember that to remain on the Special Force you must kept up your grades."

"I'll t-try my best."

"Welcome to gang," said Jump Rope.

"We sure can use more Special help," said Spitball.

"I've a feeling we'll be hearing from Lisa Edward, our Special Messenger, often in the next few days," said AcePlus.

Noise opened her mouth wide. Out came the sound of a bugle tooting a cavalry charge.

10. More School Troubles



The next morning Jessamyn, Sammy, Anthony, and Naomi entered the school together. More graffiti covered the hallway walls.

"A Special Treat," Jessamyn read off one wall. *"Graffito."*

"Graffito is cunning," Naomi explained. "He can camouflage himself to blend with anything he stands near. That's why teachers never catch him doing his drawing."

As the four students passed the office, they heard Mr. Whitherby's voice.

"What a morning! The bells won't ring and the fire alarm went off five times. Now all test scores have been altered in the computers! Is Lisa Edwards here yet? Have her get the Specials. I've a few frank questions to ask them."

"We may never meet Triple-O!" Naomi told the others. "She hacks from a home computer and never attends school."

At that moment, Class Clown's voice blared from the hallway intercom. *"Good morning, gorillas and boys! Why did the Specials cross the road? Whoops, sorry, the Specials are so clumsy they couldn't cross the road. Ha! Ha! Haaaaa!"*

Anthony scratched his thatch of blond hair. "That leaves only Tease," he said. "I wonder what the purple gator is up to."

As he spoke, a scream came from the kindergarten room. Miss Sweet, the teacher, ran out the door.

"Someone fetch the Specials!" she cried. "Our class pets have escaped from their cages! The rat took over my desk! The rabbit chewed up our picture books. And the snake won't let anyone sit on the rug!"

Jessamyn, Sammy, and Anthony looked toward Naomi.

"Yes, Tease can control the action of any animal," she explained.

When the team entered Room 4, Mrs. Washington was erasing graffiti from the whiteboard. It showed the Specials sitting on stools, wearing dunce caps. In the fish tank, the goldfish sloshed water onto the floor. In the back of the room, the computer screen showed a pink tongue along with the words:

What's so special about a Special?

"How many Specials does it take to screw in a light bulb?" Class Clown called on the intercom. "I don't know, but you're about to find out!"

Shortly afterward, the classroom lights turned off.

"Ha! Ha! Haaaaa!"

The four Specials slipped into their seats.

Sitting in the dim light, Jessamyn pressed her watch button.

Dit dit—dit dit dit—dit!

Have a special day, Specials.

11. Fulton



Mr. Whitherby held up a sheet of paper.

"Here's a list of complaints I've received from teachers this morning," he told the four Specials, sitting before his desk. "One...computers receive only X-rated websites on the Internet. Two...third-grade desks are filled to the brim with applesauce. Three...all drinking fountains spout purple water. Four...eels found in the Boys' Room toilets. Five...all classroom globes are missing Canada. The list goes on and on."

Spitball sucked the end of his gold tube. "We believe a former student, Fulton Black, is responsible for these pranks," he said.

The principal ran a hand over his smooth head. "Fulton Black? Yes, I remember Fulton Black," he said. "Mr. Black spent many hours in this office. Quite frankly, I was relieved when he left the school."

"We think he's returned in disguise," said Noise.

"And we intend to track him down this recess," Jump Rope put in.

Mr. Whitherby gulped from his coffee mug. "As you know, Specials, this afternoon is our All-School Band Assembly," he said. "I want this school running smoothly and safely by then."

The Specials left the office. Almost at once, they spotted an unfamiliar custodian down the hallway, wiping graffiti off the library door.

Jump Rope started her rope twirling. "That must him," she said.

Spitball inserted bits of paper in his mouth for fresh ammo.

"Let's go," said AcePlus.

The team charged up to the janitor. A look of panic crossed the man's face. The nametag on his gray overalls read: MR. MALO.

"Funny costumes," he said with an German accent. "You kids trick-or-treating?"

"Where's Mr. Slurry?" AcePlus said.

Mr. Malo shrugged. "He quit. He said too many crazy things happen at this school." The man gestured to the graffiti on the door. "See? Crazy!"

The four Specials lowered their weapons.

"Sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Malo," said Noise.

Jump Rope coiled up her rope. "But we'll catch the menace who's messing up these walls."

The custodian went back to work, muttering to himself, "Crazy school. Everything here's crazy."

The Specials continued down the hall. But when they rounded a corner, they nearly tripped over another man in gray overalls. He knelt under the drinking fountain.

"Mr. Slurry?" said Noise.

The janitor looked up, waving his wrench. "Purple water!" he grumbled. "Don't just stand there, Specials. Go catch the vandal who did this!"

The Specials shot back around the corner, but Mr. Malo was gone. In his place was a message scrawled on the wall:

BAD MORNING TO YOU, SPECIALS!

HAVE A BAD DAY!

Spitball rammed his tube into his waistband. "Fulton," he muttered.

"He's making us look like fools," said AcePlus.

Recess was nearly over before the Specials ran into Mr. Whitherby again. A stooped gray-haired man stood by his side.

"There are our school super-heroes now," the principal said. "Jump Rope, Spitball, AcePlus, and Noise, let me introduce you to Mr.

Mauvais, our newly-elected school board member. He stopped by for a school tour."

The man shook hands with each Special.

"The Special Force is one of the many extra-curricular activities we have at Acorn School," Mr. Whitherby told the school board member. "Quite frankly, outfitting the Specials was my idea."

Mr. Mauvais smiled. "The School Board has heard about many of your Special acts," he said with a French accent. "We're proud of you young people." He drew an envelope from his coat pocket and handed it to AcePlus. "Here's a little something for your efforts."

Mr. Whitherby placed a hand on Mr. Mauvais's shoulder. "Now I'll show you our gym," he said, leading him down the hall.

When the hallway cleared, AcePlus tore open the envelope. "Does anyone recall a recent school board election?" he asked.

He held up a piece of paper with the words:

SO FAR, SO BAD, SPECIALS!

The foursome flew down the hall. They burst through the gym doors, but Mr. Whitherby stood alone under the basketball hoop.

"Where is he?" Spitball called. "Where's Mr. Mauvais?"

"He left suddenly to work out a school board problem," the principal said. "Isn't it wonderful that our school district is in such caring hands."

Jump Rope whipped the floor with her rope. "Fulton's done it again."

At lunchtime, Jessamyn, Sammy, Anthony, and Naomi inched their way forward in the cafeteria line. Today was pizza day, and as Jessamyn pushed her lunch tray along the metal rods in the serving area, she studied the wheels of pizza behind the glass.

"Well, there's our Special of the Day," she heard a voice say in an Italian accent. "What'll it be, Jump Rope? Pepperoni or cheese?"

Alarmed that someone knew her secret identity, Jessamyn looked up. A new serving lady stood there. She was tall, blond, and wore thick makeup.

"Fulton Black?" Jessamyn said under her breath.

The serving lady smiled. "At your service, dear. But what a pity. Out of your cowgirl getup you have no Special power to try and stop me."

He turned toward Anthony next in line. "And how about you, AcePlus, our Blue Plate Special? Pepperoni? Cheese?"

"You never looked lovelier, Fulton," Anthony said.

Sammy came next. "So what's the deal, Fulton? What're you and your delinquents doing at this school? Whatever it is, the Specials will soon put a stop to it."

"Indeed, Spitball, you and your little peashooter frightens us so," Fulton said. "But excuse me, I see a dear old friend to whom I must say hello." He smiled at Naomi. "Ciao, N-N-Noise...Special Edition. I hear you now specialize in birdie cries."

"Your games are over, Fulton," Naomi snarled. "You and your band of behavior problems are no m-match for the Specials."

The blond lady leaned forward. She served each Special a piece of pizza. Whiffs of stale tobacco stank the air, as she whispered, "I'm having so much fun, Specials. And this is only the start of something...something really Bad. Now move along, please. Next in line! Pepperoni or cheese?"

12. Lisa



Mrs. Friendly pointed to an M on the white board. “Mmmmm,” she said.

“Mmmmm,” repeated Lisa, Peter, and Alice, who sat at the jellybean-shaped table.

The teacher slid her finger to an R. “Rrrrrr.”

“Rrrrrr,” the students echoed.

The special ed teacher checked the clock. “Hmmm,” she went.

“Hmmm,” said Lisa, Peter, and Alice.

“Time to return to class,” Mrs. Friendly said. “But Lisa, before you go, may I have a word with you?”

After Peter and Alice left, Lisa jabbed her pencil into her frizzy red hair. She rubbed her nose, leaving a gray smudge. A comma of glue colored the collar of her shirt, and periods of paint dotted a sleeve.

First, Mrs. Friendly explained to the kindergartner about Fulton Black and the DS trouble. “I imagine our Special Messenger will be needed often,” she said. “I also wanted to tell you that your test scores are in. They’re low.”

Lisa scowled. “I detest tests.”

“Poor performance on exams is a common Special trait,” the teacher explained. “Although the Specials have extraordinary abilities in reading and math when put to practical use. Yes, Lisa, I believe

you're ready to begin Special training. Have you had any more, um, *moments?*"

"Lots," Lisa replied. "Yesterday I looked at the pencil sharpener and the handle spun. Anything metal. Especially when I'm angry. I even watched the classroom clock and the minute hand moved faster to recess time."

The teacher jotted in a notebook. "Your *especially special* power is developing rapidly," she said. "If you work hard, by first grade you'll be ready to join the Special Force."

Lisa ran a stained finger under her nose, leaving a gray mustache. "I can't wait to be a Special," she said. "I'm sick of being called Sloppy Carrot-Top at school."

Mrs. Friendly smiled at the girl's untidy hair, untied shoes, and untucked shirt. "The name-calling might not change, dear," she said. "Remember, your specialty must be kept hidden from classmates."

At that moment, Mr. Whitherby called over the intercom, "*Mrs. Friendly, if Lisa Edwards is with you, please give her this message: Two tutors in tutus taught two too many to's. Toodle-oo.*"

The teacher and kindergartner laughed.

"Lisa, how naughty. That's the silliest secret signal yet you've asked Mr. Whitherby to say," said Mrs. Friendly. "What does it mean?"

"Code Silver," Lisa answered. "The Specials should suit up and be on stand by."

"Mr. Whitherby suspects trouble at the band assembly," said Mrs. Friendly. "So off you go."

Lisa hurried from Room 3C. She was about to climb the stairs when she tripped over something. She landed hard on her knees.

Turning, she saw a leg. The leg, inside green pants, stuck out of the wall. As she watched, a boy clad in green overalls, beret, and mask emerged from the wall as if he had been part of the paint.

The boy stood over her. "Did you have a nice trip, Sloppy Carrot-Top?" he asked. "Compliments of Graffito."

Lisa leaped to her feet. She bolted down the hall, only to bump into a girl in an orange clown's costume.

*"What did Lisa Edward say to the Specials?" the clown asked.
"Nothing, because Lisa is a kid who's about to be kidnapped."*

13. Bad Luck



One by one classes filed into the gym. They sat on the floor, kindergartners in front, and fifth-graders in back

Mr. Whitherby stood on stage, adjusting a microphone. Behind him, the school band fingered instruments and waved to classmates. Trumpets squawked, clarinets squealed, and flutes squeaked.

As fourth-graders, Sammy, Anthony, and Naomi sat near the back of the gym. Jessamyn, a saxophone player, sat in the front row of the band. Since Lisa hadn't summoned the Specials all afternoon, they figured Fulton Black had gone home, and they could enjoy the concert.

Mr. Whitherby held up two fingers to silence the students. The microphone squealed before his voice boomed from the gym speakers. "Good afternoon, kids! Let's start off the band assembly by welcoming the Acorn School District band teacher, Mr. Humburger!"

A skinny man with a ponytail and goatee stepped to the mike. "Our first piece will be *When the Saints Come Marching In*," he announced.

Mr. Humburger raised his baton. The players raised their instruments. The bandleader swished his stick, and the musicians puffed and blew. But no sound, not a note, came from the stage.

Laughter rose from the floor.

"Sh! Sh!" went the teachers who sat on folding chairs by the gym door.

At that moment, the gym went black. Not a pixel of light came from behind the window shades or from beneath the wide doors. Even the red Exit signs were out.

"Hooray!" cried some students.

"Sh! Sh! Sh!" repeated the teachers

"The light switch doesn't work," one teacher called out.

"The doors won't open as well!" called another.

"You mean we're trapped in here?" Mr. Whitherby exclaimed from the stage. "You mean, no one can return to class?"

"Hooray!" the students cried again.

"Sh! Sh! Sh!" the teachers answered.

A silent moment passed, before a beam of light, a single white shaft, shot from the back of the gym. The spotlight struck center stage. It angled upward, leaving a white circle on the gym ceiling.

Now from the speakers came Class Clown's voice. *"Girls and boys! Boys and girls! Turn your attention to the light above your heads!... Presenting something extremely bad!...Bad news! Bad taste! Bad company! Bad breath!...The original bad boy himself! Heeeeeeeeeere he is...Bad!"*

Gasps rose from the floor as a shadow crossed the pool of light. Following the shadow glided a giant raven with its black wings spread wide. The bird stopped in the white circle, hovering there like a kite before a full moon.

After their eyes adjusted to the brightness, the students saw that the raven was actually a boy of about fifteen. He wore a rubber wet suit, covered with black feathers. A feathered hood bound his head, and a black mask with a long yellow beak shielded his face. How he stayed aloft, no one could tell.

"I am *Bad!*" the teenager called out. "I am not half bad! I'm not going bad! I *am* Bad!"

Mr. Whitherby called from the dark stage. "Get down from there, mister, whoever you are."

The teenager sneered. A flap of wings sent him gliding toward the stage. The spotlight stayed on him. He landed next to the principal, now standing in the bright circle with his arms crossed.

"Too *bad* for you, Mr. Whitherby," Bad said. "Bad's in a *bad* mood, and when he's feeling *bad*, it's *bad* to be on his *bad* side!"

"Quite frankly, you're in bad trouble, mister," the principal replied. "The Specials will be here any second now."

"Your Specials will soon come to a *bad* end," said the teenager. "Now, no more *bad*-mouthing!"

Here the raven raised a wing, and the principal clutched his throat. His eyes bulged and his face reddened. Although his jaw bobbed up and down, no words came out.

"*Bad* taste in your mouth, Mr. Whitherby?" Bad asked. "When I was in school, teachers told me to *sound it out* when I was reading. Well, guess what? Instead of sounding it out, I learned how to take out sounds. Not *bad*, eh? Yes, *Bad*! Now, Mr. Whitherby, go to Time Out!"

On command, the principal stumbled out of the spotlight. He stepped to an empty chair and sat down.

Bad spread his black wings and bowed to the audience. "Yes, boys and girls, for years teachers had power over me," he said. "Now I have power over the teachers. Teachers will obey anything I say! Not *bad*, eh? Yes, *Bad*!"

At this point, Mrs. Washington, who sat in a folding chair with the other teachers, called out, "Stop horsing around, young man. Get off the stage"

Bad threw his head back and laughed. "For years teachers told me to stop horsing around. I never understood what that meant. So, teachers, please show us. Start horsing around.

At once, Mrs. Washington and the other teachers stood. They raised their heads and whinnied loudly. Then, with flaring nostrils, the teacher began galloping around the room as if they were wild mustangs.

Meanwhile, the three Specials on the floor held a huddle.

"What's that bad bird Fulton up to?" ask Sammy.

Naomi watched Mrs. Friendly prance past them. "Fulton has more power than I knew," she said.

"And no doubt Out-of-Order has rigged the school phones and alarms, so no help will come?" said Anthony.

With the spotlight on him, the raven paced from one end of the stage to the other. "Boys and girls, now I have *bad* news," he announced. "I can't let anyone leave the gym just yet."

Groans rose from the floor.

"But perhaps that's not all *bad*," Bad continued. "You see, among you are four students who have been *bad* thorns in the sides of *bad* people for years. Of course, I'm referring to the Specials--Jump Rope, AcePlus, Spitball, and a girl who used to be in with my *bad* crowd, Noise. All I'm asking for, before I'll let you go, is for these four to stand up."

Instantly Sammy, Anthony, and Naomi slid apart. They dared not move, whisper, or even look at each other. Now they knew Fulton Black's plan. If the Specials identified themselves, they would lose their Special powers. If that happened, Bad and his band of baddies could take control of the entire school.

Peter in the front row raised his hand. "Mr. Bad, sir," he called out. "Can I go to the toilet? I gotta go bad."

"That depends upon the Specials, doesn't it, little man?" Bad answered. "We can all go to the restroom or get a drink of cool water if they stood up. We might be here another minute or all night."

More groans circled the gym.

"Of course, boys and girls, I could simply tell you the Specials' real names and what class they're in," Bad went on. "But I've a *bad* feeling you wouldn't believe me. It's best to see for yourselves. So Jump Rope, AcePlus, Spitball, and Noise, it's your choice. Make the most of a *bad* deal. Show yourselves, so we can all get out of here."

Sammy, Anthony, and Naomi looked toward Jessamyn on stage. She sat with her saxophone between her knees. Did Jessamyn have a plan? No, the girl only shrugged.

14. The Prisoner



Lisa Edwards sat on the cold cement floor of the school's supply room. Her chin rested on her knees. A bicycle chain bound her wrists to her ankles.

Graffito, a red felt pen in hand, was drawing galloping horses on the wall.

"Get this, Graffito," called Class Clown, who sat on the copy machine, thumbing through a joke book. "A teacher says to a student, 'I thought I told you to stand at the end of the line.' The student replies, 'I tried, but someone was already there.' Ha! Ha! Haaaaa!"

Lisa rattled the chain that bound her. "You know, Bozo," she said. "The worst part of being your prisoner is having to listen to your stupid jokes."

"Put a sock in it, Sloppy Carrot-Top," Graffito sneered.

Lisa studied her two captors. Again, she wondered, *Why did they bring me here? No doubt, so I couldn't alert the Specials. But about what? The assembly announcement just came over the PA. No doubt whatever trouble Fulton Black has planned, he'll do it now.*

Lisa squeezed her lips and eyes shut. In her head, she named things that made her angry.

Being called Sloppy Carrot-Top... flat red balls on the playground... paper peeled off crayons... teachers talking on cell phones in class.

On the shelf above her, a box of paperclips rattled.

Lisa's eyes popped open. *Mrs. Friendly said my power is improving*, she told herself. She studied the bike lock that linked the chains around her ankles. *So maybe if I get angry enough...*

Glaring at the lock, Lisa closed her eyes again and thought hard.

Rainy day recesses... pencil points that break too easily... words that don't spell like they sound.

Lisa's brain rumbled. Her face turned red. Yes, the dial on the bike lock moved. It turned right, left, right again—*click!* — and fell open.

By the wall, close to where Class Clown stood, sat a metal mop bucket on wheels. Now Lisa stared at the bucket. What else made her angry?

Sour milk at lunchtime... kids who cut in line... knots in the tetherball rope.

Slowly, slowly the bucket started to roll. Using all her mind power, Lisa aimed it toward Class Clown. Inch by inch it crossed the floor, until it stopped right behind the clown's feet.

"Hey, Bozo!" she called out. "When did Jack and Jill go up the hill?"

Class Clown stepped backward. She tripped over the bucket and crashed to the floor.

"Right before the fall!" Lisa said, throwing off her chains. She sprang to her feet and tore out the supply room door.

In a flash, the kindergartner raced down the hall and up the stairs to Room 4. Without stopping, she pulled the backpacks off the four Specials' chairs, and shot from the room again.

By the time Lisa reached the gym, however, Graffito and Class Clown were standing guard outside the doors. Bike chains wound through the door handles, and no music came from inside.

Breathing hard, Lisa crouched behind a drinking fountain. *Something terrible is happening in the gym*, she told herself. *I must get these uniforms to the Specials.*

Lisa returned upstairs and approached a door at the end of the hall. This door, seldom used, lead to the projection room high above

the gym. The door was locked, but with her pent up anger, Lisa used her mind power to open it.

The long, narrow projection room was dark. Once inside, Lisa ducked behind a file cabinet. A boy dressed in a purple alligator costume sat by a small window overlooking the gym. The boy worked a spotlight, aimed at a tall raven standing on the stage.

Lisa crawled forward. On a shelf above the alligator's heads, she spotted a stack of round film cans.

"Hey, DS behind the spot!" she called out. "Here come spots before your eyes."

Clang!

A quick angry thought, brought the metal cans down upon the alligator's head. He dropped to the floor, and lay there as if dozing upon a riverbank.

15. Rescue



"I'm hot," a first-grader complained.

"I'm thirsty," said a second-grader.

"I gotta go real bad, Mr. Bad," Peter called from the first-grade row.

The spotlight followed Bad, as he paced the stage. *"Pity, there's a Boys' Room and a drinking fountain with fresh, cooooool, delicious water right outside the gym doors,"* he said. He turned toward Jessamyn Johnson in the front row of the band. *"If only the four Specials would stand up and state their names. Then you can all get out of this stuffy, boring place."*

Jessamyn held her breath. As for Sammy, Anthony, and Naomi, they glanced about the gym, pretending to look for someone standing.

All this time, the teachers pranced like ponies around the sides of the gym.

Bad pointed a black wing at them. *"Your horseplay is getting tiresome, teachers,"* he said. *"So here's another question. What did you mean when you told me to stop my monkeyshines? Show us, teachers. What is this monkey business?"*

Each teacher suddenly stopped galloping and climbed onto a folding chair. Crouching, they let out shrill cries and scratched their armpits.

At that moment, the spotlight trained upon the stage flickered.

Bad looked toward the window high up the back wall. "Cease your teasing, Tease!" he roared.

But the spotlight still blinked. Only the four Specials knew that it flashed in Special code which they mentally deciphered:

WHEN SPOTLIGHT GOES OUT, BACKPACKS WILL DROP.

In the next instant, the gym went dark.

"Tease, you flunky!" Bad screamed. "Turn that spot back on me!"

All the gym lights came on. The students of the floor could now see that the four climbing ropes at the end of the room dangled to the floor. And at the top of each rope, holding on by a single hand and ankle, was a Special.

"Hurrah!" everyone cheered. "The Specials are here! Specials! Specials! Specials!"

From the ropes, AcePlus saluted, Spitball twirled his gold tube, while Jump Rope rotated her lasso. On the last rope, Noise opened her mouth wide. Out came the bugle cavalry charge.

"Charge!" the classes shouted.

Together, the Specials swung their ropes, arching high over their schoolmates. Spitball, AcePlus, and Noise released their holds and went sailing through the air. They landed on the gym floor by the doors.

Jump Rope, with her rope still twirling, let go and leaped onto the stage.

"Greetings, Raving Raven," she said. "You're bound for the county birdcage."

"Nice of you to drop in, Jump Rope," Bad replied. "Not a *bad* entrance, I'll say. But now I must bade you a *bad* good-bye."

With a flap of his wings, he rose from the stage.

"Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!!" Jump Rope shouted.

Her lasso rocketed toward Bad, and dropped around his waist. Hand-over-hand, as if hauling in a big fish, Jump Rope pulled him toward her.

"Look what I caught," she quipped. "I'd call this your *bad* air day, Bad."

Like a black balloon, Bad floated above Jump Rope. With a flick of the rope, she spun him like a top. The rope wrapped around him until--*Thud!*--he landed on the stage floor.

"Jump Rope! Jump Rope! Jump Rope!" the children cheered.

Jump Rope yanked the rope. "Quote the raven," she sneered. "*Nevermore.*"

16. Escape



Still wrapped chest to waist in the jump rope, Bad stood on the stage.

"Hate to be a *bad* sport, Jump Rope," he said. "But your arrival was *bad* timing."

The raven rotated toward the audience. He nodded toward the empty chair in the front row of the band. "Does anyone know what happened to the girl who sat in that chair?" he asked.

Jump Rope froze. What was Fulton Black, teenage genius, up to?

"Wasn't dear fourth-grader, Jessamyn Robbins and her shiny saxophone sitting there?" Bad went on. "So where is Jessamyn now? Hmm? Well, I'll tell you. She's standing next to me, dressed in a silly cowgirl getup. Yes, the girl behind that red mask is none other than Jessamyn Robbins."

The crowd went quiet. Some fifth-graders in back chuckled.

"No way," said a fourth-grader.

"I'm, sure," said another.

"I knew you'd doubt me if I told you the Specials' secret," Bad said. "But it's true. There's nothing special about awkward Jessamyn."

The rope quivered in Jump Rope's grip. She searched the puzzled faces staring at her. The students hung on her every gesture.

Suddenly she felt weak and odd. She remembered feeling this way before meeting Mrs. Friendly, before becoming a Special.

Bad unraveled the rope around him. "Yes, boys and girls, our rootin'-tootin' Special, Jump Rope, is a fraud." She's fooled you for years. She's no hero." He held his end of the rope toward the cowgirl. "Come on, Jessamyn, show us how you jump rope."

Jump Rope glanced toward AcePlus and Spitball standing by the gym doors. She knew they couldn't help her. But as she took the rope, a new voice called from the middle of the gym.

"What's that bird brain Bad talking about?"

The voice belonged to Jessamyn Robbins. Following this came the sound of a squeaky saxophone playing *When the Saints Come Marching In*.

All heads turned. Bodies twisted.

"I might have two left feet, but I keep trying," the voice said. "Jump Rope helps me!"

Upon the stage, Jump Rope grinned. Glancing up, she spied Noise hidden behind the basketball backboard. Her Jessamyn imitation was first-rate.

"You show him, Jump Rope!" a second-grader shouted.

"Jump Rope! Jump Rope!" third grade chorused.

Jump Rope felt power surge through her legs and arms. With her schoolmates back on her side, she was a Special again.

"Well, since Jessamyn is safe, I'll give a short demo," she announced.

The jump rope whirled faster than an eggbeater. The girl hopped so quickly her feet were a blur. Front-crosses, sideswings, leg-overs, behind the back crosses! Within seconds, she did every trick in the book.

The students cheered wildly.

"Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!" Jump Rope cried, and the rope became a lasso again that shot toward Bad.

This time, however, the teenager was ready. Dodging the loop, he streaked toward the gym doors like a black missile.

Phoot! Phoot!

Spitball shot two spitwads and brought the raven crashing to the floor. He landed between the doors and the teachers who were still acting like monkeys.

"Teachers, you used to say that I *drove you up a wall!*" Bad said, rising to his feet. "Now, show me that wall."

At once, the teachers stood shoulder to shoulder, forming a tall barrier between Bad and the Specials. Spitball and AcePlus ran up to the teacher wall, but couldn't get past.

"*Bad* luck, Specials!" Bad said. "I'll see you again in *bad* time. Not *bad*, eh? Yes, *Bad!*"

He pounded on the gym door.

Graffito's voice came from the other side. "No one leaves the gym until his badness Bad says so."

"Let me out of here, you dunce!" the teenager snarled, and soon the door opened and he was gone.

The instant Bad left, the teachers returned to acting like teachers and the four Specials ran after him.

In the hallway, they found a policeman standing there, writing on a notepad.

"Ah, there you are, Specials," the officer said. "A teenager just rushed by here. I wrote down his description."

The policeman handed Noise a slip of paper and the foursome took off down the hall. Not until they had searched the school and found no one, did Noise read the paper:

THINGS WILL NOW GO FROM BAD TO WORSE, SPECIALS.

PREPARE FOR THE FOUR SCHOOL PLAGUES.

"It's been a rough day for being a fourth-grade super hero," said Spitball.

"And we still have to go home and do homework," said AcePlus.

17. The First Plague



Early the next morning, Mr. Slurry entered Room 4. He handed Mrs. Washington a bouquet of daisies.

"How lovely," the teacher said. "Who could they be from?"

"Nunno," said the janitor. "A Fed Ex man delivered them. There's a daisy bouquet for every teacher in the school."

The teacher plucked a card off the bouquet. "They must have come from a student," she said. "How sweet. All the card says is *COOTIES*."

Mrs. Washington placed the daisies in a vase. "Now class, take out your reading books," she said.

As the fourth-graders opened their desktops, Courtney in the front row, started scratching her head.

"What's the problem, Courtney?" the teacher asked.

"I scratch. I mean, I itch," the girl answered. "I mean, I'm scratching an itch."

The teacher walked up to Courtney and examined her curly black hair. She whispered something into her ear, and quickly the girl left the room.

"Now who wants to read first?" Mrs. Washington said.

But now Nathan and Rachel began scratching their hair.

Mrs. Washington checked both heads and shook her own. "We must all go see the nurse right away. Our classroom has..." Here she lowered her voice. "*Head lice.*"

The fourth-graders filed from the classroom and down the stairs. Outside the nurse's room, they found a traffic jam of other classes. In each line, students scratched heads, arms, and legs.

Mrs. Booboo, the school nurse, sat on a stool in the doorway. Using two tongue depressors, she searched one head of hair after another.

"Uh-huh, head lice," she said to a third-grader with short brown hair. "Head for home."

"Yep, lice. Home you go," she told a blond girl.

The Specials stood one behind another in the fourth-grade line.

Sammy scratched an elbow. "Kids at school might throw-up, throw food, throw punches, or throw tantrums," he said. "But nothing gets them sent home faster than head lice."

"I've a creepy feeling that Fulton Black brought these lousy louse to school in the daisy bouquets," said Jessamyn, scratching her brown bangs.

"A Plague of Lice," Naomi uttered. "What we n-need is a cootie catcher."

Anthony scratched his mop of blond hair. "I have a solution to this lice crisis in my lab—my *A+ Lice Crisis Solution*. A few blasts will make every little bug hate school and head to the nearest exit."

Unseen, Anthony slipped from the line. A short while later, transformed into AcePlus, he headed to Room 3C.

Meanwhile, the line outside the Nurse Booboo's office grew longer. The nurse continued checking heads with her tongue depressors. "Lice! Get your coat," she said to a redheaded fifth-grader.

Mr. Whitherby appeared in the hallway. "What a disaster!" he declared. "We'll have to shut down the school! Where are the Specials? Why aren't the Specials here?"

As he spoke, a voice came from the top of the stairway. "Specials at your service, sir!"

Arms spread wide, AcePlus slid down the handrail, waving a spray bottle. As he dropped, he sprayed a clear mist into the air. The hallway filled with a popcorn-scented fog.

Almost at once, the students stopped scratching.

"Amazing," said Nurse Booboo, who was examining Jessamyn's hair. "I saw the tiny white cooties marched straight onto Jessamyn's shoulder, down the wall, and out the window."

"Nice and precise go the lice," said AcePlus. "I sprayed my Special cootie treatment in every classroom."

"Excellent, Ace," said Mr. Whitherby. "Now we can all go back to class."

AcePlus winked at Jessamyn, Sammy, and Naomi. "One plague down," he said under his breath. "And three to go."

18. Plagues Two and Three



Room 4 was warmer, much warmer. After the fourth-graders returned in their seats, Mrs. Washington tried opening the windows, but everyone was stuck shut.

"Despite the heat we must focus on our 3 R's," said the teacher. "Are you listening? Are you doing your best? And Are you on task?"

"Are you kidding?" said Nathan. "It's too hot to do any of those things."

"This room's like an oven," Reed complained. "I've never been inside an oven, but this must be what it's like."

The classroom temperature continued to climb. Students slumped in their seats. Their arms stuck to their desktops, and sweat sopped their armpits.

Fanning herself with the attendance book, Mrs. Washington checked the thermometer by the door.

"My, it *is* hot in here," she said. "I hope the Specials are still in the school."

Jessamyn, Sammy, Anthony, and Naomi slid farther in their chairs. Special code wasn't needed to tell them why it was hot. Fulton Black had released his second plague, a Plague of Heat.

Jessamyn turned and nodded to the others. She would handle this problem. After asking to get a drink, she left the room with her backpack.

The hallway was even hotter than Room 4. Ripples of heat rose off the tile floor. A long line of students stood at the drinking fountain.

Jessamyn ducked into the girls' room. Out came Jump Rope, spinning her rope before her.

"Jump Rope, I'm boiling," whined a second-grader at the fountain.

"Even the drinking water's boiling," said another.

"Keep your cool, kids," Jump Rope replied. "I'll soon have the climate under control."

The cowgirl stepped to a long hallway bulletin board. With a single yank, she pulled off a long length of yellow construction paper. Back and forth, she folded it until she held a giant paper fan. She made a second fan from red paper off the opposite wall and held one in each hand.

"You've seen me spin ropes," she called to the students in the hall. "Now watch what I can do with these fans. *Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!*"

Her arms went to work. Like airplane propellers, they spun so fast they became a blur. The fans sent a stiff, cool breeze down the hall.

"Ahhhh!" the students chorused. "Cooooool!"

Jump Rope wandered down the hall, blasting cool air into all the classrooms.

"Return to your schoolwork," she called. "While Mr. Slurry fixes the furnace and windows, I'll continue with *my* three R's--refresh, refrigerate, and ruin Bad's plans."

The third school plague hit at lunchtime. As the classes ate spaghetti in the lunchroom, Peter started wiggling at the first-grade table.

"Good gravy, Petey, you're acting as if you have ants in your pants," said Miss Spills, the lunchroom monitor.

"I do," Peter replied, squirming some more. "I do have ants in my pants."

The woman stepped to the first-grade table. Sure enough, ants swarmed over the bench, tabletop, and lunch trays.

"Good heavens," she exclaimed. "How'd all these ants get here?"

A scream came from the fifth-grade table.

"They're all over the place!" a boy cried.

"Like it's totally ants!" said a girl.

More shouts circled the room. From every crack in the lunchroom walls, ants were crawling out. The ranks of insects flowed across the floor like a moving black carpet.

The students sprang up, shaking feet and slapping legs. "Ants! Ick! Ants! Eeeeeew!" they called.

At the fourth-grade table, the Specials held a quick meeting.

"Fulton's third plague has struck," said Anthony, flicking an ant off his lunch tray. "A Plague of Ants."

Sammy brushed three ants off his hand. "And I have an Anti-Ant Plan," he said. "I'll need to work fast, but my super-sonic speed hasn't had a workout in a while."

As the ants claimed his tray of spaghetti, Sammy slipped from the lunchroom.

"Good grief," Miss Spill called out. "We'll postpone lunch until the ants are gone. Dump your lunch trays in the trashcan and return to class. I'm sure the Specials will fix the problem shortly."

Sure enough, no sooner had the classes begun to leave, than every ant in the room made a sharp about-face. They skittered off the tables and disappeared into the cracks from which they came.

"Look at them go!" called a third-grader.

"The ants go marching hundred by hundred. Hurrah! Hurrah!" the kindergartners sang.

Within minutes, not a single insect remained in the lunchroom.

"Good riddance!" said Miss Spill.

Anthony, Jessamyn, and Naomi stepped out the door leading to the playground. Where did the ants go?

Spitball, pale and sweating, sat on a bench outside. Five spit wad tubes and a box of nails lay at his feet.

"I forgot how tiring shooting nails can be," he said, rubbing his jaw.

Anthony, Jessamyn, and Naomi stood in the doorway, admiring Spitball's playground construction work. Standing in the middle of the asphalt, as big and tall as a billboard, was a giant ant farm. White sugar filled the space between twin sheets of glass. Near the bottom, ants had already begun burrowing tunnels. A line of ants still crawled from the school to an opening in the ant farm's side.

"Ingenious," said Jessamyn. "You built an ant farm no ant could resist."

"In under ten minutes," Anthony put in.

"The glass came from the gym windows, the wood from the roof," Spitball explained. "And the cooks donated sacks of sugar."

"Lice, heat, and ants! Fulton sure knows how to b-bug kids at school," said Naomi.

"And there's one plague to go," said Spitball.

19. The Last Plague



The next day Room 4 had a substitute. A short man with short-cropped hair and a short beard stood before the whiteboard. He wore khaki shorts and a short-sleeve shirt, and judging by the scowl on his face, he also had a short temper.

"I'm Mr. Subset and you are my subjects," the sub said. "This morning your teacher felt sub par, so I rode the subway to this suburb, prepared to teach you any subject, from subtraction to subatomic substances."

Mr. Subset strolled up one aisle of desks. "And my sub standards are never substandard," he said. "We'll begin with a counting drill. Who can count?"

Reed, in the third row, raised his hand. "You mean like one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten?" he asked.

The substitute halted behind the boy. "Did I say subside?" he snapped. "Recite the subsequent numbers!"

Reed gulped. "Eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen," he went on. "Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen..."

Dit dit--dit dit dit—dit Jessamyn tapped her watch button.

This sub is subhuman.

Dit dit--dit dit dit—dit

And all the other classes have substitutes, too, Anthony replied.

"Eighty-four, eighty-five, eighty-six," Reed counted.

Mr. Subset returned to the teacher's chair. Placing his feet on the desktop, he pulled a sub sandwich from his lunchbox and chomped into one end.

"Courtney, continue counting!" he said with his mouth full.

The girl's eyes went wide. "Ninety-nine, one-hundred, one-hundred one," she peeped.

So the morning went. One after the other the sub called on students to count. When everyone had a turn he said, "Reed, go again."

"Two-thousand forty, two thousand forty-one," the boy said.

At last, as Sammy recited, "Nine thousand sixty-three," the recess bell rang. The class raced from the room.

In the hallway, the noise level was ten times normal. Students ran, wrestled, bounced balls, flung Frisbees, swung backpacks at each other, and played Cap Keep-Away.

Jessamyn, Sammy, Anthony, and Naomi walked down the stairs, listening to conversations.

"Our substitute slept the whole morning," a second-grader shouted. "We had a blast!"

"The sub we had let us dance on our desktops," said a third-grader.

"Paaaaarty!" shouted a fifth-grader, zipping down the banister.

"I fear Fulton's released the last school plague," said Jessamyn. "A Plague of Bad Substitutes."

"Discipline will only grow worse after recess," said Anthony. "How do we get rid of bad subs?"

At that moment, Lisa Edwards walked up to the Specials, and whispered, "Code Gold. He's super mad."

Five minutes later, the Specials sat in Mr. Whitherby's office. The principal's face was red. He gripped his coffee mug as if trying to squeeze juice out of it.

"Every classroom teacher is out today," he said. "Every teacher caught the Twenty-Four Hour Teacher Pox."

"We heard you needed a few substitutes today," said Spitball, sucking on the end of his tube.

“And quite frankly, this school is in chaos,” Mr. Whitherby said. “The students are out of control. As I clearly stated, if the Specials can’t handle school problems I can’t waste good school money supporting them. Effective immediately, I’m suspending the Special Force. Please go change, and hand your uniforms to Lisa Edwards. After recess, return to your classroom. Frankly, I’ve never been able to guess what room you’re from, but quite frankly, I’ve had enough of secret identities and student super heroes. From now on I’ll use my own discipline management program at Acorn School,”

20. The Ice Cream Truck



The next morning, Mr. Whitherby held an assembly on the playground. Carrying plastic chairs before them, the students marched from the school, and sat in rows on the asphalt.

"Sh! Sh!" called their teachers, who were one hundred percent back in attendance.

With Spitball's giant ant farm as a backdrop, Mr. Whitherby stood before a microphone.

"Morning, kids," he said.

"Mooooorning," came the weak reply.

"You're here to learn about my new behavior management program at Acorn School," said Mr. Whitherby. "The program is called Let's Just Get Along. To begin, let's all join hands and recite the words, 'Let's just get along'."

At that moment, a loud bang! startled everyone. A battered white truck, with missing bumpers and four bald tires, drove through the playground gate. On the truck's mud-splattered sides were the words:

Bad Humor Ice Cream

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Smoke poured out the wagging tailpipe, as the truck crossed the basketball court. It came to a screechy stop behind the classes. Through a bullhorn mounted on the dented roof, tinkling bells played Pop Goes the Weasel.

"Girls and boys! Boys and girls! Presenting the return of something super bad!" a voice called. "A bad sport! A bad temper! A bad risk! A bad egg! A bad mood! A bad excuse!...The original bad dog himself! Heeeeeeeere he is...Bad!"

The side of the ice cream truck swung open. Inside stood the tall black raven that every student recognized as Bad.

"What's going on here?" Mr. Whitherby called out. "Who are you?"

Bad's voice boomed through the bullhorn. "Stop badgering me, Whitherby! Time out!"

At once, the principal skipped to the swings and sat down.

"Not bad, eh?" the teenager thundered. "Yes, Bad!"

The black figure stepped from the back of the truck. He raised his winged arms and floated over the students' heads. Forward, he glided. Backward, forward, backward, and forward again.

"Badminton anyone?" he said, and landed in front of the ant farm. "One Bad turn deserves another."

"Someone get the Specials!" shouted a teacher.

"Sit down, young man!" said another.

Bad shook his head. "When I was in school, teachers kept telling me to sit down," he said. "But when I sat, they said to stop squirming like a worm. Teachers, show us what you meant by that."

Instantly, every teacher dropped to the asphalt. Lying on their sides, they wriggled into S's, and C's.

"What Mr. Whitherby said is true, boys and girls," Bad said. "There is a new behavior management program at school. Me!"

Again the white truck's bullhorn played Pop goes the Weasel. From the back of the truck three figures, one wearing green overalls, one dressed as a clown, and one in a purple alligator costume, stepped out. Each carried a plastic cooler.

"Now here's proof that a few bad apples can spoil a whole school--Graffito, Class Clown, and Tease," said Bad. "And they've brought treats for everyone. Not bad, eh? Yes, Bad!"

"Hurrah!" the students cheered.

Like vendors at a baseball game, the three DS's tossed Popsicles into the crowd. "Popsicles! Get your Popsicles here," they shouted.

Bad grabbed four Popsicles and faced the fourth-grade class.

"Boys and girls, I spy four students who deserve special treatment," he said. "Catch Sammy Newton."

Bad tossed a Popsicle at Sammy. The boy reached out, but it smacked him in the face.

Laughter rippled around the crowd.

"And H-h-h-hello, Naomi H-H-H-Hornsby," Bad said, drawing more chuckles. "And maybe, for entertainment, Jessamyn Robbins will try jumping rope for us, and Anthony Lane can try reciting the three times tables."

The students laughed some more.

"Pitiful, aren't they, kids?" said Bad. "But for the past few days, you've seen what talented students such as Graffito, Class Clown, and Tease can do at school. In fact, they have a special title, DS, which stands for delightful student. If you work hard and listen to what I say today, you can become a DS, too. Not bad, eh? Yes, Bad!"

The four Specials nudged each other.

"So Fulton intends to turn this school into a Delinquent Special training ground," Anthony whispered.

"With more DS's, he can control more schools," Jessamyn pointed out.

"And as you've seen, Fulton's a m-master at getting kids to do what he w-wants," said Naomi.

"Now, boys and girls, return to your classrooms," Bad went on. "During DS training, we'll be as busy as beavers, as teachers say. So teachers, could you show us what you mean by that?"

21. Lost and Found



That afternoon Jessamyn, Sammy, Anthony, and Naomi sat in Room 3C. Their heads lay on the jellybean-shaped table. Lisa Edwards sat on the floor, reading a book called *The Special Child*.

"DS training is murder," Jessamyn said to Mrs. Friendly. "Class Clown had us practice head locks, lock picking, pick pocketing, and how to pick on little kids."

"Next Graffiti taught us *Gross-Out Art*," said Sammy. "We mixed glue with red paint to make fake blood and blended pencil shavings with green paint to produce pretend vomit. After that we made phony snot from rubber cement."

"Triple-O taught us rude writing on the computer," Anthony added. "Only sentences with nasty word in them were allowed."

"Oh, don't just sit here and sulk," Mrs. Friendly said. "Fulton now has full run of the school."

"What can I do about it?" said Jessamyn. "I tripped all through the game of *Slug Tag* that Tease taught us in PE."

"Without my lab, I'm just absent-minded Anthony again," said Anthony.

"My *especially special* power is especially gone," said Sammy. "I couldn't even spit when Tease was giving us spitting lessons."

At this point Lisa Edwards looked up from her book. "Why?" she asked. "Why can't the Specials use their powers?"

Mrs. Friendly smiled at the girl. The others gave her a *What-Do-Kindergartners-Know?* look.

"I never had a Special uniform or special gear when I broke out of the supply room," Lisa went on. "Watch."

Lisa closed her eyes. Seconds later the metal filing cabinet by the table, as if bowing to the Specials, bent in two.

The fourth-graders grew silent.

"How'd she do that?" asked Jessamyn softly.

"No Special outfit or gear or anything," Sammy said.

Anthony finished his sentence, "And her *Especial* Special power still works."

"Good point, Lisa!" The voice was Fulton's, but it came from Naomi. "I guess I just didn't try hard enough."

"Your Special power worked," said Jessamyn, amazed. "What's so special about a Special costume anyway?"

She walked to the wall and unplugged an extension chord. She held it like a jump rope. Twirl, hop, twirl, hop, twirl, hop.

Anthony stood with a finger raised. "One squared times the square root of one is one squared," he stated. "And I'm a square only if I think I'm a square."

Sammy bit the corner of a sheet of paper and chewed. He inserted the juicy wad into his drinking straw.

Phoot!

The spitball smacked the X in the exit sign above the door.

"Spot marks the X," he said. "Specials, it's time to put an end to a Bad situation."

Mrs. Friendly ran a satisfied look around the table. "Splendid. But you still must honor the Special oath," she said. "A Special must never reveal his or her student identity."

"Nothing fancy, but I know where to find new disguises," said Anthony.

The Specials ran down the hall to the janitor's room. A large cardboard box by the sink served as the school's Lost and Found. They rummaged through sweaters, hats, jackets, and shoes.

Jump Rope stepped out of the room first. She wore a straw hat, a red windbreaker, and a red towel wrapped around her waist as a skirt. A dog leash would be her lariat.

"Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!" the cowgirl shouted.

The leash whipped a BAD IS GOOD sign on the wall and ripped it in two.

AcePlus came out next. He wore a blue sweatshirt inside out and blue sweatpants with holes in the knees. A blue bike helmet covered over his head.

Spitball left the room in a dingy T-shirt and soccer shorts two sizes too big for him. Still carrying the drinking straw, he chewed pieces of paper towel for fresh spitwads.

"Lost, now found," said Noise, joining the others. A moth-eaten brown sweater and torn brown tights made up her outfit.

"After a quick trip to the art room to make masks, we'll be ready," said AcePlus.

"Let's go get that Bad guy and his bad guys," said Spitball.

Noise let out a bugle call, and the four Specials charged down the hall.

22. *Playground Games*



Bad lay in a lounge chair on the shady side of the ice cream truck. He held a microphone in one hand and a grape Popsicle in the other.

"It's Game Time, boys and girls," Bad called through the truck bullhorn. "Grades 1 and 2 will join Class Clown on the soccer field for water balloon tossing. Grades 3 and 4 go with Graffito to practice wall spray-painting. Fifth-graders, you and the kindergartners meet Tease by the jungle gym for a lesson on *Rude Noises that Bug Teachers*."

The students scrambled to their assigned stations. On the way, a few bumped into their teachers who stood about the playground frozen like plastic action figures. Bad had ordered them to be as still as trees.

Game Time had hardly begun, however, when a sound shook the air loud.

Thump!

"I heard elephants!" called a girl, covering her ears.

Thruump!

"A whole herd of them!" said another.

Thruuuump!

"And they sound like they're charging through our school," cried someone else.

All classes turned toward the building. From the playground door burst Jump Rope, AcePlus, Spitball, and Noise.

"The Specials! The Specials are back!" the children shouted.

Bad sat up in his lounge chair. "Well, what a Special surprise," he called out. "Love your outfits. Recycled Specials, how quaint. But why are you has-beens here?"

"It's time for *us* to play games," said AcePlus.

The Specials stood side by side at the end of the asphalt. "Red Rover! Red Rover!" they chanted. "Will the DS's come over?"

Bad rose to his feet. He called to Class Clown, Tease, and Graffito. "What are you nitwits waiting for? Stop these four annoyances, once and for all!"

The DS's rushed toward the Special's line.

AcePlus picked up two red rubber balls and faced Graffito. "Care to play some dodge ball, Picasso?" he said, and bowled both balls toward the boy in green.

The balls skipped across the asphalt. They struck Graffito's legs, and he fell flat on his front.

At once AcePlus leaped upon him. He had his hands and legs bound with jump ropes before anyone could count to three-Mississippi.

"Now I'll play *Capture the Wag*," said Noise. And she let out a high squeal that caused Class Clown to halt and cover her big ears.

Noise bolted forward. With a flying tackle, she knocked the clown to the ground.

"Tag!" she said. "You're in for it!"

Meanwhile, Spitball aimed his gold tube toward Tease who was walking past a tetherball pole.

"Take ten baby steps forward!" he called out.

Phoot!

A spitwad smacked the yellow tetherball, sending it into orbit. The string wrapped around both the pole and purple alligator.

"Sorry, you didn't say '*Mother may I?*'" Spitball said.

Phoot! Phoot!

Two more shots kept the ball spinning, binding Tease tightly to the pole.

Seeing his DS's defeated, Bad leaped into the driver's seat of the ice cream truck.

"Last place losers!" he screamed through the bullhorn. The engine revved, and the truck started to move.

Jump Rope stepped to the metal cable that surrounded the playground. With a single yank, she pulled the chord off its posts. She tied a lasso in the end and twirled it over her head

"Red Light! Green light!" she called out, tossing the loop toward the truck. "*Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!* Red light!"

The lasso encircled the truck, and it jerked to a stop. The wheels squealed and spun, straining to move forward. Bad turned the steering wheel, but with Jump Rope holding the other end of the cable, the truck drove in circles.

"Ring around the Rosie," the girl in red sang out.

Bad cut the engine and flew from the truck.

"You can't keep a *bad* boy down, Specials," he shouted. And spreading his raven wings, he rose above the playground.

Quickly, the Specials grabbed four Hula-Hoops from the equipment shed.

"Ten points for ringing the raven," called Spitball.

One after the other, they flung their plastic hoops upward. One, two, three, four, the rings wrapped around Bad, wings and all.

He banked steeply. Wearing a look of disgust, he spiraled downward headfirst. He landed in a Dumpster filled with rotting leftovers from yesterday's spaghetti lunch.

The students burst into cheers.

Noise made the sound of a whistle blowing.

"Game over, Fulton," Spitball called out.

Fulton's head, dripping with noodles, appeared above the side of the Dumpster.

"Good riddance to *Bad* rubbish," said AcePlus.

23. A Bad Ending



“What a waste,” said Mrs. Friendly.

The special ed teacher and the four Specials sat around the jellybean-shaped table in room 3C.

Jessamyn removed a golden jump rope, her latest model, from the jump rope rack. With a flick of her wrist, the rope straightened. Now stiff and strong, it made the perfect spear or fighting staff.

“So you only *pretended* to act like a horse, monkey, beaver, pig, worm, and tree,” she asked the teacher.

Mrs. Friendly smiled. “It was more important to see how the Specials would act,” she explained. “That’s why I waited until you captured Fulton to call the police.”

Naomi imitated the police sirens on the playground yesterday.

“And all along you knew that our *especially special* p-powers would work no m-matter what we wore?” she asked.

“True talent needs no special props or costumes,” the teacher answered. “You needed to discover that for yourselves.”

Sammy pulled out his newest gold tube, one with a loop in the middle.

Phoot! Phoot!

Two spitwads shot out five yards, made a sharp U-turn, and blew apart two Styrofoam cups on the table.

"Good of Mr. Whitherby to put the Special Force back into the school budget," he said

Anthony stood at his lab table, adding an attachment to the Special Ed computer, an *A+ Anti-Hacking Devise* for tracking down Triple-O!

"So what will happen to Fulton Black?" he called out.

"He'll spend time at the Juvenile Detention Center where he's spent time before," Mrs. Friendly replied.

"But I bet the teacher in you will try to help Fulton," he said. "Right, Mrs. Friendly?"

The teacher smiled. "I suppose so."

At that moment, Lisa Edward barged into the room. She carried four Special uniforms, pressed and dry-cleaned, wrapped in clear plastic bags.

"Code Red, Blue, Yellow, and Brown," she announced. "Time to suit up for the award ceremony."

"Isn't it kind of our principal to hold this big assembly in our honor?" said Jessamyn.

"A simple apology would have been just as welcomed," said Naomi.

"Mr. Whitherby is giving each of you a tall trophy for saving the school," said Lisa. "He wanted to put a Special engraving on each one. So guess what he asked me?"

"What's our room number?" the four Specials said together.