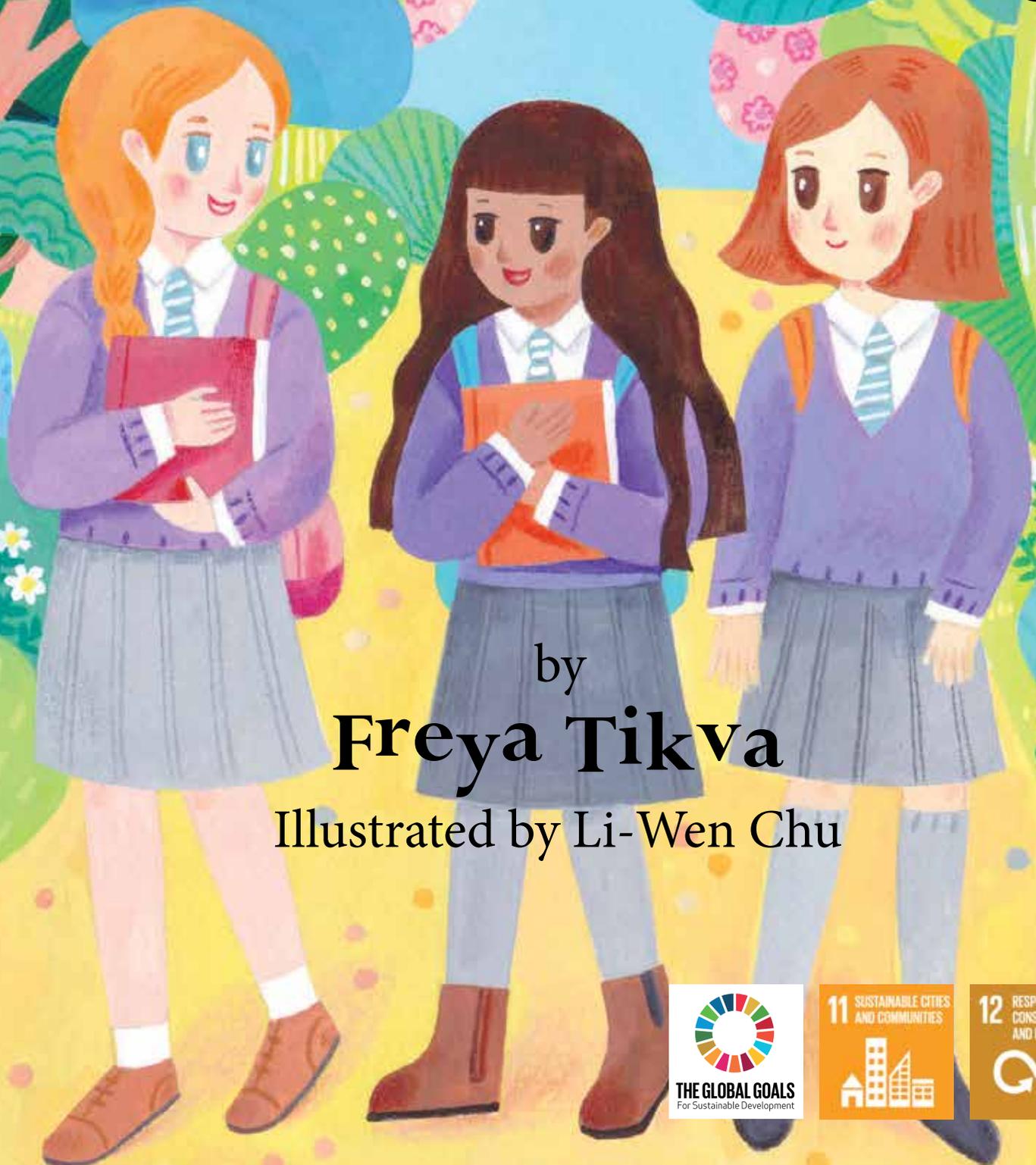


# The Girl Who Changed Everything



by  
**Freya Tikva**  
Illustrated by Li-Wen Chu





# **The Girl**

## **Who Changed Everything**

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# The Girl

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**Freya Tikva**

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# foreword

The UN initiative Agenda 2030 includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), primarily aimed at achieving “a decent life” for all life on Earth. Increasing uncertainty owing to global change mandates that we need stories to generate knowledge about what trends and mechanisms underlie the qualities of social understanding, and the conservation of ecosystems that sustain a better world. To monitor human impacts and action, the SDGs offer potential targets and indicators for assessing progress toward achieving the Agenda in 2030. From early childhood onwards, knowledge is defined as the “justified belief,” i.e. justified by rigorous age-appropriate knowledge transfer that reveals patterns so clearly as told here.

This inspiring tale touches on some of the most pertinent issues of our days. When little Zina from Tunisia joins her new school in England, her classmates react to her as the unknown stranger. It takes a whole lot of curiosity and braveness for them to connect and learn from her experience in what seems a place far away. Then, finally, she paints a vivid picture of a sea turtle choking on plastic. This image bridges the cultural gap and leads to a unified understanding, which inspires change. Today’s world is closely connected; we must tackle the plastic crisis in addition to climate change. Our global actions matter; they not only affect us, but have broad ramifications. And while our cultural experience may differ, humanity is connected by the shared value of preserving the health of our planet, which means a better life for all.

Based on the “grand narrative” of the UN SDGs, the book shows one example of how the effort of a single child can contribute to a better life for all, and a vision for the young and old for how we want to live in 2030 and beyond. We need more young people with this commitment and zeal to follow this excellent example. All the best!

— *Priv.-Doz. Dipl.-Ing. Dr. Andreas H. Melcher*  
Institute for Development Research and Ethikplattform, Deputy Head  
BOKU University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna



# preface

I was both intrigued and excited to be asked to read and write a Preface for *The Girl Who Changed Everything*. Intrigued, because the title of the book suggests a myriad of possibilities for the protagonist: who ‘the girl’ is, what she does, and how she changes ‘everything’; excited, because there was the chance that in the reading of this book with such an intriguing title, I might be informed and inspired, and even improved. And so it proved.

*The Girl Who Changed Everything* is a modern-day allegory, and as with all excellent examples of the genre, it makes its points simply, yet clearly and compellingly, and it provides the reader with some of the knowledge and all of the impetus they could wish for to take on the messages it contains and determine to do something positive. Even more impressively, this short story shows the way, with examples of behaviours and actions the reader might take to make an immediate, positive impact upon our environment and within our society.

This collaboration between Freya Tikva and Li-Wen Chu tells of the importance of kinship and of reaching out to, helping, and learning from, others. As an educator, I have learned through my experience of the social and personal value to individuals and communities that can be created when students exemplify these behaviours. Yet I have rarely seen such a concise and cogent creative piece that encapsulates both the importance and the benefits of such traits in identifying problems and collaborating to solve them.

Underpinning this excellent story is the message that to be a girl (or indeed, anyone) with the power to change everything, you need the determination to do the right thing, even when you are uncertain; the courage to reach out and to speak out, even if you are nervous; the creativity to innovate and iterate possible solutions to real-world challenges, and the humility to reflect, learn from others and set a good example. These are the qualities of true leadership and I commend Freya and Li-Wen for demonstrating precisely these qualities in respectively writing and illustrating their wonderful book.

— Dr. Richard Girvan  
Principal, the Stephen Perse Foundation



# preface

*The Girl Who Changed Everything* by Freya Tikva is an empowering story about plastic pollution, friendship, activism, and the importance of working together to make a difference.

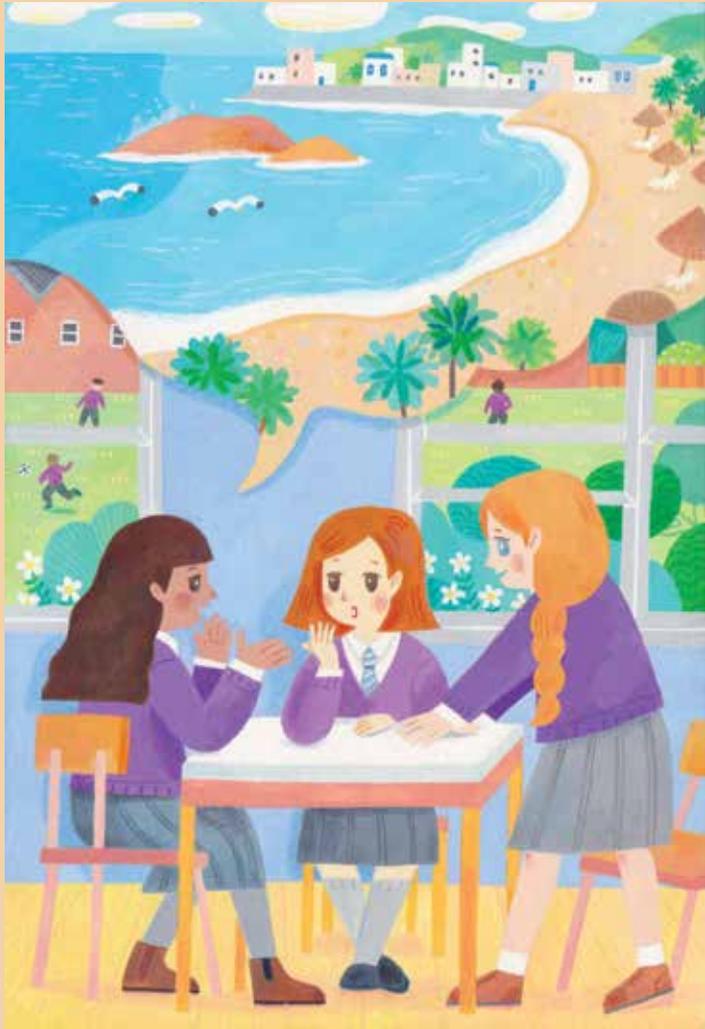
Sadly, plastic pollution is a devastating problem everywhere in the world. In the UK, we use so much plastic that it is often normalised as part of everyday life, and we forget to consider the consequences for wildlife and the natural environment. When we see how harmful human-made plastic pollution is for animals, it is a stark reminder of our responsibility to reduce our impact as much as possible.

I loved how this story uses a week-long plastic-free challenge to illustrate simple tips and practical swaps that help the characters use less plastic, inspiring readers to try the same.

Freya's story perfectly illustrates the benefits of tackling a problem by taking action (rather than ignoring it or feeling overwhelmed), and highlights how you can be more effective and have more fun when you work together with others (rather than trying to do it all on your own).

Taking positive action will help make the problem better and help you feel better too. This is a vital lesson for children and young people as they face a future with many environmental challenges: get involved with groups that are working on the solutions because it is good for you and for the planet too!

— *Amanda Keetley*  
Founder of Less Plastic CIC, Author of *Plastic Game Changer*





# chapter 1

## The new girl

“Pass, pass!” shouted Sophie.

“Shoot!” said Stephanie.

“We did it!” exclaimed Emma.

They were in a sports lesson when they heard the news. A new girl was coming to the school, and they would need to welcome her. They gossiped about it during break.



“We can’t let her in our group,” Stephanie stated.  
“Why? We could see what she’s like,” Emma suggested.  
“We’ll see, but I still don’t think she’s going to be nice,”  
said Sophie.

The new girl was weird in every way. She was black, short for her age and she never talked. But when she did speak, all she said was that the school should ban plastic. Sophie told everyone that they should not talk to her. She spread mean comments about the new girl around the school. There was even a rumour that she was actually a spy for another country.

No one knew her name since no one spoke to her. She had a teal backpack which looked faded and well used. It had a strange symbol with a black logo of a turtle on it. She wasn't wearing the school uniform, which made her stand out even more.





# chapter 2

## Emma's plan

One day Emma decided to talk to the new girl. She was feeling bad about the way she had treated her. Emma nervously approached her before she could change her mind. Lots of questions started popping up in her head. The main one was, “What will my friends think of this?” But there were other ones like... “Should I leave my friends for this new girl?” and “What is your name and where do you come from?”





Emma started off by saying, “Hi...my name is Emma.” At first the new girl didn’t say a word, but then after a few seconds, she said in a shy and nervous voice, “Marhabaan aims Zun. My name is Zina.” The new girl spoke with a bit of an accent.



“Where are you from?” asked Emma. “Tunisia,” replied Zina.

“Wow, that must have been a long journey,” said Emma with astonishment. “Long...” said Zina, “Love my country, miss family a lot.”



“Do you like our country?” asked Emma. “Yes,” replied Zina. “Back home, too much plastic, and poll... Wait, pollution.”

“Well said Zina,” said Emma. “Thank you,” replied Zina.

“We have to get to class,” said Emma.

“Bye,” said Zina, with a big fat smile across her face.

“Bye,” replied Emma.



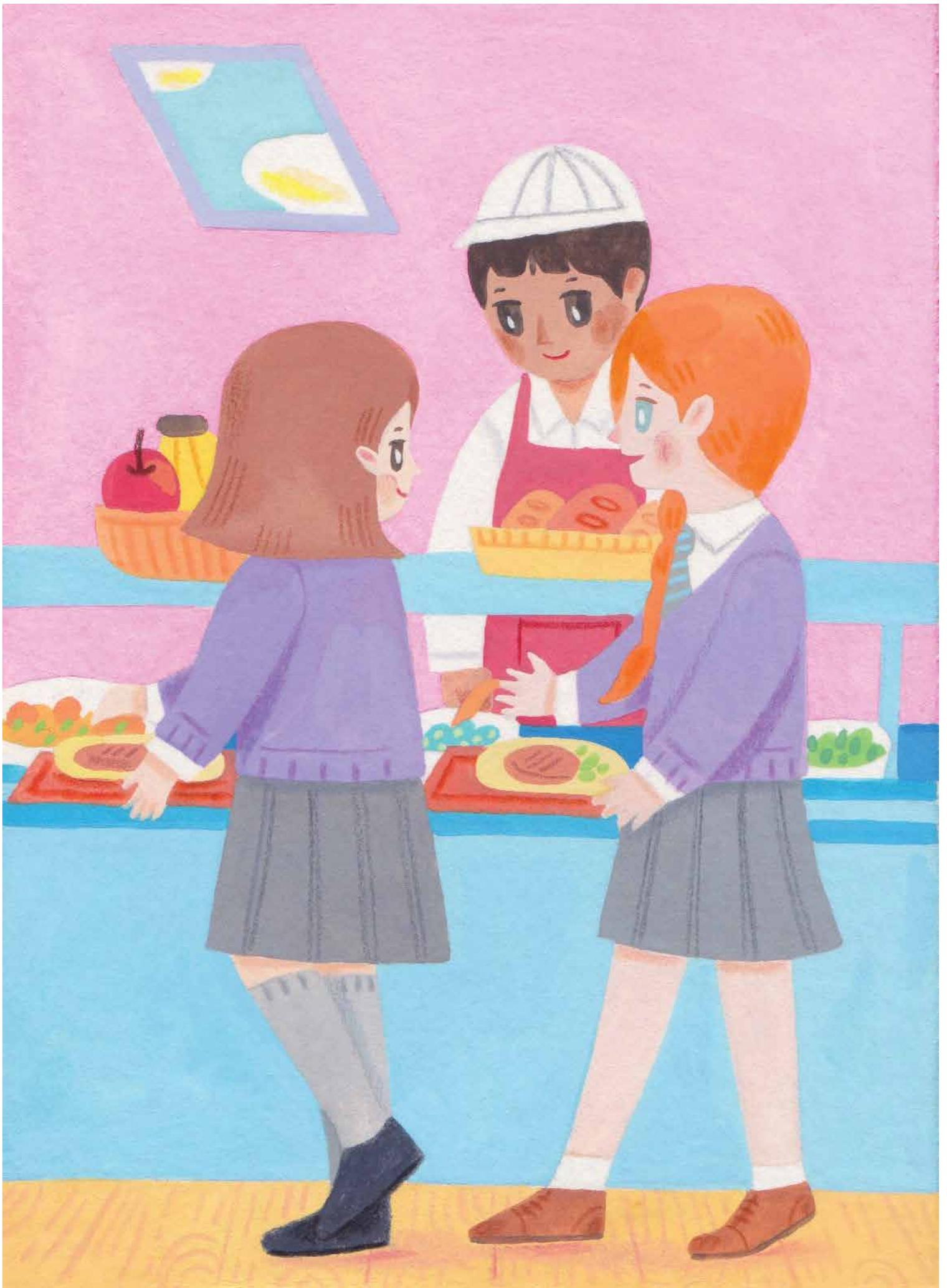
Emma had one problem. How would she tell the others about this?



# chapter 3

## A new friend

On her way to class, Emma started to think of a plan for how to persuade her friends to like Zina. She thought harder and harder, and finally came up with an idea that just might work. Her plan was to tell her kindest friend Stephanie first, and then the rest of the group. Emma didn't know if she was doing the right thing, but she thought it was worth a try. She didn't know how her friends would react to her idea, but she knew deep down that including Zina was the right thing to do.



Later at lunch break, Emma approached Stephanie who was singing to herself while she waited for lunch. She stopped singing when she saw Emma and smiled. Emma told her that she had talked to the new girl at first break, and that her name was Zina. Something made Emma look towards the door and she saw Zina looking a bit lost. Emma waved to Zina, and she joined them. Stephanie smiled at her, and the three girls sat down to eat their lunch away from the others.

Timidly, Zina told the girls about where she came from and how long she had been in England. The girls sat open-mouthed as she explained how she had lost her home and family. Zina told them that she had a good friend who was still in Tunisia. “Wow, that must have hurt leaving her behind,” said Emma. “Hurt a lot,” nodded Zina.

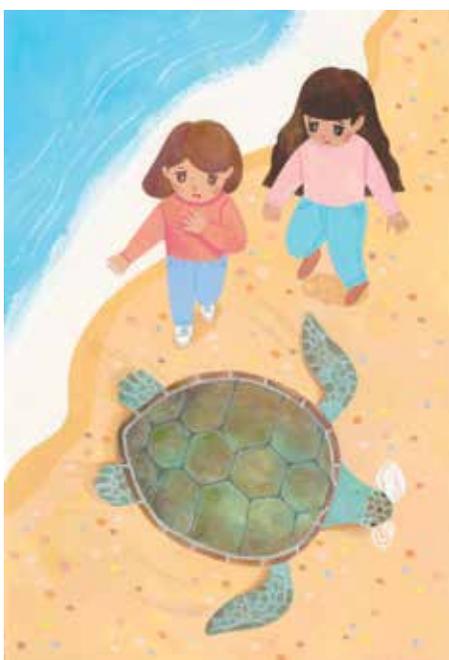


They went out to find the rest of their friends. Zina stopped and stared when she saw a boy throw a plastic water bottle on the ground and kick it. When they found the rest of the group, Emma introduced them to Zina.

Emma was really keen to find out more about Zina but didn't want to overwhelm her with questions. However, Zina started talking to them anyway. "I had a very good friend in Tunisia called Hannah," she told them. "We were playing in sea, when I saw something in corner of my eye. It was a turtle but not happy. We went to turtle and saw it was choking on plastic. We picked up turtle and got help. We took plastic out of mouth. The turtle saved! We say goodbye and turtle swim away."

"Wow!" exclaimed Sophie in amazement.

"I never thought plastic could cause that much harm!" cried Michelle.





# chapter 4

## The meeting with the headmaster

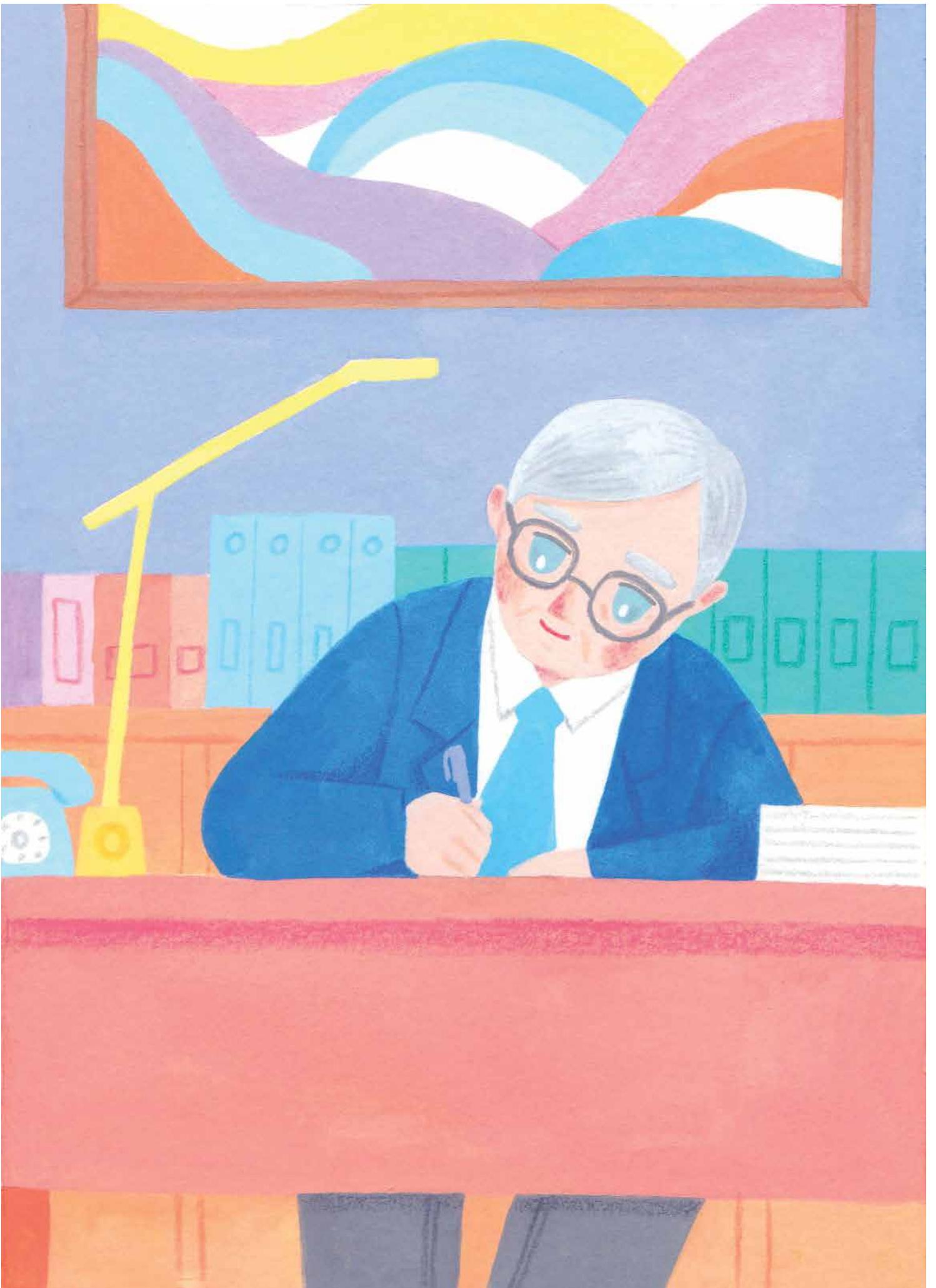
They had a plan to spread Zina's message about the dangers of plastic to the environment, but they didn't know if it would work. Zina told her new friends she had seen plastic rubbish around the school, and it seemed like no one cared. The girls realised she was right, and they were shocked they hadn't really noticed before

The plan went like this... They would all go to the headmaster's office and persuade him to let them lead an assembly. If he said yes, they would prepare speeches.

"Ssshhh!" whispered Emma as they approached the headmaster's door. "Who will knock?" asked Stephanie. "I will," said Sophie with determination.



“Who is it?” asked the headmaster. “Emma, Stephanie, Sophie, Michelle and Zina,” replied Michelle. “Come in,” said the headmaster, although he was clearly very busy. Michelle slowly opened the door. They told the headmaster the story Zina had told them about the turtle who almost choked on plastic. He listened to them carefully, and when they asked about putting on a school assembly, he said a very firm “Yes!” They all did a silent cheer and left the office with excitement. Without delay they all prepared their speeches at break in the library for the next day.





# chapter 5

## The assembly

Emma began saying: “Today’s assembly will be worth remembering, and if you tell your family and friends, it will make such a big difference. I would like to introduce you to our new student, Zina.”

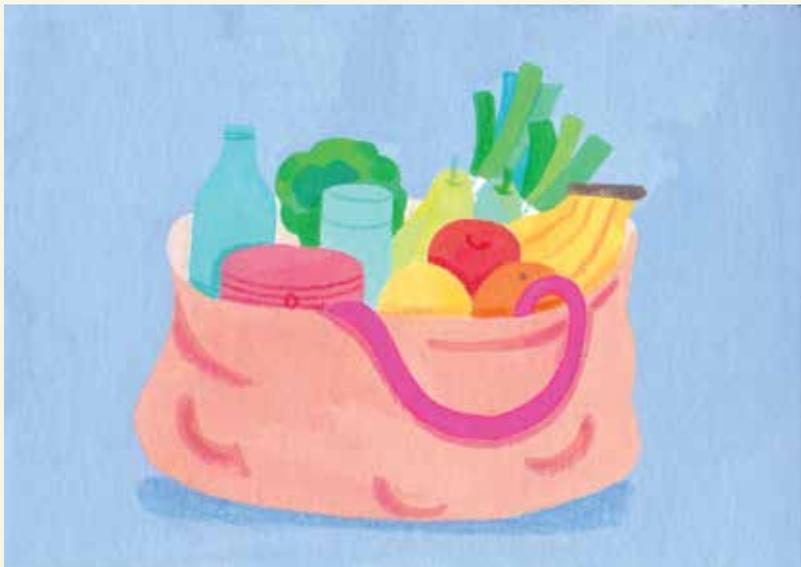
“Hi, my name Zina. I ten-year-old and from Tunisia,” said Zina in a quiet voice. Michelle continued by telling everyone that this assembly was all about plastic. The students in the assembly hall looked puzzled.

“Yes, plastic has been hurting the earth and animals, and we need to stop this!” Sophie exclaimed. “Our friend Zina will tell you a story from her life in Tunisia,” said Emma.



“I was playing with my friend in sea. I saw something near me in water and looked. It was turtle choking on plastic! We picked up turtle and took plastic off. Me and friend then saw turtle swim away. I told my family and friends and at school and we make posters to say no to plastic,” recounted Zina.

“We also need to change how much plastic we use in our lives, and we will now set a challenge for us all,” announced Emma. “Our challenge is not to use any plastic for the whole week!” Everyone in the hall gasped.



# chapter 6

## The end of the challenge

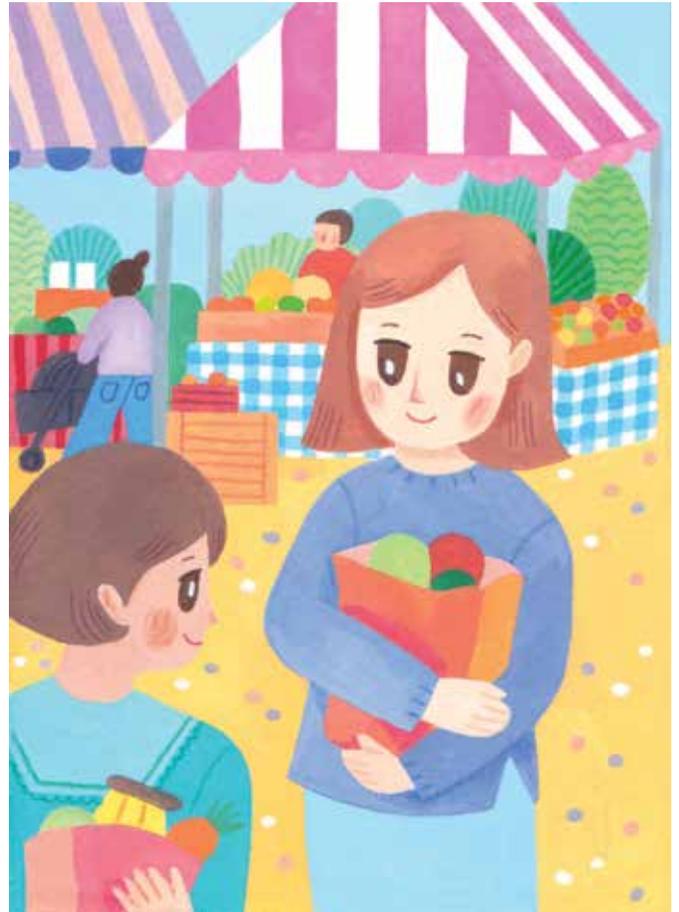
The following week, the girls stood at the front of the hall and explained how the challenge had evolved for them. Emma began by saying, “My mum and I went to a plastic free shop just around the corner. We brought containers with us and filled them up with flour, salt, and sugar. We brought our own bottles to buy lots of other things like sunflower oil and vinegar. This challenge was really fun and interesting, but there were a few difficulties like not being able to grab packaged food on the go.”



Michelle continued by saying, “I felt challenged to knock on our neighbours’ doors to tell them about the dangers of plastic to animals. I also collected any spare plastic they did not want so that I could recycle it!”

Then it was Sophie's turn to speak. "We went to the market and picked out all of the fruits we wanted and put them into a paper bag. Then we weighed them and bought them. This challenge is outstanding, and it feels so much better not using plastic."

Emma told everyone that the girls had designed posters during the week to encourage people not to use disposable plastic water bottles. Zina finished the assembly by saying, "Thank you to you all!"





When Emma got home on the last day of the challenge week, she told her mum about her day. She explained how they led another assembly to mark the end of the challenge. It was really interesting to hear how everyone had tried their best not to use plastic.





The next morning came quickly. Emma hurried to the door as she heard someone knocking. She opened the door hurriedly, and a whole crowd with cameras and microphones appeared out of nowhere! They were asking questions such as, “How did you manage a week without plastic? Tell us!”

She told them about all the struggles and solutions of their plastic-free challenge. Emma explained that they had come up with some solutions to use less plastic in everyday life.

Emma felt so good that she had not only made a new friend, but also helped to make a difference to the environment.

Later that day, the girls contacted the Mayor and City Council, and persuaded them to ban single-use plastic in their town. The City Council agreed, and the girls were overjoyed!

“We did it!” exclaimed Zina. “Yes, we did,” Emma whispered back.



# about the author



Photo: © Bethia Hope Rollins.

**Freya Tikva** is a curious girl, buzzing with ideas and full of energy. As a member and leader in the Cambridge Schools Eco-Council, she is dedicated to campaigning for preserving our environment.

Having grown up in different countries, Freya is aware of cultural differences and norms and passionately seeks to build bridges and bring people together. She has friends all over the globe with whom she is deeply connected.

Freya loves painting and drawing and regularly creates artwork. She likes illustrating her own stories. For this book she sketched out five scenes, which served as a basis for the artwork of her chosen illustrator, Li-Wen Chu.

Apart from playing the piano and singing in the school choir, Freya enjoys sports, and she applies her team spirit to her school's hockey team.

Freya thinks of her dyslexia as a special gift that provides her a chance to grow and campaign for literacy.

# about the illustrator



**Li-Wen Chu** was born in a beautiful mountain village of East Taiwan in 1989. Ever since Li-Wen can remember, she has been traveling with her family throughout Taiwan, visiting remote mountains, beautiful valleys, and the stunning coastline. As a child, she spent most of her time exploring this wonderful world. Li-Wen's dad is an amateur calligrapher and seal-cutting artist. He was also her first mentor in both drawing and writing. After graduating with a BA in fashion design, Li-Wen decided to leave her sweet, cozy hometown for an adventure and decided to study illustration at the University of the Arts in London. She completed a MA at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge School of Arts, where she devoted herself to children's book illustration. LiWen loves to draw harmonious landscapes, botanical patterns, and happy characters, as well as write stories for picture books. Outside of illustrating, she can be found reading, travelling, and dancing to music.



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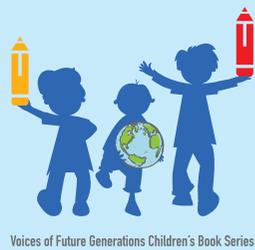
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## The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

All children are holders of important human rights. Twenty-five years ago in 1989, over a hundred countries agreed on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the most important human rights treaty in history, they promised to protect and promote all children's equal rights, which are connected and equally important.

In the 54 Articles of the Convention, countries make solemn promises to defend children's needs and dreams. They recognize the role of children in realizing their rights, which requires that children be heard and involved in decision-making. In particular, Article 24 and Article 27 defend children's rights to safe drinking water, good food, a clean and safe environment, health, and quality of life. Article 29 recognizes children's rights to education that develops personality, talents and potential, respecting human rights and the natural environment.

— *Dr. Alexandra Wandel*  
World Future Council



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## Sustainable Development Goals Statement

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are a bridge from the previous Millennium Development Goals adopted by the international community in 2000 to the future. Construction of this bridge began in 2012 at the United Nations Rio+ 20 Conference on Sustainable Development. At this Conference, countries agreed that it was time to take concrete action for the present and the future by acting on issues such as climate change, poverty, inequality and biodiversity. This resulted in The Future We Want, a global statement of priorities and responsibilities for countries toward the people, environment, biodiversity and future.

In 2015, the bridge took shape in the form of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which countries agreed to implement between 2015 and 2030. The SDGs, as they are commonly called, comprise a set of 17 specific goals, over 160 targets within these goals, and hundreds of indicators to measure if the goals and targets are being met. The SDGs address the key issues that face our world community now and that will define this community in the future, such as poverty, climate change, education rights, gender equality, discrimination, health, food and water access and safety, and the promotion of justice for all members of society. Since 2015, children around the world have joined in efforts to incorporate the SDGs in their countries and communities, adding their voices and perspectives as future leaders. The SDGs show the power of all people, including children, to create positive and lasting change that addresses the needs of local and global society.

— *Dr. Alexandra R. Harrington*  
Centre for International Sustainable Development Law



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## Thanks and Inspiring Resources

### **'Voices of Future Generations' International Commission**

Warmest thanks to the International Commission, launched in 2014 by His Excellency Judge CG Weeramantry, UNESCO Peace Education Research Award Laureate, which supports, guides and profiles this new series of Children's Books Series, including: Ms. Alexandra Wandel (WFC), Prof. Marie-Claire Cordonier Segger (CISDL), Dr Kristiann Allen (New Zealand), Ms. Irina Bokova (Former Director-General UNESCO), Ms. Emma Hopkin / Ms. Hannah Rolls (UK), Ms. Julia Marton-Lefevre (IUCN), Dr James Moody (Australia), Prof. Kirsten Sandberg (University of Oslo), Judge Marcel Szabo (Hungary), Dr Christina Voigt (Norway), Dr Alexandra Harrington (CISDL).

### **'Voices of Future Generations' Goodwill Ambassadors and VoFG Team**

Most sincere appreciation to HH Sheikha Hissa Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum (ELF / Middle East), Dr Ying-Shih Hsieh (EQPF / Asia), Dr Gabrielle Sacconaghi-Bacon (Moore Foundation / North America), Ms. Melinda Manuel (PNG), Dr Odeeth Lara-Morales (VoFG), Neshan Gunasekera (VoFG), Ms. Sarah Sanders (VoFG).

**The World Future Council** consists of 50 eminent global changemakers from across the globe. Together, they work to pass on a healthy planet and just societies to our children and grandchildren. ([www.worldfuturecouncil.org](http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org))

**United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO)** strives to build networks among nations that enable humanity's moral and intellectual solidarity by mobilizing for education, building intercultural understanding, pursuing scientific cooperation, and protecting freedom of expression. (<https://en.unesco.org/>)

**The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** is the body of 18 independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its three Optional Protocols, by its State parties. ([www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org))

**United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. ([www.unep.org](http://www.unep.org))

**International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** envisions a just world that values and conserves nature, working to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable. ([www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org))

**Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL)** supports understanding, development and implementation of law for sustainable development by leading legal research through scholarship and dialogue and facilitating legal education through teaching and capacity-building. ([www.cisdl.org](http://www.cisdl.org))

**Environmental Quality Protection Foundation (EQPF)** established in 1984 is the premier ENGO in Taiwan. Implementing environmental education, tree plantation, and international participation through coordinating transdisciplinary resources to push forward environmental and sustainable development in our time.

**World's Largest Lesson (WLL)** World's Largest Lesson brings the Global Goals to children all over the world and unites them in taking action. Since it was launched in September 2015, the World's Largest Lesson has reached over 130 countries and impacted over 8 million children each year. (<https://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org/>)

**Emirates Literature Foundation**, home of the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature is a not-for-profit non-governmental organisation that supports and nurtures a love of literature in the UAE and across the region through a programme of varied cultural initiatives. Recognising the distinctive contribution that literature makes to children's lives, the Foundation focuses on introducing and cultivating a spirit of reading while acting as a catalyst for writing and cultural exchange. (<https://www.elfdubai.org/en/home>)



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## About the 'Voices of Future Generations' Series

To celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Voices of Future Generations Children's Book Series, led by the United Nations and a consortium of educational charities including the World Future Council (WFC), the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL), the Environmental Quality Protection Foundation (EQPF), the Fundacion Ecos and the Trust for Sustainable Living (TSL) among others, as well as the Future Generations Commissioners of several countries, and international leaders from the UN Division for Sustainable Development, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN Education, Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and other international organizations, has launched the new Voices of Future Generations Series of Children's Books.

Every year we feature stories from our selected group of child authors, inspired by the outcomes of the Earth Summit, the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) and the world's Sustainable Development Goals, and by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) itself. Our junior authors, ages 8-12, are concerned about future justice, poverty, the global environment, education and children's rights. Accompanied by illustrations, each book profiles creative, interesting and adventurous ideas for creating a just and greener future, in the context of children's interests and lives.

We aim to publish the books internationally in ten languages, raising the voices of future generations and spread their messages for a fair and sustainable tomorrow among their peers and adults, worldwide. We welcome you to join us in support of this inspiring partnership, at [www.vofg.org](http://www.vofg.org).





A lovely and perceptive story about friendship and how we can learn from 'outsiders' to view our world differently. This story has an important message for everyone: we must look after our environment and reduce our use of plastic.

**Stephanie Palmer**

**Associate Professor and Director of Postgraduate Education at the University of Cambridge and Barrister**

A touching story that has the power to inspire and embolden: wherever you come from, plastic waste demands action today, not tomorrow.

**Sylvie Delacroix**

**Professor in Law and Ethics at the University of Birmingham, Fellow at the Alan Turing Institute and Mozilla**

Freya's story is an impressive example of a young European citizen committed to bridging divergent perspectives. She invites her peers to look through the eyes of a Tunisian girl, to better understand her needs for a global sustainable transition. In her story, this understanding opens up room for creative problem-solving and collaboration among school kids. It is courageous to reflect critically on one's own behavior against the backdrop of global inequality and injustice - and beyond that it is a key competence of global citizenship education.

**Gabi Slezak**

**Austrian Foundation for Development Cooperation (ÖFSE)**

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