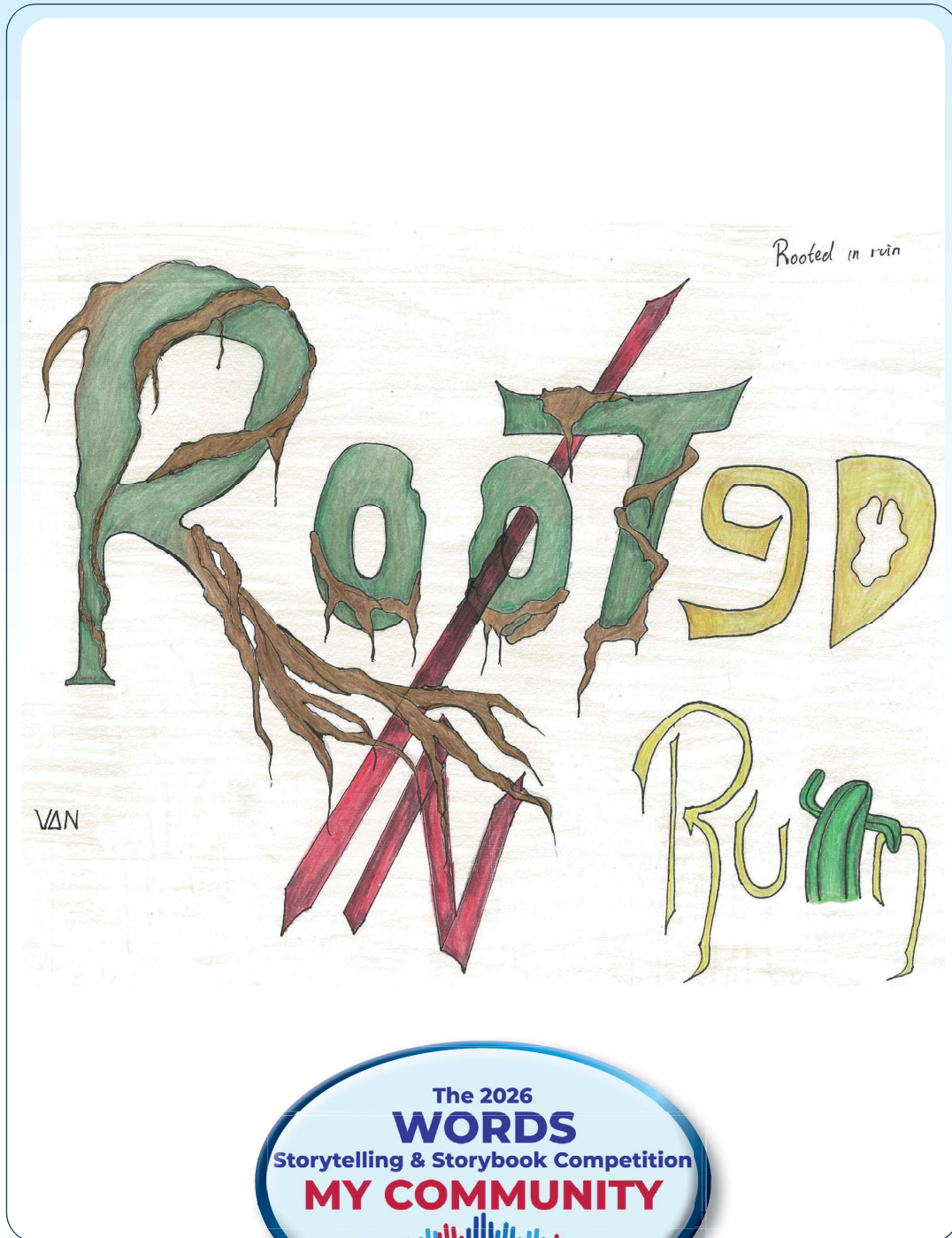
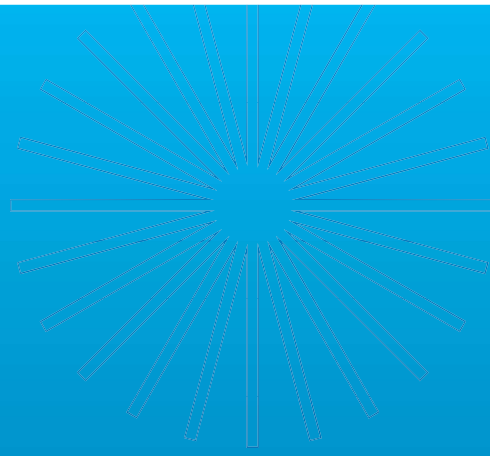


VANIA NABILAH SAPUTRA

- ROOTED IN RUIN -



The 2026
WORDS
Storytelling & Storybook Competition
MY COMMUNITY



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These storybooks have been lightly edited for clarity.

Table of Contents

4	Foreword
5	About the WORDS Competition
6	Rooted in Ruin
21	About the Author
22	About AMINEF
23	About the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program and ETA in Indonesia

Foreword

The seventeen stories presented in this book came from a collaborative process between students and their teachers— both their home institution teacher (co-teacher) and the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) serving in their schools. At the heart of the collaborative process is the desire to foster understanding and to bridge differences. The schools where they taught were selected through a collaborative process between AMINEF, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to host the ETAs. Indeed, everything about this program underlines cooperation between all parties involved.

After a long selection and preparation process, the ETAs served in Indonesia for eight months. They came from various states in the US, from New York to California, Vermont to Louisiana - some from urban areas, others more rural. Together, they represent the rich landscape of places and cultures in America. Likewise, in Indonesia, the ETAs were exposed to and experienced life in various places and cultures. They co-taught English in various areas, spreading from Padang, Jambi, Lampung, Kulon Progo, Kudus, Sidoarjo, Praya, Palangkaraya, Makassar, and Kendari.

Over the eight months the ETAs, co-teachers, and students, in essence, serve as cultural ambassadors to one another. They forged friendships beyond the classroom walls and invested their time and energy in the communities. And this year's theme for the WORDS Storybook competition is indeed "My Community".

The stories you are about to read here were written by the stars of each school. The authors won a local competition organized by the ETAs and the co-teachers. They then worked intensively on their books and on how to best narrate the stories. In April, the students, co-teachers, and ETAs were invited to Jakarta to celebrate their journey – from beginning to learn English to becoming authors and, subsequently, storytellers.

The students performed confidently in front of a panel of four prominent judges who are all Fulbrighters from Indonesia and the US: Ahmad Fuadi, an author of best-selling novels including "Negeri 5 Menara" and a prominent public speaker; Anna Grundström, a performing artist and independent researcher based in Brooklyn, New York; Azalia Muchransyah, filmmaker, scholar, and lecturer at BINUS University; and Douglas Ramage, AMINEF Board Member and founding Managing Director of Bower-GroupAsia Indonesia.

The third place went to Clarintha Glory Amungin Allokendek from SMK Raden Umar Said Kudus with "Hannah The One-Man Team" whose story reminded us of the importance of collaboration with others. Putri Permata Sari from SMK 9 Padang's story "The Pursuit of Happiness", won second place. It is a beautiful story about self-acceptance and creating a community of your own.

In first place was Florencia Kirana Wilman from SMK 6 Padang, with her story "The Day Coffee Called Us Home." Ms. Wilman presented a powerful reminder that, amid disasters and challenges, communities can work together and find solutions. Her story showed that sometimes what the community needs is one person to plow the way, helping each other, and others will follow.

The WORDS Competition is a celebration for all: the students, the ETAs, and the co-teachers. It is a celebration of a new, and hopefully lasting, connection among people. And AMINEF is proud to have been part of these connections.

Dr. Sandra Hamid

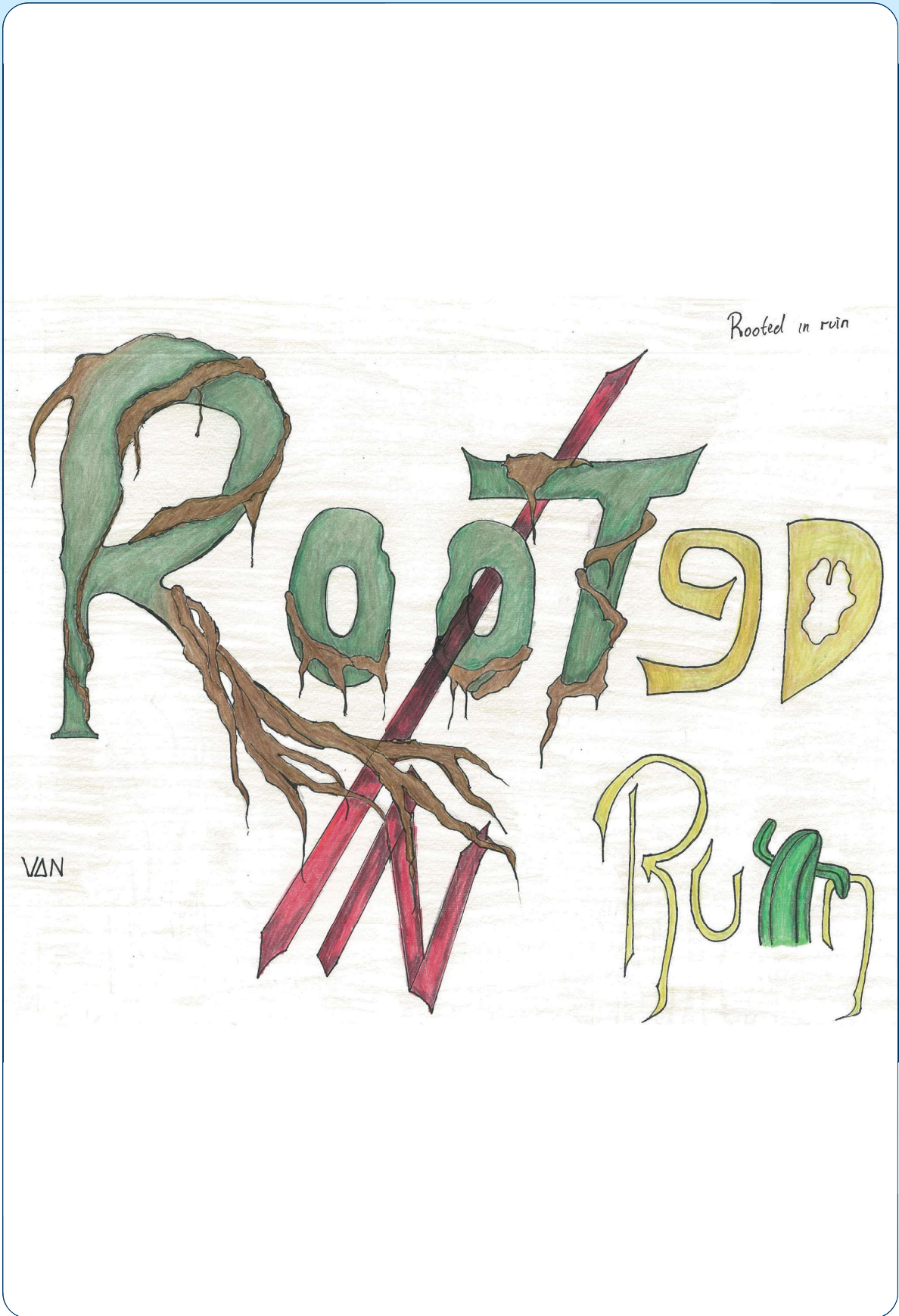
Executive Director, AMINEF

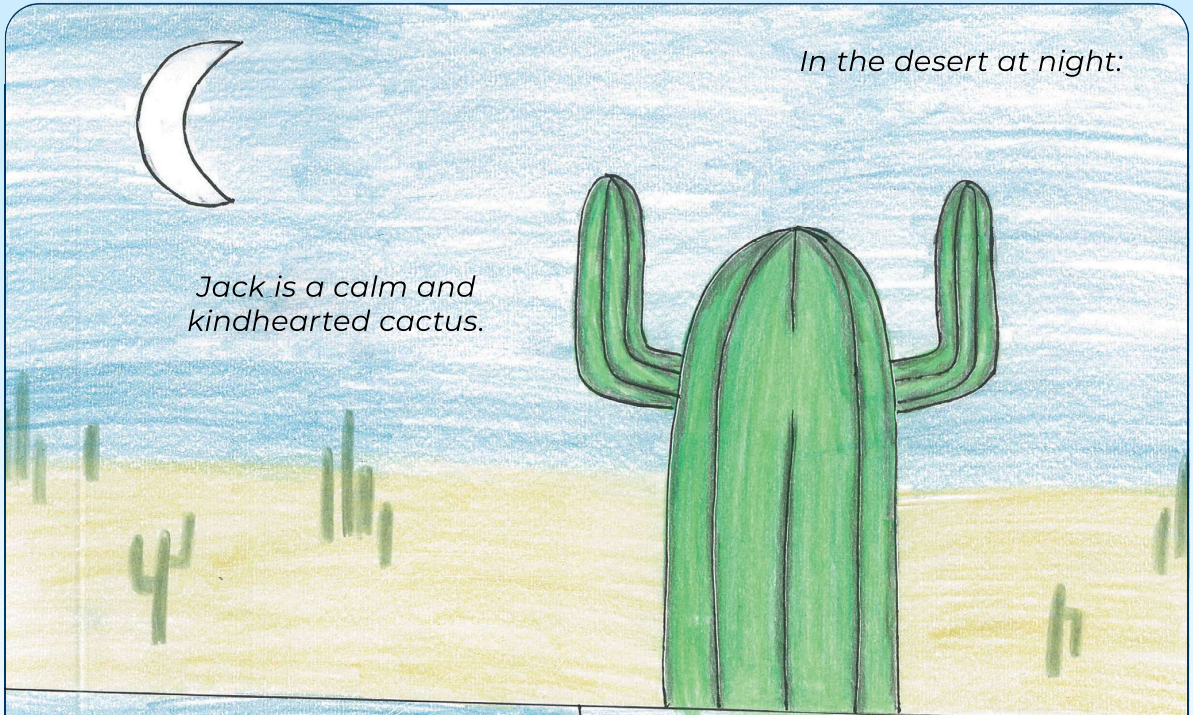
About the WORDS Competition

WORDS is a national English-language competition that brings together one student from each Fulbright ETA host school. Launched as a speech and talent contest in 2007, it evolved into a storytelling and storybook competition in 2018.

Finalists first win their school-level competition, which Fulbright ETAs organize in collaboration with the co-teachers. ETAs support students through brainstorming sessions, workshops, and performance feedback.

A highlight of the AMINEF year, the WORDS Competition allows 10th and 11th graders to showcase their storytelling skills, English proficiency, and cultural insights. In 2026, seventeen finalists will bring the theme **“My Community”** to life through their original stories.





In the desert at night:

Jack is a calm and kindhearted cactus.

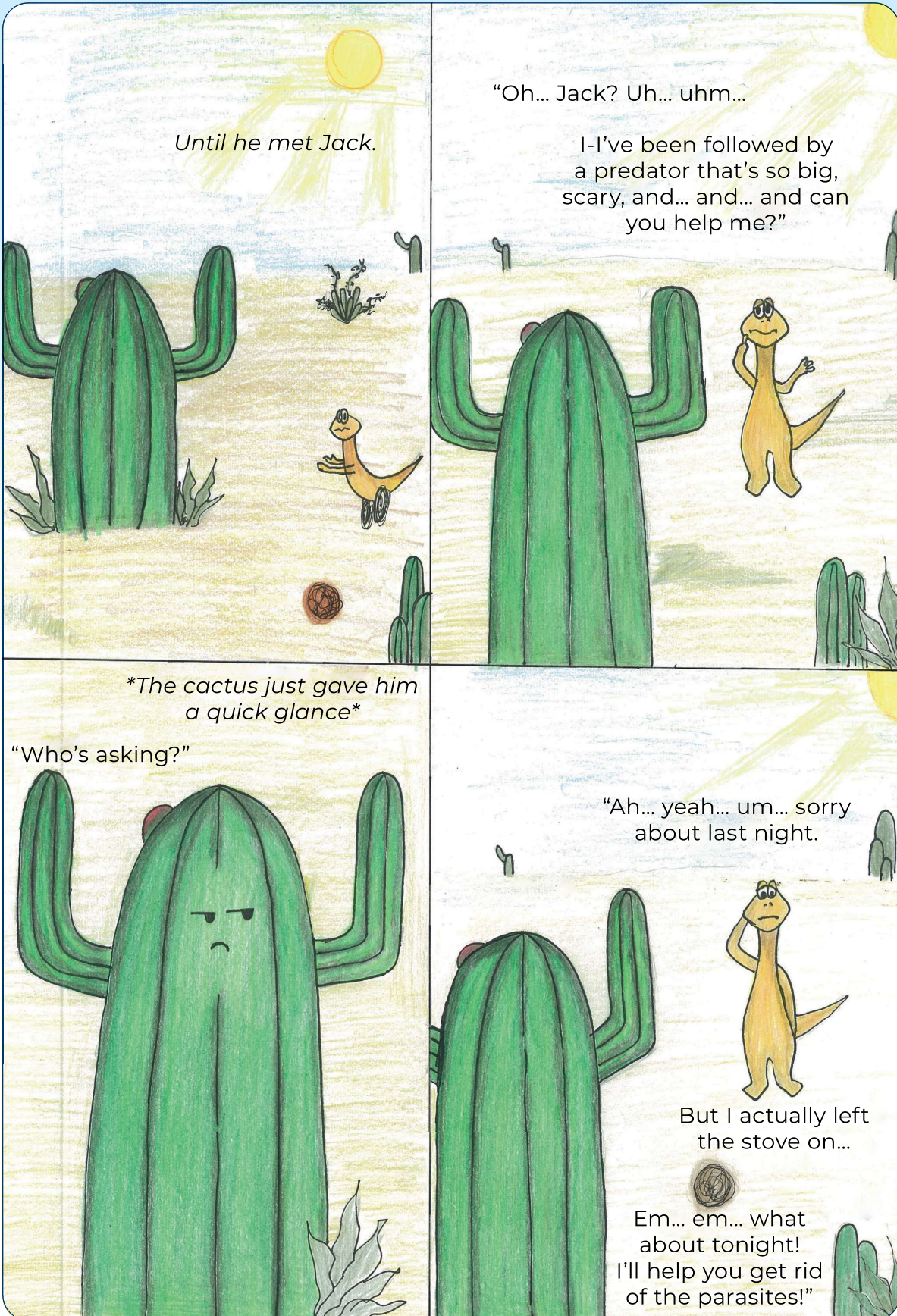


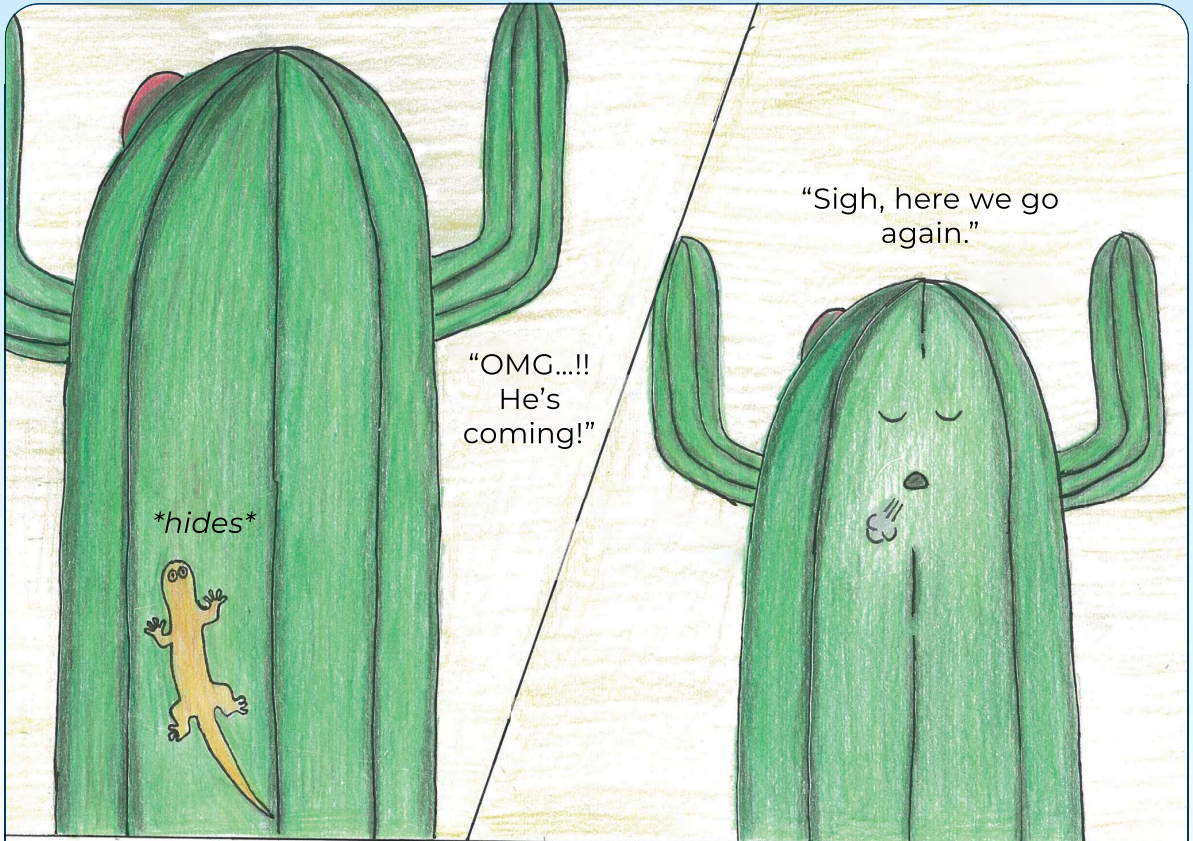
At night, when the cactus opens its pores, those pests drain its water supply.

"These parasites always bothering me!"





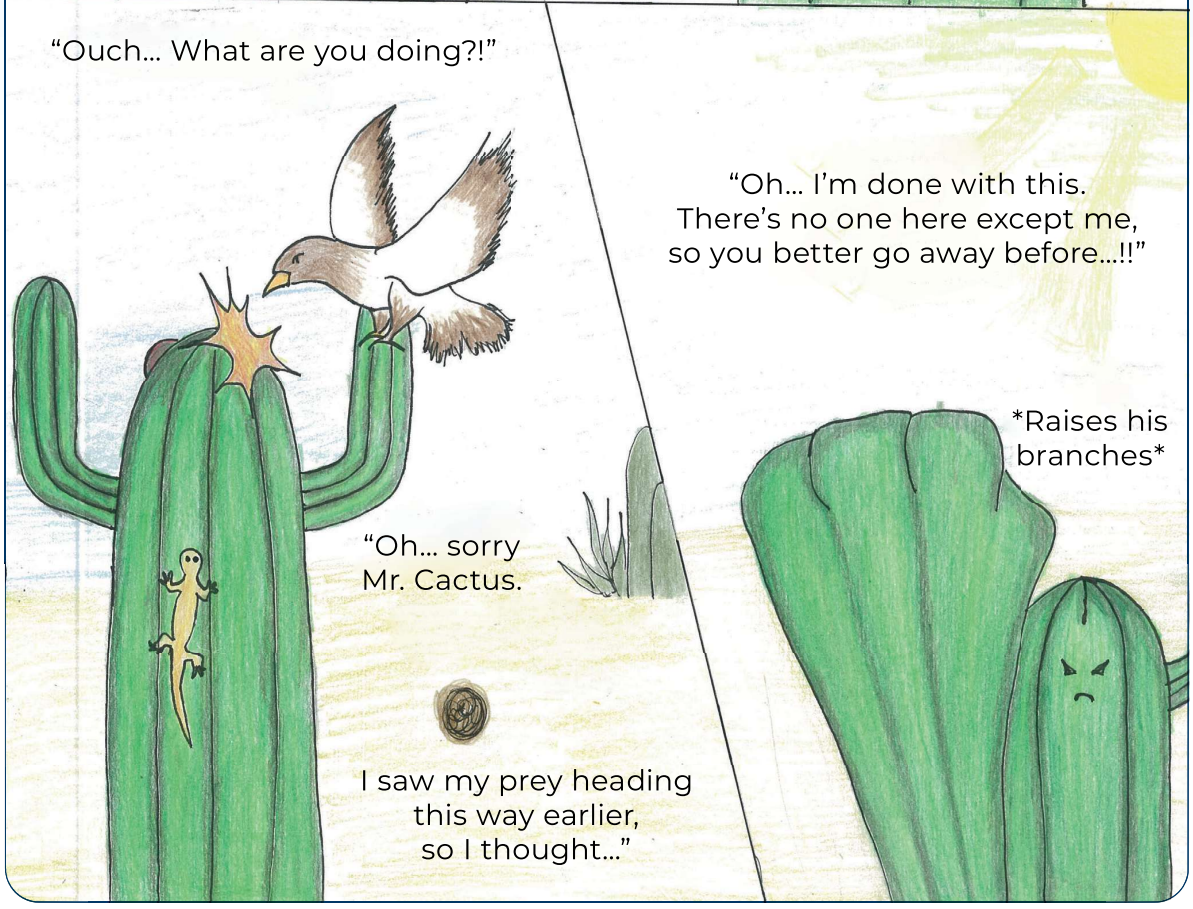




hides

"OMG...!! He's coming!"

"Sigh, here we go again."



"Ouch... What are you doing?!"

"Oh... sorry Mr. Cactus."

I saw my prey heading this way earlier, so I thought..."

"Oh... I'm done with this. There's no one here except me, so you better go away before...!!"

Raises his branches

And true to his promises, Moki helped Jack remove all the parasites, but...

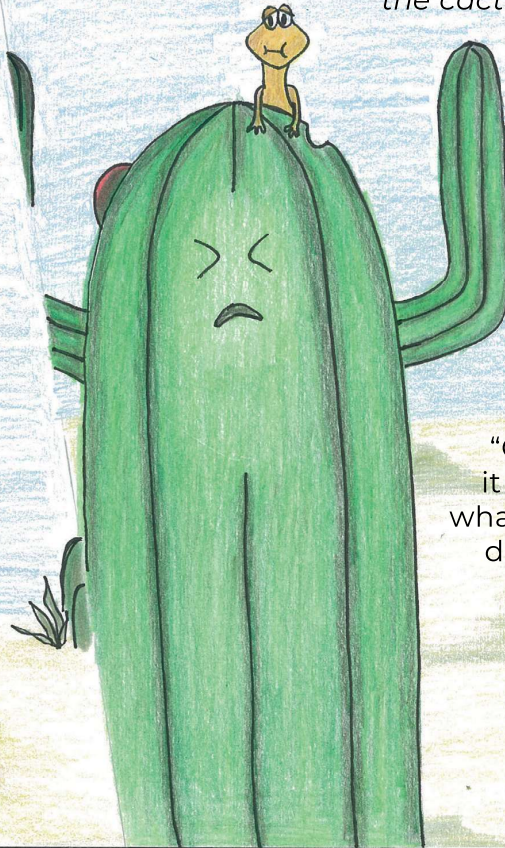


It seems he wasn't really serious about his promise. Like now he's only pretending to remove the parasites, when he was pulling out the cactus' spines. Then...

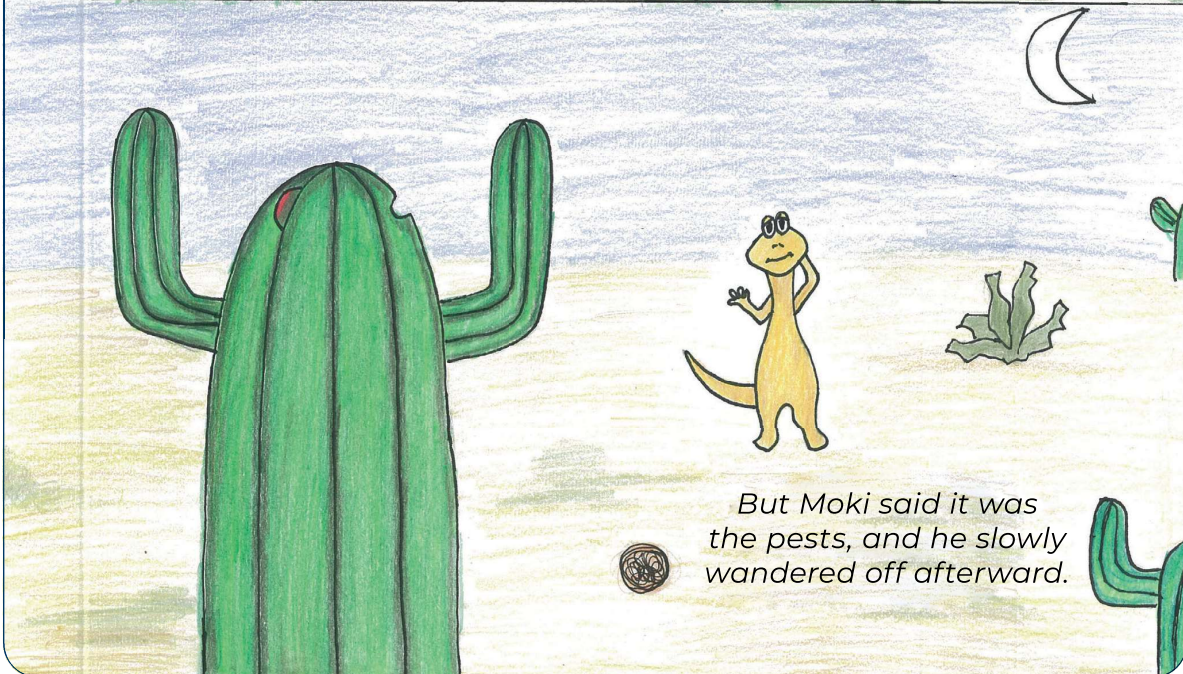


chomp!

He ate a small part of the cactus.



"Ouch... it hurts... what are you doing?!"

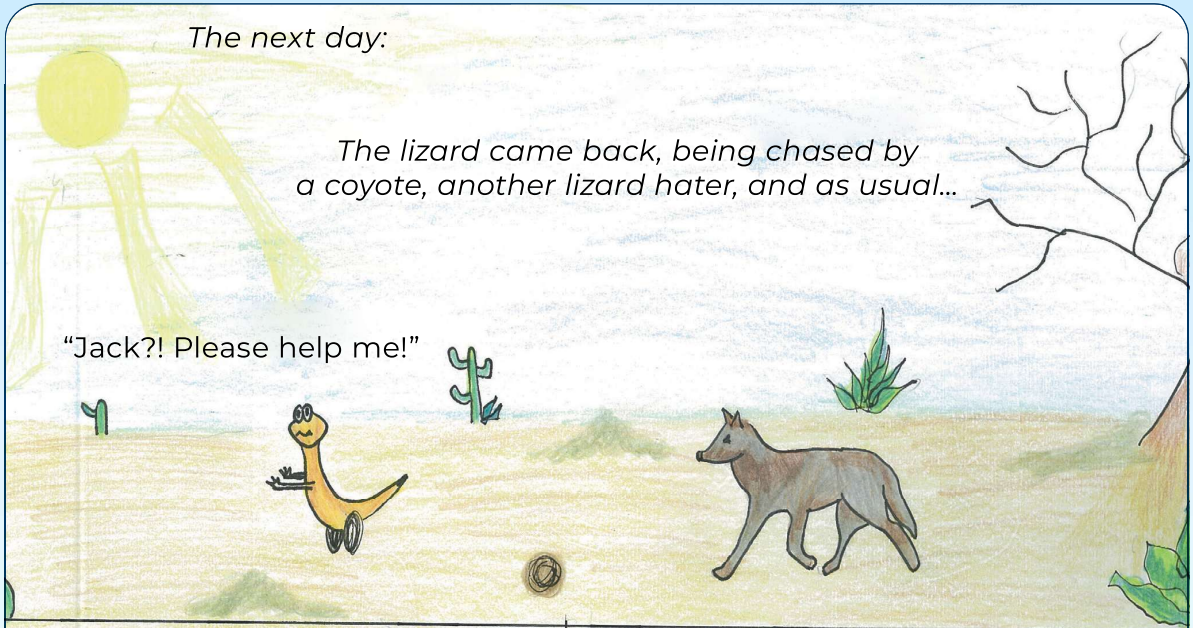


But Moki said it was the pests, and he slowly wandered off afterward.

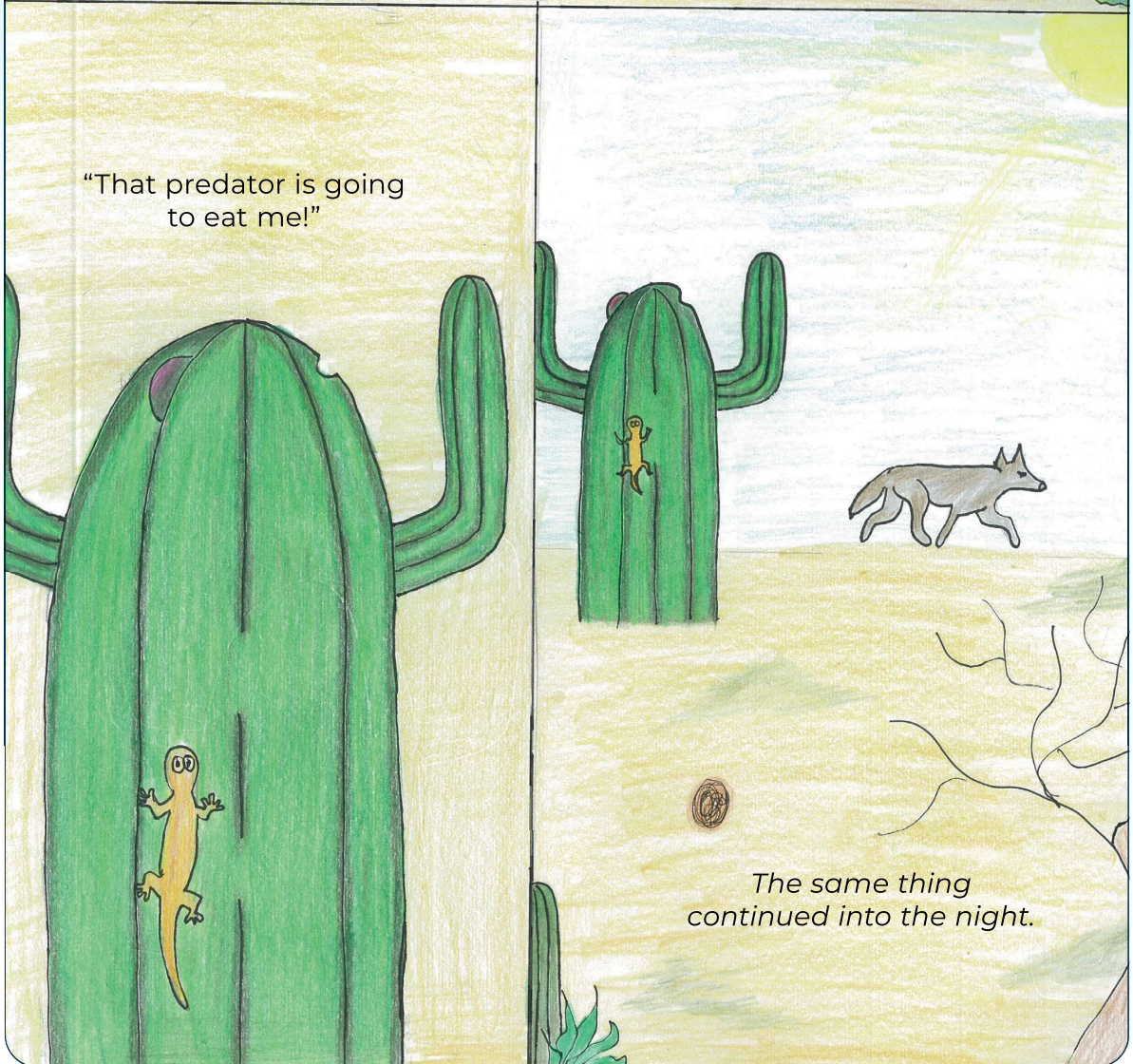
The next day:

The lizard came back, being chased by a coyote, another lizard hater, and as usual...

"Jack?! Please help me!"

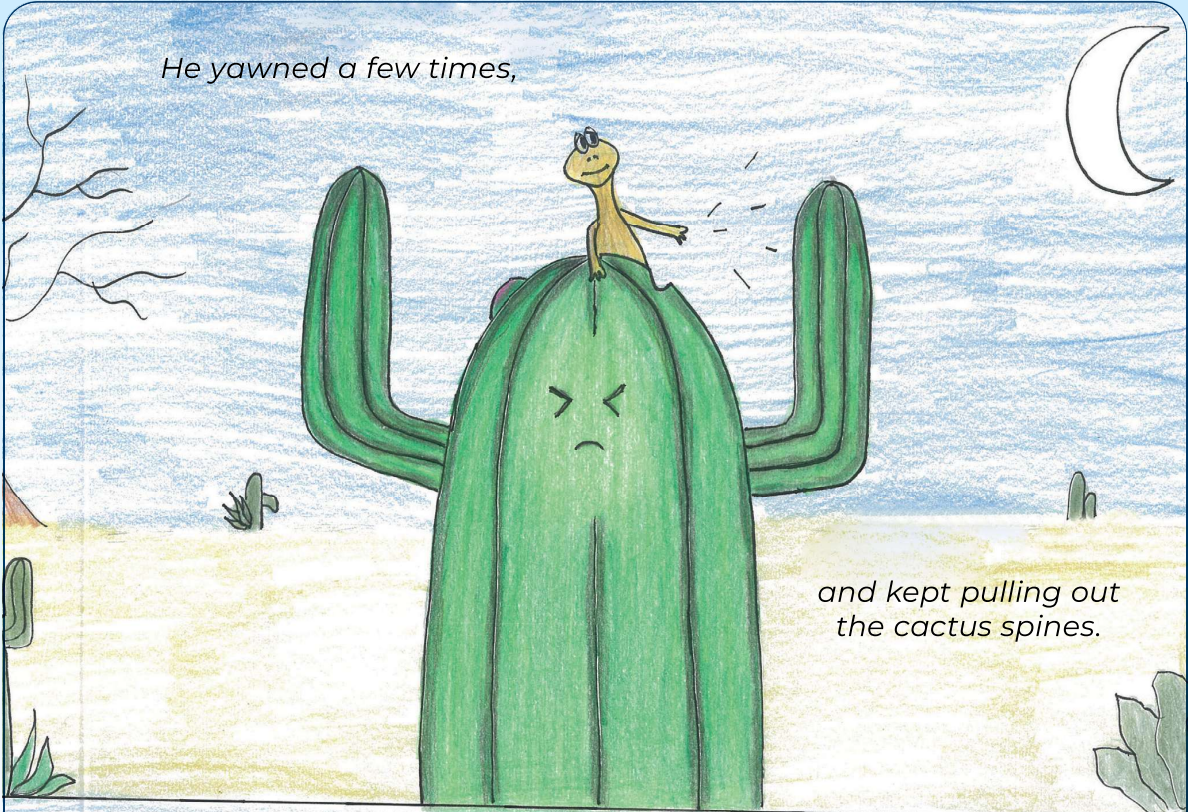


"That predator is going to eat me!"

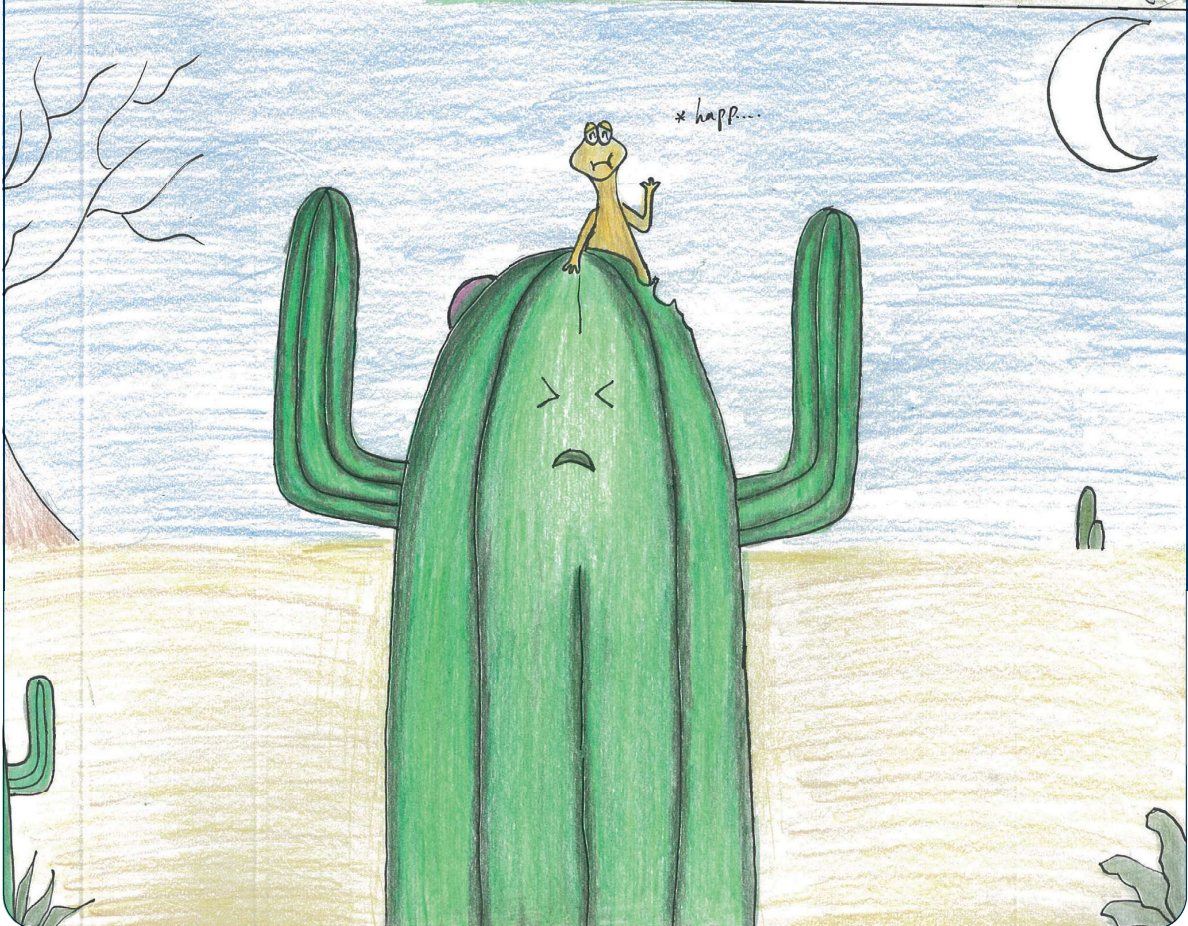


The same thing continued into the night.

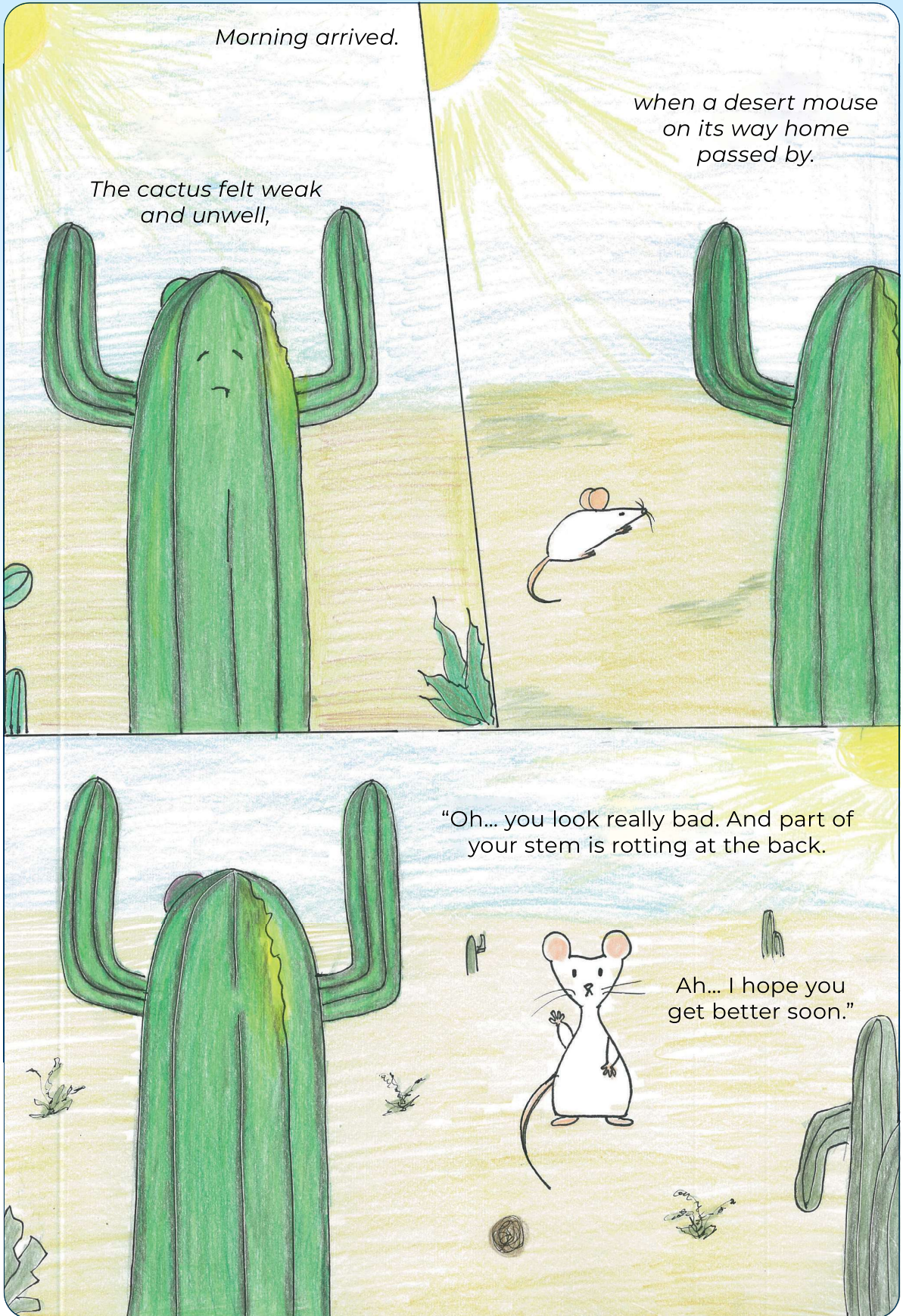
He yawned a few times,



and kept pulling out
the cactus spines.



*happ...



Morning arrived.

The cactus felt weak
and unwell,

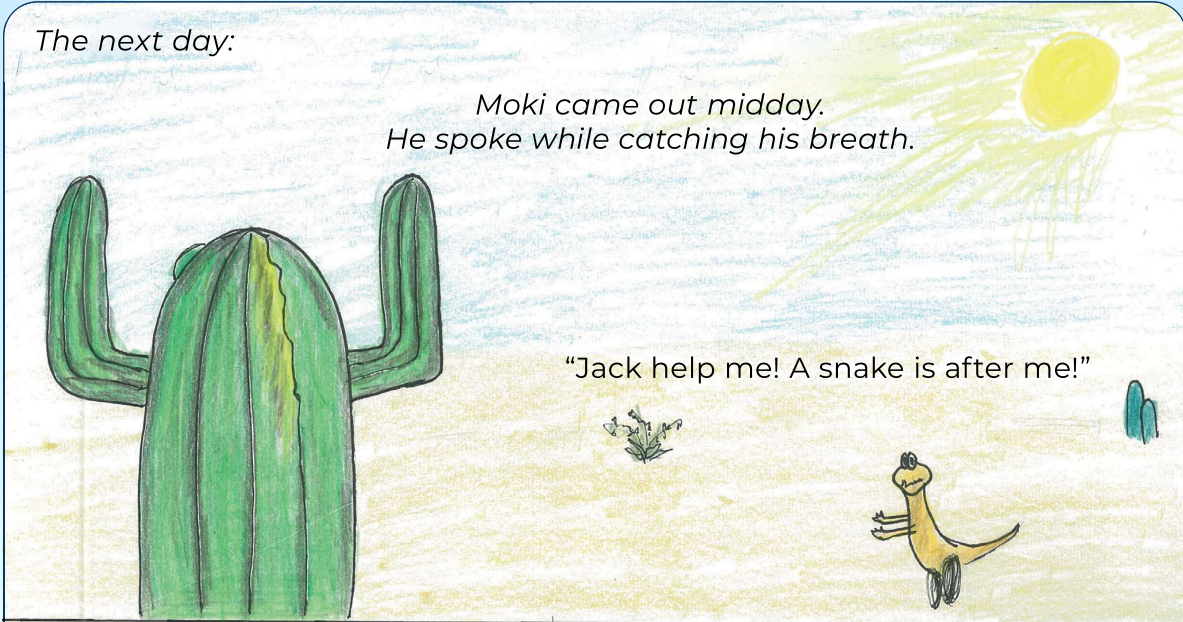
when a desert mouse
on its way home
passed by.

"Oh... you look really bad. And part of
your stem is rotting at the back.

Ah... I hope you
get better soon."

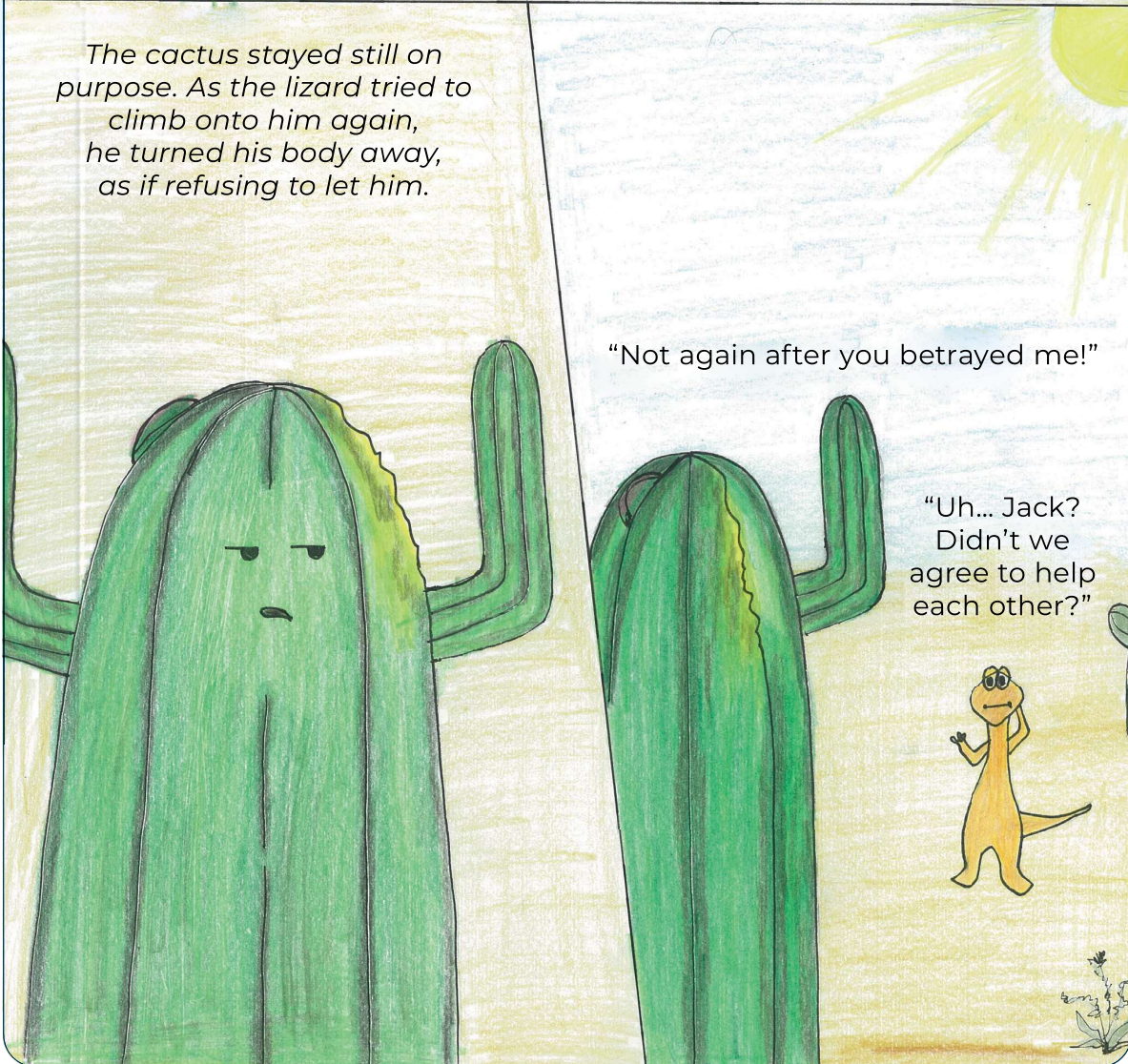
The next day:

Moki came out midday.
He spoke while catching his breath.



"Jack help me! A snake is after me!"

The cactus stayed still on purpose. As the lizard tried to climb onto him again, he turned his body away, as if refusing to let him.

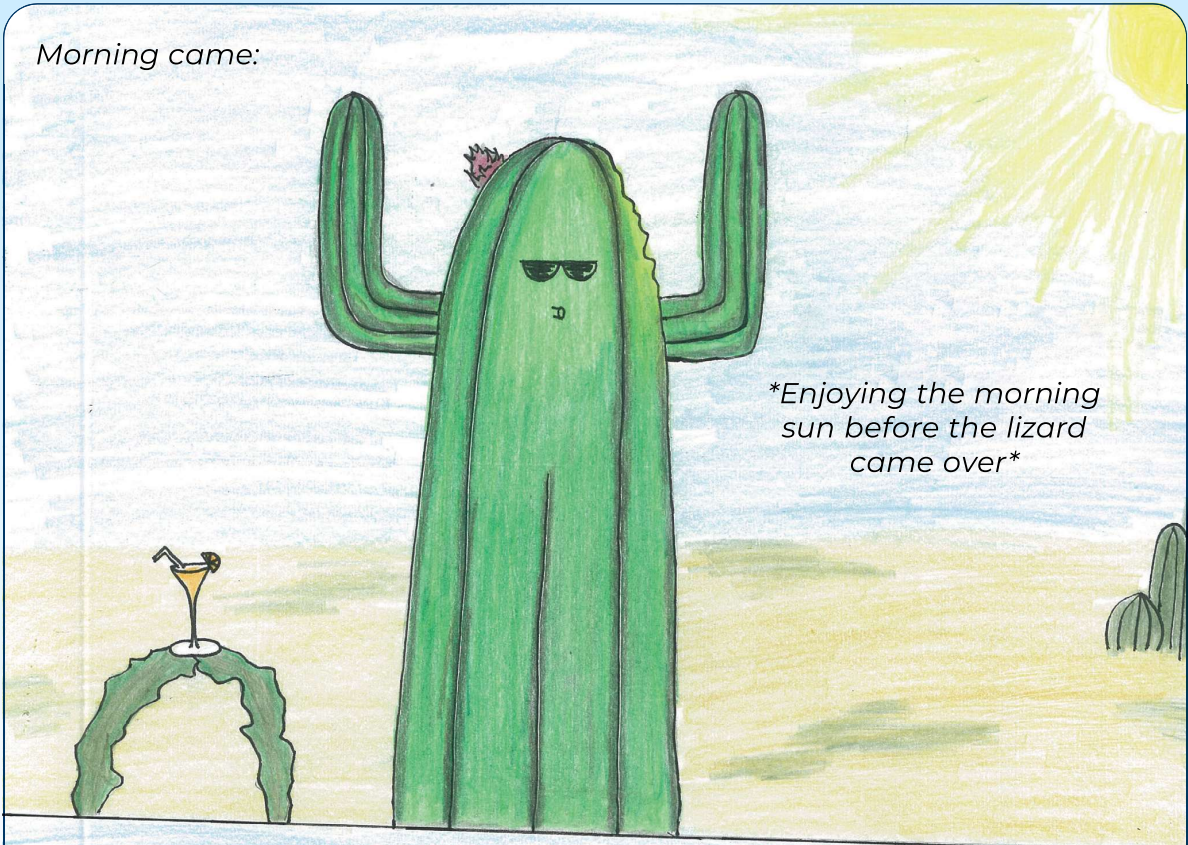


"Not again after you betrayed me!"

"Uh... Jack?
Didn't we agree to help each other?"



Morning came:



Enjoying the morning sun before the lizard came over

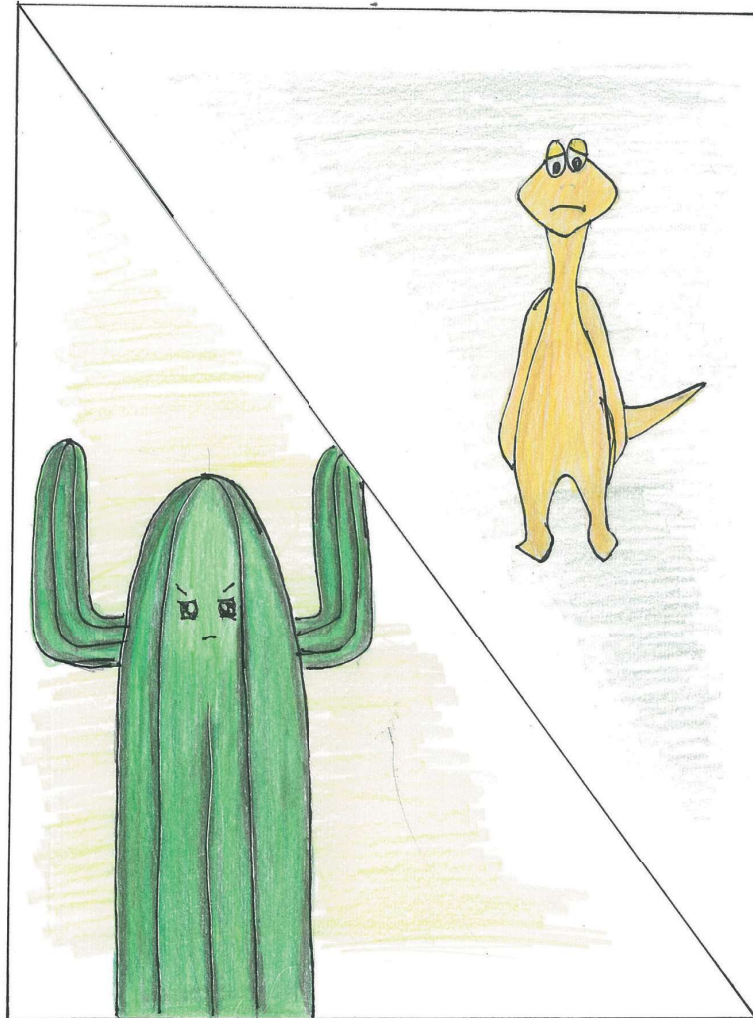
Still ignored him



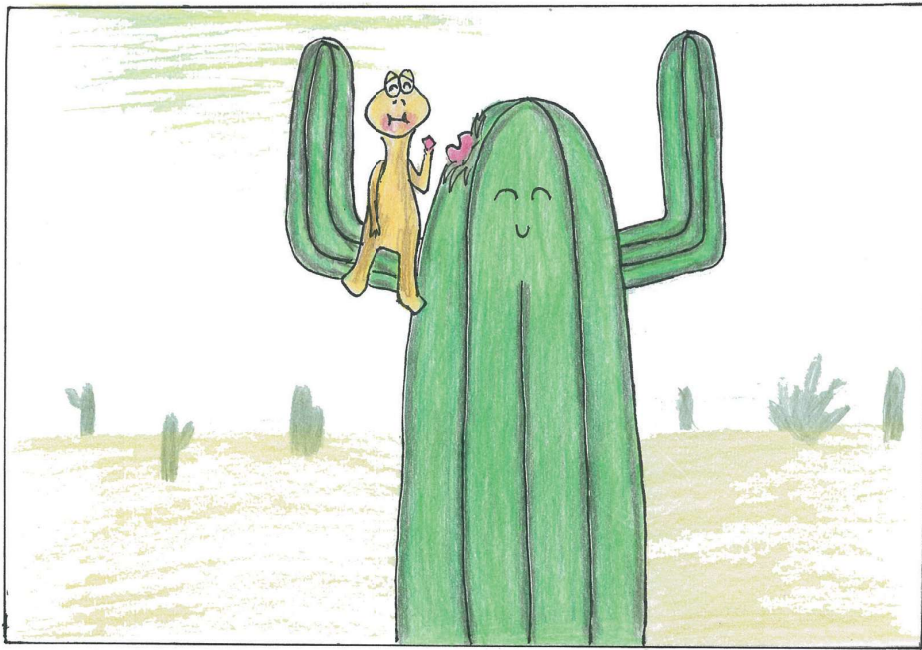
“Uh... um... I just wanna apologize...”

this is all my fault...”

He kept trying to persuade the cactus to forgive him. He truly realized his mistakes and felt deep regret, understanding that he had no one else until finally the cactus forgave him.

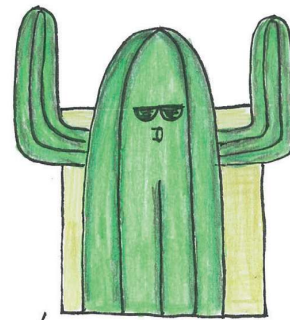


The lizard cleans the rotting parts of the cactus to stop the decay from spreading, and Jack allowed him to eat the fruits that grew on it, and the cactus protect him from predators.



*In the end, their egos faded. Leaving behind
an undeniable sense of togetherness, a quiet
realization that they needed each other.
From obstacles to harmony, their bond grew.*

26. February - 2026
to
1. April - 2026.



Absolute cinema

Vania n.s.

About the Author

Vania Nabilah Saputra
SMKN 8 Makassar



Hi! my name is Vania Nabilah Saputra, but everyone call me Vania. I'm 16 years old, I was born in east Jakarta on August 13th, 2008. I'm in 11th grade at SMKN 8 Makassar.

I like trees, rain, leaves.... stuff like that. I don't really have hobby, but I do like eating. My dream.....maybe to become a famous designer, well, I just want to be successful.

About AMINEF

The American Indonesian Exchange Foundation (AMINEF) is the binational Fulbright Commission for Indonesia. AMINEF's many educational exchange programs have increased mutual understanding between the United States and Indonesia and strengthened the ties that unite our two countries.

Since 1952, more than 3,500 Indonesians and 1,400 Americans have participated in exchanges. Annually, 80-100 Indonesians travel to the US through Fulbright grants for degree study, teaching, research, or non-degree professional fellowships. Similarly, up to 60 Americans receive Fulbright support to contribute their expertise in teaching, research, or as Specialists, offering insights to Indonesian institutions.

For detailed information on degree scholarships and non-degree fellowships available to Indonesians and Americans, visit the AMINEF website at www.aminef.or.id.

About the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program and ETA in Indonesia

The Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program, one of the US State Department-funded Fulbright programs in many countries worldwide, places recent college graduates and young professionals as English teaching assistants in primary and secondary schools or universities overseas.

The program helps improve international students' English-language abilities and knowledge of the US while increasing the US student's language skills and knowledge of the many host countries worldwide.

In Indonesia, the Fulbright ETAs are placed in high schools (SMA, SMK, and Madrasah) that assist local English teachers. The program has been running for over two decades, since 2004, affecting thousands of Indonesian students and their communities across the archipelago. AMINEF works closely with the Indonesian Ministries of Primary and Secondary Education and Religious Affairs to administer the Fulbright ETA program in Indonesia.



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American Indonesian
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FULBRIGHT
Indonesia

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