

# An UNEXPECTED SOLUTION



someone at school might get mad at you for no reason?"

Derek nodded as he stared at his homework.

"Well, I have an idea," Dad said. "Try smiling at them."

What? That wasn't what Derek expected. "I don't know," he said. "That sounds kind of weird."

"Nothing too weird about smiling," said Mom.

Dad nodded. "It wouldn't hurt to try. Keep your head up and try smiling at whoever you see. It's pretty hard to get mad about a smile."

Derek thought about Dad's idea. He prayed about it before bed, and he felt peaceful. OK. He'd try it out.

The next morning, Derek hopped off the bus. A crowd of kids squeezed through the front doors of the school. Derek walked inside with his head down, like normal.

But then Derek remembered Dad's idea. *Just smile*, he thought.

With a deep breath, Derek raised his head. An older boy was walking toward him. He was at least one grade above Derek. Maybe two.

He wore a sports jersey and walked with big, fast steps.

Derek almost looked away. This was exactly the kind of kid he thought

might push him out of the way without warning. But he had promised to try.

So he smiled.

The other boy's face brightened a little bit. After he passed, Derek stopped walking for a moment. He didn't feel so nervous now!

Derek smiled at more people on his way to class. Almost all of them smiled back! Dad was right. No one got angry from a smile.

As he walked into the classroom, Derek thought that middle school might not be so scary after all. There was still lots to learn, and he still had some worries. But smiling helped. Maybe his smile could help someone else feel better too. ●

Change can be stressful! Turn to page 38 for some ideas to help you.

his already-full backpack.

Derek's new school was so different from his old one. Now that he was in sixth grade, he went to a school that was much bigger, with lots more students. The classes were harder, and he had more homework too.

But what worried Derek most of all was the other kids. Some of them seemed so mean! He didn't want anyone to get mad at him.

Derek slung his backpack over his shoulder and walked into the hall. Kids were everywhere. He kept his eyes down and tried to weave between them without bumping into anyone. Sometimes it seemed like just looking at someone might

make them mad.

"How was school today?" Dad asked that night. "Any better?"

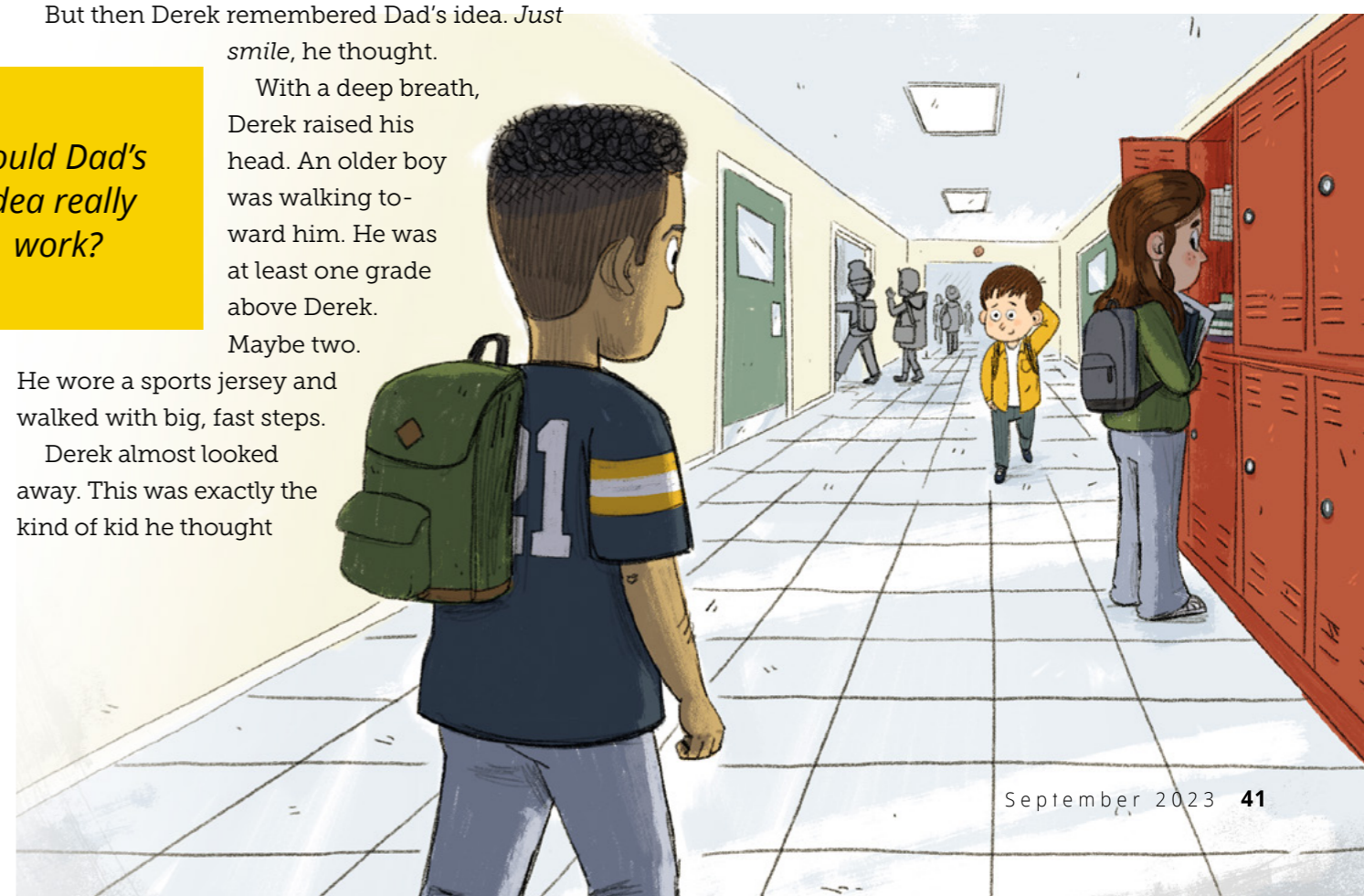
"Not really," Derek said.

Dad set down his book. "You know how you told me that sometimes you worry that

*Could Dad's idea really work?*



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DANIEL DUNCAN



By David Dickson  
(Based on a true story)

This story took place in the USA.

The bell rang just as Mr. Nickels wrote their weekly math homework on the board. There were so many problems to solve! This would take forever.

"Turn in your homework on Friday," Mr. Nickels said. "No excuses."

Everyone groaned. Derek shoved his math book into