Name _____ Date _____

The New Kid

Short story · 4th–5th grade

The new kid arrived in October, when everybody already had their seats, their friends and their jokes. Her name was Elena, and on her first day she sat at the end of the lunch table, ate her sandwich in six minutes and read a book the rest of the time.

"She's stuck-up," said Sam's friend Marcus. "I said hi, and she just nodded." Sam shrugged. He'd been ready to like her, but by Friday he had to agree. Elena never laughed at anyone's jokes, never raised her hand and never talked to anybody.

The next Monday, Ms. Okafor put them in pairs for a science project about weather. Sam got Elena. He groaned inside. "So," he said, "I guess we could do tornadoes." Elena looked up. "Or hurricanes," she said quietly. "I know a lot about hurricanes."

At the library, Elena found books faster than Sam had ever seen anyone find anything. She drew a perfect diagram of a hurricane's eye and explained the winds that spin around it. Sam realized he had stopped being bored.

"How do you know all this?" he asked. Elena was quiet for a long moment. Then she said, "A hurricane hit my town in Puerto Rico last year. Our house was damaged. We lived with my aunt for a while, and then my mom got a job here." She looked down at her notebook. "Everything is different here. Even the cold."

Sam didn't know what to say. He thought about his own first day in a new place, at summer camp when he was seven, and how he had cried on the phone every night. That was just one week. Elena had left her whole town behind.

"I'm really sorry," he finally said. "That sounds hard." Elena nodded. "It's okay. I just don't know anybody yet."

The next day at lunch, Sam picked up his tray and sat down at the end of the table, across from Elena. Marcus raised his eyebrows, then followed. "Elena knows everything about hurricanes," Sam told him. "Ask her anything." Marcus did, and for the first time, Sam heard Elena laugh.

Questions

1. What did Marcus think of Elena at first?

2. What changed Sam's mind about Elena?

3. Why did Elena know so much about hurricanes?

4. What memory helped Sam understand how Elena felt?

5. What is the theme?

6. Was Marcus fair to Elena? Why or why not?

7. What could you do to welcome a new student in your class?

The lesson in my own words

Answer Key

1. That she was stuck-up.
2. Working with her and hearing her story.
3. A hurricane hit her town in Puerto Rico.
4. His first week at summer camp.
5. Try to understand someone's story before you judge them.
6. Answers will vary.
7. Answers will vary.

Lesson: Try to understand someone's story before you judge them.