Name _____ Date _____

The Robot That Wouldn't Turn

Short story · 4th–5th grade

The robot was supposed to drive forward, turn left at the blue line and drop a ball into a bucket. Instead, it drove forward, ignored the blue line and crashed into the wall. Again.

"That's the ninth time today," groaned Leo. The competition was in one week, and the Eagle Bots, the robotics team from Maple Street School, had a robot that couldn't turn.

Maya was the team captain. She had written most of the code herself, and she was sure the problem was the motors. "We need new ones," she said. Nobody argued. Maya was usually right.

But Priya, the newest and quietest member of the team, kept staring at the robot's light sensor, a tiny eye on its belly that was supposed to see the blue line. She opened her mouth to say something, then closed it again.

The new motors arrived on Wednesday. On Thursday, the robot drove forward, ignored the blue line and crashed into the wall. Maya sat on the floor with her head in her hands. "I don't get it. The motors are perfect."

Priya took a breath. "Maybe it's not the motors. I think the sensor can't tell blue from gray. The gym floor is shiny, and the lights bounce off it." She held a flashlight near the sensor and showed them the numbers on the screen. Blue and gray were almost exactly the same.

For a second, Maya felt embarrassed. Then she laughed. "We spent a whole week fixing the wrong thing! Priya, why didn't you say something sooner?" Priya shrugged. "Everyone always listens to you."

That night, Maya thought about that. The next day, before anyone touched the robot, she asked each person for one idea. They tilted the sensor, added a small shade made of black tape and changed one number in the code.

At the competition, the Eagle Bots' robot drove forward, turned left at the blue line and dropped the ball into the bucket with a perfect plunk. They didn't win first place. But on the ride home, Maya made a new team rule: every voice gets heard, especially the quiet ones.

Questions

1. What was wrong with the robot?

2. What did Maya think caused the problem?

3. Why didn't Priya speak up at first?

4. How did Maya change by the end?

5. Which theme fits the story best?

6. Have you ever had an idea you were afraid to share? What happened?

7. What makes a good team captain?

The lesson in my own words

Answer Key

1. It crashed instead of turning at the blue line.
2. The motors.
3. Everyone always listened to Maya.
4. She learned to ask everyone for ideas.
5. Teams work best when every voice is heard.
6. Answers will vary.
7. Answers will vary.

Lesson: Mistakes are part of solving a problem, and teams work best when everyone's ideas count.