

Who Are Our Secondary Students?

Student Profiles:

Abdul



Abdul is from Pakistan and is currently in 7th grade. He attended a good school in Pakistan and studied English for many years, though his academic language proficiency in English is still far below grade level.

He has picked up a lot of social English, which he uses a lot in his writing, but struggles to fully understand academic text or communicate through writing using the vocabulary of the content areas.



Student Profiles:

Chisel

Chisel is from Mexico and is currently in 10th grade. She is literate in her native language, Spanish, which helps her transition her reading skills to English. Chisel does especially well recognizing Spanish cognates and incorporating them into her vocabulary.

However, Chisel is reluctant to speak English, preferring to speak Spanish with her friends who help her translate into English. She is insecure about how to express herself in English and self-conscious about her accent.

Student Profiles:

Matthew



Matthew is from Liberia and is currently in 11th grade. Due to instability in his country, Matthew was unable to attend school on a regular basis for many years.

As a result, his literacy level is more than 3 years below grade level. Reading and writing in English is a very slow and arduous process for him, and he is often frustrated by his struggle to keep up with his classmates. However, Matthew's listening comprehension is high, and he does best when written instructions and assignments are paired with oral explanations.



Student Profiles:

Carina

Carina is from the Dominican Republic and is currently in 9th grade. She has been in an ESL Program since the 5th grade. Her native language literacy is not well developed.

Carina works extremely hard and seems to enjoy writing. However, her writing is difficult to comprehend due to organizational grammatical and spelling errors.

"Wherever you are... I'm coming to get you.
I'm going to bring you home."

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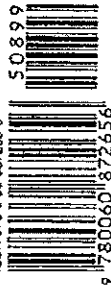
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EXTRAS
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Chanda's WARS

Allan Stratton

could tease about boys, before her days on the street.

Besides, even if I do have a crush, it's not *that* kind of crush. Is it? I'm not sure. I've never had a crush like that—at least I don't think I have—so it's hard to tell. All I know is, I could watch him forever.

Mr. Selalame finishes clapping his dusters and centers them on the ledge under the blackboard. As always after a clapping, he has a tickle on his nose from the chalk dust. He rubs it with the back of his wrist. Then he turns around, wiping his hands with a handkerchief. We both jump when he sees me.

"Chanda!"

"Mr. Selalame!" I think he's embarrassed I caught him singing. I'm embarrassed he caught me spying.

"Come in," he laughs. "Sit, sit. Can I offer you a tea?"

"No, thank you." I hesitate, then slump into my old desk—middle aisle, two rows back—and stare through the hole in the upper right-hand corner where the ink bottle used to go.

Mr. Selalame props himself against the desk opposite me. "I see you've come about something important."

I nod. Mr. Selalame smells of fresh soap and peppermint. I try not to notice.

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I BIKE to the secondary, run down the hall to Mr. Selalame's classroom. He's working late, as usual. Right now, he's leaning out the window, clapping his blackboard erasers, singing a march. What do I do? Waltz in? Knock first?

I end up outside his door, staring. Some teachers have coffee stains on their jackets or stink of B.O. and alcohol. Not Mr. Selalame. He's the cleanest, handsomest, smartest man in Bonang. And he uses new words for fun. His newest is *ergo*.

Esther thinks I have a crush. One day when I couldn't stop saying his name, she said: "Remember, Chanda, he's got a wife and kids." I gave her the eye. "Of course I remember, Esther. When it comes to men, I'm not like some people." I hope she's forgotten. It was back when we

"I've been getting this nightmare." I say at last. As the words fall from my mouth, I want to jump out the window; I have a dream and I run to my old teacher? "Mr. Selalame. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have come, I have to go."

He raises his hand. "Not before you tell me your dream."

"It's stupid."

"Nothing you care about is stupid."

I look in his eyes. They coax the truth out of me, like Mama's. I check the door to make sure no one's listening. Then, even though I'm kicking myself, I take a deep breath and begin. When I'm finished, Mr. Selalame thinks a bit, clicking his tongue behind his teeth. "Your dream is always the same?"

I frown. "Sometimes the ditches by the road are full of crocodiles. Other times they're full of blood, and the children paddle by in dugouts. But it's always about Tiro. Tiro and Mama and my little brother and sister. Is it a warning? Is something terrible going to happen?"

Mr. Selalame smiles. "Relax," he says. "Dreams don't predict the future. They're about the present. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes." I lower my head. The truth is, I don't know it. I

say I do, because it's what Mr. Selalame wants to hear. But deep down, I'm not sure what I think. I don't believe in magic. All the same, I know there's more to life than what we see with our eyes.

"Your nightmare is a chase dream," Mr. Selalame says calmly. "Ergo, it's about feeling helpless. Trapped. Chase dreams come when we're stressed."

I sit up straight, shoulders back. "But I'm not."

"You are." He folds his arms. "You need to slow down, Chanda. Since your mama passed, you haven't taken a breath."

"There hasn't been time."

"Make time."

"How? There's always a problem with Soly and Iris—a scrape, a fever, a stubbed toe. Or Soly will cry, or Iris will throw things—and I know it's from missing Mama, and I want to make it better, but I can't. And when I'm not messing up with them, I'm working, or doing chores, or visiting Mama at the cemetery. And I haven't even started the friendship center in her memory. I promised to open one when she died, and—" I bang my head on the desk, twice. "I'm sorry. It's just, Mr. Selalame, I'm scared. Sometimes I fill up with this panic. I can't stop it. Why? What's wrong

with me? Mama always managed. She did what she had to. Why can't I be like her?"

Mr. Selalame checks his shoes, so we can pretend he doesn't see my eyes fill. "Chanda," he says slowly, "what about taking a break from your supply teaching?"

"No. My family needs the money."

"Not as much as you need your health."

"I can't afford to think about that."

"You have to. For the sake of your brother and sister. You can always patch clothes. Stretch a pot of soup. But if you make yourself crazy-sick, you won't be able to do anything. Then what?"

I breathe out till my lungs are empty. "You must think I'm a baby."

"No," he exclaims. "But you're not an adult either."

"I'm old enough. Mama was married at my age. She had babies."

"Is that what you want?"

I shake my head, rock on my hands. "All I want is to make Mama proud. I want her to know I'm taking care of things. That Soly and Iris are safe."

"She knows. She's proud."

"How can you say that? Everything's falling apart."

Mr. Selalame pauses. "You're too tired to see this, but I promise you: You're doing fine. One day Soly and Iris will be grown up. You'll go back to school. You'll graduate with that scholarship. You'll build your Mama's friendship center. Trust me. These things take time, that's all. Don't let your pride destroy your future."

He lets me think about that for a while, then he leans back slowly. "If I recall rightly, you have people in Tiro."

My throat dries up. "It depends what you mean by people."

"Relatives. Your mama-granny and grampa, some aunts and uncles, cousins—and isn't there an older sister? It's where your mama went when she got sick."

I nod.

Mr. Selalame strokes the side of his head like he's nursing an idea. "In your dream, you have to get to Tiro," he says slowly. "Maybe your mind is telling you, you need to return to your roots. Families are something to cling to when things get overwhelming. Maybe you need a visit to Tiro. It'd give you support. It'd give you a rest as well."

"No," I blurt out. "I'll never go back to Tiro."

Mr. Selalame leans in, eyes alert.

My ears burn. "Things happened in Tiro," I whisper.

"Things happened to Mama." I flap my hands. "Please, don't make me say it."

Mr. Selalame puts his finger to his lips. "If you want an ear, I'm here. Otherwise, I haven't heard a thing."

"Thank you. Thanks."

I don't know where to look. A silence swallows the room.

Mr. Selalame clears his throat. "So," he says carefully, "where else could we turn for some help? . . . How about your neighbor lady?"

"Mrs. Tafa?" My eyes twitch.

Mr. Selalame looks like he's stepped in a cow pie. "I guess it's not my day for ideas."

I find myself laughing. "I guess not!"

He smiles.

My eye catches the time on the wall clock. "It's late. Soly and Iris, they'll be waiting for supper. *Ergo*, I better go." I get up, stand awkwardly by the desk. "Mr. Selalame . . . thank you. Thank you for everything."

"But I didn't do anything."

"Yes. You did. You made a difference just being here."

He gives me a wink for encouragement. "Drop by anytime."

"I will." I stop at the doorway, heart bursting. "Mr. Selalame—you're the best teacher in the school. And you have the cleanest blackboard erasers in the whole world."

I flush and race down the corridor. *You have the cleanest blackboard erasers in the whole world?*

How embarrassing.

