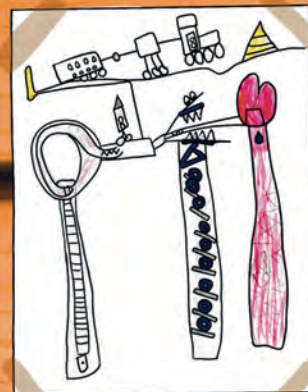
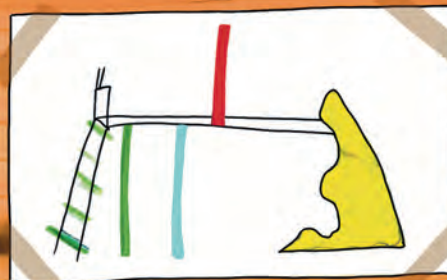




The

Perfect

Playhouse



The Perfect Playhouse



The Perfect Playhouse

An original story published by Trails of Tales that Travel

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First published 2025

**Trails of Tales
that Travel**

Richard O'Neill
Michelle Russell

Trails of Tales that Travel

A bus can take you here & there A book can take you anywhere



EARLY YEARS
LITERACIES

Trails of Tales
that Travel

ROMLIT is a research project based at the University of East Anglia. It is funded by the Joyce Morris Legacy Fund. Its aim is to develop early years literacies through Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage.

The Perfect Playhouse

Maya Angelou famously said “There’s no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” True! There’s no person in the world without a story to tell. And there is no community without shared stories. Such stories bring generations of people together and nurture the collective imaginary of each community.

At ROMLIT we don’t create stories for our project participants. Instead, our participants create and tell (and re-tell) their own stories. This unconventional approach allows for schools, early years children and their parents/carers to become themselves storytellers and authors.

The story you are about to read, ***The Perfect Playhouse***, is a new story that was created by a collective of young authors who are students in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 in three remarkable schools, namely Heartwood CE VC Primary and Nursery School, Swaffham, Emneth Academy and Mulbarton Primary School, all in Norfolk.

Between October 2024 and June 2025, the students worked alongside and took inspiration from two celebrated professionals, namely Richard O’Neill, MBE, author and storyteller, and Michelle Russell, illustrator. Richard and Michelle visited the schools several times so they could work with the students’ ideas and help them put them into the book you are holding in your hands.

If you are a professional, a parent/carer or a student in one of these schools, you have every right to feel proud of the accomplishment to which you have contributed!

If you work in a different school and you like what this book is about, then please get in touch with ROMLIT so we can discuss how to work with your students to make them authors of their own book, their own story.

Our heartfelt thanks to the dedicated and inspiring members of staff at Heartwood VC Primary and Nursery School, Emneth Academy and Mulbarton Primary School and all the parents and children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 in these schools. A massive thanks to our team of exceptional ROMLIT researchers and to Richard O’Neill and Michelle Russell, who empowered all students they worked with to become authors and illustrators at such a young age.

ROMLIT will keep giving schools, children and their families the means through which to thrive in their literacy journey - and tell the story for years to come!

Dr Spyros Themelis
University of East Anglia
ROMLIT project leader

PLAYHOUSE AWARDS



“We start with a story,
then we write the words.
We edit and write again until
they look and sound fabulous.”

Richard



“I had lots of fun merging the artwork shared by pupils, with my style of illustration.”

Michelle

Meet the judges - from the pupils' art ideas in school to illustrations in a book.





What a wonderful project. It has been great to see the children engaging in the writing process and getting to see their ideas come to life. It is something the children will remember for a long time.

Lindzi Morgan

Family support worker, Emneth Academy



Our children loved this experience so much. They looked forward to each session creating the book and were excited to share their ideas. It was so wonderful that a piece of artwork was included from one of our families.

Rebecca Starman

Headteacher, Heartwood CE VC Primary and Nursery School



It was lovely to see the children so excited and engaged in planning, writing and illustrating a book. They were fully invested in the project from start to finish. What a special experience.

Kirsty Savory

Deputy Headteacher, Mulbarton Primary School

I liked drawing
some pictures
for the book.

I liked that
we made
a real
book.

I liked designing
the pictures: it
was helpful the
way Richard told
us to do it.

I liked it when
I made the
treehouse: I
made a slide.

I liked
Richard
he was
funny.

I love
English.

I liked the
assemblies:
it was fun.





We really enjoyed
creating and
colouring our
playhouses.

I liked to
hear the
questions
and answers.

Drawing
the
pictures
was the
best bit.

I liked thinking
about the
playhouse ideas
and all the things I
could put in.

Richard was
good at
telling
stories.

I liked drawing
the pictures
because it was
fun.

I liked the
colouring.



I was excited to go over the work and see what others had drawn and written.

I looked forward to see the pictures online and all the different rooms.

I liked taking part in the writing.



We got to see what others had done when we sat on the mat.



I liked it when we all had to draw together, drawing our classrooms.

We had to design things and draw them.







The

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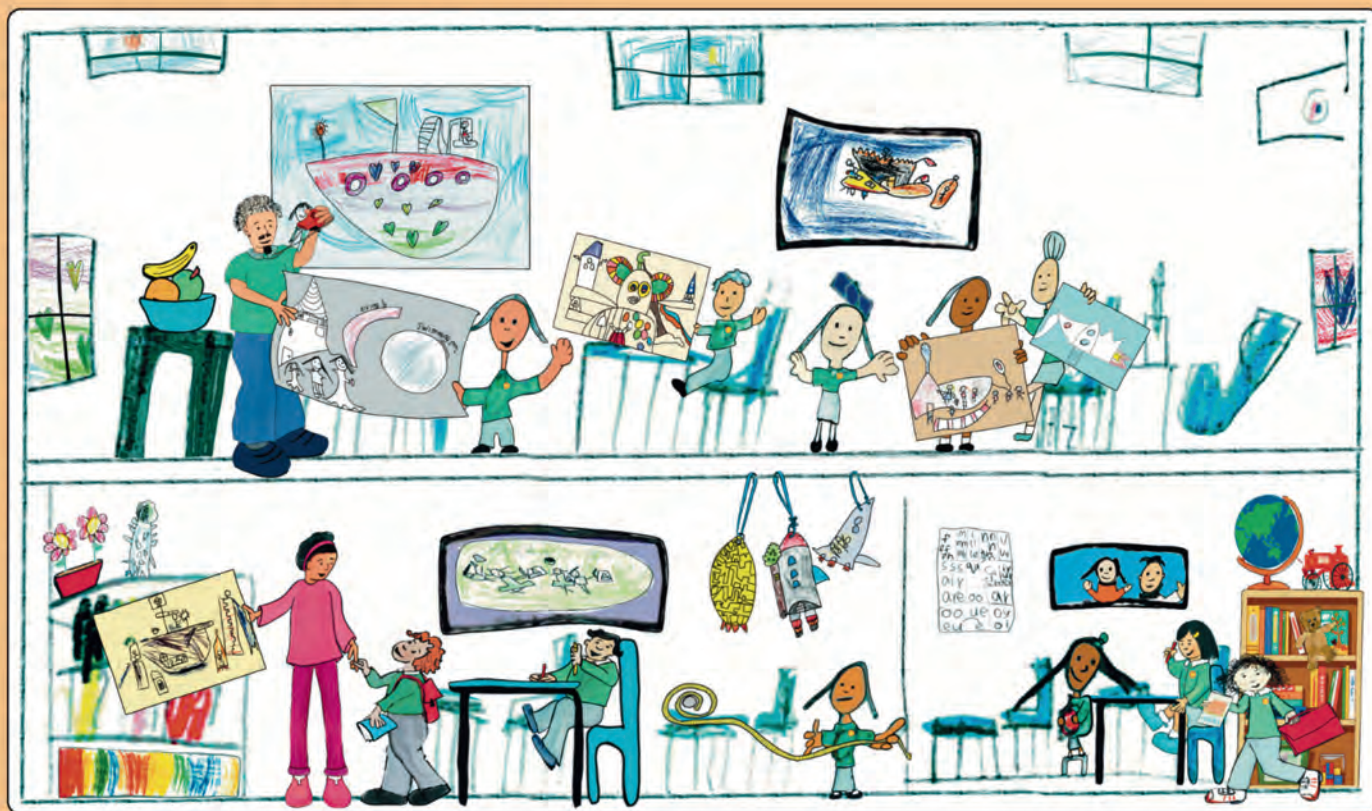


“Have you heard about the playhouse competition?” Mrs Woods asked, holding up her tablet for the teachers and teaching assistants to see.

Her eyes sparkled with excitement as she explained their school would compete against two other schools.



The following day, classrooms were buzzing with energy. In Mrs Woods' school, children from Reception, Year One, and Year Two shared their ideas enthusiastically.



“What if it’s a castle?” piped up Enid.



“How about a jungle with monkey bars?”
said Isla, sketching furiously.

“Or a spaceship that lights up!” blurted out
Rocky.



The children had an opportunity to work with a writer and an artist.



“What’s your story behind this?” the writer asked, kneeling beside a group of children.

“Why does the castle have rainbow towers?” enquired the writer.

“Because it’s a magical kingdom!” said Enid.

“And there’s a secret slide inside!”

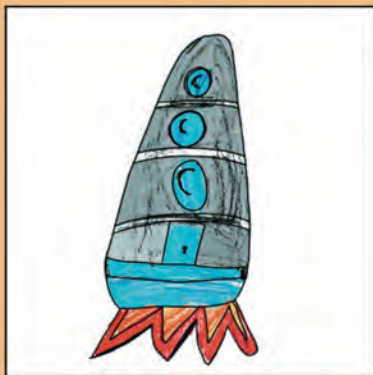
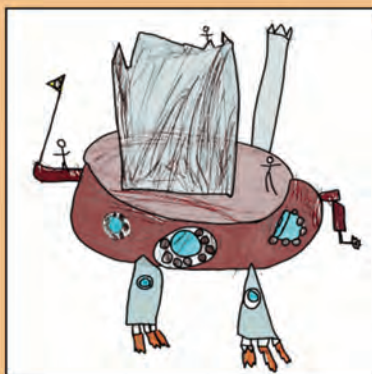
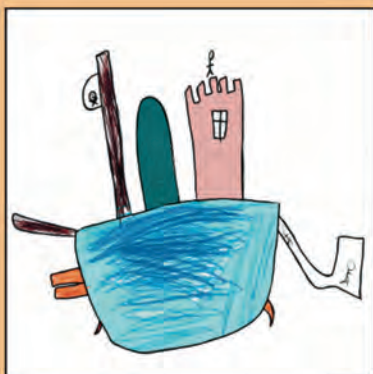
whispered Ben.



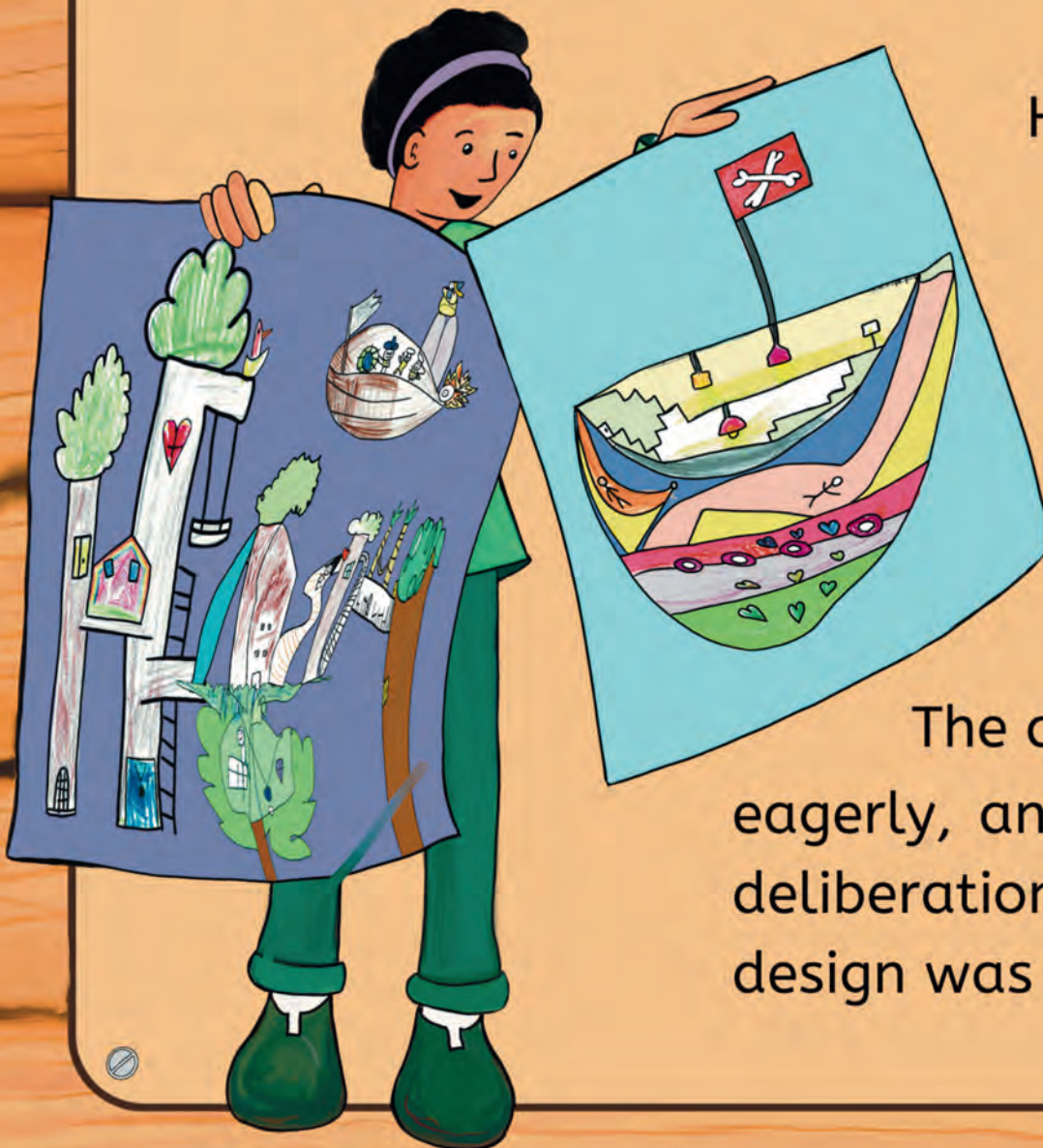
Meanwhile, the artist worked with another group. “How about we add some texture to your treehouse? What’s it made of?”



By the end of the week, every class had so many creative designs, but it was time to vote on which one to enter into the competition.



“Alright, class,” Mrs. Woods said, “hands up for the treehouse idea.”



Hands shot up.

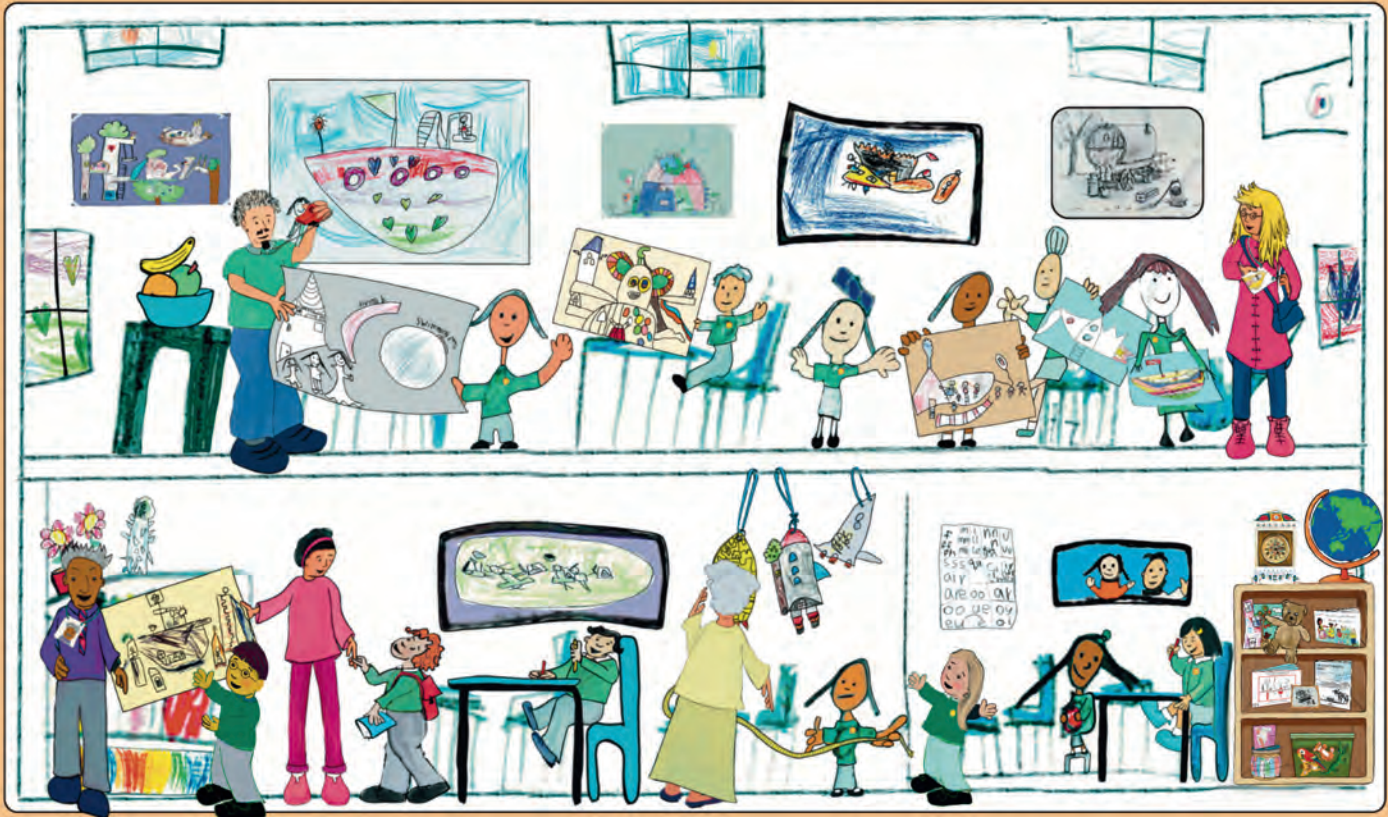
“And for the pirate ship?”

The children voted eagerly, and after much deliberation, a winning design was chosen.

The judges visited each school, asking thoughtful questions.



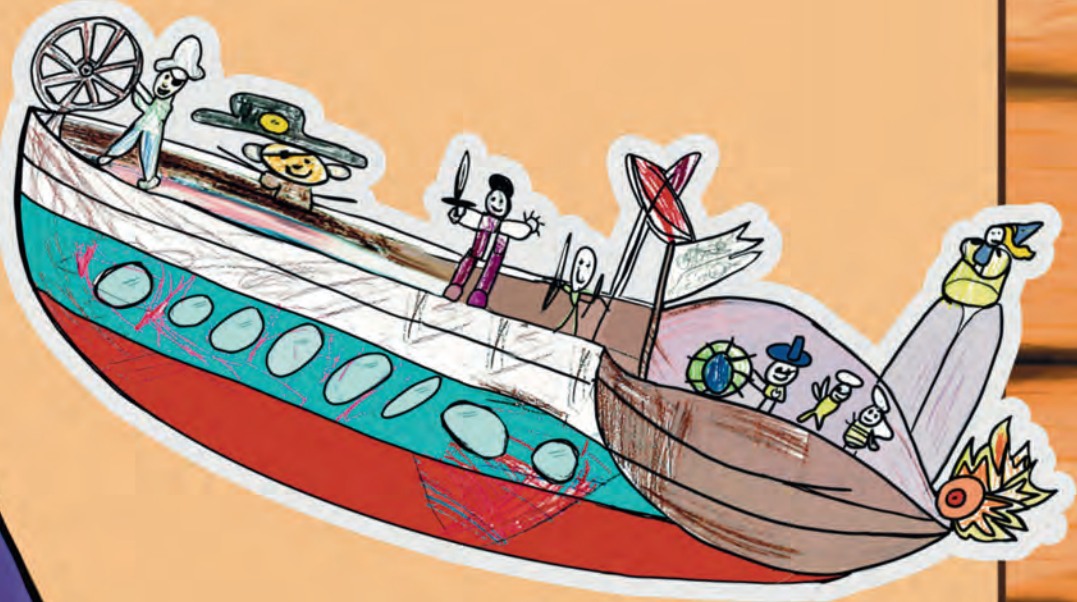
“Why did you choose a rocket ship theme?” one asked.

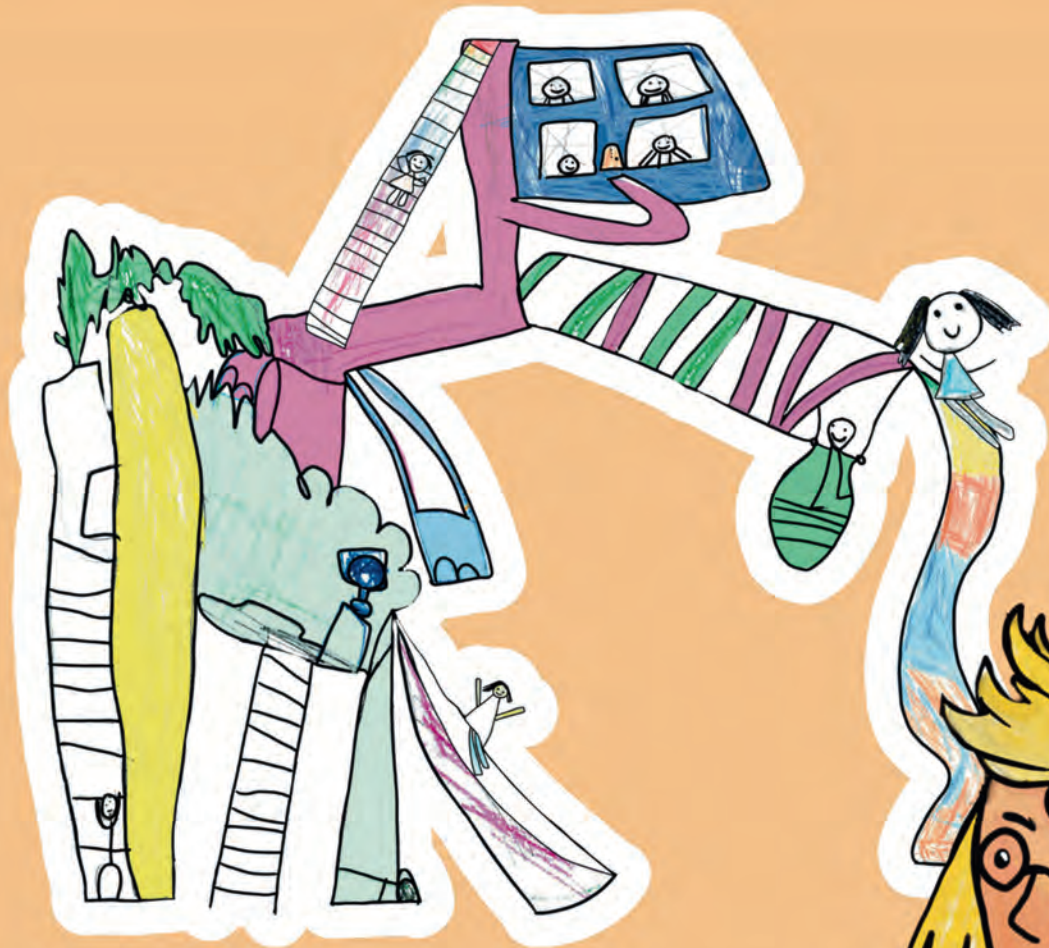


“Because it can take us to other planets!” answered Sadie.

When the final designs were submitted,
the judges were blown away.

“These are incredible,” one judge
 marvelled, studying a pirate ship that
 seemed ready to set sail.

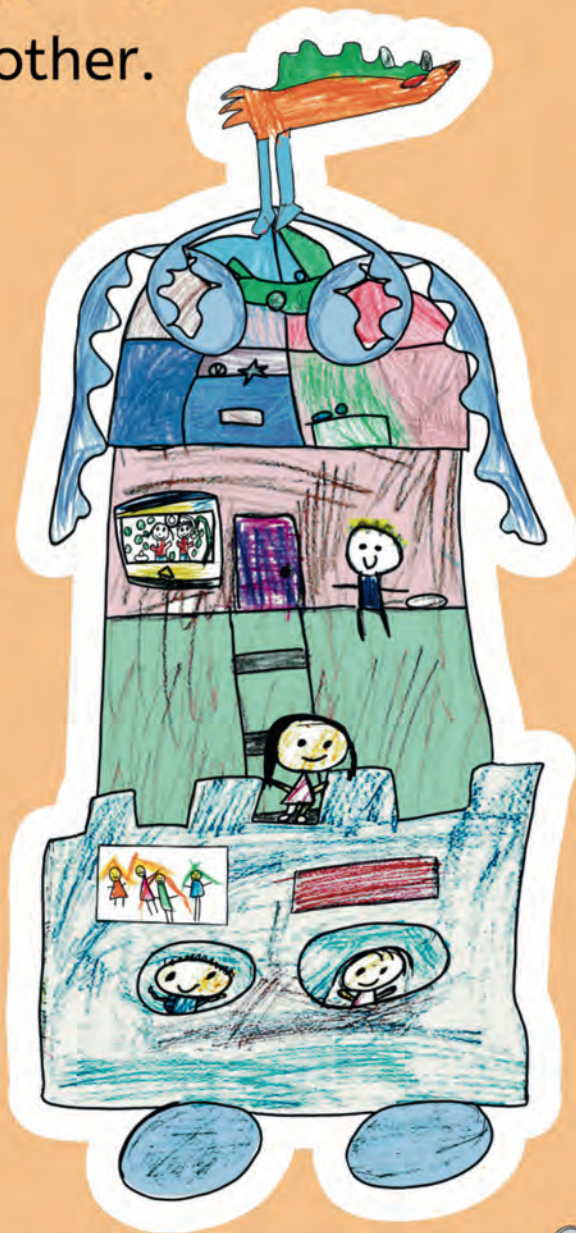




“I love the creativity in this jungle gym,” proclaimed another.



“This caravan design is stunning,” exclaimed another.



But when it came time to choose a winner, the judges couldn't agree.

"Every design is unique," pondered the head judge. "How do we pick just one?"





The schools waited eagerly.

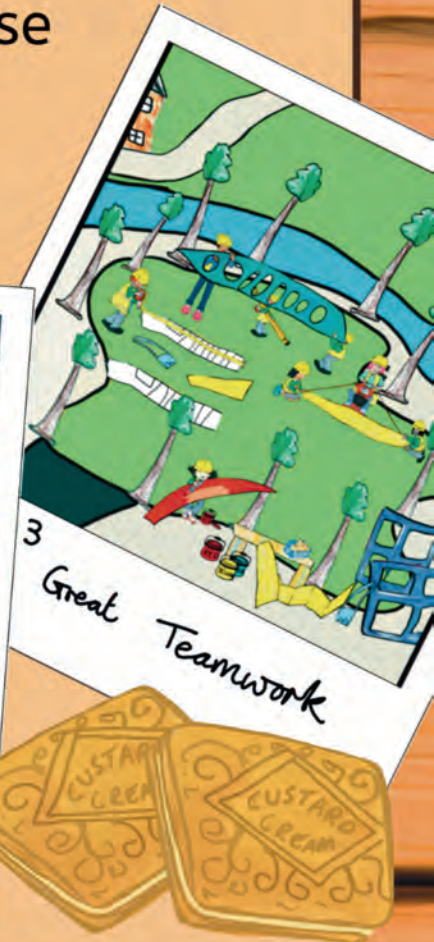
Finally, the head judge appeared on screens in all three school halls.

“We have news,” she began with a smile. “Your designs are all so wonderful that we’ve decided to combine them into one big playhouse!”

Cheers erupted from every school.

“But there’s a catch: you’ll have to build it together.”

Over the next month, the schools collaborated to build the playhouse on a shared piece of land.



Children, staff, and parents worked side by side, measuring, painting, and decorating.





“That’s our
treehouse ladder!”
exclaimed Sam.



“And our pirate ship deck!” added Ella.

“That’s the caravan
bunk for resting on”
said Rocky.



On the final day of building, the children noticed something strange: no adults had arrived to pick them up.

“Where is everyone?”
questioned Lily.



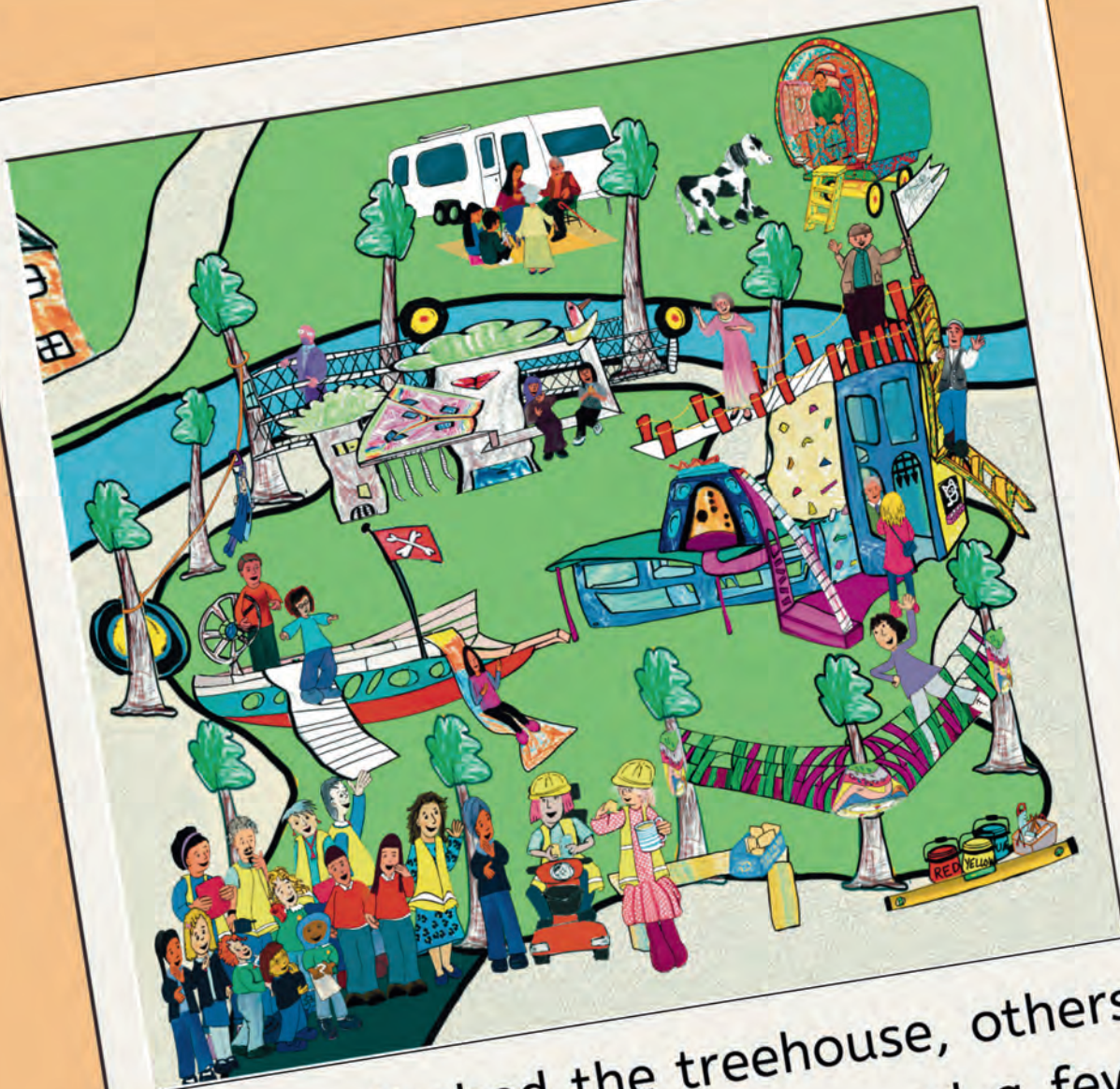
While they waited, the teachers decided to take the children to see the completed playhouse.



When they arrived, they burst into
laughter. The grown-ups were playing!

They were all having
a great time.



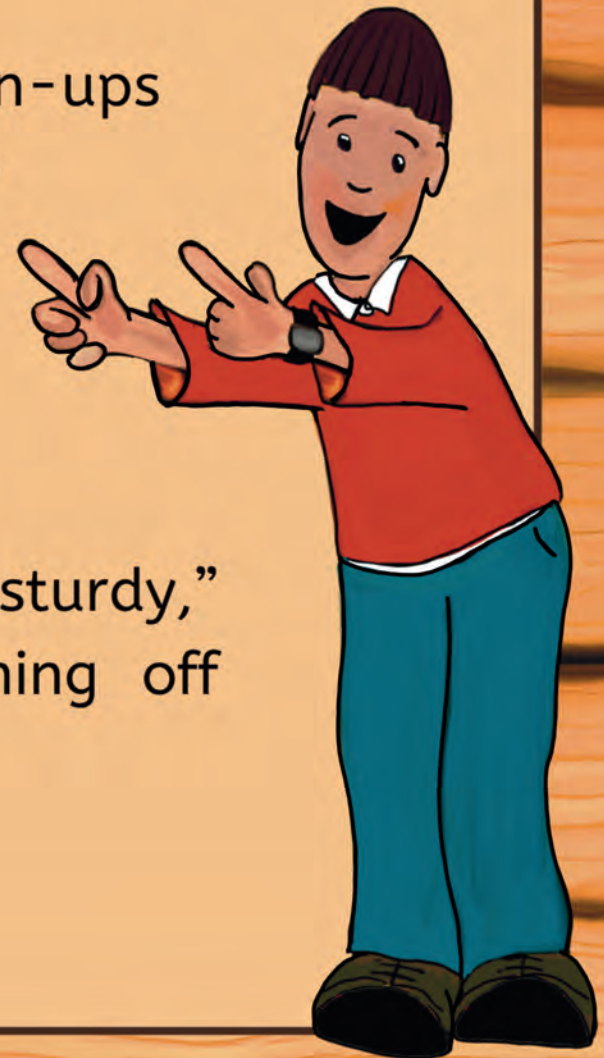


Some climbed the treehouse, others zoomed down the slide, and a few pretended to be pirates.



“Caught you!” shouted Max

The grown-ups
sheepishly
climbed
down.



“It’s... uh... very sturdy,”
one said, brushing off
his trousers.

“The playhouse is for everyone,” said George.

“You’re never too old to play,” added Sophie.





Climbing, balancing
hide and seek.



Singing, dancing, sharing
stories ~ having fun.



And so they all played together, children,
parents, carers and grandparents until it was
time for tea.

From that day on, the playhouse became
a place of laughter, friendship, and fun,



reminding everyone that some things are better when shared.







What happened when the parents
got to see the playhouse first?
Find out, what fun everyone had,
designing and competing for a
super prize!

