

Contents

Chapter 1: Some Good	9
Chapter 2: Never Bad	27
Chapter 3: No Warmth	45
Chapter 4: Always Trouble	61
Chapter 5: Pretty Awesome	77
Chapter 6: Kind Enough	93
Chapter 7: Added Charm	113
Discussion Questions	129
Word Keep Book	131
Worksheet 1. Homophones	132
Worksheet 2. Contractions	133
Worksheet 3. Action Verbs	134
Worksheet 4. Subjects and Predicates	135
Word Search Solutions	136
Answer Keys	143
Acknowledgments	145



Chapter 1

Some Good

“No, Morgan, you are not going to watch that scary movie. It’s not allowed in our home and you know that,” my mother said firmly.

“Oh, come on, Mrs. Randall,” Brooke begged. “Pleeeeee. It’ll be all right.”

“No, sweetheart. It won’t be all right. As I said, Morgan is not allowed to watch certain types of programs. I **recommend** you guys pick something else to watch. I want you girls to have a good time, but the rules are the rules. Morgan thinks she can handle those creepy movies, but she can’t.”

I went up to Mom and placed my arm around her waist to soften her up. “I can handle them, Mommy. I promise. I won’t be afraid.”

She stepped back from me, like I had a bad cold or something. “There’s more to it, Morgan. That movie is

rated PG-13 and it has scenes in it that you aren't ready to see yet."

"But my mom lets me watch them at home. And Morgan and I are the same age. Please, Mrs. Randall," Brooke pleaded again.

"No, girls. I said no and that's final," Mom said in her strong voice.

Both Brooke and I stomped off in a huff. We stomped hard. We were too upset at the moment to be respectful.

"You know what. Come here," Mom said, not being too happy with us. "I'm glad that you're staying over tonight, Brooke. And your mom told me that I could speak to you like I speak to Morgan. You're in my house and she knows I care about you. So, you little ladies need to listen up good. You must be polite when an adult says no. It's not the end of the world. Just find something else to do. And if you girls don't hurry up and turn those frowns into smiles, I'm going to put you to work."

"Work? I cleaned up everything," I said to Mom, still frowning.

"No, that *Summer Bridges* book I bought for you to work in over the summer has several pages that you haven't done. How about you and Brooke go and do that. Come back to me after a while so I can check how much you've done."

"Yes, ma'am," I said, trying hard not to show her how unhappy I was.

When Brooke and I went to my room, Brooke com-

plained, “Wow, I can’t believe she won’t let us watch the movie.”

“I know. I’m sorry. I’m a big girl and I want her to quit acting like I’m a baby. She keeps treating me like I’m little and can’t handle anything. It makes me so angry.”

“Well, you have to show her that you’re a big girl instead of just telling her.”

Looking around my room for the workbook, I said, “What do you mean, Brooke?”

“Here’s the deal. When she goes to sleep, we’ll watch the movie anyway,” Brooke said, as she spotted the workbook on my bookcase and handed it to me.

“Huh?”

“That’s how I got my mom to let me watch them. At night I would watch a movie and in the morning when she woke up I would tell her all about it.”

“She didn’t get mad that you watched somethin’ you weren’t supposed to watch?”

Brooke looked at me and smiled. “Well, I never really asked her.”

“What if we get caught?” I was really scared because the whole plan sounded so risky.

“If she’s asleep, how is she gonna know?” Brooke said, giving me a slick look and a wink.

Shrugging my shoulders I said, “I don’t know.”

“Let’s just get these pages over with,” Brooke said, as she snatched the book away from me and opened it to the last page I’d done. “We’ll have her all buttered up so when

she goes to sleep, she'll never know."

I heard what my friend was saying and I didn't want Brooke to think staying over at my house was lame. I wanted her to know that I'm cool and so is my mom. But I should have known that Mom wouldn't let me do everything Brooke could do at her house. We were both growing up, and I just wished Mom would accept that.

But for now, there was only one problem for me. After Mom said no, I didn't think I should do something that she told me not to do. Then again, I couldn't help but wonder, *Would it really be that bad?*

I looked at the *Summer Bridges* book, and my mom was right. I did have a lot of pages left to finish and summer was nearly over. I was going back to school next week to be in the third grade! I was definitely not a baby anymore. The first page we turned to was about **homophones**.

"H-o-m-o-p-h-o-n-e-s. Homophones."

"Okay, what are homophones?" Brooke asked me.

"They are words that sound the same but mean something different. Like *your*, which means you own something. Or *you're*, which stands for 'you are.'"

Brooke said, "Oh, I get it. And like *two*, the number two and the word *too*, which means 'also' or 'very.'"

"Exactly. And you use the pronoun *their* when you're talking about more than one person. Or the word *there*, when you're talking about another location. Or the word *they're*, which is short for 'they are.' Whew!"

“Wow. Homophones are tricky.”

“Yep.”

Brooke looked at the workbook. “Here’s a sentence: *They herd/heard that sailors leave their families and sail away.*” As she read aloud, we were both looking at the page. We knew we had to circle the correct choice from the underlined words. But I just put my head down.

“Daddy,” I said quietly, as I started feeling sad.

Brooke could tell that I was thinking about him. “I’m sorry, Morgan. It’s just a sentence,” Brooke said, patting my shoulder.

“I know, but it makes me think about how much I miss my dad.”

“Well, it’s okay to think about him. I’ll do the sentence. The answer is *heard*, which means to hear something. *Herd* means a group of animals.”

“Yeah, that sounds right to me. Next sentence: *I did not have any sodas four/for months.* *Four* means the number and *for* means—”

“It means that *for* is the right one,” Brooke said, as we laughed.

“Yep. Here’s another one: *Children should always try to make the write/right choices.*”

“*Write* means to write something down, but *right* is the correct answer because it means the opposite of wrong. Right?” Brooke said, smiling. We really were enjoying learning homophones together.

We kept on laughing as we finished the lesson and

rushed downstairs to show my mom our work. She was pleased with what we had done. Then Mom helped us bake some cookies. With our treats in hand, we headed to the basement for our girls' night of fun.

After a while, Brooke tiptoed over to the stairs and whispered softly, "All the lights are off up there. Your parents are probably asleep now, so we can watch the movie. She's not gonna come downstairs."

I didn't follow my own **instincts** and say no to my buddy. I just let my friend turn the channel to the scary movie. We sat close together as the weird music began. Knowing it was the wrong thing to do, I could feel trouble coming.

Not long after the movie started and the actors' names came across the TV screen, the light in the room came on too. That scared us so bad that Brooke almost jumped into my lap. Was it the bad man from the movie coming to get us? No! It was worse.

Mom yelled out, "I know that's not the movie I told you not to watch! Morgan, turn that TV off! You girls go upstairs and get in the bed right now! I said move!"

I looked at my friend. Brooke looked at me. I hung my head low and clicked off the TV. Walking upstairs, I knew I was in trouble with my mom for sure. And it was bad.



"Morgan, I'm sorry," Brooke said, as we were lying in my bed.

I didn't even say anything to her.

Later that night, we were both tossing and turning. It was a mess. Neither one of us could sleep.

When I couldn't take it any longer, I sat up in the bed and said, "I thought she was asleep. But I knew it was wrong for me watch that anyway. And I knew I would get in trouble for it, but I went along with you."

"You could have told me to turn it off, Morgan. Don't get mad at me!"

"I'm not mad at you, Brooke," I said, knowing that my friend was right. But I really did do it because I wanted to please her, not because I wanted to watch the movie. Though I didn't have to go along with it, she didn't have to throw it in my face either.

"We're both in trouble. Okay?" said Brooke. "I feel so bad. I wanna go to your mom right now and tell her I'm sorry." Then she thought about it some more and added, "But in the morning when she's calmed down. Anyway, I'm in double trouble."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"My mom doesn't let me watch those movies either."

"Then why did you tell my mom that she did?"

"Because I never asked my mom if I could and she doesn't even know I watch them. I guess she lets me because she never comes to check and see what I'm lookin' at in the middle of the night."

"Maybe after my mom talks to her, she'll start."

We both lay back in the bed and closed our eyes. When

we opened them again it was morning. All we could hear was the sound of my mom's loud voice.

"Girls, get up! Now!"

I looked over at the clock and it was only 7 a.m. It wasn't even a school day, and I wanted to argue. But, for sure, we didn't need to make it worse since we were already in trouble.

"Uh-oh, she sounds really mad. We'd better hurry up," Brooke said.

Getting out of the bed, I prayed, *Lord, I don't even deserve to pray to You because I was wrong. But can You make Mom not so mad, please?*

"Morgan, what's taking you so long? Come on!"

Mom had us follow her down to the laundry room. There were piles of freshly washed clothes waiting for us. "Okay, get to sorting. Brooke, you'll fold towels and pillow cases. Morgan, you can handle your jeans and shirts. Now get to work."

She didn't say anything more, but she didn't leave us in the room by ourselves either. My mom just quietly watched us. And her silence was worse than any words.

Finally, I turned around to her and said, "Mom, I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what, Morgan? Sorry that you got caught doing something I told you not to? Sorry that you didn't get to see the movie? What are you sorry for?"

"No, ma'am, I'm sorry that we **disobeyed** you in the first place."

"You're not sorry about that."

“Yes, I am.”

“If I hadn’t come downstairs, you would have kept watching the movie, right?”

“But even the music had me a little jumpy,” I added.

“That’s one of my points, Morgan. You think you’re a big girl and I can see that you’re growing up. But if you’re not careful, you’re going to do more harm than good. If you keep acting like you know better than me, you’ll miss out on some good times. I promise you.”

“What does that mean, Mom?”

“Girl. I’m so mad at you,” she said, **gritting** her teeth. “And Brooke—”

“Yes, ma’am?” Brooke said.

“I want Morgan to have friends who can help her do the right thing. Not ones who talk her into doing something wrong. I know last night you were a part of the reason for her doing the wrong thing. And I have a problem with that. I’m not sure if you’re the type of friend Morgan needs to be around because together the two of you are creating some bad habits.”

I went over to my mom and threw my arms around her. “No, Mom, we’re good for each other.”

“Well, if you’re good for each other, then why are you doing things that are so wrong?”

“It’s my fault,” Brooke said. “I didn’t tell you the truth. I told you that my mom let me watch those movies, but she doesn’t even know I watch them. I figured since you were asleep, you wouldn’t—”

“Come and check on you,” Mom said, finishing my friend’s sentence.

“Right. Yes, ma’am.”

“But, Brooke, that’s no way to be, sweetheart. Even when adults don’t catch you doing the wrong thing, God is always there watching you.”

“I didn’t even think about that,” Brooke said, as her eyes started to tear. Mine were beginning to do the same.

“Exactly. You have to think about the consequences to your actions. Would God want you doing something wrong? There’s a reason why those movies are rated the way they are. Neither one of you girls is thirteen. Without you even knowing it, whatever you’re watching on TV gets into your spirit. Then when you’re not even watching TV, you can get tense and nervous about things. And I want to help you avoid times like that. Instead, I want you to deposit positive memories in your life.”

“You’re gonna talk to my mom, aren’t you?” Brooke said with her head down.

My mom lifted her chin and said, “No, sweetie, you are. You’re a big girl. And because you’re a big girl, I expect you to tell her what’s going on. I want her to call me and let me know that you did the right thing. But if I don’t get a phone call soon after you go home, then I’ll tell her. It’s not because I want you to get in trouble for this. It’s because I don’t want you to get in trouble for something worse than this. We need to be able to trust you young ladies. You all should hold each other **accountable**.”

“Accountable?” I said, unsure of what that meant.

Mom said, “It means that you help each other do what’s right so you’ll never, ever do what’s wrong. It’s not good for you to break the rules, because God is not pleased with that kind of behavior. Do you understand?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Now, finish folding these clothes. Then come on up and get some breakfast. I love you both, okay?”

“Yes, ma’am,” we said again.

When Mom went upstairs, Brooke said, “I’m sorry, Morgan. I shouldn’t have pushed you into doing something that was wrong. I really do care about you.”

“It’s okay. I’m sorry I didn’t stand up to you and tell you that there’s no way I was gonna disobey what my mom said. But at least we’re learning right from wrong.”

“Yeah. We’ve got to do better.”



“Oh, so you got caught watching some bad movies?” Papa said to me. Jayden and I were staying the night since my parents were celebrating their two-year anniversary. I didn’t like it when Mom told her parents on me, but I was wrong and I would have to own up to it sometime.

“Get off of her back,” Mama said to Papa. “Morgan, now you know that was something you weren’t supposed to do, right?”

“Yes, ma’am. I know when Mommy tells me not to do something that I shouldn’t do it, Mama.”

“Speaking of the TV, go and turn that thing off. Don’t you hear all that lightning and thunder outside, young lady?”

I did hear a little bit of thunder, but I didn’t think it was that bad. That was one thing I didn’t like about coming over to my grandparents’ house. You had to sit still and be quiet when it was storming outside. You couldn’t even move. I didn’t like that because it made me focus more on the storm than anything else. At least when I was watching TV, I wasn’t worried about the loud crackling of the lightning bolts.

The next day I went to church with Mama and Papa. During service, we prayed for Miss May’s niece because her son, Billy Wood, got struck by lightning. My face looked very serious and I felt my insides quaking.

“Billy Wood from my class?” I asked Papa, whispering loudly.

Papa shushed me and asked, “You know him?”

“Yes, Billy is my friend. He was in my class.”

Then I started praying. *Lord, please let Billy be okay.*

Right after church, Papa asked me if I wanted to go to the hospital and see Billy. I remembered the hospital from a year ago when I had to go and visit my mom. She and baby Jayden weren’t doing too well. Pretty soon they were okay and didn’t have to stay too long. Since I was over it now, I told Papa we could go.

When we got to the hospital, Mama and Papa were talking to Billy’s mom and his aunt. I found out that if you

weren't the mom, dad, grandparents, or another close relative, you had to have a special pass to go into a patient's room. So I went and sat in the waiting room. There was a girl sitting next to the remote control. The TV was off but I wanted to turn it on and watch something.

"Excuse me, can I have the remote control?"

"No," she said, sounding angry.

I could tell she was a little older than me. I didn't know why she was being so mean. I had never done anything to her and didn't even know her. So I tried again.

"Can I please get the remote control?"

She stood up from her seat, walked over, and looked in my face. The remote control was still in the seat. She pushed me just a little and said, "I told you no the first time."

"You don't own the TVs in this hospital."

Before she could say anything back, Mama walked up and said, "Morgan, come on, sweetheart. They're going to let you see your friend."

"Okay."

"Why do you have that look on your face?" Mama asked.

I couldn't even give Mama an answer. But out of the corner of my eye, I could see the mean girl looking at me like, *HA, HA, HA! You didn't get the remote!* She even stuck her tongue out at me. I just shook it off. It wasn't that important to me and I didn't want to go into Billy's room upset about anything.

“They said you can go in for a little bit. He’s awake and he just finished his lunch. He’s going to be okay, honey.”

I pushed open the door to see Billy sitting up with the TV on.

“Billy!”

“Hey, Morgan, you came to see me?”

“Yeah, and the whole church is praying for you. What happened?”

“I was in the garage and I was supposed to be sitting down. All I remember was I didn’t want my bicycle to get wet. The next thing I knew, I woke up here. They said it could have been worse. But I’m cool.”

“Oh, Billy. I’m glad you’re okay.”

“I love it! It’s making my sister crazy mad that I’m getting all this **attention**.”

“Your sister?”

“Yeah. My mom said she’s in the waiting area. She’s tall and always has a mean look on her face. Her name is Bridget.”

“Yeah, I met her,” I said, looking sad and mad all mixed up together like a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

“Don’t worry about her. She’s not so tough. I did learn one thing, though. When your parents tell you to do something, just do it. Or, you could end up getting struck by lightning, or worse. Even though it knocked me out and I ended up in the hospital, I wasn’t hurt too bad. So in the end, my nightmare turned out to have some good.”

Letter to Dad



Dear Dad,

I learned some things that I can share with all kids. I recommend they do what their parents say. I learned that some words sound the same but are spelled different and have different meanings. And if you don't get the word right, you'll mess up a sentence. For example, plane and plain are homophones. I hope you get on a PLANE soon and come see me. My instincts tell me you'll be here before I know it.

Dad, I disobeyed Mom. I know it was wrong. Mom was gritting her teeth to hold in her anger. I know now that I must be accountable for my bad actions. She got my attention and I won't let her, you, Daddy Derek, Mama, Papa, or God down again.

Your daughter,
Learning Morgan

Word Search

H A T T E N T I V R B A
D I S O B E Y E D E A C
J B L E W A S E E C K I
G B L U E T E K C O E N
D R V R Y T A O X M I S
I Z I L E E U W W M N T
S F F T R N O E E E S I
O L L D T T J A E N T N
B E U A F I G K K D I C
Y W B A C O N J O H N T
D L P H O N E G A M C S
E H O M O P H O N E S L

ACCOUNTABLE

ATTENTION

DISOBEYED

GRITTING

HOMOPHONES

INSTINCTS

RECOMMEND

Words to Know and Learn

1) **rec·om·mend** (rĕk'ə-mĕnd') *verb*

To present as worth doing; suggest; advise.

2) **hom·o·phone** (hŏm'ə-fŏn', hŏ'mə-) *noun*

A word that is pronounced the same as another but has a different meaning and often a different spelling, such as night, knight, blue, blew.

3) **in·stinct** (in'stĭngkt') *noun*

A strong natural tendency or ability.

4) **dis·o·bey** (dĭs'ə-bā') *verb* **dis·o·beyed** (past tense)

To refuse or fail to follow an order or rule.

5) **grit·ting** (grĭt) *verb*

Clamping (the teeth) together.

6) **ac·count·a·ble** (ə-koun'tə-bəl) *adjective*

To be held responsible for one's actions.

7) **at·ten·tion** (ə-tĕn'shən) *noun*

Concentration of the mind on something.



Chapter 2

Never Bad

“No, oh, no!” I moaned, as I looked at the third grade classroom lists outside the school’s office door. I was in for some trouble now.

“What’s wrong with you? Are you kiddin’ me? Third grade is about to be awesome. We’re in the same class again,” Brooke said, as she walked up beside me and grabbed my shoulders.

She and I were both excited to be in the same class again. It was going to be cool because Trey Spencer and Alec London were our classmates too. I smiled as I pointed to both their names.

“Wait, so you’re happy Alec’s in our class?”

“Yeah, he’s cool. And I know you’re happy Trey’s in our class,” I teased Brooke.

“Yeah, Trey is my buddy. So if the class is cool, what’s your problem?”

“Mrs. Hardy is our teacher and you know they say she’s mean.”

“Oh, my goodness, that’s right. I’m sad now,” Brooke said.

“Well, at least y’all have each other,” a voice behind us said. It was Chanté. “I got Miss Harper and I would take Mrs. Hardy any day to be in the class with you all.”

Everyone wants the first day of school to be bubbly and bright. But I couldn’t help but remember that this time last year my world was upside down! Right before school started, my dad went back to the Navy. My mom was having a new baby. I also had a new daddy to get used to. But Daddy Derek turned out to be okay after all. Baby Jayden isn’t too bad either. Besides, I have good friends now at this school. I just hoped this year was going to be even better.

I was hoping to start the third grade off on the right track. But Mrs. Hardy? Ughh! She was the one who yelled in the hallway at everybody else’s class. She’s the one who makes her class come in early from recess. She’s the one who doesn’t let her class talk that much at lunchtime. She’s the one everyone prays they don’t have as a teacher.

I had everything going on with me this week—from getting into trouble to visiting Billy in the hospital. But I forgot to pray that I wouldn’t have Mrs. Hardy!

“You’re makin’ a big deal out of nothin’,” Brooke said. “She can’t be that bad.”

“I hope you’re right,” I said to my friend. Then I looked

over at Chanté and said, “Smile, girl. I think our classes are right next to each other.”

“They are,” Chanté said. “But I don’t have anyone I know in mine. Even Billy is in your class. I saw his name on Mrs. Hardy’s list.”

“Guess what, guys. I saw Billy in the hospital this weekend. I don’t think he’s comin’ to school today.”

“That’s right. My mom told me that he was hurt. I hope he’s okay. I can’t believe he got struck by lightning,” Chanté said to us.

“Me either. Whenever there’s a storm, I’m gonna sit still. I definitely won’t be going outside,” I said to them.

“Well, you all aren’t in my class, but you’re still my girls. Right?” Chanté asked, as Brooke and I nodded our heads. “Good, then that’s all that matters.”

“Girls, get into your classrooms. The bell is just about to ring,” said a lady we never met before. “Let’s move it right now.”

I looked at Brooke. Brooke looked at me. Chanté darted away to her class. Right then, I knew Mrs. Hardy was as mean as everyone said she was. It was going to be a long year.

“Let’s stick together,” Brooke whispered to me.

“I don’t even think so because I’ve given the class assigned seats. Find your name on the desk and park it there,” she said from behind us.

“It looks like the milk in her cereal must have been spoiled this morning or somethin’,” Alec whispered from in front of me.

Our names were listed in alphabetical order by last name. Morgan Love followed Alec London. Brooke was a couple of rows over in the front of the class. Her last name was Atwater so she wasn't near me. She really didn't like that she wasn't sitting by Trey. Since his last name was Spencer, his seat was in the back of the room.

Mrs. Hardy stood in the front of the room, looked down at us from the top of her glasses, and said "Good morning, class."

"Good morning," we all said, not sounding too happy.

"I see a lot of you have long faces this morning. I've also been walking around the halls hearing all the students say, 'Oh, I'm glad I don't have Mrs. Hardy. She's so mean.' Well, let me just say this. If you are a good student, we won't have any problems. Yes, I am hard on my class, but my students leave the third grade passing the **mandatory** test. It is a standard reading and math test that students must pass to go on to the fourth grade. If not, you could have me again. And that seems to be a big reason for everybody to work hard and move on."

"Why are you so mean?" Trey blurted out.

"First of all, people don't follow my rules. By the way, the rules are posted next to the door. And, young man, you just broke rule number one. If you want to be heard in my class, you have to raise your hand. I can't just let you do what you want to do. There must be order in my class. We will have fun when it's time. But we have a lot to learn in the next ten months. Enough said. If you show honesty,

integrity, and respect in my classroom at all times, we won't have any problems. I very well may be your favorite teacher by the end of it all."

Everybody started laughing. Who was going to believe that?

"This is very serious. And for those of you who laughed, just remember I know each of your faces. Trust me, you don't want to get on my bad side. Now that we've got that out of the way, let's get busy. What was the best thing you remember about your summer break? We'll start up here," she said, pointing to Brooke.

Brooke answered, "Well, for me, I remember my birthday party. All my friends came and it was a special time. I know a lot of you guys weren't invited but that's because I didn't know you. Next summer, I'll invite everybody and we'll have a super time."

More kids talked about their parties. Some kids talked about visiting with their families out of town. After everyone finished, I raised my hand to speak.

"Hi, I'm Morgan Love. Like Brooke Atwater, I only know a couple of you guys in here. Trey, Alec, and Brooke. I know Billy too, but he's not here today. I also had a great time with some of my cousins. I found out this summer that I have good self-esteem. Nobody is perfect, but we're all amazing just the way we are."

"Okay, Morgan. That was very good," Mrs. Hardy said. "All right, class. Now we can break into groups and have some fun."

The rest of the day we played games and did worksheets on things we should know up to this point. I watched as Mrs. Hardy walked around, getting to know all of my classmates. Even though she was a serious teacher, I realized she had a heart too.

So I prayed, Lord, I'm sorry that I really didn't want to have Mrs. Hardy when I came to her class. I've gotta have more faith that You know what's best. She doesn't seem like a bad lady. I love You, Lord. And I hope to have a great year in the third grade.



After we'd been in school for a week, Mrs. Hardy was so pleased with our conduct that she let us choose our own seats. Alec moved to the back and sat next to Trey. And since I had an open seat next to me, Brooke came and sat in it.

When everyone finished changing their seats, Mrs. Hardy said, "Some classes don't start learning their multiplication facts until the tenth week. But I want us to get an early start on things. How many of you want an early start?"

All of us raised our hands. "Okay, we will have to cut five minutes of recess and come inside to do extra math drills. In a few weeks, we're going to have a big test to see who's doing well and who needs after-school **tutoring.**"

Brooke and I looked at each other. Then we looked all around the classroom. From the faces I saw, it looked like

no one wanted to be in after-school tutoring. Not that getting extra help was a bad thing, but for us it wasn't good. We were going to pass this test!

"Well then, let's get started. Last week, we worked on 1s and 0s. Now we'll do the 2s, 3s, and 4s."

Trey raised his hand. "Yes, sir, Mr. Spencer?"

"Mrs. Hardy, I just don't understand why you have $2 + 2$ on the board if we're doing multiplication."

"Okay, Trey. What's $2 + 2$?"

"It's 4."

"And $3 + 3$?"

"Six."

"And $4 + 4$?"

"It's 8."

"Now, look at this. $2 + 2$ is 4, but that's the same thing as 2×2 . You're just adding the number 2 two times."

"Huh?" Trey was confused and many of us were as well. I noticed there were tons of puzzled looks.

Alec said, "I think I get it. If 2×2 is 4, then 2×3 is 6, because you're adding the number 3 two times."

"Exactly. So Alec, since Trey just told us $4 + 4$ is 8, what's 2×4 ?"

"Eight."

"And what's 2×5 ?"

"Ten."

"And 2×6 ?"

"Twelve. And you know that because $6 + 6$ is 12 and $5 + 5$ is 10."

“Great!”

“And we only have to go to 12?” Brooke shouted out.
“Oh, I’m sorry, Mrs. Hardy.”

The teacher looked sternly at her for not raising her hand and Brooke got the message.

“Yes, Brooke. We have to go up to 12. So what’s 2×12 ?”

“Twenty-four!” we shouted.

“Very good, class. Now we have to learn the 3s.”

She wrote $2 + 2 + 2$ on the board. Again, we all kind of looked like, *What is this?* Multiplication wasn’t gonna be so easy to learn.

“Alec, what’s $2 + 2 + 2$?”

Alec quickly answered, “Six.”

“Okay, so when you add the number 2 three times it equals 6 as well. Then $3 + 3 + 3$ is 9 and 3×3 is 9. The more you write the facts down, the easier it becomes to remember them. You’ll get a lot of practice as you do your homework assignments.”

We went on to do the rest of the 3s:

3×4 is 12; 3×5 is 15; 3×6 is 18; 3×7 is 21; 3×8 is 24; 3×9 is 27; 3×10 is 30; 3×11 is 33; 3×12 is 36.

The 4s were easy too:

4×1 is 4; 4×2 is 8; 4×3 is 12; 4×4 is 16; 4×5 is 20; 4×6 is 24; 4×7 is 28; 4×8 is 32; 4×9 is 36; 4×10 is 40; 4×11 is 44; 4×12 is 48.

The 5s were simple to remember.

“I know you guys know how to do your 5s. Just count by 5 up to 12. Ready?”

Mrs. Hardy clapped her hands to a beat and we clapped with her: “5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60.”

“See, you just have to go to 12. The 10s are just as easy. Any number times 10 is that same number but add a 0: 10×1 is 10; 10×2 is 20; 10×3 is 30; 10×4 is 40; 10×5 is 50; 10×6 is 60; 10×7 is 70; 10×8 is 80; 10×9 is 90; 10×10 is 100; 10×11 is 110; 10×12 is 120.”

Alec raised his hand. “Mrs. Hardy, I like the 10s.”

“That’s good, Alec. I like the 11s myself. Any number times 11 is the number twice.”

“The number twice? Oh, I’m sorry again, Mrs. Hardy,” Brooke said. She kept forgetting to raise her hand.

“Brooke, you have to understand. If you want to speak, you must always raise your hand.”

“Sorry.”

“It means you will get the answer by repeating the same number you are multiplying by 11. For example, 2×11 is 22; 3×11 is 33; 4×11 is 44.”

“Oh, so 5×11 is 55 and 6×11 is 66?”

“Exactly. It’s a little tricky when you get to the numbers 11 and 12, but we’ll discuss that when we get there.”

All of that fun learning took up the first hour of class. In the second hour, Mrs. Hardy called Alec and me to her desk.

“Are the two of you aware of the Challenge Program? This is a special class that offers students with high grades a chance to learn faster. A letter was sent to your parents

about your participation and they have given you both permission.”

Mom and Daddy Derek told me about it and I guess it was going to be okay. But I told them that I still didn’t want to skip a grade if that was a part of it. Before I could say anything to Mrs. Hardy, Alec spoke up.

“Yeah, they got it. It’s a program that challenges kids to work a little harder,” Alec said, seeming more **astute** than I’d ever heard him sound before.

“That is correct. You will be taking a bus to another school one day a week and stay there the remainder of that day. I’m really proud of you both. You’re my only Challenge students this year. If you have any difficulty with the lessons, let me know. My kids have a **reputation** in Challenge of being leaders, so I expect only the best from both of you, okay?” Mrs. Hardy asked, waiting on a positive answer from us.

“Yes, ma’am,” we said.

Looking pleased and smiling, she said, “Good, then go ahead and gather your things. The bus is waiting for you.”

On the way to the bus, I must have looked at Alec like I had a question mark on my face. He already knew what I was thinking because he said, “Oh, what? You didn’t think I was smart, huh?”

“I mean, last year you barely did any work.”

“That was different. I was goin’ through some stuff at home and I didn’t try hard. You know what I’m talkin’ about. But the school I used to attend was a lot harder than

this one. I guess it got me ready for the program. People say this Challenge Program is real hard. So if we need to study together, we should ask our parents if it's okay with them," Alec suggested.

"Yeah, that'll be fun."

"Yeah, that'll be fun," some girl behind us mocked, as we walked through the hallway.

She stuck out her leg and when he saw I was about to trip, Alec grabbed my arm. I looked at her real hard. I knew that girl. It was Billy's sister, Bridget. Alec and I didn't pay any attention to her and just went outside to get on the bus.

"I don't know why she's so bad and why she's so mean to me," I said.

"Maybe something's bothering her and she's mad about it. Don't even worry about it. Let's go check out this new program."

We both jumped up on the bus, ready and **eager** to learn.



"What's wrong with Brooke?" Chanté asked me on the playground.

We'd been in school for four weeks. I was finding out that the third grade was not a joke. I had to study harder than ever before. Although I only went to the Challenge Program once a week, I already had a report to turn in. Alec thought he needed to study with me because we had

a test coming up in a week. But I was thinking that I might have to study with him. He was making nothing but 100s.

Even though I had all As because I worked hard at it, it reminded me how really happy I was that my mom hadn't let me skip a grade. This was enough of a challenge for me. Today was the big multiplication test. Our teacher was going to time us on our 2s, 3s, 4s, 5s, 10s, and 11s facts. We couldn't just know them; we had to be able to recall them quickly.

I was ready! Over the last two weeks, Mom, Daddy Derek, Mama, and Papa tested me with flash cards. Mom even put the cards in Jayden's hand and taught him how to turn it over and show me the right answer. I couldn't believe he was already a one-year-old and walking up a storm. The time had gone by so fast.

Chanté and I headed over to Brooke by the swings. When she saw us coming, Brooke turned her head. She twisted the swing around so we couldn't see her face. She'd been acting weird all day, so I knew something was wrong.

"Are you crying?" Chanté asked her, as she went around the swing to look at Brooke's face.

"Leave me alone, Chanté. Don't make a big deal about it. Okay?"

"What's going on, Brooke? Did Trey do somethin' to you, girl?" Chanté asked.

"No, nobody did anything. I'm just not a smart girl. I don't even **deserve** to have any friends."

Chanté just looked at me like she didn't know what else to say. I walked in front of Brooke and said, "Talk to me, Brooke. Tell me what's wrong."

"You don't care."

"I wouldn't be askin' you if I didn't care. That's not fair."

Brooke blurted out, "I didn't study for the test! Okay?"

"What test do y'all have?" Chanté asked. "Mrs. Hardy must be much harder because we don't have any test this week."

I knew what she was talking about so I explained to Chanté, "We have a big multiplication test today . . . and our teacher is cool. She's just tryin' to help us stay ahead."

Brooke rolled her eyes and said, "I don't wanna be ahead. We're moving too fast. I thought the test was next week."

"Brooke, how could you think it was next week? She's been tellin' us all along that the test would be today. You knew. Why didn't you study?" I wasn't letting her off the hook.

Chanté said, "I don't even know my times tables yet."

I just shook my head, thinking, *This is not the time to say that. Brooke was already saying she didn't know hers either.*

She surprised me when she stood up from the swings and grabbed my shirt. "Morgan, you gotta help me! Please? I need you now, bad. You can't let me fail."

"Help you how? You wanna go over them with my

flash cards? We still have ten minutes before we have to go back inside. And I can bring them to lunch if you want.”

“No,” Brooke said, as she got even closer and started whispering. “You know . . . we sit right beside each other, right?”

“And?”

“And . . . I just thought—Oh, forget it! You don’t care about me.”

“Whatever,” Chanté said. “You know Morgan would help you with anything that you need.”

“I’m just sayin’ this one time, Morgan. I promise I’ll study this weekend and from now on for every test. If I fail, I’ll be in super trouble for not studying. Besides, if I have to do after-school tutoring, I won’t have anyone to pick me up because my mom works. And kids will laugh at me. I need your help, Morgan, please!”

“Calm down, Brooke. Just tell her what you need and she’ll help you,” Chanté said.

“Your teacher is calling you to come inside,” I said to Chanté. I saw her class lining up.

“See, you act like you don’t even wanna help me,” Brooke said and walked away in a hurry.

I was confused so I just plopped down on the swing she left empty. During lunch, Brooke didn’t sit beside me. I guess I looked kinda out of it when I took my tray because Alec came right behind me and tried to cheer me up.

“I see Brooke didn’t sit with you at lunch. You must have told her no.”

“About what?” I wondered what he meant.

Surprising me, he said, “She wants to copy off of your math test.”

I almost dropped my tray. So that was it!

“How do you know?”

“Because I heard Trey giving her the stupid idea.”

“I really didn’t know what she wanted, but now it all makes sense. She kept saying we sit right beside each other. Ughh! I can’t do that,” I told Alec.

“You can’t and you shouldn’t. But will you?”

Alec left me standing there thinking. After that, I didn’t even want to go to class. Before I was eager for the test but now the last thing I wanted was to take that test. I didn’t want my best friend to fail, but letting her cheat off my test was just wrong.

My mom had already told us that we had to be there to help each other do the right thing. Brooke wanted me to help her cheat. There was no way I was going to do it.

Soon after Mrs. Hardy told us to begin the test, she stepped out of the classroom. Tears started to fall from Brooke’s eyes and she hit the empty test paper. Feeling sorry for her, I just pushed my test over a little. That way if she wanted to copy, she could.

Then she whispered, “Thank you so much, Morgan. I will study next time. I promise. Helping a friend out is never bad.”

Letter to Dad



Dear Dad,

Well, since school is mandatory, I guess I should have a good attitude about it. I'm in the 3rd grade now. And my teacher says if we all work hard, treat each other right, and have integrity, we'll do fine in her class. But 3rd grade is more challenging for me. I may need tutoring.

For now, I have all A's. Mom says I'm real astute. I have a reputation of studying hard every day. I guess I'm eager to learn more than I know. I do want to make you and Mom proud. I can't wait to see you, Dad. Come home soon. You deserve a big hug for all your service to our country.

Your daughter,
Hard-working Morgan

Word Search

S M A R T R H T B A K E
E M K N G E E U E I D A
R D A G X P L T G N I S
V R M N H U P E C T N T
E B E I D T E V T E T U
E E R R E A D L O G E T
A A I O S T T M O R G E
G V C T E I Q O T I A N
E E A U R O K P R T L S
R R J T V N L A N Y O P
Q U I Z E T E A C H E R
N E C E S S A R Y D A Y

ASTUTE

DESERVE

EAGER

INTEGRITY

MANDATORY

REPUTATION

TUTORING

Words to Know and Learn

1) **man·da·to·ry** (măn'də-tôr'ē, -tôr'ē) *adjective*

Required.

2) **in·teg·ri·ty** (ĭn-tĕg'rĭ-tē) *noun*

A strong sense of honesty; firmness of moral character.

3) **tu·tor·ing** (tū'tər, tyū'-) *verb*

Instruct or teach privately.

4) **as·tute** (ə-stūt', ə-styūt') *adjective*

Being shrewd; quick in understanding or judgment.

5) **rep·u·ta·tion** (rĕp'yə-tā'shən) *noun*

The level of respect at which a person is thought of by others.

6) **ea·ger** (ē'gər) *adjective*

Having or showing keen interest, intense desire, or impatient expectancy.

7) **de·serve** (dĭ-zûrv') *verb*

To be worthy of or have a right to.