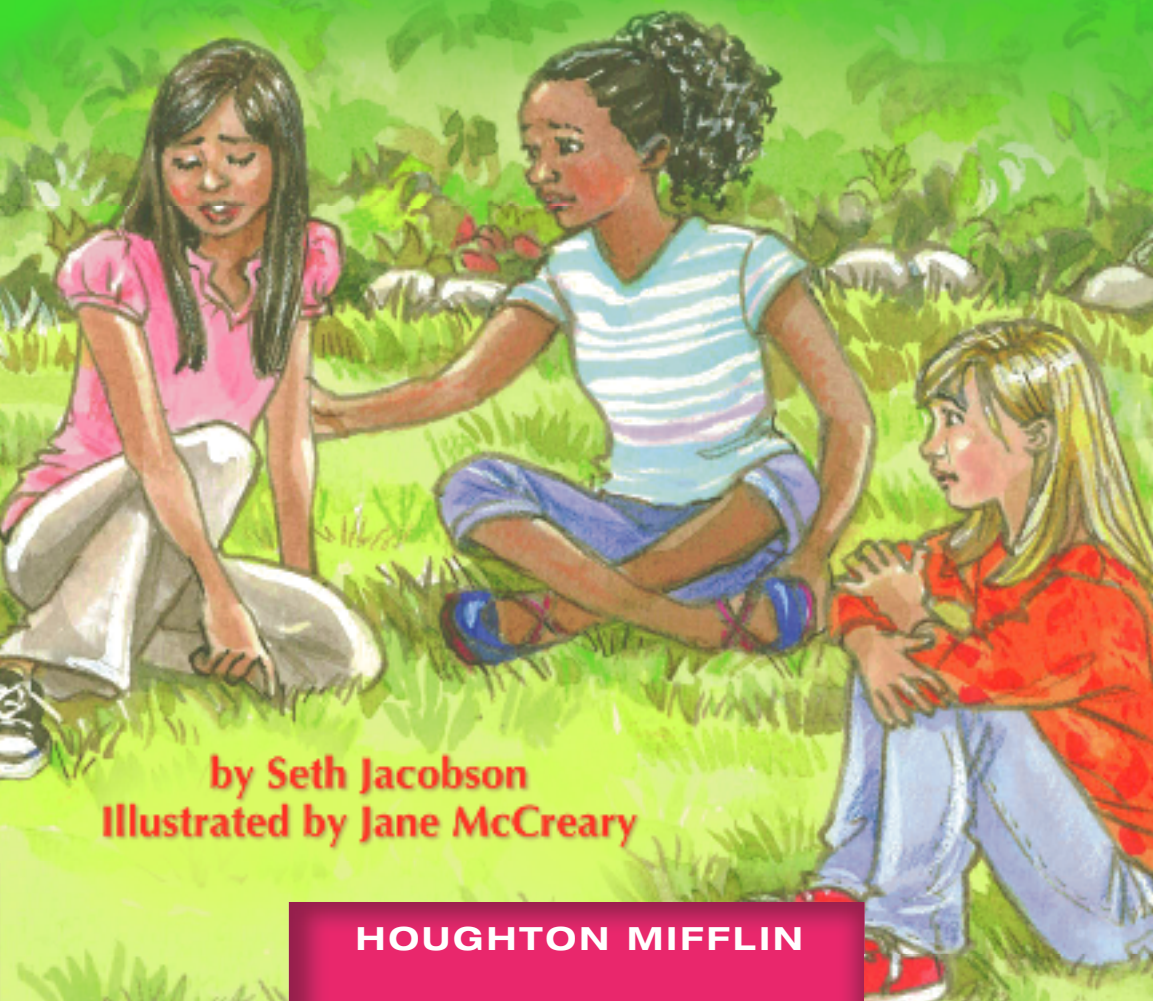




Three Friends or Two?



by Seth Jacobson
Illustrated by Jane McCreary

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BOSTON

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The New Kid at School

“Have a good day, Sweet Pea!” Petra’s mom said at the entrance of Petra’s new school. She started to kiss Petra good-bye, but Petra quickly dodged her.

“The rule, Mom?” she said. Petra had clearly stated the rule for school drop-off: NO PUBLIC DISPLAYS OF AFFECTION. Petra’s mom liked to hug and kiss you good-bye, no matter what your age. She also thought nothing of licking her finger to get a smudge off your face — in front of your friends! *And* she liked using cutesy nicknames.

 Her mom looked disappointed. “Sorry, I forgot.”

“That’s OK, Mom. Thanks for the ride. Good luck at work today!”

Her mom forced a smile. She had started a new job at the state house in Sacramento. Petra knew that her mom was still nervous, trying to fit in with her new co-workers.

Petra wasn’t feeling so good about her life, either.



Petra’s mom drops her off at school.



Sasha isn't as happy to see Petra as Amy is.




She'd been going to her new school for three weeks, but she still felt like an outsider. That is, except for the times when she was with her new friend, Amy.


When Petra got to her locker, Amy and Sasha were nearby, laughing. Petra approached them nervously, hoping to make a good impression on Sasha. Sasha and Amy were best friends, and Petra got the feeling Sasha didn't like the idea of having Petra as a friend.



"Hey, Petra!" Amy said.

"Hi, Amy. Hi, Sasha," she added in the friendliest voice she could muster. Sasha nodded but didn't make an effort to strike up a conversation. All three gathered their books for class. Petra and Amy were in most of the same classes, but Sasha wasn't.

 “See you at lunch, Sasha!” Amy said while Petra looked for the book she needed. Amy grabbed Petra’s arm just as she grabbed her book. “Come on. You’ll make us late!” Petra grinned at Amy’s attention. But when Petra waved good-bye to Sasha, the grin turned into a frown. Sasha looked so sad, maybe even **spiteful**. Petra had heard the phrase “three’s a crowd” a lot. She didn’t believe in it. It seemed like Sasha did.

 The last thing Petra wanted to do was come between two friends. Still, Amy was the first friend she had made at her new school. Why should Petra have to stop being friends with Amy just because Sasha was insecure?

Lunch Break

At lunchtime, Amy and Petra looked for Sasha. Lunch was the only time they got to see Sasha during the school day. Sasha was sitting at a crowded table with only one empty seat left. When she saw Amy, she waved her over, as if Petra didn’t exist.

Amy looked at Petra. “Go ahead,” Petra said. “I can find a seat somewhere else.”

“Wait here,” Amy said. Petra could feel her cheeks getting warm. She watched Amy walk over to Sasha.

🔊 Instead of sitting down, though, Amy said something to Sasha. The room was too loud to filter out their words, but it was clear they were arguing.

When Amy walked back to Petra, she looked upset. “Let’s find someplace to sit,” she said.

🔊 “No, really. It’s OK if you’d rather sit with Sasha,” Petra said. She looked over at Sasha, who had her back to them now. This wasn’t what Petra wanted at all. Maybe three really *was* a crowd.

“Forget it,” Amy said. “If she’s going to be unfriendly toward you, I don’t want to sit with her. Besides, she’ll come around eventually.”

🔊 “But I don’t want her to be mad at me,” Petra said.

“She’s not mad at you,” Amy said. “Something else is bugging her. I’m not sure what it is. I’ll find out later. For now, let’s just go eat.”



🔊 Petra worries that Sasha is mad at her.

They found a table near the trash bins. Amy made a face at the smell.

“Are you sure you want to sit here?” Petra asked. “I really don’t mind if you want to sit with Sasha.” Now more than ever, Petra felt responsible for putting Amy and Sasha’s friendship in jeopardy.




Amy tells Petra not to worry about Sasha.

“Don’t worry,” Amy said. “Sasha and I have been best friends for a long time. I think best friends have to learn how to make room for other people, you know?”


Petra nodded and picked at her sandwich. She thought about the friends she’d left behind at her old school. She wished she could call them right now and ask for advice. But she knew that they’d say, “Just be yourself, Petra. You’ll make lots of new friends.”

Track Practice

After school, all three girls were in the locker room, getting ready for track practice. Sasha was lacing up her shoes while Amy hurried to get dressed. Petra scrounged in her bag for a hair clip.

 Amy and Sasha talked about what they planned to do at practice. It was as if nothing had happened at lunch. Petra was glad things seemed to be OK.

“You coming, Petra?” Amy asked as she and Sasha stood to go. Petra looked at them: two best friends.


 “Not quite. I’ll meet you out there,” Petra said. Petra sat for a minute. A familiar loneliness crept into her chest. It was the same feeling she had as she drove with her mom to yet another *new* home. At the time, Petra thought she’d never feel that lonely again. Knowing that she had been wrong pained her even more.




 Petra feels lonely at her new school.



 Petra looks on as Sasha and Amy celebrate.

 During practice, Petra kept her distance from Amy and Sasha. She ran by herself. Petra ran hard, pushing her legs forward and lengthening her strides. She felt a sense of **exhilaration** as she finished her laps. She didn't want to stop running. But then the coach blew her whistle for a timed run.

 Amy and Sasha lined up first. Petra held back and waited to run in the next heat. She watched Amy and Sasha sprint around the track. When everyone had finished, the coach gathered them together. She told Amy and Sasha that they'd beaten their best time. Amy and Sasha hugged. Petra felt jealous, but quickly shook it off. She picked up her water bottle. Then she trudged back to the locker room by herself.




The Invitation

Amy and Sasha were laughing when they came into the locker room. “I almost forgot!” Amy said to Sasha. “My aunt asked me to babysit my two cousins this Saturday.”

“Sounds like *fun*,” Sasha said sarcastically.

“Oh, stop. They’re cute! Why don’t you come help me?”


“OK!” Sasha said, suddenly appearing much more positive about the cousins. “But I have to warn you. I have no clue how to take care of little kids.”

 As she listened to Amy and Sasha make plans, Petra felt her loneliness creeping in again. She got up to leave. “Do you want to come too, Petra?” Amy asked.

Petra turned around, surprised. “Really?”



Amy asks Petra to help her and Sasha babysit.

 “Absolutely!” Amy said. “My cousins are twins and a total handful. We could have a sleepover after, just the three of us!”

Petra looked at Sasha. It would be so great if Sasha said, “Yeah! Join us, it will be fun!” But she didn’t.

Petra sighed. Before she could think of an excuse not to go, Amy jumped up and smiled. “It’s settled then! We’re going to have so much fun!”

Yeah. Some fun, Petra thought.

Saturday Comes Around

Saturday started out being about as fun as Petra expected. Amy was busy chasing her cousins around the yard, while Sasha and Petra followed her. Amy was right about the twins being a handful.

At one point, the twins “disappeared” under a picnic table while Amy searched all over for them. Amy sat on the grass and said, “I give up!” Then the twins popped out and yelled “surprise!” Petra had to laugh. She caught Sasha giggling, too. For the first time, Petra felt OK about being with Amy *and* Sasha.

After the twins went home, Amy plopped down on the grass. “Whew,” she said. “I’m glad they’re gone!”

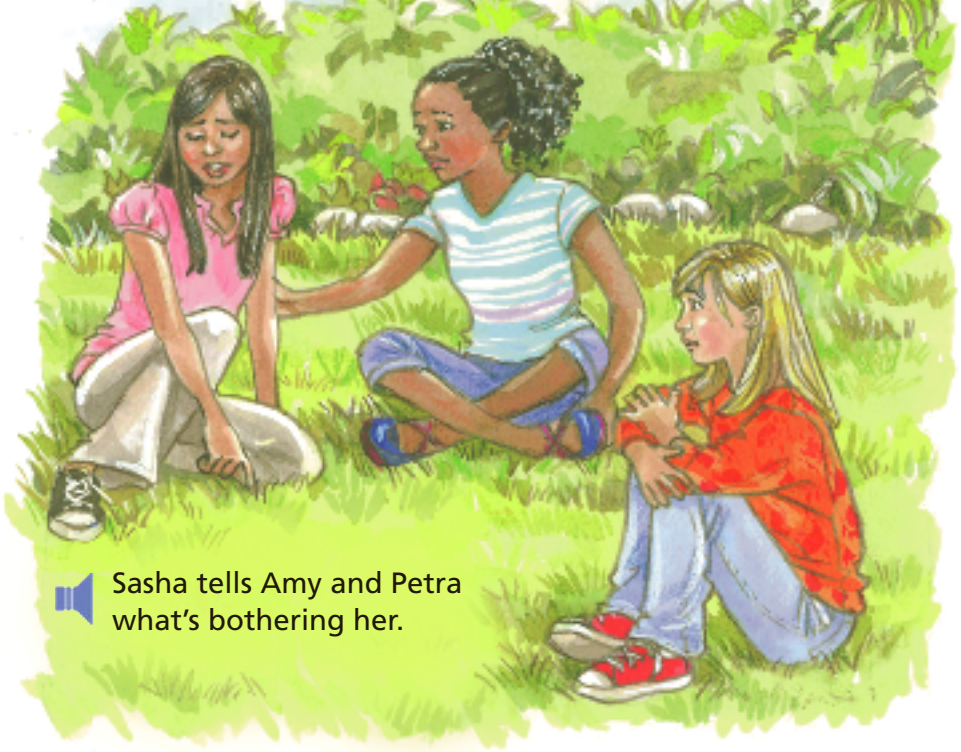
“Me, too,” said Sasha, sitting down right beside Amy. Petra sat across from them. The space between her and “the two best friends” seemed as wide as the ocean.


“I meant I’m glad they went *because* I want to talk to both of you,” Amy said. “I’d really like to know what’s bugging you, Sasha.”


Petra shifted on the grass. She didn’t like confrontations, and this one felt like it would be a big one. She glanced at Sasha, who also looked uncomfortable. Well, at least they had *one* thing in common.

Sasha and Petra watch Amy chase after her twin cousins.





 Sasha tells Amy and Petra what's bothering her.

 Sasha took a deep breath, then paused. "I'm really sorry. I know I've been acting like a jerk," she said. "But . . . but . . . well, it's just that everything I've always counted on has been falling apart lately."

"What do you mean?" Amy asked.

"I didn't want to say anything before. I thought if I said *it* out loud, that would make *it* true. But it's true anyway. My parents are getting divorced."

"Oh, no!" Amy said. "I had no idea!"

"I should have told you weeks ago," Sasha said. "And then you started spending more time with Petra. It was like our friendship was falling apart, too."



Coming to an Understanding

Petra hugged her knees to her chest. If she could *really* disappear under the picnic table, she would. She hated to think she'd put Sasha through more pain.

"I'm so sorry, Sasha," Petra said. "I never meant to come between you and Amy. I thought we could all be friends."



Sasha was crying now. Amy had her arm around her. Petra wanted to leave them alone. But how could she leave now? She stayed put, not sure what to do.

After a while, Sasha stopped crying. "It's OK, Petra," Sasha said, wiping her eyes. "You couldn't have known what was going on. I shouldn't have kept everything bottled up."



"Don't blame yourself, Sasha," Amy said. "It's my fault. I should have asked you what was wrong sooner."

"We aren't going to fight about whose fault it is, are we?" Sasha said, smiling.

Amy laughed. "Nah. I don't have the energy after chasing my cousins all over."

"Taking care of them is a lot harder than track practice," Sasha said. "Isn't it, Petra?"

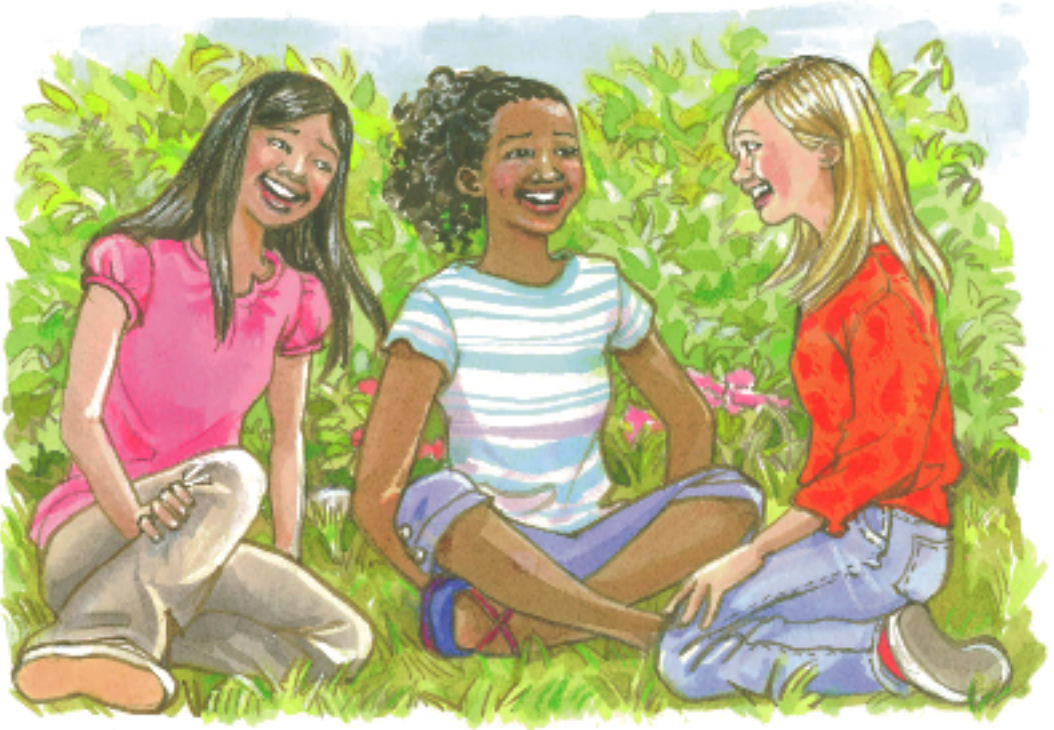
"It sure is," Petra replied. "It's a good thing we can sleep in tomorrow."

Both Petra and Sasha turned to Amy, and said at the same time, “Your cousins aren’t coming over tomorrow, are they?”

This time, they all laughed.

“You two better be able to stay awake tonight,” Amy said. “I’ve got a great movie for us to watch.”

Maybe, Petra thought, three is a crowd sometimes. But at other times — like right now — there’s plenty of room for three.



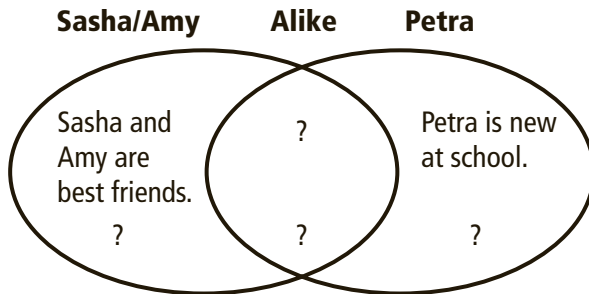
Amy, Sasha, and Petra all share a laugh.

Responding



TARGET SKILL Compare and Contrast

How is Petra different from Sasha and Amy?
What does Petra have in common with the other girls? Copy and complete the diagram below.



Write About It

Text to Text You've just read a book about a character who tries to fit in at her new school. What other books have you read about someone trying to fit in? Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting another book with this one.



TARGET VOCABULARY

abrupt

blurted

comprehension

eventually

exhilaration

jeopardy

oracle

scrounged

spiteful

stable



TARGET SKILL

Compare and Contrast Examine how two or more details or ideas are alike and different.



TARGET STRATEGY

Infer/Predict Use text clues to figure out what the author means or what might happen in the future.



GENRE Realistic Fiction is a present-day story with events that could take place in real life.

Level: S

DRA: 40

Genre:

Realistic Fiction

Strategy:

Infer/Predict

Skill:

Compare and Contrast

Word Count: 1,940

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