

AROUND THE WORLD



FELIX FIGHTS EQUITY



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WELCOME TO CHICAGO







The Windy City, Chitown, the City of Big Shoulders... all nicknames for the mighty **metropolis** of Chicago, Illinois.

America's third most populous city is situated conveniently between the **Great Lakes** and the **Mississippi River System**. This ideal geography has made Chicago a center for transportation and trade since its founding.



Metropolis

A very large and densely populated industrial and commercial city.

Great Lakes

Five large, interconnected lakes on the border between the United States and Canada, known as Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, and Ontario. They form the largest group of freshwater lakes in the world by total area.

Mississippi River System

A huge network of rivers and streams across the United States that includes the Mississippi River and its many smaller rivers, flowing all the way from northern Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. This system is one of the largest drainage systems in the world.

It is a bustling city and has long been home to amazing art, famous architecture, fantastic entertainment, and highly successful businesses.

However, the city also has a dark side, and Chicago has a long and terrible history of violence, crime, poverty, corruption, and low-performing schools. In recent years, hoping to reduce challenges for underperforming schools and students, Chicago's political and educational leaders have pushed the DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) practice, and the results have been alarming.

A colorful illustration of a young boy named Felix. He is standing on a sidewalk, holding a brown briefcase in his right hand. He is wearing a teal polo shirt, light blue jeans, and white sneakers. He has short dark hair and wears blue-rimmed glasses. To his left is a 'NO STANDING' sign with a bus icon and the number '52B'. Behind him is a wooden bench. The background is a warm, orange-toned sky with some clouds.

This is Felix

Felix lives with his mom and little sister in an apartment in one of Chicago's many rough neighborhoods. It's not the worst area around, but there's enough violence and gang activity that Felix knows to be careful during the day, not to go out at night, and which types of people to keep his sister and himself away from.

Despite his neighborhood, Felix is a very proud Chicagoan. He takes great pride in the toughness it takes to grow up in the city, deal with its frigid winters, and navigate its maze of buses and elevated trains. Felix rides a train for a few stops when traveling to school, and he loves looking out across the rows and rows of rooftops between his train line and Chicago's famous downtown skyline.



The buildings are so tall that they can be seen from miles away, and they often touch the clouds.

When he was little, rather than play with his toys, Felix preferred to take them apart, examine how they worked, and try to put them back together. Because of this, his mom got him a toolkit a few years ago, and it is Felix's most prized possession. His mom always tells him that they have the same kind of brain. Her name is Sandra, and she works as a machinist in a manufacturing factory during the day.

At night, Sandra takes classes at a community college and has a goal to one day become a mechanical engineer. Because she is so busy during the week, weekends are very important for family time, and Sandra and Felix have a special Saturday night tradition of putting puzzles together at the kitchen table while singing along to the radio. Sometimes, they listen to the latest hip-hop hits and sometimes to Puerto Rican classics. Like many of their neighbors, before moving to Chicago as a teenager, Felix's mom spent most of her childhood on the island of **Puerto Rico**.

Felix is very smart and has always made good grades, but academic success hasn't been easy for him. He's never been the strongest reader, and writing can be a challenge, but the biggest issue has always been trying to learn while in chaotic classrooms. Things weren't that bad in his early years, but by 4th and 5th grades, Felix's school days were dominated by disruptive classmates yelling insults, fights breaking out almost daily, and teachers spending far more time trying to manage behavior than teaching lessons.

Puerto Rico

A Caribbean island with a primarily Spanish-speaking populace. The United States acquired Puerto Rico from Spain in 1898 and officially designated the island an American territory in 1917.





Favorite Subject

This year, Felix entered middle school as a 6th grader, and when the school year began, he couldn't have been more excited. He and his classmates had been warned that grades and attendance really mattered now, so he hoped that school would be filled with less chaos. But what Felix looked forward to most was that, for the first time, he would have a specific math class with a teacher who specializes in the subject.

Felix has his struggles with reading and writing, but he has always excelled in mathematics. In fact, he's never gotten a math grade lower than an A. The day before school began, he explained to his mom why math is his favorite subject. He told her that he wasn't exactly sure why, but that "it just makes sense because I know exactly when I get an answer right or wrong."

"I agree," Sandra said with a smile. "And, it's the same for everybody around the world. Math doesn't care about who's doing the solving; it treats everybody equally. That's why it's my favorite, too."

Unfortunately for Felix, 6th-grade math was not exactly what he expected. Very little math was taught during math class because of the chaos, distractions, and violence. However, despite not learning much from class or his specialized math teacher, by the end of the year, his love for the subject had only grown.



Suburb

An outlying district within a metropolitan area known for having pleasant, family-friendly residential neighborhoods.

Mofongo

A Puerto Rican dish of deep-fried green plantains mashed together with other ingredients such as seafood or pork.

Arroz con Gandules

A Puerto Rican dish of rice, pigeon peas, and Caribbean spices cooked together in the same pot.

This is Ms. Sanchez

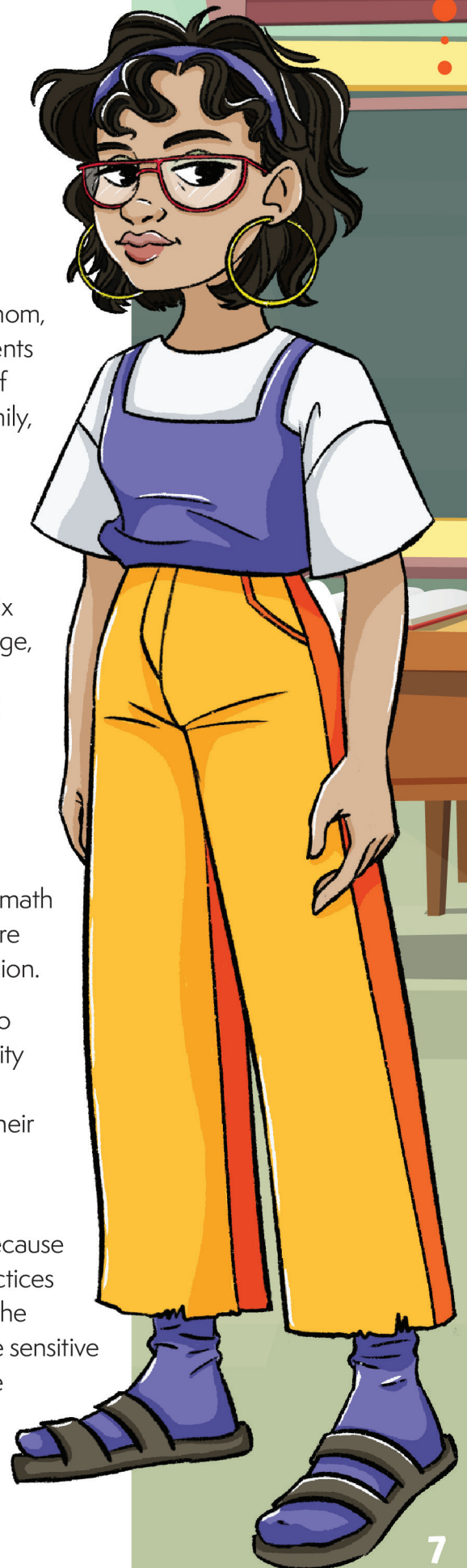
Jessica Sanchez was Felix's 6th-grade math teacher. Like Felix's mom, her grandparents came to Chicago from Puerto Rico, and her parents grew up in Felix's neighborhood. She was born and raised in one of Chicago's many **suburbs**, and unlike the older members of her family, Ms. Sanchez doesn't speak much Spanish, but she still takes great pride in her cultural heritage.

During her childhood, Ms. Sanchez loved attending Chicago's many Puerto Rican festivals and parades, and her mom's shrimp **mofongo** and **arroz con gandules** are her favorite foods. Like Felix and Sandra, her favorite subject was always math, and during college, she chose to major in education. Her goal was to become a math teacher and work for a middle or high school in the neighborhood where her parents had grown up. She wanted to feel closer to her heritage and help out the community that had shaped her family.

While in college, learning how to teach and getting her teaching credential, Ms. Sanchez was surprised by the lack of math in her education courses. There was little instruction about how to teach math or about how kids best learn math. Instead, most of her lessons were about how to follow and practice DEI—Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

At first, these lessons were confusing. Her parents had taught her to treat people based on who they were as individuals, but her Diversity lessons told her differently. Ms. Sanchez's professors told her that people's actions and performances are determined by things like their skin color and where they come from. She had questions but was hesitant to ask them.

Ms. Sanchez was timid about speaking up and asking questions because when learning about Inclusion, she was told that adopting DEI practices was required. Her professors insisted that teaching methods from the past either didn't understand or accept Diversity, and in order to be sensitive to students' needs, conforming to these new ideas was a must. She didn't want to go against her professors, plus she had once asked a question during class about Equity, and that hadn't gone well.





Do Not Question DEI

Discrimination

The unfair treatment of individuals or groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or religion.

Bigot

A person who is intolerant towards those who hold different opinions, beliefs, or practices, often resulting in prejudice and discrimination against groups or individuals.

Ms. Sanchez was taught that the goal of Equity is to achieve what is known as “equality of outcome.” This means that in a classroom setting, things like grades and discipline records should be similar for all students. However, because students have obvious differences, to achieve this goal, “equitable” teaching requires teachers to have different behavioral rules and grading standards for different students.

Ms. Sanchez’s professor taught that teachers must be conscious of group identities, and to be “equitable,” they would need to have different expectations based on characteristics like skin color. The professor instructed that “requiring a correct answer from students of color can be a form of **discrimination**.” A confused Ms. Sanchez raised her hand with a question. She asked the professor if her lesson applied to math. She explained that the reason she had always loved math was that it was the same for everyone, and answers were either right or wrong no matter who was solving the problems.



Her question irritated the professor, and she told the class that requiring some students to get correct answers was a form of racism. She then responded directly to Ms. Sanchez and said, "Not everyone has the opportunity to get a 'CORRECT' answer, Jessica. In order to be sensitive to group differences and not be a **bigot**, equitable teaching rewards student effort over academic or behavior outcomes."

Ms. Sanchez didn't want to upset her professors, and she certainly didn't want to be thought of as racist, so she stopped asking questions, finished up her classes, and received a teaching certificate from the state of Illinois. She interviewed at a few schools in her parents' old neighborhood and accepted an offer to teach 6th-grade math at the school Felix would be attending.

When the school year began, just like Felix, Ms. Sanchez couldn't have been more excited. Unfortunately, things didn't go anywhere near how she hoped they would...



Uncle Tom

An insult, based on the main character in the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, given to black Americans accused of being over-eager to gain the approval of whites.

Restorative Justice

A controversial behavior management strategy that aims to repair relationships and create accountability without punishments.

New School, Same Problems

It was the first day of middle school and the beginning of math class. Felix wanted to get off to a great start, but he didn't fully understand the warm-up activity. He tried asking Ms. Sanchez for further explanation, but before he could finish a sentence, a boy began mocking the way Felix spoke. The boy mimicked Felix's voice and called him an "**Uncle Tom**." A large section of students roared with laughter, and Felix's heart sank. He slumped down in his seat. His mother demands that her children speak clearly and use proper grammar, and for years, this has often resulted in Felix being harassed for "sounding white."



Ms. Sanchez was shocked by the insult and quickly came to Felix's defense. She sternly told the boy who had insulted Felix to respect his classmates and warned him not to do it again. In response, the boy crumpled up his warm-up paper, snapped his pencil in half, stood up, pushed everything from his desk onto the floor, called Ms. Sanchez a nasty name, and then walked out of class.

The student's behavior startled Ms. Sanchez, and she used the classroom intercom to inform security that the boy had left. As she told the administration office about the boy's behavior, the class erupted with laughter, and pencils were thrown around the room. Both Ms. Sanchez and Felix turned red from a mixture of embarrassment and frustration, and a group of students began a chorus of taunts.

After school that day, Ms. Sanchez asked her principal what punishment the boy had received for insulting Felix, disrespecting her, and leaving her class without permission. The principal seemed offended by the question and told Ms. Sanchez that in order to "teach in an equitable way," she would need to adjust her expectations for student behavior. The principal explained that the disruptive boy had a challenging background and that it would be wrong for him to be held to old ideas of discipline and accountability.

Ms. Sanchez replied that most of her students lived in challenging environments, but many chose to act appropriately. She then asked how not punishing bad behavior was fair to her students who weren't disruptive and wanted to learn. This only offended the principal more, and she angrily reminded Ms. Sanchez that she was teaching in an "equitable school that practices **restorative justice**" and finished by saying, "There will be no punishments or negative consequences. Those methods are discriminatory. You will need to create a positive reinforcement system to keep your students from misbehaving."





An Equitable Classroom



Ms. Sanchez desperately wanted to be an effective teacher, so she followed her principal's instructions and implemented the school's restorative justice discipline rules. She also attended staff training sessions titled "How to Make an Equitable Classroom" and "Grade for Equity." However, despite her best efforts, her classes were disastrous as the school year went on.

Each day, her classes were filled with disruption and disrespect. She tried offering rewards for not misbehaving, but many students just took advantage of there being no penalties for negative behavior. These students regularly arrived late to class and walked in and out as they pleased during the period. Out in the halls, they'd team up with other wanderers to goof around, sell and exchange drugs, and gleefully run from security guards. When they were in class, they'd constantly talk over Ms. Sanchez and try to intimidate their classmates, using language filled with profanity, racial slurs, vulgarity, and threats.

Academically, very few of her students were motivated to learn, and most hardly ever paid attention to instruction, but no matter what, they all passed Ms. Sanchez's math class anyway. This was because she was required to "grade equitably," making it almost impossible for a student to fail a class.



Equitable grading rewards completion over correctness, but even if assignments aren't finished, teachers are not allowed to enter grades below 50% in their gradebooks, and if a student at report card time has a grade below 70%, teachers are required to complete mountains of justification paperwork.

For the few students like Felix, who take pride in their work and want to learn, an equitable classroom means they get little attention. Equity's goal of achieving equality of outcome results in teachers giving the majority of their time and energy to the students who give the least amount of effort. Ms. Sanchez needed her unmotivated students to pass so badly that Felix didn't receive much instruction.

During the first few months of school, he didn't mind the lack of attention. Felix got good grades on all his assignments, and he appreciated that Ms. Sanchez had come to his defense on that first day. The math work mostly came easy to him, and he took great pride in having the highest grade in his class, but everything changed once he realized his good grades didn't mean he actually knew very much.



Math Is Racist?!

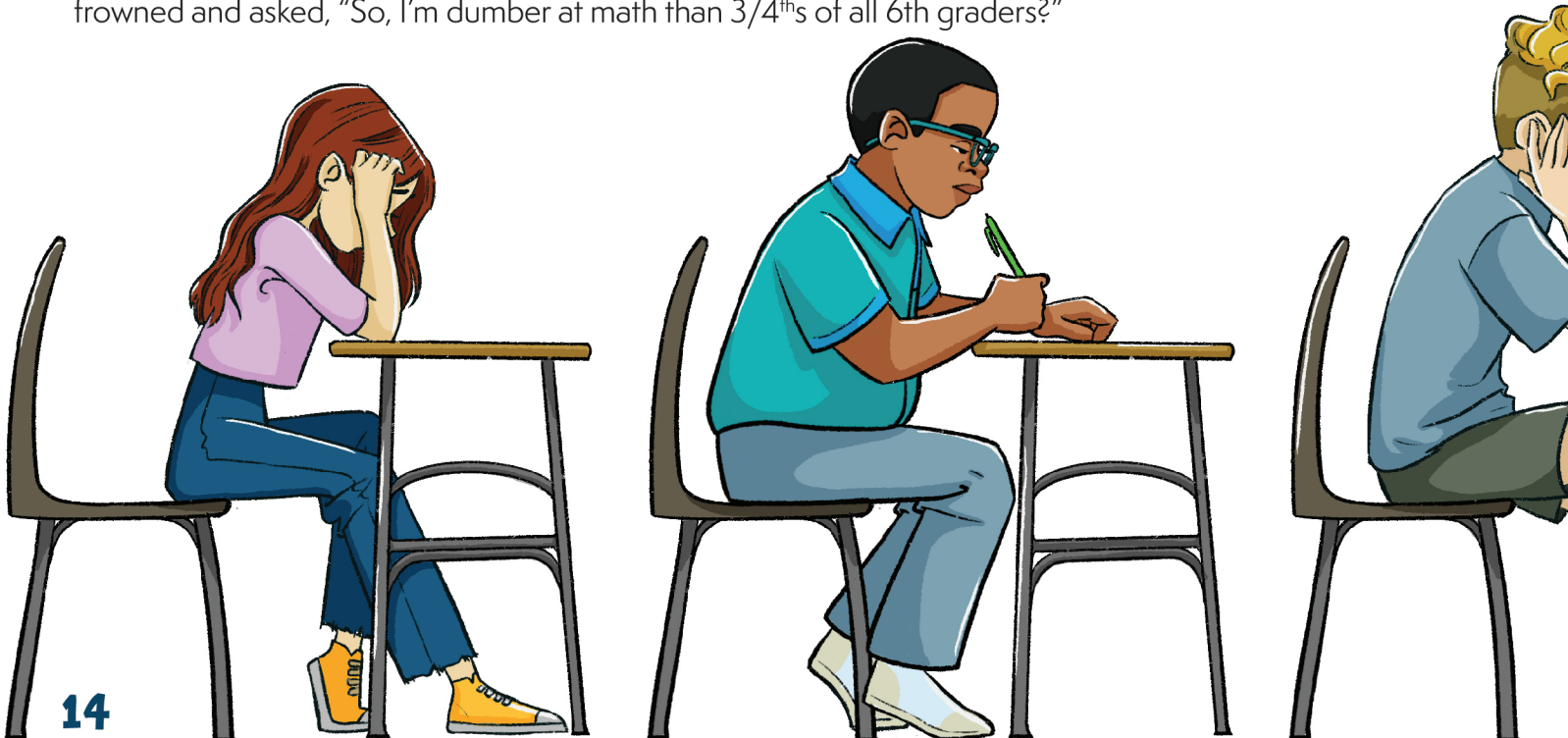
Each school year, students across the country take standardized tests that provide valuable information to education leaders. Because the tests are similar for everyone, students and schools can be compared. With the results, leaders can then determine what resources different schools need.

When Felix took the 6th-grade fall semester standardized math test, he was uncomfortable with how difficult it was. Most questions involved lots of reading, fractions, and formulas he was unfamiliar with, and many complicated charts and graphs. After recording a few answers, he expressed his anxiety to Ms. Sanchez, but she told him not to worry about questions he was unsure of. She said he wasn't being graded and to just do his best.

About a month later, Ms. Sanchez handed Felix and his classmates each an envelope with their name on it. Felix knew these were the results from the standardized test, and he quickly opened his. He pulled out a report filled with more charts, a graph, and a box in the bottom left corner that read "27th Percentile."

Felix's heart began to race. He had never made anything lower than a 90 in math, and he rushed over to Ms. Sanchez. He showed her the report, but instead of matching his concern, Ms. Sanchez smiled, patted him on the shoulder, and said his performance was one of the best in the entire school.

Ms. Sanchez knew Felix didn't understand why she was pleased, so she explained that his 27th percentile didn't mean that he only got 27% of the test questions right. It meant that his score was a little higher than a quarter of all the other 6th graders tested across the state, but instead of being relieved, Felix frowned and asked, "So, I'm dumber at math than 3/4ths of all 6th graders?"





Ms. Sanchez told Felix that the numbers didn't demonstrate how smart he was, but since she sensed that his feelings and confidence were hurting, she added that he had done nothing wrong and that his score wasn't his fault.

Ms. Sanchez explained that the kids who had performed better probably didn't face as many challenges outside of school as he and his classmates did and that she had learned during her teacher training that standardized tests were actually racist and probably wouldn't even be used in a few years.

Felix's mood didn't improve, so Ms. Sanchez continued. She explained that during her training, she had been taught that what is considered right and wrong is different for people of different cultures, communities, and races. So, having set standards is **oppressive** and a form of discrimination. She used a word, "Equity," that Felix had never heard before, and she said, "Even math can be racist if everyone is expected to get correct answers all the time."

Felix knew Ms. Sanchez was trying to make him feel better, but her explanation of percentiles, tests, and math being racist only made him feel worse. He left her class and walked down the wide school hallway. On either side of him were pictures of past students who had attended Felix's school years ago and then gone on to be highly successful adults. There were athletes and performers, but as he was walking, Felix focused on the pictures of a doctor, an inventor, and an architect who had designed one of Chicago's famous skyscrapers. Felix knew they all had to have been excellent at math. He doubted any of them had ever been in the 27th percentile, and for the first time in his life, Felix didn't feel smart.





Time to WORK!

When Sandra got home from class that night, she could tell something was wrong with her son. Most nights, she would find her kids watching TV together on the couch, but tonight, she found Felix lying on his bed, staring up at the ceiling. Sandra sat down next to Felix and asked him how his day went. He said his day was fine and he just needed some alone time, and Sandra responded, “OK, I understand, but I know something is wrong, and you can always talk to—”

Before she could complete the sentence, Felix sat up and told his mom all about the test, Ms. Sanchez, his classmates, the pictures of the famous alumni in the halls, and that he felt like a loser. He got teary-eyed and explained to his mom that he was supposed to be the “smart kid” in school—especially in math.

Sandra hugged her son tight and held on until his tears dried. She told Felix to go to her desk and grab her laptop, a mechanical pencil, and a few sheets of the graph paper she liked to use for her homework assignments. Then, she told him to meet her at the kitchen table.

Once they were seated, Sandra started up her computer and found an online tutorial for 6th-grade math. Felix didn’t recognize any of the concepts, so they tried a video designed for 5th grade. Felix said the problems looked kind of familiar, but when he tried a few, he didn’t know how to solve them. Sandra could feel her son getting frustrated and could tell he was embarrassed, so she closed the laptop and told him a story.

Sandra told Felix about her first math class in community college. She said it was called a “remedial class,” which was for the students who didn’t have the skills required for a regular college math class. Sandra explained that her middle school and high school math classes hadn’t prepared





her well, and at first, she was very embarrassed that she had to take the remedial class. But she got over the embarrassment as soon as her math skills began improving, and now she is taking the most advanced mathematics course that the college provides.

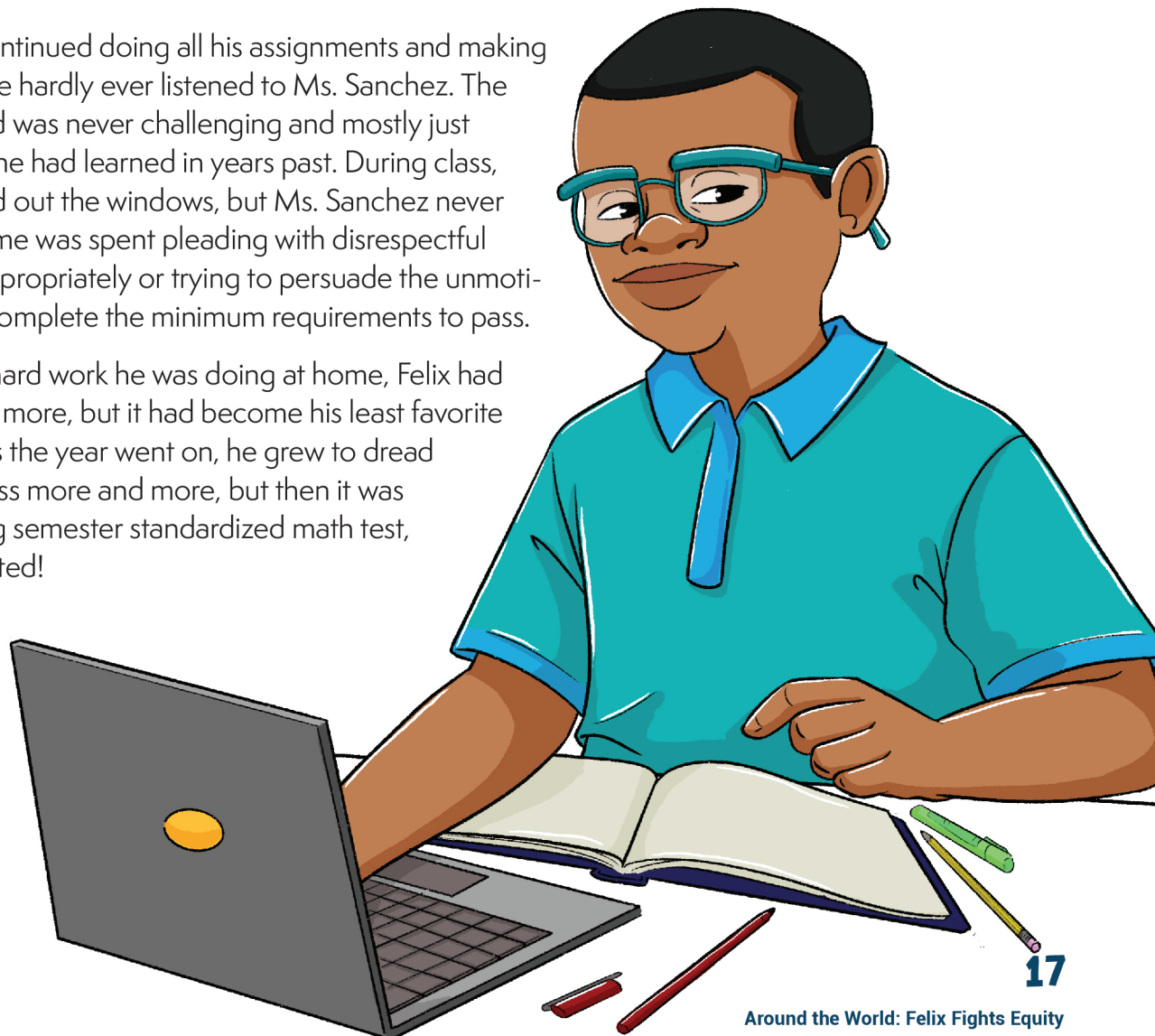
Felix appreciated the story, was proud of his mom, and wanted to make her proud, too. Sandra reopened the computer and found a video for 4th-grade math. Felix said the problems looked familiar. He took a big deep breath and GOT TO WORK!

From that moment on, Felix dedicated 30 minutes each night to watching math videos and doing practice problems. Many of the online teachers were funny and presented math in fun and creative ways. There were even videos with clever strategies for word problems designed to help kids like him who struggle with reading.

Along the way, Felix began to feel smart again.

In school, Felix continued doing all his assignments and making A's, but in math, he hardly ever listened to Ms. Sanchez. The work she assigned was never challenging and mostly just reviews of things he had learned in years past. During class, Felix mostly stared out the windows, but Ms. Sanchez never noticed. All her time was spent pleading with disrespectful students to act appropriately or trying to persuade the unmotivated to at least complete the minimum requirements to pass.

Thanks to all the hard work he was doing at home, Felix had never loved math more, but it had become his least favorite class to attend. As the year went on, he grew to dread Ms. Sanchez's class more and more, but then it was time for the spring semester standardized math test, and Felix was excited!





Does Hard Work Pay Off?

The test was certainly not easy. Felix had never seen so many word problems, but he used strategies he'd learned for decoding difficult words, made use of all his scratch paper to work out the questions, meticulously showed all his steps, and double-checked all his answers.

At first, he was a little worried that other students were finishing before him, but there was plenty of time to make sure he was giving his best possible effort. When he finished, Felix took a deep breath and submitted his test. Ms. Sanchez asked him how he thought he did. Felix shrugged his shoulders and left for his next class.

Inside, he felt confident.

A few weeks passed, and Felix was anxious to get his score. He knew he had improved but was a little nervous to see how much. When the scores finally arrived, Felix's heart raced as the envelopes were handed out.

When Ms. Sanchez got to Felix, she sensed he was tense and said, "Remember, these scores don't show how smart you are and are unfair to a lot of people."

Felix shrugged and opened his envelope as fast as he could. His eyes darted to the percentile number in the bottom left corner of the report. "Eighty-seven!" Felix coughed out without realizing others could hear him.

Ms. Sanchez darted back to Felix. She looked stunned and asked to see the report. After looking it over, she handed it back and said, "Felix, I'm so proud, but how, how did—"

Felix grinned widely and replied, "Either I've been working every night at home, watching videos of all the math I haven't learned at school, or maybe the test just wasn't racist this time."

Ms. Sanchez blushed with embarrassment and shame. She told Felix she was sorry he hadn't learned much in her class and that he had to work so much on his own. Felix replied, "It's OK, Ms. Sanchez. I know you tried." Then, he walked out of class.



As Felix walked down the school hallway, he looked up at the pictures of the successful alumni. Under each portrait was a quote about how his school had helped them on their paths to success.

Most of the quotes reflected on how the school had instilled toughness, and the demands of its teachers had taught them to work hard and be dedicated to personal growth. Felix shook his head and wondered what they would think of the school now.



Summer Vacation

When the school year ended, Ms. Sanchez told her principal she wouldn't be returning at the end of summer break. She's now trying to find a school where students like Felix are rewarded with attention and instruction, but she's having a difficult time. In the Chicago area, there is a shortage of math teachers, so she's getting lots of interviews, but in each, she is asked to explain how DEI is a part of her classroom, and none of her interviewers has liked her response.

Ms. Sanchez answers the DEI questions with honesty and describes how Equity and equitable teaching ruined her first year as a teacher. She tells her interviewers that Equity's promise to achieve equality of outcome, for academics and behavior, sounds nice at first, but since students have different temperaments, abilities, interests, and work ethics, it is a ridiculous target. She explains how much time and effort she had to spend during her first year with students who did not want it and how this forced her to neglect her students like Felix.

Ms. Sanchez tells her interviewers that not punishing bad behavior actually does punish students. The offending students have no reason to change their behavior, and their better-behaving peers are punished with constant chaotic classroom environments where little is learned and that are often unsafe.

Hopefully, Ms. Sanchez can find a school that hasn't been infected by DEI and doesn't push the Equity lies, but if not, she will be alright. Her parents have told her that until she figures out her next step, she can move back in with them. Ms. Sanchez isn't excited at the possibility of moving into her old bedroom, but it will be better than participating in an education system that is harming students like Felix.

As for Felix, his summer is going great. Most of his days are spent babysitting his sister, but he doesn't mind. Each weekday morning they walk down to their neighborhood library and spend a few hours there. While his sister reads or listens to "storytime" from the librarians, Felix volunteers as a math tutor. The library has a tutoring center, and Felix has become one of the most popular tutors. He not only helps explain math concepts, but also gives advice for reading, dealing with mean classmates, and for navigating schools where little is taught. Thanks to DEI, Felix's school failed him this past year, but he overcame the obstacles, and with help from his mom, he solved the problem and made himself a success.



Sudoku Challenge: Exploring the Infinite Grids

Can you work with numbers like Felix?
Test your skills by completing the Sudoku puzzle below.

	3	4			6			7
		7	8	1			6	
1	8	6	3		2	4	5	
		9	6	8				2
6								4
7				9	5	6		
	9	2	5		7	1	4	8
	7			3	8	9		
8			2			3	7	

What is a Sudoku Puzzle?

A Sudoku puzzle is a logic-based number puzzle that is typically played on a 9x9 grid. The objective of Sudoku is to fill in the entire grid with numbers so that each row, each column, and each of the nine 3x3 subgrids, known as "regions" or "boxes," contains all of the digits from 1 to 9 without any repetition.

Here are the basic rules of Sudoku:

- Each row must contain all the digits from 1 to 9 without repeating any of them.
- Each column must also contain all the digits from 1 to 9 without repetition.
- Each 3x3 region or box must contain all the digits from 1 to 9 without duplication.
- The challenge lies in finding the unique solution that satisfies all the rules of Sudoku.

Will we ever run out of Sudoku puzzles?

No! The number of unique, solvable Sudoku grids is astoundingly high, at 6,670,903,752,021,072,936,960. This number far exceeds the estimated count of stars in the known universe. Imagine if every one of the roughly 8 billion people on Earth were to complete one Sudoku puzzle every second. Even at this incredible rate, it would take until around the year 30,992 to solve every possible unique Sudoku puzzle.

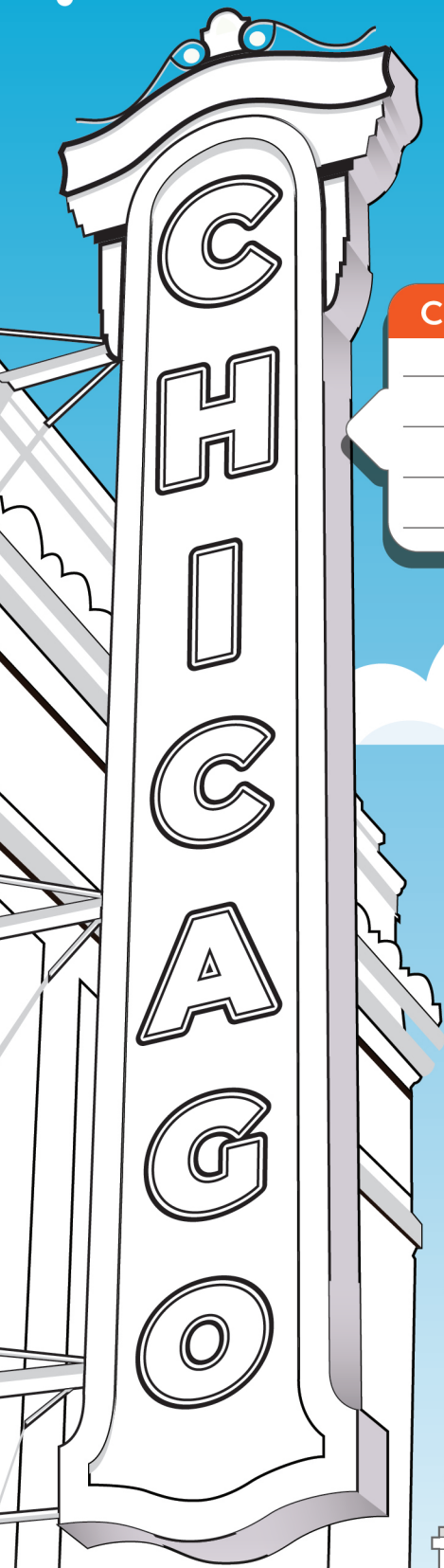
Chicago's Landmarks

Color the Chicago landmarks, then research a fascinating fact about each landmark. Write the fact below the landmark name.

CHICAGO THEATER

BOARD OF TRADE BUILDING

NAVY PIER





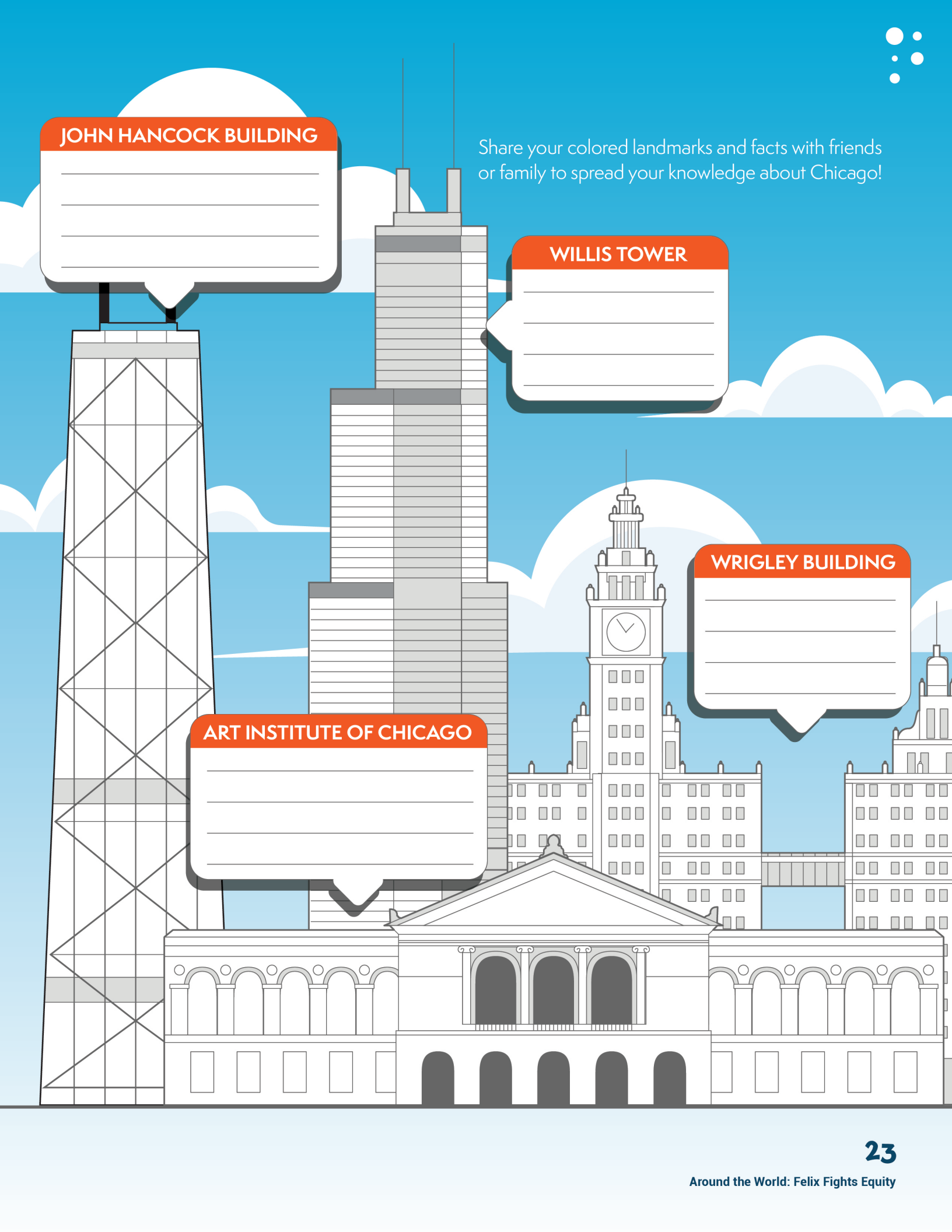
JOHN HANCOCK BUILDING

Share your colored landmarks and facts with friends or family to spread your knowledge about Chicago!

WILLIS TOWER

WRIGLEY BUILDING

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO





Writing Activity

Reflect on the story of Felix in Chicago and discuss how the implementation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) principles failed him. Analyze how a focus on traditional American values, like merit and individual achievement, could have led to a more positive outcome for Felix. Provide specific examples from the story to illustrate how merit-based approaches could benefit students in similar situations.

Recommended Readings

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Sudoku Challenge Solution

2	3	4	9	5	6	8	1	7
9	5	7	8	1	4	2	6	3
1	8	6	3	7	2	4	5	9
5	4	9	6	8	1	7	2	2
6	1	8	7	2	3	5	9	4
7	2	3	4	9	5	6	8	1
3	9	2	5	6	7	1	4	8
4	7	5	1	3	8	9	2	6
8	6	1	2	4	9	3	7	5

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FREE RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS & PARENTS

Supplement your child's viewing experience with lesson plans & worksheets that meet educational standards.

An illustration of five diverse cartoon children standing in front of a world map. From left to right: a boy in a grey military uniform with a peaked cap, a boy in a blue and white soccer jersey with the number 30, a girl with long brown hair in a blue top and yellow skirt, a girl with dark skin in a yellow top and patterned skirt, and a boy in an orange shirt and grey shorts. The title "AROUND THE WORLD" is written in large, bold, white capital letters across the middle, with "ANIMATED SERIES" in smaller white capital letters below it.

AROUND THE WORLD

ANIMATED SERIES

See the story come to life
with the Around the World
animated series.

Watch now at
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