

# SIMPLE COURTESY

Carol and Leora were laughing as they rushed down the hallway. Outside the school office, they bumped into Joe, who was passing by carrying a large stack of folders and papers. He stumbled a bit, and papers flew up in the air and scattered around him.

“Hey!!” he exclaimed, as the girls flew past him.

“Sorry! We’re going to the supply room to get some paper for a project we’re making,” Leora yelled over her shoulder. They turned a corner and disappeared, but their excited shrieks echoed down the corridor.

“Oh, now what do we do?” asked Carol as they stormed into the supply room. “The orange construction paper is on the top shelf, and there’s no way we can reach it.”

“I saw Mr. Markell as we passed the office. Let’s ask him to help,” Leora suggested, and they raced back out the door.

“Mr. Markell!” they called together at the figure sitting at the desk in his office with his

back to them. “Mr. Markell! ... We need you to get something for us in the storage room. Hello!”

Mr. Markell turned and put a finger to his lips. The girls saw that he was on the phone.

“We can’t reach the orange sheets of construction paper,” Carol persisted, oblivious to his request. “Can you reach it for us?”

Miss Taina was passing by and heard the last sentence. “I’ll get it for you,” she said kindly.

“Good,” Leora said, “Come. We’ll show you what we need.”

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The next morning, the third-grade teacher, Miss Ginison, was late. The children waited for over 20 minutes until she finally showed up. She didn’t greet them, and she also didn’t apologize or offer any explanation for being late. Instead she went straight into the history lesson on the Roman Empire.



“Who can tell me some of the differences between ancient Roman times and the present,” she asked at one point.

A few hands went up. “William?”

“One difference is that people had to travel by...”

“People had to walk a lot more in those days,” said Miss Ginison interrupting William.

The kids were surprised that Miss Ginison had cut William off as if he wasn't talking and had answered the question for him. She continued to do this throughout the rest of the class.

As the lesson was drawing to a close, it was time for the mid-morning break, and the kids began walking toward the door to go outside. Suddenly, Miss Ginison pushed them aside and walked right between them and out the door without excusing herself or acknowledging them.

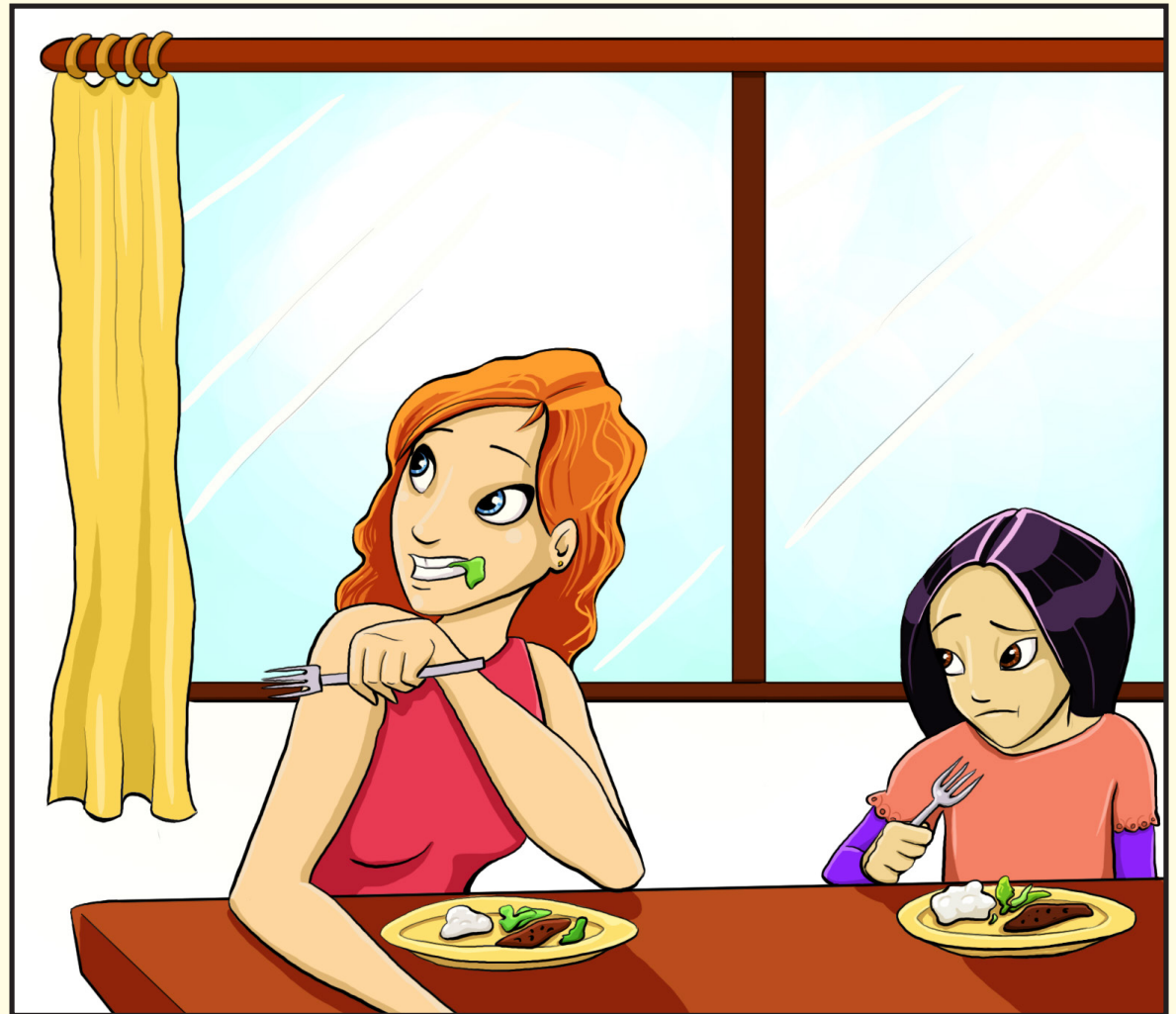
While outside, Carol was telling Marisa and Leora about the amusement park her parents were planning to take them to the coming weekend. As Carol was explaining about some of the rides, suddenly Miss Ginison walked up, interrupted Carol, told Marisa to go right away and get a jacket from the closet for her, and left.

Leora looked at Carol and said, “I've never seen Miss Ginison act like that, have you?”

“No,” replied Carol. “It's as if she doesn't even notice the rest of us.”

This strange behavior continued at lunch. Miss Ginison reached past William to get the water, nearly pushing his fork into his mouth.

Later, when Leora was salting her vegetables, Miss Ginison grabbed the salt from her. Miss Ginison didn't excuse herself, but instead salted her food and went on with eating her meal, chewing her food loudly with her mouth open and her elbows on the table. As she jabbered on about how hungry she was, the children looked on in shock as a piece of lettuce fell out of her mouth back onto her plate!



On most days, after lunch, Miss Ginison would give the children 20 minutes of quiet individual reading of an assigned story. Normally during this time, Miss Ginison would quietly study the afternoon's lessons she would be teaching the class. Today, however, Miss Ginison began browsing through some songs on her computer, playing bits and pieces through the computer speakers. She'd start playing a song, then would switch it off and turn another one on. Most of the students had a difficult time focusing on their reading, but Miss Ginison seemed unconcerned.

Twenty minutes had passed when Miss Ginison turned off the music, sat back in her chair, and looked up at her students with a smile.

"Please put away your books. I have something to explain to you," she said to the children.

"First, is there anything you noticed in regard to how I behaved today?"

There was total silence.

Miss Ginison smiled. "Is there anything you would like to say about my actions today?"

Again silence.

"Do you think I was polite and courteous in my actions toward you?"

Those words were the springboard for a number of comments from the children.

"Not really," answered Joe.

"You interrupted me when I was trying to answer your question," William said.

"You reached over William and took the water pitcher without asking for it to be passed to you," said Marisa.

"I couldn't concentrate on our reading assignment because of the music," said Alan.

"You didn't explain to us why you were late this morning," said Carol. "And, you didn't apologize for butting into my conversation with Marisa and Leora. In fact, you didn't even ask Marisa to help you, but just told her to get a jacket for you right away."

Miss Ginison listened as her students told her of the many ways she had hurt their feelings, upset them, treated them discourteously, and been disagreeable toward them.

"I was ill-mannered toward you today," said Miss Ginison. "In fact, can you think of one word to sum up the way I behaved?"

"Rude?" asked William.

"Yes, that's right. Today, all of you experienced what it's like to be on the receiving end of actions from someone who is rude."

Marisa spoke up. "I never expected grown-ups to act this way, especially teachers. They know better."

“You’re right, Marisa,” said Miss Ginison. “We should know better. While growing up, we should have been taught the right way to behave, and have had a lifetime to work at building habits of being courteous and considerate of others.”

“However, my behavior today wasn’t due to carelessness. I was behaving rudely for a purpose. I wanted to help you understand what it’s like to be on the receiving end of discourteous behavior.”

“Oh, I get it,” said Leora. “You were trying to show us how we sometimes make others feel.”

“Yes,” answered Miss Ginison. “You are such wonderful children, but sometimes you are quite inconsiderate of how you affect each other.”

“What are some ways we can each improve in being courteous and showing respect to others?” asked Miss Ginison. “We can list pointers on the whiteboard as reminders of things to work on during the coming month, and let’s talk again at the end of the month to see how we’ve improved.”

“And if we’ve made sufficient progress, can we plan a way to celebrate?” asked William.

“For sure,” answered Miss Ginison. “What do you have in mind?”

Hands went up, and one after the other, the children shared their ideas of ways to be more courteous and ideas for celebrating their progress.

