

The Invisible Boy

By Trudy Ludwig

Can you see, Brian, the invisible boy? Even Mrs. Carlotti has trouble noticing him in her classroom. She's too busy dealing with Nathan and Sophie.

Nathan has problem with what Mrs. Carlotti calls "volume control." He uses his outside voice inside too much. Sophie whines and complains when she doesn't get her way. Nathan and Sophie take up a lot of space. Brian doesn't.

When the bell rings for recess, Micah and J.T. take turns choosing kids for their kickball teams. The best players got picked first. Then the best friends of the best players. Then the friends of the best players. Only Brian is left, still waiting and hoping.

J.T. glances in Brian's direction and, just as quickly, looks away. "We've got enough players for each team," he tells the others. "Let's play ball!"

In the cafeteria, Madison and her friends talk about her birthday party. "The rope swing over the pool was awesome!" says J.T.

"Yeah, so was the waterslide," adds Fiona.

"That was the best pool party ever!"

"I'm so glad you guys had fun!" says Madison. Everybody did except Brian. He wasn't invited.

At Choosing Time, while the other kids play board games and read, Brian sits at his table, doing what he loves to do best: He draws fire-breathing dragons scaling tall buildings...space aliens locked in intergalactic battles...greedy pirates digging for treasures...and superheroes with the power to make friends wherever they go.

On Monday morning, Mrs. Carlotti introduces Justin, a new student, to the class. Brian smiles shyly at him. Some of the other kids sneak looks at Justin, trying to figure out if he's cool enough to be their friend. They haven't quite made up their minds yet.

At lunch, Madison and J.T. watch Justin eat with chopsticks. "What's that?" asks Madison as she points at Justin's food.

"It's Bulgogi."

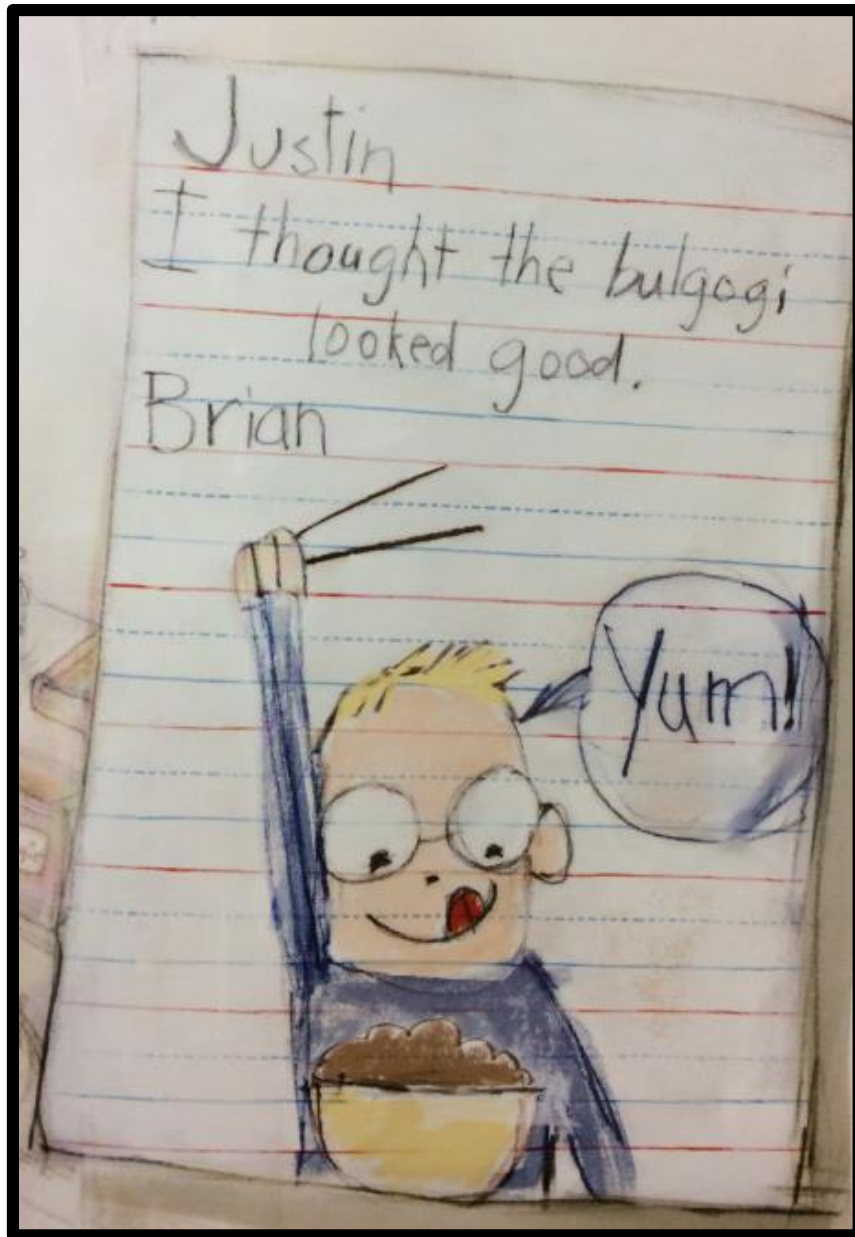
“Bul-what??”

“Bul-go-go. It’s Korean barbecued beef. My Grandma made it for me. It’s really good, Do you want to try some?”

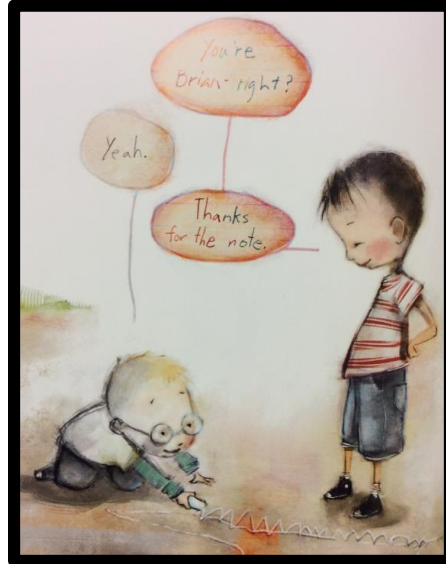
“There ‘s no way I’d eat Booger-gi.”

And the kids laugh. All of them, that is, except Brian. He sits there wondering which is worse – being laughed at or feeling invisible.

The next day, when Justin goes to his cubby to put away his backpack, he notices a piece of paper with his name on it.



At morning recess, Brian finds a piece of chalk on the group and starts drawing away.



"Hey, Justin," Emilio calls out from the tetherball court, "you're up next."

"Sorry, I gotta go," says Justin. "By the way, that's a really cool drawing," he adds before taking off.

Back in class, Mrs. Carlotti asks the kids to team up in twos or threes for a special project. The kids scurry around the room to pair off. Brian heads toward Justin. "I'm already with Justin," says Emilio. "Find someone else."

Brian looks at the floor, wishing he could draw a hole right there to swallow him up.

"Mrs. Carlotti said we can have up to three people in our group. We're only two. C'mon, Emilio, let him work with us."

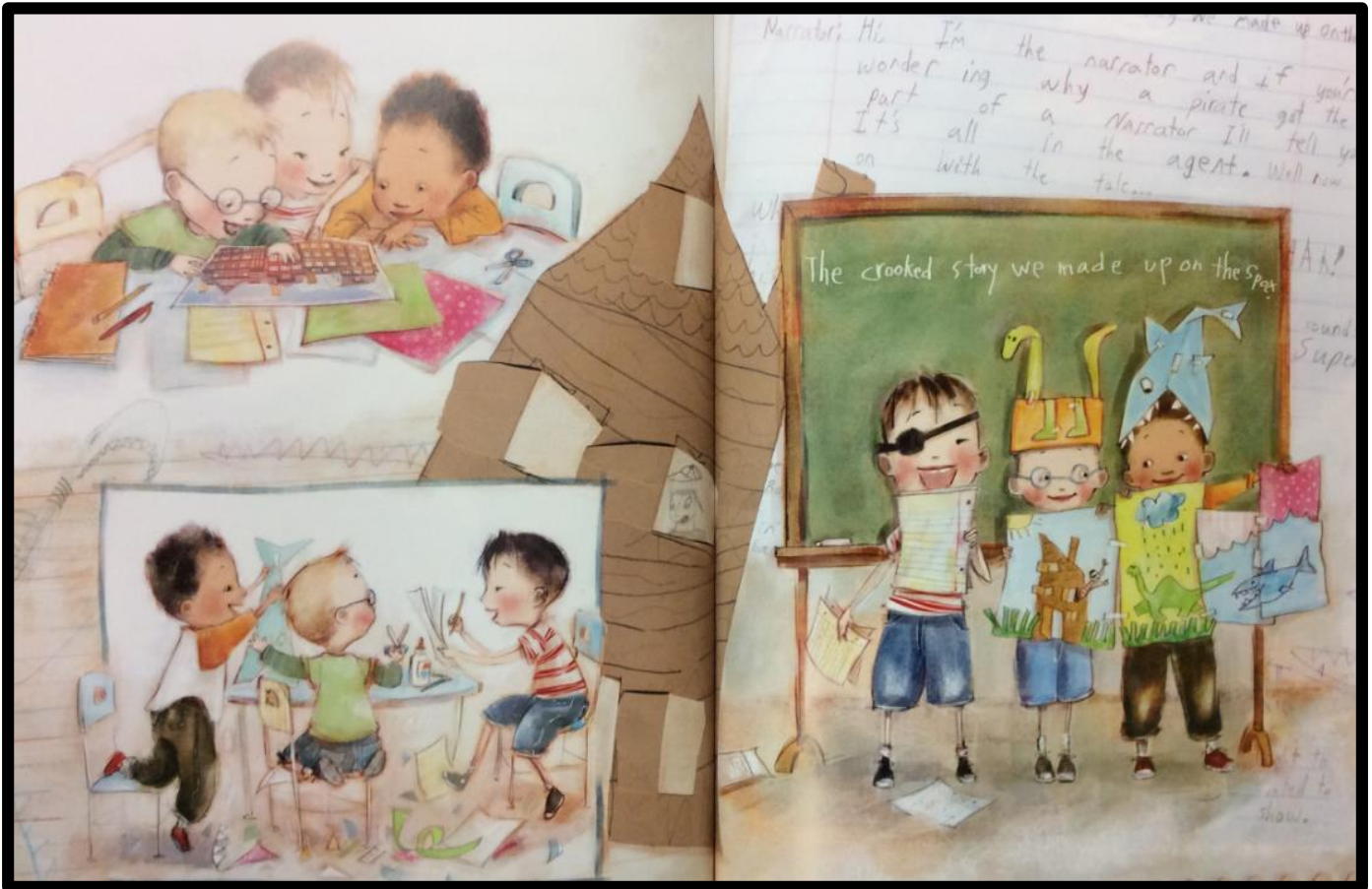
"Okay...I guess."

Mrs. Carlotti gives the class directions for the project. "Your assignment is to work together to write a story about what you see in that photograph. Use your imagination and have fun!"

"Whoa...cool!" says Emilio. "What kind of people do you think would live in houses like that?"

"I don't know, but I bet Brian could draw them to go with the story," says Justin.

Brian smiles as he takes out his lucky pen.



It's lunchtime again – Brian's least favorite part of the day. Another twenty l-o-n-g minutes of kids talking and laughing with everyone else....but him. "Brian!" he hears someone shout. "Hey, Brian – over here!" Brian turns and sees Justin waving him over. Emilio nods at Brian as he makes room for him at the table.

"Cookie?"
"Thanks!"

Maybe, just maybe, Brian's not so invisible after all.