

Vote for Me Because ...

by Rene Saldana • illustrated by Addy Rivera Sonda

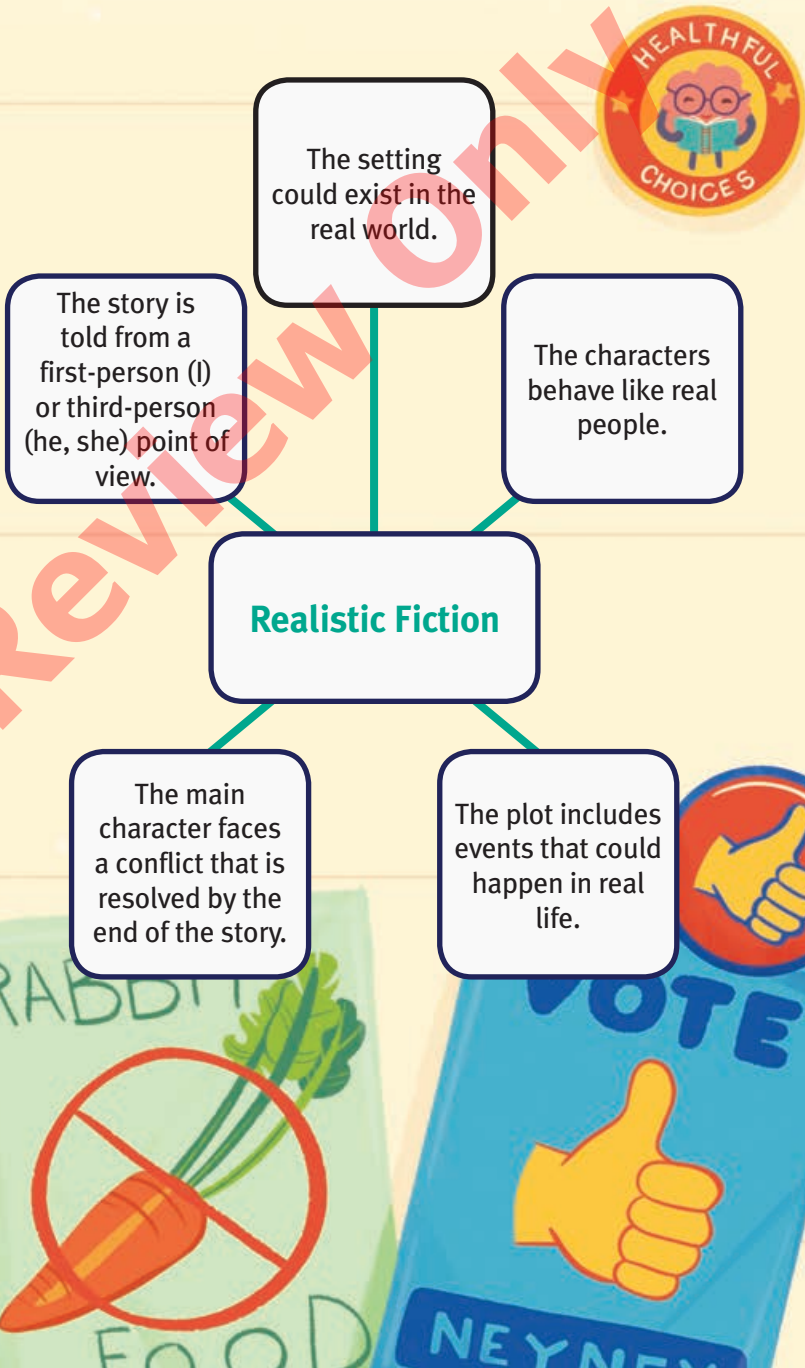


REALISTIC FICTION
LITERATURE

Level	S/40
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Realistic Fiction

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ISBN: 978-1-5322-8011-5

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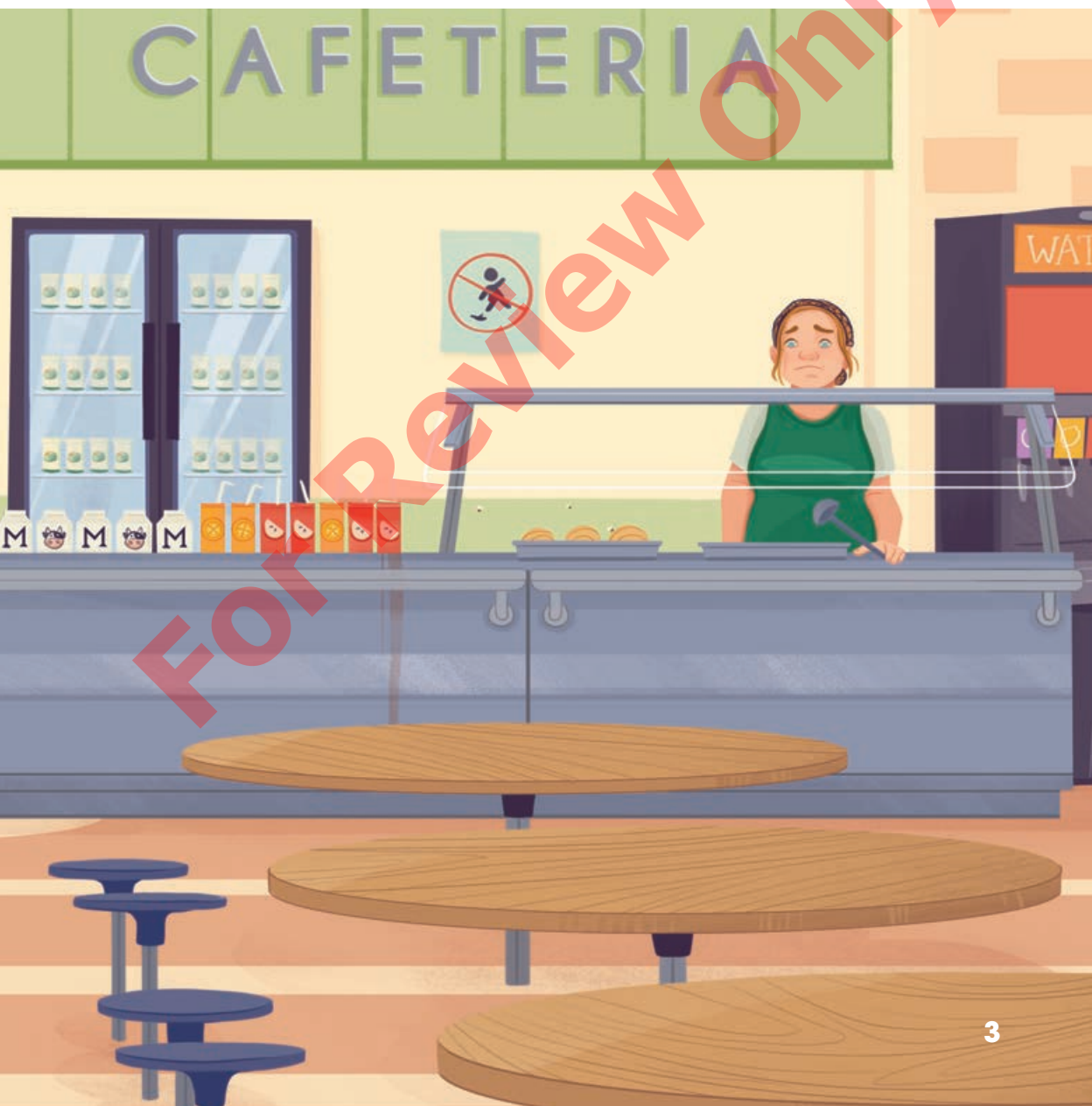
I'll Make Lunch Better!

On Tuesday, the cafeteria at the Narciso Martínez School stood empty, except for the line of servers. The students were so unhappy with the sight of the lukewarm rice, rubbery chicken, and bland vegetables they decided not to stay. As the servers waited, students bypassed the cafeteria, walked directly into the school's courtyard, and waited until lunch period was over.

On Wednesday and Thursday, students walked right past the cafeteria again. Even the kids who usually brown-bagged their lunches didn't come in to eat.



Instead, most of the kids munched on granola bars to keep their hunger at bay. They wanted better food, had made a plan, and were determined to see it through. Many of them had sent e-mails to Principal Brown that the food in the cafeteria didn't look or taste good. And there was no variety. Many days it was the same—mystery meatloaf, watery mashed potatoes, and limp salad greens.



On Friday morning, Mrs. Peña called her class to attention and announced, “Principal Brown has read your e-mails about some dissatisfaction with your cafeteria experience.”

“Dissatisfied is an understatement,” muttered Mason Jarrell, low enough so that only Eliana Campos, who sat next to him, could hear. “The food is gross.”

“In the coming weeks,” Mrs. Peña continued, “Principal Brown will be making major improvements in the kinds of foods our cafeteria serves. She wants to offer food that is both nutritious and appealing so that students enjoy their lunch. She wants your input.



"I told Principal Brown that we could have a debate on what changes can be made to the cafeteria menu. It will tie in to our history lessons on American presidents.

"And I'm hoping that some of you will want to run for student council president after participating in a debate about the cafeteria food. Any volunteers to be the teams' speakers? I need two volunteers. Hands? Anyone?"

Eliana glanced back at Mason. He looked as if he had a joke on the tip of his tongue.

Eliana shook her head. She had been friends with Mason since they were little, even though they had very different personalities: Mason liked to make jokes and goof off, while Eliana was very serious and studied hard. She liked to have facts, and Mason liked to tell stories. But still, somehow their friendship worked.

"Since no one is willing to volunteer, I will pick the speakers first," Mrs. Peña said. "Let's see. ... Mason can be the speaker for one team and ... Eliana for the other."

Eliana winced. Though she had a good memory and was able to rattle off facts, she didn't enjoy being the center of attention, like Mason.

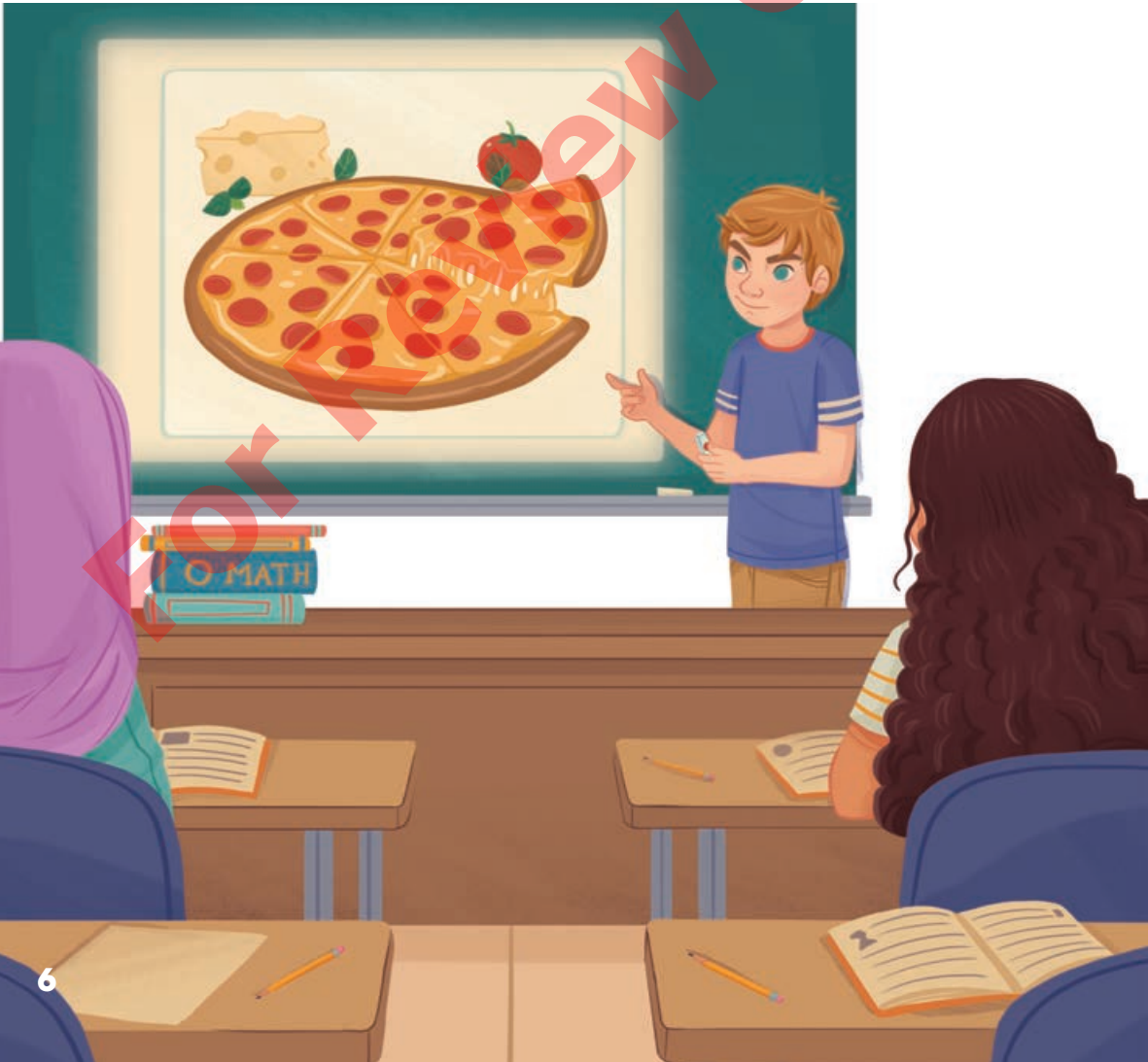
Eliana listened as Mrs. Peña called other names in the class to join their teams. It seemed as if Mason's team had students who didn't take school seriously, much like him, while Eliana's team had more studious students.

"Okay, class, I'll give you the rest of the period to discuss with your teams and develop your arguments," Mrs. Peña said. "Then we will have a fifteen-minute debate."

Thirty minutes later, Mason and his group stood up in front of the class. Mason pulled up a picture of a pizza on the class's smartboard. Eliana could practically hear stomachs rumbling from the class.

"If it's a better time in the cafeteria we're looking for, wouldn't food like this make it the best time ever?" Mason said. "We could have the biggest burritos and cheesiest of pizzas."

The rest of the class erupted in applause as Mason led them in a chant, "Piz-za! Piz-za!"



"Students, settle down," Mrs. Peña called. "Eliana, your team is up next."

Mason was all smiles as he took his seat next to Eliana. She smirked. Eliana had been nervous, but now she felt as if she could win this. Mason's presentation was all flash and no substance. She had well-researched facts.

Eliana cleared her throat as she stood up in front of the class. She shuffled her organized index cards into a perfect rectangle.

"Thank you for that, ah, *interesting* argument," Eliana said. "It is exciting to think that fast food would make our lunchtime experience more enjoyable. However, I would argue that in the long term, some junk food will actually do more harm than good. A healthful selection would be more beneficial, therefore more fun. I would suggest a real salad bar—"

Mason let out a snort. Then he stood up and said, "You want us, your classmates, to eat rabbit food?"

Eliana's mouth hung open. She couldn't believe that her best friend had been so rude.

The class erupted in laughter.

Mason continued, "That's how you would make lunch more fun?"

"It's not rabbit food. While rabbits do eat vegetables and fruits, they also eat hay, which I'm not suggesting," Eliana said, trying to redirect the class. "I'm suggesting a real salad bar instead of these wilted vegetables we are served in the cafeteria. There's a big difference, you know?"

“Yes, a big difference. Greens are boring; pizza rocks!” Mason said. The class exploded in applause again. Eliana even noticed members of her team clapping for Mason’s idea.

Eliana waited for the class to quiet down. She had her own idea.

“Why not burgers and fries every day?” Eliana asked. “How about a large soft drink to wash it all down, too?”

The class clapped. She looked down at her index cards, then added, “Delicious, right?”

Her classmates nodded in agreement.

“Do me a favor: hold your hands out in front of you in the shape of a cup,” Eliana instructed. They did. “Imagine you’re holding four sticks of butter. Now imagine eating them.”

A few students called out, “No way” and “Gross.”



"But by eating a few fast-food meals, you could be eating a pound of fat," Eliana said. "That is equivalent to four sticks of butter."

A few students stuck out their tongues in disgust. Others were shaking their heads. Eliana's eyes went to Mason. He looked unfazed.

"Eliana, thanks for that enlightening argument," Mrs. Peña said. She clapped her hands and looked at the clock. "The period is almost over. Class, didn't Eliana and Mason do a great job? I'd have to call it a tie."

The class clapped politely. Though some of the students softly called out, "Mason, Mason, Mason."

"Now that you've got an idea of how a debate works, would any of you be interested in running for student council president?" Mrs. Peña asked.

"I would," said Mason, standing up. "I think I'd win."

Mason's teammates and a few others cheered. The other half of the class looked at Eliana and started chanting her name: "Eliana! Eliana!"

Mrs. Peña turned to Eliana and said, "Well, what do you say?"

Eliana shrugged and said, "I'm not sure."

Then the bell rang, and the students started running out of the classroom. Eliana returned to her desk and grabbed her things. Without the rest of the class there cheering her on, she didn't know what to do.

Should I do it? she wondered. Should I run against my best friend?