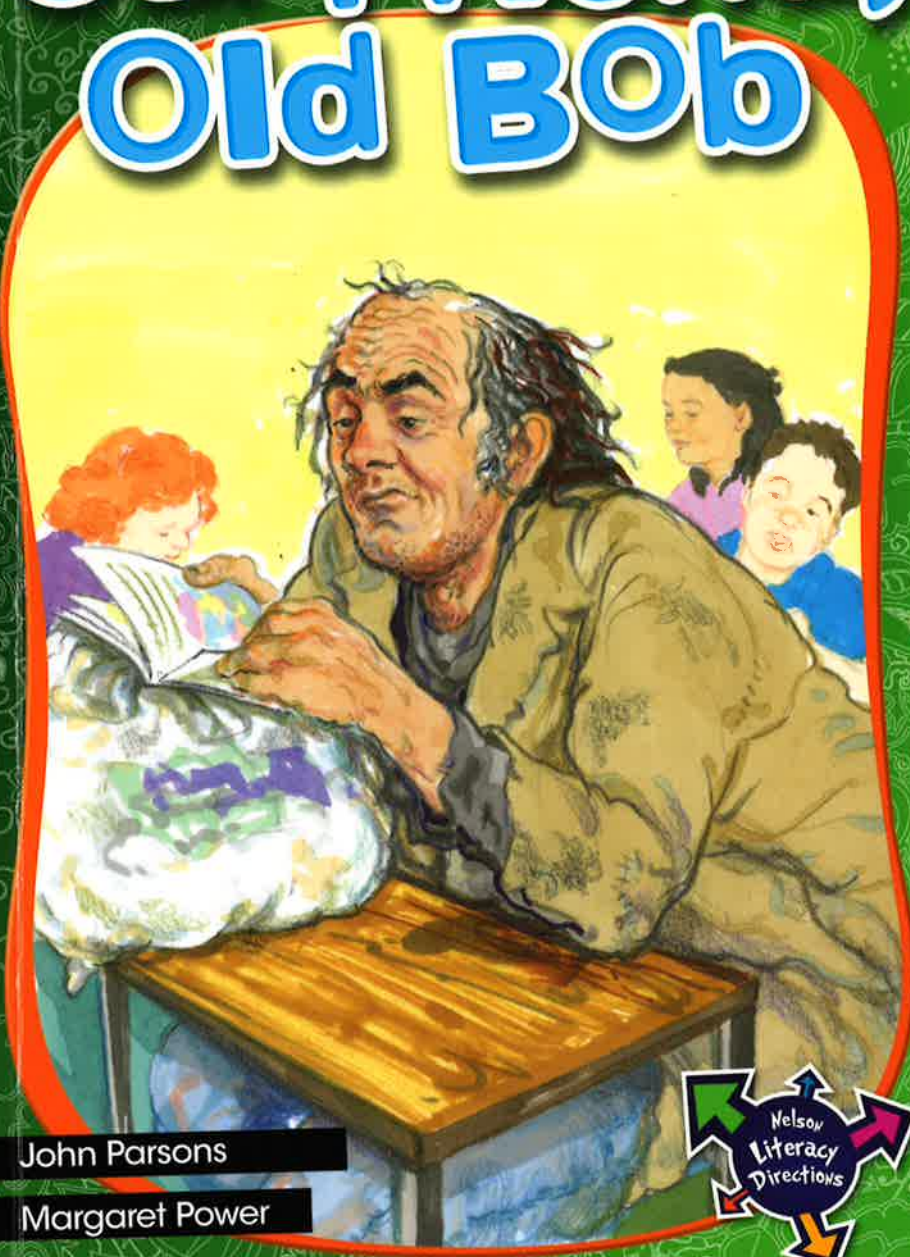
Our Friend, Old Bob



John Parsons

Margaret Power

Nelson Literacy Directions

For teachers' inspection ONLY

Our Friend, Old Bob

Written by John Parsons
Illustrated by Margaret Power

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Meet the Characters

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Old Bob

A homeless man who cannot read or write.



Mr Jermyn

The principal of Southwold school.



Claire

A student at Southwold school.



Mrs O'Driscoll

Claire's mother.



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POSTCARD

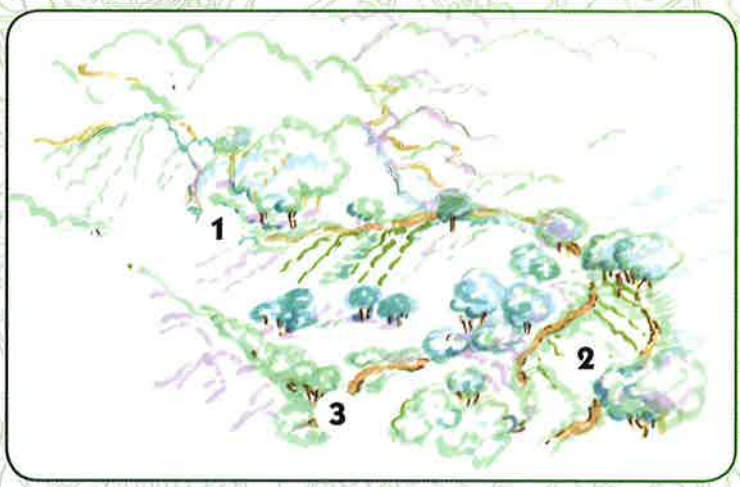
Dear Reader

Once, I was waiting for a bus. Sitting next to me in the bus shelter were two old homeless people. They were scruffy and unkempt – but I was amazed when I heard what they were talking about: the plays of William Shakespeare!

I wondered how they had become homeless – and realised that you can never judge people by the way they look!

John Parsons
Author

The Lea Valley



1. The road from Southwold
2. The ravine
3. The road to Northmount

1 A Fair Deal



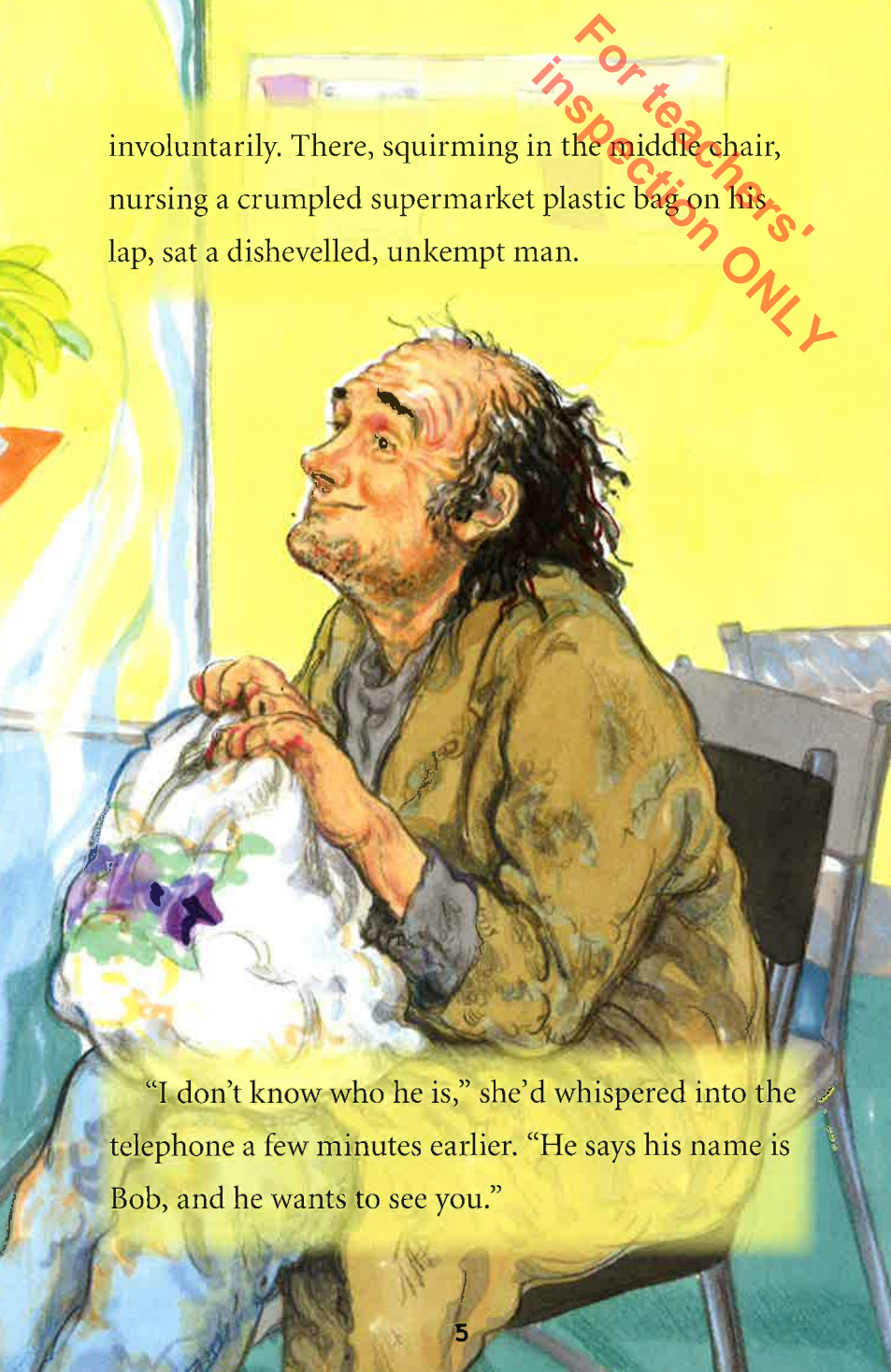
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No matter how hard she tried, Mrs Kemp, the school secretary, found it difficult to keep her curious eyes focused on the computer keyboard in front of her.

Her gaze flicked over her red-rimmed spectacles towards the row of chairs along the wall of the Southwold School office. She wrinkled her nose

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involuntarily. There, squirming in the middle chair, nursing a crumpled supermarket plastic bag on his lap, sat a dishevelled, unkempt man.



"I don't know who he is," she'd whispered into the telephone a few minutes earlier. "He says his name is Bob, and he wants to see you."



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Mr Jermyn, the principal, had agreed to see Bob. "I just have to finish these reports," Mr Jermyn had said. "Can you ask him to wait for a few minutes, please?"

"Mr Jermyn will see you in a moment," Mrs Kemp had told Bob, wondering what he could possibly want to speak to the principal about. She noticed an old scar beneath his grizzly whiskers.

Bob had nodded, mumbled something and wriggled nervously in his chair. He looked like he would be more comfortable sitting at a bus stop or on a park bench.

Mrs Kemp tried not to stare at the scruffy man. Nevertheless, she couldn't help flicking her eyes upwards once more and, to her alarm, she saw Bob looking straight back at her. She forced herself to smile, and Bob responded with a grin, revealing a mouthful of gaping holes where his teeth should have been.

The man plunged a grimy hand into his crumpled supermarket bag, rustling around its contents noisily.

"Chocolate?" he asked, offering Mrs Kemp a half-eaten block that he'd retrieved from his bag.



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Mrs Kemp tried not to shudder.

"No, thank you. Just had breakfast," she said, smiling weakly.

Bob shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. "Just about to have mine," he said. He wiped the chocolate on his overcoat, and popped two squares into his mouth.

Mrs Kemp tried to concentrate on the agenda for the staff meeting that she was supposed to be typing into the computer, but the sound of a satisfied Bob noisily sucking and swirling chocolate around his mouth was too distracting.

Just when Mrs Kemp was wondering how much longer she would have to put up with the man, the door marked "Principal" swung open and Mr Jermyn strode over to the row of chairs.

"Hello," said Mr Jermyn, looking Bob up and down. "I'm Mr Jermyn, the principal. How can we help you?"

Bob flashed what few teeth he had, stained with chocolate, and held out his hand. Mrs Kemp, who



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had been keeping a furtive eye on proceedings, was impressed that Mr Jermyn didn't flinch. He took Bob's hand and shook it.

Under Mr Jermyn's gaze, Bob shuffled uncomfortably. "I have a question," he said, his eyes firmly fixed on the office carpet.

Mr Jermyn smiled helpfully, and raised his eyebrows expectantly.

Bob glanced over at Mrs Kemp and rustled his plastic bag nervously. "It's a personal question," he added.

"Right," said Mr Jermyn, catching Mrs Kemp's eye. He looked at his watch. "Well, I do have a minute before my next ... aah, my next appointment, don't I, Mrs Kemp?"

Mrs Kemp shuffled some papers on her desk, pretending to look for the imaginary appointment. "Yes, Mr Jermyn," she replied. "Just a minute."

"You'd better come in," said Mr Jermyn, waving Bob towards the principal's door.

Bob looked nervous.



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"Been a while since you've been summoned to the principal's office, eh?" joked Mr Jermyn, trying to put his visitor at ease.

Bob nodded. He and his plastic bag shuffled noisily towards Mr Jermyn's office.

Mr Jermyn followed Bob and, with a backwards glance at Mrs Kemp, he raised his eyebrows and shut the door.

Mrs Kemp heard a muffled conversation taking place behind the principal's door. She decided to give Bob and Mr Jermyn two minutes before she dialled the extension that connected through to Mr Jermyn's phone. She heard a ring behind the door and Mr Jermyn's voice crackled down the line.

"Hello?" he said.

"Your next appointment, Mr Jermyn," she said conspiratorially. "I hope you don't mind that I've made you spend two minutes with that man," she whispered.