

LESSON IN LITERATURE . . .

ESTABLISHING SETTING

- Setting, as we learned in Unit One, includes place, time, and mood.
- In a drama, the scenery and dialogue create the place.
- The scenery, costumes, and dialogue tell us when the drama takes place.
- The lighting, background music, plot, and dialogue create the mood.

THINK ABOUT IT!

1. In the story *Prairie Fire*, what tells you where the action takes place?
2. In the story "Rock Face," how does the reader identify the "place" of the action?
3. At what time of day, time of year, and period of history does "Rock Face" take place?
4. If you had to choose a "mood" for this story, which of the following would it be: scary; lazy; hurried; mysterious; exciting; easygoing. Explain your answer.

Rock Face

"I CAN'T DO IT!" Bill shouted down over his shoulder. His right foot dangled into the fifty feet of air separating him from his fellow campers. The toes of his left foot were jammed into a small crevice. Three fingers of his right hand clutched a small crag not more than an inch thick. Bill's left hand gripped his best hold—a handle of granite that stuck out a full five inches. For an experienced climber, a hold this easy and this high up would have felt like cheating. But Bill was no experienced climber. He was a first timer, and he was panicked.

"You're perfectly secure in the harness." The camp counselor's voice billowed up from below. "Just push off and let yourself drop. It's the only way down."

"I CAN'T. I'M SCARED."

The afternoon sun blazing into the canyon seemed to squeeze the water right out of Bill's body.

"Hang on, dude," said a voice. "I'm coming up."

Bill risked a peek over his shoulder. Pete?

Pete was a quiet, skinny boy from his school back home. He was often the last boy chosen when teams were picked, but here he was scaling the rock face like it was a staircase. Within minutes Pete was by his side.

"Alright, listen," Pete began. His voice was calm, authoritative. "We can climb all the way to the top, or we can drop."

Pete looked skyward. "I do some climbing back home, and I'm telling you, we're not going to get up those last thirty feet."

Bill just nodded. He couldn't hold on much longer.

"Let's drop together," Pete said.

"Okay."

"These ropes are secure," Pete said, tugging at his own harness. "Trust me. I've taken my share of falls. Without this harness, I wouldn't be here."

Bill nodded.

Pete reached his left hand out toward Bill. "Take my hand."

With his right hand, Bill clutched at Pete's as if it were a life preserver.

Pete smiled. "One. Two."

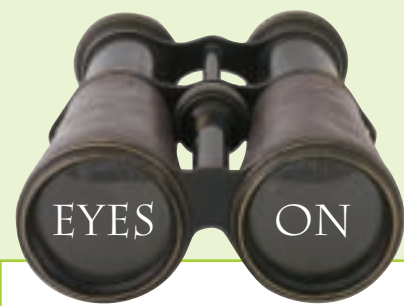
Bill took a deep breath.

"THREEEEEEEEE!" they shouted together as they pushed back from the rock face and fell to safety below.

INTO . . . *The Streets are Free*

In the play you are about to read, you will see that a group of children can work to make a change in the city where they live. How do they do this? What does the story say about politicians? About the press?

The Streets are Free seems to be based on events that actually occurred in Caracas, Venezuela. Children usually have to wait for adults to improve things. But in *The Streets are Free*, it is the children who start a project and work at it until it is a success.



. . . Drama

A play is written to be performed before an audience. A play allows us to *see* and *hear* what is occurring. A play is divided into sections called acts. The acts are numbered: Act One, Act Two, and so forth. Every act is divided into sections called scenes. The scenes are also numbered: Scene One, Scene Two, and so on. The script of a play begins with a list of characters in the order in which they appear on stage. After the list of characters, the playwright describes the setting and props in italics, and may also give stage directions.

THE STREETS ARE FREE

In the hills above the city of Caracas, Venezuela, thousands of people live crowded together in neighborhoods called barrios. The children of the barrio of San José de la Urbina had a problem. More than anything else they wanted a place to play. *The Streets Are Free* is the true story of how they worked to make their wish come true.

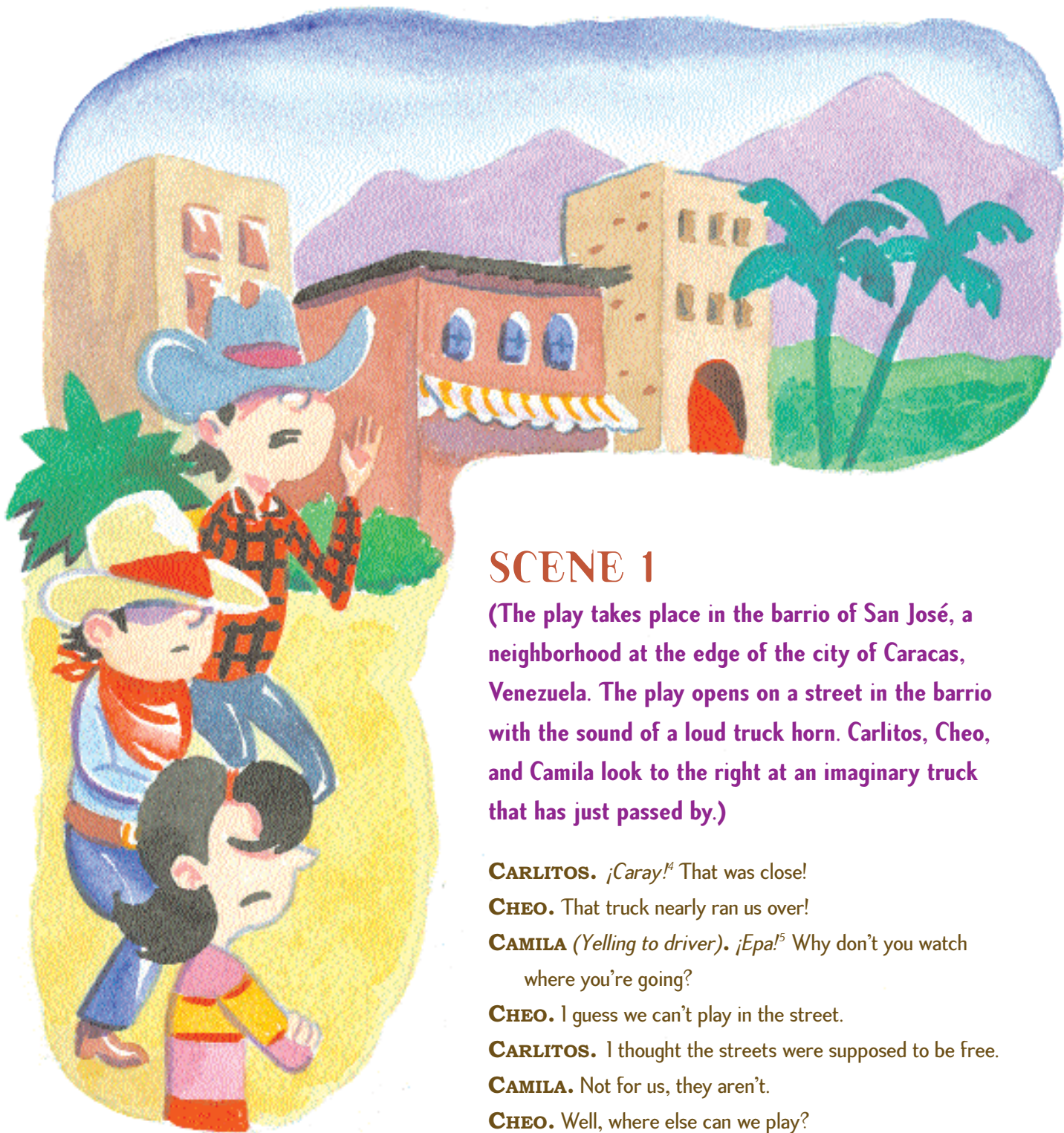
CHARACTERS

Carlitos ¹	Guard	Cheo's Mother
Cheo ²	Mayor	Carlitos's Father
Camila ³	Reporter	(Children, Officials, Police
Neighbor	Cheo's Father	Officers, Mayor's Aide,
Librarian	Camila's Mother	and Photographers)

Kurusa

1. *Carlitos* (kar LEE toss)
2. *Cheo* (TCHAY oh)
3. *Camila* (kah MEE lah)

WORD BANK **aide** (AYD) *n.*: an assistant or helper



SCENE 1

(The play takes place in the barrio of San José, a neighborhood at the edge of the city of Caracas, Venezuela. The play opens on a street in the barrio with the sound of a loud truck horn. Carlitos, Cheo, and Camila look to the right at an imaginary truck that has just passed by.)

CARLITOS. ¡Caray!⁴ That was close!

CHEO. That truck nearly ran us over!

CAMILA (Yelling to driver). ¡Epa!⁵ Why don't you watch where you're going?

CHEO. I guess we can't play in the street.

CARLITOS. I thought the streets were supposed to be free.

CAMILA. Not for us, they aren't.

CHEO. Well, where else can we play?

CAMILA. Don't ask me.

CARLITOS. How about flying kites up on the hill?

4. *Caray* (kah RY) is a Spanish word that means "Gee! Gosh!"

5. *Epa!* (AY pah) is Spanish for "hey!"

CAMILA. Impossible. If we go up there, on the hill, the kites will get tangled in the power lines.

CHEO. And I don't feel like getting electrocuted.

CARLITOS. How about playing catch right here? Hey, Cheo! Catch! (He throws a ball to Cheo, but it lands in a Neighbor's laundry basket.) Uh-oh. (He goes to get ball, and gets in the Neighbor's way.)

NEIGHBOR. You kids get out! Go on! Scram! You're always getting in my way!

CAMILA. We can't help it! There's nowhere else to go!

NEIGHBOR. That's not my problem. I have my laundry to do! And after that I've got to go shopping at the market or I'll never get supper on the table! And after that...

CHEO. Come on, Camila. Let's just leave her alone. (The Children sit down on the steps of the library.)

CARLITOS (Gloomily). There must be somewhere we can play.

CHEO. Maybe we can go to City Hall and ask the Mayor.

CAMILA (Sarcastically). Oh, sure. Do you really think the Mayor's going to listen to a bunch of kids?

CARLITOS. We can ask our parents to come with us.

CHEO. My parents are working.

CAMILA. So are mine. They're always busy.

CARLITOS. I guess mine are, too.

CAMILA. So much for that idea.

(They sigh and sit in silence. Librarian comes out.)

LIBRARIAN. Why all the sad faces?

CHEO. There's no place to play.

LIBRARIAN. Hmmm. You're right. (Librarian sits down next to them.) Did you know that this entire hillside, was once covered with forests, streams, and trails? The trouble is, our city grew up so fast that the streets and buildings just took over. No one had time to plan a playground.

CAMILA. Well, why doesn't somebody plan one now?





CHEO. I know a great place—that empty lot near the bottom of the hill.

CAMILA. That one with all the garbage and broken glass? Who would want to play there?

CARLITOS. If someone fixed it up it wouldn't be bad.

LIBRARIAN. What would you do to fix it up, Carlitos?

CARLITOS. Who, me? I don't know. Maybe if we planted those tall *apamate*⁶ trees and some shrubs...

LIBRARIAN. Wait! You should write this down! I'll get a pencil and a pad of paper.

(Librarian runs into the library.)

CAMILA. What's the use of writing it down? Who's going to read it?

CARLITOS. Maybe the Mayor will!

CAMILA. Here we go with the Mayor again.

(Librarian returns with paper and pencil.)

LIBRARIAN. Here, Camila. I appoint you official list-maker.

CAMILA *(Sighing and taking the pencil and paper).* Fine. Go ahead.

CARLITOS. Our playground should have swings and slides!

6. An *apamate* (ah pah MAH tay) is a tree that grows in Venezuela.

WORD BANK

shrubs *n.*: woody plants with many separate stems, smaller than a tree

CHEO. And room to play baseball and volleyball and soccer.

CARLITOS. And tag, and hide and seek, and places to fly kites, and run around!

CHEO. And benches for our parents to sit and visit.

CAMILA. Slow down!

CARLITOS. And don't forget the *apamate* trees and shrubs.

LIBRARIAN. Don't you have any suggestions, Camila?

CAMILA. Yes. I suggest we forget the whole thing. What good is planning a park if we can't get our parents to help us?

CARLITOS *(Boldly).* We don't need their help. We'll go to City Hall by ourselves. We can round up all our friends...

CHEO *(Caught up in the spirit).* And we can make a banner!

CARLITOS. Right! It can say, "Give us a playground or else!"

LIBRARIAN. Maybe something a little less threatening would be better.

CHEO. What about, "We have nowhere to play. We need a playground"?

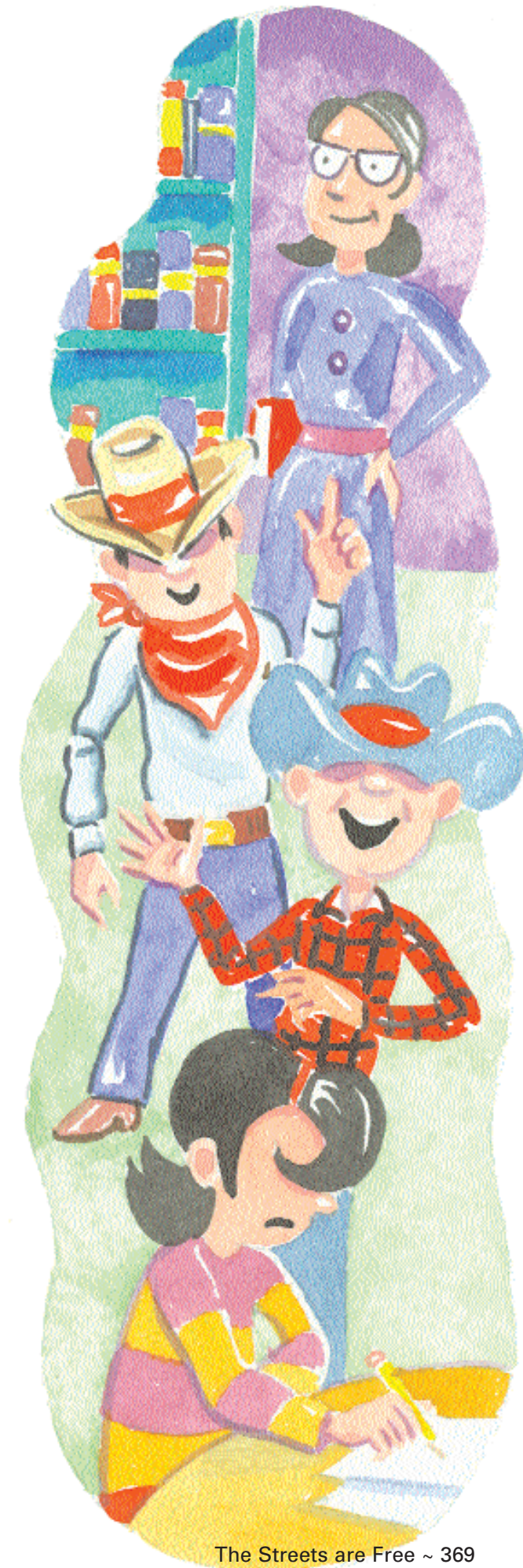
LIBRARIAN. Perfect. You can use the paint and crayons I have in the library.

CHEO *(Enthusiastically).* Great! Come on, Camila. You're good at making posters.

CAMILA *(Reluctantly standing up).* Fine, I'll help, but I'm telling you, you're wasting your time.

WORD BANK

banner *n.*: a large sign painted on cloth





SCENE 2

(The setting is in front of City Hall. Carlitos, Cheo, Camila, and their friends are marching in a circle. They are carrying the banner they made.)



CHILDREN (*Chanting*). We need a playground! We need a playground!

GUARD (*Gruffly*). I told you before. No one gets in to see the Mayor.

Especially not a bunch of kids off the street. Go home!

CAMILA. We need somewhere to play.

GUARD. Then go somewhere to play. But not here!

CHEO. The streets are free! We're not leaving until we see the Mayor.

GUARD (*Losing his patience*). That does it. I'm calling the police!

(*The Guard blows a whistle. The Children continue to shout. Five Police Officers enter. The Children stop chanting.*)

CARLITOS. The police!

CAMILA. ¡Que bueno!⁷ Now we'll have our playground in jail.

GUARD. Arrest these kids!

(*Police officers try to grab the Children, who run around trying to avoid them. In the middle of the confusion the Librarian and several worried Parents rush in.*)

LIBRARIAN. There they are!

7. *Que bueno* (KAY BWAY no) is Spanish for "great!"





CHEO'S FATHER. What is going on here?

CHEO (*Pointing at the Guard*). He won't let us talk to the Mayor about our playground!

GUARD. These kids are disturbing the peace! (*To Police Officers*) Take them away!

(*Police Officer takes hold of Camila's arm.*)

CAMILA'S MOTHER (*Stepping forward*). Oh, no you don't. If you put a hand on these children, you'll have to arrest me, too.

CARLITOS'S FATHER. And me!

LIBRARIAN. And me!

(*Children and Parents cheer. Police Officers stand there, uncertain. Children begin to chant, "We want a playground!" The Mayor, Mayor's Aide, a Reporter, and Photographers appear at the door of City Hall.*)

MAYOR. What's all this ruckus? What is going on out here?

CARLITOS. It's the mayor!

GUARD. Your Honor, these people are starting a riot.

CHEO'S FATHER. They're trying to arrest our children!

CHEO. We need a playground!

MAYOR. *¡Un momento!*⁸ Wait a minute! One at a time!

LIBRARIAN. Let the children speak first.

REPORTER. Yes, I would be very interested to hear what they have to say. (*Reporter takes out notebook and pen.*)

CHEO. We came to ask you for a playground.

CAMILA. The barrio of San José is too crowded!

8. *Un momento* (OON moe MENT oh) means "just a moment!" in Spanish.

WORD BANK

ruckus (RUCK iss) *n.*: uproar; a noisy commotion

riot (RY itt) *n.*: a noisy, violent public disorder caused by a crowd of people

CARLITOS. The streets are dangerous. There are too many cars and trucks.

CAMILA. But the streets are the only place we have!

CARLITOS. We just want a place to play baseball and volleyball and soccer and fly kites.

CHEO (*Cheerfully*). That's all.

MAYOR. A playground. Hmmmmm. (*To Aide*) Is there a space for them to have a playground?

CARLITOS. *¡Si!*⁹ We know the perfect place!

CHEO. It's an empty lot at the bottom of the hill.

CARLITOS. It's beautiful!

CAMILA (*Amazed*). You think that empty lot is *beautiful*?

CHEO. Well, with a little work, it could be beautiful.

CARLITOS. We even made a list. (*Carlitos begins reading from the list.*) It should have apamate trees and shrubs and flowers and benches and a field for playing.

REPORTER (*While writing in pad*). You children have been doing your homework.

MAYOR. Hmmmm. "Mayor Builds Playground for City Children." (*The Mayor smiles.*) I like the sound of that. *¡Si!* I'll look into it first thing tomorrow. Remember, I am always here to serve you. Now, line up and I'll let you shake my hand. Then you can leave.

(*The Mayor shakes everyone's hand and leaves, along with Aide.*)

REPORTER. I'd like to take a look at this playground of yours.

CHEO. Come on! We'll take you there!

(*Cheo, Reporter, and Photographers leave.*)

CARLITOS. Isn't it great, Camila? We've practically done it!

CAMILA. I'll bet nothing happens. Just you wait and see.

(*Carlitos and Camila follow after Cheo.*)

9. *Si* (SEE) is Spanish for "yes."



SCENE 3

(The setting is the vacant lot at the bottom of the hill. It is one week later. The lot is scattered with garbage. Carlitos, Cheo, and Camila are standing at the edge of the lot.)



CAMILA. I told you nothing would happen. Check it out. This lot is the same ugly garbage dump that it was one week ago.

CHEO (*Discouraged*). And after all that work we did. The banner, the list, the marching...

CARLITOS. Maybe we should have made the banner bigger.

(*The Librarian rushes in, waving a newspaper.*)

LIBRARIAN. Hey, you three! Take a look at this!

CARLITOS. ¿Qué pasa?¹⁰

CAMILA. What is it?

LIBRARIAN. Today's newspaper. Read the front page.

CHEO (*Reads from newspaper*). "Children of San José take on City Hall. They demand park, but Mayor doesn't budge."

CHEO. The children of San José! That's us!

CARLITOS. We're famous!

CHEO (*Laughing*). Look at this picture of the Mayor. He looks as if he just swallowed an *arepa*.¹¹

CARLITOS. And there's me, right behind him. Look, Camila.

CAMILA (*Glancing at the paper and speaking sarcastically*). Ah, sí. That's a nice picture of the back of your head, Carlitos.

CARLITOS. At least the back of my head is in the newspaper.

CHEO. We're all in the newspaper! They'll have to take us seriously now.

CAMILA. Come on, Cheo, wake up. They're still not going to do anything.

LIBRARIAN. You may be wrong, Camila. Look who's coming.

(*The Mayor enters, wearing a new suit. He carries a huge pair of scissors. His Aide, Officials, the Reporter, and Photographers are with him. The Aide carries a sign and a long red ribbon.*)

10. *Qué pasa?* (KAY PAH sah) is Spanish for "what's going on?"

11. An *arepa* (ah RAY pah) is a cornmeal cake.



CARLITOS. ¡Buenos días!¹² Mr. Mayor.

MAYOR (To Photographers). Stand over there so you can get the whole picture.

Hurry up now, we don't have all day.

CARLITOS (Craning his neck). What does the sign say? I can't see!

CAMILA. "This Site Reserved for the Children's Park of San José."

CHEO. You see, Camila? Everything's working out fine!

(The Officials unwind the red ribbon and hold it in front of the Mayor. The Mayor takes out a piece of paper, clears his throat, and reads.)

MAYOR. Señoras señores. The children of San José are unhappy. And when the children are unhappy, I am unhappy.

CAMILA (Rolling her eyes). Oh, give me a break.

MAYOR. My friends, the barrio of San José has become too crowded! The streets are dangerous. But the streets are the only place the children have to play!

CAMILA. Wait a minute. Haven't I heard this somewhere before?

MAYOR. They need a place to play baseball and volleyball and soccer and fly kites.

CAMILA. He's saying the exact same things we said!

MAYOR. Señoras y señores, the children need a playground. And I intend to give them one.

(Light applause, mostly from Aide and Officials.)

MAYOR (Holding hands up modestly). Thank you. My friends, I have come up with a wonderful idea. I am reserving this vacant lot for the children of San José. A playground will make the future brighter for you—and you—and you.

(Mayor points to the three Children.) Now, turn around and smile for the cameras, children.

CAMILA (Smiling a fake smile). This is so silly.

(Mayor cuts the ribbon with the giant scissors. The cameras flash.)

12. *Buenos días* (BWAY noss DEE ahs) is Spanish for "good day."

WORD BANK

site *n.*: the place on which something is to be built



MAYOR. How about another shot of me with the children? (To Children, as he poses) Well, my young friends, are you happy with your new playground?

CHEO AND CARLITOS. Very happy, Mr. Mayor.

MAYOR. What about you, little girl?

CAMILA. New playground? (Scornfully) It still looks like a garbage dump to me. It just has a pretty new sign, that's all. You can't fool me. There's an election coming up. I'll bet after this ceremony you don't do anything.

MAYOR (Embarrassed). ¡Qué va!¹³ You have it all wrong, little girl! I'm always here to serve you! Now, line up and I'll shake your hands, and then you'll have to leave. I'm very busy!

(The Mayor hastily shakes some hands and then walks off with Photographers, Aide, Reporter, and Officials.)

LIBRARIAN. Well, children, it looks as if your hard work has finally paid off.

CARLITOS. Yes! We're going to get a playground!

CAMILA. Don't count on it.

13. *Qué va* (KAY VAH) means "not at all" in Spanish.



SCENE 4

(It is four weeks later. The sign the Mayor left has faded in the sun. The letters are barely visible. The lot is even dirtier than before. Camila kicks a can across the stage.)



CAMILA. I told them, I warned them, but they didn't believe me.

Maybe they'll believe me now. It's been over a month. Where are the swings? Where are the playing fields? Where are the flowers?

There's more garbage and junk in this lot than there was before our march! It's hopeless!

(*Carlitos enters.*)

CARLITOS. No, it's not, Camila!

(*Cheo, the Librarian, the Children and Parents of San José enter behind Carlitos carrying hammers, wood, trees, flowers, shrubs, paint buckets, and shovels.*)

CAMILA. What's going on?

CHEO'S MOTHER. We had a meeting last night.

CARLITOS'S FATHER. We decided to build the playground ourselves!

CHEO. Who needs City Hall?

CARLITOS. All it takes is a little teamwork!

CAMILA. Teamwork? Come on! No one ever cooperates in San José, not even to clean the sidewalks.

CAMILA'S MOTHER. Well, that's going to change. I brought some wood I had lying around.

CARLITOS'S FATHER. I have some flowers and a few saplings.

LIBRARIAN. I brought my shovel and some tools.

CHEO. And I made a brand new sign to put up over the old one.

WORD BANK

saplings (SAPP lings) *n.*: young trees

(Cheo and Carlitos and some of the Parents hammer the new sign up. It says, “San José Playground. Everybody come and play.”)

LIBRARIAN. *Bueno*, what do you say now, Camila?

CAMILA. What do I say? I’ll tell you what I say. (Pause.) I say—that I always knew we could do it!

(Everyone cheers. People begin digging, planting, painting, and cleaning up as the curtains close.)

THE END



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kurusa is the pseudonym (pen name; a name that is not the author’s real name) of a Venezuelan writer and editor. She was born in Caracas in 1942 and spent the first few years of her life in Caracas, the United States, and Costa Rica. Currently, she lives in Caracas with her daughter, Daniella, and her two dogs. Kurusa is the president of a non-profit organization that publishes legends of the Pemon and Guajiro Indians of Venezuela. She also writes realistic stories about the difficulties children face growing up in Caracas.

Studying the Selection

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Does the play sound realistic to you?

QUICK REVIEW

1. When the play opens, where are the characters?
2. What are the names of the children?
3. Who else appears in the play?
4. Why can’t the children play on the street?

FOCUS

5. In the end, it is the parents (along with the Librarian) who help the children. Describe an incident in which someone in your family came through for you. You may also describe an incident in which someone else helped you out.
6. Since your class will be performing this play, make sure you know the pronunciation of the Spanish words, and their English definitions. If you include the word *barrio*, that’s thirteen words.

CREATING & WRITING

7. In *The Streets are Free*, the Guard and the Police do not behave very nicely. Are you surprised by how they treat the children? In one or two paragraphs, describe how they could have been more helpful.
8. In many big cities, people live in apartment buildings and they have no backyards. Why are playgrounds and parks important?
9. You are the Photographer for the daily newspaper, *The Caracas Chronicle*. In your black and white “photo,” show how the playground looks when the parents are finished. Don’t forget to include the new sign in the photo and a caption at the bottom. (If you prefer, you can take a “before” picture!)