

**Genre** Realistic Fiction

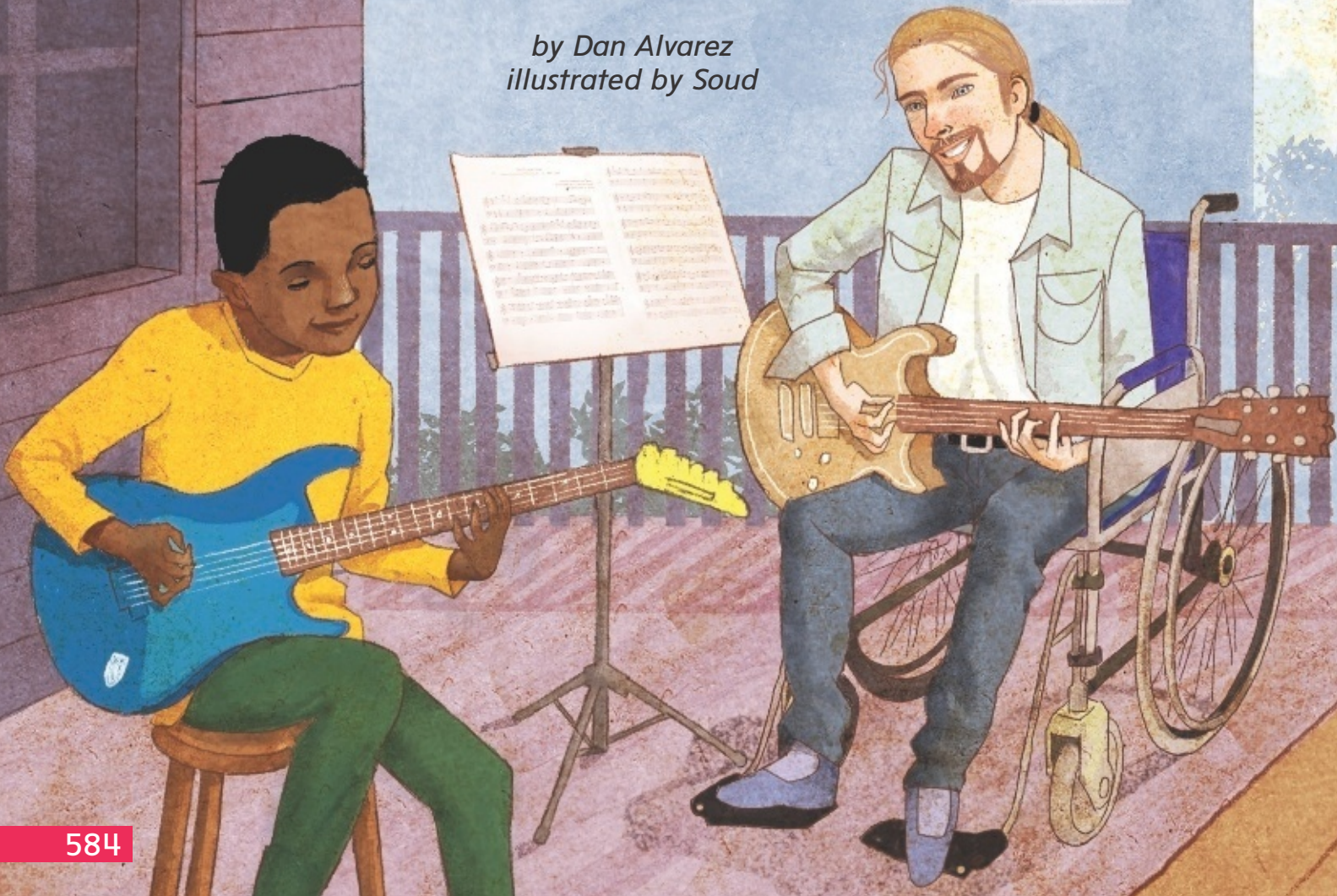
**Essential Questions**

How can a community come together to achieve a goal?  
When have you worked together with somebody to do something great?


# Art

## Works!

*by Dan Alvarez  
illustrated by Soud*







Jordan strummed the last notes of the new song he had learned. The music had a heavy beat, and Jordan could feel the strings vibrate underneath his fingers.

"Terrific," said his guitar teacher, Mr. Crane.

"It's fantastic with an amplifier," Jordan teased. "I like my music loud! Loud music is my forte!"

"If there was more space inside my house," Mr. Crane explained, "we could use an amplifier. The porch is larger, but I can't risk making too much noise. I don't want any complaints from the neighbors."

Mr. Crane placed his guitar on a stand beside his wheelchair. "You've made great progress," he said. "You're definitely ready to perform for an audience. I'd love to hold a recital so all the students could play for their families and their friends, but I just don't have enough room."

Jordan thought it would be exciting to play for an audience. "Maybe you could have a recital at the library," he suggested.

"Unfortunately, the library only allows public events, and a student recital is considered a private use." Mr. Crane shook his head. "I'm determined to keep looking, though, because I know there's always a solution to every problem."





On his way home, Jordan passed by his old elementary school. The brick building was boarded up, and the American flag no longer fluttered on the tall flagpole. Several swings at the playground were broken, and the climbing gym was rusty. Two girls played on the merry-go-round, and it gave off the harsh sound of creaking metal as it went around. The grass was patchy and brown, the shrubs were overgrown, and chunks of broken asphalt littered the driveway. A basketball hoop, missing its net, hung at a crooked angle.

"It looks horrible, doesn't it?" said a voice. Jordan turned as a stout, bald man approached. He waved his hand toward a trim house with a colorful flower garden in the front yard. "I live across the street and see that dilapidated building every day," he griped. "I wish they'd tear it down." Before Jordan could think of what to say, the man turned and stalked away.

Jordan wondered if a building could feel sad. If it could, this empty school would feel terrible. He hurried on, trying not to think about the abandoned school that used to be filled with the voices of children and teachers.



"I walked by our old school today," Jordan said at dinner that evening. "It's really run-down, and the playground looks almost dangerous."

"I read in the newspaper that the Barton Town Council might sell the entire property," said Jordan's mother. "A developer wants to demolish the building and construct a mall. The location is ideal since it's right in the center of Barton."

Jordan's older sister Grace dropped her fork onto her plate with a clatter. "That's terrible," she said. "The school grounds are the only green space we have around here. We need recreation space more than we need another parking lot and more stores."





"I've got an idea!" Jordan exclaimed. "Mr. Crane was telling me that he couldn't find a place large enough to schedule a recital for his guitar students. His house is so cramped that his music books are packed into crates stacked behind a chair. I'll bet there are plenty of music teachers with the same problem. Maybe the town could turn the building into a place where people could take music lessons, and performers could present concerts and recitals."

"I hate to admit it, little brother," said Grace, "but I think that's a brilliant idea. The town could rent the classrooms for art studios. The artists could turn the corridors into an art gallery so people could see their work. Remember how we used to decorate the halls when we were students there?"


"Since the school is right on Main Street, it would be a breeze for kids to walk there or take the bus. And the auditorium would be a perfect spot for recitals if the town built a ramp so anyone could get onto the stage," Jordan continued.

"I'd say you have the beginning of a plan," said Jordan's father. "Now you need to figure out how to convince the town. It will be a challenge, but it's worth a try."

"Let's start by having a neighborhood meeting," Jordan said. "We need to find out if they support the idea."

"Definitely," said Grace. "We could make flyers and deliver them to each house. If the neighbors are in favor of an arts center, the town council would have to consider it seriously." Then Grace frowned. "There's just one slight problem. Where are we going to hold the meeting?"

"Easy," said Jordan. "Mr. Crane said the library lets people hold public events, so maybe we can have it there."



As soon as they finished dinner and cleared the table, Jordan and Grace rode their bikes to the library to use the computers there.

"We need to make a meeting flyer for neighbors of the empty school on Main Street," he told a librarian. "We're hoping that the school can be transformed into an arts center."

"That's a lofty goal," the librarian said, smiling at them. "I'll be glad to help."

"But we need a place to hold the meeting," Grace added. "May we use a room at the library?"

"Provided the meeting is open to the public," the librarian said, "it's a possibility."

"Absolutely," Grace said. "The more people who attend, the more support we can get."





"Let's see if anything is available," the librarian said, tapping on her computer keyboard. "There's just one opening this month. If you can be ready by next Tuesday, you can have a room all evening."

"We'll take it," Grace said, "but we need to make flyers and distribute them right away."

Jordan and Grace sat at one of the computer stations, and the librarian clicked a few keys until a blank screen appeared. "How about coming up with a catchy slogan to get people's attention?"

"Hmm, yes, a catchy slogan," Grace said thoughtfully. "We just want people to know that artworks can be enjoyed by everyone in town."

Jordan gave his sister a playful swat on the shoulder. "That's it, Gracie! Our slogan can be Art Works!"

The librarian laughed, "That works perfectly!"

With the librarian's assistance, Jordan and Grace designed the flyer with their new slogan at the top. When they went to the printer station, they discovered that each copy cost ten cents.

"We need at least a hundred flyers," Grace said, looking discouraged. "It would cost us ten dollars to print them all!" She pulled two dimes from her pocket. "For now, let's just print two copies. We'll post one at the library today, and we'll figure out how to make more copies later."

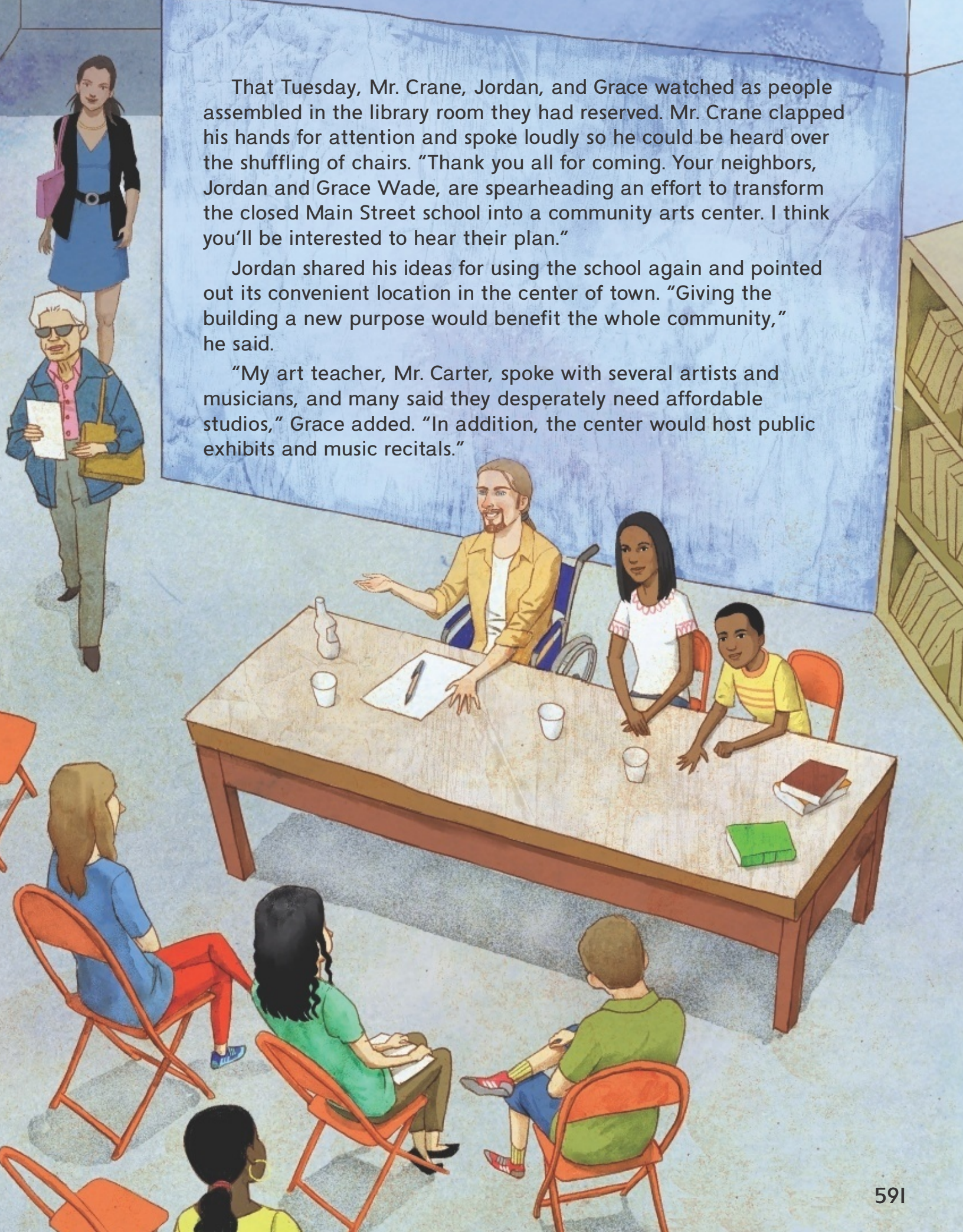
Heading home, Jordan and Grace decided to take a detour and stop at Mr. Crane's house to tell him about their plan.

"I sure would love to have a studio with some elbow room," he said. "As for the flyers, I'll make copies on my printer. You deliver them around the neighborhood, and I'll share some with my friends." In just a few minutes, Mr. Crane had printed a stack of flyers and bundled them into an oversized envelope.

Grace thanked him and said, "Tomorrow we'll bring one to every house around. We don't have much time before the meeting."







That Tuesday, Mr. Crane, Jordan, and Grace watched as people assembled in the library room they had reserved. Mr. Crane clapped his hands for attention and spoke loudly so he could be heard over the shuffling of chairs. "Thank you all for coming. Your neighbors, Jordan and Grace Wade, are spearheading an effort to transform the closed Main Street school into a community arts center. I think you'll be interested to hear their plan."

Jordan shared his ideas for using the school again and pointed out its convenient location in the center of town. "Giving the building a new purpose would benefit the whole community," he said.

"My art teacher, Mr. Carter, spoke with several artists and musicians, and many said they desperately need affordable studios," Grace added. "In addition, the center would host public exhibits and music recitals."



Mr. Crane asked for questions and comments from the audience. "We're here to get your input," he said.

A willowy woman draped in a long scarf stood up. "Music lessons and art studios are important," she said. "However, I would only support an arts center if dance classes were included."

"Dance is certainly an art," Grace agreed. "What other activities should we add?"

"Photography," a man called out.

"Ceramics," said an older woman. "The school is a safe place for potters like me to use their kilns."

Jordan made a list of the different arts. He hadn't realized there were so many.

The man who had spoken to Jordan on the sidewalk stood up. "I am Sunil Chaudry," he said, "and I live across from the school. An arts center is undoubtedly a fine idea, but it will bring more traffic and noise. The school is an eyesore and it should be torn down."

A few members of the audience expressed their agreement. "What we need is a park!"

How could Jordan keep the meeting from turning into a plan to demolish the school? "We'll request that the town make improvements," he said. "Please keep an open mind until all the details are in place."

A bearded man stood and said, "I'm Jeffrey Carter, an art teacher at Barton High School. If the town approves, I'll work with my art students to paint a colorful mural on the school bricks. It will definitely improve the view." There were murmurs of approval from the audience.

Mr. Chaudry grumbled. Jordan was worried that if too many people opposed the arts center, the town council would not approve the idea at all.



"The discussion last night was helpful," said Mr. Crane to a small group of supporters who had gathered on his porch. "The majority is enthusiastic about an arts center, and there's more good news. The town council has placed us on their agenda for Monday."

He paused. "There's also some bad news. There are just twenty classrooms in the school, and even if every room is rented, I estimate it won't be enough money to pay the cost of maintaining the building. We need to find ways to raise some funds if the arts center opens."

"There's a spacious auditorium," said Marie Bell, the dancer. "We can add drama to our list of arts. There are several residents who want to organize a theater group, and we could sell tickets when they put on performances."

Dan Blake, the photographer, suggested they rent out the school kitchen. "Let's put culinary arts on our list. I'm sure some local chefs and bakers would teach classes."





"How about selling buttons with our slogan?" asked Jordan. "It shouldn't cost too much to order them."

"We could silk screen T-shirts and sell them, too," Grace added.

"I'll make ceramic mugs with the slogan," Alexa Machado, the pottery maker, said. "I'm happy to donate them, and we can raise some money selling them."

"There are only five days until the town council meeting," Mr. Crane said. "It might be helpful to present a petition with the names of supporters, so I printed several sheets." He handed them out.

Jordan read aloud, "We support creating a community arts center in the former Main Street elementary school." The rest of the page had blank lines for each person's signature and address.

"Only registered voters can sign," said Mr. Blake, "so we'll have to knock on a lot of doors. The more signatures we gather, the easier it will be to get approval."

Before the group adjourned, Mr. Crane addressed Jordan and Grace. "In addition to collecting signatures, you have another assignment. Be prepared to present your idea to the council members because it will be up to you to convince them to support the project."

"One more thing," said Mr. Carter. "We'll have to satisfy opponents like Mr. Chaudry. I'll make a sketch of the mural, and we should think about other ways to improve the appearance of the building and grounds. It's going to be essential to prove that the school can look appealing."





On the day of the meeting, Jordan stood quietly behind a podium. The three council members were seated at a large marble-topped table. Brass nameplates in front of each member read: Carla da Silva, Adam Freedman, James Yee.

Jordan glanced at them nervously. Cool air blew through a ceiling vent just above his head, and he shivered.

Ms. da Silva called the meeting to order. "We feel quite privileged to have two young people from the community tonight. We know they've been working diligently to convince us to approve their plan to turn the Main Street school into an arts center." She nodded to Jordan and Grace.

Jordan's hands trembled as he handed the bundle of petitions to Ms. da Silva. After he introduced each committee member, Jordan said, "As you will see, we have collected nine hundred sixty-seven signatures of voters who support an arts center."

"That's impressive in a short amount of time," said Mr. Freedman. "We've done our homework, as well. The Budget Director studied the costs. Even fully rented, an arts center will not make enough money to cover maintenance and operation of the building. The town can make far more money if it sells the property."

Jordan's shoulders slumped, but then he heard Mr. Freedman add, "But community interests are far more important."





Jordan described the idea in detail and recited the uses for the arts center. "We'll have music, painting, pottery, dance, drama, photography, and culinary arts," he said. He showed the council a sketch of the mural that students would paint. Finally, he asked for the council's support.

"Are there any objections?" asked Mr. Yee.

Mr. Chaudry stepped to the microphone. "I've tried to keep an open mind," he said. "Still, the building's appearance concerns me. I believe it should come down." A wave of disappointment washed over Jordan.

"I believe we've come up with some solutions," Grace interjected. "We contacted several businesses, and each offered to donate money to create a new playground. The Barton Garden Club promised to plant new trees and bushes and create and maintain flower beds. Finally, a local artist offered to donate a sculpture."

"You've definitely brought the community together," declared Mr. Freedman. "I believe this project could be successful."

"If the town will guarantee that improvements will be made," Mr. Chaudry said, "I'm willing to withdraw my objections."

Mr. Yee nodded. "The school was an important part of this town for more than fifty years, and it still has a great deal to offer. I move that we approve funds to begin this worthy project." With a show of hands, the council members approved unanimously.

The audience erupted in cheers, and Jordan and Grace hugged each other. Mr. Crane beamed.



For months after the vote, the school was a beehive of activity. The interior was scrubbed clean, a ramp was built to the stage, and the kitchen was polished until it gleamed. Town crews cleared brush, planted new grass, and disposed of the damaged playground equipment. Studios filled up with people and materials.

Grace, Jordan, and numerous volunteers had helped in every way they could. They had painted the walls in Mr. Crane's new music studio and helped him move his guitars into the bright room. Jordan happily plugged in the amplifiers. "My guitar is going to be loud!" he teased his sister.





ART WORKS  
IN BARTON!



At last, the arts center that Jordan had dreamed of was about to open. He listened as the town councilors thanked the committee for its work, as well as all the town workers and volunteers who had assisted. Most of all, they expressed their gratitude to Jordan and Grace for making their idea become reality.

Mr. Chaudry stood beside Jordan and Grace, their parents, and Mr. Crane. He shook Jordan's hand. "You and your sister should be proud of what you have accomplished. You have taught me that it's important to keep an open mind to new ideas. I'm looking forward to sitting on my porch after work and looking at this fine building."

"Where do you work?" Mr. Crane asked.

"I have a restaurant in Barton," Mr. Chaudry smiled. "In fact, I will be teaching a class on vegetarian cooking at the arts center. Vegetarian food is not only tasty, but with so many different vegetables, each dish is beautiful, too."

Jordan was amazed at the change in Mr. Chaudry's attitude. But he was itching to see the sculpture, since the town had kept the design a surprise. He turned his attention back to the speakers as the sculptor was introduced. After thanking the sculptor for his generous donation, the council members stepped aside.

The sculptor made a few brief remarks. "Most of all," he concluded, "I am grateful for the cooperation of the town council members. We all had different ideas about what the centerpiece for the property should be. We shared our thoughts, and we each compromised a little until the design was something we all agreed upon. Most of all, we managed to keep it a secret—until now!"

He stepped forward and untied the rope that held the covering closed. With a dramatic flourish, he pulled off the cloth.

Jordan gasped.

The figures of a boy and a girl danced together. The sculpture looked so alive, Jordan almost expected it to move.

Instead of holding hands, the figures held out their arms as if they were reaching to the sky. On each outstretched palm was the symbol of a different type of art.

Jordan saw a large paintbrush sticking out from a palette, a wooden spoon in a bowl, and a huge musical note that looked as if it were dancing, too. Grace pointed out the comedy and tragedy drama masks, a camera with a long lens, and a beautiful pot.





“Just imagine,” Jordan said. “Every person who walks, bikes, or drives along Main Street will see this sculpture, the colorful building, and the green playground. It will be the first thing that visitors notice when they arrive in Barton.” He wondered if the building felt happy again now that it would be filled with people every day.

The crowd whistled and applauded, but no one cheered louder than Jordan and Grace.



You will answer the comprehension questions on these pages as a class.

### Did You Know?

Students who have arts education have stronger problem-solving and critical thinking skills than those who don't. Taking classes in music, drama, writing, dance, or other art forms gives students an overall edge in the classroom.

## Text Connections

1. Why does Jordan want to find a space for a music recital?
2. Why don't Jordan and Grace make all of their flyer copies at the library? How does Mr. Crane help?
3. Why does Mr. Chaudry want the old school to be torn down? What possible problem does he bring up at the town meeting?
4. Think of what classes will be offered at the arts center in the story. How would an arts center benefit a community more than a mall would?
5. Why do you think arts such as poetry, music, and dance are important?





## Write

Write about some of the classes you would like to take at a community arts center. What would you like to learn to do, and why?

## Look Closer

### Keys to Comprehension

1. How do Jordan and Grace respond to challenges in the story? What do you think the author is trying to say about challenges and cooperation?
2. Compare and contrast Mr. Chaudry and Mr. Crane. How are they different in the story? What do they have in common?

### Writer's Craft

3. How do Jordan and Grace come up with the slogan "Art Works"? How is this an example of figurative language?

### Concept Development

4. How does the illustration of the statue help you understand how art can bring different people together?





Read this Social Studies Connection. You will answer the questions as a class.

### Text Feature

**Parentheses** are often put around additional information that is not necessary for understanding the main text, but is still useful to know.

## Town Council

You just read about how community members approached their town council with a plan. They wanted to turn a closed school into an arts center. A town council or city council is part of local government. Council members are elected by townspeople. They help make decisions about what happens in the area by proposing bills, holding votes, and passing laws.

Citizens may speak at a meeting by registering with the city clerk. When an item is discussed, the city clerk calls the names of community members who registered to speak to the issue. When people's names are called, they step forward, state their names and addresses, and make their comments.

Speakers may propose plans, ask questions, or present research that elected officials might consider when making decisions. While adult citizens are usually the ones speaking at town council meetings, children can present as well, as was the case in "Art Works!" Children can present a point of view that an adult may not have considered. Kids can be very effective speakers when their ideas are organized and when they are prepared to speak in public.

Town and city councils may have significant power over the lives of their citizens. To produce new funds, they may levy additional taxes. They can draft legislation to prevent citizens from engaging in certain behavior.

The exact power of the council varies from one location to the next. Sometimes the mayor is the leader of the city council, and other times he or she is an independent employee. The nature of the council depends on what the citizens (as represented by the council) feel works the best.

Speaking at a council meeting is one of the most important things citizens can do to effect change and become engaged in their community.





1. What is the role of a town or city council? How does this institution affect us in our communities?
2. How do institutions such as town or city councils make decisions?
3. What can we do to effect institutional change? What role do citizens play in city government?



## Go Digital

Search for more information about your local government. Do you have a town or city council? What kind of structure does it have?