

Comprehension

Genre

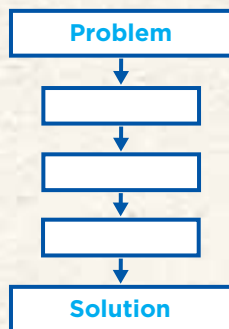
A **Mystery** is a story in which the characters and the reader must use clues to find the explanation for a troubling event.



Make Inferences and Analyze

Problem and Solution

As you read, fill in your Problem and Solution Chart.



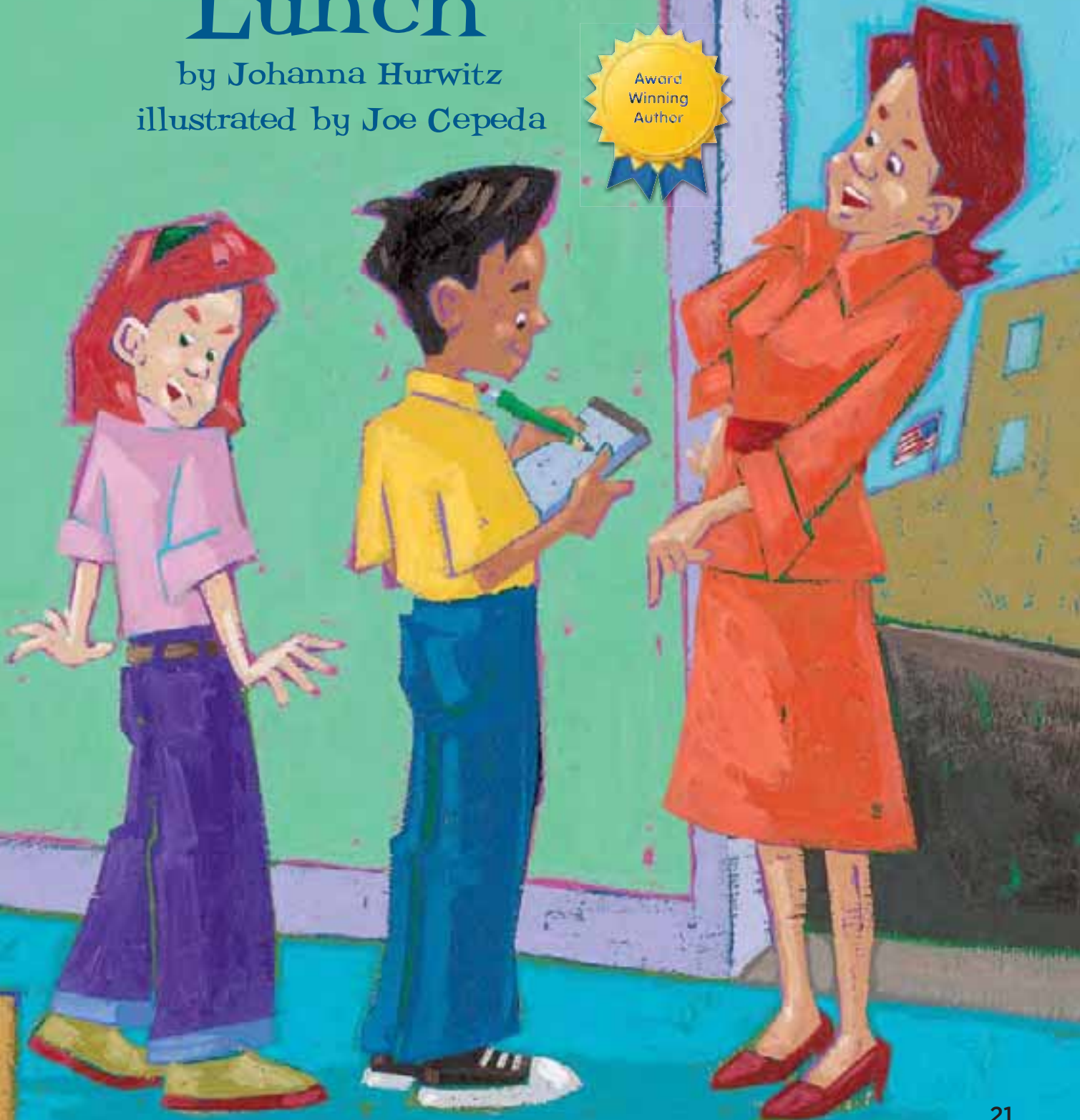
Read to Find Out

Can you solve the mystery before Ramón does?



The Mystery of the Missing Lunch


by Johanna Hurwitz
illustrated by Joe Cepeda



At noon, on the first day of school, a very hungry Ramón García looked for his lunch bag in the coat closet. He searched the shelf above the coat hooks but couldn't find his lunch. "My bag isn't here," he complained.

"Are you sure you brought it?" asked his friend Emily Wilson. "Maybe you left it at home."





Ramón was sure. His mom had made him his favorite sandwich—salami—and he knew he hadn't forgotten it.

“Here’s my lunch box,” reported Ted Collins between sneezes. Ted had been sneezing all morning. “**Allergies**,” he explained, apologetically.

Ramón didn’t hear him. He was too angry. “Someone took my salami sandwich!” he said to Emily. “And I’m going to find out who!”



Problem and Solution

Ramón has a problem. What does he need to find out?



“Maybe it was Jack Crawford,” Emily whispered. “He’s always hungry.”

Ramón took out the little notebook he had bought to write down homework **assignments**. It would be good for keeping track of any clues. Then he went over to Jack. He noticed at once that there was no lunch bag or box on Jack’s desk.

“Where’s your lunch?” he asked.

“I don’t have one,” answered Jack.

“Why not?” asked Ramón.

Jack pulled a couple of dollars out of his pocket. “I’m buying today,” he said.

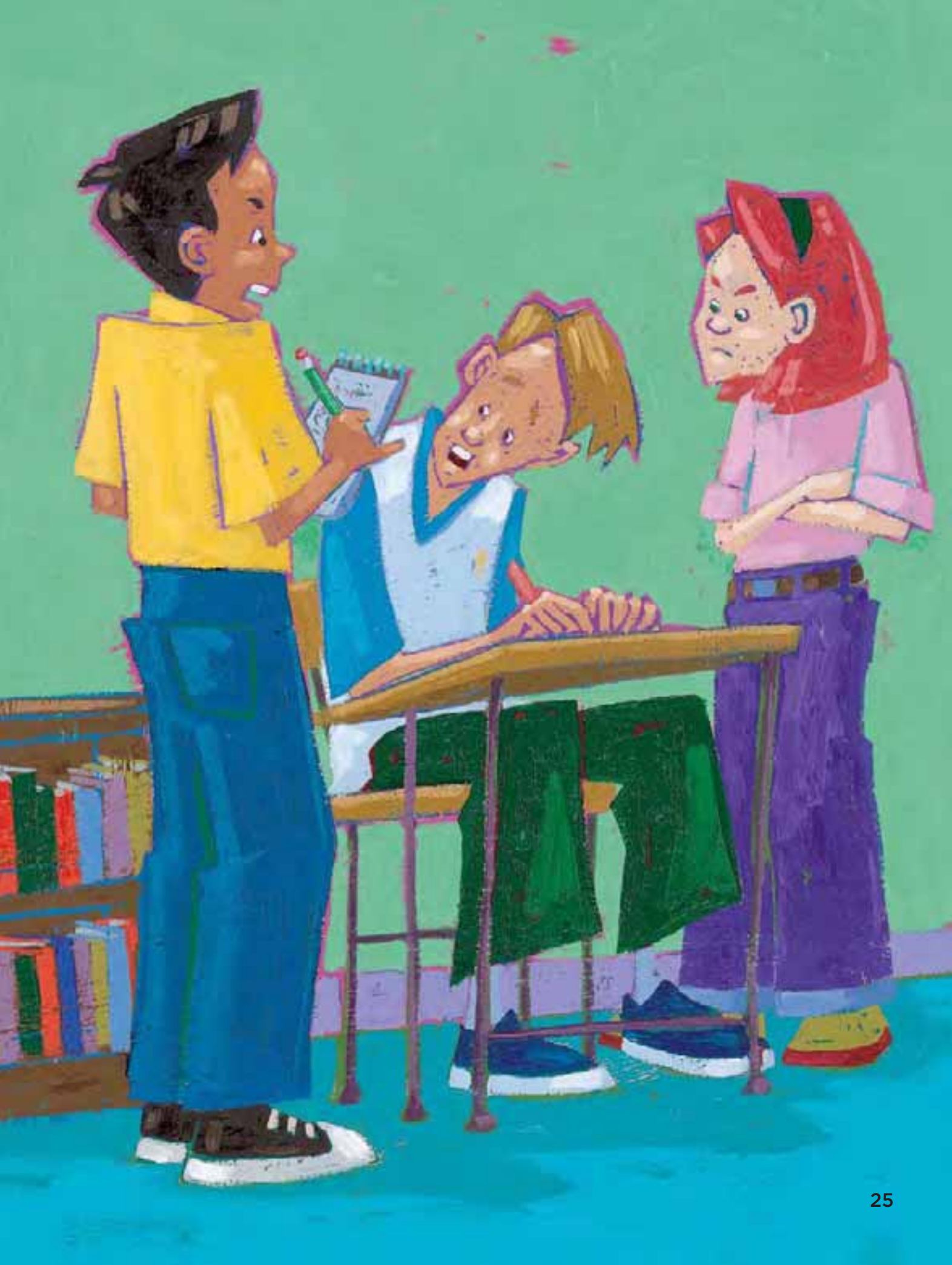
Ramón leaned closer to Jack and sniffed deeply. He couldn’t smell any salami on his classmate’s breath.

“What’s that?” asked Emily. She pointed to a brown smudge on Jack’s shirt. “It looks like mustard.”

“It’s just an old paint stain,” claimed Jack. “I got it when I helped my dad during the summer. It may look like mustard, but it’s called ‘golden oak’ on the paint can.”

“A likely alibi,” Ramón muttered to himself. He made a note of the stain on Jack’s shirt.





“All right, what’s going on here?” asked Mrs. Richmond, their fourth-grade teacher.

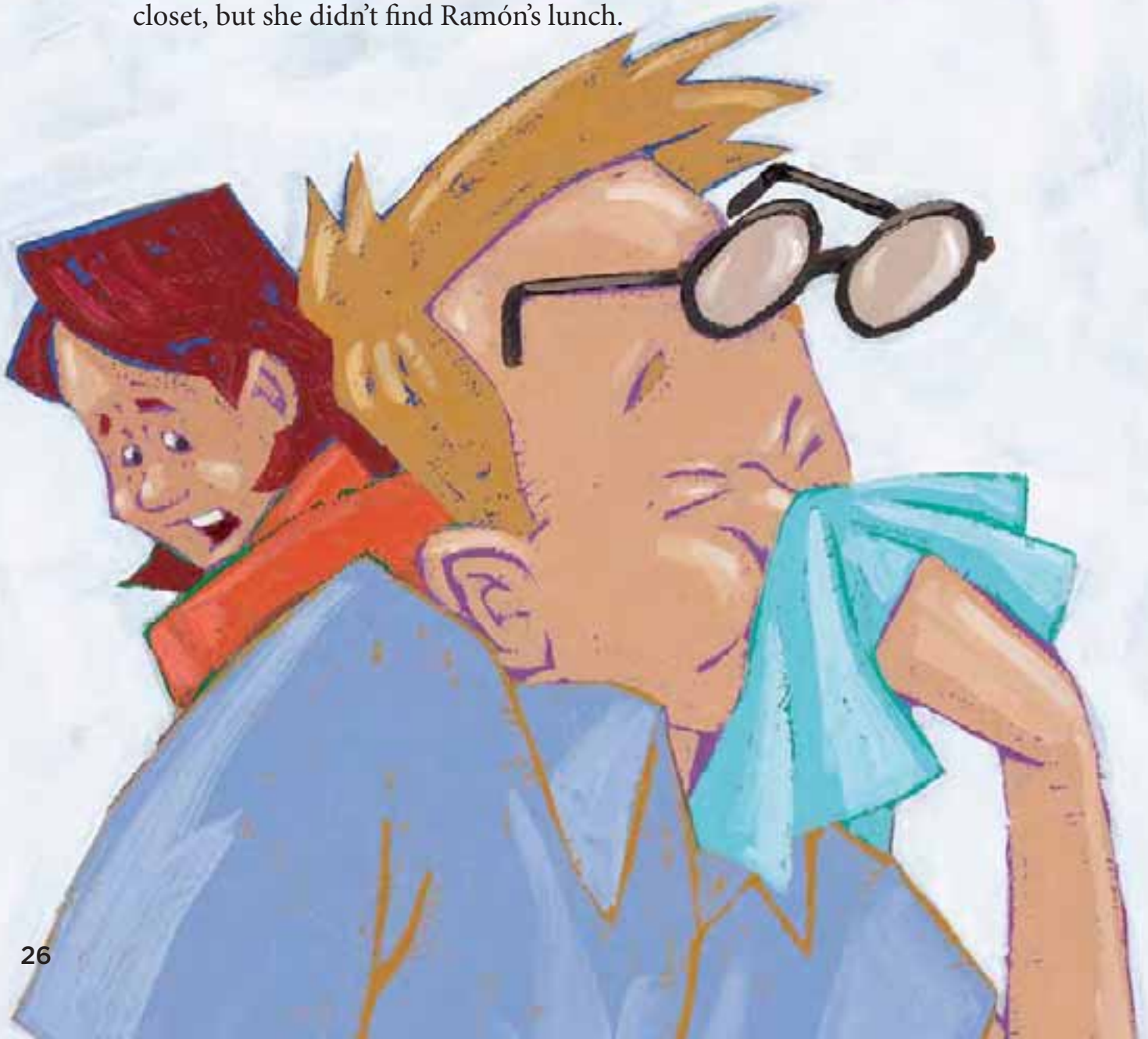
“Someone took my lunch,” said Ramón.

“Don’t look at me,” said Jack. “I’m innocent.”

Mrs. Richmond clapped her hands. “Everyone in your seats,” she shouted. “A lunch is missing. We can’t leave for the cafeteria until we find it.”

“Awww,” grumbled all the students together. By now, everyone was hungry. Ted sneezed three times in succession.

No one knew anything about Ramón’s lunch bag. The whole class waited while Mrs. Richmond checked the coat closet, but she didn’t find Ramón’s lunch.





By this time Ramón was so hungry, his stomach was growling. Mrs. Richmond must have been hungry herself, because she solved the problem by handing Ramón a five dollar bill. “Buy something with this,” she told him. “You can pay me back tomorrow. I have a feeling that you left your lunch on the bus. I can’t imagine any of your classmates taking it.”

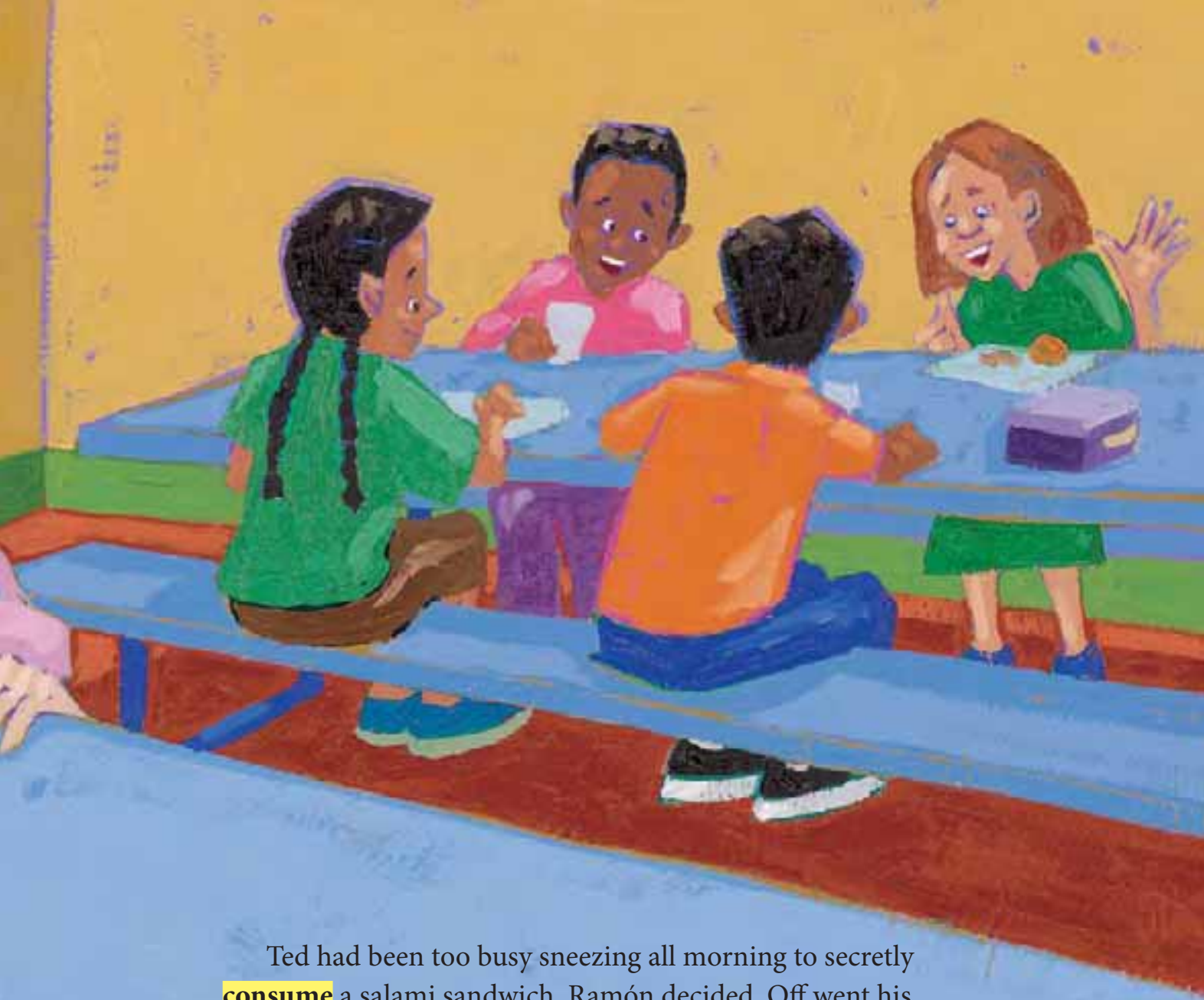
Of course, it was a relief that Ramón could buy some food. However, he was 100% certain that he had put the bag in the closet. He was determined to discover who had taken it.



In the cafeteria, while he was eating the soggy tuna fish sandwich he had bought, Ramón wrote again in his notebook. He made a list of all his classmates. Any one of them could be the culprit.

Emily leaned forward to see. “Just because you like salami doesn’t mean that everyone else does,” she pointed out. “Josh, Tina, and Margaret are vegetarians. They wouldn’t eat a salami sandwich.”

“You’re right,” agreed Ramón, crossing out their names. “Sarah thinks salami is smelly. She holds her nose whenever she’s around it. And all Max ever eats is peanut butter and jelly,” he added. He crossed out their names too. After a minute’s **consideration**, he crossed Jack’s name off his list.



Ted had been too busy sneezing all morning to secretly **consume** a salami sandwich, Ramón decided. Off went his name too.

“Cross me off the list of suspects, too,” said Emily. “I don’t even like salami.”

So far, out of a class of eighteen, eight were definitely innocent. Then there were Beverly and Grace. Neither of them was tall enough to reach the shelf where Ramón put his lunch. He crossed off their names too. The list of potential suspects kept getting shorter. It got even shorter when Ramón realized that he was one of the eighteen students in the class. And he knew for certain that he had not eaten the salami sandwich.

Ramón sighed deeply. His chances of solving this case were getting slimmer and slimmer.



Then, after lunch, when the students were given quiet time for reading, Ramón went back to the closet to see if he could find any clues that he hadn't noticed earlier. He looked under the book bags but found nothing **suspicious** there.

On his way back to his desk, Ramón passed the library corner. He stopped. What was that scratching sound? Could there be a mouse in the classroom? Mice eat anything.

Looking around, he saw poor Ted was still blowing his nose. Then he spotted something! Pieces of torn brown paper lay on the floor near Ted's desk. Ramón picked them up. Immediately, he noticed that there were ink markings on the papers. He placed them together, like puzzle pieces, to form the picture of a smiley face. Ramón recognized it at once. It was the same smiley face his mom had drawn on his lunch bag that morning!

This was a very important clue. Whoever had taken his lunch had torn up the **evidence**!



Just then, Mr. Gordon, the Assistant Principal, knocked and came into the classroom. “Here’s the new computer we ordered for you, Mrs. Richmond.” He placed it on the counter.

As he started to leave, Mr. Gordon said, “By the way, has anyone seen a stray cat? She sneaked into the school building a few weeks ago when we were painting, and I think she’s still hiding somewhere.” The kids looked at each other and shook their heads.

“Please let me know if you do. I want to find her a home,” Mr. Gordon added.



Mrs. Richmond looked around with a little chuckle. “I don’t see any cat in this room,” she said.

At that moment, Ted gave three more loud sneezes.

“Wait a minute,” Ramón called out. The biggest clue had been right there under his nose all this time. “Ted, what kind of allergy do you have?” he asked. “Could you be allergic to cats?”

“How did you know?” Ted asked when he stopped blowing his nose.

“Your nose gave it away,” said Ramón.

Ted grinned. “I’m very allergic to any animal with fur,” he admitted.

Mrs. Richmond turned to Mr. Gordon, “And I was worried that he was allergic to fourth grade!”



Ramón started pulling all the books out of the shelves in the library corner. The other students and Mr. Gordon helped. Sure enough, there behind the mystery books was the solution to the mystery of the missing lunch. Three little kittens were hiding amid the remains of Ramón's salami sandwich.

"But where's the mother cat?" asked Mrs. Richmond.

"She won't be far away from her kittens," Mr. Gordon said.

A loud hiss confirmed his words. On top of the closet stood the anxious mother cat.





“You stole my lunch!” Ramón scolded the cat, but he was smiling. He was pleased that he did not have to **accuse** one of his classmates.

The mother cat jumped off the closet and slipped out the door.

“There she goes!” said Mr. Gordon. “Well, I’ll take these kittens to my office until we find good homes for them. Their mama will find them. Cats have a good sense of smell.”

“*And they like salami!*” said Ramón.



Problem and Solution

Ramón solved the mystery.
Who took his lunch? Why?

Clues About the Author and Illustrator



Johanna Hurwitz likes to write about everyday boys and girls, like the ones in this story, and their funny adventures. Johanna gets her story ideas from many places. She thinks about children she knew as a librarian and about people and places she's seen on her trips. She also gets ideas from her family, and, as proven in this story, her cats.

Other books by Johanna Hurwitz and Joe Cepeda



Joe Cepeda did not plan on becoming a children's book illustrator. He planned to be an engineer, but then he went back to school to study illustration. Joe thinks that children who want to be artists should spend a lot of time reading and studying math.



Find out more about Johanna Hurwitz and Joe Cepeda at www.macmillanmh.com

Author's Purpose

What clues can you use to figure out Johanna Hurwitz's purpose for writing *The Mystery of the Missing Lunch*? Did she want to entertain, inform, or persuade? How do you know?

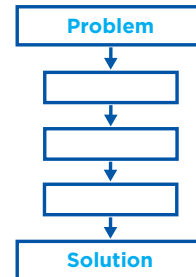


Comprehension Check



Summarize

Use your Problem and Solution Chart to help you summarize *The Mystery of the Missing Lunch*. Describe Ramón's problem and the steps he took to solve it.



Think and Compare



1. Describe one piece of **evidence** Ramón gathered to solve the mystery. How did that piece of evidence help him?

Make Inferences and Analyze: Problem and Solution

2. Reread the last paragraph on page 28. What conclusion does Ramón draw about Jack? Use story details in your answer.

Analyze

3. How would you have tried to solve this mystery? Explain. **Apply**

4. Think about Ramón's problem-solving methods. In your opinion, are they effective? Explain your answer. **Evaluate**

5. Read "The Case of the Blurry Board" on pages 18-19. How is Jason's method of solving a problem similar to Ramón's? Use details from both stories in your answer. **Reading/Writing Across Texts**

