

A New Friend from Europe

Mrs. Wagner was reading a story to her 5th grade class. While Joseph listened carefully, he also watched the new boy. Ivan looked sad and confused and Joseph could not understand why. Mrs. Wagner had introduced Ivan to the class about a week ago. Ivan was from a country in Europe. It had a very long name that Joseph found hard to pronounce. Ivan's parents were both dead and he had spent most of his life in an orphanage. Then Mr. and Mrs. Mayer adopted him and brought him to America. Mrs. Wagner explained that Ivan did not speak English but she was sure he would learn it very soon. No wonder Ivan looked sad and confused. Joseph would feel that way if he could not understand the story that Mrs. Wagner was reading.

Joseph wanted to make friends with Ivan but he didn't know how to do this if Ivan could not understand English. That night, Joseph asked his parents what he should do. Father thought a bit and then he answered, "You know, Joseph, words are not the only way to communicate with people. You can let Ivan know you want to be friends by the look on your face and the gestures you make. You can share things with Ivan such as a special treat from your lunch or perhaps a toy."

Joseph thought about this when he went to bed. Before he fell asleep, he had a plan. Joseph loved trains. He had played with toy trains since he was a baby. He had his own model train set and he had many books about trains. The next morning, Joseph chose his favorite book. It had beautifully colored pictures of trains from the first steam to the sleek modern diesel engines of today. Joseph also liked to draw trains and he tucked one of his pictures between the pages of the book.

After lunch, Joseph walked toward Ivan who, as usual, was sitting alone on the playground. When Ivan looked up, Joseph smiled. He sat down next to Ivan, pointed to himself, and said "I'm Joseph." Then he took the train book out of his backpack. He placed it on Ivan's knees and slowly began to turn the pages. Ivan seemed very interested and once, he put his hand over Joseph's to stop him from turning the page. Ivan looked for a long time at a picture of a silver streamliner crossing a bridge over a deep ravine. When he came to Joseph's drawing, he pointed at Joseph. His whole expression indicated that he was asking if Joseph drew the picture. Joseph nodded and Ivan smiled.

The next day, it was raining heavily. Joseph knew that the class would spend recess indoors. So he added something new to his backpack. When lunch was over, Joseph walked over to Ivan who seemed glad to see him. Joseph took out his drawing tablet and his set of colored pencils. Then he opened the train book to the picture of the streamliner and began to draw the engine. Ivan watched closely. After a bit, Joseph handed the tablet to Ivan and held out the pencils. Ivan paused for a little. Then he took a pencil and continued the drawing. The boys worked together to draw and color the silver streamliner. When they were finished, Joseph made a sharp forward motion with his arm and said "Whoosh!" to indicate that the train went fast. Ivan made the same motion. "It goes fast," said Joseph. "Fast," Ivan repeated and both boys laughed.