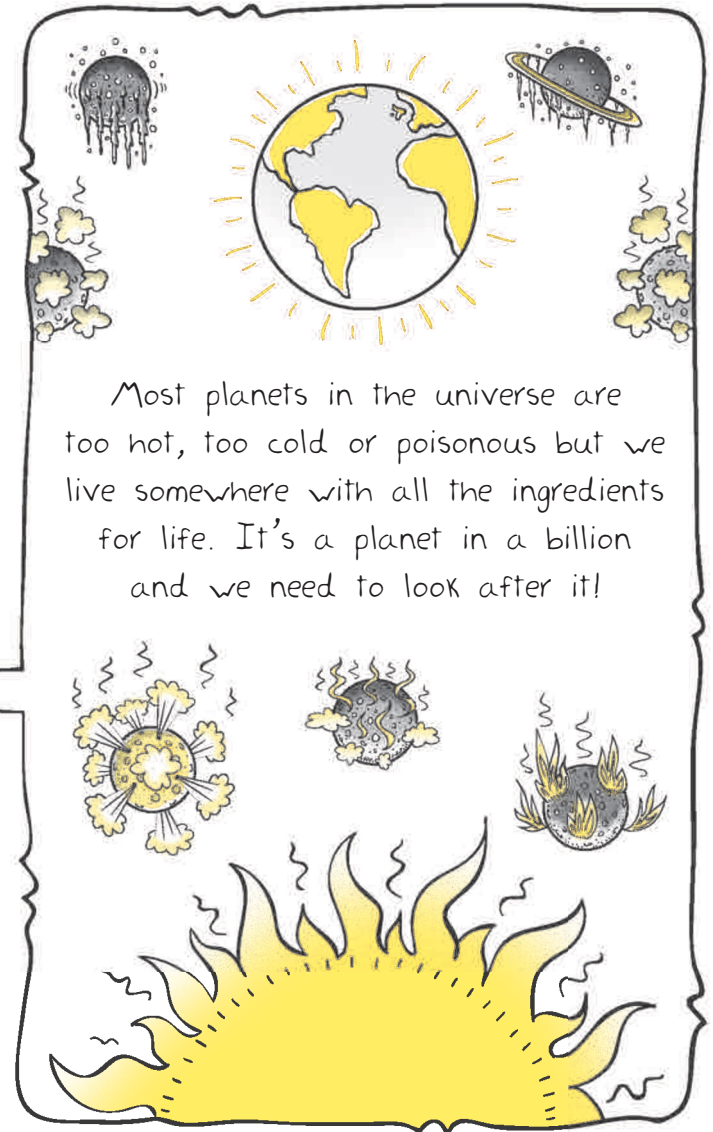


From my bedroom window I can see green  
fields far away on the edge of town.  
Dan said there used to be a meadow  
right here but they ploughed it up to build  
our block of flats. There are fifty families  
living in Meadow  
Tower and we  
live at the top.



Dan used to live in the flat next door.  
At first he was just our next-door  
neighbour but then he became our friend.  
He didn't really have a job but he knew  
a lot. His best subjects were nature and  
saving planet Earth.

'We're lucky to be living here,  
Mel,' he'd say.



Most planets in the universe are  
too hot, too cold or poisonous but we  
live somewhere with all the ingredients  
for life. It's a planet in a billion  
and we need to look after it!

Dan doesn't live in Meadow Tower any more. I miss him.

Mum calls out from the kitchen,

Breakfast!

For breakfast I have honey on my toast but for tea I like cheese or scrambled eggs. We eat quick food because Mum's always tired when she gets back from the police station.

Detective Inspector Meadly, that's my mum. Seeing so much bad stuff makes her worry.



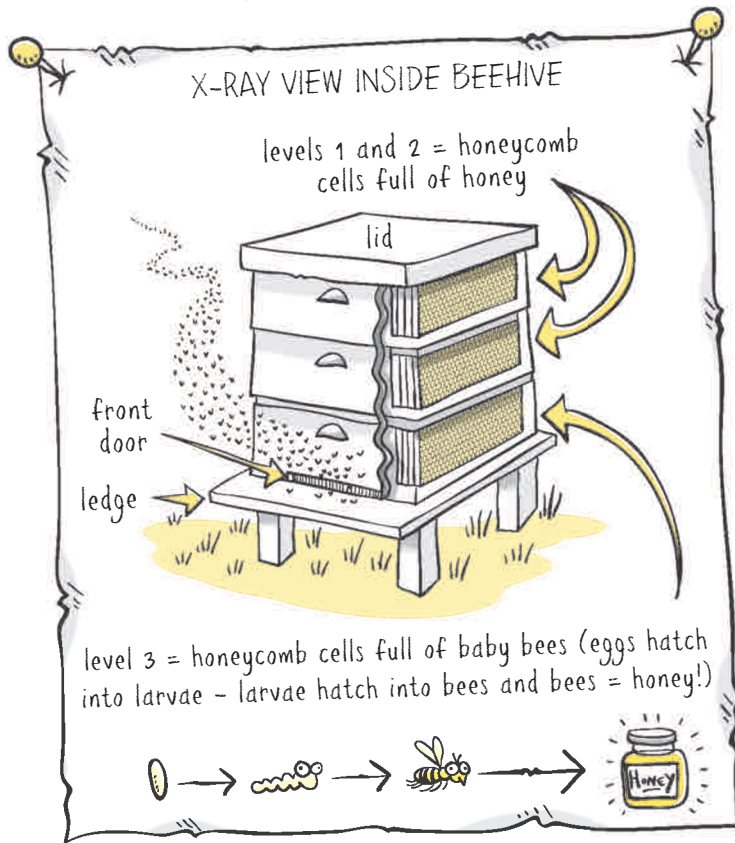
I spotted some of your mates messing around in the shopping centre at lunchtime.

I don't have any mates and, anyway, the people she saw would have been older than me. I munch my toast and honey and think about bees.



Today is a VERY important day. There are 50,000 bees in our beehive and after school I'm going to open it up and look inside. I need to check that they're making new bees to keep the hive alive and making honey too. I've done it lots of times before but never on my own.

It was a few months ago when Dan found the hive at the dump and brought it home. It needed mending but Dan was good at that sort of thing. He did a sketch to show me how beehives work. It's on my pinboard.



'You're going to be a bee-keeper!' he said.  
'It's important work but it will be fun.'

And it was fun. Brilliant fun. I was hooked immediately and I've been bee-crazy ever since.

'We'll give the bees a home and they'll give us honey!' Dan said.

'Like rent?'

'Yeah, sort of.' He laughed.

We bought some bees from Dan's mum, Daisy. Daisy lives near Meadow Tower and keeps beehives at the bottom of her garden.

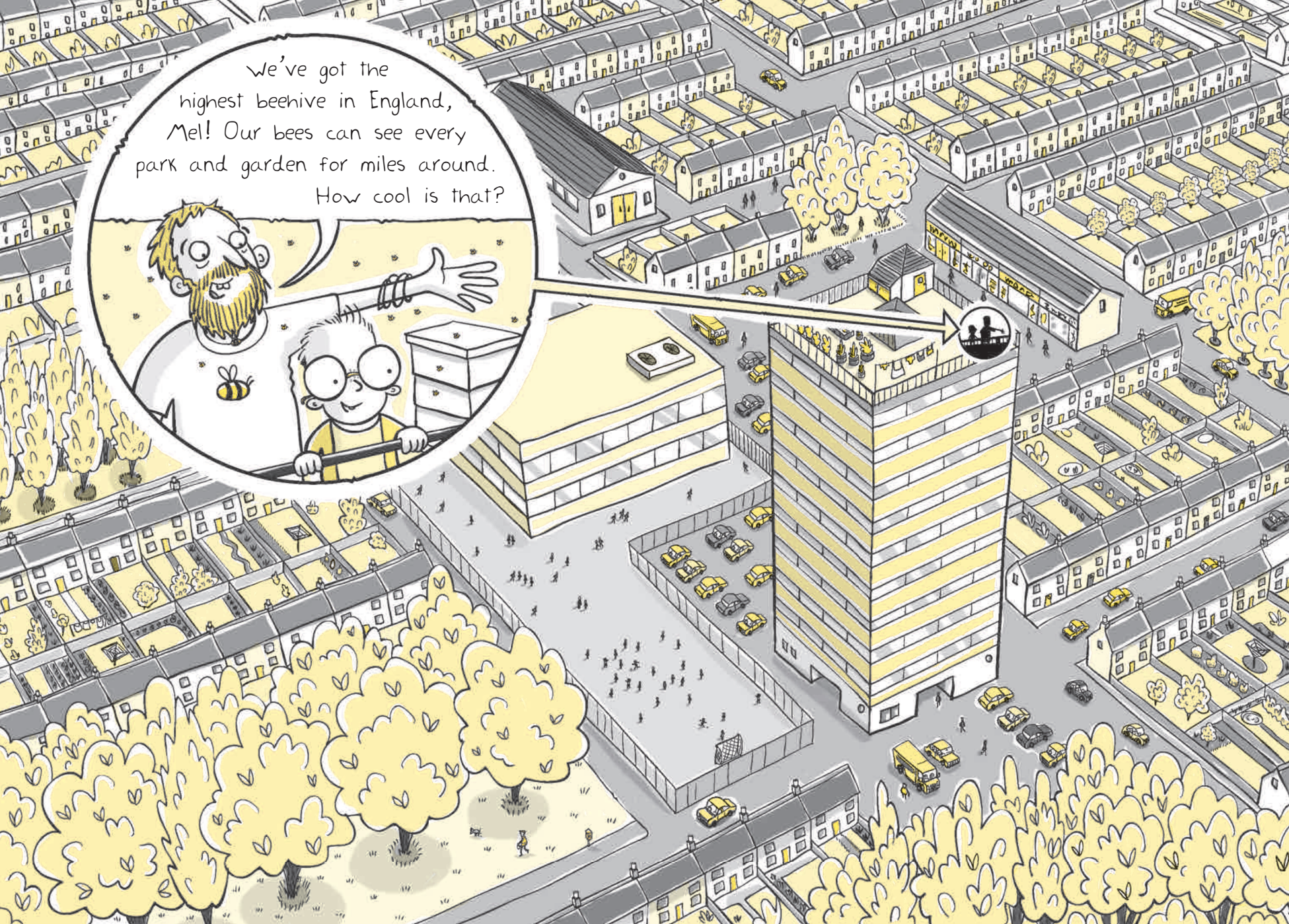
'Bees love living in towns,' she told us.  
'Away from farmland that is sprayed with harmful chemicals.'

So guess where we put ours?





We've got the  
highest beehive in England,  
Mel! Our bees can see every  
park and garden for miles around.  
How cool is that?





Our bees love their high hive and are always busy buzzing around the town gardens collecting pollen and nectar and bringing it back to the roof. When Dan was here he'd wait until I got back from school and we'd check on the bees together. He'd chat and joke with Mr Johnson,

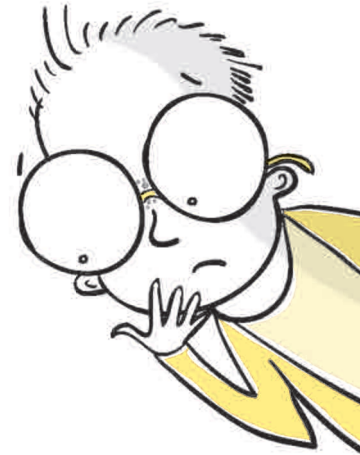


who grows flowers and vegetables in pots. Mr Johnson is interested in bees and keeps an eye on things when I'm not there.

The bee-keeping went well when Dan and I first started but then, disaster - our bees were attacked. It was like a battle scene. Bee wings, legs and heads were scattered all around. Dan said the attackers had eaten some of our baby bees and honey too.

'Who did this?' I asked.

'Probably wasps,' Dan said. 'A deadly killer. Honeybees have lots of enemies including microscopic mites and death's head hawkmoths.'



I'm eating supermarket honey on my toast this morning but that's going to change. Dan left the hive and the bee equipment and today is the day when I take charge. If my bees are happy and healthy I'll be eating Meadow Tower honey in a few weeks.

Mum squeezes my shoulder.

'Eat your toast and go to school!'

I keep my head down when I walk to school.

'Don't draw attention to yourself and people won't bother you,' Mum says.

The kids at school don't get it. I've tried to explain that bee-keeping is cool but nobody's interested. Maybe they'll listen next week when it's my turn to read my project at assembly. It's called BEES ARE BRILLIANT and I'm going to have a practice in the library at lunchtime. Mrs Gashkori, the librarian, is going to listen and offer advice. Mrs Gashkori says the whole school will be bee-crazy after my talk.

I'm walking up the school steps.

'Melvin Meadly! Here, please.'

It's Mrs Wheelks, my teacher.

'Ben Flemming is ill,' she says.

'Yes, Miss?' I reply.



'So instead of Ben, you will read your project at this morning's assembly.'



I'VE GOT TO  
READ MY PROJECT  
TODAY?

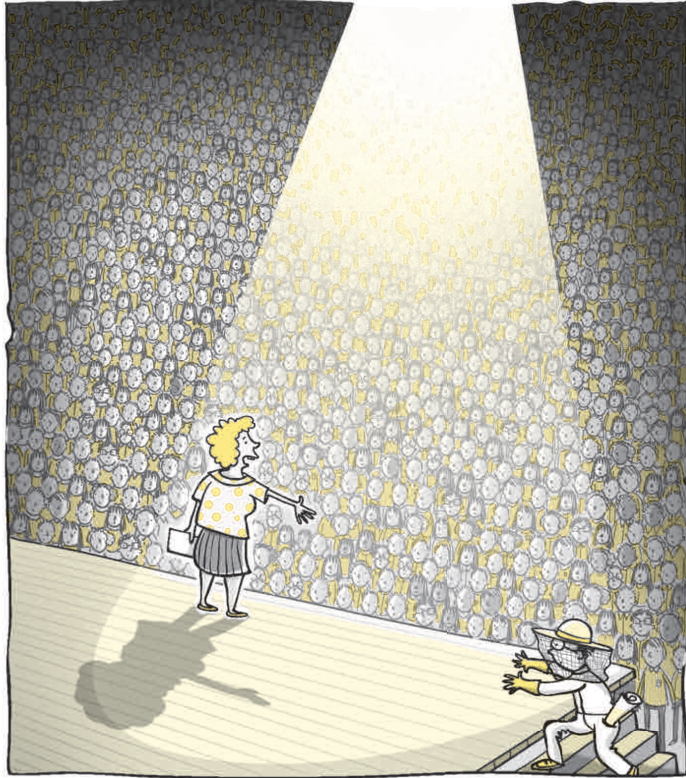
'But I'm not... I haven't practised...'

'Nonsense! What's it about? Bugs or something?' Mrs Wheelks asks. Then without waiting for an answer she heads for the staffroom. 'You'll be fine. Come up on stage after register,' she shouts.

But maybe this is my chance. My project is written and I've even got my bee-keeper's suit in my backpack (I was going to show it to Mrs Gashkori at lunchtime). I think I'm ready.



The registers have been called. This is it. The whole school is waiting with excitement to hear my project.



But I'm trembling as I step on to the school stage.

My bee-keeper's suit has a hood with mesh at the front to keep bees out. I can normally see OK but the hall lights are very bright so I'm walking like a nervous zombie.



Three hundred confused faces stare up at me.

'And now Melvin Meadly is going to give his talk about...'

Mrs Wheelks peers down at her notes.

'Bees! Quickly, Melvin, step forward.'

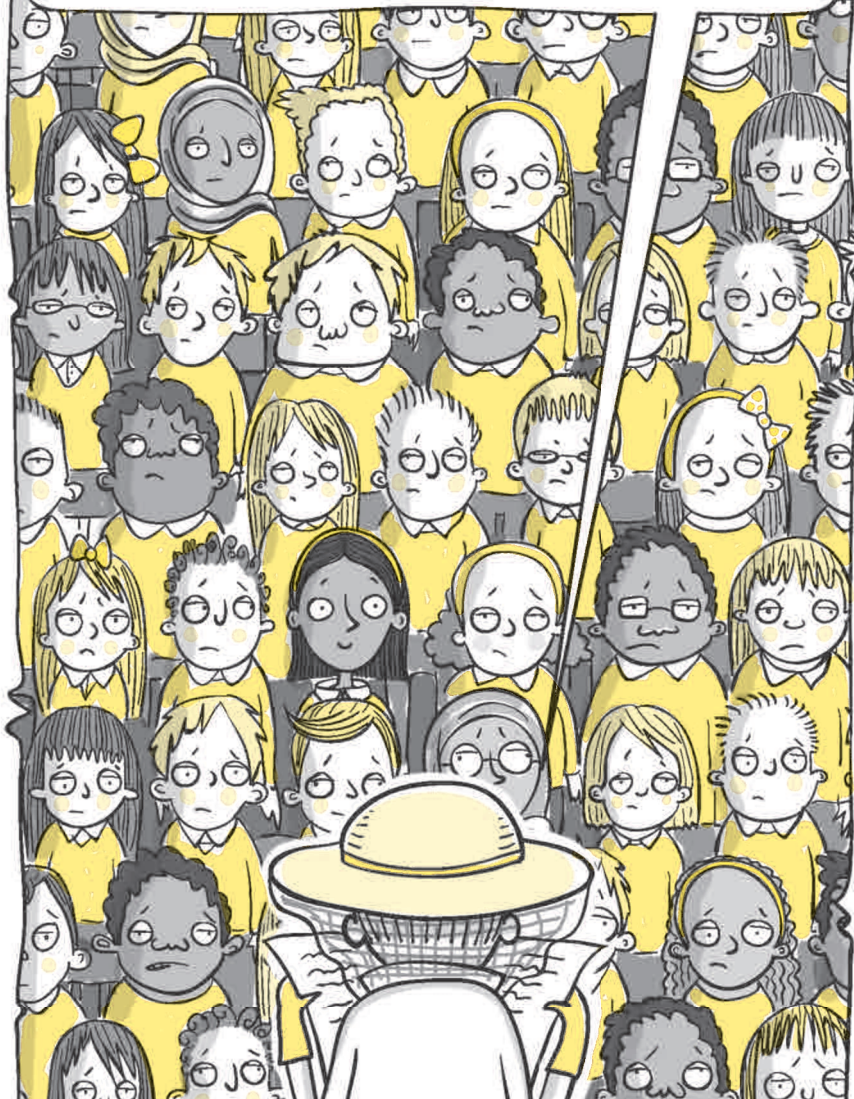


Nobody claps as I make my way to the front of the stage.

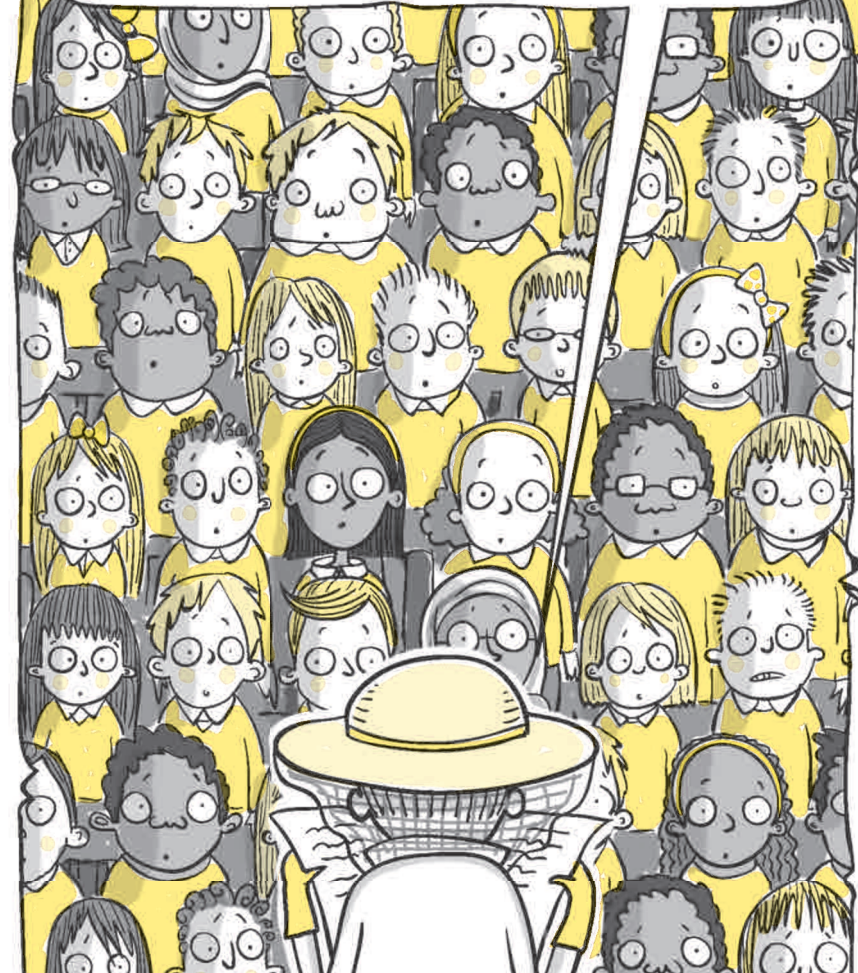
I clear my throat.



Good morning. Some of you may already know that I am a bee-keeper and today I am going to tell you all about my bees...

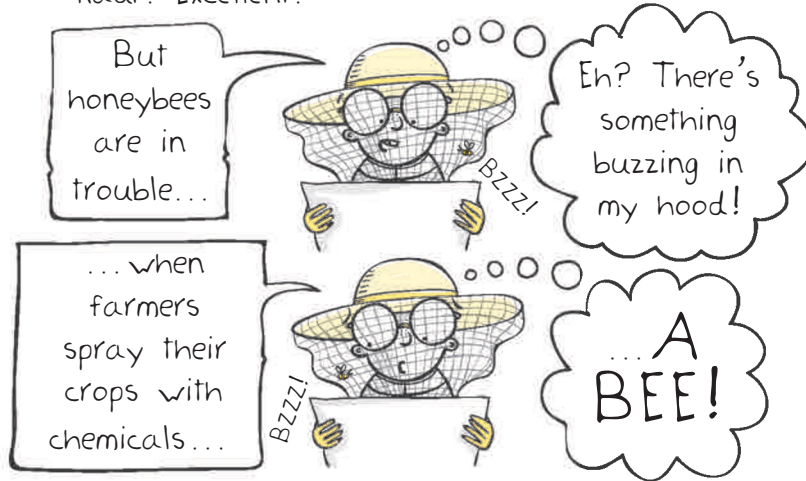


...For human beings to stay alive we need plants to eat. But plants need bees to pollinate them so they can reproduce and make more plants. That is why bees are SO important. NO BEES, NO WORLD!

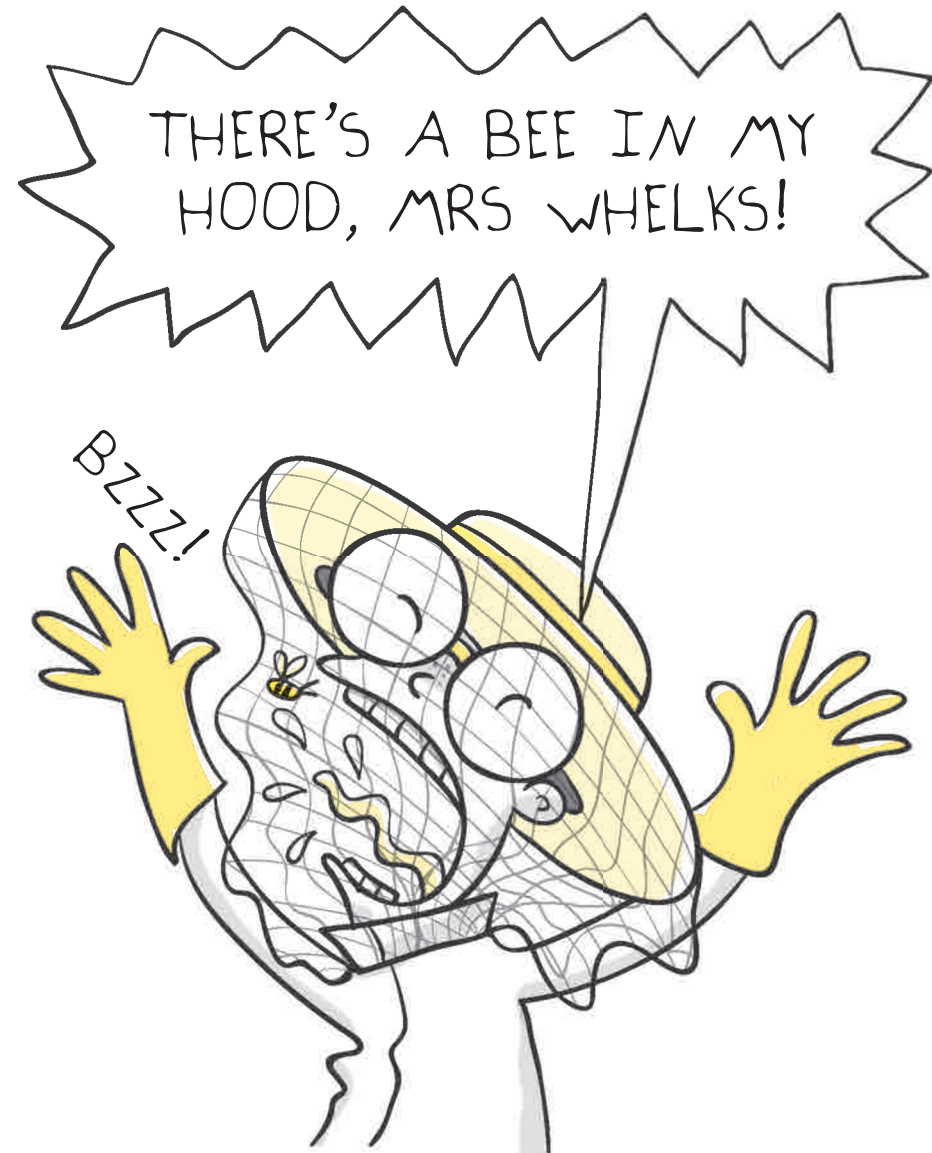




Phew! It's going OK. They seem interested - even the new girl in our class, Priti Kaur. Excellent.



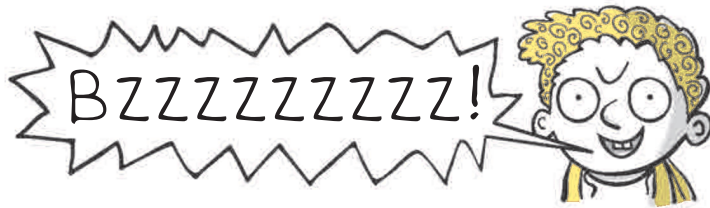
There's sniggering from the audience as I struggle to unzip my hood. I know I shouldn't panic but I can't help it.



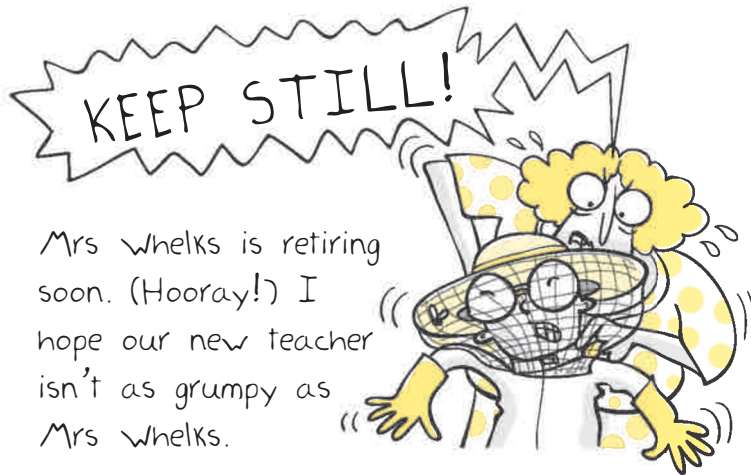


The chuckles turn to laughter. Somebody at the front starts buzzing.

It's troublemaker, Norman Crudwell.

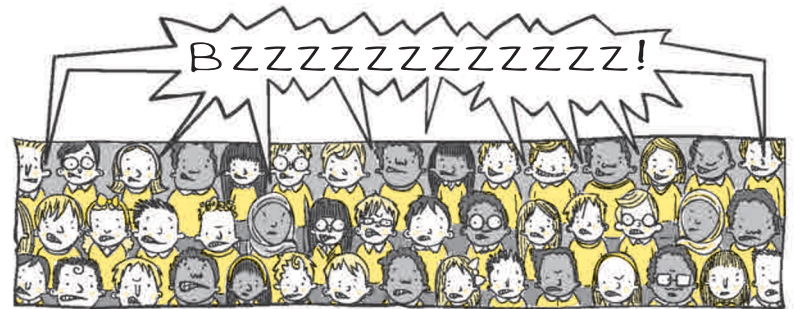


Mrs Wheelks tuts and fumbles impatiently for the zip on my hood.



Mrs Wheelks is retiring soon. (Hooray!) I hope our new teacher isn't as grumpy as Mrs Wheelks.

Now the rest of the school has joined in.



'The bee suit was a silly idea, Melvin,' Mrs Wheelks hisses under her breath when she finally finds the zip.



'You should have...

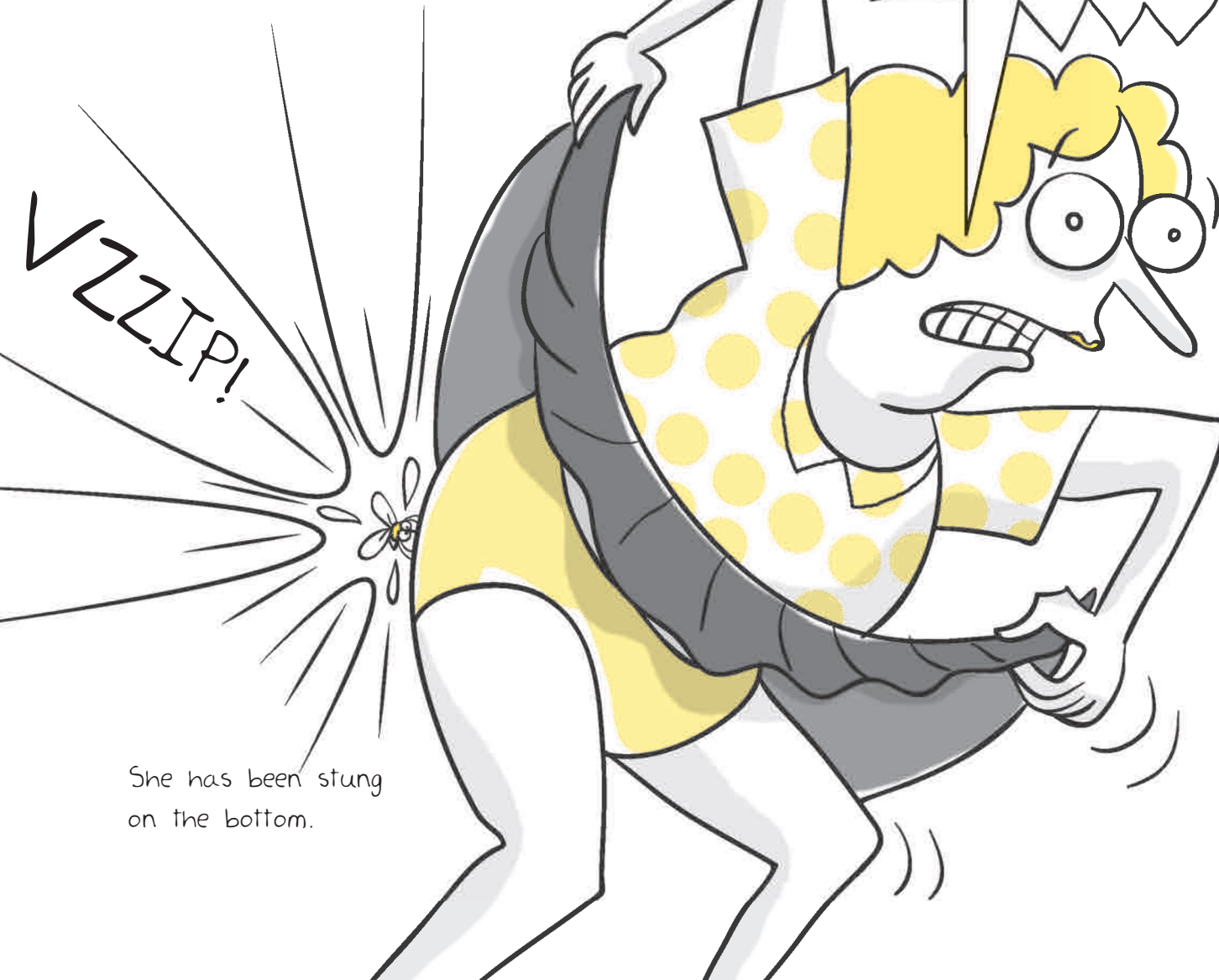
BZZZZ!

The bee whizzes out, does two loop-the-loops and disappears up Mrs Whelks's dress.

She's dancing around the stage - singing too!



The three hundred faces are now staring at Mrs Wheelks's pants.



She has been stung on the bottom.

Crudwell snorts with joy.

Nice one, Bee Boy!



BEE BOY?  
Where did that come from?

Seconds later, everybody's chanting...





Bee Boy! Bee Boy! Bee Boy!

DISASTER!

PRITI KAUR  
HAS JOINED IN!



Beetroot-faced  
Mrs Wheelks  
has had enough...



SILENCE! NORMAN AND MELVIN,  
SEE ME AFTER MORNING BREAK -  
YOU CAN CLEAN OUT STINKY AND  
WHIFFER, THE SCHOOL GERBILS.  
NOW BACK TO THE CLASSROOM!

Brilliant. Now Mrs Wheelks has got it in  
for me and Crudwell is being punished  
too. They're going to make my life hell.

And what about 'Bee Boy', my new  
nickname? I guess it doesn't sound too  
bad but I don't think they meant it as  
a compliment.



The school day seems to take FOREVER  
but 3:30 finally arrives and I scurry  
home. At Meadow Tower the lift is out  
of order again. I don't mind using the  
stairs except I have to go past Crudwell's  
door and he is the last person I want to  
see. I should be OK because he's usually  
indoors playing computer games (if there's  
a game that involves blowing things up,  
Crudwell's got it).

I hear a voice.

Oi, Bee Boy!