

The Great Fourth-Grade Debate

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Chapter One

The Party

Many of us still remember the Great Fourth-Grade Debate as if it were yesterday. We may never forget, but how could we?

Ms. Brady, our fourth-grade teacher, had introduced the idea of an end-of-year party.

“We must have cake!” Taylor shouted.

“We need chocolate ice cream!” yelled Ben.

“No, we should have strawberry!” screamed Michelle.

Soon, everyone was arguing over which cake and ice cream to have.

Frustrated, Ms. Brady spoke up. “We’ve learned how to have a class discussion,” she said sternly, “and this isn’t the way to do it.”

She was right. All year, we had practiced how to have productive class discussions, but we were ignoring those rules.



Chapter Two

Calming All Sides

I had known the best way to move forward.

“How about if we start by brainstorming a list of ice-cream flavors and then vote for our three favorites?” I suggested.

“Excellent idea, Celia,” responded Ms. Brady. “I’ll write suggestions on the board. So far we have chocolate and strawberry. What else?”



Each student volunteered a different favorite. When it came time for us to vote, hardly any flavor had more than two. However, Will hadn’t voted.

“Why didn’t you vote, Will?” Haley asked.

“It doesn’t matter to me,” he replied.

That comment set off a flurry of campaigning. Each kid wanted Will to vote for his or her favorite. Finally, he voted. Chocolate was the winner, followed by strawberry and peanut butter cup. Everyone began commenting at the same time.

Just then the bell rang, so we would have to continue the discussion the following day.



Chapter Three

Feeling Left Out

I hurried to catch up with Will as he walked home from school.

"You didn't seem thrilled by our ice-cream choices," I said.

"To be honest, I can't eat ice cream because I'm allergic to dairy. I get hives if I eat things like ice cream and cheese, and I hate being itchy all over."

"I'm sorry," was all I could say.

"I've learned to live with it," he replied. "I don't make a big deal of it, and you shouldn't either, Celia. Don't worry about it."

That night I tried not to think about it, but I failed. It didn't seem fair that Will would be left out of the celebration.

Chapter Four

The War Begins

At recess the next day, the ice-cream discussion continued. However, it was no longer a polite debate. It had turned into an ice-cream war. Kids were screaming so loudly at each other, that kids from the other classes were complaining.

When we got back into the classroom, Ms. Brady began: "I heard about the argument at recess, and I am tempted to cancel the party. This is supposed to be fun."



There were groans and pleas not to cancel the party. At last, I spoke up.

"It's really not the ice-cream that's the issue. It's just hard to pick a favorite without someone getting left out." I pointed to the votes on the board from the day before, and asked, "How many of you would feel left out if we decided to have only the favorite, chocolate?"

More than half the class raised their hands.

I continued carefully, because I didn't want to single out Will. "I think we should reconsider the treats. Some of our parents might not like us having so much sugar, and some of us could have allergies."

My words were greeted with moans and groans, but my friend Haley backed me up.

"It's true," she said. "I didn't want to make a fuss, but I'm allergic to peanuts. Even a tiny piece of peanut could send me to the hospital, so peanut butter cup ice cream is out for me."

"I'm allergic to wheat," said Antoine. "So I can't eat cake unless it's made with wheat-free flour."

"My family is vegan," contributed Tahir. "We don't eat eggs or dairy, and most cakes are made with eggs and milk."

Encouraged by the others, Will finally spoke up. "I'm allergic to dairy, so I can't eat cake or ice cream, either."

The moans and groans turned into loud grumbles of protest. "That basically knocks all the fun stuff off the list! Are we supposed to eat raisins and celery instead?" asked Gene. His remark was met with nods of agreement. This encouraged him to add, "That stuff is boring!"

While Gene's manners were not polite, he had contributed an honest opinion, with which many kids agreed. Most of us thought the same way he did.

"Maybe healthy foods are boring, but maybe they're not," I responded. "Haley, Antoine, Tahir, and Will might not be able to eat certain foods, but that doesn't mean they don't enjoy delicious healthier treats. If we give nutritious snacks a chance, we might like them."

Chapter Five

The War Ends

We conducted a class vote and decided to rethink the class treats. In small groups, we discussed healthy treats, voted again, and agreed on our favorites. We ended up reaching a fair compromise by having some ice cream and some healthy snacks for the occasion.

Everyone loved our end-of-year party. Even Gene tried the healthy food and thought carrots and spinach dip were really good. The Great Fourth-Grade Debate had ended peacefully.

