

A Positive Outlet

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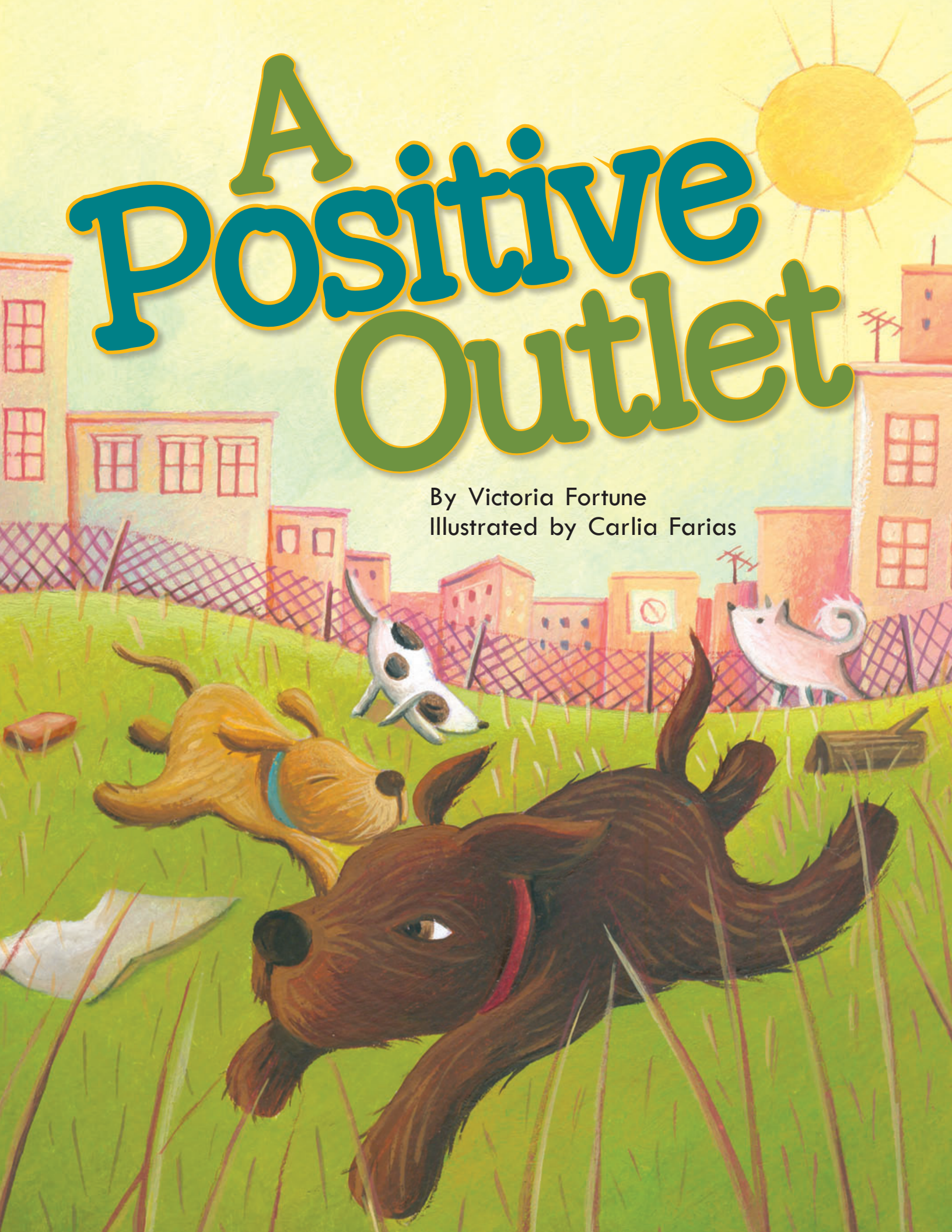


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A Big Dog and a Big Job

Tiana begged and pestered her parents, and finally, after several months, they agreed to get her a dog. However, their one stipulation was that she had to walk the dog every day. No problem, she thought. How hard could it be to walk a dog?

Now Tiana grumbled under her breath as she clipped a sturdy blue leash to the collar of her enormous brown dog. Oscar had grown much larger than anyone had expected, and he was also a bundle of energy. As soon as they walked outside, he would scramble down the sidewalk, pulling and tugging Tiana throughout the neighborhood.



Who's Walking Whom?



Today was no different, and as soon as Oscar spotted a beautiful golden retriever across the street, he scampered toward the other dog, straining at his leash and dragging Tiana behind him.

“No, Oscar!” Tiana shouted urgently as she jerked on his leash to slow him down, but it was impossible. Oscar and the retriever sniffed one another happily as Tiana struggled uselessly to pull Oscar away. “I’m terribly sorry,” she mumbled to the dog’s owner.

Tiana glanced up and realized that the owner was the elderly man who always sat on the wooden bench outside the corner store. This was the first time she had seen his face up close, and she noticed that the deep creases in his cheeks made his face look like the bark of a tree.

Mr. Jacobson

“That’s a mighty big dog for a little bit of a girl,” the man said in a deep, rumbling voice.

The old man was grinning at her. The expression completely transformed his face, stretching the creases so that he resembled a smiling coconut instead of a tree. Tiana couldn’t help herself and smiled back.

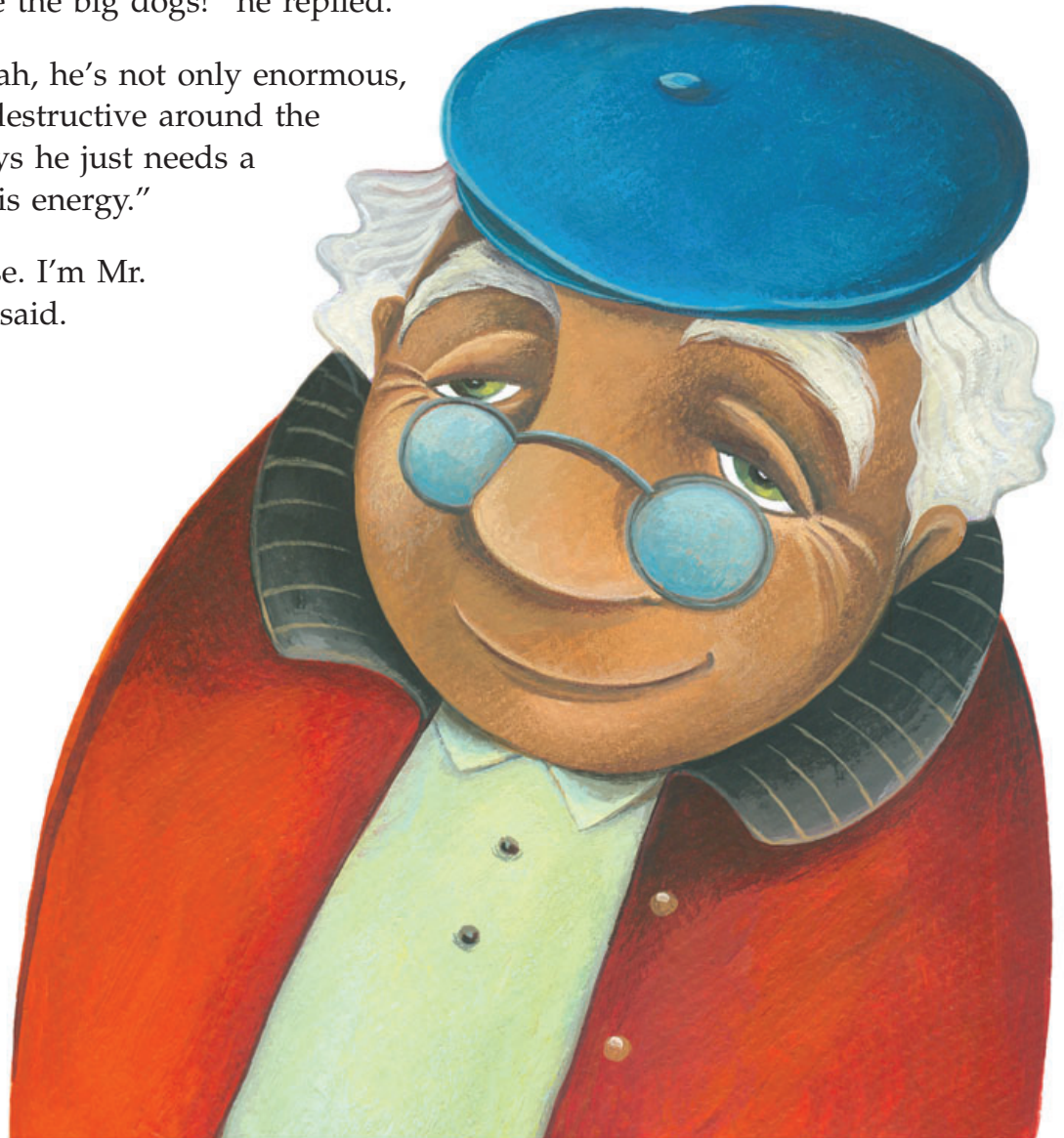
“The volunteers at the animal shelter told us that he was going to be a medium-size dog,” she said.

“I would hate to see the big dogs!” he replied.

Tiana chuckled. “Yeah, he’s not only enormous, but also extremely destructive around the apartment. Mom says he just needs a positive outlet for his energy.”

“Your mother is wise. I’m Mr. Jacobson,” the man said.

“Hi. I’m Tiana.”



A Partnership



Mr. Jacobson gestured toward the vacant lot they were standing next to. It was full of weeds, broken glass, rusted cans, and other garbage. “I was thinking how pleasant it would be to transform this lot into a neighborhood dog park. Then your dog and my Minnie here would have a place to run, romp, and play together — a positive outlet,” he said.

Tiana’s face lit up with excitement. “That’s a fantastic idea!” she exclaimed. “It would probably be impossible to get permission, though.”

“Most vacant lots are owned by the city, which is eager for people to find ways to use them. I have a friend on the City Council, who I’m sure could arrange for a permit. The difficult part would be cleaning up the lot,” Mr. Jacobson said.

Tiana considered the eager students in her social studies class, knowing they would welcome the opportunity of helping the community. “What if I could gather volunteers from my school to clean it?”

Mr. Jacobson smiled. “Then, we have a deal!” He offered his hand and Tiana shook it.

Chapter Five

Success!

Tiana could hardly contain her excitement and couldn't wait to tell her class about the neighborhood dog park. The next day, they voted unanimously to make the park their class community service project. Mr. Jacobson and other retirees from the Senior Center drafted plans for the park. They convinced a local garden center to donate tools, soil, flowers, and grass seed.

Tiana's entire class came out to clean the lot and plant grass and flowers. Some of the people in the neighborhood asked for donations from local businesses and bought trees for the park. One business even donated several benches.

When the work was completed, the neighborhood hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony, and Tiana's class and the senior citizens received a special community service award from the mayor.

Now, Tiana actually looks forward to walking Oscar. She takes him to the dog park, where she plays chess with Mr. Jacobson while Oscar, Minnie, and other neighborhood dogs run and play freely. Tiana has a new friend, but best of all, the dogs have a positive outlet.

