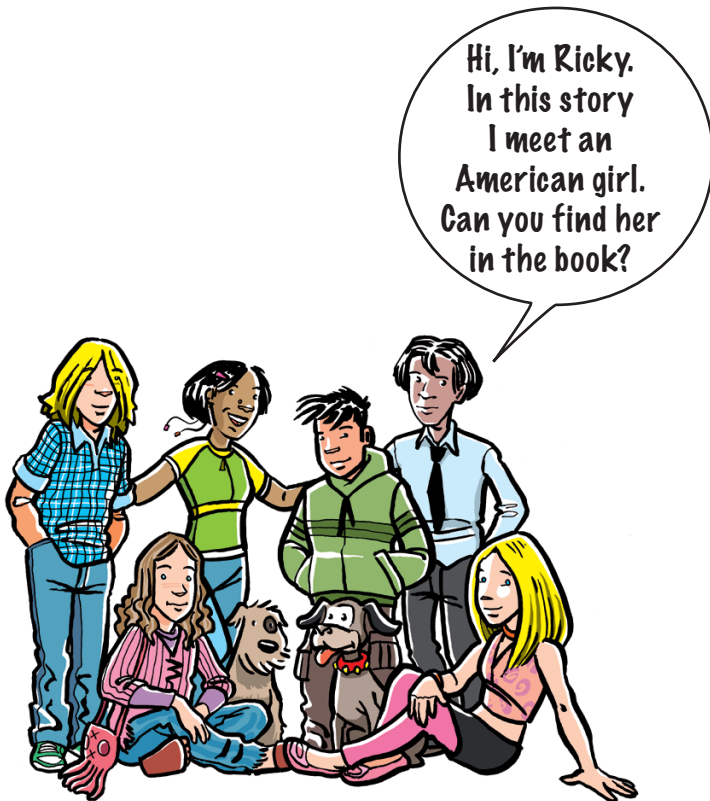


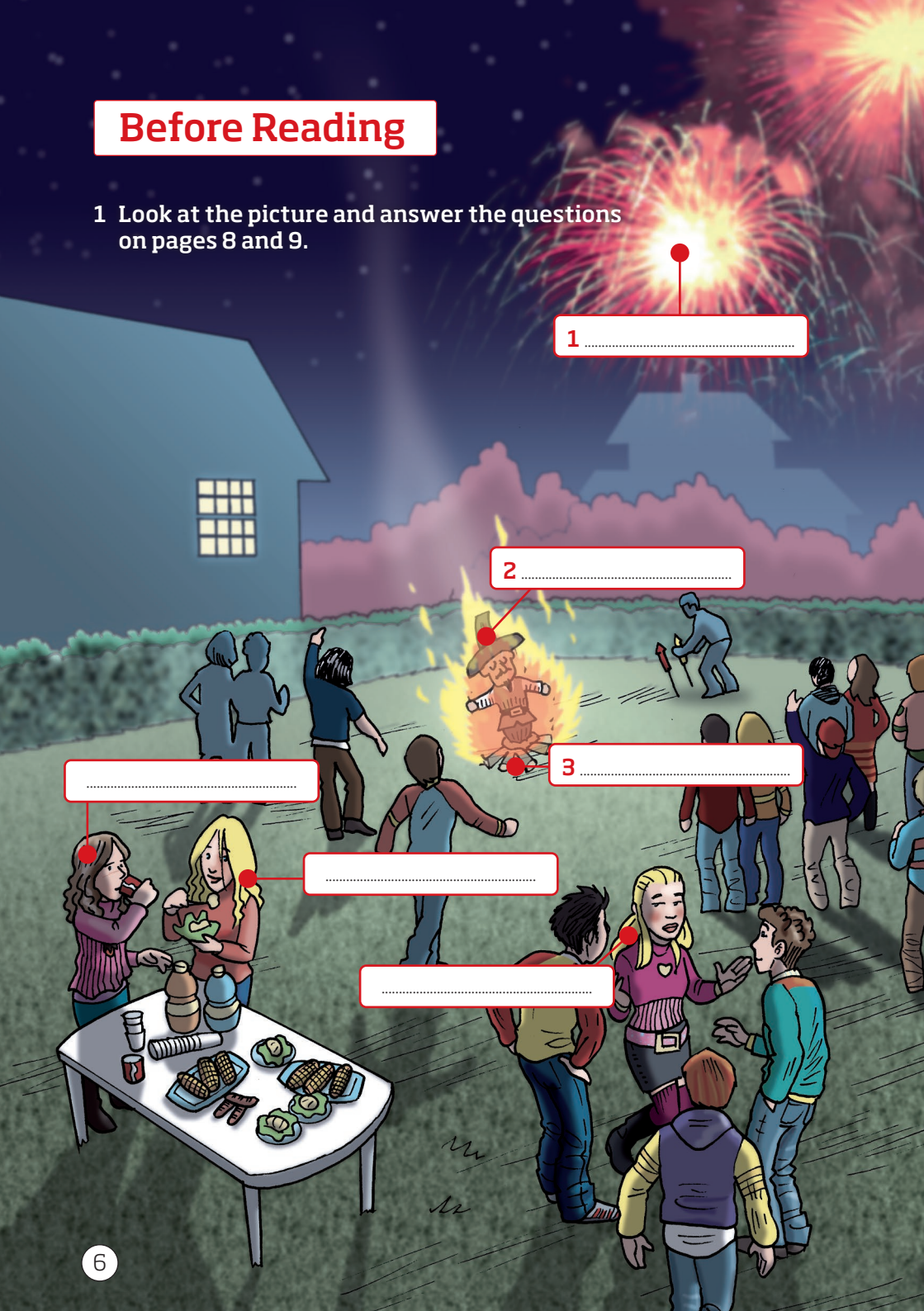
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Before Reading

1 Look at the picture and answer the questions on pages 8 and 9.



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 Ricky's world changed completely on a cold Friday afternoon in November.

It was only five to four, but it was already getting dark. Ricky was walking home from school, his bag hanging over his shoulder. He wasn't listening to his MP3 or chatting with friends. He was alone and he was doing calculations in his head – maths calculations. He was a bit of a mathematical genius and he loved solving problems. He didn't need a calculator or a computer. He could do them in his head.

But then he saw someone looking up and down the street. She seemed confused. But when she saw Ricky, she called out. And from that moment on, his life would never be the same again.





Ricky's week started normally enough.

On Monday morning at breakfast time, while he was trying to read his computer games magazines, he had to listen to his sisters' favourite

topic of conversation – boys.

‘You can’t like Steve, he’s so ordinary,’ said Sonia.

‘He’s really good-looking,’ said Jade.

‘Good-looking? No, Hassan’s good-looking...’

‘No way!’

‘And Ryan,’ continued Sonia, ‘and Tyler and Sam.’

‘Yes, Sam has lovely hair,’ agreed Jade. ‘And Tyler wears cool clothes.’

‘Yeah, and Ryan’s a good dancer,’ added Sonia. ‘And not many boys can dance!’

They started laughing.

‘You should learn to dance, Ricky,’ said Jade. ‘Then you might get a girlfriend.’

Ricky blushed. And then they laughed some more.

On Tuesday, Ricky spent the whole evening in his room working at his computer. On Tuesday, his class always had maths homework and Ricky always helped out his schoolmates[•] with their problems. They sent him emails asking him for advice[•], and he emailed them back with suggestions and explanations. He never actually[•] told them the answers – Ricky was too honest for that – but he guided them in the right direction to find the solutions for themselves. He didn't charge[•] for the service, either, although Jack often pointed out[•], 'You could make a lot of money doing this.' But Ricky enjoyed helping his friends.



Ricky was always a bit of a hero on Wednesdays. His friends went up to him and thanked him for his help with their homework.

‘Hey, Ricky, you were brilliant!’ said Josh.

‘Thanks, man,’ said Dan.

‘You’re another Einstein!’ said Alex.

Ricky saw Jack kicking a ball around the school yard.

‘Hi, Jack,’ Ricky said.

Jack looked at him and nodded.

‘Have you done your maths homework?’ Ricky asked.

Jack shook his head.

‘Do you want me to take a look?’

Jack didn’t have a computer at home, and he didn’t like to ask for anything. Jack nodded and smiled.

‘OK. We’ve got ten minutes!’



Teachers liked Ricky, too, especially the maths and science ones. Whenever they asked questions, Ricky always seemed to know the answers.

When Mr Edwards asked a question like, ‘What happens when we add sulphuric acid to...?’ most of the class didn’t listen to the end of the sentence. It was either too boring, or too difficult to follow. Ricky was different. He knew the answer even before Mr Edwards finished.

And when Ms Cooke wrote “ $4x + 2(y - z) = ?$ ” Ricky knew what number “x” represented. He knew what “y” was. He even understood what “z” meant. Alex was right. Ricky really was a genius!





Friday was a cold and miserable day. But everyone was happy as the school bell rang and it was time to go home. The weekend started now!

Ricky heard brief bits of conversation as he walked across the playground. David was arranging to see Jack on Saturday afternoon. Josh was talking quietly to Anna. And Holly was talking to Zadie and Grace.

‘What are you doing at the weekend, Holly?’ asked Grace.

‘Oh, well, it’s going to be fun. We’ve got relatives staying and...’

But Ricky didn’t hear what Holly was going to do. As he got to the gates, Dan and Alex called out, ‘See you, Ricky!’

‘Bye,’ said Ricky, and set off home.

Ricky turned up the collar of his blazer. It was cold and damp and it was already getting dark. He was walking home alone. It was strange, Ricky was popular with the boys in his class, but he wasn’t close friends with any of them. And although he was good-looking, and girls sometimes whispered things about him and giggled, he didn’t hang out with them either. He was happy with his own company. He had his own website; he invented computer games; and he composed music on his PC. He also enjoyed doing calculations in his head. Which was what he was doing at 15:55 when he saw a girl standing in the road ahead of him.

She was about the same age as Ricky with long blonde hair.



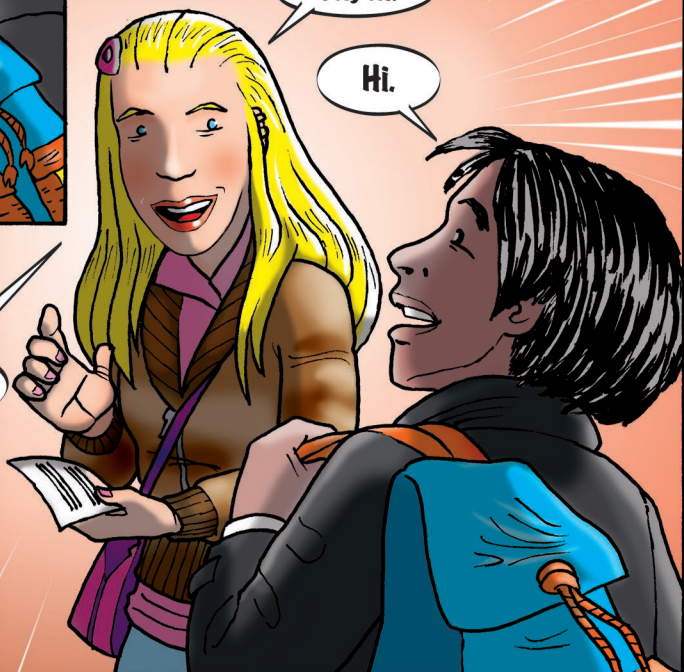
When she saw him, she smiled.



Oh, hi.

Hi.

Can you help me?
I think I'm lost.



You're American, aren't you?

How did you guess?

Er ... it was your accent.

Hey, I was only kidding.
Yeah, I'm from California.

