



THINKING

Consider, ponder, wonder!

Do you know what I dislike most in the whole world?

The wasting of time. Mine specifically.

I figured this out today – as soon as I realized Mr King was making us draw dens for the rest of the afternoon. *Dens and shelters?* Sir, please. It wasn't that it was a *bad* activity. It was fun, educational and practical – everything I enjoy. It just wasn't a two-hour thing. It's a five-minute filler, at best.

Listen, I like Mr King – really, I do. I pride myself on seeing the very best in everyone. But, I have to admit, this made me wonder about him. He's been here at Larch Hill Primary forever – even in the dark days, before the internet. He taught my mum too, and, well, she's getting kind of old.

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I reckon Mr King's over his job. He must be. Wouldn't you be? Imagine sitting at the same coffee-stained desk, staring at the same dusty screen, setting the same simple tasks for most of your samey life? Sad. It could never – will never – be me. I'm going to get out there, get things done and make change – that much I promise.

Mr King tapped noisily at his keys, squinting through the thumb-smudged lenses in his thick tortoiseshell glasses. Occasionally, he'd stop typing and rub his balding head, polishing it, perhaps hoping a genie would pop out and grant him three wishes. If one did appear – and anything is possible; I don't dismiss the supernatural because who *really* knows – I'd step right up to that spirit and request relevant, challenging schoolwork, and then world peace. Mr King could keep the last wish. That's only fair.

I leaned back in my chair to look at the clock. This one in our classroom is weird. It doesn't tick and I don't like that. The steel second hand just spins silently, yet time never moves fast enough.

It just drags.

I decided I'd change that clock. Yes. I'd fundraise and swap it for something more suitable. Maybe a sponsored silence? I think our class would love that

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because it's easy, and they can be lazy sometimes. If they didn't want to raise funds, well, I'd just bring in the clock from my kitchen.

That clock would hopefully speed everything up, making the time spent here at school more efficient. Imagine if Year Six could be done and dusted in three months, instead of taking a whole school year? How brilliant would that be?

I'd have time for better, more important things – my other projects and plans – *and* I'd get to university way ahead of schedule. Just last week, I ranked my top ten choices and ordered their prospectuses – that's their booklets, basically. Four have arrived in the post already. I could've been looking through them on this wasted Wednesday afternoon – considering subjects to study, ranking all the famous, important people who attended, making up my mind – but no, instead I was here, drawing dens and shelters.

Mr King – really?

It was three fifteen now, according to the annoying clock, so a full five minutes to go. The afternoon was over and absolutely nothing remarkable had been achieved.

I picked up my pencil and looked over my work, thinking of quick ways I could improve it, but,

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honestly, I couldn't. It was finished and had been for an hour.

My friends and neighbours, at school and at home – we sit together and live close by – were still going. Wesley, my oldest friend, had pushed his bottle-green sleeves up over his brown elbows. They poked left and right as he slid and shifted his piece of paper over the desk to colour his design, making sure the shading and shadows were just right. This task was very Wesley. He's great at art and designing things – talents he gets from his mum, Ella. Ella's always creating and making interesting things for people in our close to look at and play with. She's been having a bit of a break recently, though, because she hasn't been feeling too well. Plus, it's November now, so it's getting too cold to be outside all the time. I stared at Wesley, who was concentrating very hard. I could tell because he was squinting and his tongue was sticking out a bit, and I've known him forever. Well, since we were five.

Margot, my newest friend, was focused, too. She sat with her back ruler-straight in her seat. Her head was tilted towards her left shoulder, and her dark-brown plaited pigtail grazed it. She wasn't drawing – that wasn't Margot's strongest skill. Honestly, she wouldn't mind me saying that – she agrees with me

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on lots of things; it's why we get on well. Margot was writing – adding so many notes to the page that her tiny sketch was surrounded and swamped by her words. Since Margot and her dad, Michael, moved to Luton from London at the start of September, Wesley and I have noticed she's always noting things down – so much so that Wesley doesn't trust her and thinks she's a spy. I'm pretty sure she's not. She just wants to be a writer – she doesn't know which kind yet. In any case, it's good she's practising now, because she'll only get better, surely.

I sighed and leaned over my work. Margot and Wesley were calm and content, and I just wasn't. I rarely am. 'This is unacceptable,' I muttered. I spun my sheet round to share my work. I jabbed at my drawing. '*This* is something the Year Ones do on a rainy, wet-play day.'

Wesley glanced over at my work. 'Nah, it's not – and it looks good, Josie. You've got a solid structure there, and nice work on your fabric cover. I'd stay in that den, no problem. Relax. It's decent.'

'I don't need to relax, I'm not tense, and that wasn't my *actual* point,' I replied. 'It *should* be decent. This is Year Six. Six! Not One. At this point, in the middle of the autumn term, we should be way past this. Why are we sketching? I want to be stretched!'

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‘Stretched?’ asked Margot, putting down her pencil. ‘What, like in yoga?’ She raised both of her arms above her head to demonstrate. ‘We had to do that at my old school. In assembly every morning and –’

‘Nah, she doesn’t mean yoga,’ said Wesley, cutting in. ‘Josie wants more work. She simps for school, big time.’

‘No, I don’t! I just think this task could have more value.’ I nibbled the end of my pencil, then drummed it against my lip. ‘I’m going to talk to Mr King.’

I dropped my pencil, pushed my chair away from the table and stood up.

‘Oh no, don’t! Don’t!’ pleaded Wesley, pulling at the sleeve of my cardigan with both of his hands. ‘Not again! The bell’s about to go any second – don’t ruin the day for everyone. Nobody wants homework!’

‘I’m not asking for any and I’m not ruining anything. I’m helping,’ I said, pushing his palms away. ‘You’ll appreciate this one day, wait and see.’

‘I totally won’t,’ said Wesley, leaning back in his chair. ‘Never will. Some of us have lives – things to do outside of school, you know?’

‘*Exactly!*’ I said, throwing my arms in the air. ‘That’s exactly why the time we spend here should be worth it.’

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Margot's head spun between Wesley and me.

'I-I think you're right, actually,' said Margot, standing up. 'Come on, Jo. I'll go with you!'

'Tragic,' said Wesley, narrowing his eyes. 'You're both such disrespectful suck-ups, I swear. Mr King will make you regret this.'