

**NISHA'S LONG BRAIDS**



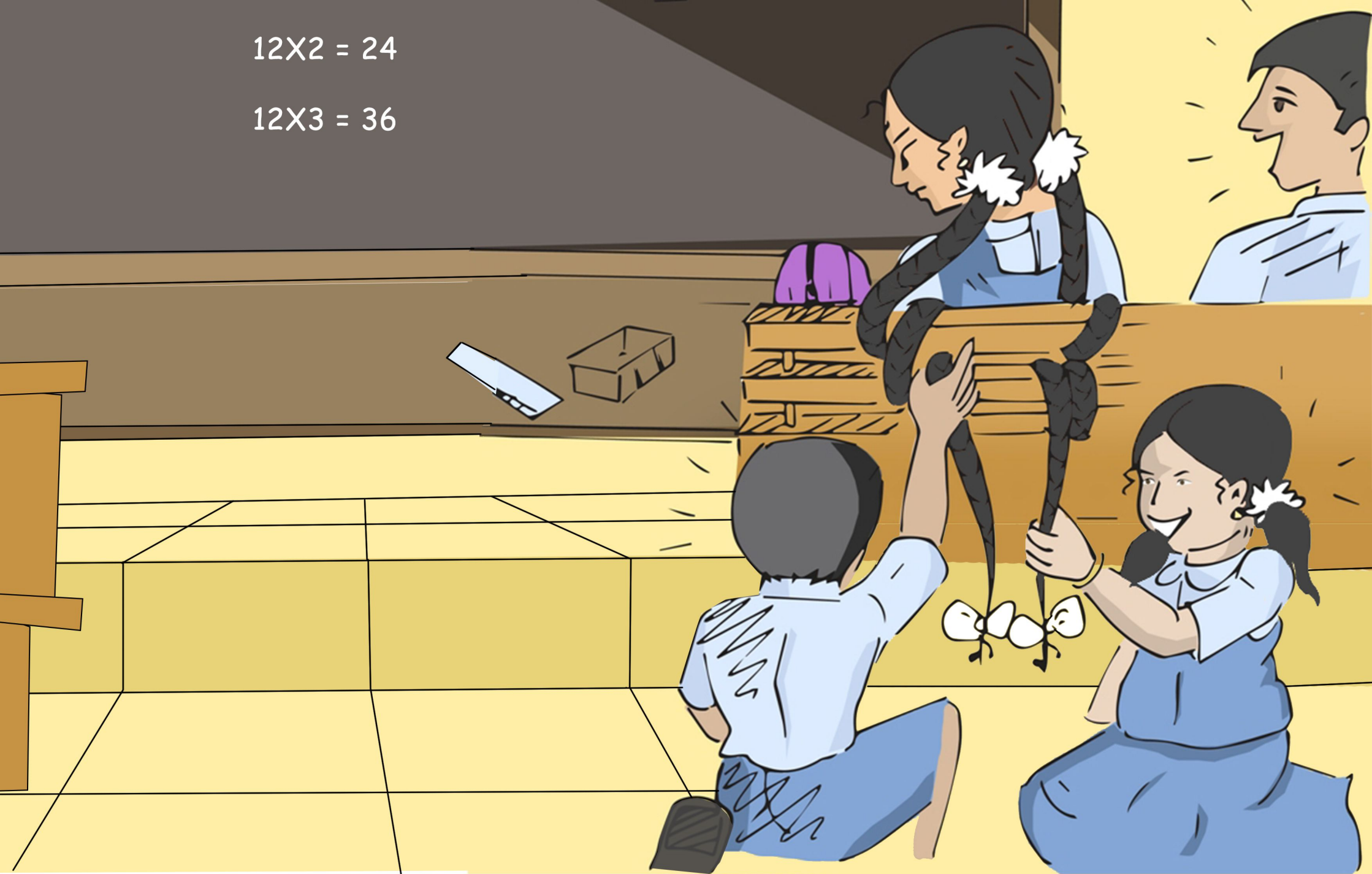
Nisha was new at school. She had long hair that was oiled and made into braids that hung down to her knees. Some children made fun of her.



"Here comes Nisha with two tails" they sang.

$$12 \times 2 = 24$$

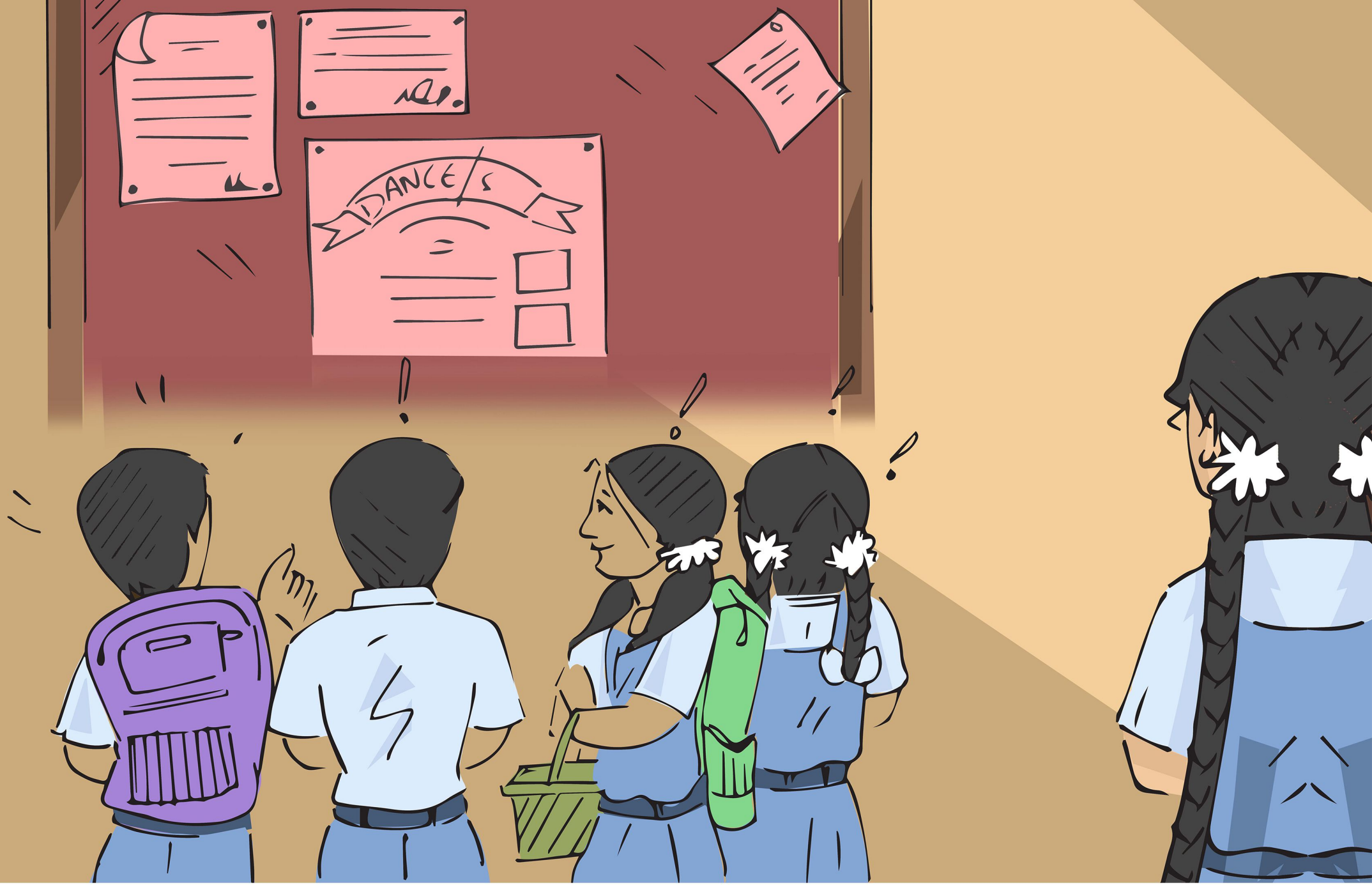
$$12 \times 3 = 36$$



Two of them even tied her braids to her chair during the math class and Nisha was in tears when she found that she could not get off her chair at break time.



And so, Nisha became quieter and quieter and hardly spoke to anyone at school. She usually ate her lunch alone, in a faraway corner of the playground where not many children went to play.

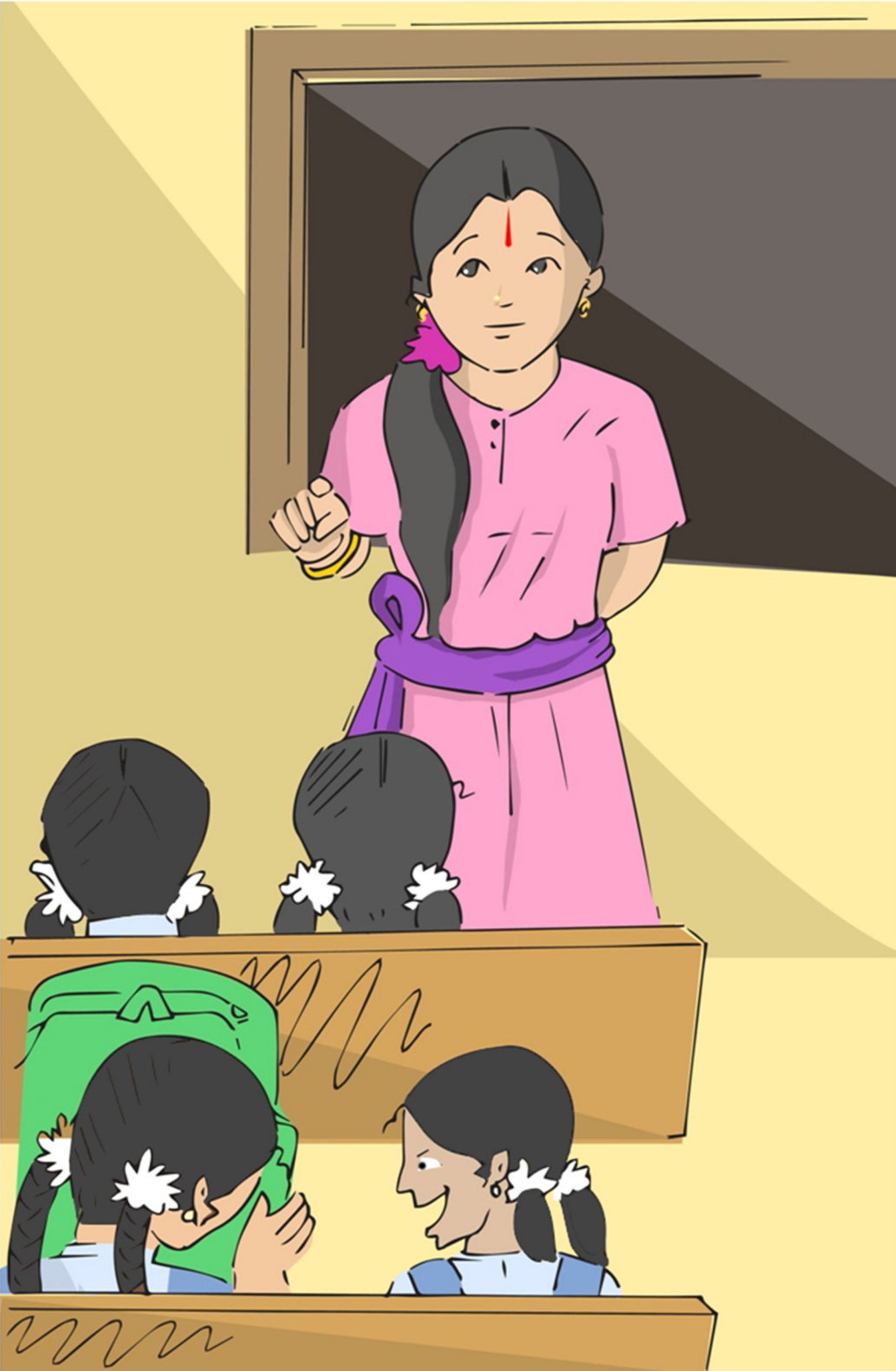


One day, there was much excitement at school as preparations for the school concert were due to start. The main attraction of the concert was to be a dance drama and many children were hoping to get a role in it.



"Hey Nisha, may be you can be some kind of weird tree...tie your braids with green ribbon and let them hang down may be... hahahahaha", teased one child.

"Well, you aren't even going to get to sing, that's for sure...considering your funny accent when you talk," said another one disdainfully.



"So, when the dance teacher came into the school hall to begin selecting children to sing and dance in the dance drama, Nisha sank into her chair, trying to make herself as invisible as possible. "I wish I were anywhere but here," she thought. "I wish I didn't have this horrible long hair...why won't Amma let me cut it off so that I can look like the others? But Amma keeps saying that I don't need to be exactly like everyone else...and that different is beautiful! Amma just does not understand...!"





Suddenly she heard the teacher's voice say: "What about that new girl? Do you sing?" To her horror, the teacher was looking at her. "No, no, not me," she said, not wanting to speak further lest everyone laugh at her accent again.



"Hmmm...what beautiful long hair," said the teacher.

"Dancers often have long hair like your's... I wonder if you dance...?"

"A li-little," stammered Nisha.

"Well, why didn't you raise your hand when I asked at first," said the teacher, surprised. "Come forward and show me what you can do."



Very nervously and hesitantly, Nisha then went to the front of the hall, amidst some jeering and laughter from her classmates. She then began to dance to the music the teacher played. After the first few faltering steps, Nisha forgot her fear, her classmates' teasing, her long braids and her funny accent. She just danced...and there was stunned silence in the hall, as she performed some of the most difficult Bharatnatyam pieces. The teacher was amazed at such talent and gave her the lead role in the dance drama.



As for her classmates, those who had teased her about her hair and accent, they came and congratulated her and apologized too. "Hey, Nisha, congratulations on getting the lead role! You really deserve it...you are a fabulous dancer," said one bully. "And we are sorry we laughed at you...we should not have hurt you so. Please let me make it up to you...let's go to the canteen and get some ice-cream," said another of the bullies.



When Nisha told her mother that evening all that had happened at school, her mother said "I told you...different is beautiful. What's the fun in everyone looking and being the same? So boring! We don't have to change ourselves to look and be like others...everyone is unique in how they look, and in the things they do...and that's why each individual is special."



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Community Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service Project,  
Department of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry,  
National Institute of Mental Health & Neurosciences (NIMHANS)  
(Institute of National Importance)  
Hosur Road, Bengaluru - 560029

Website: [www.nimhans.ac.in](http://www.nimhans.ac.in)  
Email: [capnimhans@gmail.com](mailto:capnimhans@gmail.com)

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