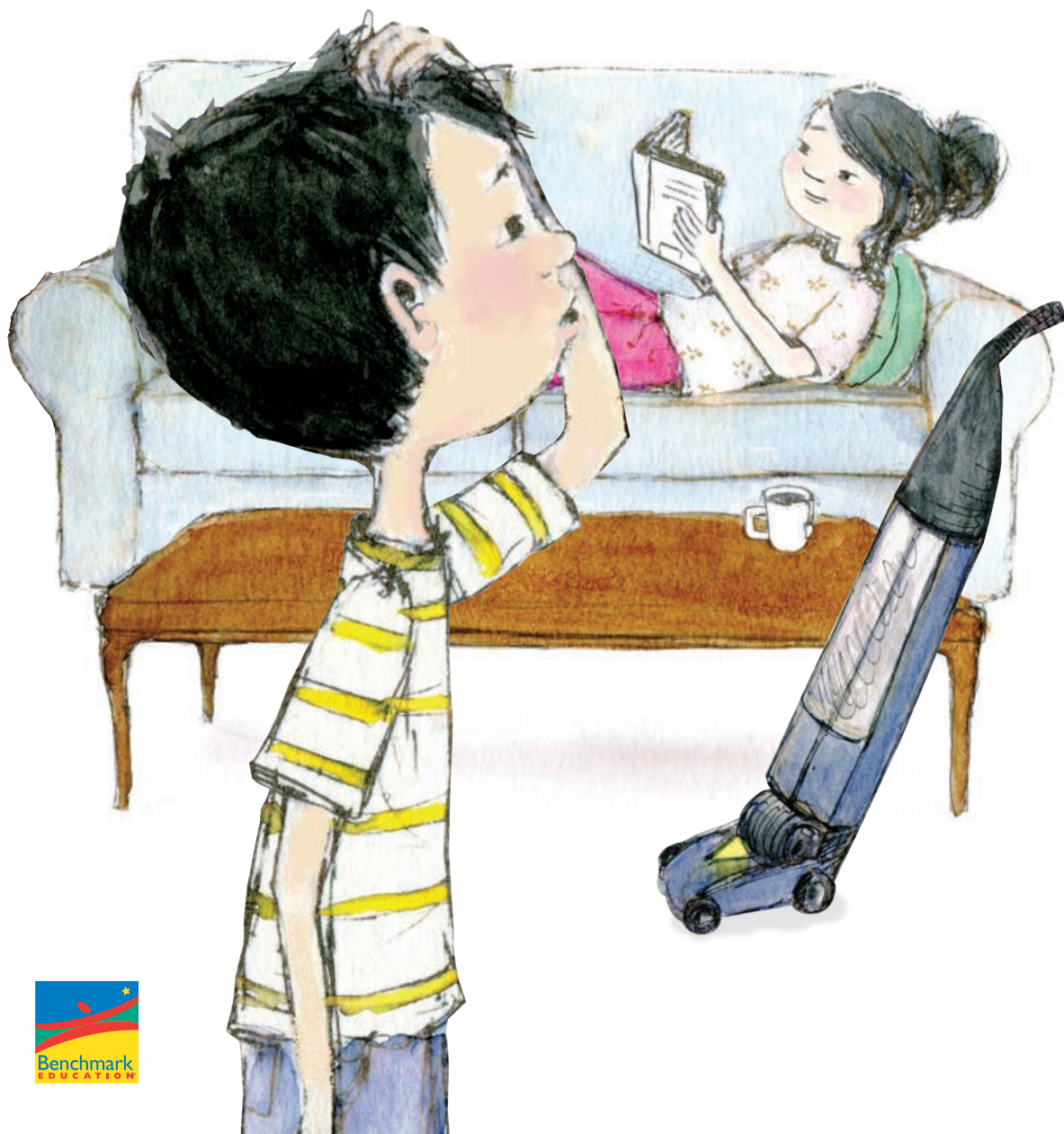


# Mom on **STRIKE!**

by Greg Leitich Smith • illustrated by Laura Bobbiesi

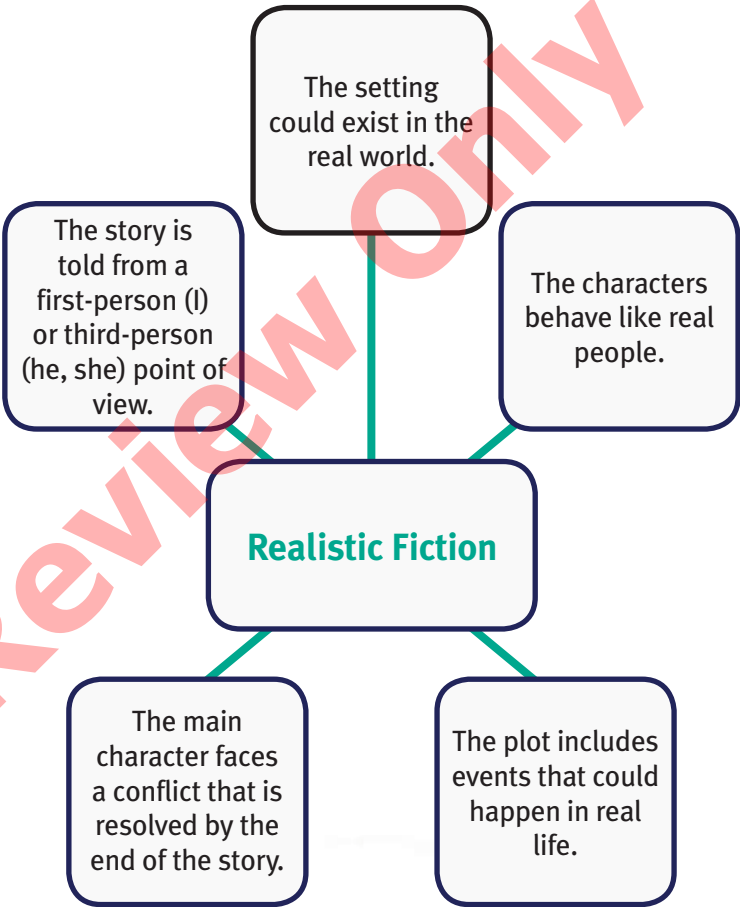


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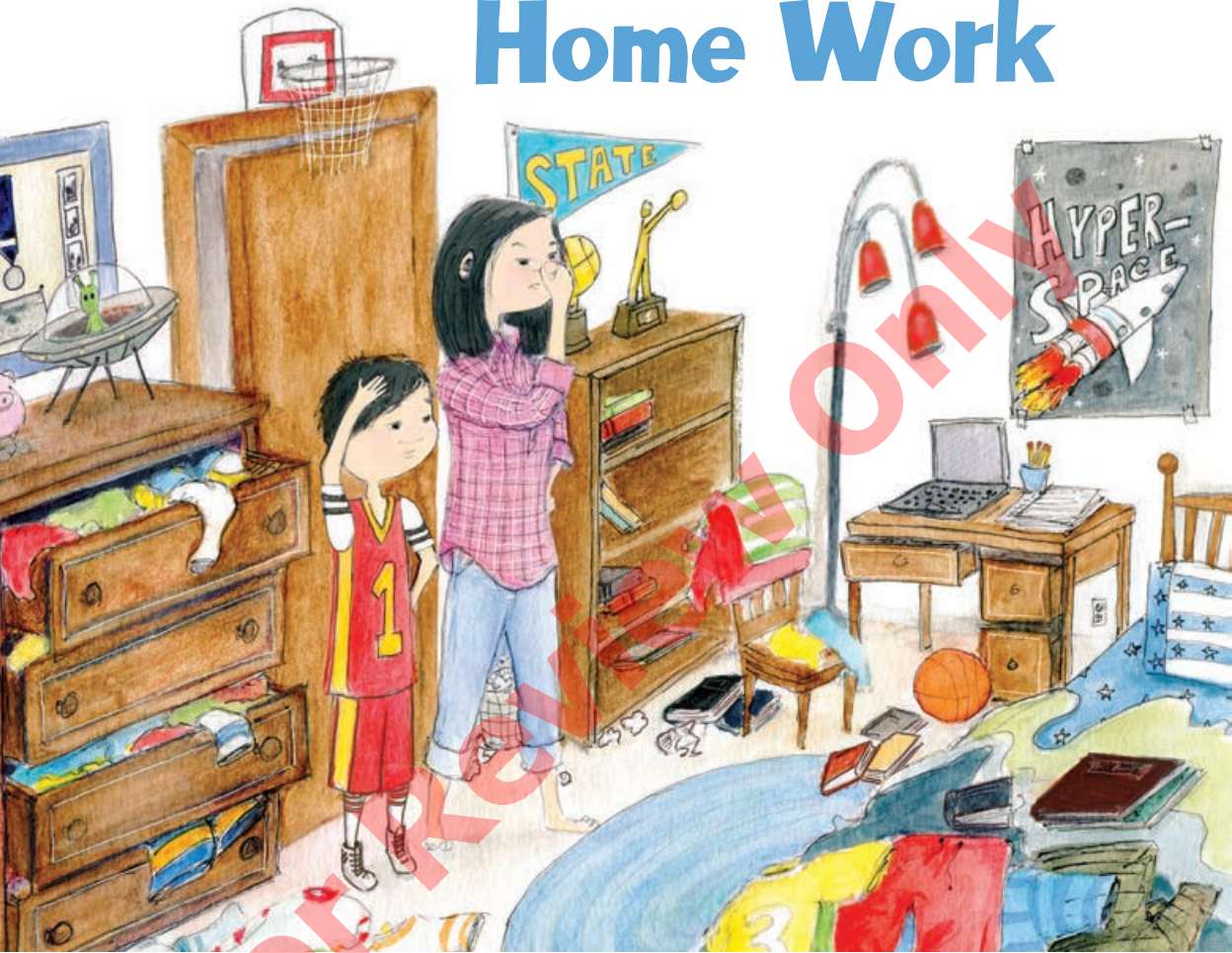
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# Homework and Home Work



“Clay Tanaka, you really need to tell me in advance if Mrs. Gibbs can’t drive you home from basketball practice,” Mom said as she parked the car in the family’s garage.

“Sorry,” Clay said robotically.

Mom closed the garage door and turned to Clay. She looked at him intently. “You can’t just text me right before school ends. What if I had a meeting and I couldn’t leave work?”

Clay shrugged. What was the big deal? After all, he had texted Mom as soon as school ended to let her know that Mrs. Gibbs couldn't drive carpool today. That was a good hour's notice.

As they entered the kitchen from the garage, Mom asked, "Did you clean your room this morning, as you said you were going to?"

"Yeah," Clay replied.

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"Show me," Mom ruffled his hair affectionately.

Mom led the way to his bedroom on the second floor, and opened the door. The floor was cluttered with the science fiction and fantasy novels that Clay loved to read. Only a few were stacked in the bookcase that Mama had built to hold them. Dresser drawers were half open, dirty clothes were tossed into piles around the room, and there was a slightly musty odor.

"This is clean?"

"Yeah ..." Clay's voice trailed off. "Looks fine to me ..."

Mom pinched her nose from the smell. "I want you to clean your room before you watch the basketball game tonight."

"But Mom! The NCAA basketball tournament is in full swing. I can't miss it!" Clay said. He had been glued to the coverage all month.

Mom paused as if to say something else, but then just shook her head in disappointment and went downstairs.

"What's for dinner?" Clay called.

"Sushi!" she answered. "While Mama's in Singapore, I figure we may as well get our fill since she's allergic to fish."



Clay started to clean; he cleared all the papers that were on top of his desk by pushing them onto the floor. He was making good progress for a few minutes when his phone rang.

“Hey Bryce,” Clay answered. “Did I leave something at practice?”

“Can we just talk about how State should win the game tonight?” Bryce said. “They have the best point guard in their league!”

“Point guard?” Clay said. “They have the best forward. Did you see the rebound he got last week? It won the game!”

“Clay! Dinner!” Mom called from the kitchen.

Clay jumped. He’d totally lost track of time! Mom couldn’t see his room looking like this! Clay hung up the phone and scooped up the dirty clothes that were scattered on the floor and on his bed. His heart was racing. There was no time for the hamper. He carried the pile downstairs, dropping a couple of socks and at least one pair of shorts on the way. He dropped the dirty clothes all over the laundry room floor.

“I cleaned my room!” Clay announced.

“Did you finish your homework?” Mom called.

Clay walked into the kitchen just as she was placing sushi on the table.

“Yeah,” Clay answered as he scarfed down a *futomaki* roll, a *tekamaki* roll, and a couple of pieces of salmon.

“Chew your food. Don’t choke,” Mom said.

Clay managed to grab a few more pieces, and sprang up from his seat.

“You need to put your dishes into the dishwasher,” Mom said.

“Game’s about to start. I’m going to miss tip-off,” Clay muttered. He quickly shoved his plates and chopsticks into the dishwasher.

Clay was glued to the basketball game. He didn’t notice when the clanking of dishes and the sound of water from the kitchen had stopped. But he definitely noticed when the vacuum cleaner went on.

As Mom wheeled the vacuum into the family room, he grabbed the remote and turned the volume all the way up.

“Mom! You’re blocking the screen!” Clay complained. Mom sighed and took the vacuum upstairs.



“Yes!” Clay jumped to his feet and cheered as the half-time buzzer sounded. State was winning by four points! That’s when he noticed Mom staring at him and tapping her fingers at the bottom of the stairs.

“Is there anything else to eat?” Clay asked.

Mom didn’t say anything. Her face was pinched.

“What?” he asked.

“Come with me,” she said. She pointed up the stairs.

“Now what did I do?” Clay asked, looking puzzled.

Mom led the way up to his bedroom and opened the door. The bed was still unmade. Drawers were still half open. And his sci-fi novels were still scattered all over the floor.

“I cleaned up the laundry,” Clay smiled charmingly.

“Nice try. You took it downstairs and dumped it in a pile on the floor for me to deal with,” Mom said with a laugh. It was not a happy laugh.

Mom picked up one of the books off the floor and began to read its back cover.

“I can’t remember when I last had time to read a book for fun,” Mom said. “Even at the law firm, when I worked nonstop negotiating labor contracts, I still found time.” Mom tossed the book on the bed, then sat down. “One small boy should not take up more time than an entire labor union.”

Mom paused for a minute. Then she continued, “So ... starting tomorrow, there are going to be changes around here.”

Mom grabbed one of the pieces of notebook paper Clay had thrown onto the floor. Then she started writing very fast.

“What do you mean?” Clay asked, suddenly nervous.

“I am no longer going to tell you to do anything. You are going to be responsible for yourself,” Mom said.

“Umm, okay,” he answered. This didn’t sound too bad.

“This means you will be responsible for getting yourself to school and for preparing all your meals,” she said.

“Wait, what?”

“As of right now,” Mom said, handing him the sheet of paper, “I am on strike. Here is a list of what you need to do this week. Consider it your *home work*.”

Clay grabbed the piece of paper. It read:

1. Go to school.
2. Prepare your breakfast, lunch, and dinner.
3. Clean up your room, and any messes you make.
4. Do your laundry.

“But ...” Clay couldn’t tell if his mom was serious.

“You’ve seen me doing these things a million times. But if you have any questions, there’s always the Internet.” She stood up. “Enjoy the rest of the game! Go State!”





# Mom Is on Strike?



When Clay went down to breakfast the next morning, he found Mom leaning against the counter, reading from her smartphone, and drinking a cup of coffee.

Usually, Clay would have found a bowl of cereal with some fruit in it and a glass of milk sitting on the table, for his breakfast. There was nothing. He hadn't quite thought she'd been serious.

“You’re on strike? Really?”

Mom took a slow sip of her coffee before responding.

“You’d better hurry,” Mom said. “You’ve got to eat something, get your things together, and get to school. You don’t have much time.”

Then Mom walked into the living room and sat down on the couch, still reading from her phone.

Clay looked at the clock, not quite sure if she was serious. He poured milk over some cereal, then chugged down a glass of orange juice. When he was done, his mother hadn’t moved.

Now Clay began to think that this strike thing was more than just a joke. He couldn’t find the list she had made for him, but in his mind he began to run through all the stuff he needed for the school day: books, homework that he had finished after the game the night before, basketball uniform.

“Mom!” he shouted as he sprang from the table. “Where’s my basketball uniform?”

“Probably the same place you saw it last,” Mom answered. That would be the pile of clothes he’d dumped on the laundry floor the night before. Clay flung open the laundry room door and picked through the pile until he found the matching scarlet shorts and shirt. They were still wrinkled and slightly damp from basketball practice. He grabbed them and rushed into the living room.

“You didn’t wash these last night?”

“I usually do laundry in the morning before you get up,” Mom replied. Her eyes didn’t leave the smartphone. “But today, I’m—”

“I get it,” Clay interrupted. “You’re on strike.”