

MOZART OR VOLLEYBALL?

TEXT BY DAVID MARTÍN DEL CAMPO

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DAVID MARTÍN DEL CAMPO (México, 1952) Studied Communications at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, where he studied cinematography. He has worked as a cultural journalist in different media. He has published more than 40 books (novels, chronicles, biographies). His novels include: *Las rojas son las carreteras*, 1976; *Isla de lobos*, 1986; *Dama de noche*, 1989; *Alas de Ángel* (awarded with the Premio Internacional Diana, 1990); *El año del fuego* (awarded Premio Nacional de Literatura IMPAC Monterrey, 1996); *Cielito lindo*, 2000; *El azul de Van Gogh*, 2003; *Las siete heridas del mar* (awarded Premio Mazatlán de Literatura, 2012); *La niña Frida*, 2017, and *Ahí viene el lobo*, 2023. He has also published books for children and young adults: *El tlacuache lunático*, 1989; *El hombre del Iztac* (awarded Premio Juan de la Cabada, 1995); *Zum-zum, la mosca*, 1999; *Tú no existes*, 2007; *Azul y buenas noches*, 2009; *Matías tiene cinco amigos*, 2018; *La historia del hielo*, 2022; *Obvio*, 2022, and *La rebelión de los felices*, 2023.

MOZART OR VOLLEYBALL?

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Mozart or volleyball?

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PRESENTATION

Mozart or volleyball? is a literary proposal of the colección **Árbol**, which the Instituto Nacional Electoral offers with the intention of disseminating, in a simple and entertaining way, topics that contribute to the strengthening of democratic values, while promoting the formation of analytical, critical, and participatory readers.

Today, many societies are characterized by their individualistic nature, which favors unhealthy competition among its members, failing to remember that we are social beings and are part of communities whose development requires the participation of all its members from childhood. For this reason, this publication aims to encourage children to reflect on the meaning of the common good: that which allows all people to harmoniously achieve different objectives that benefit them.

What does it mean to achieve a consensus of opinion? How is it built? Why is it important to consider contrary opinions and express our own without offending or discrediting others? This and much more can be explored through the narration offered by the author, set in a school community that must agree and make decisions for its own benefit.

The publication includes, as an appendix, the section “For Reflection and Dialogue”, so that adults, family members and teachers, can talk with young readers about the subject, listen to how they experience similar circumstances in their environment and remember that, when living in democracy it is important listening to others, learning to analyze reality, creating your own opinion, and respecting those of other people. We hope you enjoy it.

Mozart or volleyball?

She was sleeping. She was sleeping when something startled her out of her dreams. She tossed and turned in the sheets, pressed her pillow and knew, for sure, that she had woken up. What a drag to be snatched in the middle of the night from her precious rest, only to abandon her fantasies, to not quite remember that strange delirium and, on top of that, to wake up weeping.

Rebeca was almost twelve years old and now she needed a handkerchief to wipe her tears with something more than the sleeves of her pajamas. Should she go to her parents at that time to get some comfort? Or with her brother, Alberto, in the other room? And what would she tell him?

“I was dreaming –I can’t remember what–, then I woke up crying.”

Beto would grumble:

“Go back to sleep now, Rebe... it’s 3:00 in the morning! We must go to school in a few hours.”

And he would be right.

She tried to calm down. Then she remembered her holidays in Puerto Vallarta, that fortnight of sheer sun and fun. Now there was nothing left from those days: that swell, that swimming pool, those afternoons of volleyball matches on the beach. She tried to discern the time on the alarm clock, but the dark would not allow her to see anything but shadows. Shadows on shadows, and the voices echoed in her head again... the court, the auditorium, a beautiful orchard! Those were phrases and cries than came from every part of the school.

And all of that was because, on the hotel beach, Rebeca had revealed herself to be an exceptional finisher. She would leap at the last moment and, almost grazing the net, she’d hit





the ball with a tremendous shot that would leave the opposing team's players widely open-mouthed.

The court... well, that one had certainly been her request. A volleyball court could be built now that the school had been awarded –so surprisingly– with such a donation.

She then remembered Mr. Ledesma's words at the schoolyard. That had occurred the morning before, after the flag salute. The headmaster, mike in hand, shared a message.

“I have good news for you: the city council has decided to donate the 500-square-metre adjoining land to us, so that a complementary facility can be built there for the development of the students' sporting and artistic activities. And on top of that, we shall be allocated a cash fund to pay for the works.”

While some kids wondered what a cash fund was, others began to yell:

“A football pitch!”



“No, an auditorium!”

“A gym!”

And, as Rebeca recalled that cheering in the middle of the schoolyard, she finally fell asleep again.

Hours later, as she hurriedly ate breakfast, she remembered the tears that had dampened her pajamas. That had happened because of an argument with her friend Toño at recess time.

Antonio Talancón was one of the best students in the whole class: B in Language, A- in Healthy Life, and A+ in Arts. In fact, he was taking private lessons with a piano teacher and always carried a flute in his backpack. Sometimes he would isolate himself in a corner of the playground to practice *Yesterday* by the Beatles.

Not that Toño was a particularly special, sad, or sensitive boy. He was her same age and attended her same class. He was relaxed and funny at times, but his true thing was notes on a pentagram. That afternoon after school, he had said to her:



“You may say sports are very good for your health, Rebe, but arts are also very important in our lives. That’s why I think we’d rather have a school auditorium to organize a choir, a *rondalla* or a small student orchestra... A football pitch? You can have a little match on any street corner...!”

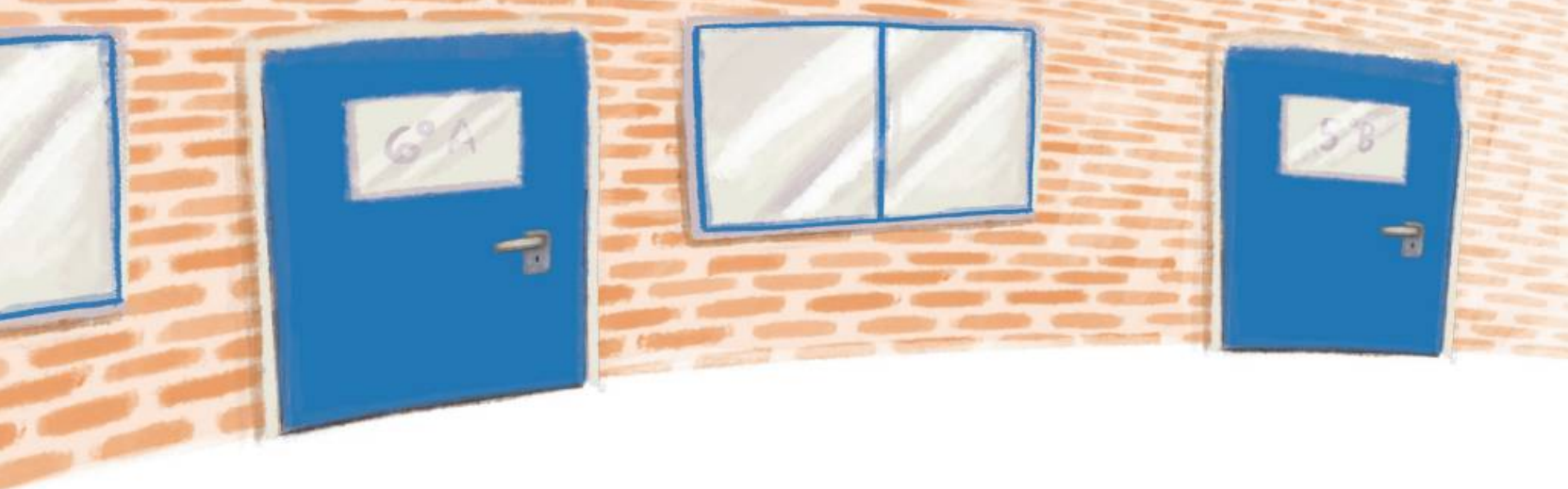
Then she had yelled horrible things at him:

“You’re a bore, that’s why you only like classical music! You’re a drag, a porcelain doll, an enemy of sports!”

Antonio didn’t answer a thing. He just sat down on the bench in the courtyard, took his flute out of his backpack and began to play a melody that sounded a little sad. That day, shortly before the first recess, Mr. Ledesma appeared in the classroom. He entered just like that, after knocking three times on the door.







“Good morning to everyone. Please don’t get up. You might imagine why I’m here.”

“Indeed,” said Mr. Gumaro Mendoza, the head teacher. “We have to designate the escort for the Flag Day celebration.”

“No, not exactly,” replied the headmaster apologetically. “I have come because we are conducting a survey –or a poll, as they now call it.”

“A survey?” insisted Mr. Mendoza.

“Yes, because the city council’s offer to develop that project on the land behind the school has caused a lot of concern. I mentioned it to you last Monday: it will be the work that we decide on.”

To take advantage of the opportunity, Mr. Mendoza stepped forward:

“Well, I think it would do us a lot of good to build a theatre for staging events. There we could salute our national flag as we do every Monday morning.”

“Very well, Mr. Mendoza,” said the headmaster, “but I would also like to know the students’ opinions. I have already visited the fifth-year classes; now it’s your turn to find out what you think about this situation.”

“And why not an Olympic-sized swimming pool?” said Carlitos Ibarrola. “It will help me learn to swim...”

“No, no!” said Ursula Benavides while raising her hand. “Tell them to build a doll museum. I have eight Barbies at home; I could lend them out.”

“No! A bowling alley!” yelled Nuncio, who sits at the back of the classroom. “My dad was his club’s champion last year...”

And so were the rest:

A baseball field, a cinema theatre, a skatepark, a roller coaster, an ice rink, a waterslide resort, a room for Scrabble contests...

Mr. Ledesma took note of all those suggestions. He carried a small notebook and a pencil, and grimaced as he listened to one proposal after another.

Then Rebeca realized she was about to miss her chance, so she stood up and exclaimed:

“No, no! We’d better have a volleyball court. Volleyball is the greatest sport ever,” she exaggerated.

“You mean football, don’t you?” corrected Fabricio.

“No, I said *volleyball*.” A professional court with a dome and staves, like the ones at the Olympic Games. Now if we have a limited budget, let it be a beach volleyball court, which is the most entertaining sport in the world.” Of course she was exaggerating again.







“And how do you know that, girl?” asked the headmaster.

Rebecca held her hands out to explain:

“During holidays, I practiced every day on Puerto Vallarta’s beach. I’m quite a finisher.”

“You’re quite *finished*,” scoffed Nuncio.

“Oh, you think you’re so smart, don’t you! But you totally stink at sports.”

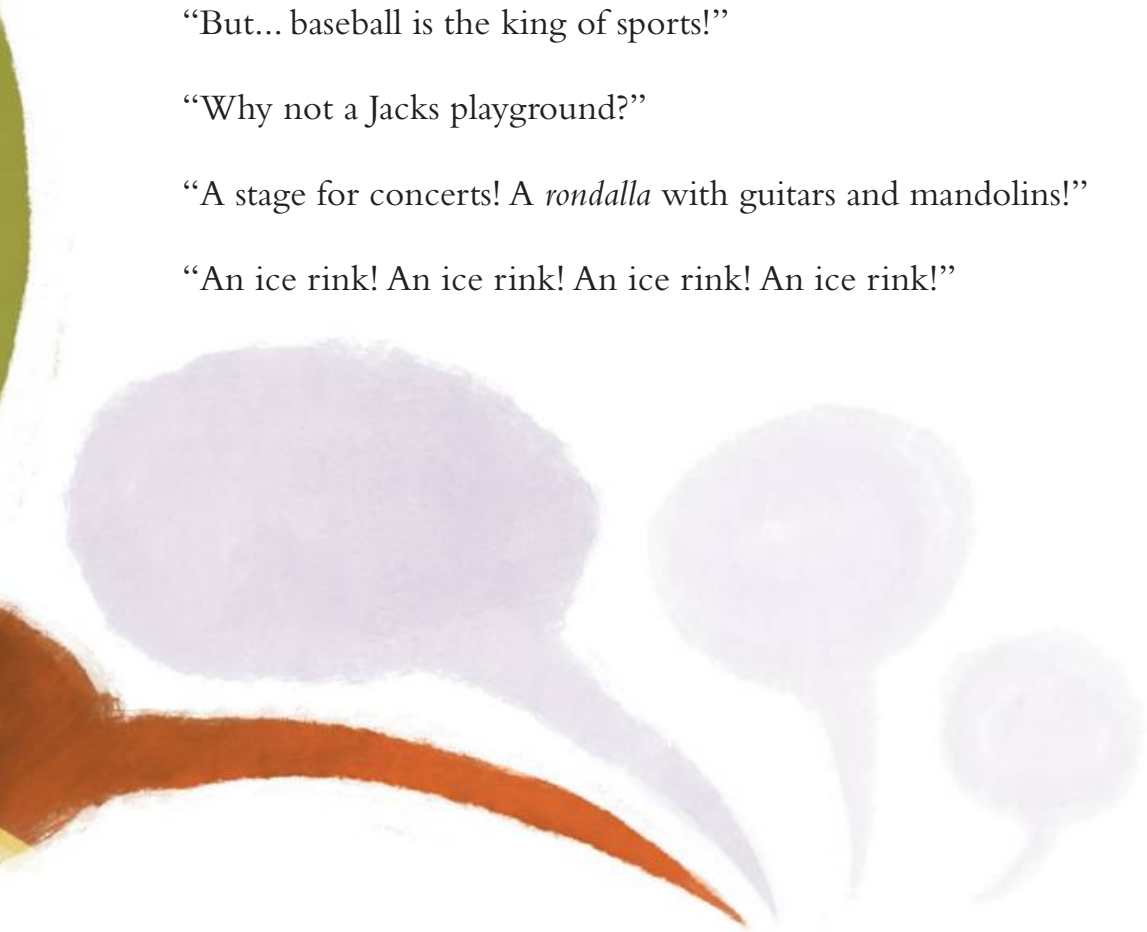
And then all the yelling began.

“But... baseball is the king of sports!”

“Why not a Jacks playground?”

“A stage for concerts! A *rondalla* with guitars and mandolins!”

“An ice rink! An ice rink! An ice rink! An ice rink!”





“A school auditorium, so we can invite Luis Miguel and Gloria Trevi to perform there!”

“A velodrome!”

“Videogame machines are the best tool to prepare ourselves for artificial intelligence!”

Then a series of harsh claps were heard: one, two, three... It was Mr. Ledesma, who was raising his voice:

“Ahem, ahem! Would you please calm down?”

Mr. Mendoza then seconded him:

“Quiet... quiet or face the consequences. You know: ten pages with the sentence ‘I must keep balance and harmony in all places and at all times.’ Be warned.”

Thus “peace” was made, but the conflict had not been resolved yet.



“Well,” concluded Mr. Ledesma. “I have already taken note of your concerns.”

“Excuse me, Sir,” said Mr. Mendoza. “It is just that this news has caused us a lot of concern. And everyone defends their own idea as if it were the ultimate.”

And on his way to the door, to carry on with the consultation in the other classrooms, the headmaster suddenly stopped. His attention was drawn to a small hand raised right in the middle of the room. It was Ana Zurita, the shyest person in the class.

“Yes, Anita?” Mr. Mendoza encouraged her. “Say what you have to say, before Mr. Ledesma leaves.”

The girl was cute and tiny, like a small cartoon character. She got up from her desk and took a breath to give herself courage to speak.

“What I think, Mr. Ledesma, is that, in addition to the theatre, auditorium, or gym they propose to build in the site, they should leave some space for a garden. An orchard, a little

park with trees and, perhaps, some crops: lettuce, carrots, strawberries. And rose and gladiola bushes. Something not too complicated, something we could learn from. Nature was here before us, the *homo sapiens*, and therefore we should respect it. That is my opinion, Mr. Ledesma. Thank you very much for your kind attention.”

There was silence, then some applause. Mr. Mendoza congratulated her and then everyone did until the headmaster of Instituto Libertad said goodbye.

Two days later, Rebeca bumped into her friend Toño in the queue at the small shop. At first, she didn't know what to say to him.

“Are you having a sandwich?” she asked (something had to be said).

“No, Rebe. I'm having a chocolate bar. That's the second thing in life that makes me the happiest,” he replied.

“You can live without chocolate. You can live without sandwiches. But can you live without gardens?” Rebecca couldn't stop thinking about Ana's unusual proposal.

“I owe you an apology,” she said to Toño.

“For the argument the other day?” asked the lad, smiling. “Oh, don't worry about it. Musical art, contrary to what some people think, is not only about joy and merriment. Music always has its problems... ‘Porcelain doll,’ that's what you called me the other day, isn't it?”

“I'm sorry.”

“I had never been called such a thing before.” Antonio shook his head. “I thought that was kind of funny and I even told my father, who then gave me a knock on the head. ‘Let's see if your little porcelain head doesn't break into pieces,’ he said to me mockingly.”



“It’s just that we’re very nervous about this project. Sports, arts, the environment... as if they were three political parties. They’re all just defending their own interests.”

“Well, yes, they are. At home, my brother Luis and I have discussed about the same thing. It is normal, I guess. You can’t always be right, although you have to know how to stand up for your ideas.” Toño was about to take his flute out of his rucksack, but he stopped. “Whatever happens, I think it’ll be better than keeping that land just there as a breeding ground for rats.”

Rebecca sighed. Has anyone at all understood the importance of a volleyball court? “I’ve heard Mr. Ledesma wants to hold a meeting for addressing that same issue,” she said, trying to make amends. “He wants some teachers or their representatives to attend, as well as the most outstanding students...”

“Ana Zurita will certainly go as our ambassador, I guess.”

“Oh, yes. We’ll have to see what comes out of that meeting. Let’s see who persuades who...”



“As always,” Toño arched his eyebrows. “Some ideas weigh in one way, some others in a different way; but all ideas weigh. That’s what I think.”

“Hey, Toño,” she didn’t seem to be paying any attention to him anymore, “may I ask you a question?”

“Yes, sure, Rebe. What is it?”

“You said that chocolate is the second thing that makes you the happiest. But, what’s the first one?”

Toño smiled again. He pointed to the South, where the disputed land was.

“An auditorium, a gym, an orchard... We could spend our lives arguing about that,” he took a step forward and asked the lady in the little shop for two chocolate bars. The first thing that makes me the happiest, Rebeca, is Mozart.”

“Mozart?”



“Wolfgang Amadeus were his first and middle names. Search for his music on Spotify –but I suppose you’ve already heard it.”

“Of course I have,” Rebeca defended herself. “Absolutely.”

“Then you know what I’m talking about. You must be happy in one way or another and share your happiness. Would you like a chocolate bar?” he asked while offering it to her.

The famous “school parliament” –as the headmaster called it– was hold that Friday at lunchtime. It was attended by several teachers (mostly female teachers, who were the majority in the school) and students representing their grade level. Mr. Mendoza sent little Ana Zurita –his favorite–, as well as Toño and Rebeca, there:

“I only ask you to defend your viewpoints with arguments and no yelling, and then we shall see what conclusion they come to.”

To their surprise, in the headmaster’s office were, apart from several teachers and a dozen students, two representatives of the town council who were sent there by the mayor. They would decide.

Once they were assembled, Mr. Ramiro Ledesma (that was his full name) greeted them while checking his watch:

“Good afternoon. I bid you welcome you to this cramped office, now that we are going to discuss the use and destination of the 500-square-metre land bordering this institute to the south, which has been kindly donated to us by the City Council, presided over by Mr. Hugo Torrentera, for whom I ask for a round of applause... in his absence.”

They clapped enthusiastically, until Mr. Ledesma warned them:

“Let me remind you a couple of things –three, actually. First, there are two jugs back there, one with lemonade and the other with hibiscus tea, for each attendant to refresh themselves





if need be. Second, please keep your voices low. No yelling or hand-waving. Everyone will have one or two turns to expose their ideas which, I beg you, will not take more than five minutes because, third, I remind you that the school shift ends at 2:30 p.m., and we all shall have to go for lunch, which is a very good thing. So, Miss Diana, can we hear your point of view?”

“What I think, if I may,” the teacher, who wore rimmed glasses, began her argumentation, “is that the site could be used for building kind of a school theatre, let’s say an auditorium, for ceremonies, concerts, poetry recitals, film shows, plays, and so on. An auditorium for around three hundred people, which is the full school enrolment. That’s my opinion if I may say so.”

Rebecca nudged Toño, who was sitting on the carpet next to her.

“One point for you,” she whispered.

The headmaster got up from the desk where he was presiding over the meeting, and commented:

“Very well, Miss Diana. Now, can we hear your argument, Mr. Apolonio?”

Mr. Apolonio was wearing in a T-shirt. He was the gym instructor, as well as the coach of the football and basketball teams that practiced in the playground.

“Well, in fact, I think this land could be used to build two football fields, three basketball courts, and even one baseball court and athletics track that goes all the way around. I’ve already measured it; it would have 250 meters of clay to spare. And both the poetry thing and the plays... well, I think we can leave them for a bit later. I believe there will be some room for that in the town hall theatre once those leaks are repaired. My motto has always been “a healthy mind in a healthy body”, because the healthier you are, the more mind you have, don’t you think so?”

There was some murmuring and throat clearing. Mr. Ledesma silenced all with a gesture. He rested his hands on the desk to announce:

“Now it’s the turn of Miss Janet García, a fifth-grade teacher who won last year’s Isaac Ochoterena Science Competition. What would you like to propose?”

“Well, I love science,” began Miss García. “Science is everything, or almost everything, and without science there would be no progress. Our students need to exercise in it; well, that’s what I think. On that expanse of land, a laboratory building could well be built. It would be an academy, the Julieta Fierro Academy, with Chemistry, Biology and, of course, Physics laboratories, plus a modest astronomical observatory on the roof (telescopes aren’t that expensive anymore). Everything would fit on three floors and our students could be like little Einsteins or little Madame Curie in the making. At least that’s what I think. Thank you very much.”

And so did the other teachers, with Mr. Ledesma constantly checking his wristwatch. A literary lyceum, a velodrome, a gallery of modern art, an Olympic diving pit, a painting and engraving workshop, a field hockey court, a concert hall with a radio station, five tennis

courts with bathrooms and dressing rooms... No one was quite moderating their proposals, and the headmaster kept taking more and more notes, to the alarmed faces of those sent by the town council.

Finally, the students' turn arrived, and with them, the most outlandish proposals.

“We must build an international field for marbles competitions,” said Daniel Muñúzurri. It would be the first in the world, and I am the undisputed champion at marbles. Even the president could come to inaugurate it. Don't you think it's a bright idea?”

“You are totally bonkers!” yelled Beatriz Arce. “That's the worst initiative I've ever heard in my life. Marbles... Nobody plays marbles anymore! We live in the era of the Internet and video games. You think like a child from the past century... marbles, ball-and-stick, spinning top. Those toys are history; don't be a fool. Today we have PlayStation! And that's what they should build: a huge video-game room.”





“Just listen to ‘Nerdy Bety’...” muttered Lalo Barberena. “Oh, calm down, you wunderkind! The ultimate of the ultimate is music. Rock music, heavy-metal —not reggaeton, though! Groups like The Strokes, Flying Colors, Marilyn Manson, Deep Purple, Shame, Black Pistol, even The Smashing Pumpkins... So, what we need is an outdoor punk stage. A Mexican-style Woodstock if you will. Long live rock & roll!”

“But... but...” Mr. Ledesma tried to step in the conversation.

“But what about sports, Lalo? Are those your grandparents’ ideas?... Elvis Presley, Janis Joplin, Mick Jagger... they’d rather deserve an Archaeology Museum, wouldn’t they?” Rebecca had jumped up to the middle of the classroom. “Volleyball is the most complete sport in the world. You run, you jump, you roll on the court, you coordinate with the team. Just imagine a volleyball court with a stave and a dome, if we can afford it; now if we can’t, we could have several beach volleyball courts, just like in Puerto Vallarta. Rock & roll is about to be a century old, Barberena. Couldn’t you think of anything worse?”

“But what are you saying, girl!” cried Skinny Hinojosa. “Both volleyball and football can indeed be played in the playground. What we need is a stage for the great theatre of the world. To stage comedies and tragedies by Molière, Shakespeare, Euripides, Anton Chekhov, Oscar Wilde, Bertolt Brecht; *Life is a Dream* by Calderón de la Barca; *Bohemian Lights* by Valle Inclán; even *Two-Scented Rose* by Emilio Carballido —the lad was inspired. Theatre is life, and life is nothing but theatre! Video games? Volleyball? Heavy rock? That’s utter nonsense!”

“Nobody is interested in drama, you fool! And those who pretend to do theatre think they’re going to become famous and appear on TV.”

“I believe I didn’t explain myself all that well” yelled Muñúzurri. “Marbles is the easiest game ever; anyone who doesn’t know how to play marbles... is a moron!”

“Morons are you and all your nerdiness!”

“You, pig-headed! Today’s latest thing is video games!”

Then Antonio Talancón stood up and started to speak among all the noise:

“Hey, listen to me! Listen to me, please! I think an auditorium with several rooms for practicing different instruments...”

“Anyone who handles a PlayStation controller can handle any drone, and who handles a drone... will rule the world!”

Antonio tried to carry on with his argument:

“...instruments such as flute, piano, guitar, saxophone, violin... in short. Thus, we could listen to music by Mozart, Vivaldi, or Agustín Lara. Something that allows us to better educate ourselves in music, an art without which human life would be non-human,” but nobody was listening to him anymore.

“Marbles!”

“Rock & roll!”



“A laboratory!”

Mr. Ledesma feared the meeting was getting out of hand. The worst thing had happened. Everyone was yelling and nobody was listening. He raised his hands again and cleared his throat several times.

“Ahem. Girls, boys, please!”

Silence had returned to the room. The guests looked at each other with astonishment, complicity, and antipathy. Each had their own ideas.

“I’m afraid we’re not reaching a consensus here. And if things remain like this, we shall lose the town council’s offer.”

“What? What? What?” shouts of protest were heard.



The heated discussion continued.

“Yes, guys. Look at yourselves: one disqualifies the other. You take offence at each other, insult each other, and don’t even try to understand each other’s proposition. ‘You don’t think like me, then you’re an idiot,’ would seem to be an appropriate motto for this meeting. So, I think we’d better call it a day, unless we can reach a consensus.”

“Unless we can reach what?” they all asked.

“Con-sen-sus, which means that we can listen to everyone’s voice and come to an agreement; that we take into account the different opinions and come to a proposal that we are all happy with.”

Then, the headmaster fell silent. A small voice in the middle of the room distracted him:

“Mr. Ledesma, may I have the floor?”

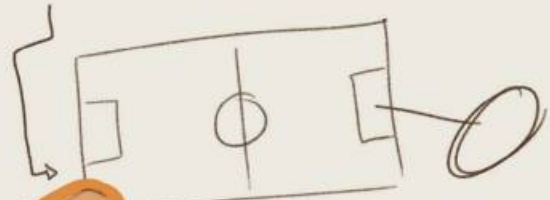
It was Ana Zurita, the fifth-year student. She was raising her hand shyly.

“Very well, girl. What is it about?” grunted the headmaster, holding back a grimace. “We are all ears.”

“What I think, Mr. Ledesma, is just what I told you the other day. And I think my humble proposal reconciles many of the ideas so... vehemently put forward here,” she allowed herself a smile.

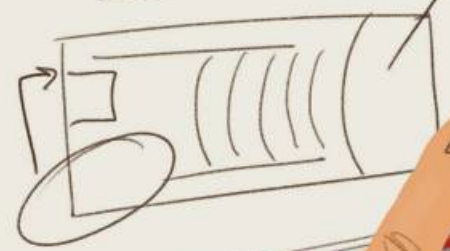
“I think we can indeed take advantage of the spaces on the

SPORTS COURTS
209 m² x \$\$\$



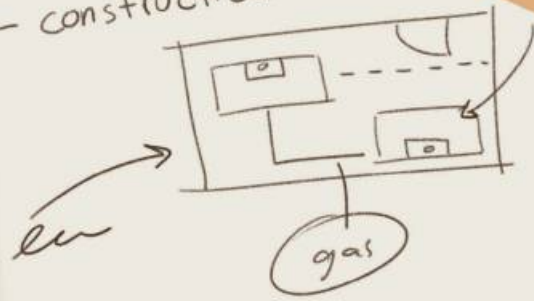
GRASS

AUDITORIUM



LABS

- equipment - material \$
- construcción \$



VELODROME





site that are being offered to us, by giving each proposal its fair ‘quota of reason’, so to speak. Allow me to explain myself. We should leave a section to cultivate a lovely garden, perhaps an orchard, where we could plant several trees to offer the freshness of their foliage, and of course, some hedges with rose bushes, carnations, and other similar flowers. That would add beauty and serenity to the school. I have already done the math. I think it is possible to build a modest sports center where we could play volleyball, indoor football, and basketball. Also, on the other half of the land, a medium-sized theatre could be built for organizing concerts and recitals, and where a student orchestra and choir can practice; and, of course, those interested in theatre could stage the plays they want right there. All these things are feasible. Remember they are about to demolish the old colonial cinema in the downtown area, so we could use its seats –there are 190, I have already counted them– as well as the bricks left from the demolition. I mean we can get all of this almost for free. Here I have a sketch I drew in my notebook,” and she showed it to them. “And yes, there’s enough room for everything, and everyone will be happy, and everyone will collaborate, because that’s what education in society is all about. Or am I wrong? Thank you very much for your time.”

There was a general murmur of approval.

“Hmm...”

“All right.”

“It doesn’t sound that bad at all.”

“That thing about the Colonial cinema,” interjected one of the town council representatives, “is true. It seems to me that all that material could certainly be put to good use before being turned into rubble. And the multi-purpose sports center... I think it’s a brilliant idea. I believe that it takes up and sums up the proposals of most of the people here. I’m sure Mayor Torrentera will be happy to approve this proposal which, it seems to me, in a way brings together everyone’s initiatives.”

“Except for the stadium for marbles competitions, right?” joked the headmaster.

“Not quite right,” said tiny Ana Zurita again. “You can perfectly play marbles under the trees. I’ve learnt that with my cousins.”

After offering her a nod of admiration, Mr. Ledesma announced:

“Very well. We seem to have settled the discussion on the most rational terms. And it seems we shall have a recreational complex that will raise the educational level of this school –and of the whole community, I would assume. That concludes our discussion, which has been most productive, and I thank you all for your cooperation. This is your home. Now let’s all have lunch; we’re getting quite hungry.”

There were general laughter, applause, and cheering. There were also hugs, greetings, and smiles. With good sense, everything was possible. Rebeca gave Toño a hug; he did likewise.

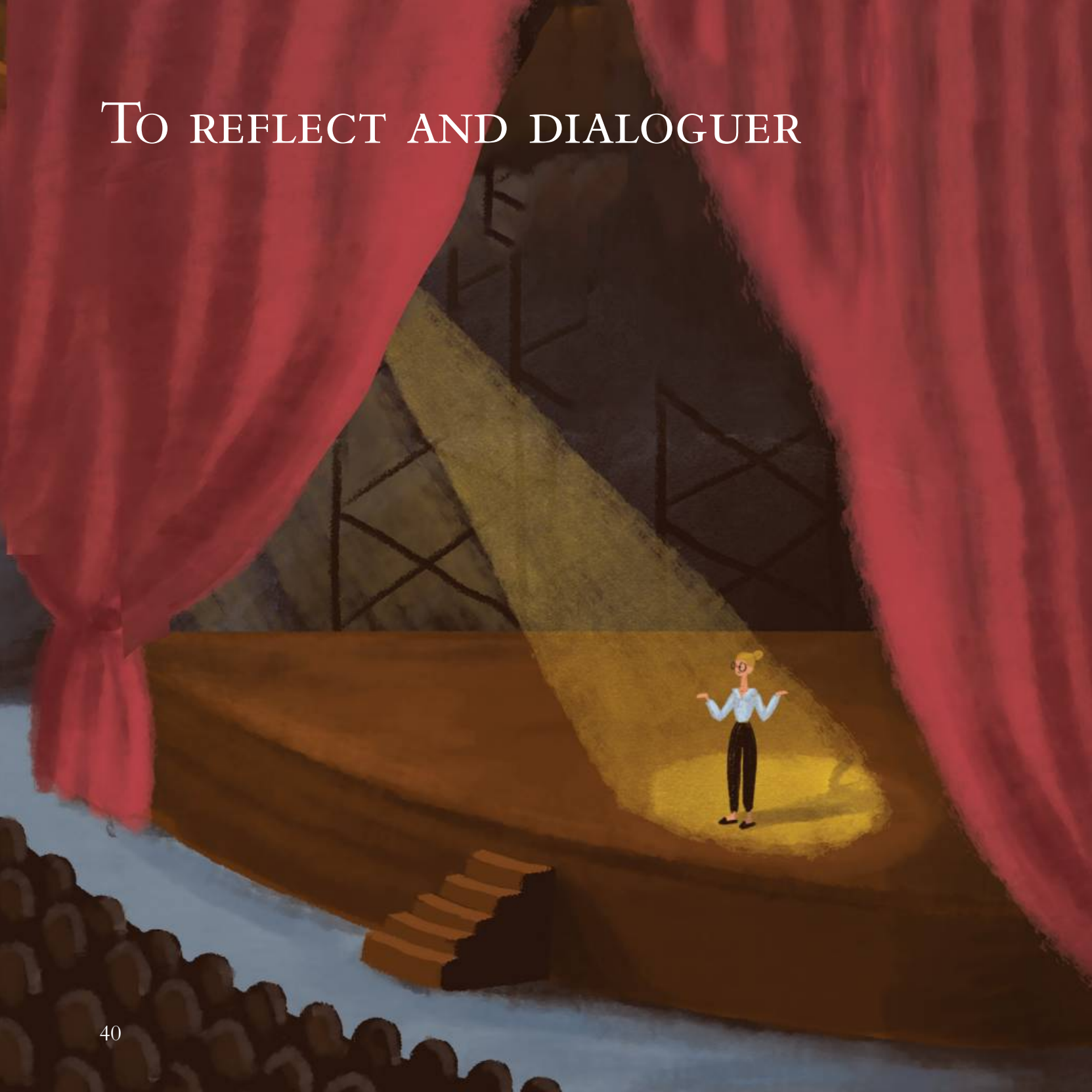
“Long live volleyball,” said the boy.

“Long live music,” said her friend again.

That night, Rebeca woke up again around midnight. It was no longer a nightmare, nor the guilty tears that had soaked her pajamas. It was something in the air, something flowing along the shadows of that late hour. Was it the cats on the roof? The whistling wind? No. It was the sound of a flute –so it seemed to her– floating outside her window. She gasped, but she didn’t feel like getting up and find out what was behind the curtain. Was it a serenade? It was something that resembled Paul McCartney’s legendary melody. Rebeca began to hum it, hidden under the covers: “Hey Jude, don’t make it bad. Take a sad song and make it better...” Then, as never before, she missed making a good shot from the top of the net.



TO REFLECT AND DIALOGUER



DIALOGUE AND CONSENSUS BUILDING

The exercise of dialogue towards consensus building is essential for the democratic life of a society that seeks to organize itself to achieve the common good.

The argumentation of ideas, as well as respecting other people's opinions, should be valued and taught to children as a fundamental part of their citizenship education. To foster reflection, here we provide some elements of analysis that are illustrated in different moments of the story *Mozart or volleyball?*

The school –setting of this story– has received additional land and economic support; in the face of these new resources, there is confrontation of opinions to decide on the best use.

“I have good news for you: the city council has decided to donate the 500-square-metre adjoining land to us, so that a complementary facility can be built there for the development of the students’ sporting and artistic activities. And on top of that, we shall be allocated a cash fund to pay for the works.”

Thus, students begin to express what they think is best according to their likes or needs. An example of this is the conversation between Rebeca and Antonio, who, despite their friendship, do not agree on their ideas. It is clear from the start that the characters find it difficult to talk without disallowing each other:

“You may say sports are very good for your health, Rebe, but arts are also very important in our lives. That’s why I think we’d rather have a school auditorium to organize a choir, a *rondalla* or a small student orchestra... A football pitch? You can have a little match on any street corner...!”

Then she had yelled horrible things at him:

“You’re a bore, that’s why you only like classical music! You’re a drag, a porcelain doll, an enemy of sports!”

This exchange of opinions is not taking place within a framework of democratic dialogue. In a truly democratic society, people try to get to know others and listen to them when they express their opinions. They express themselves freely, argue, and explain their points of view; but they also take into account what others think.

If we consider that democracy is a way of life that is based on respect for human dignity, freedom, and the rights of all people in a given space, it’s clear that in this school, the students are not thinking about the common good. Their points of view are individualistic, and they set aside what should be a priority: the benefit for the educational community.

“It’s just that we’re very nervous about this project. Sports, arts, the environment... as if they were three political parties. They’re all just defending their own interests.”

If everyone exclusively defends their own interests, there is no possibility of achieving the common good, which is the aim of our collective life and which cannot be the sum of individual goods but an indivisible good that can only be achieved with the collaboration of all.

Now, to participate means to take part in a situation. To do so, it is essential to analyze the conditions, express our opinion and make proposals to achieve the improvements or changes we consider important. Participation is both a right and an obligation in societies in search of their progress; that is, the common good. But for participation to be truly constructive, we must ensure that those involved listen attentively, respect the differences, and truly debate the proposals.

“Well, yes, they are. At home, my brother Luis and I have discussed about the same thing. It is normal, I guess. You can’t always be right, although you have to know how to stand up for your ideas.” Toño was about to take his flute out of his rucksack, but he stopped. “Whatever happens, I think it’ll be better than keeping that land just there as a breeding ground for rats.”

Mr. Ledesma stresses the importance of the participation of everyone in the decision, but the enthusiasm to have every proposal in the community taken into account generates disorder and the objective is set aside:

“Quiet... quiet or face the consequences. You know: ten pages with the sentence ‘I must keep balance and harmony in all places and at all times.’ Be warned.”

Thus “peace” was made, but the conflict had not been resolved yet.

“Well,” concluded Mr. Ledesma. “I have already taken note of your concerns.”

“Excuse me, Sir,” said Mr. Mendoza. “It is just that this news has caused us a lot of concern. And everyone defends their own idea as if it were the ultimate.”

People often disagree with each other. It is difficult for us as a society to reach a consensus because we have dedicated ourselves to compete and not to cooperate. A dialogue is not always created when two people talk. When one person expresses his or her ideas and the other just listens, that is a monologue taking place. This is illustrated again in different passages of the story:

Mr. Ledesma feared the meeting was getting out of hand. The worst thing had happened. Everyone was



yelling and nobody was listening. He raised his hands again and cleared his throat several times.

“Ahem. Girls, boys, please!”

Silence had returned to the room. The guests looked at each other with astonishment, complicity, and antipathy. Each had their own ideas.

“I’m afraid we’re not reaching a consensus here. And if things remain like this, we shall lose the town council’s offer.”

“What? What? What?” shouts of protest were heard.

The heated discussion continued.

“Yes, guys. Look at yourselves: one disqualifies the other. You take offence at each other, insult each other, and don’t even try to understand each other’s proposition. ‘You don’t think like me, then you’re an idiot,’ would seem to be an appropriate motto for this meeting. So, I think we’d better call it a day, unless we can reach a consensus.”

“Unless we can reach what?” they all asked.

“Con-sen-sus, which means that we can listen to everyone’s voice and come to an agreement; that we take into account the different opinions and come to a proposal that we are all happy with.”



Dialogue is the conversation between two or more persons who alternately express their ideas or affections; and consensus is the agreement arrived at by all the members of a group or among several groups:

“Very well. We seem to have settled the discussion on the most rational terms. And it seems we shall have a recreational complex that will raise the educational level of this school –and of the whole community, I would assume. That concludes our discussion, which has been most productive, and I thank you all for your cooperation.”

Unfortunately, at Instituto Libertad, not only the students compete and disqualify each other, but also the teaching and management staff.

“Both volleyball and football can indeed be played in the playground. What we need is a stage for the great theatre of the world. To stage comedies and tragedies by Molière, Shakespeare, Euripides, Anton Chekhov, Oscar Wilde, Bertolt Brecht; *Life is a Dream* by Calderón de la Barca; *Bohemian Lights* by Valle Inclán; even *Two-Scented Rose* by Emilio Carballido –the lad was inspired. Theatre is life, and life is nothing but theatre! Video games? Volleyball? Heavy rock? That’s utter nonsense!”

“Nobody is interested in drama, you fool! And those who pretend to do theatre think they’re going to become famous and appear on TV.”

Competition in an individualistic society, when set against considerations of respect for other people, becomes a false virtue. Unfortunately, we fight among ourselves, in appearance to solve the collective, but we fight against each other, discredit and even offend those who have different proposals. Let’s go back to the story:

“You are totally bonkers!” yelled Beatriz Arce. “That’s the worst initiative I’ve ever heard in my life. Marbles... Nobody plays marbles anymore! We live in the era of the Internet and video games. You think like a child from the past century... marbles,

ball-and-stick, spinning top. Those toys are history; don't be a fool. Today we have PlayStation! And that's what they should build: a huge video-game room."

"Just listen to 'Nerdy Bety'..." muttered Lalo Barberena. "Oh, calm down, you wunderkind! The ultimate of the ultimate is music. Rock music, heavy-metal –not reggaeton, though! Groups like The Strokes, Flying Colors, Marilyn Manson, Deep Purple, Shame, Black Pistol, even The Smashing Pumpkins... So, what we need is an outdoor punk stage. A Mexican-style Woodstock if you will. Long live rock & roll!"

It is not a matter of choosing A or B and, therefore, defending one and disqualifying the other. A discussion of that nature is just a concert of monologues. In other words, opposing the taste for music or the preference for practicing sports is a false dilemma. On the other hand, true dialogue, as opposed to fruitless discussion, seeks to build a cooperative and supportive society in which consensus building is precisely the mechanism for progress.

In consensus, the contribution towards a collective good prevails. Certainly, all the people involved must yield; but, in the end, the feeling of those who participate is one of optimism, it is a record of strength without risk of sabotage, since it is a collective and gradual construction of agreements. In voting, for example, sometimes some win and sometimes others do. In consensus, everything adds up and everyone feels they win.

Fortunately, after hours of discussion, Ana Zurita, one of the students, made an inclusive proposal that really represented both the consensus of the multiple and diverse opinions



and suggestions as well as the possibility of understanding each other, of seeing other people not from our own perspective, but taking into account their beliefs and opinions aimed at the common good of their community.

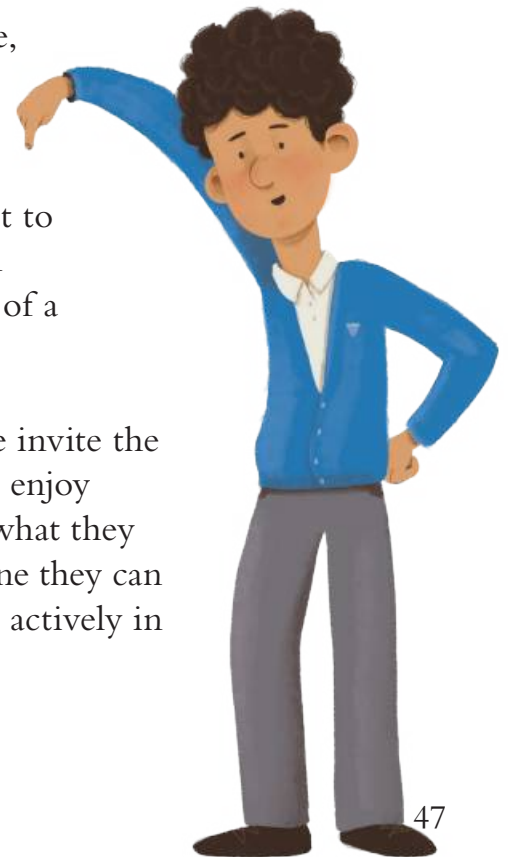
“What I think, Mr. Ledesma, is just what I told you the other day. And I think my humble proposal reconciles many of the ideas so... vehemently put forward here,” she allowed herself a smile. “I think we can indeed take advantage of the spaces on the site that are being offered to us, by giving each proposal its fair ‘quota of reason,’ so to speak. Allow me to explain myself...”

Even if different positions are opposed to each other (sports versus artistic/social), they can complement each other and be part of something more complex; the points of view are likely to be complementary.

In the end, in this story everything turned out well because, through dialogue, a consensus was reached in search of the common good.

We all have the right to be, feel, and think differently. But to strengthen our democratic life, we need to move away from individualism and selfishness, and think of ourselves as part of a collective, as social beings.

In order to make this story meaningful for the children, we invite the adults close to them, such as teachers and family members, to enjoy the reading and accompany them to dialogue and reflect on what they experience in this regard, as well as to express how they imagine they can better interact in their immediate world and participate more actively in the democratic life of our country.





Mozart or volleyball?

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Rebeca loves sports and Toño, her best friend, loves music. Both of them have good ideas to take advantage of a patch of land that their school will use to expand its premises. They are not alone in this pursuit. Other students also want to participate with their ideas, and even some teachers, willing to help, have expressed their proposals. However, tension grows during the assembly where the final decision will be made, because everyone believes that his or her idea is the best, leaving aside the common good of all the people involved.

Will the dialogue win?

Which proposal will be selected?

This volume is part of the colección **Árbol**, which seeks to contribute to the civic culture of children and young adults through attractive stories that encourage reflection and participation in society.