

THE STOLEN UNIVERSE

TEXT BY MARCELA ROMERO

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARIO ROSALES





MARCELA ROMERO is a cultural promoter, actress and scenic oral storyteller with 29 years of experience, including animated visits to different museums since 1993. She has participated in national and international book festivals and fairs (Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Spain, United States, India and Indonesia). She was a fellow of the National Fund for Culture and the Arts from 2009 to 2010 and from 2016 to 2018. Her career has been recognized with six international awards, and she has published seven books on education. Two of her works are accompanied by records: *Son puros Cuentos...* which consists of stories from Veracruz and *sones jarochos*; as well as *Historias de altares*, series of narratives and music from the Mexican tradition of the Day of the Dead.

THE STOLEN UNIVERSE

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THE STOLEN UNIVERSE

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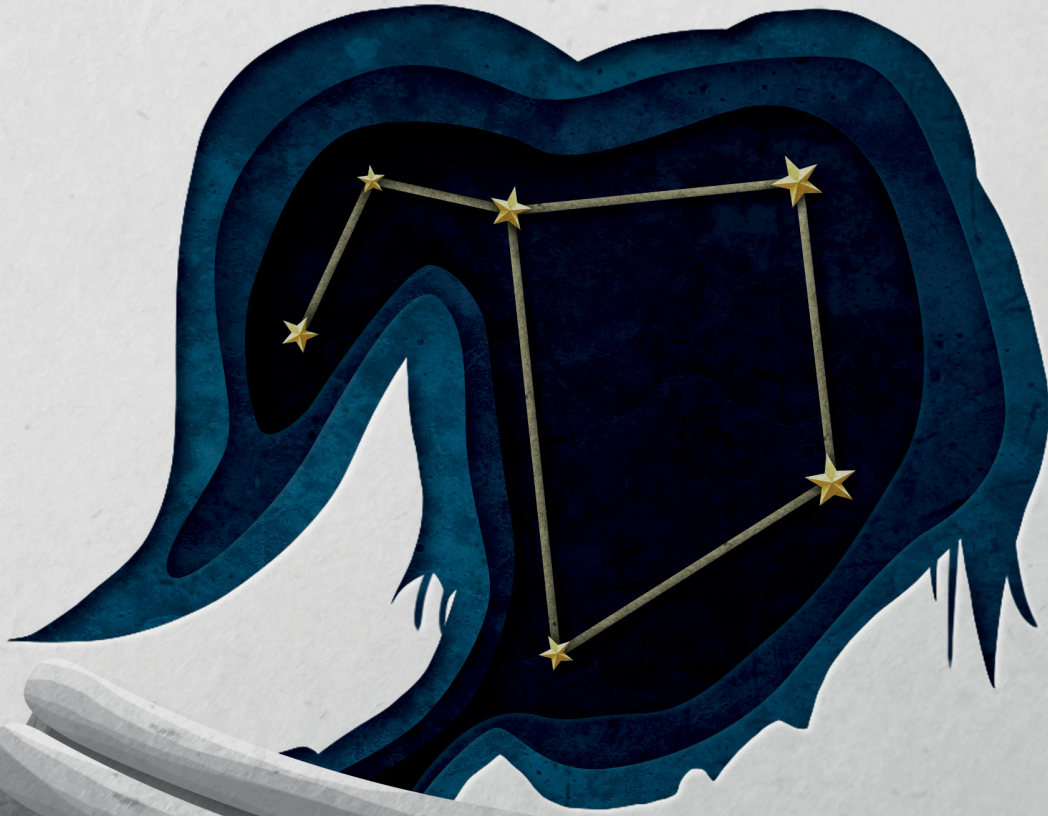
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THE STOLEN UNIVERSE

Texts by Marcela Romero
Illustrations by Mario Rosales



PRESENTATION

The Stolen Universe is a work that forms part of the **Árbol** collection, which the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE, National Electoral Institute) makes available to children, to be able to share, in an easy and enjoyable way, topics related to the formation of citizens and democratic values through literature.

This publication forms part of the Estrategia Nacional de Cultura Cívica 2017-2023 (National Strategy of Cultural Civics 2017-2023), which, through its topics, intends to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life in our society, as citizens with rights and responsibilities. In this context, its aim is to encourage the active participation of our youth in events of public interest in order to transform them into relevant participants in the political life of our country.

This volume presents an attractive story about a group of children and what they do when a very important book goes missing from the school library. The situation is not solely about reflecting on the importance of valuing the common good, but also on the awareness that many times apparently harmless acts can, in reality, be incorrect conducts that affect many and, like any other act of corruption, should be reported. While the story is attractive for all ages, it was written with elementary school children in mind. Through fiction, readers will have the opportunity to reflect upon the harmful and recurring practice that is present in all social spheres in our country: corruption, and it invites us to appreciate the importance of transparency and accountability.

Additionally, it invites the readers to always be attentive and vigilant of the activities of those who represent authority, including the Mexican government. We want the generations that will soon become citizens to exercise, from their moral standpoint, their rights and the obligation to demand clear accountability from their civil servants, especially in the honest administration of public resources.

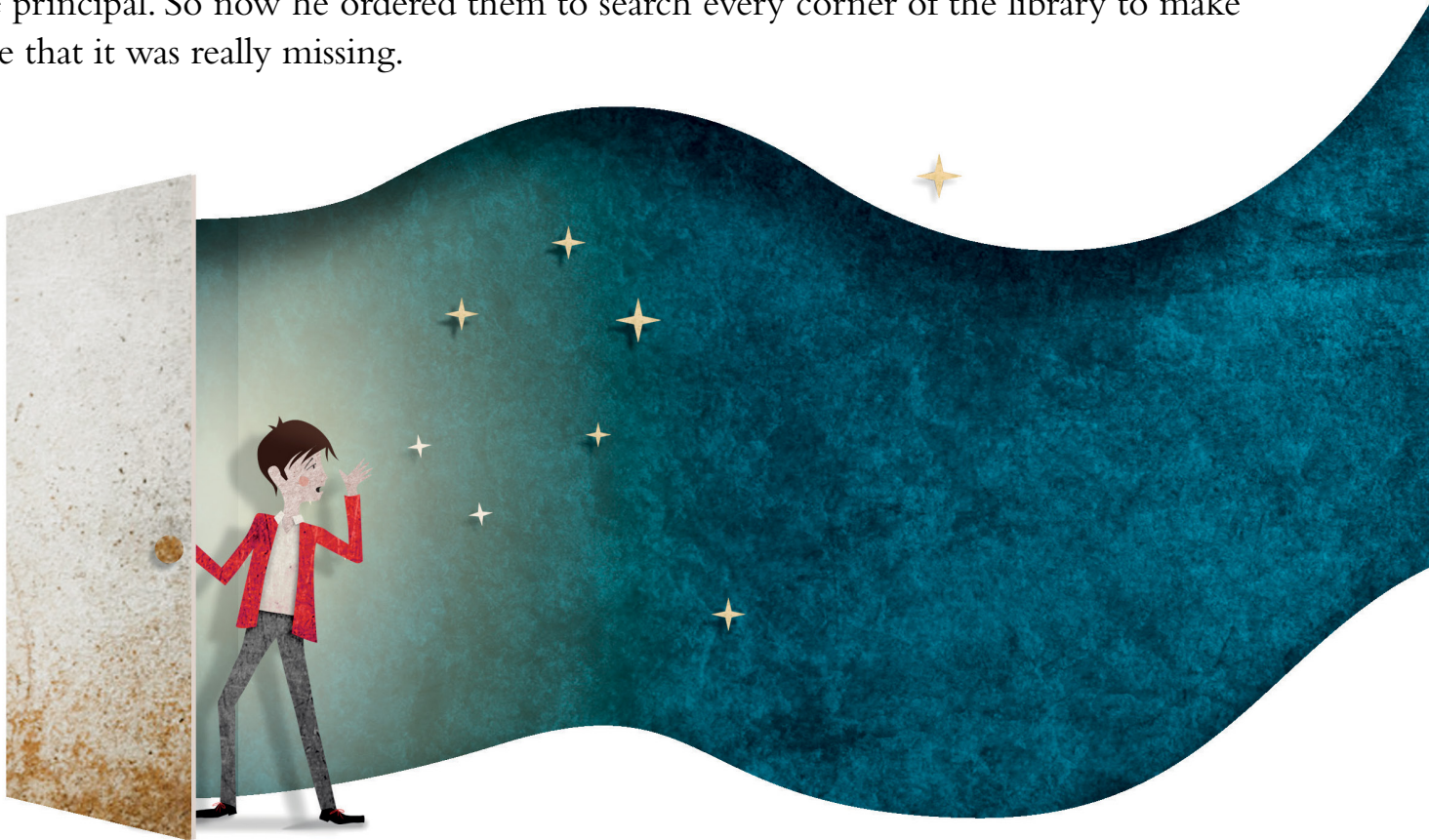
The final pages include a section aimed at young readers, so that together with adults, parents or teachers, they can reflect and discuss the importance of always being honest and within the law framework.



The Stolen Universe

“The principal says that he’s coming to inspect the library on Friday,” warned the boy, and just as he ran in, he ran out again.

Lulú, the librarian, felt like she had a hole in the pit of her stomach, her mouth went dry, and she couldn’t breathe. The third-grade teacher had ordered a book about space, a beautiful and very expensive one. It had photographs of the universe and exercises for sky watchers. However, the book had disappeared, and someone had reported it to the principal. So now he ordered them to search every corner of the library to make sure that it was really missing.







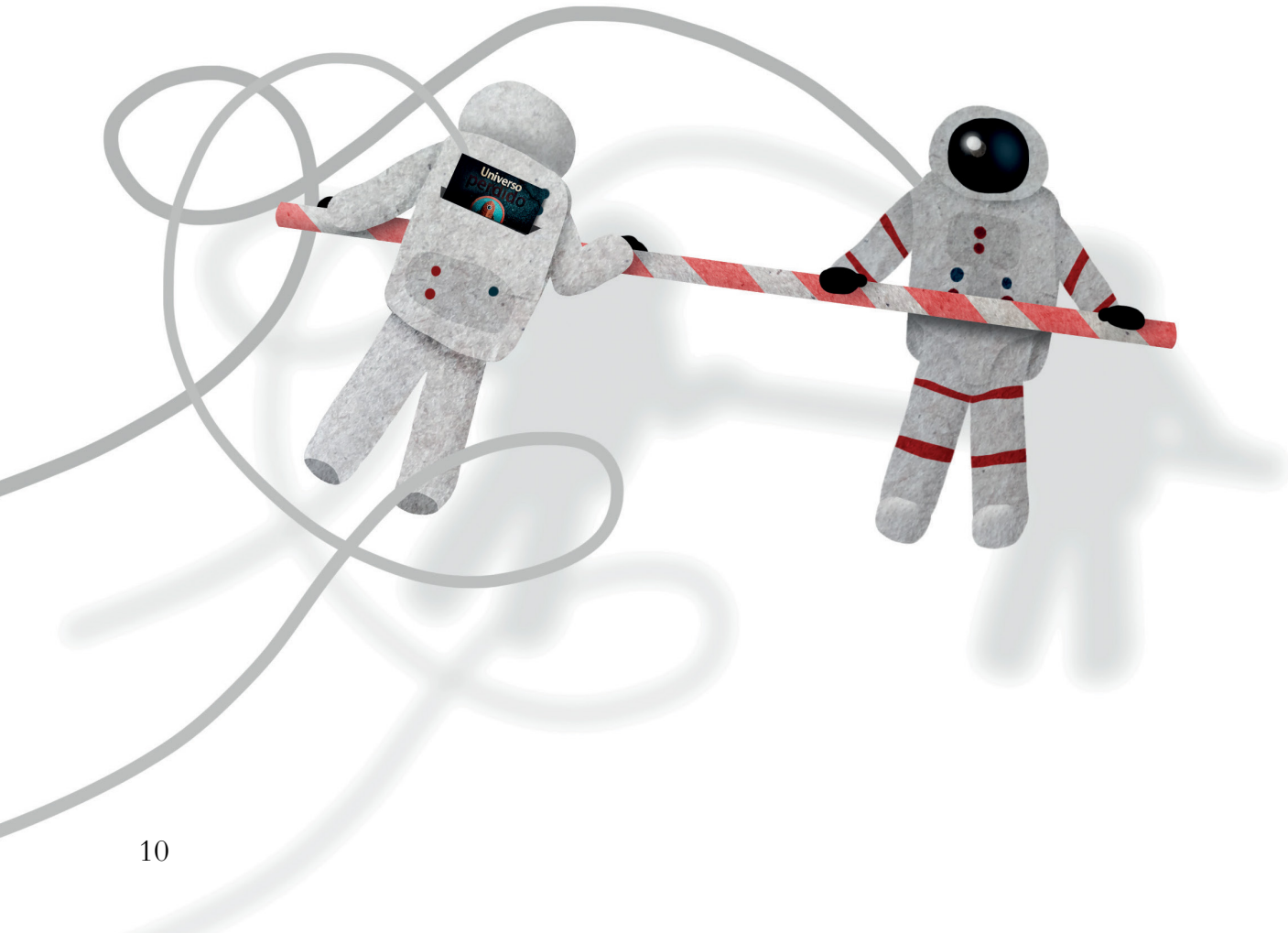
The teacher, Lulú, was new at the school and she did not want her trial period to be marked by something like this. She was just getting to know the students and she could not imagine who might be responsible for the theft. At university, a classmate had told her that the children of today were very skillful and clever at getting whatever they wanted, but she was sure that they weren't being bad on purpose. They all seemed honest, and they were friendly with her. Even so, certain attitudes had made her suspicious of some. For example, Laura, a space fanatic, who dreamt of becoming an astronaut and had asked for the book a couple times, Ernesto, who got nervous every time he saw her, or the group with Arturo, Jorge, Víctor, and Yuri, who were constantly coming in and out of the library and behaving strangely. The oddest part about it all was that they were all in the third grade, the same grade that would have to do an assignment with the book.

How to question them without offending them? She had no choice but to do it that very morning.



Lulú asked the children to come to library at recess. She invited them to come in, and offered them some tamarind water she had prepared. She wanted to be polite and careful. She started by explaining the problem, to see if maybe the guilty party would confess...

“I have a little problem, and I wanted to see if you might be able to help me. A book has disappeared, and I need to find it, because I am responsible of all the books in the library. Since you are the group that have an assignment to do with the book, I thought that maybe you might know where it is.”





EL UNIVERSO





“Which book?” asked Laura, worried.

“The big and beautiful one about the planets.”

“No way!” said Laura, “That’s my favorite, and we need it for science class.

What are we going to do?”

Víctor explained that Yuri, Arturo, Jorge, and he were on a team that played a game of clues and offered to look for some to find the culprit. Yuri even raised an eyebrow to show surprise. She always did that, much to her classmates’ envy, because no matter how hard they tried they couldn’t imitate her.

Lulú understood then why they were always coming in and out of the library. Looking for clues was a good strategy to get students to look through books. After finding the book, she would ask them to help her organize a rally with clues all over the school. Then she looked at Ernesto, expecting a confession once and for all. He got nervous and at first remained silent. He had never mentioned it to anyone, but he always hid in the library during recess because he wasn't very good at soccer and his classmates always teased him.







Finally, he got up the nerve to speak, he inhaled, and he explained what was going on with him. He dared to tell her what he had seen the previous day that had called his attention. Carmita and Julio had gone into the library with a backpack, they didn't leave it at the entrance, as the regulations say, and they left with it in a hurry.

The bell rang and the librarian asked them to come back in two days' time to see if they had any clues. They would have to be very attentive of everything that was going on. Arturo put on his cap, which made him feel like a real inspector and Víctor a wool cap. Yuri raised an eyebrow. Jorge pretended he wasn't interested and greeted the caretaker at the entrance to the school. He always knew everything that was going on at the school.

The next morning, something interesting happened. Yuri saw how a small piece of paper fell out of Julio's notebook: a due date card from the library! She immediately winked at Víctor, who had seen the same as she had. Julio picked it up nervously, he looked around, and put it back into one of his notebooks.

In science class, the teacher assigned the investigative project based on the space book. Ernesto and his team were assigned the first chapter. Worried, the boy mumbled that the book wasn't in the library, but the teacher didn't take notice. He just told him to ask the new librarian for it and continued his class.







During recess, Julio came up to Ernesto and commented that Carmita's father had the same book, and that together they could get photocopies so they could do their homework. With his eyes wide open, Ernesto asked how much the photocopies were going to cost and Julio responded that they had found a place near his house that charged \$1.50 the page. Ernesto calculated how much he would have to pay for his copies. Carmita came up to them and exchanged a knowing look with Julio and told him not to worry, they would have the copies made and later tell him how much they cost.

At the end of the school day, Jorge and Víctor stayed close to the door, acting like they were looking at a bug on the ground, when, actually, they were trying to discover a clue about the "disappearance of *The Universe*."





Almost everyone had left when Jorge and Víctor started talking to the caretaker, who every morning checked backpacks for safety reasons.

“Don Pancho, did you see Carmita leave?”

“Yes, the poor thing was slouched over, it looked like she was carrying a something very heavy and her backpack looked very full.”

“Hmm! What was she carrying?” asked Arturo, who, at that moment, appeared out of nowhere with a piece of sandwich that he had left over from recess.



The next morning, everyone told the teacher, Lulú, what had happened. In response, Laura promised to go find out how much the photocopies cost. She would be accompanied by Laika, her dog, who she was training so she could go with her to Mars one day.

“Laika,” Laura said, “is developing a great sense of smell, and doubtful acts and strange tricks stink.”

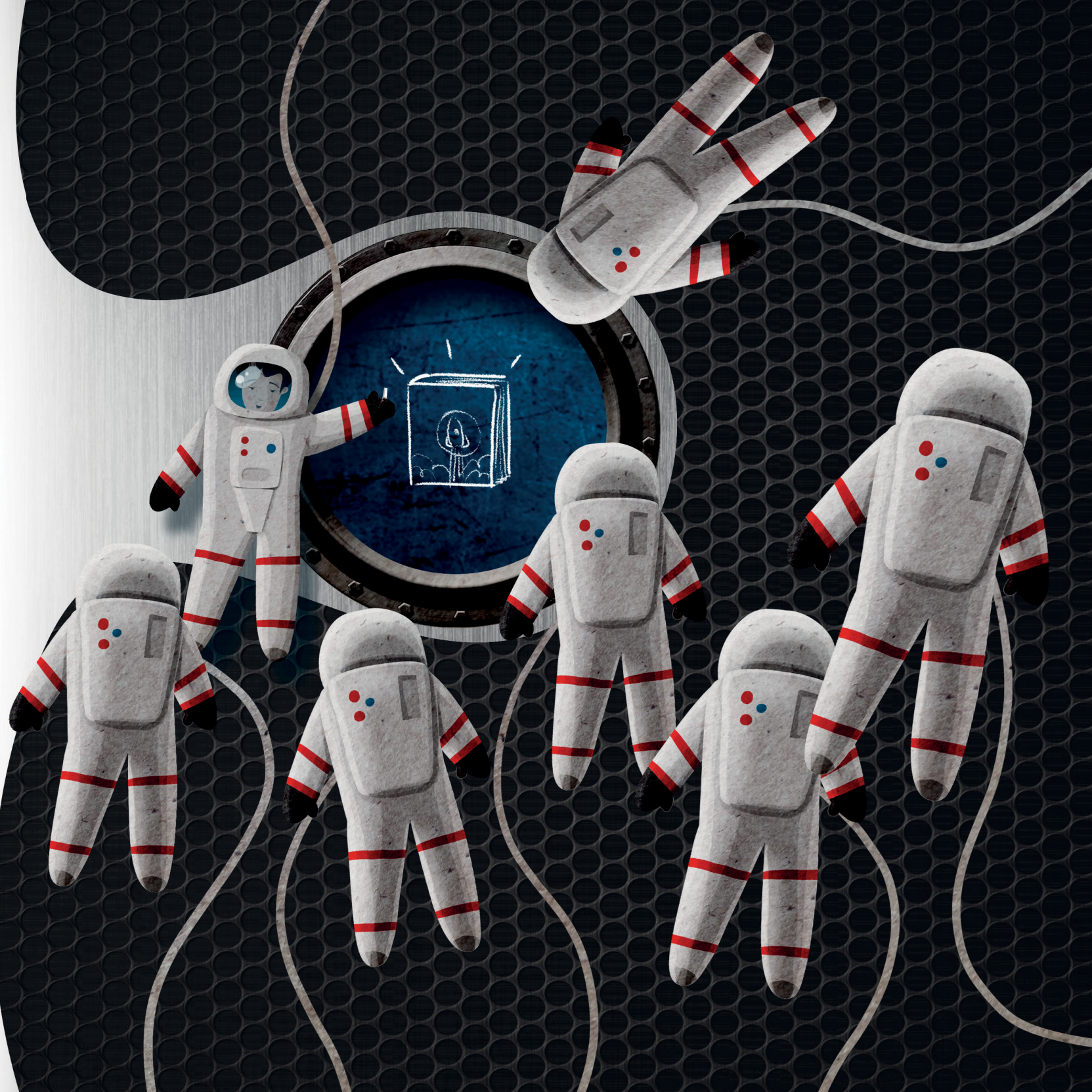


Lulú smiled, satisfied, she didn't know if she would have to buy the book with her own money, but in the middle of all this madness, she was discovering some pretty fantastic kids at this school.



The librarian called an urgent meeting during the hour of reading workshop; the children had discovered some important information. Even though Ernesto had not arrived yet, Víctor decided to begin and lead the meeting. He stood in front of the board and told everyone to sit down, including the teacher.







“Alright, your attention please! This is the situation: we have a missing book and the following clues:

1. It is beautiful and expensive.
2. We need it to do a class assignment.
3. Apparently, Carmita has the same book and has offered to make photocopies for Ernesto, who was assigned to do the first part of the investigation.
4. Don Pancho told us that Carmita’s backpack looked very full and heavy.

Could the *The Universe* book be inside it?”

Víctor had to interrupt his presentation because Ernesto, excited, came in.

“Julio has just told me that he has my copies and that they managed to get them for \$1.00 a page,” he said panting. When he finished, he turned as red as a tomato.

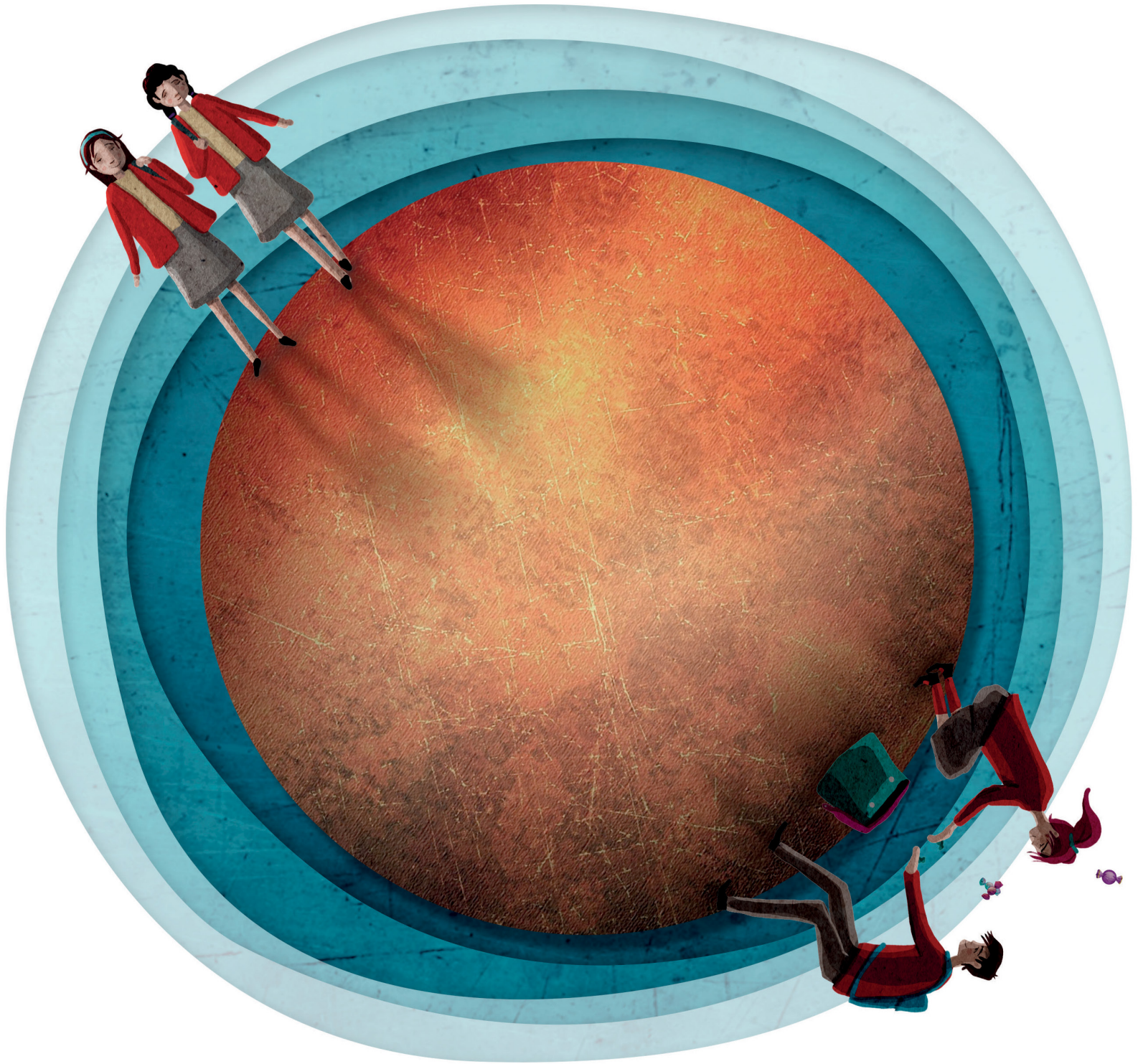


He, who never opened his mouth in public, had overcome his shyness and spoken easily in front of the group.

“What! But yesterday I went to the photocopy shop around the corner from the Julio’s house, and the copies only cost 50 cents,” exclaimed Laura.

“Well, they even showed me the receipt,” responded Ernesto, growing more satisfied by the moment, and surprised to see that everyone was paying attention to him.

“Very well,” said the teacher, and she spoke to Ernesto, who had surprised her with his participation.



“Ask Julio and Carmita for the receipt. Tell them that you need it so that your parents will give you the money. Bring it to me afterwards.”

“Who can try to find the library due date card in Julio’s papers?” she added.

“I can,” said Laura, “he asked me to help him prepare for when he has to speak about space.”

“By the way, Laura, can you give me the address for the photocopy shop? We need to be very cautious; we should not accuse anyone of anything until we are sure. See you tomorrow,” she said.

Yuri and Laura stayed behind, talking about Julio’s notebook where the library due date card probably was.



Ernesto, nervous, went for the receipt and returned with it a short time later. They had to act fast to recuperate the book if Carmita and Julio really had it.

The next morning, the librarian did not wait for recess. She peeked into the third-grade classroom and asked the teacher if she would let Laura leave the class so she could help her in the library.

With a notebook under her arm, Laura followed her, and once out of sight of the others, she showed the library due date card that she had been able to find.

It had the title of the book, and the name of the library, and all the stamps for checking the book in and out over the last 15 days. The teacher thanked her and asked her to tell Julio and Carmita that she wanted to see them at recess. She also told her to let the others know that they should stay close by in case she needed witnesses.

As soon as the recess bell rang, Carmita and Julio entered the library, a little nervous. They became more tense when they saw the principal. Lulú invited them to sit down, offered them water, and simply pulled out the library due date card that had been torn out of the book about space, together with the receipt for the photocopies.

The teacher, who liked her students, did not raise her voice, but she spoke firmly:

“How did you do this? You tricked me, as well as your classmates. What do you have to say for yourselves?”





“Because I won’t accept it if you say you don’t know anything about it. You are in big trouble. Do you understand how bad this is? You tried to take advantage of your classmates for personal benefit. Would you like it if someone did that to you?”

She also informed them that she had been to the photocopy shop and that the attendant had confessed that he occasionally sold fake receipts with higher prices. This was an issue that the principal would deal with personally.

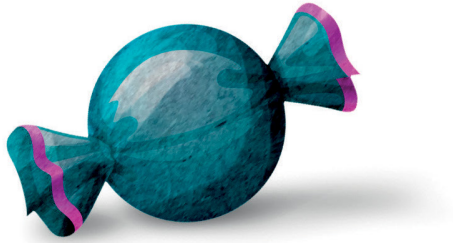
Both children had knots in their throats. Finally, Carmita took the lead and said: “I’m responsible, I’m really sorry, teacher. Remember the day that I came and asked you to recommend some fun stories to read over summer vacation? Well, while you were busy, kindly looking for some books I might like, Julio grabbed the book and took it out of the library without you realizing it.”





DIRECTOR

EL UNIVERSO

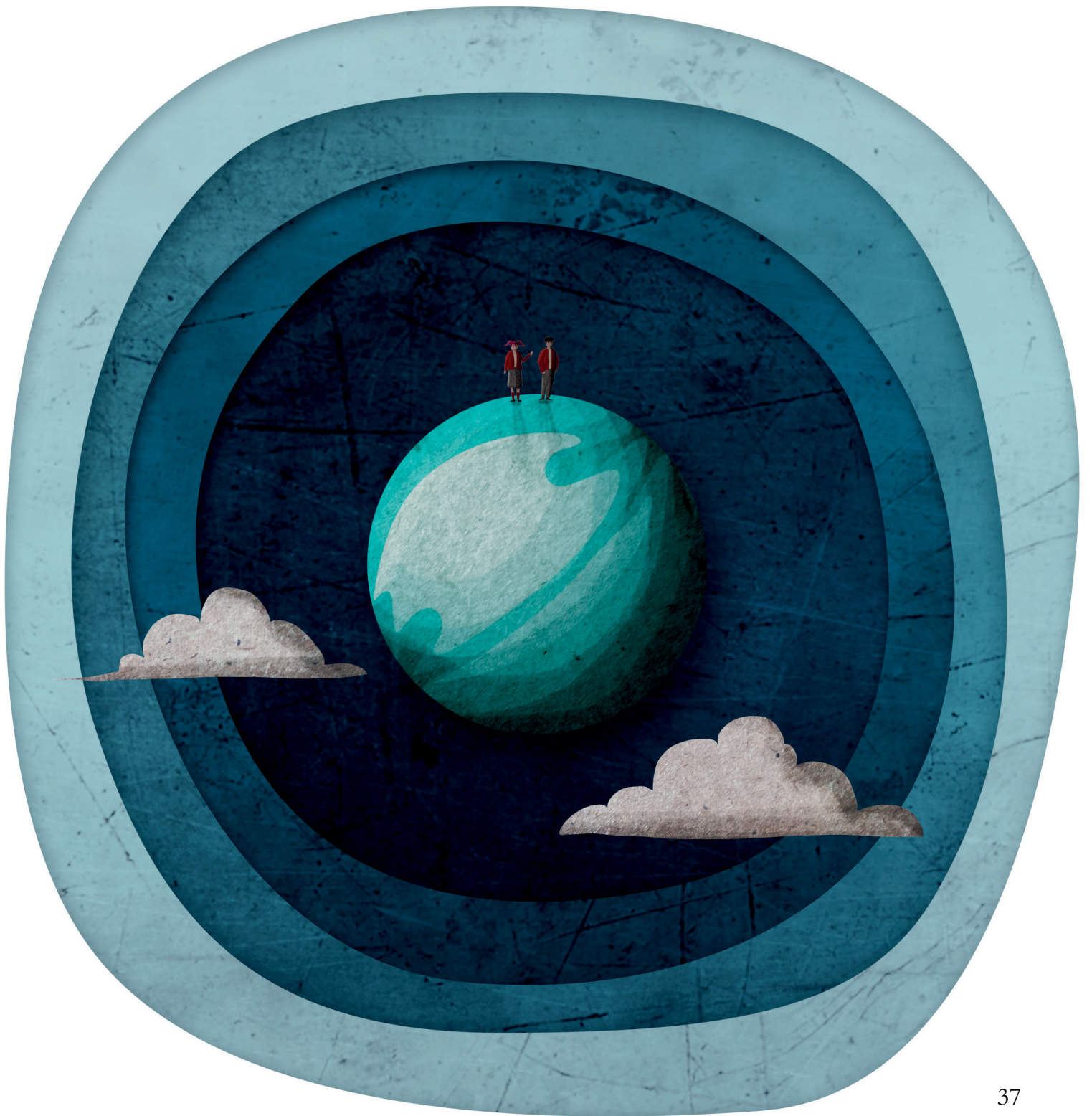


“The truth is that we really didn’t want to steal, just to hide it so no one could consult it. That way we could make a little money by selling the photocopies at a higher price than what they really cost. I wanted to buy some bags of candy, and, as class representative, give them as a surprise prize to those that earned points in class. Julio helped me because he wanted to buy his mother a birthday present. And since the money was for a good cause, we didn’t think it was that bad.”

The only thing that Julio dared to say was: “I am so ashamed, I’m sorry.”

“What a shame. The principal and I have decided that in addition to bringing the book back, you will have to do community work for the school for a month. You did not only let me down, but your whole class. Carmita, your classmates gave you their trust when they elected you class representative. Your decision was very mistaken, you should not have broken the library rules nor taken money under false pretenses, no matter how good your intentions were.”

The principal called in their parents so he could tell them what had happened, and so that the children could reflect with them at home so they would never make the same mistakes again. He warned that if the students did, they would be expelled. Finally, he also told them to make sure that they returned the book immediately.





The following Monday, there was a big hullabaloo in the third-grade classroom. The principal, the librarian, and the third-grader's teacher were at the front of the classroom. The book *The Universe* was on the teacher's desk. Everyone waited in silence. The book was even quieter.

The teacher Lulú began to speak and wrote an enormous title on the board:

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISHONESTY

She asked: "What do you think were the consequences of stealing this book, which went missing for a few days and was needed for science class? Little by little the children started raising their hands and saying what they thought. The teacher wrote down what they said:

1. "The teacher Lulú might have lost her job," said Arturo.
2. "We wouldn't have had the book to do our assignment," added Ernesto.
3. "The teacher was suspicious of some of us, and that wasn't nice," commented Laura.
4. "We don't know if we are paying a fair price at some photocopy shops," said Yuri.
5. "Because of who knows who..., we missed out on recess a few days so we could investigate," argued Víctor.

"Indeed," said the principal, "so now it's clear: the things we do that might not appear to be wrong, in reality are, aren't they? I hope that everyone has understood that situations like this are unacceptable and affect us all, in and outside of school."

Julio and Carmita felt really bad, but neither the teacher, the principal nor the librarian pointed the finger at them. They knew that they would have to face the consequences of their actions and for 30 days do the tasks they were assigned: read stories out loud to the preschoolers and, after school, classify a mountain of books, dust the shelves and clean every nook and cranny in the library. Although this would unfortunately also affect the teacher, who would have to stay late after school so the children could complete their tasks.

Carmita looked on sadly as her classmates named another class representative. Although she knew they were right in doing so, it was the consequence that hurt her the most, and she wondered how she could recuperate their trust throughout the rest of the year.

Apart from that, the whole school were aware that the photocopy shop was closed down after the principal reported to the authorities what they were doing with the receipts.

The following month when Julio and Carmita had completed their community service, they helped to organize a party where they put on a rally to learn, in a fun way, how to use the library. For their part, the parents brought delicious food, invited a great storyteller, and they all had a memorable day.

The special investigators team had grown, Laura and Ernesto were now members, and they all wrote riddles with the titles of books as challenges for the children at the party.

The first book from which they would get questions would be *The Universe*.





TO REFLECT AND DISCUSS



Transparency, Accountability, and Combating Corruption

In this section, we offer elements for analysis that can motivate and facilitate reflection and discussion about this important topic which affects our lives as citizens.

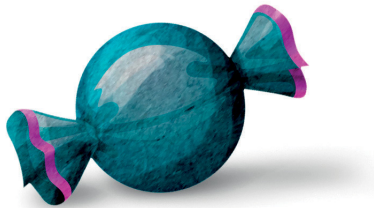
All children are sensitive and intelligent beings and deserve to learn about citizenship at school and at home.

To ensure that this story is meaningful for children, we invite caretakers, teachers, and parents to accompany them while they read, and to enjoy the story, discuss it, and reflect, with them, on our rights and obligations as citizens.

These final pages highlight the most important aspects that are touched on in the story, *The Stolen Universe*, so that they can be identified in different parts of the narrative:

What is the meaning of the word *corruption*?

- Corruption is a crime that consists of the abuse of power or the using or taking advantage of a situation for personal gain.
- The Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (Political Constitution of the United Mexican States), the maximum law that rules, establishes diverse provisions in articles 109, 110, and 113 with the purpose of guaranteeing the honest work of civil servants.





For this reason, whoever commits an act of corruption is violating a constitutional principle.

In this story, Carmita, the elected class representative, with the help of Julio, tricks her classmates, unaware of the seriousness of what they are doing. They start by not complying with the library rules when Carmita takes her backpack in with her, and although they had good intentions, they affected the whole school community: the teacher, responsible for the library; the principal, who had to intervene with reprisals, and above all their classmates, who end up coming under suspicion and not being able to consult the book for their assignments.

The Estrategia Nacional de Educación Cívica 2017-2023 (National Strategy of Cultural Civics 2017-2023) is a program designed by the Instituto Nacional Electoral to guide the actions of citizenship education that will help strengthen our democratic life. This program establishes the demand “to promote the tools for civic participation in favor of the combat against corruption [...] so that citizens can use new mechanisms, which will enable them to observe and to improve the public responsibility of civil servants.”

Furthermore, the Ley General de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información Pública (General Law of Transparency and Access to Public Information) establishes the principles, the general foundation, and the procedures in place to guarantee the right of access to said information, as well as the aim to promote citizen participation in decision making.

The children in this story participate when faced with the events: they get organized to discover who stole the book, they find proof to be sure that they don't accuse someone unjustly, until they manage to demonstrate the deception of which they were all, unfortunately, victims, because of the actions of their class representative.

The Ley General de Responsabilidades Administrativas (General Law of Administrative Responsibilities) establishes diverse sanctions for people who commit acts of corruption. These may even include the deprivation of liberty with a jail sentence.

When the children responsible for the theft of the book were discovered, the director, as well as the librarian, the students and their parents all played a role in the matter, applying sanctions for the misdeed, resolving the situation, and taking measures to prevent it happening again:

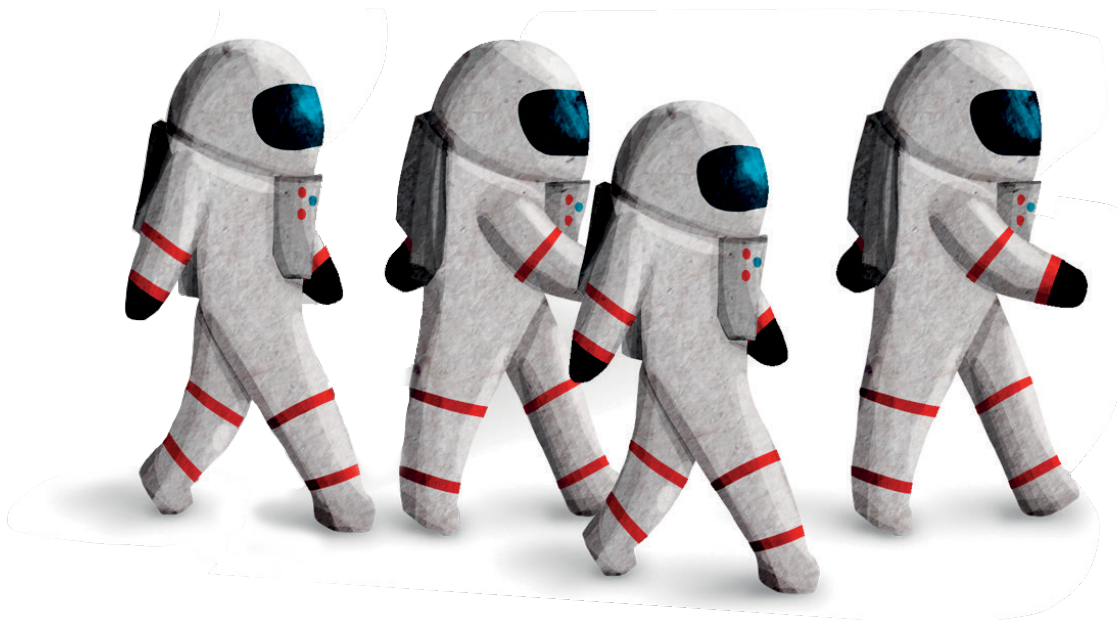
- Carmita and Julio returned the book to the library.
- They did community service as a way of compensating the harm they caused their classmates:
 - For a whole month, every afternoon, they organized the books in the library, and they cleaned that space, which is so important for all the students.
 - They read stories to the preschoolers.
 - They helped organize the rally when they had finish their community service.
- The children removed Carmita and nominate another class representative. That was the consequence for her mistake that hurt Carmita the most, and she was resolved to regain the respect and trust of her classmates by the next school year.



Apart from this, the principal had to take action against another abuse: the person in charge of the small photocopy shop who had colluded with Carmita and Julio to charge more for the copies so that they could make a profit. This fact, on its own, was deplorable, and after the principal's complaint, the authorities closed the business for committing fraud.

It is very important to clear up any doubts that children might have and to help clarify the meaning of certain words. It is an opportunity to listen to their experiences and opinions about the story and how the topic makes them feel, as well as, to think about the actions they can do at school and in their community to help combat corruption.

We hope that children and families enjoy this story and that it contributes to their citizenship education.





THE STOLEN UNIVERSE

The Bembo Std font family was used.



MARIO ROSALES was born in Mexico City. Since he was six years old, he has shown his creativity and interest in “pinching the hearts of those who observe an image and expanding the limits of their imagination.”

He is a creative, publicist, illustrator, and animator for different brands and publishing labels, such as Alfaguara Infantil y Juvenil and SM. It has been selected for leading illustration catalogs and animation festivals around the world. For more than fifteen years, he has been a visual communication consultant for UNICEF and a member of the Consortium of Animators of the UN, spreading the rights of children. Currently, he continues to develop his passions: illustration and directing animated and interactive projects.



The Stolen Universe offers readers the compelling story of a group of children facing the loss of a common good: a book that everyone needs and that was taken from the school library.

This work is part of the **Árbol** collection and shows, in an accessible way for children, the mechanisms of corruption, exemplifying the importance of transparency and accountability and underscoring the fact that all the voices of Mexican men and women count in favor of legality.