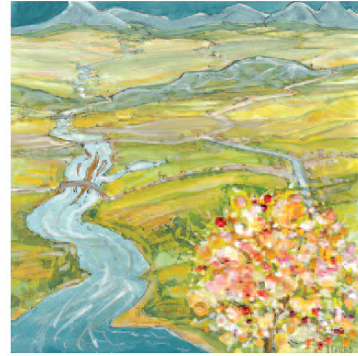


The following story is from the book

*The Central Figures*

# *Bahá'u'lláh*

*Volume Two*



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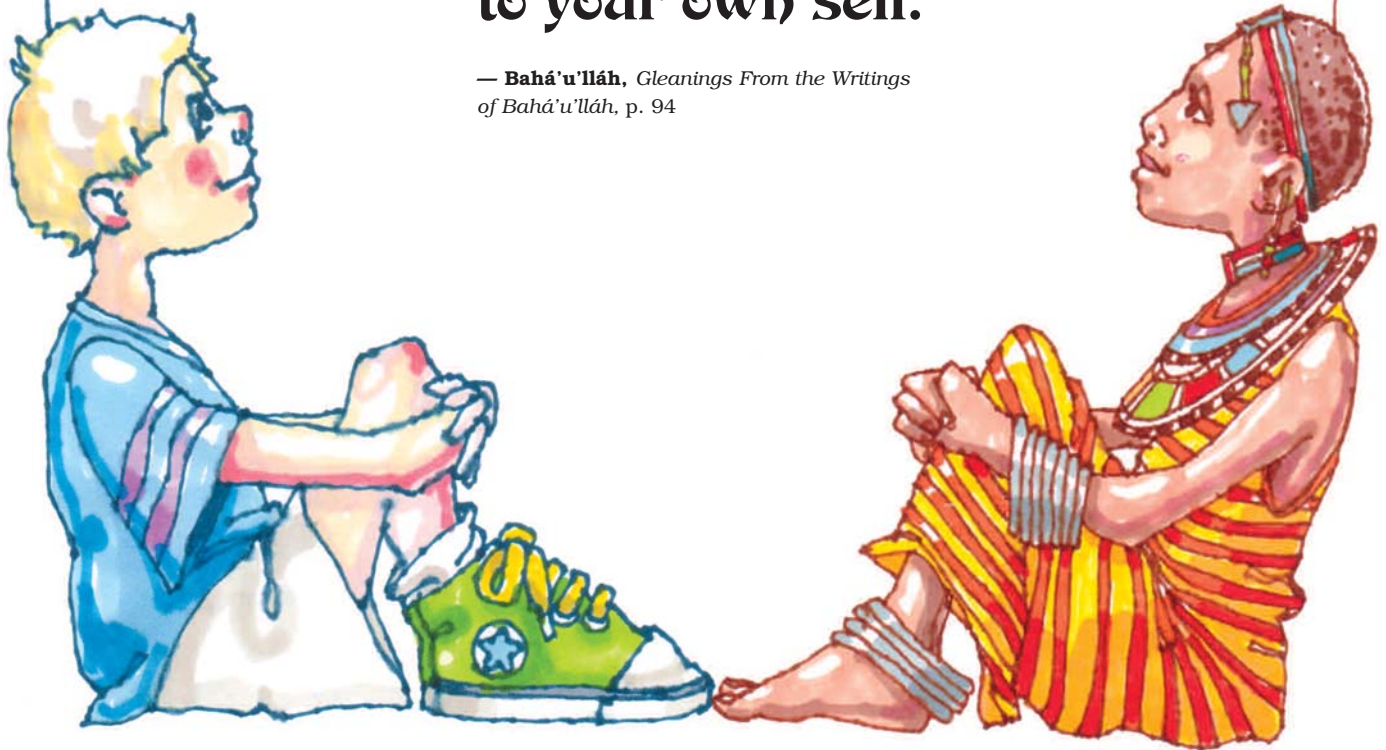
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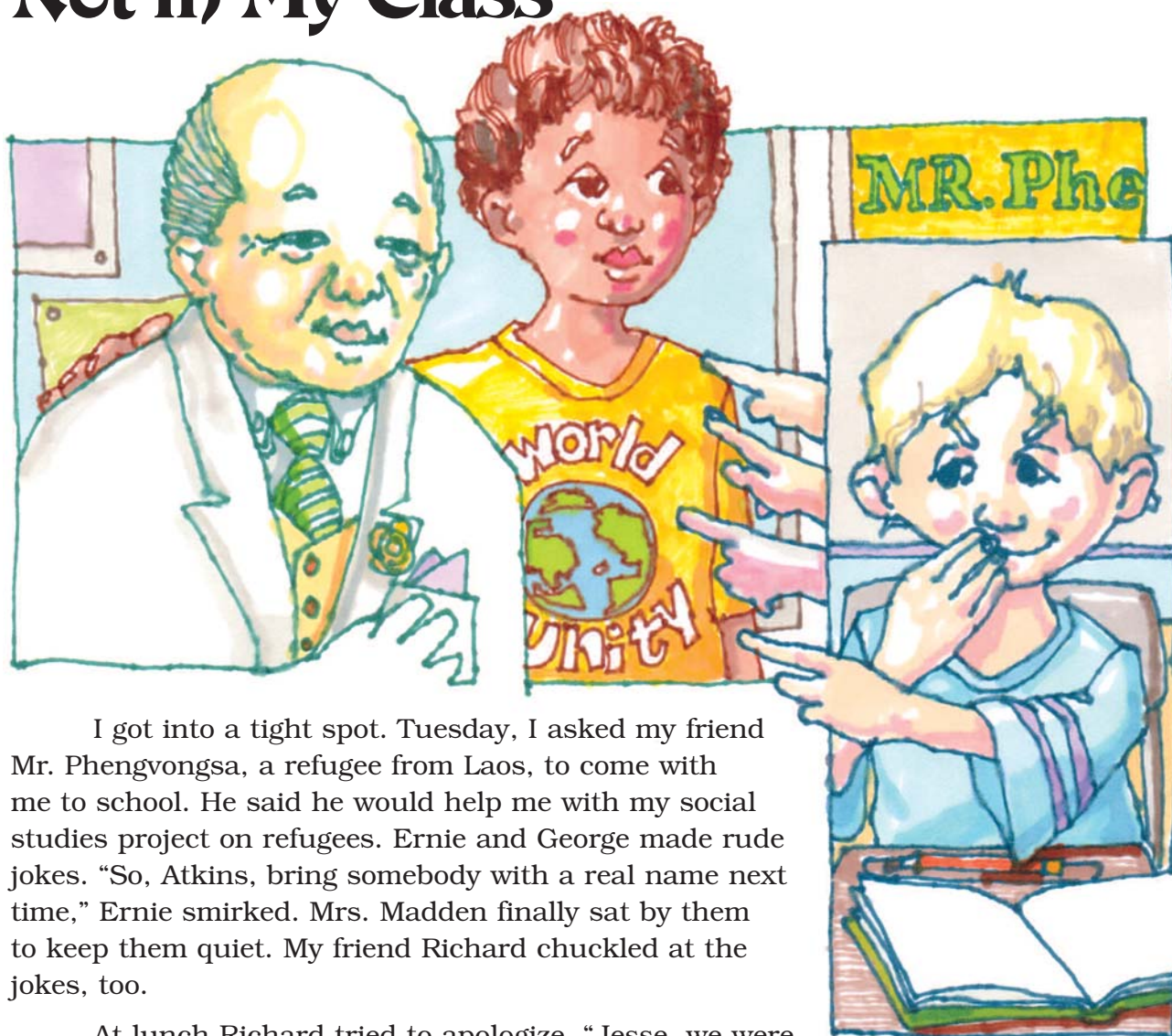
**Let your vision  
be world-embracing,  
rather than confined  
to your own self.**

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings From the Writings  
of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 94



# Not in My Class

Written by Rick Johnson  
Illustrated by Keith Kresge



I got into a tight spot. Tuesday, I asked my friend Mr. Phengvongsa, a refugee from Laos, to come with me to school. He said he would help me with my social studies project on refugees. Ernie and George made rude jokes. “So, Atkins, bring somebody with a real name next time,” Ernie smirked. Mrs. Madden finally sat by them to keep them quiet. My friend Richard chuckled at the jokes, too.

At lunch Richard tried to apologize. “Jesse, we were just joking . . . you gotta admit his name is weird. . . .” I ignored him. It really hurt for him act so ignorantly.



My sister, Jeannine, thought I should denounce Ernie and George as racists. “That’d put them in their place,” she said triumphantly. I agreed that it would certainly make a point—except I still wondered exactly what point I did want to make.

When I walked into social studies class on Friday, I smiled at Richard and walked to Mrs. Madden’s desk.

“Mrs. Madden, may I give out some candy?” I asked.

“Is there a special occasion?” she asked, looking surprised.

“Yes,” I replied, “it’s V.I.P. Day.” I didn’t explain, but Mrs. Madden knows that I’m not usually out of line, so she agreed.

I gave each person their choice of candies—they all had chocolate centers, but were covered with different colors of icing.

“This is V.I.P. Day,” I began. “Each of you is a Very Important Person to me,” I continued. “And because you’re important to me, I bought the very best candy I could afford out of my own money. I wanted you to have the best I could offer.”

Even Ernie was impressed—he loves chocolate.

“I also visited some other very important people,” I explained, “. . . Mr. Phengvongsa, Mrs. Nui, Mr. and Mrs. Manga, and the Ramirez’s. I gave them exactly the same chocolates you’re eating. They’re Very Important People to me also.”



“Some of you may think you don’t like Mr. Phengvongsa.” I looked straight at Richard. “But I do. He is a fine man who never hurt anyone and helps this town in lots of ways. He’s a Very Important Person to me, just like you are.” I could see that Richard was listening.

“The candies you’re eating,” I continued, “are different from each other, but also the same—different colors on the outside, the same sweetness on the inside. That’s how it is with people.” I went back to my seat and sat down. The class sat in stunned silence.



Everyone knew that what I had done was a Big Deal. It was the talk of the school! After school, Richard was waiting for me.

“Hey, Jesse, what you did really took guts,” he said. “I understand what you said, and I’m sorry.”

“No problem,” I responded. “I just hope you learned something.”

“Learned something!” Richard exclaimed. “When you did that, I thought I would explode! What made you think of it?”

“You know I’m a Bahá’í, Richard—you know a little about what we believe. But what you maybe don’t realize is that nothing hits my ‘hot button’ as a Bahá’í more than seeing some people put others down because they’re different.”

“Yeah, I can definitely see that in you,” Richard agreed. “I remember you going crazy that time when Mr. Barker made a comment about Hindus.”

“Oh, man, that was a mistake,” I laughed. “That was a time I listened too much to Jeannine!”

“So, I’ve learned some things, too,” I explained. “This time I wanted to handle it differently. So I asked Mom what I could do in this situation. She suggested that it might help to look at what Bahá’u’lláh, the Founder of our Faith, did in these situations. She said that He actually had similar things happen to Him when He was my age. She helped me find some stories about how Bahá’u’lláh, as a youth, responded to prejudice.”

“Mom pointed out that, for instance, sometimes people argued that one holy figure was superior to another. Once when He was around fourteen, Bahá’u’lláh heard some clergy arguing whether, in Islám, someone who suffered a martyr’s death had a higher spiritual rank than someone who was a personal companion of the Prophet Muḥammad. They argued back and forth about the superiority of one over the other . . . Bahá’u’lláh commented that regardless of who they were, they all were equal before the majesty of God, and equally humble before Him. I could see that Bahá’u’lláh would not allow others to show disrespect based on a superiority attitude.”

“Yeah,” Richard commented, “you kinda made the same point!”

“Bahá’u’lláh didn’t allow people to disrespect others, yet He was also courteous. ‘Somehow,’ Mom advised, ‘Bahá’u’lláh admonished people with kindness and patience. You need to find a way to do that.’”

“I really admire what you did,” Richard replied, “I think you got it just right. I know I’ll never see candy the same way again!”

“Well,” I responded, “I learned something, too . . . and I’m really grateful for that.” ★

