

I stared around at the jostling sea of unfamiliar faces, my stomach curdled with nervousness. The gym was crammed with people who were soon going to be my new classmates. Their chattering voices rose into the air as kids rushed forward to greet each other with hugs and smiles. I searched the crowd for any faces that I recognized, and felt a pang of relief when I saw several of my old classmates. But the majority of the other kids were people from other schools whom I didn't know. A gnawing sensation of dread twisted my stomach, and although I had just arrived at the camp, I was already not looking forward to Camp Callejon.

Camp Callejon was a camp that all the former fifth graders from all different schools came to before school started so everybody could get to know each other. The camp was hosted in the gym of Don Callejon School (DCS), and it was overstuffed with kids from all sorts of past elementary schools who would be going to sixth grade at Don Callejon. Don Callejon was a kindergarten through eighth grade school, meaning that it was a middle school and an elementary school, so I had been going to DCS since kindergarten, and was now coming back for middle school.

Scanning the jostling crowd of cheerful faces I had never seen before, I spotted my best friend, Jennifer and shoved my way through the other kids to her. "Hi," I greeted her breathlessly.

She turned to me. "Hi. There's a lot of people here, aren't there?" she responded, glancing around the room with a glint of anxiousness in her eyes.

"I know," I sighed. "I'm so nervous. What if the other sixth graders are mean?"

"That's what I'm worried about too," Jennifer fretted. "I don't know *any* of the kids from others schools, and there's hardly anyone I know who used to go to Don Callejon for elementary school." Most of the children who used to go to DC for kindergarten to fifth grade had left Don Callejon to go to other middle schools for sixth grade. In their place, former fifth graders from other elementary schools had come to DC's middle school.

"Alright, everybody, listen up!" The camp director, Mr. Johnson, stood in the center of the jostling crowd of kids. "Welcome!" He stared at the sea of faces twisted to face him. "I bet we're all very excited and looking forward to an awesome day at Camp Callejon!"

Jennifer and I exchanged an uncertain glance. "Not really," I whispered.

"Me neither," Jennifer responded, flashing a doubtful glance at the crowd of unfamiliar people surrounding us.

“Why don’t we start the day with a game called ‘The Name Game?’” Mr. Johnson suggested brightly. “Everybody get in a big circle around me.”

I shuffled awkwardly into a position next to Jennifer, feeling uncomfortable as unknown people stood next to me. In the end, we formed a big, deformed oval. “Now, hold hands with the people next you,” Mr. Johnson instructed.

I grabbed Jennifer’s hand and stared uncertainly at the other person next to me: a burly girl with the beginnings of some facial hair who I had never seen before. I grasped one of her stubby fingers in my hand, forcing myself not to flinch away at the sensation of the sweaty flesh pressed against mine. Holding hands, all of us spread out as far as we could go and created a rounder, bigger circle.

“Alright,” Mr. Johnson announced excitedly. “Each person will say their name and something interesting about themselves.” He grinned at the kid next to him who he held hands with. “Why don’t you start?”

The kid introduced himself as Nick, and stammered out several extremely boring facts about himself. Then, the girl next to him said her name, which was Andrea. Slowly, each unfamiliar person introduced themselves, until it was my turn. My tongue felt dry and limp in my mouth as I swallowed painfully and stuttered, “My name is Emily.” I hesitated, my mind racing rapidly as I tried to think of an interesting fact about myself. “I . . . I went to Don Callejon for elementary school.” I breathed a sigh of relief, thankful that my turn was over.

After that game, we proceeded to play another game. Thankfully, this game was a bit more exciting. Mr. Johnson split the mass of kids into two equal groups and instructed us to form a circle holding hands. He placed a hula hoop on the arm of one of the kids in each group. The object of the game was to pass the hula hoop around the entire circle, whilst still holding hands. Whichever group managed to get the hula hoop around the entire circle first would win. When a group had completed the game, they were to sit down on the ground.

Mr. Johnson blew into his whistle and the shrill, sharp sound rang through the air. The game began!

I bounced up and down as the first kid managed to squeeze into the hula hoop and get it to the next person without letting go of the other kids’ hands. Everybody in our circle was screaming and encouraging them. “Come on, hurry!” I squealed as a kid next to me wriggled through the hoop.

Now it was my turn. I stepped through the hula hoop and thrashed my arms, managing to get the hoop to the next person. The hoop was almost completely

around the circle and none of the other groups were sitting down yet. There was a chance our group would win. I jumped up and down, unable to contain my excitement. This was actually quite fun!

Finally, it was last person in our circle's turn. She slipped through the hula hoop easily and we were done! "Sit down!" our group shrieked, pulling each other to the ground. I felt a flicker of satisfaction when I realized we were the first one sitting down. We had won!

Our group slapped high-fives to each other as Mr. Johnson told us about the next activity we would do. We all lined up and Mr. Johnson led us out of the gym for a "tour of the school grounds." Since I had already gone to this school for elementary last year, I was already familiar with my surroundings, but it was still fun to look at all the new things about middle school. The only thing that I was disappointed to see was the tiny lockers. Each locker was at maximum two feet tall and one foot wide. I wondered how I was going to fit my backpack inside, let alone the tons of textbooks and notebooks we would get.

The hours flew by, and when we got back to the gym, I felt a twinge of disappointment that it was almost time to leave the camp. Mr. Johnson had us sit down on the gym floor and gave us a brief summary of the things that we should expect when we started middle school here. Then, he gave everybody a chance to share something that we had enjoyed about Camp Callejon. Several people raised their hand, and immediately my arm shot up into the air. "Yes, Emily?" Mr. Johnson called on me.

I swallowed, suddenly feeling a burst of confidence. "I really enjoyed this camp. I was afraid the other sixth-graders would be mean, but I was wrong. They are all really nice and I am looking forward to middle school!"

"That's great to hear, Emily," Mr. Johnson remarked.

Soon, it was time to leave. My mother came to pick me up from camp and I babbled all about the fantastic day I'd had. A mixture of emotions churned in my stomach as we walked away from the school. I felt sad to leave all the great new friends I had made that day, and excited to come back for middle school in a few days. I was really looking forward to a great year of sixth grade!