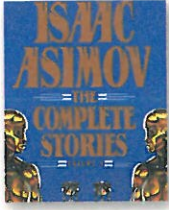


Main Selection



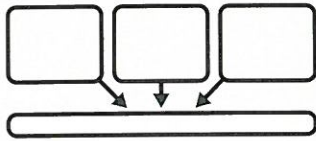
TARGET VOCABULARY

progress	insert
calculated	waste
dispute	inspector
centuries	mechanical
superior	average



TARGET SKILL

Author's Purpose Use text details to figure out the author's reasons for writing.



TARGET STRATEGY

Question Ask questions before you read, as you read, and after you read.

GENRE

Science fiction is a type of fantasy story whose plot often depends on scientific ideas.

Set a Purpose Before reading, set a purpose based on the genre and what you want to find out.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Isaac Asimov



Isaac Asimov is one of the world's best-known science fiction writers. His work helped people take science fiction more seriously. Isaac saw his first science fiction magazine in his father's candy store. After writing his first three hundred books, he said, "Writing is more fun than ever. The longer I write, the easier it gets."

MEET THE ILLUSTRATOR

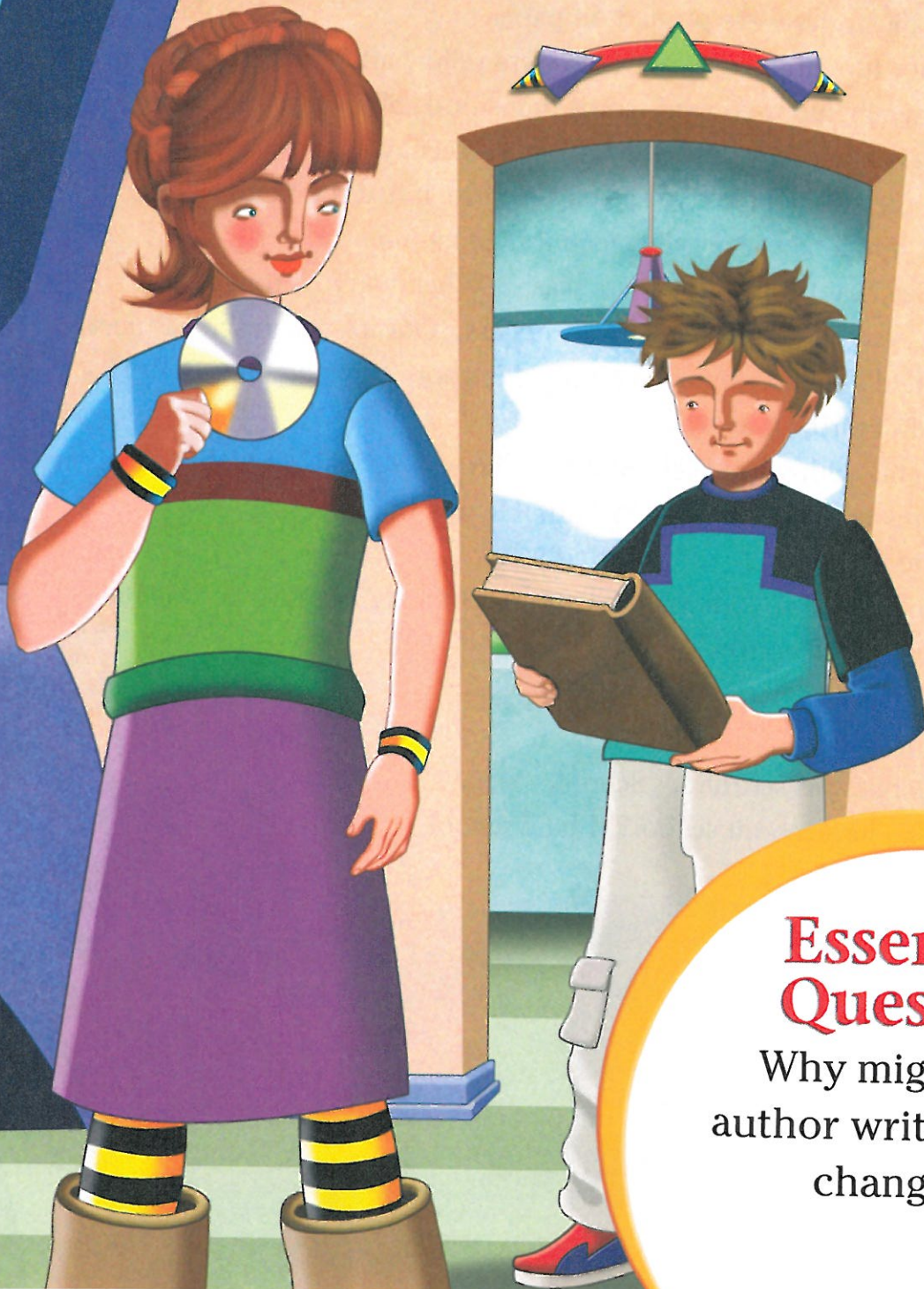
Alan Flinn



Alan Flinn has been an illustrator for more than twenty years. With author Jim Sukach, he created a book of detective stories called *Elliott's Talking Dog and Other Quicksolve Mysteries*. He has also illustrated *Constellations*, a glow-in-the-dark astronomy book.

The FUN They Had

from Isaac Asimov: *The Complete Stories*
by Isaac Asimov
selection illustrated by Alan Flinn



Essential Question

Why might an
author write about
change?

Margie even wrote about it that night in her diary. On the page headed May 17, 2157, she wrote, "Today Tommy found a real book!"

It was a very old book. Margie's grandfather once said that when he was a little boy *his* grandfather told him that there was a time when all stories were printed on paper.

They turned the pages, which were yellow and crinkly, and it was awfully funny to read words that stood still instead of moving the way they were supposed to—on a screen, you know. And then, when they turned back to the page before, it had the same words on it that it had had when they read it the first time.

"Gee," said Tommy, "what a **waste**. When you're through with the book, you just throw it away, I guess. Our television screen must have had a million books on it and it's good for plenty more. I wouldn't throw *it* away."

"Same with mine," said Margie. She was eleven and hadn't seen as many telebooks as Tommy had. He was thirteen.

She said, "Where did you find it?"

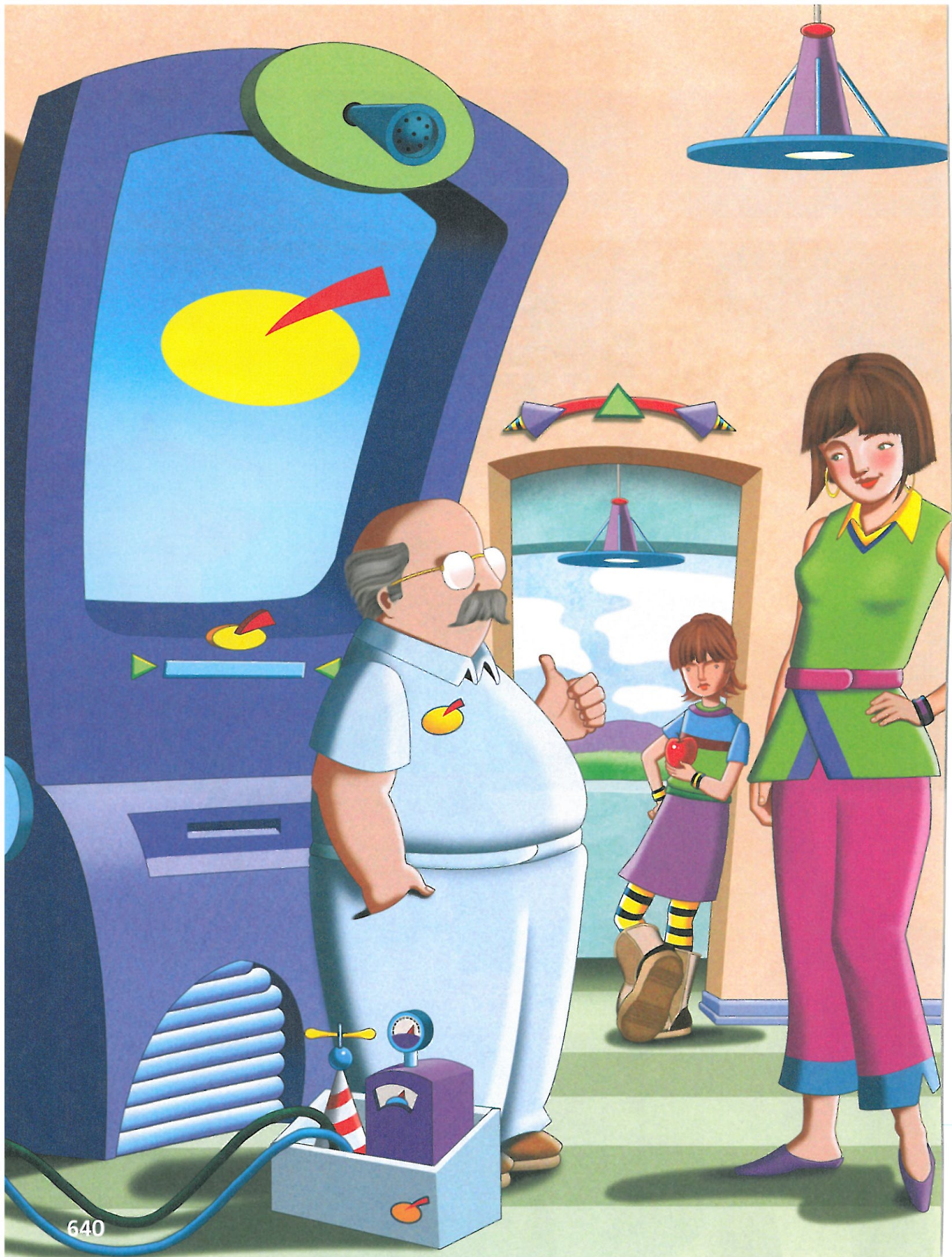
"In my house." He pointed without looking, because he was busy reading. "In the attic."

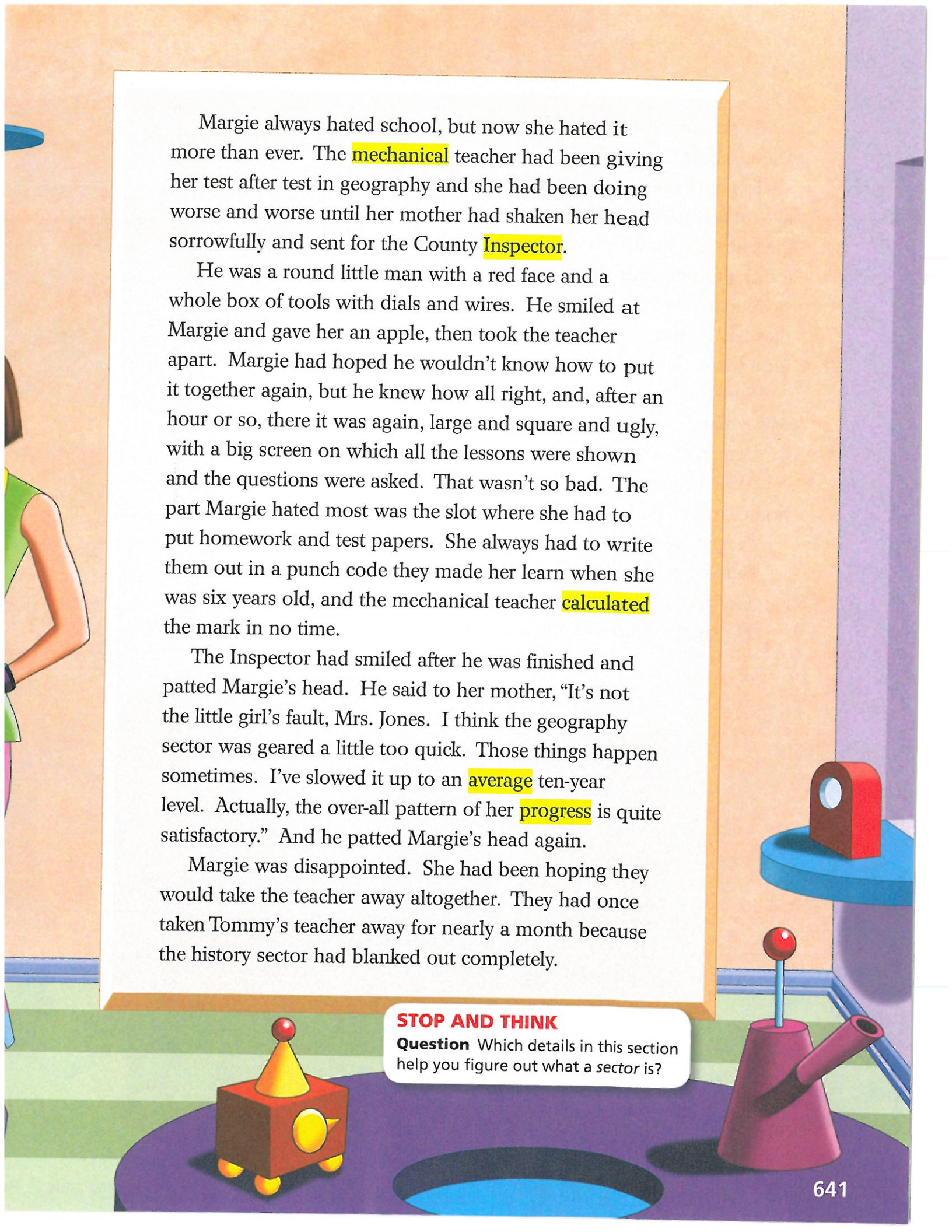
"What's it about?"

"School."

Margie was scornful. "School? What's there to write about school? I hate school."







Margie always hated school, but now she hated it more than ever. The **mechanical** teacher had been giving her test after test in geography and she had been doing worse and worse until her mother had shaken her head sorrowfully and sent for the County **Inspector**.

He was a round little man with a red face and a whole box of tools with dials and wires. He smiled at Margie and gave her an apple, then took the teacher apart. Margie had hoped he wouldn't know how to put it together again, but he knew how all right, and, after an hour or so, there it was again, large and square and ugly, with a big screen on which all the lessons were shown and the questions were asked. That wasn't so bad. The part Margie hated most was the slot where she had to put homework and test papers. She always had to write them out in a punch code they made her learn when she was six years old, and the mechanical teacher **calculated** the mark in no time.

The Inspector had smiled after he was finished and patted Margie's head. He said to her mother, "It's not the little girl's fault, Mrs. Jones. I think the geography sector was geared a little too quick. Those things happen sometimes. I've slowed it up to an **average** ten-year level. Actually, the over-all pattern of her **progress** is quite satisfactory." And he patted Margie's head again.

Margie was disappointed. She had been hoping they would take the teacher away altogether. They had once taken Tommy's teacher away for nearly a month because the history sector had blanked out completely.

STOP AND THINK

Question Which details in this section help you figure out what a *sector* is?

So she said to Tommy, "Why would anyone write about school?"

Tommy looked at her with very **superior** eyes. "Because it's not our kind of school, stupid. This is the old kind of school that they had hundreds and hundreds of years ago." He added loftily, pronouncing the word carefully, "**Centuries** ago."

Margie was hurt. "Well, I don't know what kind of school they had all that time ago." She read the book over his shoulder for a while, then said, "Anyway, they had a teacher."

"Sure they had a teacher, but it wasn't a *regular* teacher. It was a man."

"A man? How could a man be a teacher?"

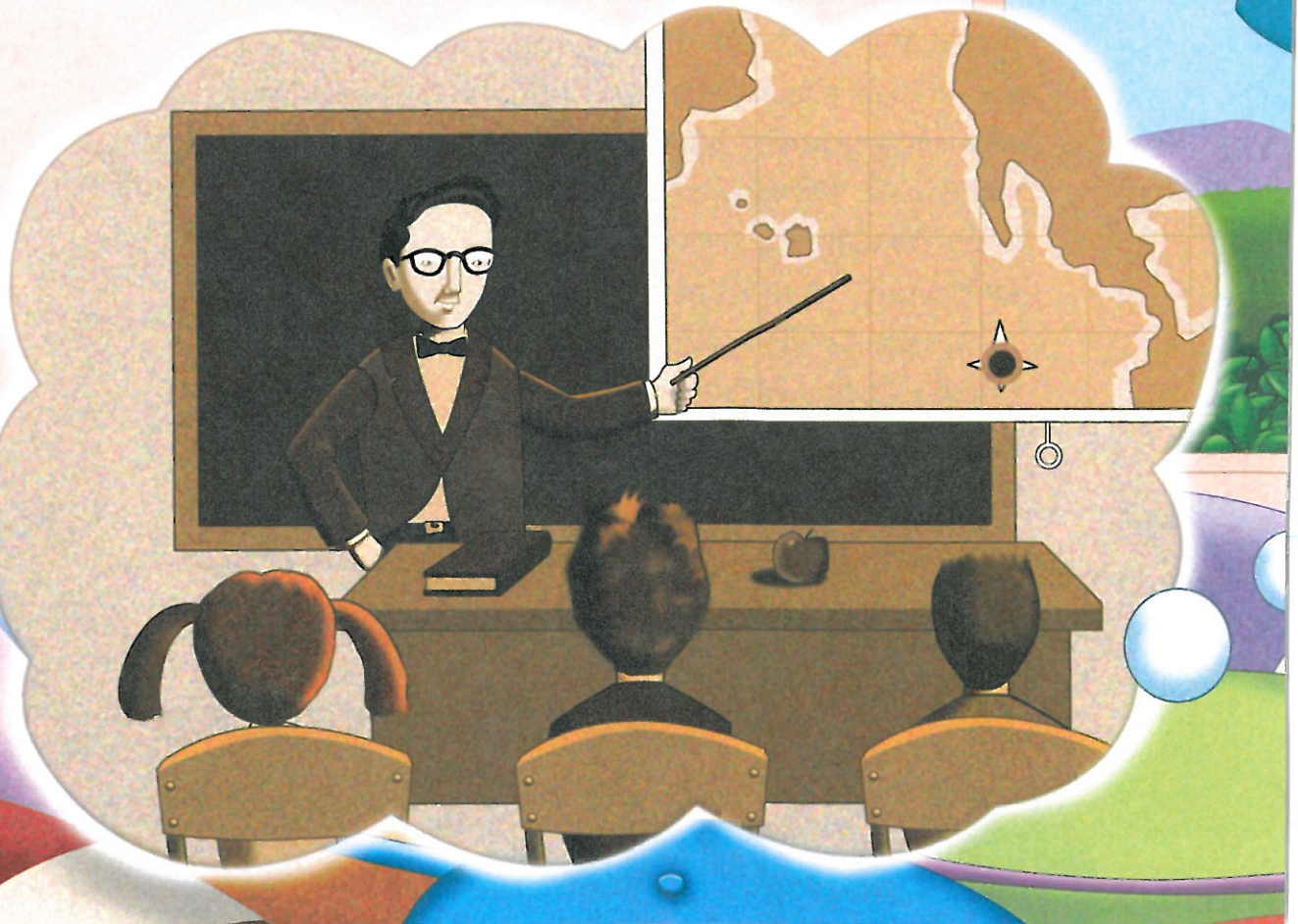
"Well, he just told the boys and girls things and gave them homework and asked them questions."


"A man isn't smart enough."

"Sure he is. My father knows as much as my teacher."

"He can't. A man can't know as much as a teacher."

"He knows almost as much, I betcha."





Margie wasn't prepared to **dispute** that. She said, "I wouldn't want a strange man in my house to teach me."

Tommy screamed with laughter. "You don't know much, Margie. The teachers didn't live in the house. They had a special building and all the kids went there."

"And all the kids learned the same thing?"

"Sure, if they were the same age."

"But my mother says a teacher has to be adjusted to fit the mind of each boy and girl it teaches and that each kid has to be taught differently."

"Just the same they didn't do it that way then. If you don't like it, you don't have to read the book."

"I didn't say I didn't like it," Margie said quickly. She wanted to read about those funny schools.

They weren't even half-finished when Margie's mother called, "Margie! School!"

Margie looked up. "Not yet, Mamma."

"Now!" said Mrs. Jones. "And it's probably time for Tommy, too."

Margie said to Tommy, "Can I read the book some more with you after school?"

"Maybe," he said nonchalantly (nahn shuh LAHNT lee). He walked away whistling, the dusty old book tucked beneath his arm.

STOP AND THINK

Author's Craft The author uses funny details and dialogue to create a humorous **tone** in his story. For example, when Margie and Tommy first look at the book, their reaction is funny. Find other details on pages 642–643 that add to the humor.

Margie went into the schoolroom. It was right next to her bedroom, and the mechanical teacher was on and waiting for her. It was always on at the same time every day except Saturday and Sunday, because her mother said little girls learned better if they learned at regular hours.

The screen was lit up, and it said: “Today’s arithmetic lesson is on the addition of proper fractions. Please insert yesterday’s homework in the proper slot.”


Margie did so with a sigh. She was thinking about the old schools they had when her grandfather’s grandfather was a little boy. All the kids from the whole neighborhood came, laughing and shouting in the schoolyard, sitting together in the schoolroom, going home together at the end of the day. They learned the same things, so they could help one another on the homework and talk about it.

And the teachers were people. . . .

The mechanical teacher was flashing on the screen: “When we add the fractions $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$ —”

Margie was thinking about how the kids must have loved it in the old days. She was thinking about the fun they had.



 **STOP AND THINK**
Author's Purpose Why do you think the author wrote this story? Keep in mind that it was first published in 1951.



Your Turn

Now and Then

Write a Response How is the future school that the author imagined similar to schools today? How is it different? Write your ideas in a paragraph. Use your own experience as well as story details to support your points.

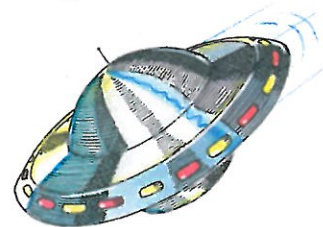
SOCIAL STUDIES



Future Fun

Draw a Scene School for Margie and Tommy is very different from school for kids today. With a group, brainstorm a list of other ways in which Margie and Tommy's lives might be different. Where do they meet their friends after school? How do they get around their neighborhood? Then draw pictures showing the activities you listed.

SMALL GROUP



Is Newer Always Better?

Turn and Talk

The author imagined a future time when school would be very different from the way it is today. How do you think the author felt about the idea of learning only from a machine? With a partner, discuss what you think his purpose was for writing about this kind of change. Use evidence from the text to support your thoughts. AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

