

Name: _____

The Great Playground Cleanup – An Earth Day Mystery

Chapter 1: The Trashy Discovery

Jake slammed his lunchbox onto the picnic table with a frustrated thud. "Another candy wrapper in the soccer field!" he groaned, holding up a crumpled piece of plastic covered in dirt. His best friend Maya peered over his shoulder, her braids swinging as she shook her head.

"It's getting worse every day," Maya agreed. She pointed to the bushes near the swings where chip bags fluttered like sad balloons. "I saw three juice boxes floating in the water fountain this morning. Earth Day is tomorrow – our school should look better than this!"

Just then, a gust of wind sent a piece of notebook paper dancing past them. Jake grabbed it and gasped. "Hey! This has teeth marks on the corner!" He held it up to show Maya the tiny puncture holes.

Maya's eyes widened. "That's weird... people don't eat paper. At least not on purpose!" A mischievous grin spread across her face. "Detective Maya on the case! Let's investigate this litterbug mystery!"



Chapter 2: The Stakeout

After school, Jake and Maya hid behind the big oak tree near the playground. They were armed with Jake's dad's old binoculars, Maya's science notebook for clues, and a bag of pretzels (for energy). They watched as the last students left for the day. The playground was quiet except for the rustling of leaves. Then – CRASH!

"There!" Jake whispered urgently. The metal trash can by the swings wobbled violently. Something small and furry was digging through the garbage!

"It's too fast!" Maya squinted through the binoculars. "I think it's... a raccoon?"

As if hearing her, the creature turned. Its little black mask and clever paws were clearly visible in the sunset light. It held a half-eaten granola bar in one paw and a juice pouch in the other before scampering away.



Chapter 3: Operation Clean-Up



The next morning – Earth Day – Jake and Maya called an emergency meeting with their class. "It's not kids making the mess," Jake announced. "It's raccoons!" Maya held up their notebook of evidence. She had photos of raccoon paw prints near the trash cans, a map showing where the worst litter was, and the bitten wrappers they'd collected.

"Our trash cans are like a raccoon buffet!" Maya explained. "They knock them over looking for food, then the wind blows trash everywhere."

Mrs. Patel, their teacher, nodded thoughtfully. "What's our Earth Day solution, detectives?"

The class brainstormed ideas. Liam suggested building trash can cages from recycled materials. Sophia wanted to make compost bins for food scraps. Carlos proposed a "Raccoon Restaurant" away from the playground.

Chapter 4: Earth Day Victory

By afternoon recess, Pine Grove Elementary had transformed. The art class decorated new locking lids for trash cans using old cereal boxes. The science club set up a compost bin near the garden (with a sign: "Raccoon Snacks Here!"). Every student got a reusable snack bag to reduce litter. As Jake and Maya admired their clean playground, a familiar masked face peered from the bushes. The raccoon waddled over to the new compost area and happily munched on an apple core.

"Case closed!" Maya high-fived Jake. "Best Earth Day mystery ever!"

On the next Earth Day, Jake and Maya smiled at their playground – spotless except for one thing. By the compost bin sat a family of raccoons, including a baby with a compostable napkin clutched in its tiny paws.

"Looks like we're not the only ones who learned to take care of the Earth," Jake laughed.



1. What problem did the characters have? _____

2. How did Jake and Maya prove raccoons caused the litter? _____

3. What is one possible reason the raccoons started coming to the playground? _____

4. How is this story's message about working together similar to real Earth Day cleanups? _____
