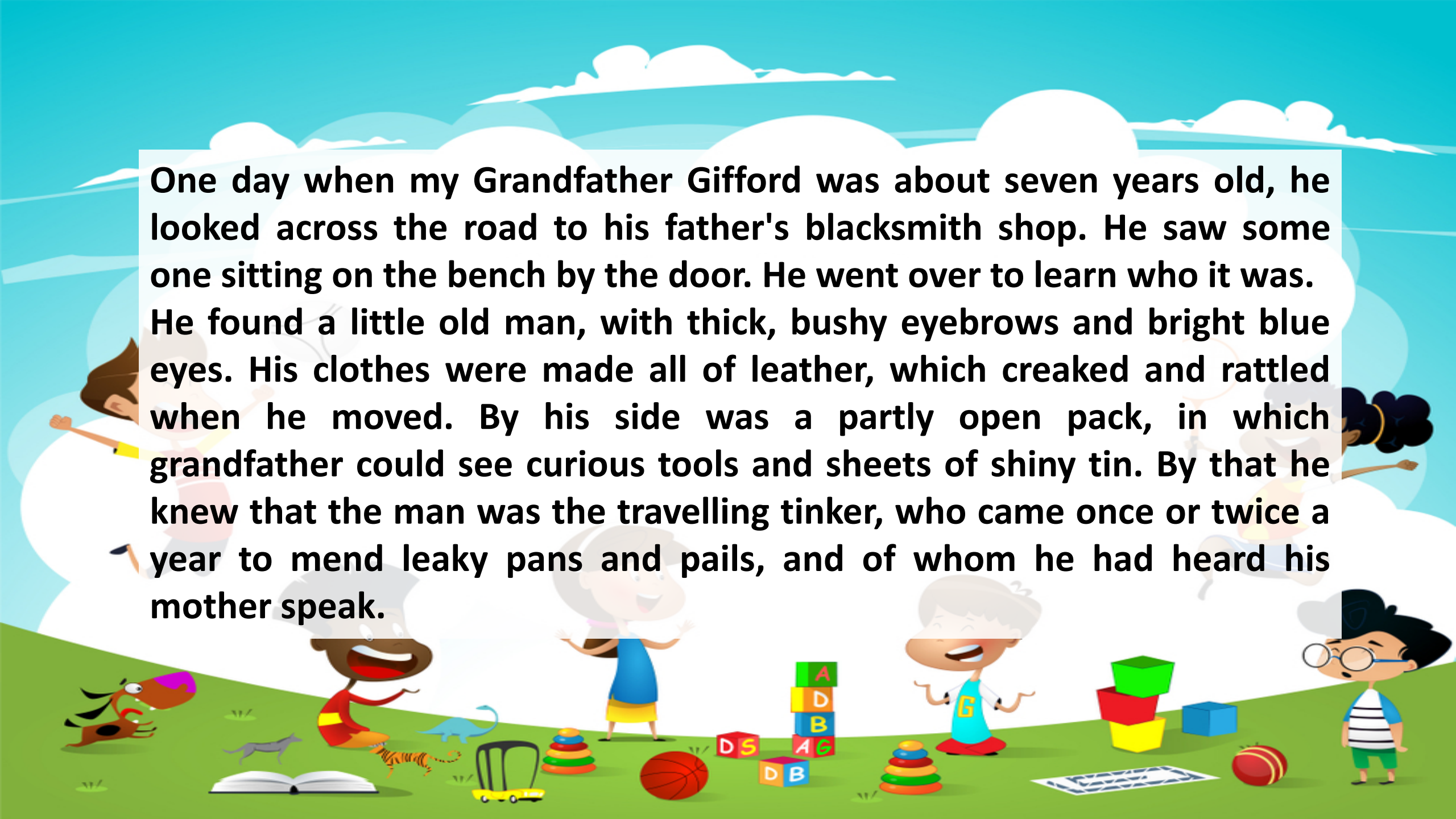


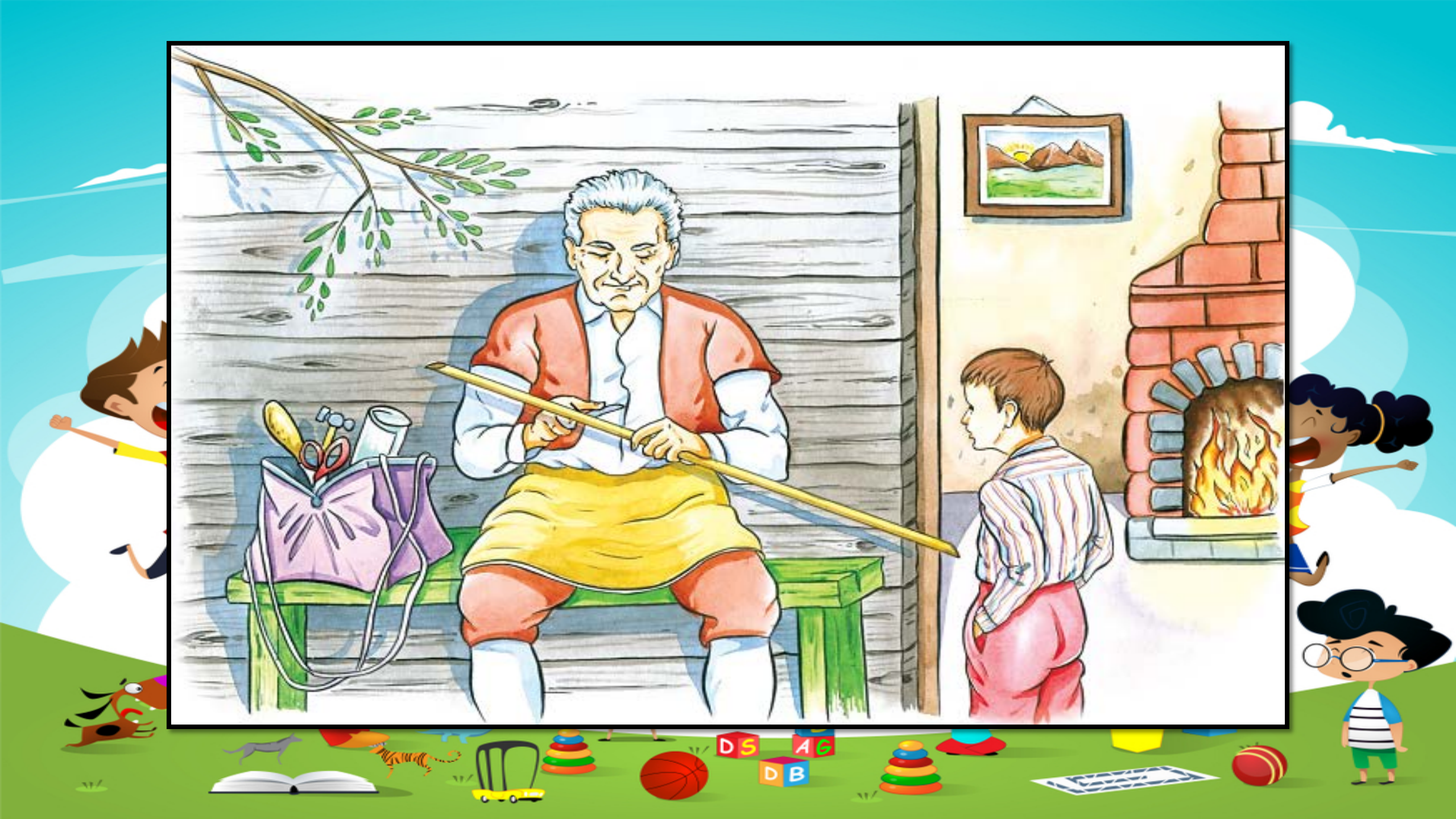
11. The Tinker's Willow

Class 4 English



One day when my Grandfather Gifford was about seven years old, he looked across the road to his father's blacksmith shop. He saw some one sitting on the bench by the door. He went over to learn who it was. He found a little old man, with thick, bushy eyebrows and bright blue eyes. His clothes were made all of leather, which creaked and rattled when he moved. By his side was a partly open pack, in which grandfather could see curious tools and sheets of shiny tin. By that he knew that the man was the travelling tinker, who came once or twice a year to mend leaky pans and pails, and of whom he had heard his mother speak.





The old man was eating his lunch - a slice or two of bread, and a cold potato; and because it seemed so poor a lunch, Grandfather went back to the house and brought two big apples from the cellar. The old man thanked him and ate the apples. Then he got up, brushed the bread crumbs from his leather breeches, and taking a little tin dipper from his pack, went down to the brook to drink water. When he had his fill, he came back to the bench and sat down.

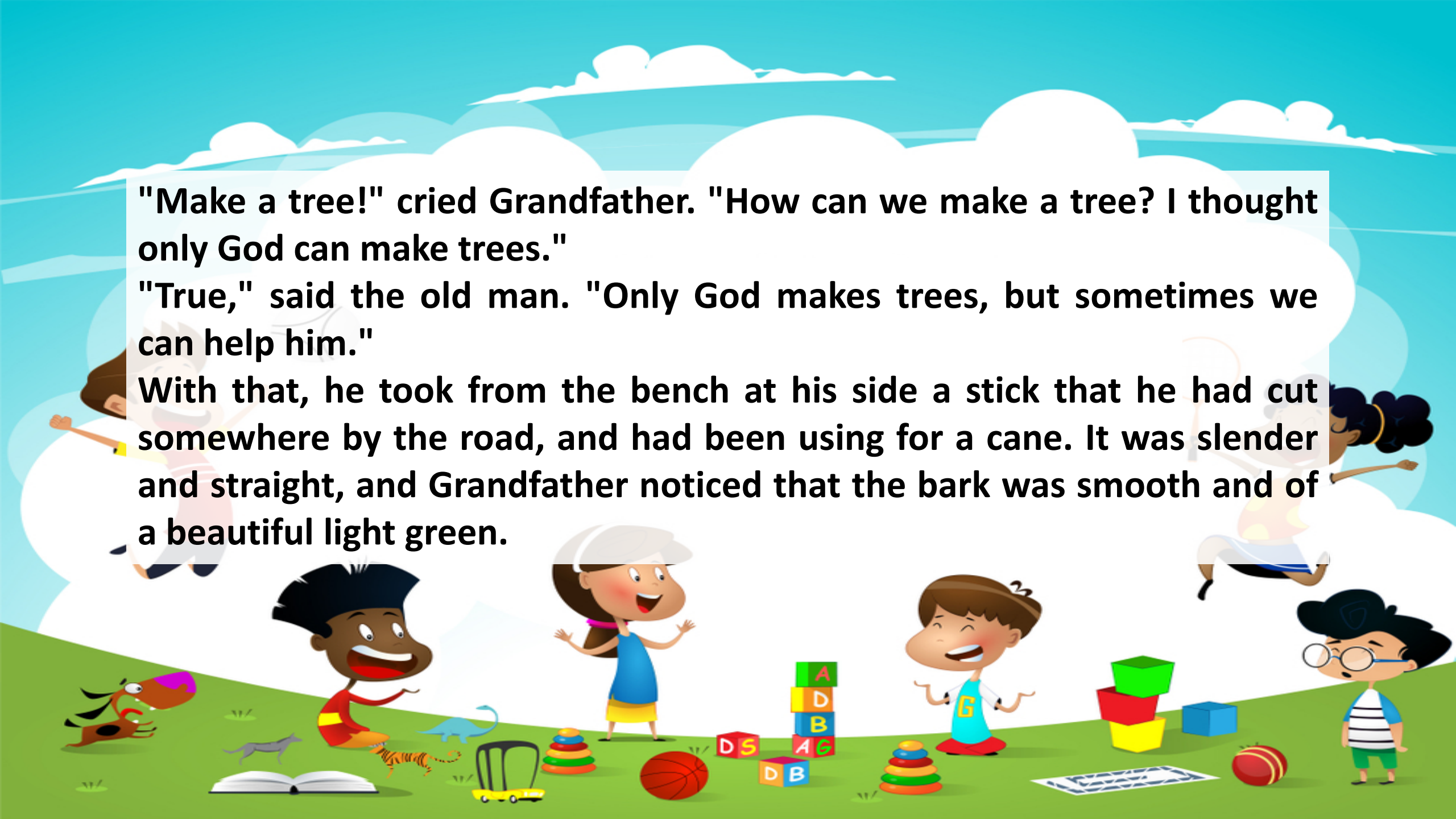
"Now, my boy," he said, "we will make a tree to grow here by the brook. There ought to be one, for shade."



"Make a tree!" cried Grandfather. "How can we make a tree? I thought only God can make trees."

"True," said the old man. "Only God makes trees, but sometimes we can help him."

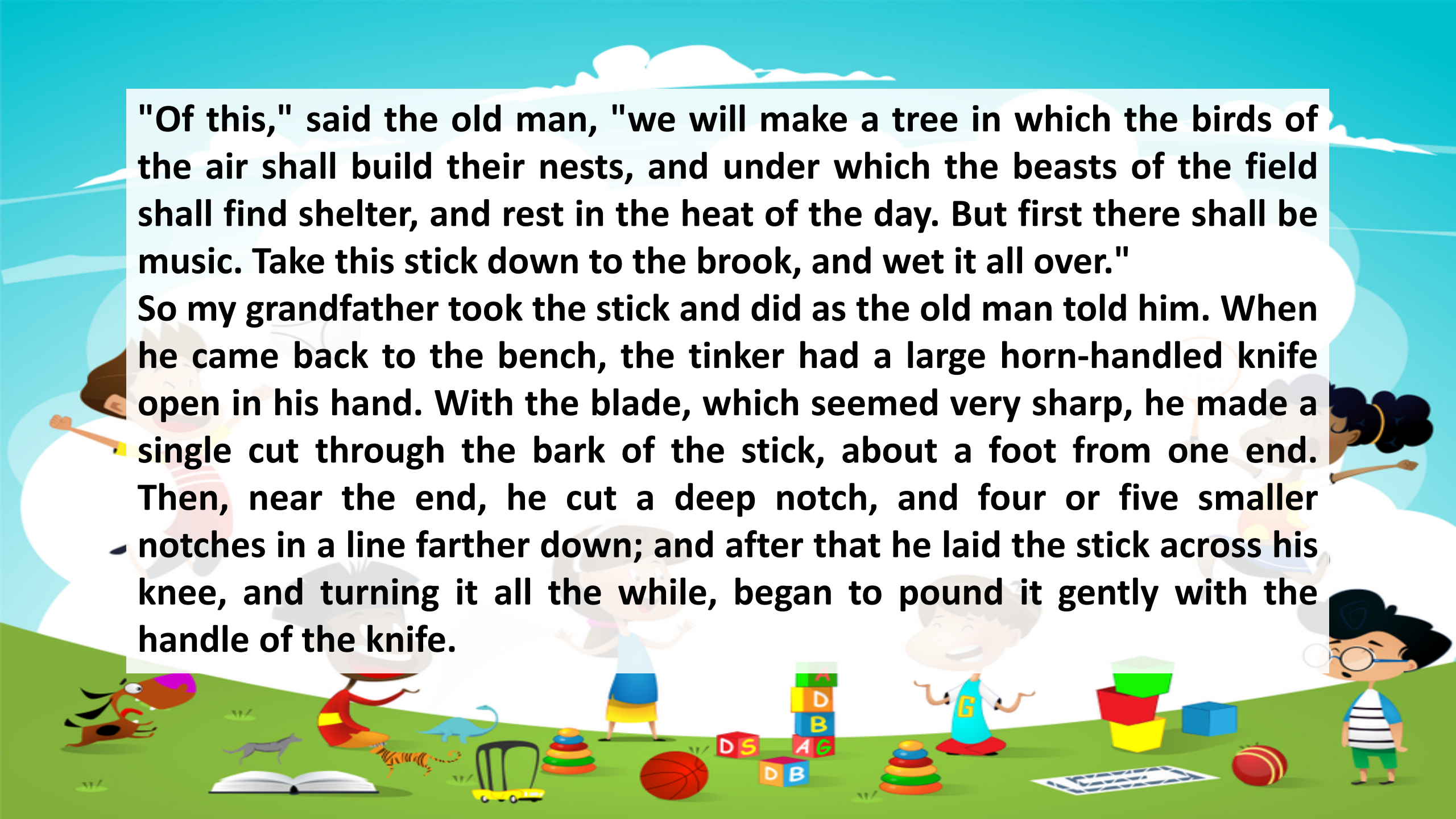
With that, he took from the bench at his side a stick that he had cut somewhere by the road, and had been using for a cane. It was slender and straight, and Grandfather noticed that the bark was smooth and of a beautiful light green.





"Of this," said the old man, "we will make a tree in which the birds of the air shall build their nests, and under which the beasts of the field shall find shelter, and rest in the heat of the day. But first there shall be music. Take this stick down to the brook, and wet it all over."

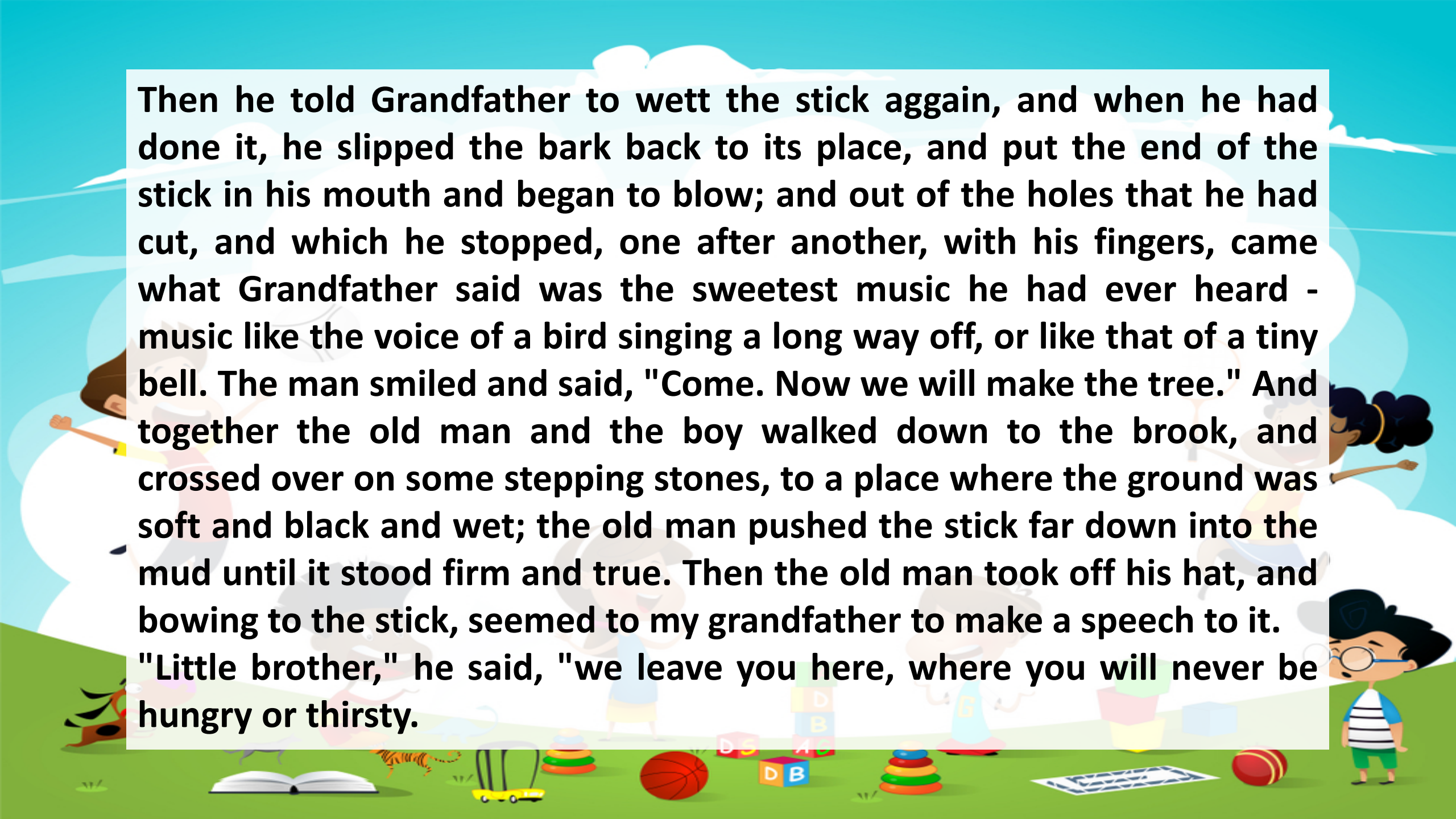
So my grandfather took the stick and did as the old man told him. When he came back to the bench, the tinker had a large horn-handled knife open in his hand. With the blade, which seemed very sharp, he made a single cut through the bark of the stick, about a foot from one end. Then, near the end, he cut a deep notch, and four or five smaller notches in a line farther down; and after that he laid the stick across his knee, and turning it all the while, began to pound it gently with the handle of the knife.



When he had pounded a long time, he laid down the knife, and taking the stick in both hands, gave it a little twist. At that, Grandfather heard something pop, and saw the bark slip from the end of the stick above the knife-cut, all whole except for the notches, a smooth, green tube.



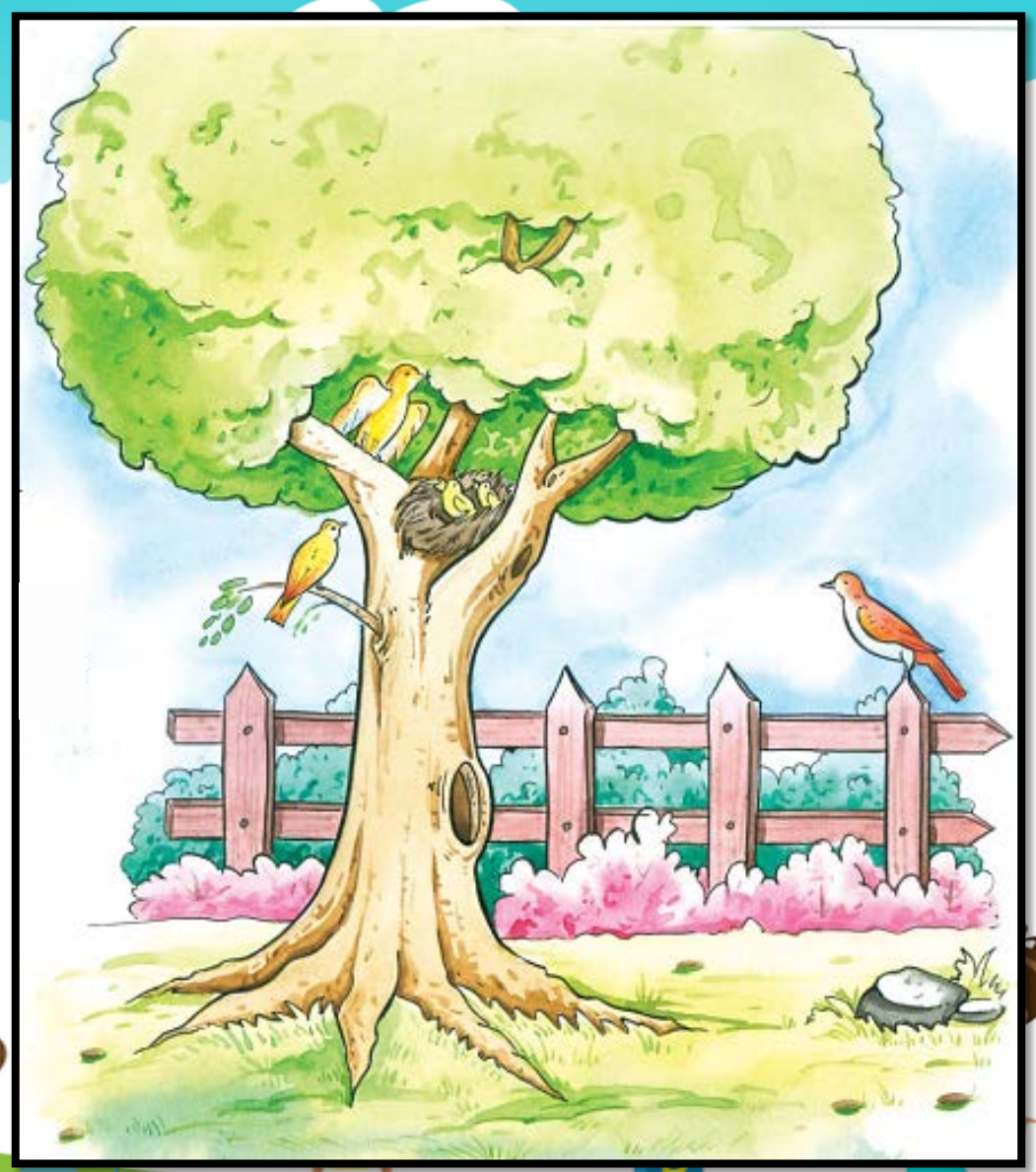
Then he told Grandfather to wett the stick aggain, and when he had done it, he slipped the bark back to its place, and put the end of the stick in his mouth and began to blow; and out of the holes that he had cut, and which he stopped, one after another, with his fingers, came what Grandfather said was the sweetest music he had ever heard - music like the voice of a bird singing a long way off, or like that of a tiny bell. The man smiled and said, "Come. Now we will make the tree." And together the old man and the boy walked down to the brook, and crossed over on some stepping stones, to a place where the ground was soft and black and wet; the old man pushed the stick far down into the mud until it stood firm and true. Then the old man took off his hat, and bowing to the stick, seemed to my grandfather to make a speech to it. "Little brother," he said, "we leave you here, where you will never be hungry or thirsty.



You have made your little music for us today, but when you have grown tall and strong, One who is greater than I shall play upon you with the breath of His mighty winds; and when this little boy is older than I am now," and here he put his hand on my grandfather's head, "his children's children shall hear your music and be glad."

In a little while after that, the old man put on his pack and went away; but my grandfather could not forget him, and almost every day he looked at the stick by the brook. One day my grandfather saw that a tiny bud had appeared and the bud became a little sprout, and the sprout a shoot, and other shoots followed, until the stick was indeed a little tree.





Through all the years that came after, it grew taller and stronger, until "The Tinker's Willow" was known as the greatest tree in all the countryside, and the birds did, indeed, build their nests among its branches, and the cattle lay in its shade in the hot noontide. Even when my grandfather was an old, old man, and had grown-up sons and daughters, and many grandchildren, he loved to sit on the bench by the shop and listen to the voice of the wind among the leaves of the great tree; and then, if we asked him, he would tell us again of the Tinker who planted it, and of the music that came from the stick out of which it grew.



Thank You

