



Having the Talk

BY CORY COLLINS

The bus let out its usual sigh as it stopped with a lurch and the door folded open. Jeremiah and Noelle exchanged tired glances. They were only two weeks into fifth grade, and it already felt like being the big kids in school meant having big responsibilities.

And now *this*. They looked at the sheets of paper Ms. Choi had sent home with them.

“What if we just...don’t talk to our families?” Jeremiah asked as they stepped off the bus.

“I think we have to,” Noelle said.

Jeremiah shuddered. He always asked his parents for help on homework and stuff. But this was different. It was more personal. And they were, like, *old*. He was afraid it would be awkward.

“FaceTime me when you’ve done it,” Noelle said. She knew interactions with adults about anything serious made Jeremiah nervous. “Promise?”

“Promise,” Jeremiah said. They did their secret handshake since third

grade—*one hand slap, two claps, three slaps, dab*—and parted ways.

Jeremiah could see his mom and dad sitting at the kitchen table. He took a deep breath, marched into the kitchen and placed his notes on the table. His parents looked over, startled by his sudden entrance and serious face.

“We need to talk,” he said. “Ms. Choi gave me this paper to have you sign.”

Jeremiah’s parents’ eyes got wide.

“Were you doing the *floss dance thing* from Fortnite in class again?!?” his mom yelled.

Jeremiah squirmed. “Well, *yes*, but—”

“Mijo, did you get into trouble?” his dad asked.

“What? No!” Jeremiah said. His parents sighed with relief.

“This is an interview,” Jeremiah continued. “I’m supposed to ask if you vote.”

Jeremiah’s parents suddenly looked as awkward as he felt.

“No,” his mom said. “I guess I don’t.”

“Why not?” Jeremiah asked.

“Well,” his mom answered, “I don’t feel like my vote for president really counts. Most of our state usually doesn’t vote for the issues I care about.”

Jeremiah thought about everything he had learned that week in social studies about voting.

“Well, Ms. Choi had us do research. I found that lots of other stuff gets decided by voters,” Jeremiah said. “Like who is on the school board! Don’t you want to help choose what happens at my school?”

“Of course I do,” his mom said, surprised by how much Jeremiah knew. “But you know, son, I only have one vote. What I think doesn’t matter.”

Jeremiah looked at his mom. He felt his nerves go away. Thanks to what he’d done in class, he was more prepared for this than he thought.

“Of course what you think matters, Mom!” he said. “All votes get counted. In Ms. Choi’s class, we looked up elections where people won by just *one vote*.”



Isn't that cool?! You could be the person who decides who wins!"

Jeremiah's mom raised her eyebrows, impressed. "I guess you're right."

"What about you, Dad?" Jeremiah asked. His dad looked sad.

"Well, *mijo*, I can't vote," his dad said. "I still only have my green card. I may not be a U.S. citizen for another year. So, there isn't much I can do about it."

Jeremiah felt silly. He knew that. His dad had only joined him and his mom two years ago after living in Mexico for most of his life. Jeremiah looked down at his notes from class and remembered something.

"Sorry, Dad," he said. "But there are things you *can* do! Ms. Choi had us brainstorm. We said that even people who can't vote can still go to town halls or protests or even help register other voters in our neighborhood. You could be like a superhero for other voters!"

Jeremiah's dad smiled wide. "I like that!" he said.

Jeremiah put his paper between his parents. "So, will you sign? If you sign, you commit to voting or helping other people with their vote!"

His parents nodded, looking proudly at their son. Jeremiah jumped and danced in celebration. "I have to FaceTime Noelle!" he said, darting out of the room.

"I did it! They signed!" Jeremiah shouted into the phone. Noelle's face beamed back. "How did it go for you?" he asked her.

"Good!" Noelle said. "I talked to Dad and Grandma. She told me about how *her* grandma used to have to walk miles to find a place where she could vote. And even then, people would make her pay money to vote! Sometimes she didn't have the money."

"That's not fair!" Jeremiah said.

"Right?" Noelle agreed. "Grandma says she always votes because she knows how hard it was for our ancestors. She said even today some people have trouble voting. So, as long as

Grandma can vote, she says she will!"

"Cool!" Jeremiah said. Then he had an idea. He was done with homework, but this was important.

"Mom!" he yelled over his shoulder. "Will you call Grandma and Grandpa? I want to ask them if they vote!" ♦

Questions for Readers

RIGHT THERE (IN THE TEXT)

Why did Jeremiah feel like he couldn't ask his parents for help with his special homework?

THINK AND SEARCH (IN THE TEXT)

Why is it important for Noelle's grandma to vote?

AUTHOR AND ME (IN MY HEAD)

Why does Jeremiah's mom feel like her vote doesn't matter?

ON MY OWN (IN MY HEAD)

What facts do I know about voting?