

On a cool October Sunday, Alejandro approached the entrance of the Furry Friends Animal Sanctuary. His frown flipped into a grin when he heard the chorus of barks.

Alejandro had been volunteering at the animal shelter for the past two months to help him feel better when he was stressed out. He was grateful to his neighbor, Mr. Wellington, for the idea. He was the one who had suggested that caring for animals could reduce stress. Volunteering at the shelter made Alejandro feel calm. He enjoyed giving back to his community. It was easy to shower the dogs with love and attention. He found it rewarding to help them become ready for adoption.

At Furry Friends, some dogs were already friendly and well-behaved, making them ready for adoption. However, other dogs needed extra training because they were less obedient. Alejandro felt pulled like a magnet to these challenging dogs. They always seemed angry with the world.

Alejandro was cheerfully walking into the animal sanctuary when he suddenly stopped. He was surprised to see someone he knew. It was Priya, a seventh grader from his school. She was gently whispering to a big beagle. Although Alejandro spent a lot of time at Furry Friends, he had never seen Priya there before.

Priya noticed Alejandro. She felt a rush of anxiety race up her spine. She remembered how he had bullied her years ago. He had teased her about her accent and made fun of her lunch. These painful memories were tattooed in her mind.

With help from her teacher, Priya had learned strategies to handle bullies like Alejandro. She practiced ignoring their mean comments and walking away. She stuck close to friends to avoid being singled out by bullies.

"Hey," Alejandro called out. He nodded a bit nervously as he walked towards her with his hands buried in his pockets.

At first, Priya was hesitant. But as they started talking about dogs, her favorite topic, she began to open up. During their conversation, she became more comfortable. Alejandro, aware of his past behavior, listened carefully to what she was saying.

In the weeks that followed, Priya and Alejandro formed a friendship while caring for the dogs together. Alejandro shared his experiences moving from Colombia to the U.S. in the fifth grade. He remembered kids teasing him because he was the new kid. Priya opened up about her own challenges with being from a different culture. She explained how she had come to embrace her Indian heritage, proud of her unique identity.

One afternoon, while they were leaving Furry Friends, a group of rowdy teens approached Alejandro and Priya. They began teasing Priya.

Alejandro felt protective of his friend. He stepped in front of Priya, facing the bullies. With a steady voice, he said, "Stop it. Leave my friend alone!" The bullies were surprised by Alejandro's confidence. They scattered like birds. From that day on, Alejandro and Priya's friendship continued to grow.



1 Read this sentence from the story.

"She felt a rush of anxiety race up her spine."

What does it mean that anxiety "raced" up Priya's spine?

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|--|---|
| A Nervous feelings appeared on Priya's back | C Nervous feelings came over Priya very quickly |
| B Nervousness made Priya want to run away from her feelings | D Nervous feelings move more quickly than other feelings |

2 Read this sentence from the story.

"With help from her teacher, Priya had learned strategies to handle bullies like Alejandro."

What does "handle" mean as it is used here?

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| A Serve | C Hold |
| B Manage | D Use |

3 Read these sentences from the story. Click to highlight two phrases that illustrate the meaning of "protective."

Alejandro felt **protective** of his friend. He stepped in front of Priya, facing the bullies. With a steady voice, he said, "Stop it. Leave my friend alone!" The bullies were surprised by Alejandro's confidence.