

One crisp October Sunday, Alejandro crunched through a carpet of leaves on his way to the Furry Friends Animal Sanctuary. A smile spread across his face as he was greeted by a symphony of barks.

Alejandro had been volunteering at the animal shelter for the past two months to help relieve his stress. So far, it was working wonders. He was grateful to his neighbor, Mr. Wellington, for suggesting it. Mr. Wellington had explained how caring for animals could help reduce stress, and he was absolutely right. Before volunteering, Alejandro had felt lost; now, volunteering gave him a sense of stability. He enjoyed giving back to his community and showering the dogs with love and attention. Helping them get ready for adoption was especially fulfilling.



At Furry Friends, some dogs were ready for adoption because they were friendly, affectionate and well-behaved around people. However, other dogs that were not as obedient and required more training. Alejandro felt drawn to these more challenging dogs. They always seemed angry with the world.

Alejandro was cheerfully walking into the animal sanctuary when he suddenly stopped. To his surprise, he recognized someone. Priya, a seventh grader from his school, was kneeling next to a beagle, speaking softly in its drooping ear. Although Alejandro was a regular at Furry Friends, this was the first time he had seen Priya there.

When Priya saw Alejandro, a wave of anxiety washed over her. She remembered how he had bullied her years ago, teasing her about her accent and making fun of her lunch. These hurtful memories were etched in her mind.

With guidance from her school counselor, Priya learned strategies to deal with bullies like Alejandro. She practiced ignoring their mean comments and walking away. She also made sure to stick close to groups of friends to avoid being singled out.

Now, at the shelter, she looked at Alejandro.

"Hey," Alejandro called out, nodding nervously as he approached her with his hands tucked into his pockets.

At first, Priya felt uncertain. However, as they started discussing the dogs they were caring for, she gradually became more open, her initial reservations beginning to fade. Meanwhile, Alejandro, aware of his past behavior, listened attentively.

Over the next few weeks, Priya and Alejandro formed a friendship while caring for the dogs together. Alejandro shared his experiences of moving from Colombia to the U.S. in fifth grade. He told her about kids teasing him for being the new kid. In return, Priya opened up about her own challenges of coming from a different culture. She described how she learned to embrace her Indian heritage and take pride in her unique identity.

One afternoon, while leaving Furry Friends, a group of rowdy teens approached them and began to tease Priya.

Alejandro felt protective of his friend and stepped in front of Priya to confront the bullies. With a steady voice, he said, "Stop it. Leave my friend alone!" Taken aback, by Alejandro's confidence, the bullies backed off. From that day on, Alejandro and Priya's friendship continued to grow.

1 Read this sentence from the story.

"These hurtful memories were etched in her mind."

What does it mean that the memories were "etched in [Priya's] mind"?

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| A Priya quickly forgot the memories | C Priya could not forget the hurtful events |
| B Priya wrote down the memories | D Priya replaced the hurtful events with new memories |

2 Read this sentence from the story.

"Helping them get ready for adoption was especially fulfilling."

Which words could replace "fulfilling" and keep the original meaning of the sentence? Choose two.

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| ☐ Comforting | ☐ Satisfying |
| ☐ Rewarding | ☐ Nice |
| | ☐ Exciting |

3 Read these sentences. Click to highlight the word or phrase that helps you understand the meaning of "reservations."

At first, Priya felt uncertain. However, as they started discussing the dogs they were caring for, she gradually became more open, her initial **reservations** beginning to fade.