

BOOK

1



Kimika & Kalynn SISTERS

Home Is Where the
Heart Smiles

Moving to a New Home

H.V.LYONS

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters “Moving to a New home”



Book 1

Home is where the Heart Smiles

Moving to a new home

By

H.V. LYONS

CONTENTS

Moving Day: A House Full of Boxes	1
The Car Ride	4
Arriving at the New House	7
The First Argument	10
Calming Down	14
Working Together	18
The Backyard Discovery	22
The Lesson	25
The Lesson of the Story	27
“What Have We Learned?”	28
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	30



MOVING DAY: A HOUSE FULL OF BOXES

The morning sunlight spilled through the half-open blinds of Kimika and Kalynn’s bedroom.

The walls that once sparkled with pictures, posters, cartoon characters, and drawings now looked bare. There were now pale outlines marking where art used to hang. Cardboard boxes stood like tiny towers, each one labeled in Dad’s neat handwriting: *Books, Toys, Shoes, Clothes, Art Stuff*.

Kimika sat cross-legged on the floor beside one half-packed box, clutching her worn sketchbook against her chest. Her fingers brushed over the painted stickers she had placed there years ago. “I don’t want to go,” she whispered, almost to herself. “Everything’s going to be different there. What if we don’t like it?”

Kalynn popped her head out from behind another stack of boxes, her curly ponytail bobbing. She was wearing her favorite explorer’s vest, the one with pockets stuffed with pebbles, rubber bands, and a mysterious feather. “Stop being silly. It’s just a house, Kimika. It’s not like we’re moving to the moon.”

Kimika frowned. “Maybe we should move to the moon. At least I’d have some peace and quiet.”

Kalynn rolled her eyes dramatically. “I doubt it. You’d still find something to

complain about. Even up there.” She giggled and tried to balance a shoebox on her head.

Dad walked in carrying another box marked Kitchen Stuff. His T-shirt was smudged with tape and dust, and he looked halfway between tired and amused. “Alright, ladies, let’s keep the peace. We’ve got one more van load to go before we hit the road.”

“Do we *have* to go?” Kimika asked, her voice small. “Can’t we just visit the new house and come back here?”

Dad crouched beside her and smiled. “I’m sorry, Sunshine. But it doesn’t work that way. Trust me, you’ll love the new house. It’s bigger and better. Just think of all the new walls waiting for you to hang your art on. I bet you’ll paint something new when you get there, maybe your biggest piece of art yet.”

Kimika looked down at her sketchbook, her lips curving slightly. “Bigger, huh?”

Kalynn leaned against a box, rocking on her heels. “And what about *me*, Daddy? Does the new place have trees? Bugs? A yard? A pond?”

Mom entered just in time to hear that. She was wearing her “Moving Day” T-shirt. It read ‘**Keep Calm and Carry Boxes**’. She chuckled. “Well, we wanted to keep it a secret, but I guess I could tell you this. It does have a backyard and a big oak tree, a swing, and there’s even room for a garden if we wanted to plant one.”

Kalynn’s eyes widened. “A *swing*? Can we make a treehouse too? And can I plant sunflowers and carrots and maybe ...”

“Slow down, slow down, little scientist,” Dad laughed. “Let’s get there and unpack first before you start farming. Okay?”

“Okay, Daddy,” replied Kalynn.

Kimika sighed and taped up her last box, pressing the tape down slowly as if she were sealing up a memory. She glanced at the empty walls of her old room one last time.

“This is where I learned to play the piano,” she said softly. “And where I drew my first picture good enough for Mom to hang up.”

Mom’s expression softened. “Don’t worry, we’ll make new memories, sweetie.”

"Moving doesn't erase the old ones; it just adds more pages to your story. You'll see."

Kalynn reached out and squeezed her sister's hand. "And I'll be on *all* your pages, even if I'm the one making a mess in them."

Kimika couldn't help but laugh. "You silly billy, you're already part of my story."

Outside, the rumble of the moving truck started up. Dad stood and brushed his hands off. "Alright, team, it's that time. Let's go start our next adventure."

Kimika took a deep breath and looked around the room again. The light caught her old sticker-covered dresser, and the faded paint on the doorframe where Mom had marked their heights every birthday.

She whispered, "Goodbye, old room," then turned toward the door.

Kalynn ran ahead, skipping down the hallway. "Race you to the car!"

Kimika groaned but smiled. "You always say that!"

"Because I always win!" Kalynn shouted back.

As they left, the sunlight followed them out the door, stretching across the floor like one last wave goodbye.



THE CAR RIDE

The moving truck rumbled ahead on the highway, stacked high with everything the family owned: sofas, boxes, and the piano that had once filled the house with music.

In the family car behind it, Kimika leaned her cheek against the window, watching the only neighborhood she'd ever known slowly disappear behind them. The trees blurred together, and so did the faces of the houses, the ones she had passed every morning on her way to school.

"Goodbye, Mr. Peterson's garden," she whispered as they rolled by. "Goodbye, corner store. Goodbye, bus stop bench."

Kalynn stretched her neck to look out the window on the other side. "Hello, *new adventure!*" She said with a grin. "Goodbye, boring old street!"

Kimika shot a sideways look past their older sister, Kimoy, who was sitting between them with her eyes closed, listening to music with her earbuds.

"It's not boring," shouted Kimika, "You just liked climbing people's fences."

"I was exploring," Kalynn said proudly, crossing her arms. "Scientists explore. That's what we do."

Dad chuckled from the driver's seat. "Well, Miss Scientist, let's try exploring from *inside* the

car today, okay?”



Mom, sitting in the front passenger seat, turned around with a gentle smile. “Kimika, why don’t you draw what you think our new house will look like? It might help you picture something good.”

Kimika opened her sketchbook on her lap and sighed. “I don’t even know what it looks like yet.”

“That’s the fun part,” Mom said. “You get to imagine it.”

Kimika thought for a moment, tapping her pencil on her chin. Then, slowly, her hand began to move across the page. She drew a house with a big porch, a garden full of flowers, and a window where she could see herself playing her piano.

Kalynn peeked over. “Make sure you draw me, too! And my frogs!”

“You don’t have any frogs,” Kimika said flatly.

“Not yet,” Kalynn said, wiggling her eyebrows. “But I *will*.”

Mom and Dad laughed softly.

As they continued their journey, the car smelled faintly of cardboard and peanut butter sandwiches. A half-empty juice box rolled across the floor as they turned a corner. From the radio, soft R&B music played, the kind Dad always listened to when he wanted everyone to relax.

Kimika’s pencil slowed. She stared at the small doodle she’d made of their old house in the corner of the page, next to the new one she was drawing. “I just wish I could bring my old friends,” she murmured.

Mom reached back and squeezed her hand. “You’ll make new ones, sweetheart. And you can always call your old friends or visit them online.”

Kalynn tilted her head. “Maybe you can draw them a picture and email it to them! That’s what artists do—they *share* their art.”

Kimika looked at her sister, surprised. “You know something, Kalynn? That’s actually... a really good idea.”

Kalynn grinned. “See? You’re lucky to have a smart little sister.”

Kimika smirked. “Smart and *annoying*.”

Kalynn stuck out her tongue.

Dad sighed but smiled in the rearview mirror. “I love this sound,” he said softly.

“What sound?” Mom asked.

“The sound of our girls being themselves. It means we’re home no matter where we go.”

Kimika looked back out the window. The sky was opening wide now, the city behind them fading into open roads and rolling hills. For the first time that day, she felt a small flutter of excitement in her chest.

“Maybe,” she whispered, “the new house won’t be *that* bad.”

Kalynn reached across Kimoy and nudged Kimika’s shoulder. “Told you. It’s going to be awesome. I bet there’s even a secret hiding spot in the attic!”

Kimika smiled faintly and added a tiny attic window to her drawing. “We’ll see.”

The car continued down the highway, sunlight flickering through the trees as if the world was waving them forward.



ARRIVING AT THE NEW HOUSE

After nearly two hours on the road, the car turned down a quiet street lined with tall, leafy trees. The sunlight shimmered through their branches, painting the pavement with golden spots. The moving truck pulled in front of a two-story tan-colored house with brown shutters and a wide porch that seemed to smile.

Kalynn pressed her face against the window.

“Whoa... It’s *huge!*” she gasped. “And look at that tree! It’s perfect for climbing, and there’s a swing!”

She unbuckled her seat belt before the car even stopped.

“Hey, hold on there, explorer!” Dad called out, braking gently. “You know better than that. Let’s park before you start your expedition.”

“Sorry, Dad,” said Kalynn, barely able to hold her excitement in.

Kimika sat quietly, staring at the house. It looked... different. Too bright. Too neat. The

flowers in the front garden stood in tidy rows, not wild and colorful like the ones she used to draw in her old yard.

“It doesn’t feel like home yet,” she murmured.

Mom turned in her seat and smiled softly. “Give it a little time, sweetheart. Homes don’t happen in one day; they grow with you over time.”

Dad hopped out first and opened the trunk. “Alright, team! Let’s start Operation Unpack.”

Kalynn leaped from the car, sneakers hitting the driveway with a slap. She ran straight to the oak tree in the front yard and tugged on the rope swing. It squeaked and swayed gently. “Kimika, come see!” she shouted.

Kimika stepped out more slowly, still clutching her sketchbook. The air smelled like freshly cut grass and lilacs. Birds chirped from the branches above, and somewhere nearby, a neighbor’s wind chime tinkled softly.

“It’s... quiet here,” she said.

“Quiet is good,” Mom said, carrying a box labeled **Kitchen**. “That means we can fill it with our special noise.”

Kalynn was already peeking under the porch. “Hey, maybe a raccoon lives down here!”

Dad laughed. “Let’s hope not. But maybe you’ll find a lucky old coin instead.”

Kimika walked up the porch steps and ran her hand along the railing. The paint was smooth under her fingertips. She could imagine painting flowers along it someday, maybe even vines that wrapped around the columns.

Inside, the house smelled faintly of fresh paint and new beginnings. Boxes filled every corner like puzzle pieces waiting to fit into place. Sunlight filtered through the living room window, making patterns on the bare floor.

Mom set down her box and clapped her hands. “Alright! Let’s make this place ours. Kimoy, start moving your things into your room. Kimika, you can set up your art supplies once we get your desk inside.”

Kalynn dashed up the stairs. “I call the side by the window!”

Kimika sighed but smiled faintly. “That’s fine. I’ll take the side with more wall space.”

Dad winked. “Always thinking like an artist.”

Mom glanced at both of them. “Remember, girls, this is our adventure together. We’ll

unpack our memories one box at a time."

Kimika looked around, imagining where her paintings would go and how her piano would sound in this new, empty space.

"It's still strange," she said softly. "But maybe... it could be nice."

From upstairs, Kalynn shouted, "Come see my window! I can see the swing!"

Kimika took a deep breath, set down her sketchbook, and climbed the stairs to join her sister. The floor creaked softly under her feet, as if the house was whispering, *Welcome home.*



THE FIRST ARGUMENT

By the afternoon, the new house was buzzing with the sounds of settling in — tape ripping, boxes sliding across the floor, and Dad’s old R&B music drifting faintly from the living room. Mom called from the kitchen, “Girls, why don’t you unpack your room next? That way, you can start decorating before dinner.”

Upstairs, the girls’ shared bedroom was a maze of boxes and bubble wrap. Kimika had already arranged her desk by the wall with the best light. “Artist’s lighting,” she called it. She spread her pencils and paints neatly across the surface, arranging every brush in a perfect rainbow.

Kalynn’s half of the room looked like a tiny tornado had blown through. An empty box was now her “science lab,” filled with rocks, magnifying glasses, and a half-eaten granola bar she’d forgotten to finish.

“Be careful with your stuff,” Kimika warned, watching her sister crawl under the bed. “What are you doing? If you’re not careful, you’re going to knock over my stuff!”



Kalynn’s muffled voice came from the shadows. “Oh, relax. I won’t knock over anything ... wait a minute! I found something!”

Kimika looked up just in time to see Kalynn wiggle backward from under the bed, clutching something small and slimy in her hands.

“Look!” Kalynn squealed. “A frog!”



Kimika’s eyes went wide. She jumped back. “WHAT?!”

Kalynn grinned proudly, holding it up like a trophy. The tiny green frog blinked, completely unaware of the chaos it had just caused.

“Get that thing away from me!” Kimika yelled, backing toward the wall.

Kalynn giggled. “Stop being so dramatic. He’s harmless! He must’ve been hiding from the moving truck. Maybe he’s the *guardian of the new house!*”

“Or maybe he’s *gross!*” Kimika grabbed a paintbrush and pointed it like a sword. “Kalynn, I mean it — keep that thing away from me and my art stuff! I mean it!”

But Kalynn, laughing too hard to listen, leaned closer. “Come on, just touch him once! His skin is so ...”

Before she could finish, the frog leaped out of her hands ... *boing!* ... right onto Kimika’s desk.

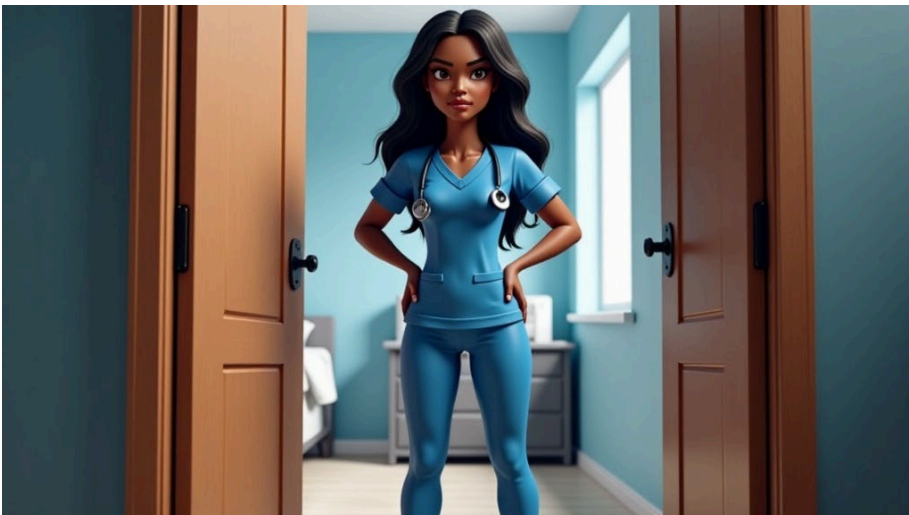
“NOOOO!” Kimika shouted, lunging forward.

The frog skidded across her palette, leaving a streak of green paint behind it. Then, with one perfect jump, it landed smack in the middle of Kimika’s open sketchbook.

For a split second, everything froze. Then both girls screamed.

“Mom!” they yelled at the same time.

Footsteps thundered up the stairs. Mom appeared in the doorway, her eyes wide. “What on earth—?”



Kimika held up her sketchbook, now smeared with paint and one perfect little frog footprint. “Look what she did!”

Kalynn gasped, her lower lip trembling. “I didn’t mean to! I was just trying to show her something cool!”

Mom tried not to laugh but failed — a soft chuckle escaped before she caught herself. “Okay, okay. Everybody breathe.”

Dad soon appeared at the door behind her, still holding a screwdriver. “What’s all this racket?”

“There was a *frog incident*,” Mom said, shaking her head.

Kimika crossed her arms tightly. “It’s ruined.”

Kalynn frowned. “I’m sorry. I’ll fix it. I’ll draw a frog right next to the footprint, and it’ll look like it’s hopping!”

Kimika’s glare softened, but only a little. “You can’t just turn every accident into an experiment.”

“Yes, I can!” Kalynn said brightly. “That’s how discoveries happen!”

Mom crouched between them, one arm around each shoulder. “Girls, you know moving is stressful for everyone — even frogs, apparently. Maybe this is our new house’s way of saying, ‘Welcome.’”

Dad grinned. “Yeah, he’s probably the neighborhood frog inspector. Making sure everyone’s unpacking properly.”

Kalynn giggled. Kimika tried to stay mad, but a tiny smile tugged at her lips.

“Fine,” she said. “But next time you find a frog, keep it outside. Preferably on another planet.”

Kalynn held up her pinky. “Okay, I promise.”

They linked fingers, sealing the truce, but the frog, sitting proudly on the window sill, looked like he wasn’t done causing trouble just yet.



CALMING DOWN

The little frog just sat on the windowsill, blinking as if nothing had happened. The room, however, looked like a tiny disaster zone — open boxes were still everywhere, there was a trail of muddy footprints straight across the floor, and a streak of green paint on the wall that somehow looked like an accidental leaf.

Mom sighed, hands on her hips, again trying not to laugh. “Well, I guess the house officially has character now. You girls really know how to leave your mark on a place.”

Kimika groaned, dropping onto her bed. “I just wanted *one* corner of the room to be perfect.”

Kalynn shuffled her feet. “I didn’t mean to mess it up. I just thought you’d think the frog was cool.” Her voice was small, and for once, she wasn’t smiling.

Kimika glanced up, her anger fading as she saw her little sister’s frown. “I know you didn’t mean to. But you should’ve listened when I said to stay away from my desk.”

Kalynn nodded. “I know. I guess I got too excited. You know I always do.”



Mom sat down between them, her arms wrapped around them both. “You two are a lot alike, you know.”

Kimika looked offended. “What? No, we’re not!”

Mom chuckled. “You both see the world in your own special way. Kimika, you see beauty and color in everything. And Kalynn, you see discovery and adventure in everything. Sometimes, those things get tangled up, and that’s okay. Just remember that when they do, you just need to slow down and see what the *other* person sees.”

Kalynn tilted her head. “So... like looking through Kimika’s eyes?”

“Exactly,” Mom said with a smile. “And Kimika, maybe try looking through Kalynn’s eyes once in a while. You might find something beautiful in her world of chaos.”

Kimika thought about it for a moment. She glanced at her sketchbook, still open on her desk. The frog’s little footprint wasn’t as bad as she’d first thought. The green smear looked almost like a brush stroke, accidentally, but full of life.

“Maybe...” she said slowly, “maybe I can turn it into something. Like a painting about new beginnings.”

Mom smiled. “Now that’s the spirit.”

Kalynn perked up. “Can I help? I can paint the frog!”

Kimika hesitated, then nodded. “Okay — but *you* keep the real one away from my desk.”



Just then, Dad poked his head into the room. “Does this mean that peace is restored?” he asked.

Kimika nodded. “Mostly.”

“Good,” Dad said, pretending to inspect the frog on the window. “Because there’s pizza downstairs and this little guy just told me he wants a slice.”

Kalynn burst out laughing. “He probably wants the pepperoni!”

Even Kimika laughed, shaking her head. “Dad, you’re so weird.”

“Yep,” Dad said proudly. “That’s my job.”

Mom stood and stretched. “Alright, artists and scientists, wash up for dinner. We’ll finish unpacking tomorrow.”

As she left the room, the sisters exchanged a quiet smile. The air felt lighter now; the tension had melted away, replaced by the warm buzz of laughter and pizza smells drifting up from downstairs.

Kalynn looked at the frog, which was still sitting calmly on the sill. “I’m going to have to find a place for him to live. Wait, a minute! I could make him a little house of his own. So, he won’t mess up your stuff again.”

"Now that sounds like a great idea," said Kimika.

Kalynn gently picked up the little frog. "All this yelling, and he never jumped away. I guess he likes it here, too."

Kimika smiled and picked up her pencil. "Yeah. Maybe we all will."



WORKING TOGETHER

The next morning, sunlight poured through the curtains, waking the girls with its golden glow. The air felt different — lighter, warmer, full of possibility. The chaos of yesterday had quieted into soft rustling and the hum of family life downstairs.

Kimika stretched and looked over at Kalynn, who was already awake, sitting cross-legged on the floor with a notebook and a magnifying glass. “What are you doing?” Kimika asked sleepily.

“Counting ants,” Kalynn said, pointing at the corner of the window sill. “There’s a tiny trail outside. I think they live near the tree.”

Kimika yawned. “You and your bugs.”

Kalynn grinned. “Hey, they’re part of the neighborhood too!”

Kimika rolled her eyes but smiled. “Okay, Dr. Kalynn. Just don’t bring any inside this time.”

Downstairs, Mom called out, “Breakfast is ready! Pancakes and fruit!”

“Race you!” Kalynn shouted, jumping up.

“Not fair!” Kimika laughed, chasing her out of the room.

After breakfast, Mom said, “Why don’t you girls finish unpacking your room today? Make it your own.”

Kimika’s eyes sparkled. “Can we decorate?”

“Of course,” Dad replied. “That’s how you make a house feel like home.”

The sisters dashed upstairs, full of ideas.



Kimika opened a box of art supplies, arranging colored pencils and paintbrushes in jars along the windowsill. She taped up her favorite drawings — flowers, dancers, and a bright yellow sun — across the wall above her desk.



Kalynn, meanwhile, built a “science corner” near the window, setting up her magnifying glass, rock collection, and a little glass jar for the frog, which she’d decided to name *Hopper*.

When Kimika noticed, she frowned. “You’re not keeping him inside, are you?”

“No,” Kalynn said proudly. “Just visiting. He’s my assistant for the day.”

Kimika shook her head, amused. “Fine. But make sure he gets a promotion — outside.”

Kalynn giggled.

By afternoon, their room had transformed. Kimika’s half was bright and tidy, filled with color and soft light. Kalynn’s side buzzed with life — books stacked high, a poster of the solar system, and a handmade “Do Not Disturb: Experiments in Progress” sign on her desk.

But something was missing in the middle. The wall between their spaces was empty.

Kimika studied it thoughtfully. “It needs something... something we both made.”

Kalynn’s eyes lit up. “Like what?”

Kimika rummaged through her art box and pulled out her sketchbook — the one with the frog’s footprint. “How about we paint *this* together?”

Kalynn gasped. “The frog print? Really?”

Kimika nodded. “Yeah. I thought it was ruined, but now I think it’s kind of perfect. It’s like our first adventure in this house.”

Kalynn clapped her hands. “Let’s do it!”

They spread newspaper on the floor and mixed paints — Kimika blending soft blues and greens while Kalynn added splashes of orange and gold. Together, they painted a big mural of the oak tree outside their window, its branches stretching wide, full of colorful leaves and tiny creatures hidden in the bark.

Kalynn painted Hopper near the roots. Kimika added two smiling girls under the tree — one holding a paintbrush, the other with a magnifying glass.

When they finished, they stepped back and admired their work.

“It’s us,” Kimika said softly.

Kalynn nodded proudly. “Yep. Sisters forever.”

They gave each other a high-five, leaving a little smudge of blue paint on each other’s hands.

Mom peeked into the room just then. Her eyes widened. “Wow, girls ... this looks amazing.”

Dad appeared behind her, smiling. “Looks like home to me.”

Kimika looked around, breathing in the warm, paint-scented air. “It does, doesn’t it?”

Kalynn nodded. “Told you this place would be awesome.”

They both laughed, and for the first time, the new house didn’t feel new anymore — it felt like *theirs*.



THE BACKYARD DISCOVERY

The afternoon sun stretched lazily across the sky, turning everything in the backyard a soft, golden color. The oak tree's leaves shimmered in the breeze, and the air smelled like grass and adventure.

After cleaning their paintbrushes, the girls ran outside, still speckled with tiny dots of color from their mural project.

"Race you to the swing!" Kalynn shouted, darting ahead.

"Not again. You always say that!" Kimika laughed, chasing her across the yard.

Kalynn reached the swing first, spinning herself around until the rope twisted tight. "Ready for launch!" she yelled, letting go and spinning back the other way until she was dizzy and giggling.

Kimika flopped onto the grass beneath the oak tree, catching her breath. "You're going to make yourself sick."

"Worth it," Kalynn said, stumbling and laughing.

The two sisters lay side by side, staring up through the tree's branches. Sunlight flickered through the leaves like glitter.

“I like this place,” Kalynn said after a while. “It’s not like our old yard, but... it feels like it has stories.”

Kimika turned her head toward her sister. “What do you mean?”

Kalynn pointed toward the tree’s roots. “Like that! See that little patch of dirt? It looks like something’s buried there.”

Kimika sat up. “You mean like treasure?”

Kalynn grinned mischievously. “Only one way to find out.”

Before Kimika could stop her, Kalynn was already on her knees, digging with her hands. “Kalynn, you can’t just—ugh, fine, at least use a stick!”

A few scoops later, Kalynn gasped. “I found something!”

She held up a small, round, silver object covered in dirt.

Kimika brushed it off carefully. “It’s... a button,” she said. The edges were engraved with tiny letters, worn smooth from age.

“Whoa,” Kalynn whispered. “Do you think it belonged to someone who lived here before us?”

“Maybe,” Kimika said, studying it closely. “It could be from an old jacket or maybe a uniform.”

Kalynn’s eyes widened. “What if it was from a kid like us? Someone who used to play in this yard and buried it as a secret!”

Kimika smiled. “Or maybe it fell off while they were playing, and they never found it again.”

Kalynn held the button in her palm and whispered, “Well, whoever they were, they can share this place with us now.”

Kimika nodded. “Yeah. We’ll keep it safe.”

She ran inside to grab her sketchbook, the same one with the frog print, and drew a tiny picture of the silver button on a new page. Beneath it, she wrote:

“The Button from Before us.”

Kalynn peeked over her shoulder. “You should add a frog and two explorers next to it.”

Kimika grinned. “Already on it.”

When she finished the drawing, they pressed the real button between the pages and closed the book gently, as if tucking in a secret.

“Let’s make a rule,” Kalynn said firmly. “Every time we find something special, we keep it in your sketchbook. It’ll be like our family treasure book.”

Kimika smiled, her eyes warm. “Deal.”

They sat under the oak tree, watching the sunlight fade into pink. Somewhere in the distance, Dad’s voice called out, “Girls, time to come in for dinner!”

Kalynn tucked the button back into Kimika’s hand. “See? Told you this place had stories.”

Kimika looked around the yard — at the tree, the swing, the soft light — and for the first time since moving, her heart felt completely still.

“It does,” she said softly. “And I think we just started ours.”



THE LESSON

That night, the house was quiet except for the soft hum of crickets outside and the gentle creak of the oak tree in the breeze. Moonlight streamed through the window, glowing across the girls' freshly decorated room.

On one wall, their mural of the oak tree shimmered softly in the pale light. The frog, the roots, the two sisters — it all looked alive, like it was breathing with them.

Kalynn lay in bed, her hands behind her head, staring at the ceiling. "Hey, Kimika," she whispered. "Do you still miss our old house?"

Kimika thought for a moment. The memory of their old street flickered in her mind — the swing set, the sound of the ice cream truck, her best friend's laughter. But now, she also saw the mural, the button, and Kalynn's bright, smiling face beside her.

"Maybe a little," she said honestly. "But not as much as before."

"Me too," Kalynn said. "This house is starting to feel like... ours."

Kimika turned toward her sister. "You know, I didn't think I'd like it here. I thought I'd lose all the things that made me happy. But I think what really makes me happy isn't the house or the old street."

Kalynn blinked. "Then what is it?"

Kimika smiled softly. “It’s the people in it.”

Kalynn grinned. “You mean *me*?”

Kimika laughed quietly. “Yes, you — and Mom, and Dad, and even your frog.”

“Hopper,” Kalynn corrected sleepily.

“Hopper,” Kimika agreed, chuckling.

There was a long, peaceful pause.

“Do you think we’ll find more treasures?” Kalynn asked, her eyes already drooping.

“I’m sure we will,” Kimika said. “Every day is kind of like a little treasure hunt.”

Kalynn yawned. “Even when we’re just brushing our teeth?”

Kimika giggled. “Especially then.”

They both laughed softly until their eyes grew heavy.

Just outside their door, Mom peeked into their room. She smiled at the sight — two sisters fast asleep under the same blanket, their sketchbook resting open on the nightstand. Inside, the pages showed the silver button, a painted frog, and the words “***The Button from Before us.***”

Mom whispered, “Goodnight, my girls,” and turned off the light.

In the darkness, the mural seemed to glow faintly — a reminder that new places, like new beginnings, always shine a little brighter when filled with love.

Kimika stirred and mumbled softly in her sleep, “Home is where our hearts smile.”

Kalynn, half-dreaming, whispered back, “And where frogs jump on sketchbooks.”

They both giggled in their dreams, the laughter echoing softly through their new home.

THE LESSON OF THE STORY

Moving to a new home can feel strange at first. You might miss your old friends, your favorite park, or even the way your room used to look. Sometimes, change feels big, almost *too* big. And that’s okay. Everyone feels that way sometimes.

But every new place has something wonderful waiting to be found. Maybe it’s a tree to climb, a new friend to meet, or a secret spot that becomes your own.

Kimika and Kalynn learned that a home isn’t just a building.

It’s made of giggles, hugs, bedtime stories, and the people who love you most.

Home is where you can be yourself, whether you’re painting, exploring, or just being silly. It’s where you feel safe, where you learn, grow, and make memories that last forever.

So, when you have to start somewhere new, remember:

- You can always carry your favorite memories with you.
- You can make brand-new ones too.
- And as long as you have love and kindness, you are never really lost — you will always be *home*.

“WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?”

- What helped Kimika and Kalynn feel at home in their new house?
- What special things do you do to make your space feel like your own?
- What’s something new that once felt scary to you but turned out to be fun?

Teacher Guide

&

Standards

1. Lesson Overview

- **Book Number:** 1
- **Book Title:** *Home is where the Heart Smiles*
- **Grade Level(s):** 2–5
- **Estimated Instructional Time:** 45–60 minutes
- **Lesson Focus: Literacy Skill:** Identifying central theme and using text evidence to support character analysis.
- **SEL Focus:** Navigating transitions, managing anxiety, and building social awareness during change.
- **Workbook Activities:**
 - 1-1A - 1-1D
 - 1-2A - 1-2D
 - 1-3A - 1-3D
 - 1-4A - 1-4H
 - 1-5A - 1-5F
 - 1-6A - 1-6F
 - Assessment 1A - 1B

2. Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to define and apply Tier 2 vocabulary (e.g., *Anxious*, *Transition*, *Perspective*) to describe the characters' experiences.
- Students will identify the central message of the story—that “home” is carried within through love and memories—using specific evidence from the text.
- Students will describe how Kimika and Kalynn manage their emotions during the challenge of moving to a new house.

3. Standards Alignment

- **NYS ELA Standards:**
 - **Reading (RL.1):** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and make logical inferences; cite specific textual evidence.
 - **Reading (RL.2):** Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development.
 - **Language (L.6):** Acquire and accurately use general academic (Tier 2) words and phrases.
- **NYS SEL Benchmarks:**
 - **Goal 1:** Self-awareness to nurture a sense of identity and agency during change.
 - **Goal 3:** Demonstrate intentional decision-making skills and behaviors that consider social and emotional needs.

4. Pre-Reading Activity (Activate Prior Knowledge)

- **Discussion Prompt:** “Have you ever moved to a new place or had to start something brand new, like a new school year? How did your body feel?”
- **Visual Aid:** Display a picture of a moving box. Ask students to brainstorm words that describe how someone might feel when they see their room packed into boxes.
- **Vocabulary Preview:** Introduce the word ‘Anxious’ (feeling worried/nervous) and ‘Transition’ (the process of changing) as they relate to moving.

5. Vocabulary & Key Concepts (Tier 2 Words)

1. **Anxious** (*adjective*) – Feeling worried, nervous, or uneasy about something that might happen.
 2. **Ambition** (*noun*) – A strong desire to achieve a goal or succeed at something important to you.
 3. **Tension** (*noun*) – A feeling of stress or tightness caused by worry, fear, or conflict.
 4. **Discovery** (*noun*) – The act of finding or learning something new for the first time.
 5. **Commotion** (*noun*) – A noisy or confusing situation where many people are moving or talking at once.
 6. **Transition** (*noun*) – A change from one place, stage, or situation to another.
 7. **Perspective** (*noun*) – A way of thinking about or understanding something based on your own experiences.
 8. **Compassion** (*noun*) – A feeling of care and concern for someone who is hurting or in need.
 9. **Adventure** (*noun*) – An exciting or unusual experience that may involve challenges or risks.
 10. **Harmony** (*noun*) – A peaceful and friendly relationship where people work well together.
- **Instructional Strategy:** Use “Emotion Charades.” Have students act out *Tension* (stiff shoulders, frowning) versus *Harmony* (relaxed, smiling) to differentiate the feelings Kimika experiences at the start versus the end of the book.

6. Read-Aloud / Shared Reading

- **Teacher Action:** Read with expression, specifically changing tone for Kimika’s small, worried voice (“Do we have to go?”) versus Dad’s warm, encouraging tone.
- **Think-Aloud:** “I notice Kimika is clutching her sketchbook very tightly. That tells me she might be feeling tension because she isn’t ready to let go of her old room.”

7. Guided Reading Questions (During Reading)

- **Literal:** What are Kimika and Kalynn doing at the beginning of the story? (Packing boxes/getting ready to move).
- **Inferential:** Why does Kimika say she wants to move to the moon? (She wants peace and quiet and is feeling overwhelmed by the move).
- **Emotional:** How does Kimika’s Perspective on the new house change after she discovers the backyard?

8. Post-Reading Discussion

- **Theme:** What does the author mean when he says, “You can always carry your favorite memories with you”?
- **Character Growth:** How did Kimika move from feeling Anxious to finding Harmony in her new home?
- **Problem-Solving:** What did Dad do to help the girls handle the Commotion of moving day?

9. SEL Focus Activity

- **“Memory Suitcase”:** Ask students to draw or write about one “memory” they would carry with them if they had to move. This practices Self-Awareness by identifying what is personally meaningful.
- **Role-Play:** In pairs, have one student act as the “Anxious” Kimika and the other as the “Encouraging” Dad. Practice using Compassion to help a friend feel better about a big change.

10. Writing Extension

- **Narrative/Reflection:** Write a journal entry from Kimika’s perspective on her first night in the new house. Use at least three Tier 2 vocabulary words.
- **Differentiation:** Provide sentence starters: “At first, I felt _____ because of the Transition. But then, I had a Discovery in the backyard...”.

11. Independent or Small-Group Practice

- **Literacy Center:** Students match the 10 Tier 2 vocabulary words to specific scenes in the book (e.g., matching *Commotion* to the “House Full of Boxes” chapter).
- **Art Connection:** Draw a “Heart Smiles” map—a map of a place where you feel safest and happiest.

12. Assessment & Check for Understanding

- **Exit Ticket:** Identify one piece of text evidence that shows Kimika was feeling Anxious at the beginning of the story.
- **Discussion Observation:** Can the student explain the “lesson” of the story in their own words?

13. Reflection & Closure

- **Prompt:** “What is something new that once felt scary to you (like moving) but turned out to be a fun Adventure?”
- **Closing Thought:** Remind students that change is a natural Transition and they have the strength to find Harmony in new places.

14. Extension & Enrichment Activities

- **Home-School Connection:** Have students interview a family member about a time they moved or started a new job. How did they handle the Tension?
- **Creative Project:** Build a “New House” diorama using recycled cardboard boxes.

15. Differentiation & Support Strategies

- **Special Education Support:** Provide a “Visual Vocabulary” board with emojis representing the 10 Tier 2 words (e.g., a worried face for *Anxious*).
- **Modified Prompts:** For the writing extension, allow students to draw their response and dictate the “Tier 2” words to a teacher.

Workbook Activities

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Book 1: Home is where the Heart Smiles

Word Bank

Before starting the chapters, review these ten words found in the story

1. **Anxious (adjective):** Feeling worried, nervous, or uneasy about something that might happen.
2. **Ambition (noun):** A strong desire to achieve a goal or succeed at something important to you.
3. **Tension (noun):** A feeling of stress or tightness caused by worry, fear, or conflict.
4. **Discovery (noun):** The act of finding or learning something new for the first time.
5. **Commotion (noun):** A noisy or confusing situation where many people are moving or talking at once.
6. **Transition (noun):** A change from one place, stage, or situation to another.
7. **Perspective (noun):** A way of thinking about or understanding something based on your own experiences.
8. **Compassion (noun):** A feeling of care and concern for someone who is hurting or in need.
9. **Adventure (noun):** An exciting or unusual experience that may involve challenges or risks.
10. **Harmony (noun):** A peaceful and friendly relationship where people work well together.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 1-1A

Chapter 1: Moving Day: A House Full of Boxes

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. How does Kimika feel about leaving her old room?

2. What does Kalynn have in her explorer's vest, and what does this tell us about her?

3. According to Dad, why should Kimika be excited about the new house?

4. What memory does Kimika share about her old room before she leaves?

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 1-1B

Feelings Check-In:

Identify two emotions felt by Kimika or Kalynn in this chapter. Explain why you believe they feel that way.

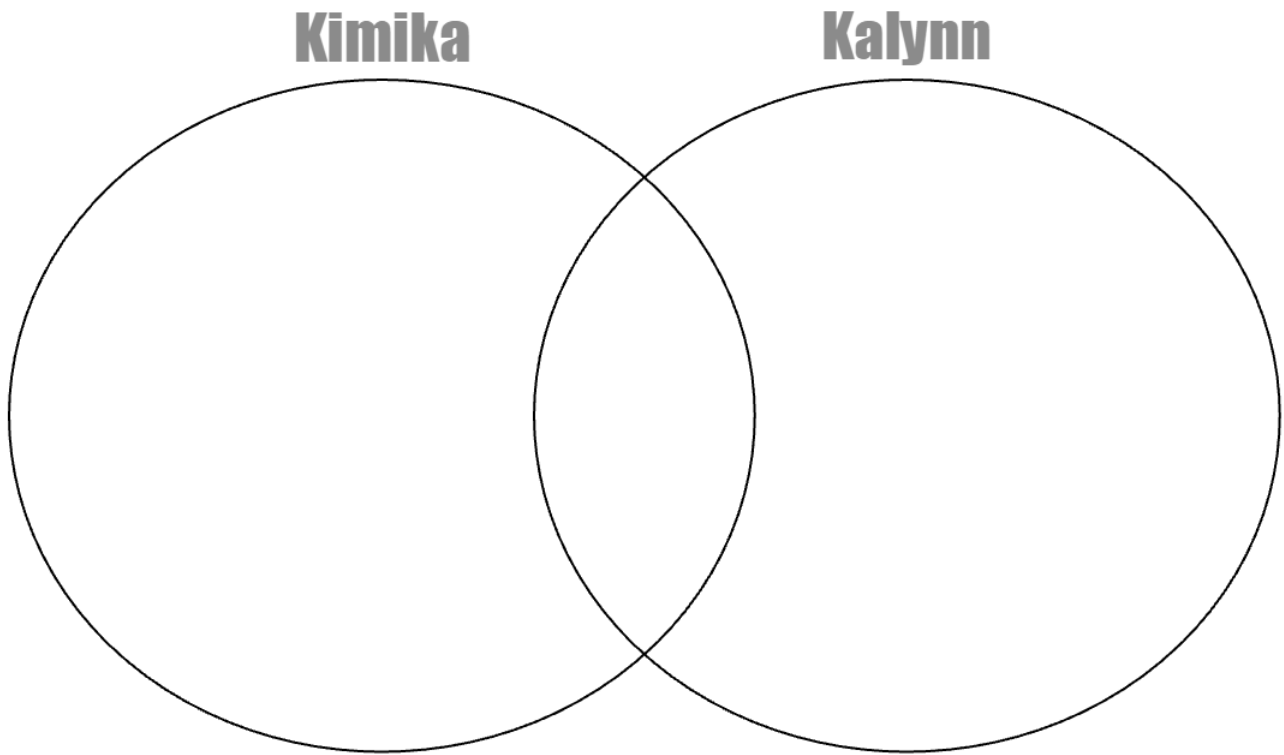
Adjective Hunt:

Find three adjectives used to describe the bedroom or the boxes. Explain what they help you visualize.

ACTIVITY: 1-1C

Character Study

Create a Venn diagram comparing Kimika and Kalynn's reactions to moving day.



Sensory Details

List one thing a character hears and one thing a character touches in this chapter.

In your own words, describe the feeling you think they experienced.

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ACTIVITY: 1-2A

Chapter 2: The Car Ride

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What specific things in the neighborhood does Kimika say goodbye to?

2. Why does Kimika get upset with Kalynn during the car ride?

3. What does Mom suggest Kimika do to feel better about the new house?

4. What “sound” does Dad say he loves hearing in the car?

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 1-2B

Feelings Check-In:

Explain the emotion Kimika feels when she looks at her old house doodle versus the new house drawing.

Perspective-Taking:

Rewrite the car ride scene from the older sister Kimoy's perspective.

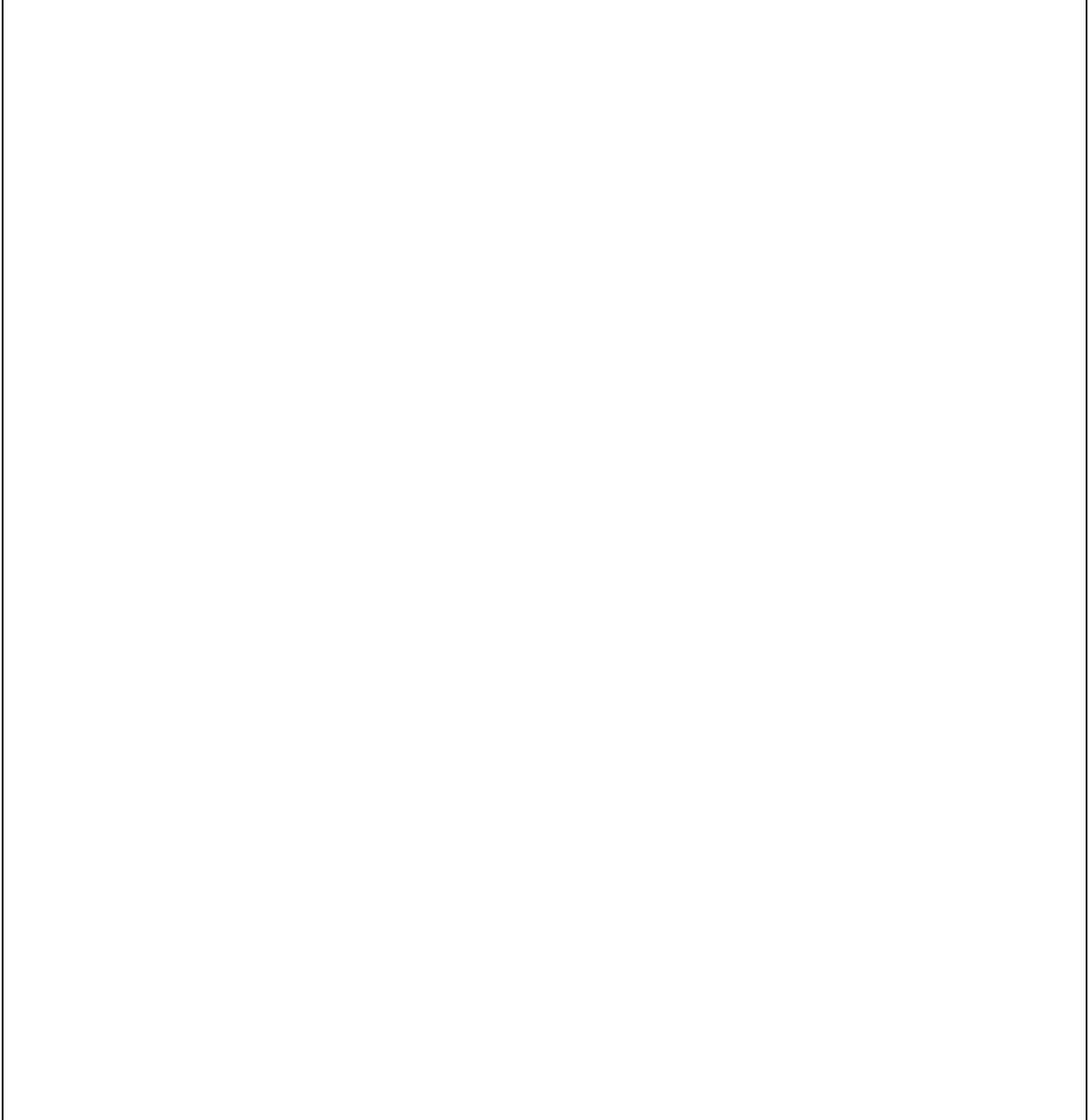
Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 1-2C

Art

Draw the house that Kimika imagined in her sketchbook.



Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 1-2D

Vocabulary Detective

Find the word “adventure” in this chapter. How does Kalynn’s use of the word differ from Kimika’s feelings?

ACTIVITY: 1-3A

Chapter 3: Arriving at the New House

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. Describe the physical appearance of the new house.

2. What is Kalynn's first "expedition" when they arrive?

3. How does the air smell at the new house?

4. Why does Kimika think the new house doesn't feel like "home" yet?

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Feelings Check-In:

Identify the “complex emotion” Kimika feels as she walks up the porch steps.

Sensory Details:

List three things the characters smell or hear in this new environment.

ACTIVITY: 1-3B
Storyboard

Create a 4-frame comic strip showing the family arriving and entering the house.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 1-3C

Reading Scavenger Hunt

Find an example of personification (where the house or an object acts like a person).

Explain what effect this has on the story.

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ACTIVITY: 1-4A

Chapter 4: The First Argument

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. How is Kimika's side of the room different from Kalynn's side?

2. What "discovery" does Kalynn make under the bed?

3. What happens to Kimika's sketchbook during the commotion?

4. How does the argument end?

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 1-4B

Character Study (Feelings Map)

Directions:

Read Chapter 4 carefully. As you read, track how Kimika’s feelings change. Fill in the chart using evidence from the story.

Story Moment	What Happens in the Story	What were Kimika’s Feelings	Text Evidence from the Story
“Artist’s lighting”	Kimika carefully sets up her desk by the window, so she has perfect lighting for her art.		
Watching Kalynn crawl under the bed	Kimika sees Kalynn digging around under the bed while unpacking.		
Kalynn finds the frog	Kalynn crawls out holding a slimy frog and shows it to Kimika.		
Kalynn brings the frog closer	Kalynn laughs and tries to get Kimika to touch the frog.		
The frog jumps	The frog suddenly leaps out of Kalynn’s hands toward Kimika’s desk.		
“The frog skidded...”	The frog slides across Kimika’s paint palette and lands in her sketchbook.		

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 1-4C

(Grades 2-3)

Visual Emotion Timeline Worksheet

Directions:

Look at the moments from this chapter below. Draw an *emoji* face that shows how Kimika might be feeling. Then write one word that describes her feeling.

Story Moment	Draw Kimika's emoji Face	Feeling Words
Kimika sets up her art desk with "Artist's lighting."		
Kalynn starts digging under the bed.		
Kalynn shows Kimika the frog.		
The frog jumps toward Kimika's art supplies.		
The frog skids across the paint palette and sketchbook.		

1. Why did Kimika feel upset, and what could Kalynn have done differently?

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ACTIVITY: 1-4D (Part 1)

Character Emotion Graph Activity

(Grades 4–5 – ELA RL.3 Alignment)

Directions:

Characters' feelings change during a story. Plot Kimika's emotions on the graph below based on events from Chapter 4.

Emotion Scale:

1 = Calm / Happy

2 = Slightly Concerned

3 = Surprised

4 = Nervous / Frustrated

5 = Very Upset / Angry

Event #	Story Event	Emotion Level (1–5)	Why Did Kimika Feel This Way?
1	Kimika creates “Artist’s lighting.”		
2	Kalynn crawls under the bed.		
3	Kalynn shows the frog.		
4	The frog jumps toward the art desk.		
5	The frog skids across the paint palette.		

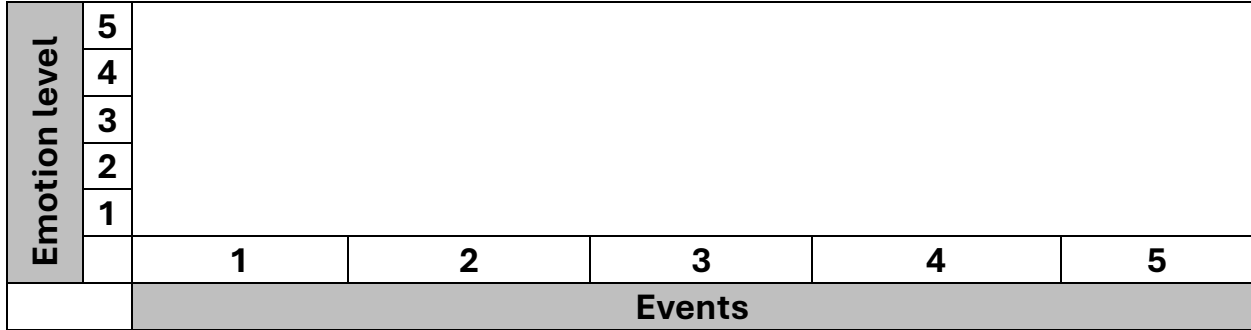
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ACTIVITY: 1-4D (Part 2)

Graph Instructions:

Using the information you entered in **Activity 1-4D Part 1**, plot your answers on the graph below, connecting the emotion level numbers for each event.



Analysis Question

How did Kimika's feelings change during this scene? Using two pieces of evidence from the text to explain in detail.

Continued on next page...

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ACTIVITY: 1-4D (Part 3)
Text Evidence Character Analysis
Character Study: Kimika

Directions:

Read the section from Chapter 4 carefully. Answer the questions using complete sentences and evidence from the story.

1. What was Kimika doing when the scene began?

Text Evidence:

2. How did Kimika react when she first saw the frog?

Text Evidence:

3. Why was Kimika especially upset when the frog landed on her art supplies?

Text Evidence:

Continued on next page...

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4. What does this moment teach us about Kimika's personality?

- She cares deeply about her artwork
- She enjoys surprises
- She likes frogs near her supplies
- She values organization and creativity

Explain your answer with evidence:

Reflection

1. How do you feel when something important to you gets ruined or damaged?

2. What is a calm way someone could handle that feeling?

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ACTIVITY: 1-4E Conflict Resolution Activity Fixing the Problem

What Happened?

In this chapter, Kimika was working carefully on her artwork when Kalynn found a frog. When the frog jumped and skidded across Kimika's paint palette and sketchbook, Kimika became very upset, and an argument began between the sisters.

Sometimes, when people feel surprised, angry, or frustrated, they argue rather than talk calmly.

But problems can be solved!

Step 1: Identify the Problem

What caused the argument between Kimika and Kalynn?

Step 2: Understand the Feelings

How do you think each character felt?

Character	Feeling	Why did they feel this way?
Kimika		
Kalynn		

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Step 3: Think of Possible Solutions

What are some ways the sisters could solve their problem?

Mark the solutions that would help.

- Kalynn apologizes for bringing the frog near the art supplies.
- Kimika explains calmly why her artwork is important to her.
- The sisters shout at each other.
- Kalynn helps clean the paint and fix the mess.
- They talk about what to do differently next time.

Step 4: Write a Better Conversation

Write what Kimika and Kalynn could say to solve the problem peacefully.

Kimika:

Kalynn:

Step 5: What Would You Do?

If something important to you was accidentally ruined, how would you handle the situation?

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ACTIVITY: 1-4F

Vocabulary Quiz

Use the words 'commotion' and 'tension' to describe this chapter.

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ACTIVITY: 1-4G

Turn-and-Talk

Read this phrase: “Was Kimika right to be angry, or should she understand that Kalynn was just being a scientist?”

Discuss with a partner and write your thoughts.

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ACTIVITY: 1-4H

Art

Draw the “perfect little frog footprint”.



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ACTIVITY: 1-5A

Chapter 5: Calming Down

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What does the room look like after the argument?

2. What advice does Mom give the girls about seeing the world?

3. How does Kimika decide to use the frog footprint in her art?

4. What “sound” or “smell” signals that the tension has melted away?

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ACTIVITY: 1-5B

Feelings Check-In:

Identify the moment the “tension” breaks. What emotion do you think it would replace?

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ACTIVITY: 1-5C

Perspective-Taking

Rewrite the “mom’s advice” scene from the perspective of the frog on the windowsill.

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ACTIVITY: 1-5D

Adjective Hunt

Find adjectives that describe the “new house’s character.”

Note: Adjectives are words that describe nouns or pronouns, adding tone and interest to sentences

For example: “*red ball*,” “*big house*,” or “*happy dog*.” They add details about how something looks, feels, tastes, or sounds, as well as its size, color, shape, and number.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 1-6A

Chapter 6: Calming Down

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What is Kalynn doing when Kimika wakes up the next morning?

2. What does Kimika put on her walls to make the room her own?

3. What is the “science corner” and what is in it?

4. Describe the mural the sisters paint together.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 1-6B

Feelings Check-In:

Describe the feeling of “Harmony” as the girls paint the mural.

Sensory Details: What does the air smell like while they are painting?

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

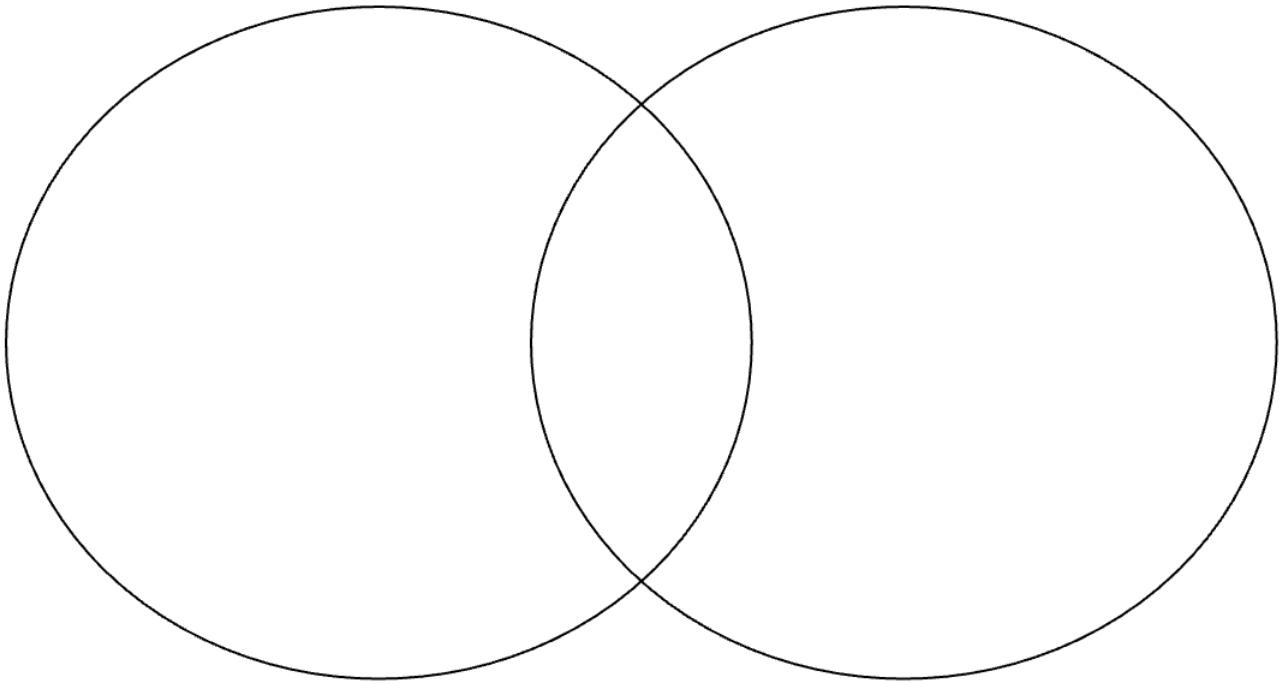
ACTIVITY: 1-6C

Character Study

(Venn Diagram): Compare the “Artist’s side” (Kimika) and the “Scientist’s side” (Kalynn) of the room.

Kimika

Kalynn



Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 1-6D

Turn-and-Talk

Read this phrase: “Why was it important for the girls to paint something *together*?”

Discuss with a partner and write your thoughts.

BOOK

9

Kimika & Kalynn SISTERS



Different but the Same

H.V. LYONS

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters “Different but the Same”



Book 9

Different but the Same

By

H.V. LYONS

CONTENTS

Questions on the Playground	1
The Ride Home	5
Family History Night	9
A Lesson Shared	15
The Beauty of All of Us	19
A Story Shared, A Story Growing	23
The Lesson of the Story	26
“What Have We Learned?”	28
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	30



QUESTIONS ON THE PLAYGROUND

The afternoon sun stretched across the playground like a warm blanket, making the metal monkey bars shimmer and the slide glow a bright, golden yellow. A gentle breeze rustled the leaves of the big oak tree in the middle of the schoolyard, the one the kids had nicknamed “The Giant,” because its branches were so wide it could shade half the playground during recess.

Kimika and Kalynn sat on the blacktop beneath it, their knees dusty from chalk and their fingers stained with bright colors. A rainbow of chalk sticks lay scattered between them like treasure. They were deep in their favorite recess activity, sidewalk art.

Kimika crouched low, pressing a soft pink piece of chalk to the pavement and slowly shaping the curve of a butterfly wing. “There,” she said softly, “if I blend the purple right here, it’ll look like it’s glowing.”

“You’re such an artist,” Kalynn said, squinting at her own drawing. She grabbed a blue chalk piece and added big dots to her butterfly’s wings. “Look! I made mine scientifically accurate.”

Kimika raised an eyebrow. “Scientifically accurate? You made the antennae curly.”

“It’s artistic science,” Kalynn declared proudly. “A hybrid field.”

Kimika giggled. “You’re making that up.”

“Maybe,” Kalynn admitted. “But it sounds cool!”

The sisters laughed together, the kind of easy laughter that came naturally when they were doing something they loved.

Just then, a shadow stretched across their drawings.

The girls looked up to see **Michael**, a tall, pale-skinned boy from their class. His reddish hair flipped up at the ends, like it wasn’t sure whether it wanted to lie flat or stand up. He held a red jump rope in one hand, and his freckles glowed in the sunlight.

“Whoa...” Michael said, kneeling down beside them. “Did you guys make all these?”

“Yep!” Kalynn said proudly. “We’re chalk experts.”

“Chalkologists,” Kimika added.

Michael smiled. “They’re awesome. Mine never look this good. My butterflies always come out lopsided.”

Kalynn whispered, “Mine too. But don’t tell Kimmy.”

“I heard that,” Kimika said, smirking.

Michael’s smile faded a little as he looked from one sister to the other. His eyes narrowed—not meanly, just curiously, as if he were working out a puzzle in his head.

“Can I ask you something?” he said quietly.

Kalynn sat up straighter. “Yep! We love questions.”

Michael hesitated. His cheeks pinkened. “Okay, um... you’re sisters, right?”

“Obviously,” Kalynn said. “We have matching dimples.”

“And matching attitudes,” Kimika added.

Michael nodded slowly. “Right. But, um...” He pointed at their arms. “How come your skin colors are different? Like... Kimika is a little darker than you, Kalynn. And I’m even lighter than both of you. I don’t get how that works.”

Kalynn’s mouth opened like she was about to give a science lecture, but then she paused. “Hmm.”

Kimika’s hand paused mid-chalk stroke. Her chest fluttered with a feeling she didn’t quite have a name for yet, curiosity mixed with surprise mixed with... maybe concern?

Michael’s voice shook a little. “I’m not trying to be rude! I promise! It just popped in my head, and my mom always says it’s good to ask questions instead of assuming stuff.”

He looked so nervous, his shoulders tight, his hands twisting the jump rope.

Kimika softened. “It’s okay, Michael. You didn’t say anything mean.”

“Yeah,” Kalynn agreed. “You’re just wondering. I do that all the time.”

Michael exhaled, relieved. “Good. Because I don’t wanna be one of those kids who says things wrong and makes people mad.”

“You’re not,” Kimika said gently. “We can explain it.”

But before she could, a sharp **TWEEEEET!** Sliced through the air.

Coach Ortiz blew her whistle near the kickball field.

“TIME FOR KICKBALL! LINE UP IF YOU WANT TO PLAY!”

Kids started running in every direction, some toward the field, some toward the swings, some toward the water fountains, as a burst of energy swept across the playground.

Michael stood up quickly. “Uh—can we talk another time about it? I really wanna understand.”

“Sure,” Kimika said, brushing chalk from her hands.

“Yeah!” Kalynn added. “We like explaining stuff. Especially sciencey stuff.”

“And art stuff,” Kimika corrected.

Michael smiled. “Okay. Later.”

He jogged off toward the field.

The sisters stood up and gathered their chalk pieces.

Kalynn nudged her sister. “Did that bother you?”

Kimika shook her head slowly. “Not really. It just... surprised me.”

“Me too,” Kalynn said. “But he didn’t say it in a mean way.”

“No,” Kimika agreed. “He’s just curious.”

Kalynn nodded. "Like a scientist."

"Or an artist who wants to know how colors mix," Kimika added.

They smiled at each other, two sisters, two shades of brown, two pieces of the same puzzle.

The kickball whistle sounded again.

"Come on," Kimika said. "Let's play."

As they ran toward the field, the question Michael asked lingered softly in their minds, not heavy, not sad, just... waiting.

Waiting for a moment when they could sit down and understand it together.

Waiting for a moment to learn something new, about themselves... and each other.



THE RIDE HOME

The school bell rang with its usual bright *BRRRRING*, echoing through the hallways. Backpacks zipped, lockers slammed, and kids spilled out onto the front steps like marbles rolling from a jar. The sun had dipped lower in the sky, turning everything a soft, honey-gold color.

Kimika and Kalynn joined the line of students waiting for their bus. Kalynn bounced on the balls of her feet, her curls bobbing with every hop. Usually, she talked nonstop after school—about science videos, playground discoveries, or what she wanted for dinner.

But today, she was unusually quiet.

Kimika noticed. “You, okay?” she asked softly.

Kalynn shrugged. “Yeah. Just thinking.”

“About Michael’s question?” Kimika guessed.

Kalynn nodded. “Yeah. It felt weird. Not bad-weird... just... different.”

Just then, the bus pulled up with a hiss of brakes, and the driver called out, “Bus 27! Let’s go, kiddos!”

The sisters climbed aboard and found their usual seat halfway down. Kimika slid in by the window, placing her backpack on her lap. Kalynn plopped beside her, hugging her own backpack like a stuffed toy.

The bus lurched forward, and the familiar rumble began under their feet.

For a moment, they rode in silence—just the low hum of the engine and the chatter of kids around them. Outside the window, houses passed by in slow motion: red brick homes, front porches with rocking chairs, neat lawns sprinkled with late-spring flowers.

Finally, Kalynn spoke.

“Kimmy...”

“Hmm?”

Kalynn twisted a loose thread on her sleeve. “Did Michael’s question bother *you*?”

Kimika thought carefully. “Not really. I mean... he asked nicely. He wasn’t trying to be mean.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Kalynn agreed. “Some kids say stuff like that to be mean on purpose.”

They both knew the kind of comments they’d heard before, kids wondering out loud if their hair was “real,” asking why their curls were big, or why their skin got “darker in summer.” Some comments were mean, some just clumsy. But Michael’s voice had been different. It wasn’t teasing. It wasn’t mocking.

It was honest. Curious.

Kimika tucked a braid behind her ear. “I think Michael just wanted to understand something he’d never thought about before.”

Kalynn leaned her head on the seat. “Mom says people ask questions when they’re learning.”

“Dad says the same thing,” Kimika added. “He says when you stay silent and guess, that’s when the trouble happens.”

A pothole bumped the bus, and Kalynn grabbed the seat. “So... do you know why our skin is different?”

Kimika hesitated. “Well... kinda? I mean, Mom told me before that it has to do with our family. Like, people get skin colors from their parents and grandparents.”

Kalynn squinted. “So, I got more of Mom’s color?”

“Probably,” Kimika said. “And I got more of Dad’s.”

Kalynn held her arm up next to Kimika’s. “Yeah... see? Yours is like warm chocolate, and mine is like caramel candy.”

“Mom is brown sugar,” Kimika added.

“And Dad is almond latte!” Kalynn finished, both of them dissolving into laughter.

But when the giggles faded, the question was still sitting there, quiet and important.

Kalynn looked out the window. “But some kids in school act like lighter means something good. Or darker means something bad. Like your color says what kind of person you are.”

Kimika nodded slowly. “Yeah. But it doesn’t. It’s just... Who you are.”

“Right,” Kalynn said. “And who we come from.”

The bus rolled to a stop at an intersection. A crossing guard dressed in neon-yellow held up a sign, waving the children across.

Kalynn turned back to her sister. “Do you think Mom and Dad know more about it?”

Kimika smiled. “Definitely. Dad knows everything about family history. Remember his giant scrapbook?”

Kalynn gasped dramatically. “The *big* one? The one that smells like old library books?”

“That’s the one,” Kimika giggled.

“Let’s ask them when we get home,” Kalynn said. “They’ll know how to explain it better.”

The bus made its final turn into their neighborhood, a cozy row of houses with tall trees lining the street. The Lyons house was third from the corner, painted warm beige with brown shutters, the kind of house that looked like it always smelled like fresh laundry and Sunday dinners.

When the bus finally stopped, the girls hopped off, landing on the sidewalk with thumps that echoed slightly.

Kalynn took two steps back. “Race you to the door?”

“Why bother? You always lose,” Kimika teased.

“Not today!” Kalynn shouted, taking off at full speed.

Her backpack flopped side to side as she sprinted, curls flying wildly behind her like a comet tail.

Kimika laughed, running after her. “Hey! You cheated!”

“No such thing!” Kalynn joked, panting.

They burst onto the front porch, breathless and giggling.

Kimika grabbed the door handle and paused.

“Hey, Kalynn,” she said softly. “I’m glad we’re talking about this.”

“Me too,” Kalynn replied. “It feels important.”

“It *is* important.”

They stepped inside together.

Whatever answers they needed, whatever stories their family held, they knew one thing for sure:

They would learn it side by side, like they always did.

Together.



FAMILY HISTORY NIGHT

That evening, the smell of Mom’s baked chicken and sweet cornbread still lingered in the air as the Lyons family cleared the dinner table together. The kitchen lights glowed softly, making everything feel warm and safe, like the perfect atmosphere for sharing stories.

Kalynn dried the dishes while humming a tune she’d made up, and Kimika stacked them carefully in the cabinet.

Dad leaned against the counter, watching them. “You girls seem deep in thought tonight,” he said with a smile.

Kalynn and Kimika exchanged a look.

“Dad...” Kimika began.

“We have a question,” Kalynn finished.

Dad raised an eyebrow. “Oh? Big question or small question?”

“Medium-big,” Kalynn said.

“Maybe even big-big,” Kimika added.

Mom walked in with her cozy house slippers on. “Well, now I’m curious. What’s this about?”

Kalynn took a breath. "Someone at school... Michael... asked why our skin colors are different shades."

"And why our skin color is different from his," Kimika added quietly.

Mom and Dad shared a glance, it wasn't a worried one, just understanding. A glance that said, *Ah. A real conversation today.*

Mom gently put her hands on her hips. "Did he say it kindly?"

"Yes," both girls said immediately.

"He wasn't teasing," Kimika clarified. "He honestly didn't know."

"And we didn't really know how to explain it," Kalynn added, rubbing her arm. "So, we told him we'd talk to him another time. But first... we wanted to ask you."

Dad nodded slowly. "I think that's a beautiful idea."

Mom smiled. "Then I believe tonight is officially..."

She reached for a soft, leather-bound book on the top shelf of the hallway closet. "**...Family History Night.**"

Kalynn clapped her hands excitedly. "Yessss! I love Family History Night!"

Dad laughed. "Of course you do. You get that curiosity from your mother."

Mom winked. "And that dramatic flair from your father."

They all settled in the living room, snuggling onto the big couch with soft pillows. Dad placed the scrapbook on the coffee table like it was a treasure chest filled with magic.

Kimika opened it gently, the pages crackling under her fingers.



Mom's Side of the Story

Mom flipped to the first page: a picture of a tropical beach with water so blue it almost didn't look real.

"This," Mom said softly, "is **St. Mary, Jamaica**, where my family comes from."

Kalynn leaned close, her curls brushing the page. "It looks like paradise."

"It is," Mom said. "Your grandmother grew up not far from this beach. She used to tell me stories about climbing mango trees and swimming in the river after school."

"Grandma climbed trees?" Kimika asked, eyes wide.

Mom smiled. "Oh yes. She was fearless. Just like Kalynn."

"Hey!" Kalynn said, but she grinned proudly.

Mom turned the page to an old black-and-white photo of a woman with warm, deep dark skin and bright eyes. Her hair was wrapped in a patterned scarf.

"This is your grandma when she was about your age," Mom said.

Kimika gently touched the edge of the photo. "She looks like you."

Mom nodded. "And like you both. That's where some of your beautiful skin tones come from, my Jamaican side of the family."

She pointed to another picture, a group photo of family members with a mix of warm

browns, sands, and caramels. “In Jamaica, people come in many shades, too. All beautiful. All connected.”

Kalynn whispered, “Like a sunset with lots of colors.”

Mom smiled softly. “Exactly.”



Dad’s Side of the Story

Dad cleared his throat gently and turned the scrapbook to a different set of pages, this one filled with history.

“This,” he said, tapping a slightly faded picture, “is **Greensboro, North Carolina**. Where my father, your grandfather, grew up.”

The photo showed a large crowd of people holding signs. Some signs said *EQUALITY NOW* and *WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED*.

Kimika frowned thoughtfully. “Was this... a protest?”

Dad nodded. “Yes. The **Civil Rights Movement**. My parents and grandparents lived through a time when Black Americans were fighting to be treated fairly.”

Kalynn scooted closer, her expression serious. “Did our family march too?”

Dad’s eyes softened with pride. “They did. My father marched in Greensboro. He was only a teenager. They wanted equal rights, for our people to be treated with dignity and respect.”

Kimika swallowed. “Was it dangerous?”

Dad nodded slowly. “Sometimes. But they marched anyway. Because they believed things *could* get better.”

Kalynn stared at a picture of men locking arms, walking with their heads held high. “They were really brave.”

“They were,” Dad said. “And their bravery is part of who you are, too.”

“Even though we never met them?” Kimika asked.

Dad smiled. “Family stories live inside us. Even the ones from long before we were born.”

He pointed to the shades of brown in the pictures, some deep like rich cocoa, some light like soft sand, and others somewhere in between.

“That’s where your skin tones come from,” Dad explained. “A mix of Jamaica’s sunshine and North Carolina’s strength.”

The Girls Begin to Understand

Mom closed the scrapbook gently. “Skin color is something passed down through families, like eye color, hair texture, or dimples.”

Kalynn poked her cheek. “We both have dimples!”

Mom giggled. “Exactly.”

Kimika looked down at her hands. “So, it doesn’t mean anything good or bad. It just... means we come from a lot of different places.”

Dad nodded. “It means you carry powerful stories. Stories of islands and rivers. Stories of marching feet and brave hearts. All inside of you.”

Kalynn’s eyes sparkled. “We’re like... a history smoothie!”

Kimika rolled her eyes affectionately. “A smoothie?”

“Yeah!” Kalynn said, spreading her arms. “Different ingredients mixed together to make something awesome!”

Mom burst into laughter. “Well... that’s one way to explain it.”

Dad winked. “A delicious way, at least.”

Kimika smiled softly. “So, what do we tell Michael tomorrow?”

Mom placed a warm hand on her shoulder. “Tell him the truth. Tell him your family comes from different places with different colors, and that’s why you each look the way you do.”

Dad added, “And tell him people everywhere come in lots of colors. Even in the same family. Especially in ours.”

Kalynn climbed into Dad’s lap. “I like our colors.”

Kimika leaned against Mom. “Me too.”

Mom pulled both girls close. “Hold on to that. Your shade is your story.”

Dad ruffled Kalynn’s curls. “And your story is something to be proud of.”

The girls snuggled into their parents, wrapped in love, comfort, and the weight of their history, warm and steady like a heartbeat.

They had come looking for answers.

And they found something even better:

Belonging.

Strength.

and Pride.



A LESSON SHARED

The next morning, sunlight streamed through the school windows like thin golden ribbons, painting soft stripes across the hallway tiles. Students bustled through the building—laughing at lockers, comparing lunches, trading jokes, and darting toward their classrooms before the bell.

But Kimika and Kalynn walked more slowly than usual.

Their backpacks felt heavier, not from books, but from the stories their parents had shared the night before. Stories of Jamaica, of Greensboro, of family, of history. Stories that tugged at their hearts in warm, important ways.

As they approached Kimika’s classroom, Kalynn tugged gently on her sister’s sleeve.

“Kimmy,” she whispered. “Do you think Michael still wants to know? What if he forgot he asked?”

Kimika shook her head. “He didn’t forget. He looked nervous yesterday. That means he really cares.”

Kalynn thought about that. “I get nervous too... mostly during math tests.”

Kimika giggled softly. “Different kind of nervous. Michael didn’t want to say the wrong thing. He didn’t want to hurt anyone.”

Kalynn nodded slowly. “That’s... a good kind of nervous.”

They reached Kimika’s classroom door just as the bell rang.

Kalynn squeezed her sister’s hand. “You’ve got this.”

Kimika smiled. “Thanks, Kaly.”

Kalynn waved and hurried off to her own classroom down the hall, her curls bouncing as she disappeared around the corner.

Kimika stepped into the room.

Michael was already at his desk, tapping his foot anxiously, glancing at the door every few seconds. When he saw her walk in, he straightened instantly, almost like he’d been holding his breath.

“Hey,” he said quietly, lifting one hand in a shy wave.

“Morning,” Kimika said, setting her backpack on her chair.

Michael fiddled with the edge of his notebook. “Um... did you... uh... talk to your parents? About what I asked?”

Kimika nodded. “I did.”

Michael’s face pinkened. “You don’t have to tell me anything. I wasn’t trying to be rude yesterday.”

“I know,” Kimika said gently. “You weren’t rude. You were curious. And there’s a difference.”

Michael let out a long breath, like he’d been holding it since yesterday.

The morning announcements buzzed overhead. Both kids sat quietly until the final “Have a great day, students!” played. Then the class moved into independent reading time, and soft whispers filled the room.

Kimika glanced at Michael and gave a slight nod.

Michael scooted his chair closer.

“So...” he whispered. “Why are you and your sister different colors? And different from me?”

Kimika took a deep breath, remembering the things Mom and Dad told her, the stories that made her chest feel warm.

“Well,” she began, “people get their skin colors from their families. From their ancestors.

My mom’s side of the family is from St. Mary, Jamaica, an island with beaches, rivers, mango trees, and lots of sunshine.”

Michael’s eyes widened. “Your family is from Jamaica? That’s really cool.”

Kimika smiled. “Yeah. And my dad’s side is from Greensboro, North Carolina. Some of them marched in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. They wanted equal rights for Black Americans.”

Michael blinked. “Wait... like the marches we learned about in history class?”

Kimika nodded. “Exactly those.”

Michael sat back in his chair, amazed. “Wow. That’s... kind of incredible.”

“It is,” Kimika said softly. “And both sides of my family have different skin tones. Mom’s family has warm, rich browns. Dad’s family too, but in different shades.”

Michael nodded slowly. “So, your skin... comes from all that?”

“Yep. It’s like mixing paint colors,” Kimika explained. “You mix two different tones, and you get something new and beautiful.”

Michael smiled—really smiled. “That actually makes a lot of sense.”

Kimika continued gently. “And everyone’s skin tone tells a story. It doesn’t tell you if someone is smart, funny, or kind. It just tells you where their family came from.”

Michael looked down at his own arm, pale with light freckles. He brushed a finger over it thoughtfully. “So... my skin has a story too?”

Kimika nodded. “Of course. Everyone’s does.”

Michael looked up, eyes bright with curiosity. “I never thought about it like that.”

“Maybe you should ask your parents about your family history,” Kimika encouraged. “Where your people came from. What places they lived in. What stories they passed down. You might learn something amazing.”

Michael’s entire face lit up. “You think so?”

“I know so,” Kimika said warmly. “Everyone’s history is interesting. Yours is too.”

Michael smiled shyly. “Thanks, Kimika. I’m really glad I asked you instead of just guessing. Guessing usually gets me in trouble.”

Kimika giggled. “We all get things wrong sometimes. But asking questions—nicely—is how you learn.”

Michael nodded. “Yeah. And maybe... if someone else asks something like that one day, I can explain it too.”

“That would be great,” Kimika said. “Sharing what you learn helps everyone.”

Their teacher clapped her hands to gather attention. “Alright, class! Time for morning stations!”

Michael scooted back to his desk, but before he turned around, he gave Kimika a soft, grateful thumbs-up.

She returned the smile—small, proud, and warm.

As she opened her notebook, Kimika felt something glowing inside her, brighter than the morning sun streaming through the windows.

It wasn’t just that she’d answered Michael’s question.

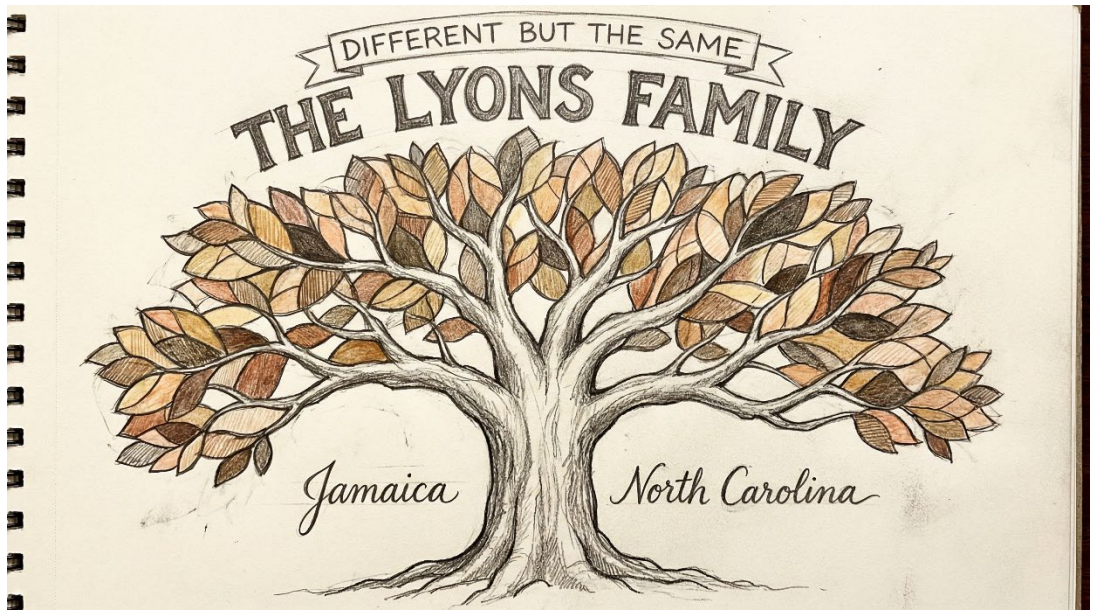
It was that she’d helped him understand something important.

She had spoken her truth with kindness.

She had shared her story with pride.

And she’d encouraged someone else to discover their own.

And that made her feel powerful, beautifully, wonderfully powerful.



THE BEAUTY OF ALL OF US

The sun was beginning to set when the Lyons family gathered once again in the living room after school. Soft orange light filtered through the curtains, casting warm gold across the furniture and wrapping the room in a calm, peaceful glow, like the whole world had paused to listen.

Kalynn hopped onto the couch first, bouncing twice before flopping onto the cushions. Kimika joined her more slowly, sinking into the corner of the couch and hugging a pillow to her chest.

Mom and Dad entered a moment later, each settling into their cozy spots like they could feel something important was coming.

Dad rested an elbow on the armrest and studied Kimika's face. "So," he asked gently, "how did things go with Michael today?"

Kimika took a breath, but the smile that spread across her face came easily. "Good," she said. "Actually... really good."

Kalynn leaned forward eagerly. "Tell us! What happened? Did you explain everything?"

"I did," Kimika said proudly. "And he listened the whole time. He didn't laugh or make weird faces or anything. He really wanted to understand."

Mom brushed a curl away from Kalynn's forehead, her voice soft. "How did it feel, sharing all that with him?"

Kimika looked down at her hands, then up at her family. “Honestly... I felt proud. Like our story meant something. Like I was teaching something important.”

Dad’s face warmed with pride. “That’s because it does mean something. Your family comes from strong, beautiful people. From Jamaica. From North Carolina. From courage and history and love.”

Kalynn stretched her arm across Kimika’s, comparing their shades like she always did. “And our colors tell some of that story.”

Kimika nodded. “Yeah. And he got it. He really did.”

She hesitated, then added with a small smile, “I even told him he should ask his own parents about where his family comes from. It might help him understand himself, too.”

Mom’s eyes glowed. “Kimika... that was thoughtful and wise.”

Dad leaned forward, impressed. “Helping him explore his history shows you weren’t just answering questions—you were encouraging him to grow.”

Kimika’s cheeks warmed. “I just figured... if learning about our story felt good, maybe learning his would feel good too.”

Kalynn scooted closer, eyes wide. “I didn’t know our family history was so awesome.”

Dad laughed softly. “Oh, it’s more than awesome. It’s powerful.”

Mom took both girls’ hands, her voice gentle and full. “You know what the most beautiful part is?”

They shook their heads.

“Your skin color doesn’t tell people how kind you are,” Mom said. “Or how brave. Or how smart. Skin only tells one tiny part of your story—where your ancestors came from. You get to write the rest.”

Kalynn’s eyes sparkled. “So... we’re writing our story right now?”

“Every day,” Dad said, wrapping an arm around her. “Every choice you make, every kindness you show, every time you teach someone something new—you’re writing your story.”

Kimika rested her head on Mom’s shoulder. “Then I want our story to say we’re proud. Proud of where we come from and who we are.”

“Exactly,” Mom whispered, kissing the top of her head.

The room fell into a soft, full silence. Not empty, but full. Full of love. Full of understanding. Full of something bigger than the four of them could see.

Then Kalynn shot upright with a burst of energy. “We should make something!”

Mom laughed. “What kind of something?”

“A poster!” Kalynn declared. “A big one! With all our shades. Caramel, chocolate, brown sugar, almond latte!”

Dad burst out laughing. “We sound like a bakery menu!”

“Exactly!” Kalynn said proudly. “A delicious family!”

Kimika grabbed her sketchbook. “Let’s draw our family tree. One branch for Jamaica, one for North Carolina.”

Mom pressed a hand to her heart. “I would love that.”

Dad nodded. “Make it bold. Make it beautiful.”

The girls hurried to the dining room table, their excitement buzzing.

Markers. Crayons. Fresh paper.

Kimika sketched a tall, strong tree with wide branches.

Kalynn shaded the leaves in different tones, browns, tans, golds, cocoa, and peach—all glowing together like stained glass.

“Look, Kimmy!” Kalynn said proudly. “All different colors... but all part of the same tree.”

Kimika smiled softly. “Just like us.”

Mom stood behind them and wrapped her arms around their shoulders. “Exactly like us.”

Dad joined them, resting a hand on both girls’ backs. “You two understand what truly makes people beautiful: kindness, pride, and respect.”

Kalynn struck a pose. “And my dimples!”

“And my art skills,” Kimika said, flipping her braids dramatically.

The whole family burst into laughter.

As evening deepened and the sky outside faded into deep blue, the poster was finished. Across the top, in bright, bold letters, the sisters wrote:

DIFFERENT BUT THE SAME

THE LYONS FAMILY

Mom hung it on the refrigerator, the family’s place of honor.

“It’s perfect,” she whispered.

“It’s us,” Kimika said, her voice warm.

“And we’re kind of awesome,” Kalynn added, hands on her hips.

Mom kissed both girls’ foreheads. “Yes, you are.”

Dad lifted his mug of tea like a toast. “To family—every shade, every story, every piece of beauty.”

The girls clinked their juice cups against his mug.

“To family!” they echoed.

Warm. Whole. Loved.

As the sisters leaned into each other, gazing at their creation, they knew one thing for certain:

Their differences didn’t divide them—they made them shine.

And in a world full of colors, their family was its own masterpiece.





A STORY SHARED, A STORY GROWING

A week later, on a bright, breezy morning, Kimika was at her locker when she heard fast footsteps pounding down the hallway.

“Kimika! Kimika!”

She turned just in time to see **Michael** rushing toward her, his backpack bouncing wildly. He skidded to a stop, nearly losing a shoe, his cheeks flushed with excitement.

“You are NOT going to believe this!” he burst out. “I talked to my parents, just like you told me to!”

Kimika grinned. “Really? What did you find out?”

Michael opened his notebook so fast the pages fluttered. He flipped to one covered in drawings, arrows, and notes written in huge, excited handwriting.

“So first,” he said, pointing proudly, “my mom’s side of the family is from Ireland. They came here a really long time ago. But that’s not even the coolest part—”

He leaned in, eyes shining.

“I found out I’m named after **Michael Collins**, one of the most important heroes in Irish history! He fought for Ireland’s independence and helped create the Irish Free State. So, you see, he fought for freedom and equality just like your Dad’s family!”

Kimika gasped softly. “That’s incredible! They’re different but the same!”

“I KNOW! Isn’t that cool!” Michael said, bouncing on his toes. “They told me he was brave and smart, and he changed Irish history forever. And my parents said they also named me ‘Michael’ because the name means **‘Who is like God?’** They said it was meant to inspire me to be strong and kind.”

He pressed a hand to his chest, still amazed.

“I didn’t know any of this before!”

Kimika smiled warmly. “That’s amazing, Michael. Your name has a story. And your family has a story, too.”

Michael nodded eagerly. “And my dad’s family? They’re from Norway! My grandpa even showed me a picture of the old village where our family lived. It’s right by these huge mountains.”

He pointed proudly to a sketch in his notebook of a little house under tall peaks.

“And get this,” he added, grinning. “My great-grandma had red hair and freckles—just like mine!”

He tapped the freckles on his nose with a laugh.

Kimika beamed. “See? Your skin, your hair, your name... it all tells a story.”

Michael closed his notebook with a proud little thump. “I’m going to make a family poster—just like you and Kalynn did. My mom said we can put it on the refrigerator!”

“That’s a great idea,” Kimika said. “Everyone’s story is worth seeing.”

The bell rang, echoing through the hallway.

Michael waved as he hurried toward his classroom. “Thanks, Kimika! Really. If you hadn’t told me to ask, I never would’ve known any of this!”

Kimika waved back, her heart glowing.

As she walked into class, she felt something warm swell inside her, brighter than sunlight and steady as her heartbeat.

She had shared her story.

She had helped someone understand.

And now, because of that, another story had been discovered—another history brought into the light.

Kimika sat at her desk, opened her notebook, and smiled.

Her family’s story was growing.

Michael’s story was growing.

And the world felt just a little bit brighter,

one shared story at a time.



THE LESSON OF THE STORY

Our world is full of people who look different from one another—different skin colors, hair textures, family histories, and cultures. These differences are not mistakes or problems. They are beautiful parts of who we are, woven from the stories of our ancestors, the places they lived, and the courage they carried.

Everyone's skin tells a story.

A story of where we come from.

A story of who came before us.

A story worth honoring and sharing.

Kimika and Kalynn learned that even within one family, people can have many shades and still belong completely to one another. Their story shows us that when someone asks a question with kindness, it's okay—good, even—to answer with kindness in return. Talking, listening, and truly understanding each other is how friendships grow.

When we understand our own story, we can share it proudly.

When we listen to someone else's story, we show respect.

And when we treat one another with kindness, we help make the world a place where everyone feels valued and seen.

Being different doesn't divide us.

It adds beauty, strength, and color to the world.

Our stories matter.

Our families matter.

And we matter—every shade, every background, all together.

“WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?”

1. Families can come in many shades, and that is something to celebrate.
2. Skin color comes from family history, not from whether someone is good, smart, or kind.
3. Asking questions respectfully is okay—that’s how we learn about each other.
4. Sharing your story helps others understand you better.
5. Differences make the world more colorful, just like a box of crayons with many hues.
6. Kindness and respect are the most important things, no matter what anyone looks like.

Teacher Guide

&

Standards

1. Lesson Overview

- **Book Number:** Book 9
- **Book Title:** *Different but the Same*
- **Grade Level(s):** 2–5
- **Estimated Instructional Time:** 45–60 minutes
- **Lesson Focus: Literacy:** Analyzing character development and central themes related to identity and family history.
 - **SEL:** Building self-awareness and social awareness through the exploration of diversity and shared humanity.

2. Learning Objectives

- **Reading:** Students will identify the central message of the story—that differences in skin color and background add beauty to the world—using specific evidence from the text.
- **Speaking & Listening:** Students will participate in a collaborative discussion about how the characters (Kimika and Kalynn) respond to questions about their appearance.
- **Writing:** Students will write a reflection on their own “story” or family history, using details to explain what makes them unique.
- **SEL:** Students will demonstrate social awareness by identifying ways to ask questions about differences respectfully.

3. Standards Alignment

- **NYS ELA Standards:**
 - **4R2:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details.
 - **4R3:** Describe a character, setting, or event, drawing on specific details in the text.
 - **W4:** Develop personal, cultural, textual, and thematic connections through written responses.
- **NYS SEL Benchmarks:**
 - **Goal 1:** Young people develop a self-awareness that nurtures and affirms a strong sense of identity.
 - **Goal 2:** Young people use social awareness to establish and maintain mutually supportive relationships.

4. Pre-Reading Activity (Activate Prior Knowledge)

- **Visual Prompt:** Show students a box of crayons with many different shades.
- **Discussion Question:** “Just like these crayons, people come in many different shades and colors. How do these different colors make a picture or the world more interesting?”
- **Vocabulary Preview:** Briefly introduce the word Melanin as a “natural pigment” that gives us our unique skin colors.

5. Vocabulary & Key Concepts

1. **Hues** (Noun): Different colors or shades.
2. **Ancestry** (Noun): One's family history or background.
3. **Respect** (Noun): A feeling of deep admiration for someone based on their qualities.
4. **Difference** (Noun): A way in which people or things are not the same.
5. **Shade** (Noun): A particular variety of a color.
6. **Melanin** (Noun): A natural pigment that gives color to skin and hair.
7. **Valued** (Adjective): Considered to be important or beneficial.
8. **Curious (Celebrate)** (Adjective): Eager to know or learn something.
9. **Unique** (Adjective): Being the only one of its kind; unlike anything else.
10. (Verb): To acknowledge a significant happy event with joy.

6. Read-Aloud / Shared Reading

- **Teacher Action:** Read the “Questions on the Playground” section with expression, pausing when Michael asks the sisters why they look different.
- **Think-Aloud:** “I notice that Michael is curious, but his questions make the sisters feel a bit put on the spot. I wonder how they will explain their family history.”

7. Guided Reading Questions (During Reading)

- **Literal:** What were Kimika and Kalynn doing on the playground before Michael approached them?
- **Inferential:** Why did the author compare the chalk sticks to “treasure”?
- **Emotional:** How do you think the sisters felt when they were asked why their skin colors didn't match?

8. Post-Reading Discussion

- **Theme:** What does the story teach us about being “different but the same”?
- **Character Growth:** How did the sisters' conversation at “Family History Night” help them feel proud of their identity?
- **Format:** Use a “Turn-and-Talk” for students to share one thing they learned about melanin.

9. SEL Focus Activity

- **Activity:** “The Beauty of Our Hues” Map.
- **Description:** Students will use various shades of brown, tan, and peach crayons to color a “self-portrait” handprint.
- **SEL Skill:** Self-awareness. Students will label their handprint with one word that describes their Ancestry or a quality they feel is Unique to them.

10. Writing Extension

- **Prompt:** Write a “Letter to a Friend” explaining why it is okay to be different and how our “stories matter”.
- **Differentiation:** Provide sentence starters for students: “I am unique because...” or “My family history is special because...”

11. Independent or Small-Group Practice

- **Small-Group:** Students work in pairs to create a “Diversity Butterfly” (inspired by the book’s art) where each wing represents a different culture or family tradition they value.
- **Independent:** Students read the “What Have We Learned?” summary at the end of the book and pick the lesson they think is most important to them.

12. Assessment & Check for Understanding

- **Exit Ticket:** “Explain one way that melanin is like the ‘paint’ of our bodies.”
- **Observation:** Note if students can identify that “skin color comes from family history,” and not from “whether someone is good or smart.”

13. Reflection & Closure

- **Prompt:** “If a new student joined our class tomorrow and felt ‘different,’ how could you make them feel valued and seen?”
- **Closure:** Remind students that “Being different doesn’t divide us. It adds beauty, strength, and color to the world.”

14. Extension & Enrichment Activities

- **Creative Project:** Create a classroom “Heritage Tree” where students add leaves detailing their family history or Ancestry.
- **Home-School Connection:** Ask students to go home and ask a family member about a story from their past to share with the class.

15. Differentiation & Support Strategies

- **Visual Aids:** Use the illustrations from the book (e.g., the chalk drawings) to help students understand the concept of “blending” and “hues.”
- **Small-Group Instruction:** For students with disabilities, provide a graphic organizer that uses pictures to represent the 10 Tier 2 vocabulary words.

Workbook Activities

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Book 9: Different but the Same

Word Bank

Before starting the chapters, review these ten words found in the story

1. **Hues** (Noun): Different colors or shades.
2. **Ancestry** (Noun): One's family history or background.
3. **Respect** (Noun): A feeling of deep admiration for someone based on their qualities.
4. **Difference** (Noun): A way in which people or things are not the same.
5. **Shade** (Noun): A particular variety of a color.
6. **Melanin** (Noun): A natural pigment that gives color to skin and hair.
7. **Valued** (Adjective): Considered to be important or beneficial.
8. **Curious** (Adjective): Eager to know or learn something.
9. **Unique** (Adjective): Being the only one of its kind; unlike anything else.
10. **Celebrate** (Verb): To acknowledge a significant happy event with joy.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-1A

Chapter 1: Questions on the Playground

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What activity are the sisters doing at the beginning of the chapter?

2. How does Michael approach the sisters, and what is his initial reaction to their art?

3. What specific question does Michael ask the sisters that surprises them?

4. How do the sisters react to Michael's question before the whistle blows?

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

Identify how Michael felt when he spoke to the sisters. What clues in the text helped you name these feelings?

Adjective Hunt:

Find four adjectives in this chapter used to describe the setting or the characters. Explain what each adjective tells the reader.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-2A

Chapter 2: The Ride Home

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. How does the atmosphere change on the bus compared to the playground?

2. What does Kimika tell Kalynn about why Michael asked the question?

3. How do the sisters describe their different skin tones using food analogies?

4. What do the sisters decide to do when they get home?

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

Identify the emotion the sisters feel as they ride home. How does the author show this emotion?

Vocabulary Detective:

Find the word **difference** in this chapter and explain how it is used

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-3A

Chapter 3: Family History Night

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. Where does Mom's side of the family come from, and what was it like?

2. What historical event did Dad's family participate in?

3. According to Dad, why are the sisters' skin tones different?

4. What "smoothie" analogy does Kalynn use to describe their heritage?

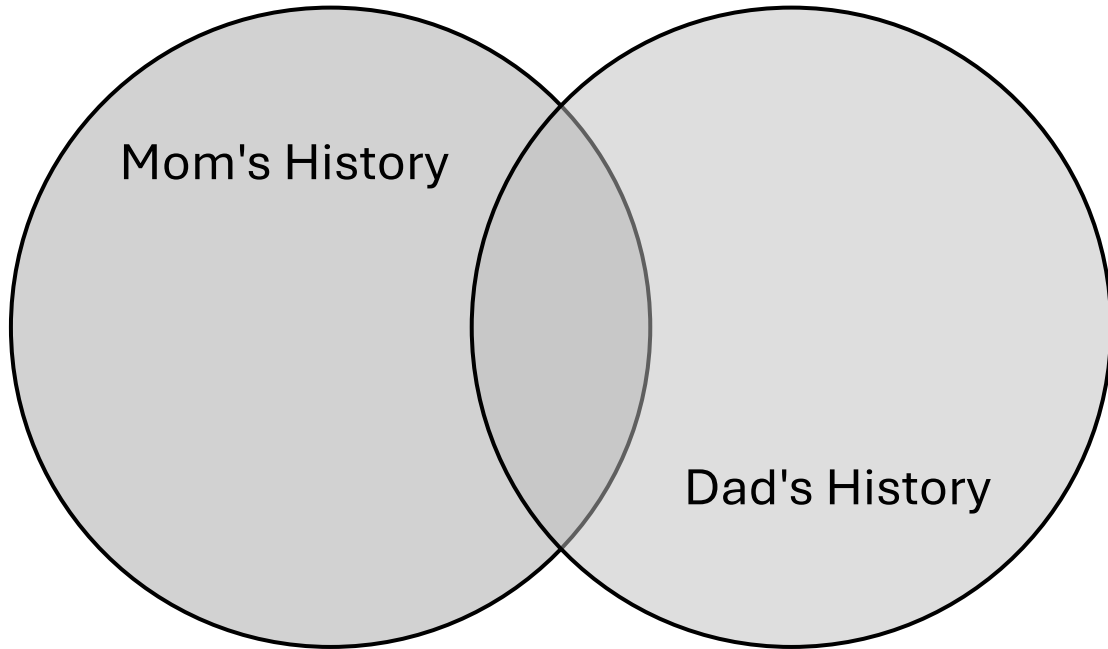
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ACTIVITY: 9-3B

Character Study

Compare and contrast Mom's Jamaican history with Dad's North Carolina history.

Explain how they are both similar and different.



Turn-and-Talk

Discuss with your partner how Mom and Dad's backgrounds influence how they raise the sisters. Record your thoughts.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-4A

Chapter 4: A Lesson Shared

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. How does Kimika describe the difference between being "rude" and being "curious" to Michael?

2. What details does Kimika share about her Jamaican ancestry?

3. How does Michael react when he learns about the Civil Rights Movement?

4. What advice does Kimika give Michael at the end of their talk?

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-4B

Perspective-Taking

Why did Michael give Kimika a "grateful thumbs-up"?

Vocabulary Detective

Use the word “**unique**” to describe why every family's story is important.

ACTIVITY: 9-5A

Chapter 5: The Beauty of All of Us

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. How did Kimika feel after her conversation with Michael?

2. What does Dad say about the act of helping Michael explore his own history?

3. What does Mom say skin color *cannot* tell you about a person?

4. What is the "one tiny part" of the story that skin color *does* tell?

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-6A

Chapter 6: A Story Shared, A Story Growing

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What does the family decide to do with their "Family History" project?

2. How has Michael changed since his conversation with Kimika?

3. What does Kalynn want to add to the scrapbook next?

4. Why is the book titled "Different but the Same"?

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

Find a part of the chapter that describes the feeling of being “Hopeful.” What does this mean to you?

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-7A

Chapter 7: The Lesson of the Story

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What is the "ultimate lesson" Kimika learned?

2. How does the world look to the sisters now?

3. What does the author say is the "most important thing" regardless of what anyone looks like?

4. What does being "different" add to the world?

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

After reading this story, what does it mean to feel "Peaceful"

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

**Assessment 9A
Vocabulary Mastery**

Fill in the Blanks

Choose the correct vocabulary word from the word bank to complete each sentence.

1. Tomorrow we will _____ our family's 25th year in this country.
2. The _____ in my family's skin comes in different _____.
3. Being able to juggle is a very _____ thing to be able to do.
4. It's okay to be _____ about the _____ between one person's complexion and another as long you do so in a kind way.
5. It is important to _____ your _____ because it is where your family gets its history from.
6. Because of _____ I have a dark brown complexion.
7. I feel good when my ideas and views are _____.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

**ASSESSMENT 9C (Part 1)
Character Study (Feelings Map)**

Directions:

Track how Kimika’s feelings changed throughout the story. Fill in the chart using evidence from the story.

Story Moment	What were Kimika’s Feelings	Text Evidence from the Story
Chapter 1		
Chapter 2		
Chapter 3		
Chapter 4		
Chapter 5		
Chapter 6		
Chapter 7		

ASSESSMENT 9C (Part 2)

Character Emotion Graph Activity

(Grades 4–5 – ELA RL.3 Alignment)

Directions:

Characters' feelings change during a story. Plot Kimika's emotions on the graph below based on events from the story.

Emotion Scale (Low → High Energy)

1. **Low Energy** – Feeling drained or tired; minimal motivation or alertness.
2. **Quiet Reflection** – Calm, introspective, and thoughtful state; energy is inward-focused.
3. **Calm** – Peaceful and steady; emotionally balanced and content.
4. **Confusion** – Mentally uncertain or unsure; energy rising due to cognitive tension.
5. **Curiosity** – Engaged and open; energy directed toward learning or exploring.
6. **Proud** – Confident and satisfied with oneself; positive, high-energy emotion.
7. **High Energy** – Very active, enthusiastic, or excited state; energy peaking.
8. **Anger** – Intense, high-arousal emotion focused on perceived injustice or frustration.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Using the Emotion scale, fill in the chart below.

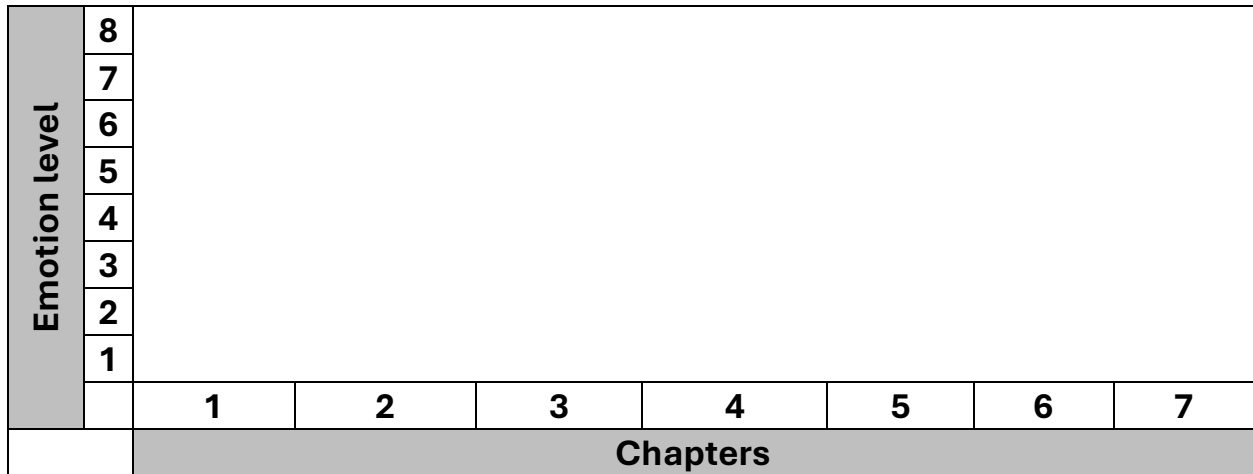
Chapter	Emotion Level (1-8)	Why Did Kimika Feel This Way?
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

Continued on next page...

ASSESSMENT 9C (Part 3)

Graph Instructions:

Using the information you entered in **ASSESSMENT 9C Part 2**, plot your answers on the graph below, connecting the emotion level numbers for each event.



Analysis Question

How did Kimika’s feelings change during this story? Using two pieces of evidence from the text to explain in detail.

BOOK

15

Kimika & Kalynn SISTERS



Growing Up Gracefully

H.V. LYONS



This book discusses early puberty, menstrual periods, and the physical and emotional changes that occur as children grow.

The content is written in gentle, age-appropriate language for young readers, but because every child’s developmental journey is different, parents and caregivers are encouraged to:

- **Review the book before sharing it** with younger readers.
- **Use the story as a starting point** for open, supportive conversations about puberty.
- **Answer questions honestly and calmly** to reinforce a healthy understanding of body changes.
- **Reassure children that growing up is normal, natural, and nothing to be ashamed of.**

This book is **NOT** intended to replace medical advice.

If you have concerns about your child’s health or development, please consult a healthcare professional.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters “Growing up Gracefully”



Book 15

Growing Up Gracefully

By

H.V. LYONS

CONTENTS

Feeling Weird & Worried	1
Changes No One Told Me About.....	5
The Embarrassing School Day	10
Mom Explains Puberty.....	17
Mom Shares Her Story	23
Getting Prepared & Feeling Empowered.....	28
Growing Up Gracefully.....	34
The Lesson of the Story.....	40
“What Have We Learned?”	41
Reflection Questions for Young Readers.....	42
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	44



FEELING WEIRD & WORRIED

The first sign that something was different didn't come with a loud noise or a big event. It arrived quietly, like a whisper that only Kimika could hear.

Tuesday morning sunlight pushed its way through the blinds in soft strips, laying bright lines across Kimika's bedspread. Usually, mornings make her feel calm and excited. She liked the way the light fell on her sketchbook, the smell of breakfast drifting up the stairs, and the predictable rhythm of a new day.

But today, something was off.

She opened her eyes slowly and stretched her arms overhead. The moment she sat up, a sharp pain shot across her chest.

"Ow."

She froze.

It wasn't the kind of "Ow" from bumping into a door or landing wrong on the playground. It was deeper, achier, like something inside her chest was sore for no reason.

She pressed her fingertips gently against the area.

Tender and sore.

“What in the world...?” she whispered.

A tiny thread of worry tugged at her heart.

Before she could think more about it, a loud thump-thump-THUMP came from the hallway, followed by the sound of someone humming an off-key tune.

The door slammed open.

“GOOD MORNING, WORLD!” Kalynn shouted, bursting in like a superhero entering a scene. She had one sock on, one sock in her hand, and her hairbrush tucked under her arm like a sword.

Kimika winced. “Kalynn! You’re so loud!”

Kalynn gasped dramatically. “Loud? Me? Never! I am the gentle whisper of the morning breeze!”

Kimika raised an eyebrow. “...You literally stomped down the hallway like a baby elephant.”

Kalynn puffed out her cheeks, then laughed. “Fine, maybe a *tiny* bit elephant-y. But guess what? Breakfast smells AMAZING. I think Dad put cinnamon in the oatmeal today. My nose tasted it.”

“Your *nose* tasted it?”

“Yes,” Kalynn said with authority. “Noses can taste things now. Science is evolving.”

Kimika would usually laugh at such nonsense. But right now, all she could think about was the soreness that hadn’t gone away.

She tried to stand up. The ache tugged again.

“Ow...”

Kalynn’s silly grin melted into concern. “Hey... you, okay?”

Kimika hesitated. She didn’t want to worry her little sister. She didn’t want *anyone* to worry. She usually handled things herself, art projects, challenging homework problems, and even scolding Kalynn for making slime in the bathtub.

But this?

This was different.

“I... I don’t know,” she admitted quietly.

Kalynn’s eyes widened. She climbed up onto the bed, placing a hand on Kimika’s forehead. “Do you have a fever? Are you dizzy? Did you eat expired yogurt again?”

“That was **ONE** time!” Kimika protested.

“Still counts,” Kalynn said. “You were burping the alphabet for an hour.”

Kimika groaned. “That is not helping right now.”

Kalynn dropped her serious act and sat cross-legged beside her sister, speaking more softly. “Okay. Tell me what hurts.”

When Kimika placed her hand over her chest, Kalynn squinted at it.

“Did you fall on it? Did Cocoa jump on you in your sleep? Did Kimoy booby-trap your bed?”

“No,” Kimika sighed. “It just... hurts. And it feels tight, like my shirt shrunk. My whole body feels weird. My chest is so sore.”

Kalynn tilted her head, studying her big sister as if gathering important scientific data.

“You look the same to me,” she said honestly. “But you do look... uncomfortable.”

“I am,” Kimika muttered. “And I don’t know why.”

Kalynn reached over and held her hand gently, her voice soft in a way she rarely used. “Is it scary?”

“Maybe a little.”

Kalynn nodded with wisdom unusual for a seven-year-old. “Okay. Then we don’t panic.”

“You always panic,” Kimika pointed out.

“Not today. Today, we’re calm like turtles.”

“Turtles?” Kimika asked.

“Yes. Turtles are always calm. They move slow. They think before running around like crazy.” She paused. “Unlike me.”

Despite everything, Kimika laughed. “Definitely unlike you.”

Kalynn squeezed her hand. “But I can pretend, if it helps.”

Kimika felt a warmth in her chest, not the soreness kind, but the comforting kind.

“Thanks, Kaly.”

“Anytime.” Kalynn puffed up proudly. “And don’t worry. Whatever’s going on, we’ll figure it out. Together.”

There it was again — that warm, gentle feeling.

Sisterhood.

Support.

But even as she smiled, the ache in her chest reminded her:

Something is happening... and I don't know what.

As she slowly got dressed for school, tugging carefully at her shirt so it didn’t rub against the sore spots, a quiet worry followed her around, like a shadow she couldn’t shake.

And deep in her heart, a whisper repeated:

Am I sick? Am I changing? What does this mean?

She wasn’t sure.

But she did know one thing:

She couldn’t hide it forever.



CHANGES NO ONE TOLD ME ABOUT

By Wednesday afternoon, Kimika felt like her body had become a puzzle that someone had scrambled overnight and forgotten to tell her how to put back together.

The day had started normally enough. Birds chirping. Mom was humming while making breakfast. Dad lecturing Cocoa about not stealing socks (which Cocoa ignored, as usual). But as soon as Kimika put on her favorite shirt, the tightness and tenderness returned.

It clung to her chest in a way that felt uncomfortable, like the fabric was shrinking just around that one spot. She tugged at the hem, stretching it out, but nothing helped. Not to mention...It hurt.

Why do I feel like this? Why me?

The questions followed her like shadows.

Recess: A Battle Between Normal and Not-So-Normal

At recess, kids scattered everywhere, climbing the monkey bars, playing tag, jumping rope, and organizing chalk art contests. The playground buzzed with happy noise.

Usually, Kimika and Kalynn would join the chalk crew or practice cartwheels in the soft grass. But today, Kimika couldn't run, couldn't jump, couldn't even walk fast without the dull ache reminding her:

Something is wrong.

She sat alone on the red bench under the big oak tree. She held her sketchbook open to a blank page, pretending to draw. But the pencil felt heavy, her hand trembling slightly.

A warm breeze rustled the leaves above her, but instead of feeling relaxed, it made her nervous.

“Kimmy?”

Kalynn plopped beside her like she’d been launched from a catapult.

“You disappeared! I looked everywhere, even behind the big slide and under the art table. Guess who was under the art table? TWO BIG ANTS. Very suspicious ants.”

Kimika didn’t smile.

Kalynn paused. “You’re not laughing. Now that’s scary.”

Kimika bit her lip. “I don’t feel like laughing today.”

Kalynn scooted so close that their shoulders touched. She lowered her voice. “Chest thing again?”

Kimika nodded, barely.

Kalynn opened her “SUPER SERIOUS SCIENCE RESEARCH” notebook like a doctor reviewing a patient’s chart.

“Okay,” she said, flipping through doodles of mystery diagrams. “So... the book said kids grow at different speeds. Some early, some later. And it might hurt sometimes. The soreness is just your body stretching.”

Kimika frowned. “But why didn’t I know it would feel like THIS?”

Kalynn shrugged. “Maybe grown-ups forget to tell us.”

Kimika sighed. “I don’t want to grow yet.”

Kalynn blinked. “Why not?”

“I just... I don’t want everything to change.”

She looked down. “I like feeling like me. I don’t want to suddenly become... different.”

Kalynn kicked her feet gently against the mulch. “You’re still you. Even if you grow an inch or two. Or ten.”

“Ten?”

“What? It could happen. Maybe you’ll become a skyscraper.”

“Kalynn!”

“Fine, maybe not a skyscraper... but maybe a tall statue.”

Despite everything, Kimika giggled. “You’re ridiculous.”

Kalynn put her hands on her hips. “Ridiculous but wise.”

Then she softened again.

“But seriously... growing doesn’t mean you change who you are. It just means your outside is catching up to your inside.”

Kimika blinked. “What does that even mean?”

“Mom says you’re creative and brave and smart.”

Kalynn poked her forehead.

“That part stays the same.”

Those words nestled gently into Kimika’s heart. She smiled.

Still, fear lingered around the edges of her mind.

The Hallway Incident

When the recess bell rang, the girls headed inside with the crowd. As they walked down the hallway, Kimika noticed two older girls whispering near the water fountain.

One girl was holding her gym shirt up to her chest.

“It’s happening,” she whispered. “My mom said it would.”

Her friend nodded. “It’s normal. My cousin said the same thing.”

As Kimika’s ears perked up, she slowed down.

Were they talking about the same thing I was feeling?

Kalynn tugged her sleeve. “Kimmy! You stopped walking. Why are you standing like a frozen llama?”

Kimika swallowed. “Nothing... I just overheard something.”

“What something?”

“Something about... growing.”

Kalynn nodded solemnly. “Llamas grow too.”

“What do llamas have to do with—”

“Shh, it’s a metaphor.”

Kimika rolled her eyes.

But hearing older girls whisper about their bodies made her realize...

Maybe she wasn’t alone.

Maybe this wasn’t unusual.

Maybe it was just... growing up.

Lunch: A Quiet Moment With Big Feelings

During lunch, Kimika moved slowly, her tray wobbling slightly in her hands. She sat gently at the table, trying not to bump her chest on the table edge.

Her mashed potatoes sat untouched.

Her green beans stayed lined up in perfect little rows.

Her chocolate milk container remained unpoked.

“Okay, you’re officially worrying me,” Kalynn said, sliding into the seat across from her. “Your food is untouched, and you’re not even looking at it with disgust.”

“I’m thinking,” Kimika murmured.

“I think what’s bothering you is called puberty.”

“I thought I knew about it. But I never thought it would be like this.”

Kalynn glanced around, making sure no one was listening. Then she leaned in with her elbows on the table.

“You know,” she whispered, “puberty isn’t a monster. Or a ghost. Or a jellyfish. It’s just...”

your body doing what it needs to do.”

“Even if it hurts?”

“Even then.”

Kimika sighed. “I still don’t feel ready.”

Kalynn reached over and took her hand again, something she rarely did in public.

“That’s okay,” she said. “Nobody feels ready at first. But you’re not doing it alone.”

This time, Kimika didn’t blink away the tears.

She let them stay in her eyes, not falling, not dramatic, but real.

End of School Day

As the final bell rang, kids rushed toward the buses like bees escaping a hive. But Kimika walked slowly, as if her backpack were heavier than usual.

She felt tired. Emotionally, physically... all of it.

On the ride home, she rested her head against the window, watching houses blur past.

Kalynn nudged her shoulder gently. “We’ll figure this out. And then everything will make sense.”

“Maybe,” Kimika whispered.

But inside, she still wondered:

*Why does growing up feel like a secret no one prepares you for? Why does it feel lonely?
Why does it feel so big?*

She didn’t know yet.

But tomorrow, the next big change would arrive, one she definitely couldn’t ignore.

And it would push her to finally ask for help.



THE EMBARRASSING SCHOOL DAY

Thursday morning felt like it was sneaking up on her.

Usually, Kimika woke up ready: ready to draw, ready to learn, ready to race Kalynn down the stairs. But when she opened her eyes today, she felt... off.

Her chest still ached, and the odd soreness in her belly from yesterday had grown stronger, like tiny knots tightening and loosening inside her. She pressed a hand to her stomach and inhaled slowly.

Please just be nerves. Please just be hunger. Please just be anything but something weird.

Breakfast Chaos... Without the Usual Fun

Downstairs, the familiar morning chaos was in full swing:

- Dad flipping eggs and humming off-key
- Mom sprinkling cinnamon and nutmeg into a bowl of porridge
- Cocoa barking at a dust bunny
- Kalynn dancing around in a tutu for absolutely no reason

Everything should have felt normal.

But it didn't.

When Kimika stepped into the kitchen, Mom's smile shifted immediately. “You're moving a little slow this morning, sweetheart.”

Kimika forced herself to smile back. “Just tired.”

“Want porridge?” Mom asked.

Usually, Kimika loved Mom's porridge.

But just looking at it made her stomach twist.

“Maybe later...” she murmured.

Kalynn screeched to a halt beside her. “Whoa. You turned down porridge? Alert the news! Sound the alarms! Call the—”

“KALYNN,” Kimika whispered fiercely.

Kalynn zipped her lips and saluted.

But her wide, worried eyes kept flicking toward Kimika as if silently asking, *Chest thing? Belly thing? New thing?*

The Bus Ride: A Moving Bubble of Nerves

The bus smelled like pencils and bubble gum. Kids chattered loudly, trading Pokémon cards and arguing about who had the fastest time on the monkey bars.

Kimika sat quietly beside Kalynn, hands in her lap, pressing her knees together. Every bump in the road sent a tiny pang through her stomach.

“You look like you swallowed a cactus,” Kalynn whispered.

“I'm fine.”

“You don't look fine.”

“I'm *trying* to look fine.”

“Well...” Kalynn leaned closer. “You look like you're trying really hard.”

Kimika sighed.

She didn’t want to say anything yet. Not here. Not with kids everywhere.
Not when she didn’t even know what was happening herself.

Gym Class: The Moment Everything Changed

Gym used to be fun.

It used to be simple.

Run. Play. Sweat. Laugh.

But today...

Today her chest and belly felt like they were made of glass, and little aches.

“Alright, class!” Coach Ortiz barked cheerfully. “Warm-up jog! Three laps! Nice and steady!”

Nice and steady for everyone else.

Not for her.

Kimika jogged slowly. Very slowly.

Every bounce made the ache sharper.

About halfway through the first lap, she was walking.

Ow... why does it hurt so much? What is happening to me?

Maya jogged past her. “You good, Kimika? You look kinda pale.”

“I’m fine!” Kimika squeaked.

Then it happened.

A warm, strange sensation.

Low in her belly.

Downward.

A shift.

She froze mid-step.

What was that?

She took another tiny step.

And felt it again.

Her heart slammed against her ribs. Her face flushed hot.

No. No. No. Not here. Not in gym class.

She pressed her legs together and walked stiffly toward the bathroom.

“Coach? Bathroom,” she stammered.

Coach Ortiz nodded. “Go ahead, sweetheart.”

Kimika hurried — but carefully — her sneakers squeaking on the polished floor.

Inside the bathroom stall, she stared in horror.

A stain.

A real stain.

Dark. Rust-colored.

Impossible to ignore.

Her breath hitched.

Her hands shook.

Her stomach flipped.

“No... no, no...” she whispered, biting her lip so she wouldn’t cry.

Her whole body felt hot and cold all at once.

She didn’t fully understand everything about puberty yet, but she understood *this*.

Her *first period* had started.

At school.

In light gray leggings.

During gym.

The worst possible combination.

Kimika grabbed her navy sweater and tied it around her waist so tightly she could barely

breathe.

She stood staring at her reflection in the mirror for a long moment.

Wide eyes.

Flushed cheeks.

Almost-tears.

"How am I supposed to walk out there?" she whispered.

Outside the Bathroom: The Almost-Disaster

When she stepped back into the hallway, Maya was there getting water.

She looked up. "Hey, you okay? You were gone awhile."

"Yep!" Kimika said in a voice three octaves too high. "Totally great. Wonderful. Perfect. Amazing."

Maya blinked. "You're sweating a lot."

"So much exercise! Love exercise! I should do more exercise!"

"Um... okay?"

Before Maya could ask more questions, Kalynn popped into the hallway like she'd been waiting behind a corner.

"Kimmy!" she whisper-shouted. "Why do you look like you just wrestled a ghost?"

Kimika cleared her throat. "Not now."

Kalynn leaned closer, whispering, "Are you having... THE THING?"

"Stop talking!" Kimika hissed, face burning.

Kalynn zipped her lips and nodded, suddenly serious. She stepped behind Kimika, whispering, "Your sweater is covering everything. Nothing's showing. You're safe."

Kimika blinked. "Thanks..."

"For what?"

"For checking."

Kalynn shrugged. “That’s my job. I’m the sidekick.”

Back in Class: A Fog of Worry

The rest of the day slid by like she was underwater.

In math, Ms. Ramos called on her.

“Kimika, would you like to solve problem number three?”

Kimika stared at the board. The numbers swam in front of her eyes.

“I... uh... can someone else try?” she croaked.

The class giggled.

Ms. Ramos raised an eyebrow.

In reading class, she kept adjusting her sweater, terrified someone would notice something she didn’t want them to see.

At lunch, she poked at her food until the mashed potatoes formed a sad little mountain. Usually, she ate lunch with gusto. Today, even the smell of pizza made her stomach churn.

Maya and two other friends watched her with concern.

“You sick?” Maya asked softly.

“No. Just tired.”

“Like... zombie tired?” Maya pressed.

“Sure,” Kimika muttered. “Zombie tired.”

Her friends exchanged puzzled looks, but they didn’t tease. They could sense something was wrong.

Dismissal: Running Away From the Day

When the final bell rang, kids rushed toward the buses like a colorful river.

But Kimika stayed by the classroom door until most of the crowd was gone.

She walked slowly outside, her sweater tied tight around her waist like armor.

Kalynn was waiting at their usual spot, her eyebrows raised. “Okay, I’ve been patient. Extremely patient. Superhero-level patient. But now you HAVE to tell me what’s going on.”

“On the bus,” Kimika whispered.

They climbed aboard. The bus smelled like wet jackets and after-school snacks. Kids were laughing, shouting, arguing, and trading erasers shaped like dinosaurs.

But in the middle of all that noise, the bench seat they shared felt like its own tiny bubble.

Kimika stared out the window, eyes glassy.

Kalynn gently nudged her. “Was it... Your first time?”

Kimika nodded.

Kalynn’s eyes softened. “Oh... Kimmy.”

A tear slipped down Kimika’s cheek. She wiped it fast.

“I didn’t know it would happen today,” she whispered. “I didn’t know it would happen at school. I didn’t know it would feel like this.”

Kalynn gently wrapped her arm around her sister’s shoulders.

“You’re not alone,” she said quietly. “You’re not weird. You’re not wrong. You’re just... growing.”

Kimika swallowed hard.

She finally whispered the thing she had been afraid to admit all day:

“I think I need to tell Mom.”

Kalynn nodded. “She’ll know exactly what to do.”

And for the first time all day, Kimika felt a tiny spark of hope beneath the fear.

A small reminder:

She didn’t have to go through this alone.



MOM EXPLAINS PUBERTY

The moment the bus doors folded shut behind them, the cool afternoon air brushed across Kimika’s face. She hadn’t realized until now how tightly she’d been holding her breath all day.

As soon as they stepped onto the sidewalk, Kalynn looked up at her big sister with soft, serious eyes.

“You still want to tell Mom?” she whispered.

Kimika swallowed. Her stomach twisted — part nerves, part relief.

“Yes,” she whispered back. “I have to.”

Kalynn nodded and slipped her hand into Kimika’s.

Not in a babyish way.

In a *you’re not alone* way.

Together, they walked toward the house.

Coming Home

The door creaked open, and a wave of home greeted them, the smell of Mom’s lemon cleaner, the soft hum of the dishwasher, the warm glow of the late-afternoon sun on the hardwood floor.

Mom turned from the counter, wiping her hands on a dish towel.

“Hey, girls! How was...”

She stopped mid-sentence.

Her nurse eyes — the ones that saw things the rest of the family didn’t — noticed the tension immediately.

Kalynn standing close to her sister.

Kimika tightly clutching her sweater.

Both girls quiet and serious.

“Kimika?” Mom asked softly.

“Are you alright, sweetheart?”

The words almost broke her.

Kimika stepped forward... then stopped.

Her throat tightened.

She opened her mouth, but no words came out. Only tiny, trapped breaths.

Mom’s expression softened into full-mom mode. She walked over and knelt in front of her.

“Baby,” she whispered, brushing a braid from Kimika’s cheek, “you don’t have to say anything yet. It’s okay.”

The kindness in her voice melted everything Kimika had been holding in.

“Mom...” she finally whispered, eyes filling. “Something happened at school.”

Mom wrapped an arm around her shoulders. “Come on. Let’s go talk in my room.

Somewhere quiet.”

She led Kimika down the hallway.

Kalynn stayed behind, but her eyes followed with worry and sisterly love.

Safe Space

Mom’s bedroom was warm and cozy. Soft pillows on the bed. A candle on the dresser. A fuzzy blanket across the foot of the bed.

Mom closed the door gently and sat beside Kimika, inviting her to sit close.

“Take your time,” she said. “I’m listening.”

Kimika’s hands trembled as she spoke.

“My chest... It’s been hurting for days. And my stomach feels weird. And today in gym...”

Her voice cracked.

She took a shaky breath.

“I... I saw blood.”

Mom nodded, not surprised, not alarmed — just calm.

“I think...”

Kimika wiped her cheek.

“I think I got my first period.”

Mom’s face softened into a warm, glowing smile. Not a *laughing* smile. Not a *surprised* smile. A *proud*, understanding one.

“Oh, sweetheart,” she murmured, pulling Kimika into a hug.

“You’re okay. You’re more than okay. This is normal. Completely normal.”

Kimika finally let herself cry — small, quiet tears that she’d been holding in all day.

Mom held her gently, stroking her back. “I’m so proud of you for telling me. That was brave.”

“I was scared,” Kimika whispered.

“I know,” Mom said. “It can be scary the first time. It feels strange and confusing because it’s new. But nothing is wrong with you. Your body is doing exactly what it’s supposed to do.”

Kimika sniffled. “It started during gym. I didn’t know what to do. I tied my sweater around my waist.”

“That was very smart,” Mom praised. “You handled it just right.”

“Really?”

“Really,” Mom said, squeezing her hand. “You didn’t panic. You stayed calm. You protected yourself. That’s maturity.”

The Explanation — Gentle and Clear

Mom grabbed a small health booklet from her nightstand, the kind she kept for moments exactly like this.

“Let me explain what’s happening,” she said softly. “Your body is changing because you’re entering a new stage of growing up. It’s called puberty.”

Kimika nodded slowly. “I know, but it hurts sometimes.”

“Yes,” Mom said honestly. “Your chest, your breasts are starting to grow. They get tender and sore because the tissue is developing. It’s completely normal.”

She pointed to a diagram in the book. “Every girl goes through this. Some earlier, some later. There’s no ‘right age.’”

“What about the stomach cramps?” Kimika asked quietly.

“That’s part of your period,” Mom explained. “Every month, your body gets ready in case one day, when you’re much, much older, you decide to have a baby.”

Kimika scrunched her nose. “A baby?! I don’t want a baby!”

Mom laughed gently. “You don’t have to think about that now. What matters is that your body releases what it doesn’t need, and that’s what a period is.”

Kimika thought hard. “So... I’m not broken?”

Mom cupped her cheek. “Sweet girl, you are *perfect*. Perfectly healthy. Perfectly growing. Perfectly you.”

Tears rolled down again — but this time, they were from relief.

Mom’s Comfort Kit

Mom stood and opened a drawer in her cabinet. Inside were neatly arranged pads, wipes, and soft underclothes.

“I’ve been saving these for whenever you needed them,” Mom said.

She handed Kimika a small floral pouch. “This is your first period kit.”

Inside were:

- pads
- liners
- wipes
- a spare pair of underwear
- a small lavender hand-sanitizer
- a tiny bag of chocolate pretzels
- and a note that read:

You’re growing beautifully. I’m here for you. Always. – Mom



Kimika pressed the note to her chest. “Thank you... Mom.”

Mom kissed her forehead. “Anytime. This isn’t something to hide. It’s something to understand and learn about. And you never have to feel embarrassed asking me anything.”

Kimika took a deep breath — a real one. Her shoulders finally relaxed.

For the first time all week, she felt safe.

Seen.

Understood.

“Mom?” she whispered.

“Yes, baby?”

“I’m glad I told you.”

Mom smiled. “I’m glad you did too.”

She pulled her daughter into another warm hug, holding her as if she were the safest place in the world.

Because she was.



MOM SHARES HER STORY

After the long, emotional talk in Mom’s bedroom, Kimika felt calmer... but also full of questions she didn’t know how to ask yet.

Mom placed a warm heating pad across her stomach and handed her a steaming mug of chamomile tea.

“Slow sips,” she said gently. “It helps with cramps.”

Kimika nodded and curled into the pillows, letting the soft warmth sink into her skin. Her heart was still beating fast, but not from fear; this time it was from relief.

Mom sat beside her, brushing a braid behind her ear.

“There’s something I want to share with you,” she said softly. “Something I don’t tell many people.”

Kimika looked up. “What is it?”

Mom took a deep breath, smiling in that soft, nostalgic way grown-ups get when they remember something from long ago.

“I want to tell you about *my* first period.”

Kimika’s eyebrows shot up. “You... remember it?”

“Oh yes,” Mom chuckled. “I remember *everything*.”

She shifted on the bed, getting comfortable, and began.

Mom’s Story: A Girl in Jamaica

“I was twelve,” Mom said, “living in St. Mary, Jamaica. It was a hot day, so hot you could feel the sun baking the ground. I was helping Grandma hang clothes on the line, and I kept feeling something strange. A little cramp here... a little ache there...”

Kimika leaned closer.

“And then,” Mom continued, “I felt something wet.”

Kimika’s eyes widened. “Mom!”

“Oh, it gets better,” Mom said with a laugh. “I didn’t know what it was yet. No one had talked to me about it. So, I ran inside and checked my underwear, and when I saw blood, I thought...”

She paused dramatically.

“I thought I was dying.”

Kimika’s jaw dropped. “Dying?!”

Mom nodded, laughing. “I cried. I screamed. I called for Grandma at the top of my lungs. Poor woman thought I’d broken a bone!”

“What did she do?” Kimika asked.

“She sat me down,” Mom said, her voice softening. “Made me tea. Put her cool hand on my cheek. Then she explained everything, what a period was, why it happened, and that it meant I was healthy and growing.”

Kimika blinked. “So, you were scared too?”

“I was terrified,” Mom admitted. “But I didn’t have books, kits, charts, or apps. I didn’t have the information you have. I learned it all in one afternoon.”

She tapped Kimika’s knee gently.

“That’s why I talked to you. And why I gave you your period kit, so you’d never feel unprepared.”

Mom’s eyes glowed with pride. “You handled everything beautifully. You stayed calm and protected yourself. I know today was scary, but you were stronger than you realize.”

Kimika smiled shyly. “I wasn’t calm on the inside.”

Mom squeezed her hand. “You don’t have to be calm on the inside. Growing up is messy and weird and full of feelings. That’s part of it — and it’s okay.”

Emotional Reassurance: Normalizing Every Feeling

Mom reached up and gently touched Kimika’s temple.

“What you’re feeling today — nervous, embarrassed, confused — is normal. Every woman has felt that way. Even your Grandma.”

“Really?” Kimika said.

“Oh yes,” Mom nodded. “And every emotion you’re having? Valid. Feeling scared doesn’t mean you’re weak. Feeling embarrassed doesn’t mean you’re dramatic. It just means this is new.”

Kimika let those words soak in.

Mom took a slow breath. “Do you remember what I always tell you about big feelings?”

“That it’s okay to have them,” Kimika whispered.

“And that you can always talk to me about them,” Mom added. “No shame. No judgment. No shushing. Ever.”

Kimika’s shoulders relaxed as she leaned against her mother.

Kimoy Joins (But Softly)

A gentle knock sounded at the door.

“Mom? Is it okay if I...?”

Mom smiled. “Come in, Kimoy.”

The seventeen-year-old big sister slipped inside, quieter than usual. She sat on the other side of the bed and placed a hand on Kimika’s foot under the blanket.

“You’re going to be okay,” she said softly. “This is just the beginning of growing up. And trust me, it gets easier.”

Kimika’s eyes softened. “Did you freak out, too?”

Kimoy snorted. “Kimmy, I cried for two whole hours. I called Dad at work and told him I needed a doctor.”

“Seriously?!”

“Seriously,” Kimoy repeated, rolling her eyes. “And Mom gave me the same talk she's giving you.”

Mom nodded proudly. “And I’ll give the same talk to Kalynn when it’s her turn.”

“**NOPE!**” came a shout from outside the door.

They all laughed.

Mom’s Empowerment Moment

Mom gently cupped Kimika’s face.

“You’re not alone in this. Your body is not scary. It’s strong. It’s healthy. And it’s doing exactly what it’s supposed to do.”

She added softly:

“A period is not something to fear. It’s not something to hide in shame. It’s a sign that your body is powerful — and that you’re stepping into a new chapter.”

Kimika exhaled shakily.

But now, the air in her lungs felt... lighter.

“Mom?”

“Yes, baby?”

“Thanks for telling me your story.”

Mom kissed her forehead. “Thanks for trusting me with yours.”

The Three of Them

For the next hour, the three of them stayed curled up on the bed:

- Mom explaining what Kimika might feel in the next few days
- Kimoy offering older-sister advice about heating pads, snacks, and comfy clothes
- Kimika asking questions she used to be too embarrassed to ask
- And all of them laughing at the idea of Dad fainting if periods came with graphic descriptions

At one point, Mom said something that stayed with Kimika:

“Growing up doesn’t mean becoming someone different. It means becoming *more* of who you already are.”

Kimika felt that warmth in her chest again — not the soreness, but the love.

By the time the tea mug was empty and the cramps had softened, Kimika felt... ready.

Not ready for everything.

Not ready for adulthood.

Not ready for every new change.

But ready to understand.

Ready to talk.

And ready to trust herself.

Growing up wasn’t something to fear.

Not when she had this kind of love holding her through it.



GETTING PREPARED & FEELING EMPOWERED

Friday morning felt different, not because the soreness had disappeared, and not because everything suddenly made sense, but because when Kimika opened her eyes, she didn't feel afraid.

For the first time all week, she felt... *ready*.

The heating pad Mom gave her the night before still lay warm at the foot of her bed. The floral period pouch kit sat neatly on her nightstand, as if waiting to start its new job.

She sat up slowly, carefully, and took a deep breath.

I can do this, she thought.

I know what's happening now. And I'm not alone.

Morning Sunshine, Morning Wisdom

As she brushed her teeth, Kimika caught her reflection in the mirror.

Same eyes.

Same smile.

Same braids.

She looked... like herself.

Different in some ways, maybe. But still *her*.

She put on a soft, loose shirt that Mom had quietly laid out for her and dark leggings, just like Kimoy had suggested. Not because she felt ashamed, but because she felt *prepared*.

When she came downstairs, Mom was at the stove flipping pancakes shaped like hearts.

“For my brave girl,” she said, sliding a warm one onto a plate.

Dad looked up from his tea. “Hey, superstar. Feeling better today?”

“A little,” Kimika said honestly.

“Good,” Dad nodded. “Remember, growing up isn’t a race. It’s a journey. Some days are easy. Some days aren’t. But we’re here for all of it.”

Mom smiled at him. “You see why I married him?”

“I’m a fountain of wisdom,” Dad declared proudly.

“More like a leaky sink,” Kimoy muttered, entering the kitchen with sleepy eyes.

Everyone laughed — even Kimika.

Big Sister Support (Times Two)

As they sat down to eat, Kimoy nudged her shoulder gently.

“You sleep okay?”

“Yeah,” Kimika said. “The heating pad helped. And the tea.”

“See?” Kimoy said with a wink. “You’ve unlocked Level One of Puberty Survival.”

“Level One?” Kimika asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Yep. Level Two is learning how to deal with cramps and still concentrate on math.”

“That’s impossible,” Kimika said.

Kimoy grinned. “It *feels* impossible. But trust me, you can do it.”

Then, unexpectedly, Kalynn gently slid a folded piece of paper across the table.

“What’s this?” Kimika asked.

“My scientific notes,” Kalynn said proudly. “For emergencies.”

Inside the paper was a list titled:

“KALYNN’S GUIDE TO FEELING BETTER WHEN YOU’RE GROWING”

It read:

1. Use heat.
2. Drink warm stuff.
3. Hug your mom.
4. Eat chocolate.
5. Rest your body.
6. Don’t panic, it’s just biology.
7. Ask me if you need a distraction. I’m good at those.

Kimika laughed, a real, warm laugh that filled the kitchen.

She leaned over and hugged Kalynn tight. “Thank you.”

Kalynn whispered, “I got your back.”

Packing for the Day With Purpose

Before leaving for school, Mom met her by the door with a small, gentle smile.

“Did you pack your pouch?”

Kimika held it up proudly. “Right here.”

“Good girl,” Mom said.

She crouched down to her level.

“Remember, if anything happens today, anything at all, you know what to do. Breathe. Go to the bathroom. Take your time. And you can call me anytime.”

Kimika nodded.

For the first time, she really believed she could handle it.

“And baby,” Mom added, “hold your head up today. You have nothing to be embarrassed about. Your body is healthy, and you are growing beautifully.”

A warm glow filled Kimika’s chest — not pain, but pride.

The Walk to School — From Nervous to Brave

The girls walked together toward the bus stop, backpacks bouncing softly against their sides.

“Today feels better,” Kalynn said.

“It does,” Kimika agreed. “I’m still nervous... but I’m nervous in a brave way.”

Kalynn tilted her head. “There’s a difference?”

“Yeah,” Kimika said. “Brave nervous means you’re scared, but you keep going anyway.”

Kalynn grinned. “I like that.”

When they reached the bus, Maya waved from a seat.

“Kimmy! You feeling better?”

“Yeah,” Kimika said honestly. “Just needed some rest.”

Maya smiled. “Good. I saved you a seat.”

As Kimika slid in beside her friend, she felt something she hadn’t felt all week:

In Control.

Not over her body, that part was still unpredictable.

But over how she handled it.

A Day of Quiet Confidence

Throughout the school day, Kimika paid close attention to her body, its signals, its rhythm, its whispers. And every time she felt a twinge or cramp, instead of panicking, she reminded herself:

It’s okay. This is normal. I know what to do.

During math, she sat with her heating pad tucked under her shirt as her mind helping keep her mind at ease.

During reading time, she found a comfortable position that didn’t press too hard on her belly.

During lunch, she ate slowly, listening to her body's needs.

When she slipped away quietly to the restroom, her pouch tucked in her hand, she felt... confident.

Prepared.

Strong.

She walked back to class with her shoulders lifted just a little higher.

And when Maya asked if she wanted to play tag during recess, Kimika smiled, not embarrassed, just honest.

“I think I’ll sit today. But I’ll cheer you on.”

“Cool,” Maya said. “We still want you there.”

The Moment She Realized Something Important

On the bus ride home, the sunset painted streaks of gold and orange across the sky.

Kalynn pressed her face to the window. “The clouds look like giant marshmallows!”

Kimika giggled. “They kinda do.”

She rested her hand on her stomach, not in pain, but in acknowledgment.

Something inside her — something quiet and strong — whispered:

You’re growing. You’re learning. You’re becoming.

And she finally whispered back,

“I think I can do this.”



GROWING UP GRACEFULLY

Saturday mornings in the Lyons house were usually full of noise.

Dad blasting old-school R&B while cleaning the kitchen.

Kalynn racing Cocoa down the hallway.

Mom chatting with Grandma on the phone.

Kimoy begging for “just ten more minutes” of sleep.

The whole house buzzing like a happy beehive.

But this Saturday morning felt... peaceful.

The sun shone through the curtains in a warm golden glow. A gentle breeze flowed through the open window, carrying the smell of freshly cut grass. And for the first time all week, Kimika woke up feeling...

Balanced.

Calm.

Comfortable in her own skin.

Her period was still there — her belly still cramping a little, her chest still tender — but the fear she’d carried earlier in the week wasn’t.

It had been replaced by something else.

Something steadier.

Something stronger.

Confidence.

She stretched gently and winced a little — but then smiled.

This is normal, she reminded herself.

I know what to do now.

She wrapped herself in her soft robe and headed downstairs.

A House Full of Love

Mom was at the stove making plantain pancakes. Dad was reading the newspaper with reading glasses perched crookedly on his nose. Cocoa trotted around with one ear flopped sideways.

“Good morning, beautiful,” Mom said warmly. “How’s my girl feeling today?”

“A little crampy,” Kimika admitted, “but good.”

Dad peeked over his newspaper. “You’re looking taller already.”

“Dad!” Kimika laughed. “It’s been two days!”

“Growth happens fast!” he insisted. “One day you’re tiny, next day you’re borrowing my slippers.”

Mom gave him a look. “Honey... she’s nine.”

“Slippers!” Dad repeated with dramatic flair.

The girls burst into laughter.

It felt good — free and easy, not weighed down by fear.

A Sister Moment on the Porch

After breakfast, Kimika went out to the front porch with her sketchbook. She sat on the top step, toes curled under her, and opened to a clean page.

Soft pencil strokes glided across the paper. She drew a flower, tightly closed but slowly beginning to bloom, each petal opening with care.

Kalynn stepped outside, holding a juice box.

“Ooh,” she said, sitting beside her. “That’s pretty. Is it a sunflower?”

“Nope,” Kimika said.

“A daisy?”

“Nope.”

“A pineapple?”

Kimika stared at her. “A *pineapple?*”

“I don’t know! Your art is mysterious!” Kalynn insisted.

Kimika giggled. “It’s... me. Growing. Slowly. Carefully. One petal at a time.”

Kalynn stared at the drawing for a moment.

Then she smiled.

“I like it.”

“Me too,” Kimika said softly.

Kalynn rested her head on her shoulder. “I’m really proud of you, Kimmy.”

Kimika’s heart fluttered. “Thanks, Kalynn.”

Mom Joins

Mom stepped onto the porch holding a steaming mug of ginger tea.

“That’s beautiful,” she said, looking at the sketch.

“It’s how I feel,” Kimika said shyly. “Not all grown up. Just... growing.”

Mom sat on her other side and wrapped her arm around her.

“That’s exactly how growing works,” she said.

“One day at a time. One change at a time. One feeling at a time. And every bit of it is part of you becoming yourself.”

Kimika leaned her head against Mom’s shoulder.

“I was really scared before,” she whispered. “But now... I’m not.”

Mom kissed her forehead. “That’s what happens when we talk about things instead of keeping them inside. Shame grows in silence. Confidence grows in understanding.”

Kimika nodded slowly.

She understood that now, in a way she never had before.

A Sisterly Welcome Into a New Club

Inside, Kimoy emerged from her room wearing fuzzy socks and a messy bun.

“What are you two doing on the porch?” she asked, stretching.

“Kimmy’s drawing a metaphor,” Kalynn announced proudly.

“A what?” Kimoy blinked.

“A metaphor! A fancy picture with a deeper meaning,” Kalynn explained.

Kimoy rolled her eyes. “Okay, genius.”

She sat beside Kimika and nudged her knee gently.

“You know,” she said, “you’re officially part of the ‘Growing Up Club’ now.”

Kimika laughed. “Is that a real thing?”

“Oh, absolutely,” Kimoy said. “Membership includes complaining about cramps, asking Mom for heating pads, and eating chocolate whenever you feel like it.”

“That’s the best club ever,” Kimika declared.

Mom laughed behind them. “It’s a lifelong membership, too.”

The Realization

The breeze blew soft and warm through the porch, brushing against Kimika’s cheeks. She closed her eyes for a moment and let it wash over her.

And suddenly — gently — she realized something:

She wasn’t a little kid anymore.

Not in the same way.

Not exactly.

But she wasn’t a teenager either.

Not yet.

She was somewhere in the middle — a place full of new feelings, new questions, new changes.

A place where everything felt slightly different, but also a little more meaningful.

A place where she wasn’t just growing taller or older...

She was growing *into* herself.

Slowly.

Gracefully.

Beautifully.

She opened her eyes and looked at her drawing again — the flower with petals unfolding.

Then she smiled.

“I think,” she said quietly, “I’m ready for whatever comes next.”

Mom squeezed her hand.

“We always knew you were.”

Kalynn grinned. “And I’ll be here to take notes!”

Kimoy laughed. “And I’ll be here to pass down survival tips.”

Dad yelled from inside, “AND I’LL BE HERE TO BUY MORE CHOCOLATE!”

They all burst into laughter. And in that moment, surrounded by sunlight, family, love, and

laughter, Kimika felt something she hadn't felt all week:

Peace.

She was growing up.

Not fast.

Not slow.

Just right.

And she wasn't doing it alone.

Not now.

Not ever.

THE LESSON OF THE STORY

Growing up can feel confusing, surprising, and even a little scary, but it is completely normal. Everyone’s body changes in its own time, at its own pace, and those changes are nothing to hide or be ashamed of.

When Kimika told Mom what she was feeling, she discovered that:

- Her body wasn’t “weird.”
- She wasn’t alone.
- And she was braver than she thought.

Growing up gracefully means *listening* to your body, *asking questions* when you don’t understand something, and *trusting* the people who love you to help you through new experiences.

It means being patient with yourself as you learn, grow, and change.

Your body is strong.

Your feelings are real.

And with support, honesty, and love, you can get through anything — one gentle step at a time.

“WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?”

Here are the important lessons from Kimika’s journey:

Puberty is normal

Every girl’s body changes as she grows, and it happens at different times for everyone.

It’s okay to feel nervous or confused

New experiences can feel big or overwhelming. Those feelings don’t make you weak — they make you human.

Talking helps

When you’re open and honest with someone you trust — like a parent, sibling, or teacher — big worries can feel much smaller.

Preparation builds confidence

Knowing what to expect and having tools (like a period kit) makes growing up feel less scary and more manageable.

You are never alone

Family, friends, and trusted adults are always there to help you, guide you, and love you through every stage of growing up.

Growing up doesn’t change who you are

It helps you become even *more* of yourself — stronger, wiser, and more confident.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR YOUNG READERS

These questions help children think about the story and their own feelings.

1. Have you ever felt worried about something happening in your body or your life? Who did you talk to about it?
2. Why do you think Kimika felt nervous when she didn’t understand what was happening?
3. Who are the trusted adults you can talk to if you ever have questions about your body or feelings?
4. What helped Kimika feel more confident and less scared after talking with Mom?
5. How did her family support her? What does that tell you about asking for help?
6. What does “growing up gracefully” mean to you?
7. If a friend was nervous about puberty or body changes, what could you say or do to help them feel supported?

Teacher Guide

&

Standards

1. Lesson Overview

- **Book Number:** 15
- **Book Title:** *Growing Up Gracefully*
- **Grade Level(s):** 2–5
- **Estimated Instructional Time:** 45–60 minutes
- **Lesson Focus: Literacy Skill:** Identifying central themes and using text evidence to describe character reactions to physical and emotional changes.
 - **SEL Focus:** Developing self-awareness and self-management during the transition into puberty.
- **Suggested Workbook Activities:**
 - 15-1A – 15-1B
 - 15-2A – 15-2B
 - 15-3A – 15-3B
 - 15-4A – 15-4B
 - 15-5A – 15-5B
 - 15-6A – 15-6B
 - 15-7A – 15-7B
 - 15-8A – 15-8B
 - Assessment 15A
 - Assessment 15B

2. Learning Objectives

- **Reading Comprehension:** Students will identify the main lesson of the story by citing specific evidence of Kimika’s growth and understanding.
- **Speaking and Listening:** Students will participate in a collaborative discussion about why Kimika felt nervous and how talking to a trusted adult helped her.
- **Writing:** Students will write a reflection on what “growing up gracefully” means to them, using at least two Tier 2 vocabulary words.
- **Social-Emotional:** Students will identify internal physical and emotional changes and name a trusted adult they can talk to for support.

3. Standards Alignment

- **NYS Next Generation ELA Standards:**
 - **2R1 / 3R1 / 4R1 / 5R1:** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and make logical inferences; cite textual evidence to support conclusions.
 - **2L6 / 3L6 / 4L6 / 5L6:** Use words and phrases acquired through reading and being read to, including those that signal precise emotions or states of being.
- **NYS SEL Framework:**
 - **Goal 1:** Young people develop a self-awareness that nurtures and affirms a strong sense of identity.
 - **Goal 3:** Young people demonstrate intentional decision-making skills and behaviors that consider social and emotional factors.

4. Pre-Reading Activity (Activate Prior Knowledge)

- **Discussion Prompt:** “Have you ever noticed your body changing as you get older, like getting taller or losing a tooth? How did that make you feel?”
- **Vocabulary Preview:** Briefly introduce the concept of “Puberty” as a natural, normal part of growing up that everyone experiences.

5. Vocabulary & Key Concepts

1. **Predictable (adj.):** Happening in a way that is expected, like Kimika’s usual morning routine.
2. **Rhythm (n.):** A strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound.
3. **Achier (adj.):** Feeling a continuous but not sharp pain, like the tenderness Kimika felt in her chest.
4. **Puberty (n.):** The period during which adolescents reach sexual maturity and their bodies change.
5. **Empowered (v.):** Given the authority or power to do something, especially after learning new information.
6. **Gracefully (adv.):** Moving or behaving in a smooth, relaxed, or attractive way as one grows up.
7. **Embarrassing (adj.):** Causing someone to feel awkward or self-conscious, like a sudden change at school.
8. **Confident (adj.):** Feeling or showing certainty about oneself after getting answers to questions.
9. **Anxiety (n.):** A feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about unknown body changes.
10. **Whisper (n.):** A soft or quiet way of speaking or a subtle sign, like the first sign of change Kimika noticed.

6. Read-Aloud / Shared Reading

- **Teacher Actions:** Read the story with empathy, pausing at the “Embarrassing School Day” to model how to handle sensitive topics calmly.
- **Student Actions:** Listen for “clues” in the text that show Kimika is feeling worried or “weird”.

7. Guided Reading Questions

- **Literal:** What was the first physical change Kimika noticed on Tuesday morning?
- **Inferential:** Why did Kimika feel “something was off” even though her morning routine was usually predictable?
- **Emotional:** How did Kimika’s feelings change after her mom shared her own story and explained puberty?

8. Post-Reading Discussion

- **Focus:** Discuss the “Lesson of the Story” found on page 40—that growing up is natural and asking for help is a sign of strength.
- **Format:** Turn-and-talk: “Who is a trusted adult you can talk to if you feel worried about your body?”

9. SEL Focus Activity

- **Activity:** “Trusted Adult Web.” Students draw themselves in the center of a circle and branch out to the names or roles of adults they trust (e.g., Mom, Dad, Teacher, Doctor).
- **Skill:** Self-awareness and identifying support systems.

10. Writing Extension

- **Prompt:** Write a letter to your “future self” about growing up. Use the word **empowered** or **confident** to describe how you want to feel as you get older.
- **Differentiation:** Provide sentence starters: “When I have questions about my body, I can...” or “Growing up gracefully means...”

11. Independent or Small-Group Practice

- **Activity:** In small groups, students can look at the “What Have We Learned?” section (page 41) and choose one fact about puberty to illustrate and explain in their own words.

12. Assessment & Check for Understanding

- **Exit Ticket:** List one physical change and one emotional change Kimika experienced in the story.
- **Observation:** Note if students can identify that Kimika felt “less scared” after talking to her mom.

13. Reflection & Closure

- **Prompt:** “What is one thing you learned today that makes you feel more confident about growing up?”
- **Closing:** Remind students that growing up is “nothing to be ashamed of”.

14. Extension & Enrichment Activities

- **Creative Project:** Create a “Growth Timeline” showing how people change from babies to adults, highlighting that everyone grows at their own pace.

15. Differentiation & Support Strategies

- **Visual Aids:** Use diagrams or illustrations to show the “predictable rhythm” of a day versus the “unexpected” changes of puberty.
- **Small-Group:** Work with students who may feel anxious about the topic in a smaller, private setting to review the “Reflection Questions”.

Workbook Activities

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Book 15: Growing up Gracefully

Word Bank

Before starting the chapters, review these ten words found in the story

1. **Predictable (adj.):** Happening in a way that is expected, like Kimika's usual morning routine.
2. **Rhythm (n.):** A strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound.
3. **Achier (adj.):** Feeling a continuous but not sharp pain, like the tenderness Kimika felt in her chest.
4. **Puberty (n.):** The period during which adolescents reach sexual maturity, and their bodies change.
5. **Empowered (v.):** Given the authority or power to do something, especially after learning new information.
6. **Gracefully (adv.):** Moving or behaving in a smooth, relaxed, or attractive way as one grows up.
7. **Embarrassing (adj.):** Causing someone to feel awkward or self-conscious, like a sudden change at school.
8. **Confident (adj.):** Feeling or showing certainty about oneself after getting answers to questions.
9. **Anxiety (n.):** A feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about unknown body changes.
10. **Whisper (n.):** A soft or quiet way of speaking or a subtle sign, like the first sign of change Kimika noticed.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 15-1A

Chapter 1: Feeling Weird & Worried

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. How does Kimika describe her usual morning routine? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

2. What physical sensation does Kimika notice while getting dressed? Provide a quote from the chapter.

3. Why does Kimika choose to wear a baggy hoodie instead of her favorite shirt? Answer in a complete sentence.

4. What does Kalynn notice about Kimika's behavior during breakfast? Cite the text.

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

Identify and name two complex emotions Kimika feels in this chapter. Explain why she feels them.

Adjective Hunt:

Find four adjectives in this chapter that describe how Kimika feels or how her room looks.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 15-1B

Turn-and-Talk

"Have you ever felt like something was changing, but you weren't sure what? How did you handle it?" Discuss for 2 minutes and write your partner's response.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 15-2A

Chapter 2: Changes No One Told Me About

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. Who does Kimika talk to at school about her worries? Use evidence from the text to answer.

2. What "secret" do the friends discuss regarding their bodies? Answer in a complete sentence.

3. How does Kimika's mood change after talking to her friends? Provide a quote as evidence.

4. What does Kimika realize about her "predictable" life in this chapter? Cite the text.

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

Identify an emotion shared by Kimika and her friends in this chapter. Why is it important that they felt this together?

Vocabulary Detective:

Find the word "rhythm" in this chapter. What is the "rhythm" of the school day?

ACTIVITY: 15-3A

Chapter 3: The Embarrassing School Day

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What unexpected event happens to Kimika during gym class? Answer using a complete sentence and text evidence.

2. How does Kimika feel when she realizes what has happened? Cite a specific word or phrase from the text.

3. Who helps Kimika during this moment, and what do they do? Provide evidence.

4. Why does Kimika feel "exposed" even though she has a sweater tied around her waist? Cite the text.

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

What is the difference between "anxiety" and "embarrassment" as shown in this chapter?

Adjective Hunt:

Find adjectives used to describe the "light gray leggings" and the "gym floor".

ACTIVITY: 15-4A

Chapter 4: Mom Explains Puberty

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. Where do Kimika and her mother have their "big talk"? Answer in a complete sentence.

2. How does Mom define "puberty" for Kimika? Use a quote from the text.

3. What does Mom say about the "rhythm" of a woman's body? Provide evidence.

4. What does Mom give Kimika to help her feel more prepared? Cite the text.

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

Identify the shift in Kimika's emotions from the beginning of the talk to the end. What caused this change?

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 15-5A

Chapter 5: Mom Shares Her Story

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What story does Mom share from her own childhood? Answer in a complete sentence with evidence.

2. Why did Mom's own mother (Kimika's grandmother) call it "growing up gracefully"? Provide a quote

3. How does hearing Mom's story affect Kimika's perspective? Cite the text.

4. What does Kimika learn about her family's history with these changes? Provide evidence.

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

Name the emotion Kimika feels when she realizes her mother went through the same thing. Is it relief, pride, or something else?

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 15-6A

Chapter 6: Getting Prepared & Feeling Empowered

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What items does Kimika put in her "empowerment kit"? List them using complete sentences.

2. How does Kimika feel when she looks at herself in the mirror at the end of the chapter? Provide a quote.

3. What does "empowered" mean in the context of this chapter? Use text evidence.

4. How does Kalynn react to Kimika's new "kit"? Cite the text.

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

Identify the "complex emotion" of feeling both nervous and ready. How does the text show this?

Adjective Hunt:

Find adjectives that describe the "kit" and the "feelings" Kimika has now.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 15-7A

Chapter 7: Growing Up Gracefully

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What is the "Growing Up Club"? Use evidence from the text to explain.

2. How does Kimika use her sketchbook in this chapter? Answer in a complete sentence.

3. What does it mean to "grow up gracefully" according to the final pages? Provide a quote.

4. How has Kimika's relationship with her sister Kalynn changed or stayed the same? Provide evidence.

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

Describe Kimika's final emotional state. Use one of the vocabulary words.

ACTIVITY: 15-8A

Chapter 8: The Lesson of the Story

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What is the main message or theme of the book? Answer in a complete sentence with evidence.

2. What advice does the author give to readers who might feel "nervous"? Provide a quote.

3. Why is the title "Growing Up Gracefully" appropriate for this story? Cite the text.

4. How does Kimika's journey show "intentional decision-making"? Use evidence.

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

How does the "lesson" of the story help resolve the "anxiety" from Chapter 1?

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ASSESSMENT:15A Vocabulary Quiz

Part 1: Fill in the Blank

Choose the correct vocabulary word from the word bank to complete each sentence.

1. Kimika's morning routine was so _____ that she always woke up, brushed her teeth, and ate breakfast at the same time.
2. The steady _____ of the music helped Kimika relax and feel calm.
3. Kalynn watched as Kimika handled the situation _____, staying calm and confident.
4. After talking with her mom, Kimika felt _____ and ready to understand the changes happening to her body.
5. It was _____ when Kimika noticed a sudden change while she was at school.
6. After learning more about her body, Kimika felt _____ and no longer afraid.
7. During _____, children's bodies begin to change as they grow into teenagers.
8. After a long day, Kimika felt _____ in her chest and didn't know why.
9. Kimika felt a sense of _____ when she didn't understand what was happening to her body.
10. The first sign of change felt like a quiet _____ that something new was beginning.

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Part 2: Matching

Match each vocabulary word with the correct description.

Write the correct letter on the line.

Word	Description
1. Rhythm _____	(A) feeling nervous.
2. Gracefully _____	(B) When something happens as expected.
3. Empowered _____	(C) Feeling like you are sure of yourself.
4. Puberty _____	(D) Feeling uncomfortable
5. Embarrassing _____	(E) A time when a young person's body becomes sexually mature.
6. Confident _____	(F) Feeling in control of yourself
7. Predictable _____	(G) Moving smoothly
8. Anxiety _____	(H) A regular repeated pattern

