

AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE

It happened again that morning. Frank was walking across the school playground when he heard someone behind him shout “Hi!” Frank turned, saw a boy looking at him and said “Hi!” back. Almost immediately he wished he had kept quiet. “I’m not talking to you!” the boy shouted rudely at Frank. “I’m talking to my friend.”

Frank often made mistakes like this. He realised he must have been between the two boys. He could tell from their clothes that they were boys and not girls. But at that distance their faces were blobs. So it was much too far for him to see they were calling to each other.

Frank walked away quietly. He knew it would be hopeless trying to explain that he couldn’t see very well. He had no idea how the two boys could see each other so clearly when they were so far apart. But the mistake left him feeling very unhappy.

A long way home

His class had been learning about multiplication that week. So Frank worked out that the two boys in the playground could see at least twice as far as he could. In fact, he thought they could probably see three or four times as far. After all, each boy saw the other clearly when all he saw was fuzzy faces.

So, on the way home from school Frank told Northwick what had happened in the playground and asked the bear: “Can other children really see that far?”

“How should I know?” replied Northwick, who was unusually grouchy. Northwick was already hungry when they left school, so he had no energy to talk. He just wanted to get home and find something to eat.

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Frank guessed what the problem was and asked the bear if he was hungry. Northwick summoned up the energy to whisper a weak “yes”. Frank stopped, searched in his pocket and found an old biscuit. He handed it to the bear who wolfed it down in two shakes of a lamb’s tail.

“Thank you!” said Northwick, who quickly perked up. “That feels a bit better. I might just make it home now. Oh, by the way, the answer to your question is yes. Other children can see that far. They can see a lot farther than us. I know because the same thing is always happening to me too.”

Take a deep breath

Northwick said they probably couldn’t do much about it. He had tried all sorts of things. Sometimes if he wasn’t sure if someone was calling him, he pretended he hadn’t heard them or that he was busy. Other times he was honest and told people that he couldn’t see very well.

“Of course, you could get one of those mono-things your parents talk about that helps you see further.” But they decided that using a monocular, which is like a small telescope, wouldn’t be very cool. They agreed that maybe a monocular would be OK if people couldn’t see you using it.

Then Northwick said to Frank: “Talking about what different people and bears can see and do, I have a question for you. Do I really eat more than anyone else?” Frank took several steps back. He also took a deep breath. Then he said “yes” and started to run home. Over his shoulder, he shouted: “But you look really good on it!”