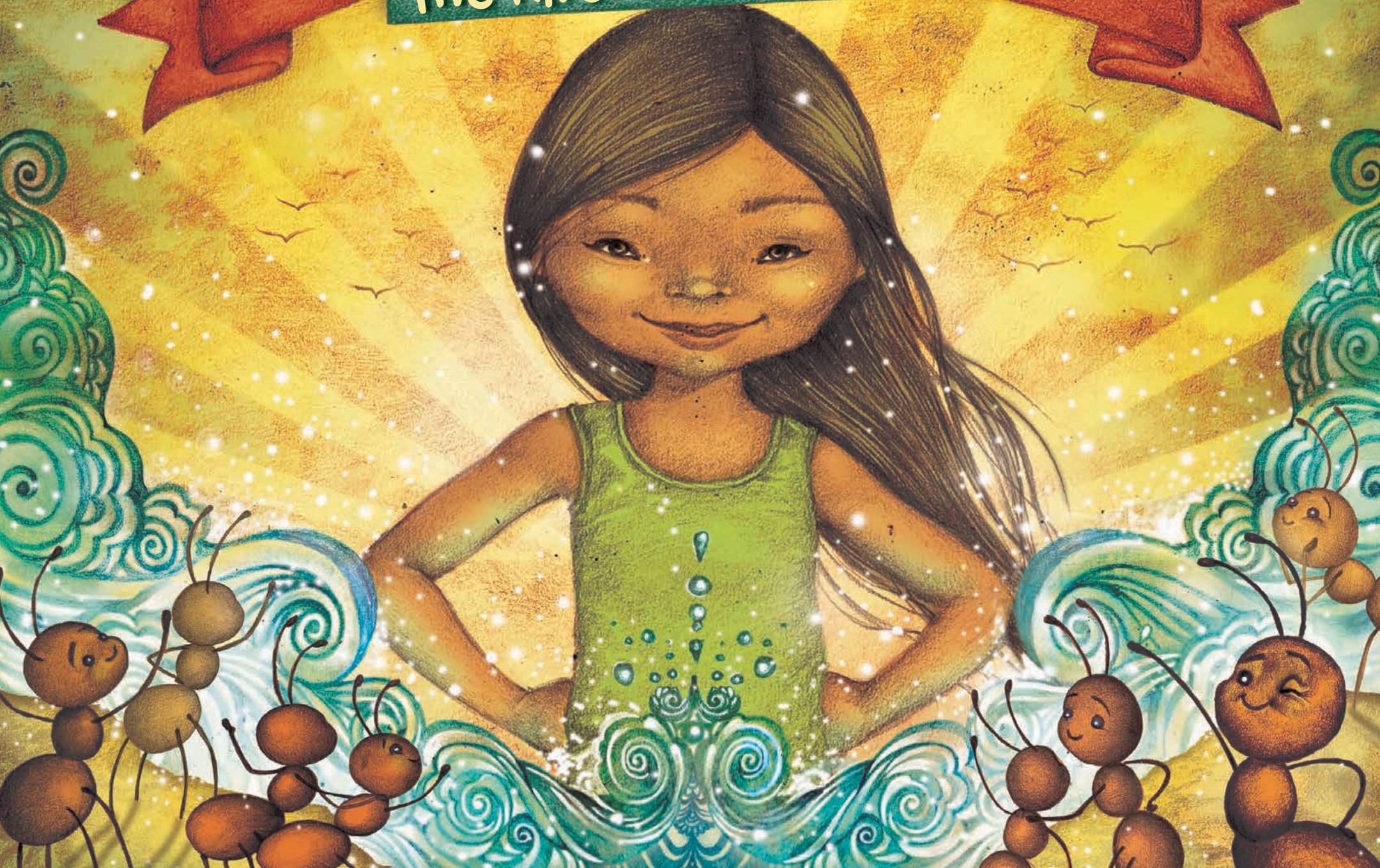


# Elena and the Ants:

The River Rescue Team







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**ISBN:** 978-9962-5546-1-5

**Author:** Lil hArriera

**Illustrations:** Martanoemí Noriega

**Design:** Lorena Carrasco

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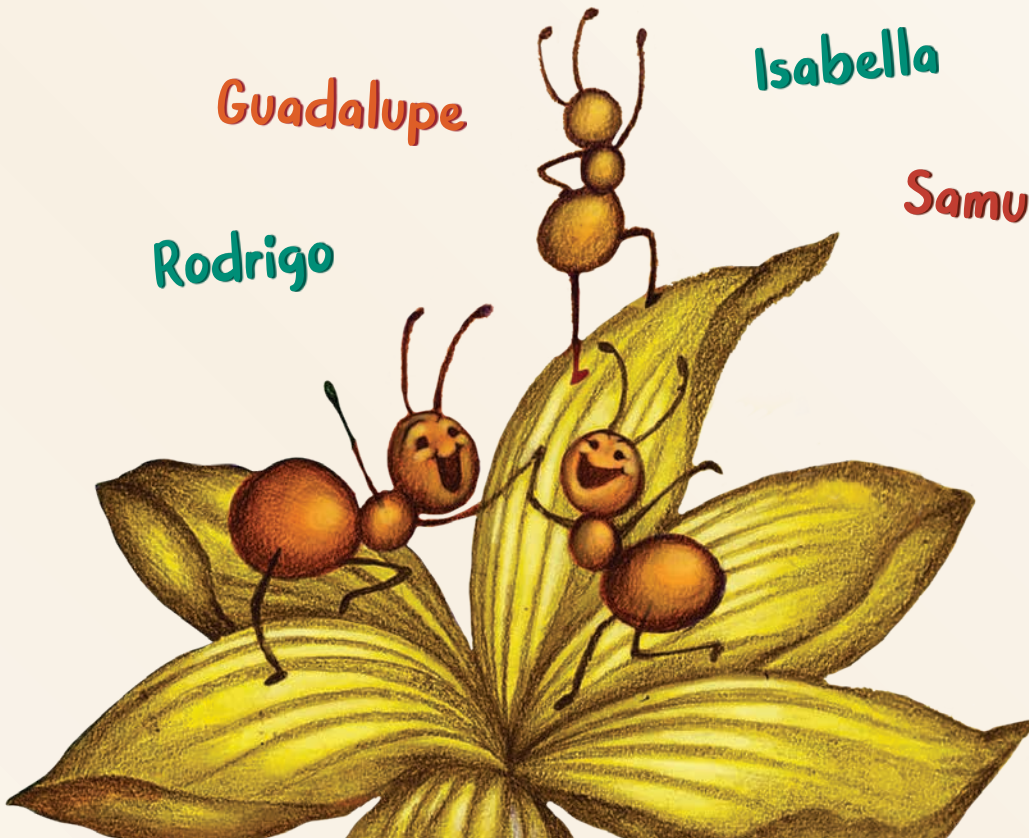
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Valery

Sonia

# THANK YOU!





# Elena and the Ants: The River Rescue Team



Illustrations: Martanoemí Noriega



## Elena has small and very observant eyes.

They look up and they look down, where they find crickets and toads. They look ahead and they look behind, they look at people and they look at trees, with the sounds of the river in the background, a soft *whooshwhooshwhoosh*. Most of all, Elena likes to look at ants: how they work together, how they communicate, and how they cooperate. Sometimes, Elena brings them sweets or saves them from being stepped on.

A little while ago, Elena and her family moved from the Panamanian region of Ngäbe-Buglé to the town of El Tigre. Elena is shy and doesn't have friends yet... human friends, that is. Instead, her friends are the birds, the trees, and, of course, the ants. Her *papá* and *mamá* work a lot, and Elena spends all her time with her *abuela*, who always tells her:

**"Nature is a great teacher. And you are a good student. Very observant, just like me."**





## And just like she says, Elena is very observant.

One lovely evening, Elena is playing by herself on the riverbank, watching the ants. She can hear the breeze singing, see the flowers dancing, hear the parakeets talking to each other. Then suddenly... **CRASHACRASHABOOM!** Elena jumps, so frightened that her shoulders go up to her ears, her knees come up to her chin, and her heart jumps to her throat.

**CRASHA  
CRASHA  
BOOM!**

What was that noise? Thunder? Lightning? Maybe it's an earthquake! The toad doesn't understand what's going on and sits with its mouth open. The parakeets take off like rockets, and Elena wonders if they'll come back down to Earth or fly to another planet like Saturn. The ants, who are always moving around, stay frozen in place.

It isn't thunder, and it isn't lightning. Not even an earthquake could make such a racket. **It's... a... REFRIGERATOR!** The angry waters of the river had knocked it against some rocks, and there it stayed.



A vibrant, painterly illustration of a scene in a stream. In the foreground, a young girl with long brown hair, wearing a blue tank top, sits on a mossy bank with her mouth wide open in shock. Next to her, a large, spotted green frog also has its mouth wide open, looking towards the water. In the middle ground, a large, rusted metal refrigerator is partially submerged in the water, tilted at an angle. The water is depicted with swirling, circular patterns, suggesting ripples or a small current. The background features a rocky stream bed, a tree with green leaves on the left, and various plants and roots along the banks.

It isn't a swimming refrigerator though,  
and it isn't a boat shaped  
like a refrigerator either. It's...

**GARBAGE!**

A lot of people think that the river is magic and can make anything they throw in it disappear. But the garbage never actually goes away. It stays there and poisons the water that we all need to survive: the parakeets, the trees, the ants, Elena... even you and I. Or it might float out to sea, where it can hurt the coral, the fish, and all the other sea life.



Two boys swimming in the river come up to the refrigerator and try to take it apart. When she sees them, Elena doesn't think twice before shouting:



**“Stop! Don't do that! You're going to poison the water! We need to get it out!”**

The boys stop what they're doing and leave, annoyed, saying:

**“Wow, she's so dramatic! I thought she couldn't even talk!”**

Elena descends to the site with care, thinking that she could fish it out by herself. The old refrigerator and the boys' words circle around in her mind like buzzing mosquitoes.

Elena thinks, “It's not enough to just remove the refrigerator. I need to remove all the garbage. To protect the river is to protect our lives, as my teacher says.

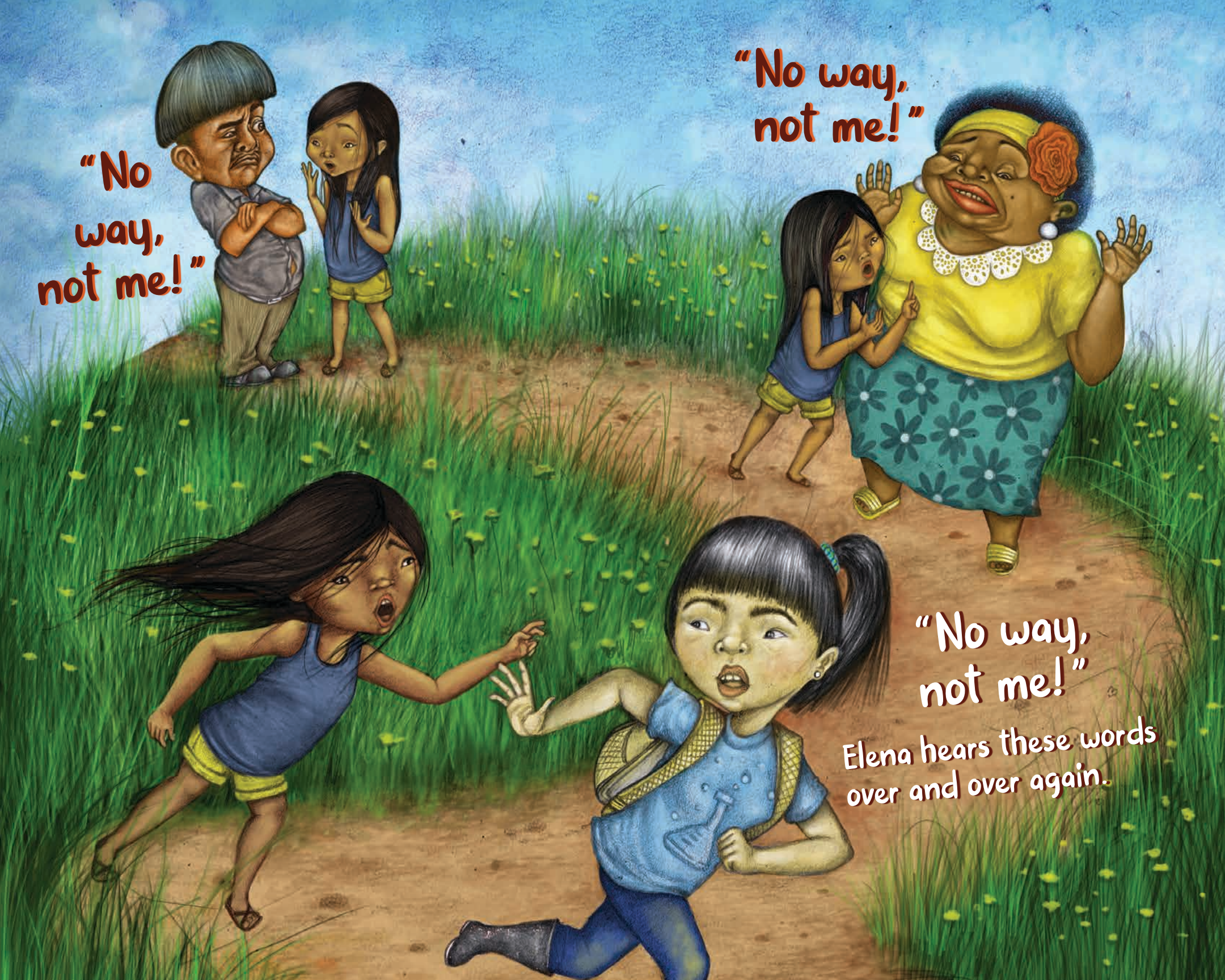
But the river flows through many places  
and connects with another river, and  
then with another, and another."  
She feels like her brain is going  
to explode and decides to  
look for help.



**She goes to visit Mr. Chongo,** a short man with a haircut that she thinks looks like a mushroom. He likes to give orders and has a voice like thunder, so Elena believes that he is the right person to solve the problem. He can tell everyone what to do. But Mr. Chongo replies: **“Who, me? No way!”** and commands with his booming voice, “Go play with a ball!”

**Next, Elena goes to visit Ms. Irma,** a neighbour who sings beautifully and laughs like a waterfall. Perhaps it’s her cheeks or her eyes, but she seems to be always smiling. Because of this, Elena thinks that she is the right person to solve the problem; everyone will be happy to help her. But Ms. Irma replies: **“Who, me? No way!”** and gives her, with smiling cheeks, some sweet mangoes.

**Finally, Elena visits Ana,** the oldest in her class. She is a perfectionist as a violinist and, in group work, she always wants to go beyond the expectations. Elena thinks that she would be the right person to solve the problem because she is very responsible. But Ana replies: **“Who, me? No way!”** and runs off because she is late for who knows what!



**"No way, not me!"**

**"No way, not me!"**

**"No way, not me!"**

Elena hears these words over and over again.

Disappointed, she lies down on the riverbank  
and, looking at the ants, wonders out loud: **“What can I do?”**

Suddenly, the grass grows, the tree  
stretches, the sky moves further away.

**Elena becomes  
tiny... like an ant.**

And before she can make a peep, she hears:


“Hello Elena! My name is Rosita. Welcome to the  
Republic of the Ants.”

Amazing! Looking into her eyes is Rosita, a real ant.

The Republic of the Ants has invited Elena to their  
home as a thank you for her friendship. While they are  
climbing an enormous mountain to get to the entrance  
of the anthill, Elena asks:







“How can you make something so big while being so small?”



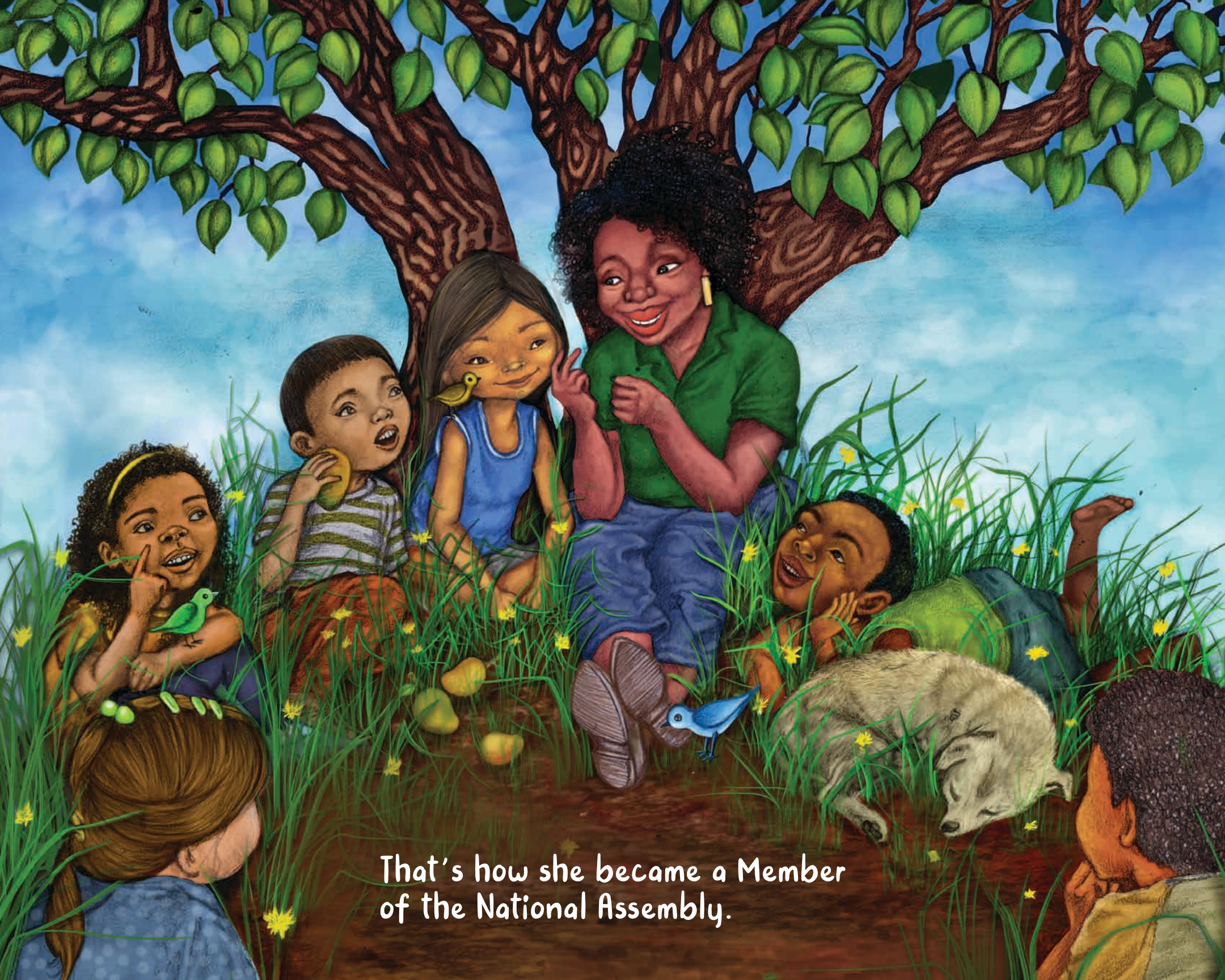
**“Our size doesn’t matter at all,”** Rosita explained. “We know that little by little, we can achieve big things together. It also helps that there are soooo many of us!”

Elena watches each ant use their talents to make the work easier: they communicate, they greet each other, they ask for help, and no one ant is in charge of everything. They are all responsible for the well-being of the Republic of the Ants. Elena begins to see everything more clearly as Rosita continues to show her around the anthill. The tour concludes with a concert in Elena’s honour by the Ant Choir, which makes everyone dance. As she loses herself in the music, Elena magically returns to her original size.

**On that very day, the parliamentarian Laura Ríos comes to visit El Tigre**

to see her friends, the neighbours who watched her grow up, and even the trees, their shadows, and the hummingbird nests. She had grown up just like Elena and was just as observant too. With a lot of help from her family, she went through school and, from there, found her place in the world of politics, a place where very important decisions are made that affect all citizens.





That's how she became a Member  
of the National Assembly.

After she meets Elena, speaks to her, and learns about the problem of the fridge in the river, she is interested in helping by passing better laws for the conservation of nature, and she even promises to come back.

The next morning, Elena wakes up without her shyness. She leaves for school feeling happy and with a new pep in her step. When she arrives, she calls a meeting of her classmates to address a life or death issue.

When her classmates arrive, she offers them a cup of stinky, dirty water.

**“GROSS! We’ll die if we drink that!”**  
they all say, scrunching up their faces.



“If we don’t do something right now, this is all we’ll have left to drink,” Elena says. They all look at her with questions. Elena explains the issue of the contaminated river, but to the kids, the problem seems as big as the sun in the sky.

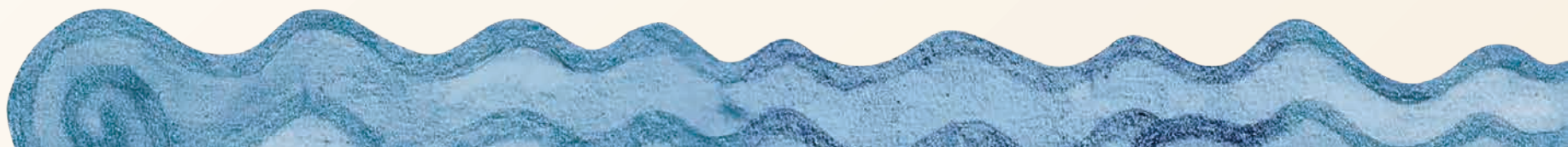


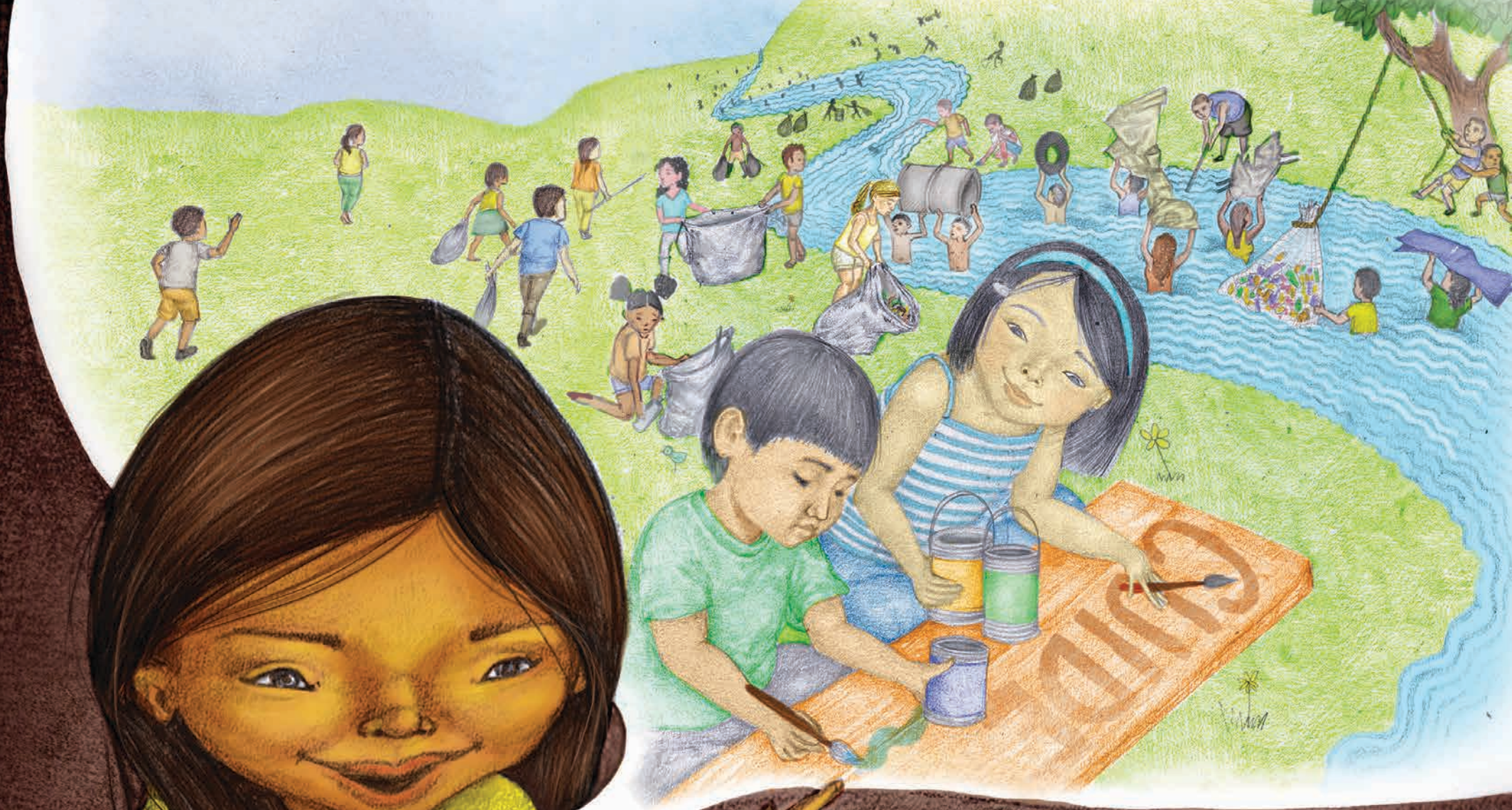
**“Just let the grown-ups handle it!”** Tito exclaims as he leaves the meeting. The other children follow him.

Since Elena is very observant and has noticed the talents of each of her classmates, she says to them:

**“Hey! Come back! Look, if we work as a team, little by little, we can achieve many things.”**

I will prove to you that the river needs all of us. Juana and Pedro can dive, so they can pick up the garbage under water. Mario and Josefina are very resourceful, so they can invent something to remove the heavy garbage. Also, Mirna and Tito, who draw beautifully, can make signs that say, ‘Don’t throw garbage into the river.’ Not littering is also cleaning up.”





This is how Elena convinces everyone that we can all do our part by using our talents.

They share ideas and spend the weekend cleaning up the whole river.

**Just like the ants, everyone has their own task and supports those in need.**

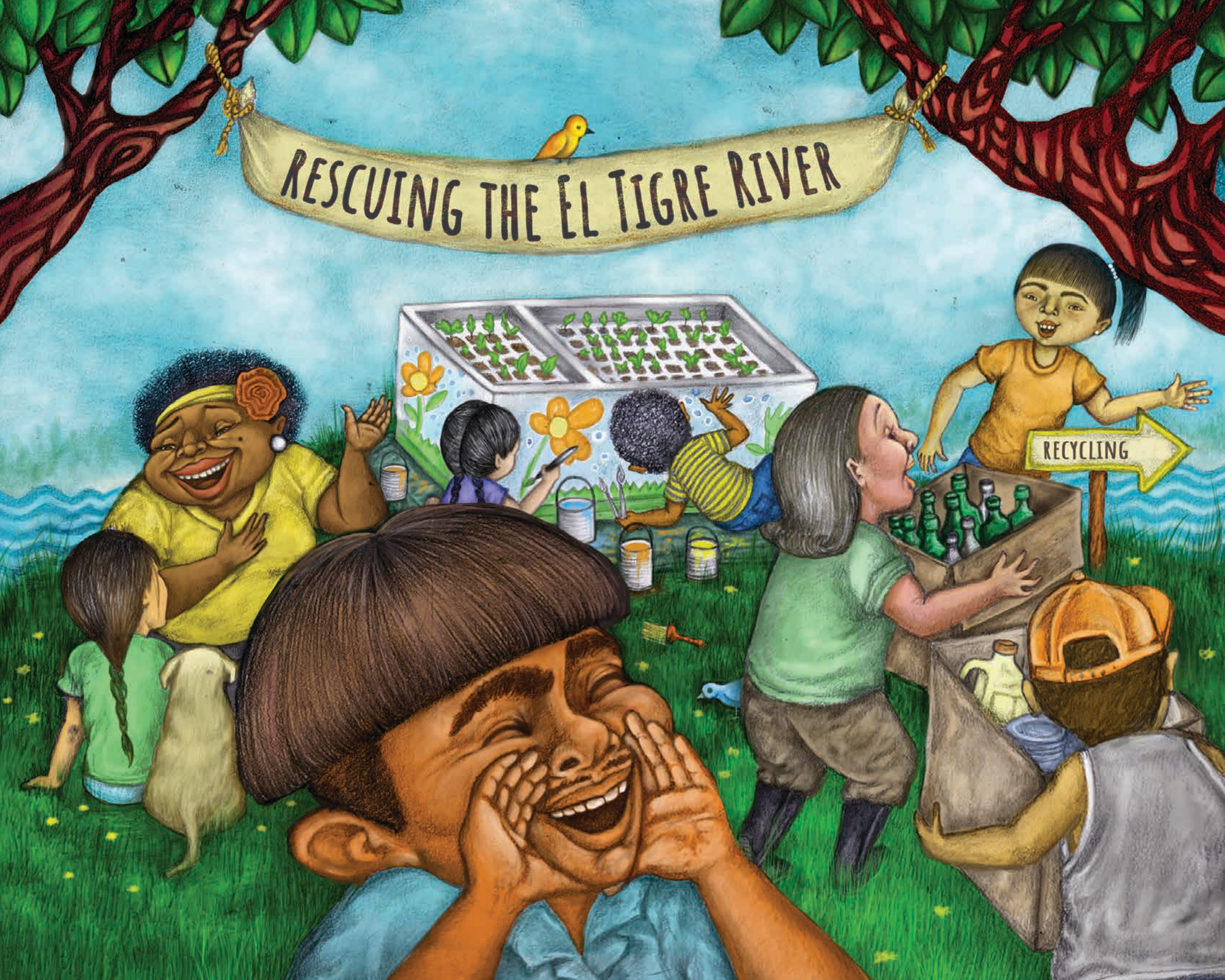
They work, have fun, and everyone feels important. They are so enthusiastic that the adults join in. Mr. Chongo, with his thunderous voice, invites the neighbours. During breaks, Ms. Irma sings and makes them laugh.

**Ana offers to organize the recycling of the garbage and turns the old refrigerator into a beautiful seedbed.**

The project, “Rescuing the El Tigre River,” grows with everyone’s effort. Elena reminds them that protecting the water is protecting life. The people of El Tigre achieved great things thanks to Elena and the Republic of the Ants.



# RESCUING THE EL TIGRE RIVER





Member of the National Assembly Ríos kept her promise to visit them again and was happy to see that Elena, together with the whole town, had achieved what seemed almost impossible.

## The parliamentarian invited Elena to visit the National Assembly,

where she works to make laws that can help communities like El Tigre.

### Do you hear that?

It's the ants, raising their legs and shouting:

“Hooray!” “Yahoo!” “Hooray!”

But who told the ants that they could go too? If it were up to Elena, she would bring them along. That's for sure.





# QUESTIONS:



1. How would you describe Elena? What are her characteristics?

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2. What does Elena want to change in the town El Tigre? How does she do it?

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3. Name something you would like to improve in your school or community and describe how you would fix it. Who would you ask for help?

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4. What talents did Elena notice in her classmates?  
What talents do you have?

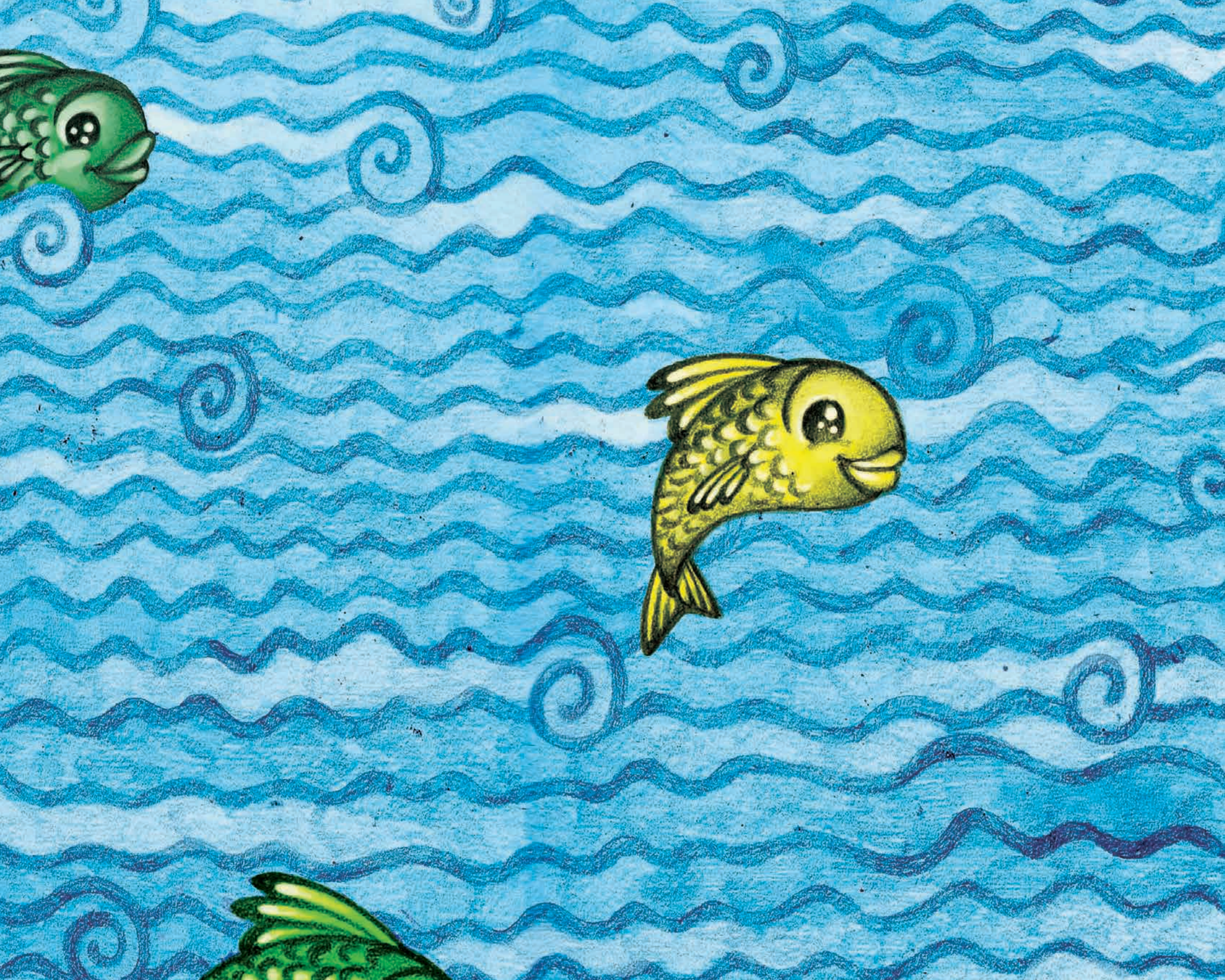
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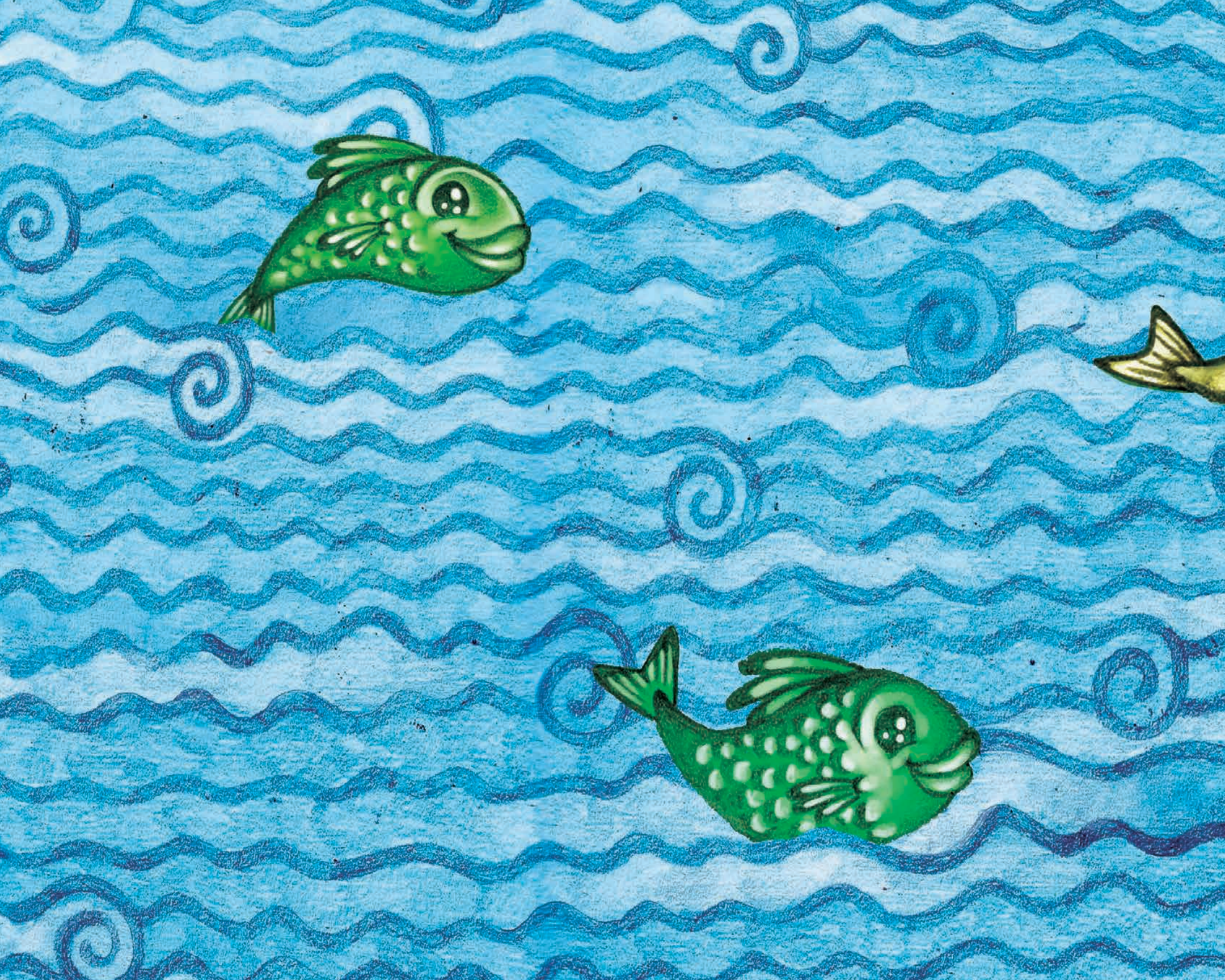
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The background of the entire page is a vibrant illustration of a garden scene. It features several brown tree trunks, large green leaves with prominent veins, and bright yellow flowers. Numerous cartoon-style ants, colored in shades of orange and brown, are scattered throughout the scene. Some ants are perched on leaves, some are on the tree trunks, and some are near the flowers. They have large, expressive eyes and thin antennae, giving them a friendly and lively appearance. The overall style is colorful and illustrative, typical of children's educational materials.

The National Forum of Women in Political Parties of Panama is an organisation made up of women from all political parties. They come together voluntarily to help many women, who may be their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, sisters or friends, to participate in the political life of our country. And with all this effort, they can become candidates for president of the republic, members of the National Assembly, mayors, representatives, and leaders who guide the country.

 Fonamupp Panama

  @fonamupp

 +507 6370-0982

[info@fonamupp.org](mailto:info@fonamupp.org) • [comunicaciones@fonamupp.org](mailto:comunicaciones@fonamupp.org)

[www.fonamupp.org](http://www.fonamupp.org)

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