

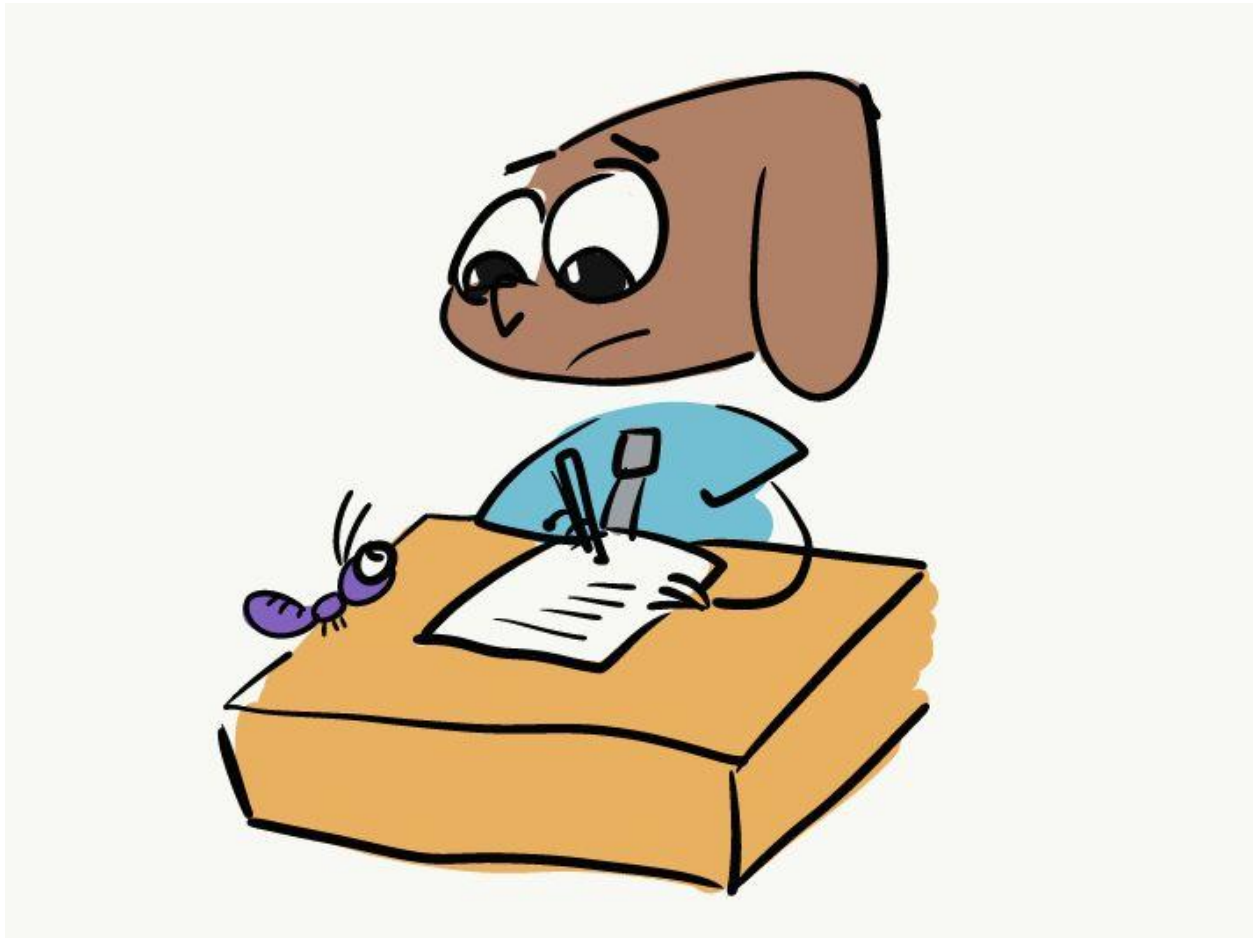
NGIRI HAS A SECRET

By Ernest Bazanye

It was English class and the kids were doing an exercise. Everyone, that is, except Wakayima who, as we know, never learned anything in class because he never paid attention. He had only come to this class to see the cartoons Benedicto used to draw during class, but this day, even Ben wasn't drawing anything. He was busy doing his school work.

Wakayima shrugged and decided, "Well, since there is nothing else to do, I might as well also do some of this stuff. After all, I know English. Us animals understand all the human languages spoken in our country."

He looked at the paper in front of him. The question was: "Three men and two women walk down the stairs of a house they have just built. They are very happy with their work. The men say to the women, 'These are very strong stairs. I am sure they will last very long.' The women look at the men and agree. Rewrite this passage in past tense."



Wakayima thought about it. This was easy, he concluded, and began to write. “So, like these guys they built a house, yeah? And like, the house was for up and down, you know those things of how some houses be. They be when they have an up part and a downer part, yeah? Okay. So these guys were in the house. They had been in the up part. Now they were going down. But they were going down on the stairs, not jumping down. So, like, three of them were men and the other two were women. Then the men they looked at the women and they said, ‘My Guys, these stairs are dope.’ And the women said, ‘I know right?’ And then they finished.”

Wakayima put a full stop at the end of the answer. He was very proud of himself. But he felt something was missing, so he added a little line above the full stop to make it an exclamation mark, so it said, “And they finished!”

But there was still something missing. “Well, why not?” said Wakayima to himself, and added a tick next to the answer because it was obviously right.

He was so proud of himself that he began to look around to see if anyone was having trouble and wanted to copy him, but nobody was copying. In this class, only two people copied and that was him and Oblong. Oblong, however, seemed to be doing fine answering the questions, but just in case, Wakayima was just about to hiss a whisper at Oblong when instead, he heard a hiss come to him.

What? Did someone want to copy him? He looked around. Nobody was paying attention to him.

He heard the hiss again.

He looked around and there was still nobody looking at him. Then the hiss came a third time. This time, it added, “Hey, down here.”

Wakayima looked down and saw where the sound was coming from. There was a little ant on his desk. “Dude, here!” she said.

“Hey, corporal,” whispered Wakayima. “I can’t talk right now. We are in the middle of a test. And don’t ask what a test is, because to tell you I would have to talk, and as I have already explained, I can’t talk right now.”

“I know what a test is. It is one of those things which Oblong fails half the time,” whispered the ant. “That’s not why I am here. Dude, you need to come with me. It’s important.”

“If you know what a test is, then you know I can’t just walk out on one. There are rules,” Wakayima whispered back.

The ant looked at Wakayima. “You might as well leave. You have got all the answers wrong.”

“How would you know? You’re just an ant. You don’t even attend class properly like me.”

“Dude,” the ant replied, “You don’t attend class properly, either. You just sit around waiting for lunch time. Anyway, Teacher Murungi likes eating kabalagala while marking papers, so we are usually around fetching crumbs. We see the answers and know which ones are right and which ones are wrong.”

Wakayima was puzzled. “How do you ants even know how to read?”

The ant didn’t have shoulders so it didn’t shrug. It just said, “Well, we started by learning how to read the word ‘insecticide’ and then after that everything else came easy. Now, look, you need to put up your hand and ask for permission to leave the class. You have to come with me.”

“Where are we going?” asked Wakayima.

“Ask for permission to go to the toilet,” said the ant.

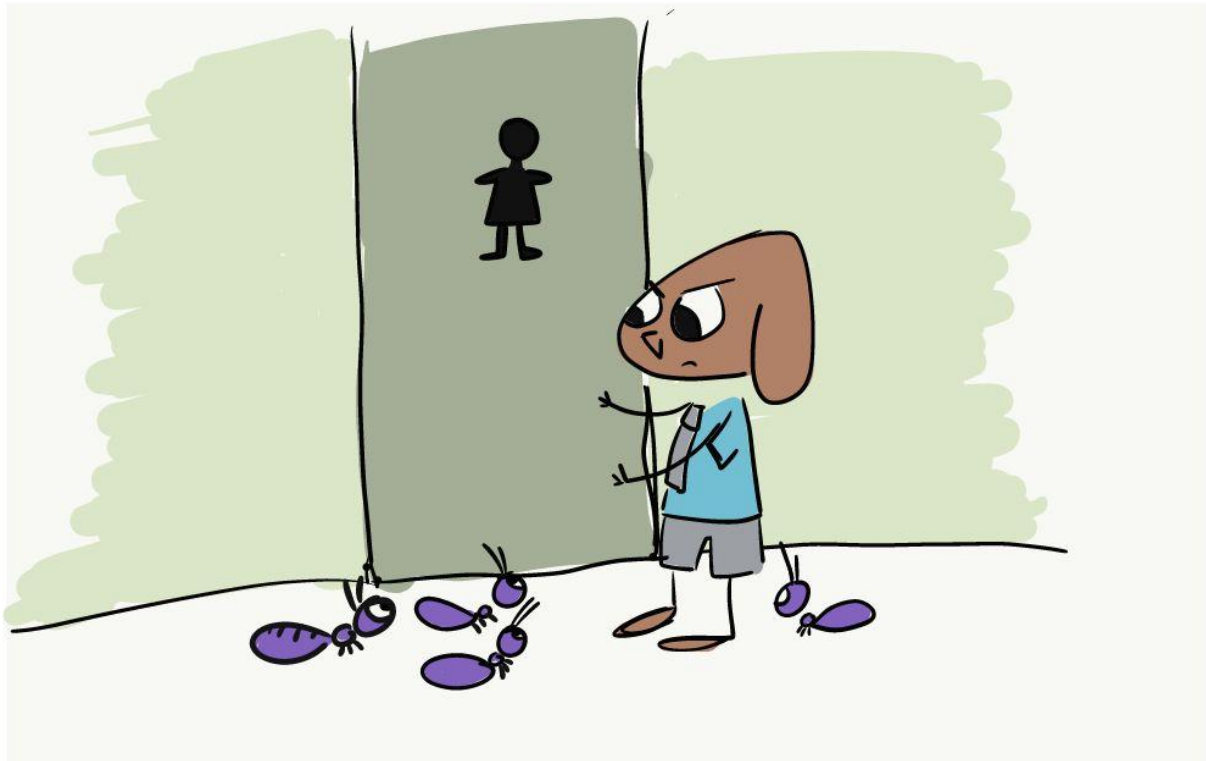
“Why?” asked Wakayima.

“Because that is where the others are waiting for you. I told you, it’s important.”

Wakayima and the corporal ant had to sort out a bit of confusion at first, because the ants had assembled in the girls toilet and Wakayima had to explain to them that they needed to use the other one.

“You said you can read. Can’t you see that it is the girls toilet?” he asked.

“That’s not a word,” replied the corporal, pointing at the symbol on the door. “And besides, how many times do we have to tell you, we are all girls! There are very few boy ants and they tend to stay in the nest.”



Eventually, Wakayima got the ants to meet him in the guys' loos. There were just five of them.

"Nakaluma," tell him what happened.

"Wakayima!" began Nakaluma.

"Yes?"

"You won't believe."

"Won't believe what?"

"What happened."

"What happened?"

"You won't believe!"

"What won't I believe?"

"What happened, Wakayima!"

“Captain, tell your friend that I am on a toilet break and they don’t last all day. She has to get to the point.”

“Save the drama for the Queen, Nakaluma, and just tell the hare the story,” said the Captain.

If I tell you the story the way Nakaluma told it, with all the “Eh!”s and the “Munanges” and the “I was like Whaaaats” then we, too, will be here all day, so let me tell you what she said in my way.

Nakaluma was one of the ants that had been biting Ngiri the day before to make him think that using stolen pencils would cause him pain. The ants did this throughout the art lesson, until finally, the lesson ended. The other ants skittered off Ngiri’s hands, but for some reason, just as Ngiri got up to angrily take Roger’s pencils back to him, his school tie swung over his shirt and caught Nakaluma the ant by surprise. She was trapped in its folds.

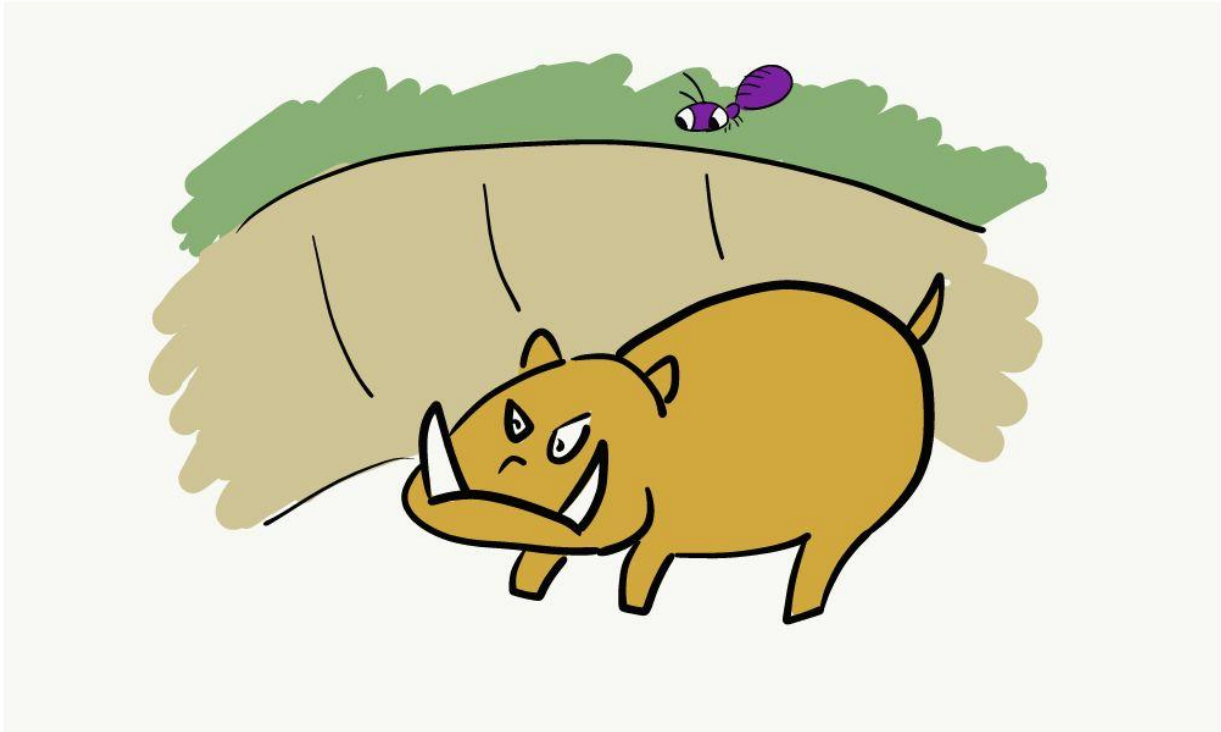
At first it was dark because she had been trapped between the tie and the shirt. She couldn’t see where she was. She decided to stay put and hide for a while until it was quiet, then she stuck her head out to see where they were. She expected that they would be in the class. Or at least in the school corridors or in the playground. But that is not what she saw.

She thought she would be on a boda or in a car with Ngiri’s parents driving him home, but what she saw did not look like a car.

She was at Ngiri’s home. He had taken his tie off. When she stuck her head out she thought she would see the things you see in a human home, like other clothes, walls, or maybe even a few of Ngiri’s siblings or his parents.

Instead she saw herself in a shallow ditch in the soil, surrounded by trees. She crawled out from under the tie and saw that the whole school uniform was crumpled up in a corner of a hole in the ground. It was getting dark, and much of the hole was in shadow, but she could see what was in the corner. It was Ngiri.

Ngiri bent over, stretched his legs, puffed out his face, tugged at his ears, and twisted himself this way and that and in a few minutes, Ngiri the school bully had transformed, completely, into a warthog!



At this point Nakaluma raised her legs up, four of them, leaving her standing on only two, and said, “I was like, whaaaaaaaat? Can you believe it?”

Wakayima’s eyes bulged with shock. He was so surprised that even in his disguise as a human, his ears popped up into their normal hare form just out of shock!

“I ran back into the tie and hid there for the rest of the night, until today when he changed again, put on the uniform and came back here. I told you! Would you believe? You won’t believe! I am so shocked. Ngiri is also a wild animal? Whaaaaaaaat?”

Wakayima was deep in thought. This was shocking news but it was also disturbing. He thought that hares were the only ones who knew the trick of disguising themselves as humans. But now warthogs also knew it? No wonder Ngiri would come to school as well. Warthogs were foragers and bullies. They liked to just look

around for whatever food they could find lying around, and when they found weaker animals eating, they would grab the food from them.

The next day there was an emergency assembly called just after lunch, and it was just for the boys. Wakayima was kind of surprised to hear about this sort of thing because he never attended assemblies (and nobody in the staff seemed to notice, so he got away with it) but this time it was right after lunch and he was too full to run away and hide. He figured he might as well go along.

Teacher Jolly was the one leading the assembly. She stood tall and slender above all the gathered boys in the assembly hall. There was something in her eyes. It seemed as if she was looking at everyone at once.

“Today we are here for what? We are here for assembly. A special assembly, okay? Now, some of you may be wondering what we are here for. What are we here for?” she said.

Oblong thought she was actually asking. Oblong forgot that sometimes this is how teachers, especially teacher Jolly, talked. And so he put up his hand to answer, “SPECIAL ASSEMBLY!” with all his confidence.

Teacher Jolly was not looking for an answer, so she just continued.

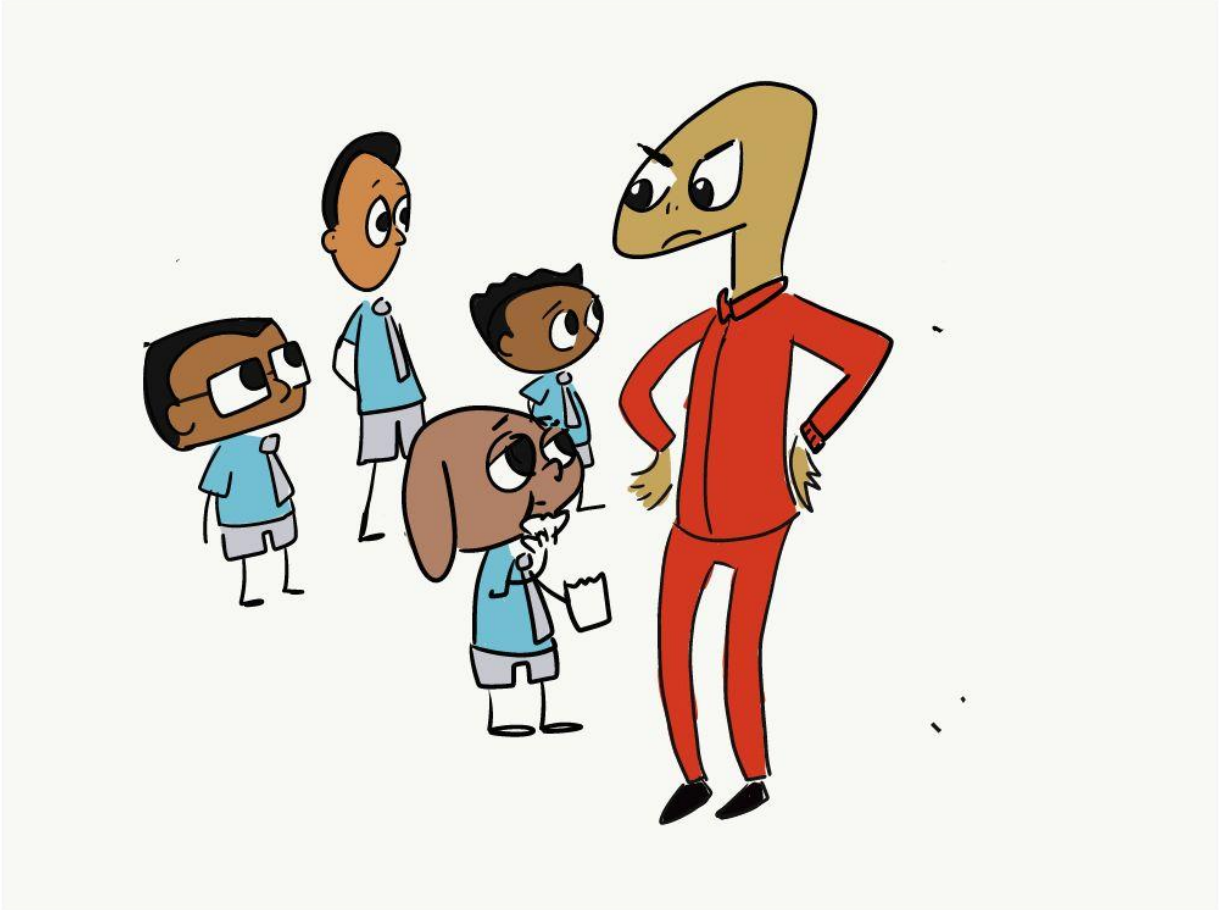
“We are here because an emergency has been occurring in the school and in the playground and now it has become worse and it has started to occur in the what?”

Kwezi looked at Oblong to make sure he wasn’t thinking of putting up his hand again. He wasn’t. Because even he didn’t know the answer.

“In the toilets! In the boys’ toilet there has been an emergency! Some of you, maybe one of you, maybe more than one, I hope it is not more than one, knows what I am talking about!” Teacher Jolly continued.

Wakayima pulled a couple of gonja crisps from his pocket and took a bite. Yes, he always kept some snacks on him for desert. As he munched then he whispered to

Roger, “No one ever knows what Teacher Jolly is talking about, at least not for the first ten minutes.” He took another munch.



“Is someone eating in this assembly?” Teacher Jolly suddenly snapped. “I hear eating. Is somebody eating? Who is eating?”

This time Wakayima raised his hand dutifully. Roger looked at him, not believing his eyes.

But Wakayima was not confessing. “Teacher Jolly. It was just me scratching my teeth. Sometimes when I scratch the back teeth with the ones on the other side, it sounds kind of munchy.”

Roger gave Wakayima an eye.

Wakayima shrugged. 'I'm not lying, am I? Scratching back teeth is how I eat,' he whispered.

Teacher Jolly rolled her eyes and decided to ignore him.

"I was saying what?"

Wakayima mumbled, "You were saying 'what' a lot," but he was smart enough to not say it too loudly.

Teacher Jolly continued. "It has come to the attention of the staff and other students and others that some bad behaviour has been taking place. Some of you, maybe one of you, maybe more of you, but someone has been urinating in the school! Who is it?"

All the boys looked at each other as if they were not sure what to do at this point. Then they all raised their hands.

Just as they did this Teacher Jolly realised that she had not asked the question correctly. "I mean urinating on the floor of the toilets, and even furthermore, he has been urinating in the playground and the school yard. Who has been susuling outside on the fences and around the swings and on the trees? Which of you? And I know it is a boy! Because boys are nasty creatures! Which of you is it?"

Very quickly, all the hands went down. And all the guys began to look at each other. They all knew that Tropical Hills Academy had very nice toilets. They were always clean and were very comfortable. They were so nice that sometimes some of the students would come to the toilet just to take a nap. Oblong especially, from back in the days when he had his sleeping problem, used to do this all the time.

No one understood why anyone would pee outside when there were all these beautiful loos just waiting indoors.

Then Wakayima looked at Ngiri. Ngiri had a tense expression on his face. He looked uncomfortable. Wakayima wondered if the Nsanafu Squad were attacking

him again, but the look on his face was not pain. It was discomfort. It was agony. It was a feeling that was strongly unpleasant, but it was not pain.

Wakayima also noticed that he was crossing his legs.

Wakayima knew what was going to happen next. And sure enough Ngiri put up his hand and pleaded, his growly voice sounding a bit high pitched this time, “Please Teacher, toilet?”

Teacher Jolly looked at him. “You must be joking. In the middle of an assembly about inappropriate use of toilet you want to what?”

“Please teacher!” pleaded Ngiri.

Teacher Jolly could see that he was serious, though. So she let him go.

Wakayima had a suspicious look on his face. But he knew that he could not ask for permission to also leave. But as we already know, Wakayima is able to make himself smaller and bigger, and stretch and twist himself, and change shape from an animal to a person. This doesn’t just mean he can change from a hare to a schoolboy, it also means he can do it halfway— He just shrunk a little bit. Enough so nobody would spot him sneaking out. He crept out of the assembly and followed Ngiri.

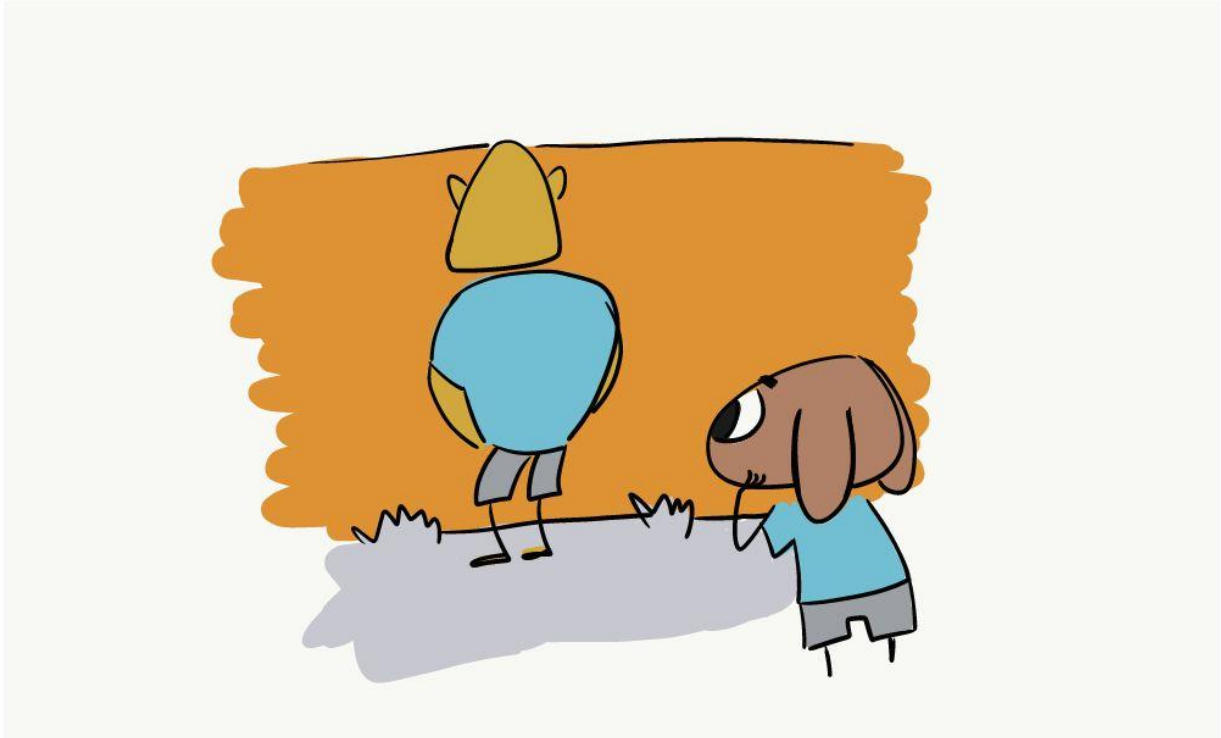
Ngiri ran down the corridor.

Wakayima hopped after him.

Ngiri reached the toilet. But instead of going in, Ngiri ran right past the toilet.

Wakayima hopped after him, only pausing in the middle of a hop to think, “Hmmm,” then hopping along.

When Ngiri was outside in the yard, he ran to the back gate and lifted one leg and promptly released a stream of you-know-what!



Wakayima first screwed up his nose. Then he remembered that he was actually an animal, not a human, and that susuling in the open was quite normal behaviour for him and his friends. So the grimace was replaced with a sly grin, as a plan began to unfold in his cunning brain. I will tell you about it next time. Don't miss it!

Wakayima has found out Ngiri's secret and has found out what to do with it! Things are getting hot!

The adventures of the cheeky, cunning hare that sneaks into the human school continue with a fresh story each week. Join the mailing list by at >>>>>or visit bazanye.com/wakayima for the latest. Stay tuned!