

FICTION—HONORABLE MENTION

“On Top of the World”

By Savy Leiser, Age 15
West Chester, PA
Unionville High School

Amy, though she was normally a calm child, could not keep still. She bounced and kicked and fidgeted all throughout attendance, during the story Teacher read to their first-grade class, and while eating lunch as well. She absolutely could not wait for recess that day, since she had something special to show her two best friends, Lauren and Francis.

Finally, the piercing *ding* of the bell sounded, and all the children in the first and second grades flocked outside to the playground.

"Lauren! Francis! Guess what!" Amy shouted, bouncing from foot to foot and smiling broadly.

"What is it, Amy?" Francis asked, swinging his Superman lunchbox as they walked to the blacktop.

"Yesterday after school, my mommy took me to the neighborhood playground, and I went on the swings. And guess what! I could swing higher than anyone there! I swung so high I almost thought I'd fall out!"

"You mean 'swung,' not 'swinged,'" Lauren remarked.

"That's not important! What's important is that I am the swing set champion! I want to show you guys. Come on!" Amy took off running, sprinting so fast that she was just a splatter of pink overalls and blond hair against a black asphalt canvas.

"Hold *on*, Amy!" Lauren called.

"Yeah, stop running!" said Francis.

Amy let her white Velcro Disney princess sneakers skid her to a stop in her tracks, then she spun around. "Come *on*, guys, the swings are over there! We got to get to them before someone else does!"

"We can't go on the swings," said Lauren.

"And why not?"

"Because the main playground is second-grader territory!" Francis explained.

Lauren looked at him sourly. "Teacher says we can't begin a sentence with the word 'because.'"

Francis rolled his eyes. "Anyway, we can't go over there or the big second-graders will eat us!"

"You guys are crazy," Amy said, dismissing their thoughts with a wave of her hand. "They won't eat us. Nobody's hungry 'cause we just had lunch. And anyway, anyone can use the swings."

Lauren shook her head. "No first-grader has gone to the second-grade part of the playground in five whole years. My big sister told me that."

"Yeah," Francis agreed. "My brother told me that last time a first-grader went over there, the second-graders captured him and ate him for dinner!"

"I don't believe you," said Amy, continuing her journey forward. "I'm not afraid of any second grader. And even if they did try to eat me, my daddy would sue. Now come on! We're gonna lose our swings!"

Lauren and Francis looked worriedly at each other, but then shrugged and followed Amy to the swings.

When she got there, though, the swing set was being guarded by a tall girl in a sweatshirt.

"What do you first-graders think you're doing?" she asked.

"I'm Amy." Amy extended her hand to shake the girl's and introduce herself. "I'm the neighborhood swing set champion."

"Well, I'm Brenda. I'm a second-grader, and I say no first-graders on our side. So get off."

"Or what?" asked Amy, as Lauren and Francis looked at each other in despair.

"Or we'll *eat* you."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah!"

"You and what army?"

Two other second graders emerged from behind Brenda. One was a boy who was quite large, squeezed tightly into his T-shirt. The other was a boy who was small, though a whole lot of evil fit into the tiny grin on his tiny face.

"Get them!" Brenda commanded.

The boys chased after the three first-graders until they were back on their own sides of the playground, the black asphalt with nothing but a few bouncy balls and jump ropes.

"This isn't fair. I'm the swing set champion. I should be allowed to use the swings."

"You should," said Francis, "but I'm not sure we should go back there. The second-graders are scary people."

"Well, we'll just have to fight them. I have a friend in second grade. Keisha. She lives next door to me. Maybe I can get her to help us out."

That day after school, Amy walked to Keisha's house and knocked on the door.

"Hi, Amy!" said Keisha. "Want to have some cookies?"

"Not right now," said Amy, motioning for Keisha to come outside with her. "I need to talk to you." She and Keisha sat on Keisha's front porch, and Amy took the plunge. "Are you against first-graders coming to your side of the playground?"

"No," said Keisha. "None of us really are, except Brenda and her friends, Harold and Fisher."

"Then why can't we come to your side?"

"Brenda, Harold, and Fisher rule the whole playground."

"Well, that's not fair."

"No. It really isn't."

The next day, Amy, Lauren, and Francis devised a plan at lunch, then at recess, they put it into action.

The three first-graders ran rampantly around the blacktop, snatching jump ropes from the grips of little girls and seizing the playground balls being used by groups of children playing four square. Within ten minutes, all eyes were on Amy, Lauren, and Francis.

"Attention, all first-graders!" Amy announced. "Who here ever wishes they could play on the swing set, maybe slide down the slides once in awhile?"

Hands shot up everywhere from the crowd around them.

"Who's tired of bowing down to three second-graders who think they own the place?"

Even more hands arose.

"Who wants to change it?"

By now, every hand in the crowd was up.

"Then let's move!" Amy made her way to the front of the crowd, then shouted, "Follow me!"

The group of first-graders marched onto the main playground. When Amy reached the swing set, Brenda stopped her.

"What did I tell you yesterday? No first-graders on our side of the playground."

"Well," said Amy, "who's gonna stop us?"

"We are!" Brenda announced, Harold and Fisher walking to either side of her.

"We're willing to fight you," said Amy.

"You and what army?"

Amy extended her arm and motioned to the crowd of one hundred first-graders behind her. Without looking back at Brenda to see her expression, the mob marched forward onto the playground.

"Why aren't any of you stopping them?" Brenda called to the other second-graders around her. Keisha shrugged. "I like Amy. She's cool. First-graders really aren't so bad, Brenda."

Brenda stomped her right foot on the ground so hard that a few wood chips flew up. Her face turned dark red and she looked like steam was about to come out of her ears. She scrunched up her shoulders, turned around, and stormed off to go sulk under a tree. Harold and Fisher followed her.

Amy spun around to face her crowd once again. "Our school playground is now officially open to all students, whether in first grade or in second!"

All the kids on the playground jumped up and down and cheered, even the second-graders.

A second-grade boy Amy didn't know walked up to her and put his hand on her shoulder. "I think it's really cool that you stood up for what you believe in," he told her. "My little sister's in first grade, and I always wished she could play with me at recess, but Brenda just scared me so much. But you weren't afraid of her. That's really cool."

Amy opened her mouth to thank him, but Lauren cut her off. "You can't start a sentence with the word 'but.' Teacher said."

Amy ignored Lauren and smiled at the second-grade boy. "Thanks," she said. She then confidently strutted over to the swing set and sat on the swing right in the middle. She dug her shoes into the ground and kicked away the wood chips to make some room for pushing herself, then she used all the power in her legs to make the swing go higher. Every time her feet brushed the ground, she pushed off harder and let herself fly. The breeze she created flew through her long blond hair and scattered it all about, making her shout, "Wheeeee!" There was nothing in the world to worry about at all: no barriers, no segregation, no scary second-graders. At that moment, she was on top of the world. All that existed was Amy and her swing, and as she felt more and more excitement brew inside her stomach, she screamed, "I am the swing set champion!"