



Just Right
Reader

BOOK
#1



NEXT-DOOR DETECTIVE AGENCY

The Case of the Horned Shadow

Contents

1. The Strange Shadow	1
2. Searching for Clues	5
3. Unlikely Detectives	11
Glossary	16

1

The Strange Shadow

Dante frowned. He wished Olivia would believe him.

"I saw it!" he said. "The monster. Just like the one from the book our class read."

Dante pointed out his window toward their school. Dark storm clouds rolled across the sky.

"It was right there," Dante **insisted**.

Olivia moved her game piece. "Dante, it's not real. And I don't want to scare Felix."

Felix was their younger neighbor. He often came over to hang out with them.

Felix looked up. "Scare me how?" he said.

"Do you know the series called The **Unlikely Detectives**?" Dante grinned.

"Everyone's reading it," Felix said. "The author is coming to our school this week, right?"



Dante nodded. "Last night I saw a shadow in the school. It looked just like Larry!"

Felix's eyes grew wide. "The monster from the book?"

Olivia dropped her **gaze**. "It wasn't Larry." She pushed the dice toward Felix. Her hands shook.

"But I saw it," Dante said. His voice grew softer. "It even had pointy horns. Just like Larry."

Olivia looked away. She hoped he was wrong.

"You guys should **investigate!**" Felix said. "You'll be just like the **Unlikely Detectives.**" He bounced in his chair.

Olivia shook her head. "This is *our* school we're talking about." She rolled her eyes. "The scariest thing that ever happens is when Mr. Kruger gives us extra homework."

Dante chuckled.

Felix crossed his arms. "You won't find anything if you don't look."

Just then, thunder rumbled in the **distance**. The room grew darker.

Dante turned to Olivia. "He's right. How cool would it be if we caught our own Larry? We could tell the author about it."

Olivia's heart pounded. "I don't think this is a good idea. Plus—"

CRACK! Lightning flashed. Their heads snapped toward the window.

The burst of light **revealed** the front of their school.



They could see something inside. It had two long, pointy horns. Its fur stuck up in all directions. It raised two curled talons.

Then, it **dis**appeared, swallowed by darkness. Prickles ran up Olivia's spine.

"No way," Felix breathed.

Dante whispered, "See. There *is* a monster."

2

Searching for Clues

Olivia gasped. Dante was right. Something was **lurking** in their school.

"Are you going to **investigate**?" Felix said.

Dante's eyes were bright. He stared **hopefully** at Olivia.

She sighed. "Okay, we'll look around tomorrow."

The next day at school, they hunted for clues. They studied the floors for footprints. They checked the bathrooms for fur. They even peeked under the tables.

But they found nothing.

"Maybe the monster is waiting for all the **students** to leave. We need to be **patient**," Dante said. "Let's watch the school again tonight."

That evening, they **returned** to Dante's window. Soon, their eyes hurt from staring. Still, they saw nothing. No shadows. No pointy horns. Nothing at all.

They needed a new plan.



"So, what should we do?" Dante asked Olivia after school the next day. He leaned against the wall of the school.

"About what?" said a voice behind him.

Dante whipped around. It was his **older** brother, Todd.

"Nothing," Dante said quickly.

“Come on, tell me!” Todd **insisted**.

“We should tell him,” said Olivia.

So, Dante did. He thought Todd would laugh. But when he finished, Todd was quiet. **Thoughtful**. In the silence, they heard a voice in the vent above them.

“There’s a set-up team coming tonight . . .” the voice trailed off.

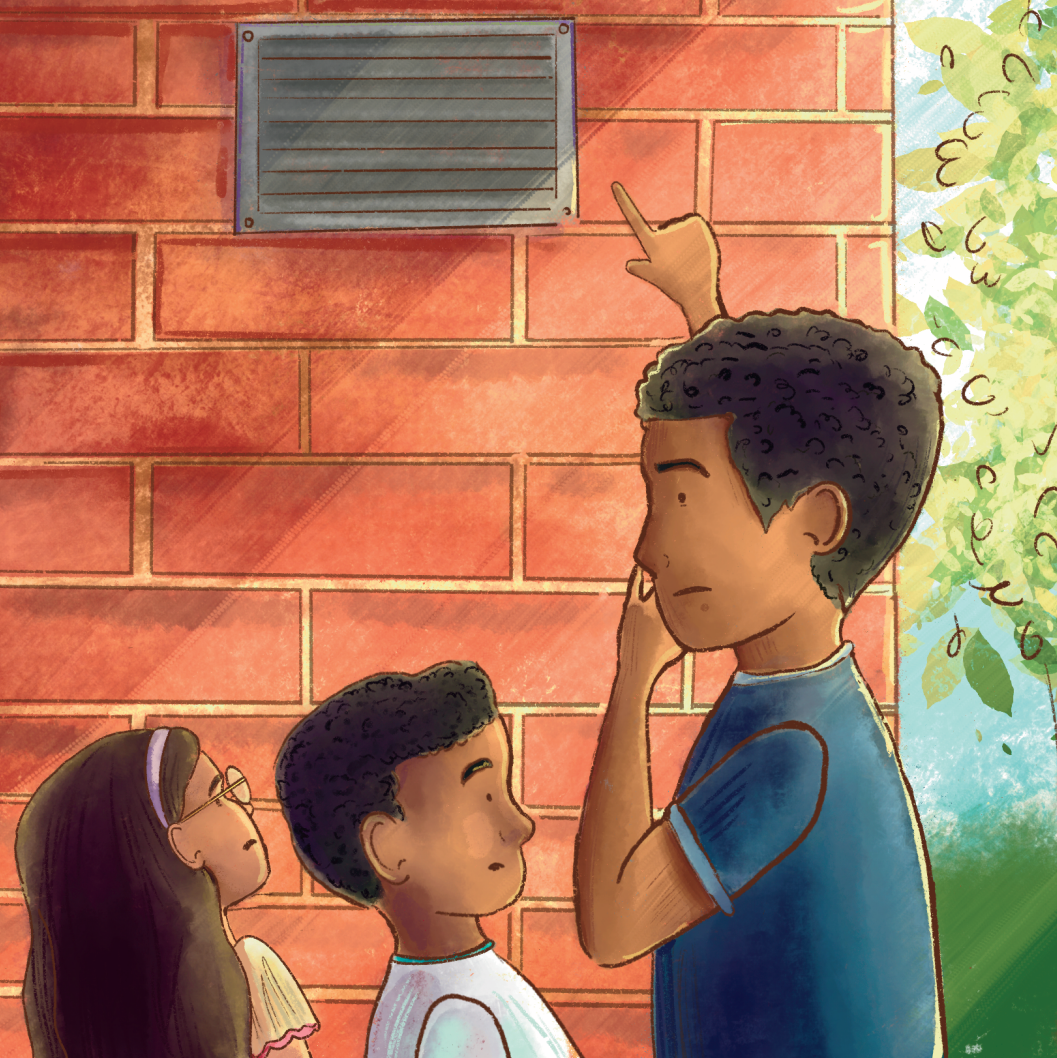
“I got it!” Todd said. He pointed to the vent. “Mr. Jones. He’s the janitor. He’s stayed late with his son the past few nights. He’s trying to get everything ready. You know, for the author visit tomorrow.”

“Let’s go talk to him!” Dante said. “Maybe he saw something.”

“Come with me tonight. I’m part of the set-up team,” Todd said. “You can talk to him then.”

“What do you think, Olivia?” Dante asked.

She frowned. Come to school at night? That sounded **scari**er than watching safely from Dante’s window. But they might learn the truth. She nodded.



That night, the three of them met at school. It was dark and quiet. They were the first ones there.

"I'm going to grab some chairs," said Todd. "I'll meet you in the gym. Mr. Jones should already be in there."

At the gym, they found the door **unlocked**. It creaked open.



They peeked inside. Olivia's heart beat faster. The gym should have been neat and clean. It should have been almost ready for the author event. But it wasn't.

Something had knocked everything over.

Then, Olivia froze. Footsteps. Suddenly, across the gym, the door to the hallway banged open. A dark shape slipped through it.

“Let’s go!” Dante said. He started toward the door.

Olivia gulped. Was Dante right? Was there really a monster here? There was only one way to find out.

3

Unlikely Detectives

"In here!" Dante said. He dashed into the hallway. Olivia followed him. Her heart pounded.



The hallway was empty. Everything was **silent**. Then, a man's voice called out, "Jack? Where are you?"

Olivia gasped. Jack was Mr. Jones's son! What if the monster had him?

"We have to warn Mr. Jones!" Olivia called.

Dante and Olivia ran **faster** down the hallway. They could hear footsteps ahead of them. Dante dashed around a corner.

BAM!

He ran into something. He hit the ground hard.

"Are you okay?" Olivia asked. She looked worried.

Dante sat up. He rubbed his head.

"Owwwww!" said the monster.

Dante **scrambled** backward. The shape on the ground had two horns. It was furry. Just like the shadow they had seen. Just like Larry.

"What's going on?" Mr. Jones stood over them. "Jack! I've been looking for you."

"Wait, what?" Dante looked **closer** at the shape.



Its horns were plastic. It had fingers, not claws. The youthful face of a boy stared up at them.

"Is everyone okay?" Mr. Jones asked.

"We thought we saw the monster from the **Unlikely Detectives** books!" Dante said defensively.

The younger boy grinned. He curled his hands like claws. "Raaar!" he roared.

Then, Olivia started to laugh with relief. "Dante, it's just Jack. In a costume!"

"There's no monster?" Dante asked. His face grew warm. "But what about the gym? Who knocked everything over?"

"Me! I'm Larry!" Jack waved his arms like he was knocking things over.

Mr. Jones frowned. "Jack, you'll need to help clean that room back up."

Jack nodded.

"So we saw Jack in the window?" Dante asked.

Mr. Jones shrugged. "He's worn this costume all week. It's his favorite series."

Olivia smiled. "Mystery solved!"

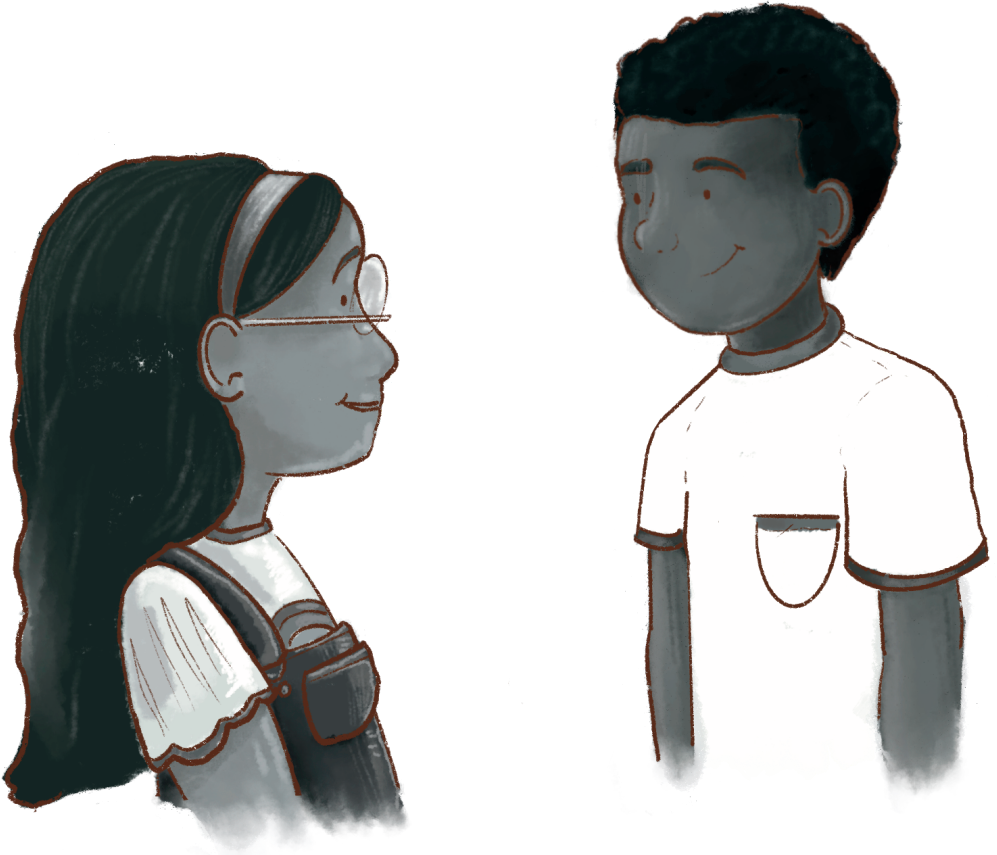
Todd's team arrived to set up chairs. Olivia and Dante helped Jack clean up the gym. Soon, it was ready for the author event.

Outside, they said goodbye to Mr. Jones and Jack. They watched Jack's horns **disappear** out of sight.

"We make a good team," Dante said. "We solved a mystery."

“Like the **Unlikely Detectives**,” said Olivia.

He grinned. He couldn’t wait for their next **unlikely** case.



Glossary

gaze

to look at someone for a long time

insist

to want something to happen

investigate

to try to learn the facts about something

lurk

to move around secretly, like hiding

scramble

to move quickly

Set 51

Phonics Skills

Prefixes, Roots, and Suffixes

Word Part	Meaning	Example in Text
un-	not	unlikely
re-	again	relief
dis-	not, opposite, apart from	disappear
-er	comparative	scarier
-ive	doing	detective
-ent	doing	patient
-ful	full of	thoughtful



Scan this QR code to watch a video about the book!



IMAGE CREDITS *All Rights Reserved*

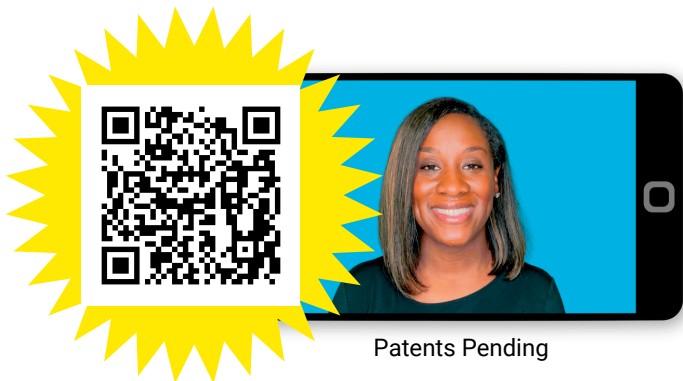
JRR Original Illustrations: Cover, P2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15 ©

Canva Pro: Cover



Just Right Reader

Scan the QR code for a phonics lesson
in English and Spanish



Patents Pending

Series: Next-Door Detective Agency

Title: The Case of the Horned Shadow

Text Structure: Fiction

Set: 51

Published by: Just Right Reader, Inc.

www.JustRightReader.com

Text copyright © 2024

Illustrations copyright © 2024

Cover design copyright © 2024

All rights reserved.



No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from Just Right Reader, Inc.