

The Maze Maker

Lila wasn't like the other kids in Room 6.

While they chatted easily in the morning, swapping stickers and laughing about shows she didn't watch, Lila would sit at her desk, tracing patterns on her notebook—spirals, grids, endless shapes made of triangles and lines.

She saw the world differently. The school's tiled floor looked to her like a giant chessboard. The clock's ticking made her blink in rhythm. She noticed that Mrs. Graham's scarf always matched her socks on Tuesdays. Patterns were everywhere, and Lila couldn't turn them off.

Sometimes, it was a gift. Other times, it made her feel like a radio tuned to the wrong station.

Most days, she felt invisible. Not picked first, or even last—just overlooked. She had one or two classmates who were kind—John always shared his pencils, and Susi sometimes smiled at her during art—but they never really saw her. Not the real Lila.

Until the day Mrs. Graham wheeled in the big whiteboard and said, “This month's project is all about design and problem-solving. We're building mazes!”

“Mazes?” the class echoed, eyebrows raised.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Graham, clapping her hands. “You can work in pairs or small groups. The challenge is to design a maze that will be tricky but solvable.”

We'll build them, test them, and—" she paused for effect—"the Principal will attempt to solve the winning one!"

A few kids laughed. "Poor Mr. Doran," said someone. Even Lila smiled.

John turned around. "Wanna be on our team?" he asked Lila.

She hesitated. "Really?"

"Yeah," Susi added. "You're good at this kind of stuff."

Lila nodded slowly. Inside, her mind had already started sketching.

That afternoon, while others doodled winding paths or scribbled random dead-ends, Lila filled three pages with potential layouts. She used graph paper and rulers. She added symbols, patterns, hidden messages that only made sense from above. Her maze wasn't just a puzzle—it was a story told in turns and walls and spaces.

"This is amazing," said John, eyes wide as he looked at the plan. "How do you even *think* like this?"

"I just... see it," Lila shrugged. "The way things fit together."

As the project continued, something changed. Her group actually listened to her. They trusted her design, asking her questions, offering ideas that Lila, surprisingly, didn't mind adjusting for. She liked that part—collaborating, finding patterns not just in shapes, but in people.

Mrs. Graham visited each group, but when she saw Lila's maze sketch, she stopped. "Lila," she whispered, "this is... extraordinary."

Lila's ears burned, but she smiled.

They spent a week building the maze on a large cardboard base.

Lila measured everything twice. She painted arrows that pointed the wrong way, tiny illusions that made paths look longer or shorter, even created a tiny trapdoor using paper and string. Susi added decorations—twisting vines, tiny signs with riddles. John built a Lego version of Mr. Doran to test it.

The morning of the Maze Challenge arrived. The gym buzzed with excitement as each group set up their creations. Some were colourful but easy.

Others had flashy distractions. But Lila's maze? It sat in the corner, quiet and unassuming.

Principal Doran arrived, smiling nervously. "Alright," he said, "I'm ready to get lost!"

Maze by maze, he made his way through the projects, laughing when he got stuck, clapping for clever tricks. Finally, he arrived at Lila's group.

"This looks... serious," he said, adjusting his glasses. "May I?"

"Good luck," Lila said softly, and John added, "You'll need it."

Mr. Doran began. He turned left—dead end. Backtracked. Turned right—spiral path that looped him back to the start. He scratched his head.

Susi giggled. "Keep going!"

It took almost fifteen minutes, but finally, Mr. Doran emerged from the final turn and raised his hands in victory. "I've never been so proud to feel so confused!"

Everyone laughed and clapped.

Mrs. Graham smiled at the class. “Well, I think we know our winner.”

The gym erupted into cheers. John and Susi high-fived. Lila just stood there, wide-eyed.

“You did it,” said Mrs. Graham quietly. “You helped us all see the world through your eyes.”

Later that afternoon, back in the classroom, something remarkable happened. Other students came up to Lila. Some asked how she thought of it. One boy said, “I want to make a maze like that too.” A girl named Zoe asked if Lila liked to draw.

For the first time, Lila felt seen. Not just for being different—but for being brilliant in her own way.

At home that evening, Lila sat on the floor with her notebook. She wasn't drawing alone anymore. She was planning her next maze—with space for others to help build it.

Because maybe, just maybe, being different wasn't something to hide.

It was something to share.