Name: _____ Date: _____

The Elevator Plan

Reading level 9 (5th grade) · 1065 words

The Very Bad Idea Club has four members and one rule, and the rule is that every idea must be drawn on graph paper first. That is how I know this idea was Zin's. It was on graph paper, with a title, THE ELEVATOR PLAN, and a picture of a building with an arrow pointing at every floor. My name is Dev. I am writing this down because somebody has to.

The question was simple. What happens if every person in our building presses the elevator button at exactly the same moment? We have eleven floors and sixty-two people. We also have one elevator, whose name is Gertrude. Mr. Pruitt, our super, gave her the name. She was built in 1931, and she moves like a sleepy cow.

Zin had written her prediction at the bottom of the page. Gertrude will be so surprised that she will stop between floors and make a noise. Time needed: four minutes. Danger: none. Mabel asked how Zin knew there was no danger. "It is buttons," said Zin. "Elevators like buttons. It is their entire job." Teodor wrote one more rule on the page. Nobody gets inside Gertrude. Teodor worries, which is useful.

The plan had five steps, and they were numbered. One, Zin writes a note. Two, Dev makes forty copies. Three, Mabel puts one under every door. Four, Teodor times everything with a stopwatch. Five, at 4:15 on Saturday afternoon, everyone presses the button on their floor, and we learn something. The note said, Please press the elevator button at 4:15 on Saturday. It is for science. Thank you.

Here is where my part of the mess began. I took the note to the library, which has a copying machine with a button marked 4 and a button marked 0. I pressed them in the wrong order. The machine made four hundred copies. A man behind me asked if I was starting a newspaper. I said no, a club, and I carried the pile home in a laundry bag.

I did not tell the others. I thought that maybe Mabel would only need a few. But Mabel is thorough. She is the most thorough person I have ever met, and when she saw a pile of notes, she did not see a mistake, she saw a job. By Friday night, every door in the building had nine notes under it, and there was one on the cat.

Teodor's part came last, and it was small, and it was the worst. At the bottom of each note, in tiny letters, he had added a line of his own. Bring a friend! He said he thought it sounded nicer. Nobody noticed, until Saturday, when I looked at the hallway and saw that sixty-two people had turned into about a hundred and fifty.

At 4:14, our hallway on the ninth floor was crowded. Doors kept opening, and out came neighbors in slippers, each one holding a note, each one with a friend. Mr. Lindqvist had a

casserole. Two toddlers had a toy drum. Mrs. Piotrowski from 9B had brought her cello, because she thought the note meant a concert, and she said the acoustics in an elevator were extraordinary.

At 4:15, we pressed. Not just on the ninth floor, but on all eleven, and we could hear the building doing it. Ding. Ding. Ding. Far below us, Gertrude began to creak. She stopped at every floor, one after another. At every floor her brass gate sighed and her doors slid open, and there were people standing there in their slippers, staring at her.

When she reached us, the doors opened on an empty elevator, and nobody moved. It felt wrong to leave it standing there with its door open, humming, as though it had asked a question. Mrs. Piotrowski said, "Well," and stepped inside with the cello. Mr. Lindqvist stepped in after her, and then it was too late for the rest of us to be sensible.

One by one, the whole hallway got in. Teodor had said nobody was to get inside Gertrude, and he stood at the back, saying so, which did not help. There were fourteen of us, one cello, one casserole and a toy drum, and a sign on the wall that said MAXIMUM EIGHT. Gertrude gave a long, deep groan, and she declined to move at all.

Mr. Pruitt arrived on the stairs. He had climbed nine floors, which is not nothing, and he stopped on the landing, breathing, with his toolbox in his hand. He looked at the elevator. He looked at the note in Mr. Lindqvist's hand. He did not shout. He said, in a perfectly level voice, "Who is going down?" and every head in the elevator turned toward us.

It was the fastest any of us had ever told the truth. "It was my idea," said Zin. "I made four hundred copies," I said. "Nine under every door," said Mabel. "I added bring a friend," said Teodor, in a very small voice. Mr. Pruitt rubbed his forehead with the back of his wrist. "Gertrude carries eight at a time," he said. "There are about a hundred and fifty of you."

So that is how we spent Saturday afternoon. Mr. Pruitt gave us a job, and it was not a punishment, only arithmetic. Eight people at a time, down to the lobby and back, with one of us riding each trip to hold the gate and say, "Mind the gap." Each ride took three minutes, and there were nineteen rides, and I will not tell you how many times I said it.

The cello went down on its own, in the last ride, with Mrs. Piotrowski sitting on the floor beside it. By then the whole building had gathered in the lobby, and she took out her bow and played something slow and low. The sound filled the hall, and for once the whole building knew each other's names, and they all stood close, and the toy drum came in, a little late.

Zin updated her graph paper that night. Under Prediction, she crossed out Gertrude stopped between floors. Under Time needed, she crossed out four minutes and wrote, Until dinner. Under Danger, she thought for a while. Then she wrote, A casserole. Gertrude did make a noise in the end, a low, creaking rumble. Mr. Pruitt said it was her laugh.

Questions

1. What was the one rule of the Very Bad Idea Club?

A. Never tell a grown-up
B. Draw every idea on graph paper first
C. Always use a stopwatch

2. Why did the plan end up with so many more people than sixty-two?

A. Teodor added bring a friend to the notes
B. The building was sold
C. Mr. Pruitt invited them

3. What does thorough mean in this story?

A. Doing something completely
B. Doing something quickly
C. Doing something badly

4. Why did Gertrude refuse to move?

A. She had run out of power
B. There were too many people inside
C. Mr. Pruitt pulled the switch

5. How did Mr. Pruitt answer the four friends?

A. He gave them a job instead of shouting
B. He called their parents
C. He locked the elevator for a year

6. What did Mrs. Piotrowski do in the lobby?

A. She played her cello
B. She gave a speech
C. She fixed Gertrude

Words to know

super: building keeper
elevator: lift in building
thorough: doing it all
acoustics: how sound carries
declined: said no

Answer key: The Elevator Plan

1. B. Draw every idea on graph paper first
2. A. Teodor added bring a friend to the notes
3. A. Doing something completely
4. B. There were too many people inside
5. A. He gave them a job instead of shouting
6. A. She played her cello