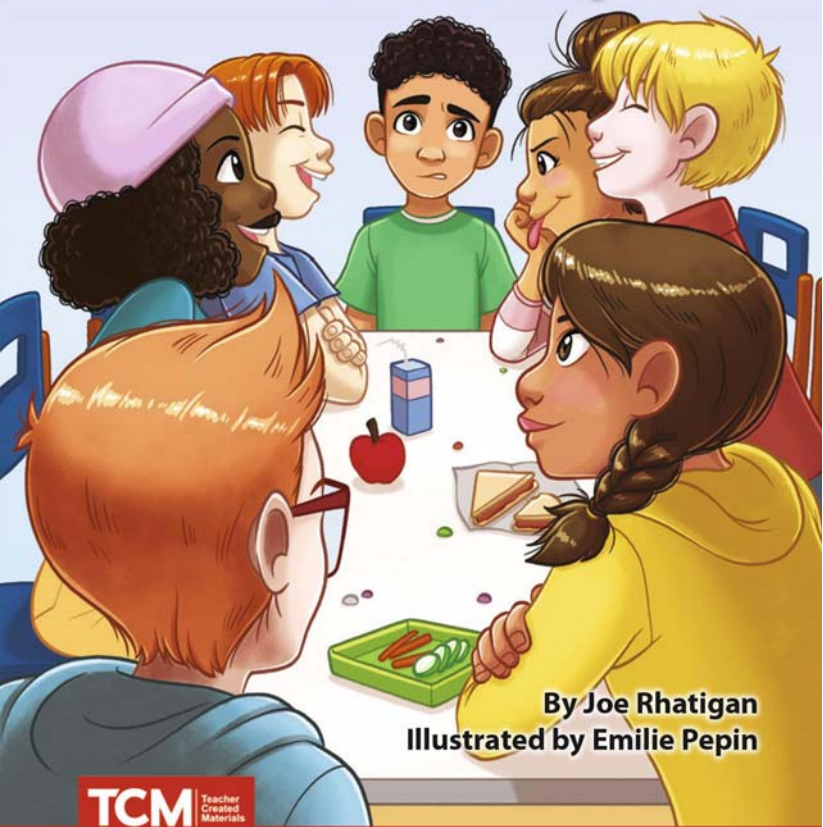


# The Egg Salad Sandwich Incident



By Joe Rhatigan

Illustrated by Emilie Pepin

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## CHAPTER ONE



### Kooser the Loser

Jesse's family moved around a lot, so he was used to figuring out new schools. However, he was a little confused that Janet B. Malone Elementary let the fifth and sixth graders sit wherever they wanted at lunchtime instead of with their classes. Eating lunch with your class kept kids, especially new kids,

from having to eat lunch alone. So, for the first day in his new school, Jesse ate alone.

It felt like an experiment concocted by the school's science teachers: "Let's study what happens when we let kids choose their own seats at lunch! It will be fascinating."

About midway through his first lonely lunch, a boy sat across from Jesse. The boy took a hand wipe out of his backpack and wiped down the table in front of him before putting down his lunch box. Without even introducing himself, the boy said, "I'm sensitive to germs, OK?"

"Yeah, no problem," Jesse said.

"OK. The cool table is over by the windows. You want to be out of throwing range of them. Otherwise, you may end up in the middle of a potato-puff storm."

Jesse introduced himself, and the boy said, "I'm Timothy Kooser, otherwise known as Kooser the Loser. You'll probably get invited to sit at

the cool table one day. If you do, just remember—I was the first kid to say hi to you.”

“I won’t get invited,” Jesse insisted.

“If someone asked me, I’d go in a heartbeat,” Timothy replied. “It must be fun to be popular.”

Jesse knew there were cliques at every school, and he always tried to avoid them. He found that it was easier to keep your hand down in the classroom and your head down everywhere else. *Don’t stand out* was his motto.

He spent the next few days sitting with Timothy at lunch. Jesse got used to him wiping every surface with disinfectant. Timothy also cleaned his hands a lot and talked incessantly about diseases. After a few minutes, Jesse would stop listening and sneak glances over at the cool table. Those kids spent a lot of time making strange mixtures with their milks and juices and iceberg lettuce salads and daring each other to drink them.

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