Take a look inside for excerpts from these exciting Minecraft books!

EDUCATIONAL SAMPLER 2020

Excerpts from Random House’s ongoing series of guides, chapter books, and middle grade novels!
Please enjoy this sampler!

We hope it inspires you to use Minecraft in fun and educational ways.

To download the trial version of Minecraft: Education Edition, visit aka.ms/MEEGetStarted
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ONLINE SAFETY FOR YOUNGER FANS
Spending time online is great fun! Here are a few simple rules to help younger fans stay safe and keep the internet a great place to spend time:
- Never give out your real name—don’t use it as your username.
- Never give out any of your personal details.
- Never tell anybody which school you go to or how old you are.
- Never tell anybody your password except a parent or a guardian.
- Be aware that you must be 13 or over to create an account on many sites. Always check the site policy and ask a parent or guardian for permission before registering.
- Always tell a parent or guardian if something is worrying you.

This sampler contains excerpts from the following books:
- Minecraft: Guide to Exploration
- Minecraft: Guide to Creative
- Minecraft: The Island
- Minecraft: The Crash
- Minecraft Woodsword Chronicles #1: Into the Game!
- Minecraft Woodsword Chronicles #2: Night of the Bats!

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GUIDE TO:

EXPLORATION

CREATIVE
At this time, Minecraft: Education Edition is supported on operating systems for PC, iPad and Mac. On PC, Minecraft is supported for Windows 10 and earlier versions. On macOS, Minecraft is supported for Sierra and High Sierra systems and later. On iOS, Minecraft is supported on iOS 9 or higher.
SINGLE PLAYER, MULTIPLAYER OR REALMS

Once you've chosen a platform, you can decide what kind of adventure you want to have, whether that's alone or with friends, in a new world, or in a map that's been designed by someone else.

Single player is the original, default mode for Minecraft. This mode is for you if you prefer to take on the challenges of Minecraft alone rather than in a team.

Choose multiplayer if you want to share your adventure with friends on the same network. One person will need to set up a LAN (local area network) game for the others to join.

Java and Bedrock editions support Minecraft Realms – a service that allows you to rent a server from Mojang. It's completely secure and safe – only people you invite can join your server.

GAME MODE

Finally, there are several different game modes to choose from, offering various degrees of difficulty.

SURVIVAL
Choose Survival mode and you'll have loads of fun fighting hostile monsters and collecting materials to help you stay alive. You'll need to eat, and you'll gain experience and levels as you play.

CREATIVE
In Creative mode you're free from hostile mobs, you can fly around and destroy blocks instantly. You'll also have a full inventory of materials with which to build amazing structures.

HARDCORE
If you choose Hardcore mode, the difficulty will be locked on hard and you'll only get one life. If you die it really will be game over – your world will be deleted and you'll have to start again. Hardcore is only available on the Java Edition.

PEACEFUL
You can also choose a peaceful option in Survival mode. You'll still collect materials and craft in order to survive, but without the hostile mobs. And your health will regenerate, too.

EDUCATOR TIPS

- Play with your whole class! Minecraft: Education Edition supports up to 30 students playing together in multiplayer and includes the Classroom Mode teacher management tool.
- Use the scarcity of resources in survival mode to drive lesson content, or plan to use creative mode build solutions or illustrate a concept.
THE MINECRAFT LANDSCAPE

This section is all about the physical landscape of your Minecraft world. You'll learn about the different biomes you might spawn in and discover the pros and cons of settling in each. You'll also learn where to search for fascinating naturally generated structures and valuable loot that will help you on your journey.
When you spawn you’ll find yourself in one of several possible biomes – regions with different environments and features. There are advantages and disadvantages to settling in each biome, so you’ll need to decide whether you’re happy to stay put or if you’ll need to search for a more hospitable area.

**DESERT**

Desert biomes are barren and inhospitable. Passive mobs don’t spawn here, and rain doesn’t fall, so finding and growing food is difficult. Visit deserts to collect resources but build your base in a more hospitable biome.

There are no trees to provide wood – the surface is covered with sand, dead bushes and cacti.

Desert temples and villages are common features. Both are a great source of materials and also contain loot chests in which you can find more valuable items and blocks.

Desert wells can sometimes be found, too – these are largely decorative but can also be used as a water source.

Look out for fossils when mining in desert biomes – they generate 15-24 blocks below the surface and are made of bone blocks. It’s thought they are the remains of giant, extinct creatures...
In Minecraft: Education Edition you can find biomes within the game in the Library. Start your lesson in a specific setting to create renewable resources solutions, explore biodiversity, deforestation, or climate change.

SAVANNA

Savannas are arid, flat biomes covered with dry grass, tall grass and acacia trees. The flat terrain is easy to build on, but farming can be more difficult due to lack of rain.

NPC (non-player character) villages are common, making them a good biome in which to gather resources. See page 34 for more info.

EXTREME HILLS

Extreme hills are impressive to look at, but building is difficult due to lack of flat ground, and exploring is dangerous as you can fall from the many cliffs.

Horses spawn frequently in savannas. See page 43 for more info on horses.

Emerald ore only generates in extreme hills, so it’s a good biome for mining.

Watch out for monster eggs which contain silverfish.
**FOREST**

Forests are an ideal spawn point as they provide lots of wood for crafting. The surface is covered with oak and birch trees, as well as regular grass and patches of tall grass.

**EDUCATOR TIPS**

Just like in the real world, certain mobs (creatures in Minecraft) only inhabit biomes that have suitable environments for them. Challenge your students to explore what would happen if one of these creatures went extinct: /aka.ms/BiodiversityChallenge

Wolves, which can be tamed to be pets, are commonly found here, but be aware that hostile mobs can use the shade under trees to stay alive during the day.

**FOREST VARIANTS**

Flower forests have fewer trees but an abundance of colourful flowers on the ground.

As its name suggests, the birch forest variant contains only birch trees.

The way each world is generated has changed a lot over the years. If you play on really old maps, strange things can happen, because the game tries to match the old environment with the new data for how biomes form. Deserts can suddenly be covered in snow, and once-flowing rivers and lakes can freeze over.
ROOFED FOREST

Roofed forest biomes are so named because of the dense covering of dark oak trees and huge mushrooms that block out most of the sunlight.

Hostile mobs often spawn during the day in this gloomy biome, so it’s best avoided until you’re experienced and well-equipped.

Unless planted on mycelium, huge mushrooms need a light level of 12 or lower to grow. See page 83 for more info on mycelium.

JUNGLE

Jungles are difficult to travel across and build in due to the hilly terrain and dense covering of trees and bushes. Hostile mobs survive well here and can spawn in the daytime as the tree canopy blocks out a lot of sunlight. This is the only biome in which you can find melons and cocoa. Jungles are worth a visit but avoid settling in these biomes when you first spawn.

Jungle temples are common and contain trapped loot chests – see page 31 for more info.

Ocelots spawn exclusively in jungles. See page 18 for more info.
ICE PLAINS
Ice plains are flat, snow-covered biomes in which all exposed water sources have frozen to ice. Sugar cane is often found here, but farming is difficult since water freezes. There aren’t many trees, so it’s not ideal for beginners.

TIP
Ice plains are a great biome in which to collect snow to make snow golems – utility mobs that throw snowballs at hostile mobs to knock them backwards. Stack two snow blocks vertically then place a pumpkin on top to craft. Pumpkins can be found growing on grass blocks throughout the Overworld.

Polar bears are common in ice plains. See page 49 for more info.

In this variant biome you’ll find large spikes of ice. Some can reach over 50 blocks in height.

As its name suggests, you’ll find a frozen river running through this variant biome.

Strays are skeletons that shoot slowness arrows at players.

Igloos generate in ice plains. See page 32 for more info.
PLAINS
Plains are flat and grassy, with only a sparse covering of trees. NPC villages are commonly found here. They’re one of only a few biomes in which horses spawn naturally. They’re relatively easy to build in so they’re great for beginners and for settling long-term.

PLAINS VARIANT
This rare variant of the plains biome is covered in sunflowers, all pointing east to help you get your bearings.

SWAMP
Swamps are flat and covered with small pools of water which often contain lily pads. Building on the flooded surface is difficult, but there is plenty of opportunity to fish and mushrooms are common. Many of the pools contain clay, which can be crafted into bricks.

Witch huts and witches are commonly found here. See page 62 for more info on witches.

Swamps are the only biome in which slimes spawn at surface level. See page 63 for more info about slimes.

You might find fossils 15-24 blocks below the surface of swamps.
**OCEAN**

Although not a good biome in which to live, oceans are an excellent source of fish and squid. In the deep ocean variant you’ll find ocean monuments containing treasure and guardians, so they’re worth a visit once you’re a little more experienced.

**EDUCATOR TIPS**

Explore these opportunities for learning under the sea with Minecraft: Education Edition and the Update Aquatic aka.ms/aquatic.

**MUSHROOM ISLAND**

The rare mushroom island biome can be found in the middle of the ocean. It’s a mixture of hills and plains, covered in mycelium. Mushroom island biomes are one of only two biomes in which huge mushrooms grow naturally. The biome is a safe refuge for beginners, but trees don’t grow here so you’ll need to move elsewhere if you want to craft anything useful.
MESA
Mesa biomes are rare. Largely composed of hardened clay and red sand, trees are uncommon and there are no passive mobs to provide meat, so avoid this biome when you first spawn. Gold ore generates at all levels here.

TAIGA
Taiga biomes are a great source of wood due to the abundance of spruce trees, making them a great starting point for beginners.

MESA VARIANTS
These variants contain clay spikes and flat, tree-covered areas respectively.

TAIGA VARIANTS
Wolves and rabbits are commonly found here, but there isn’t much else so you’ll want to move on once you’ve set yourself up with the basics.
MOBS

You’re not alone in this mysterious new world. In this section you’ll discover the differences between passive, neutral and hostile mobs. You’ll learn where to find them, how to defend yourself from neutral and hostile mob attacks and, most importantly, what each mob drops when defeated.
PASSIVE MOBS

As you explore the Overworld you’ll come across a variety of passive mobs which can easily be defeated with a tool or weapon. Most drop useful items, including meat which will be cooked if they are killed when on fire.

CHICKEN

BEHAVIOUR
Chickens spawn in grassy areas. They wander around, clucking and laying eggs every 5-10 minutes.

SPECIAL SKILLS
When falling, chickens slow their descent by flapping their wings so they don’t take damage.

DROPS WHEN DEFEATED

BAT

BEHAVIOUR
Bats spawn in caves across the Overworld. They hang upside-down when idle, but otherwise can be seen flying around erratically.

SPECIAL SKILLS
Bats are the only passive mob that spawns in the dark and that can fly.

DROPS WHEN DEFEATED

The high-pitched squeak the bat makes was toned down several times after players said it hurt their ears.
PIG

BEHAVIOUR
Pigs roam the Overworld in groups of 3-4, oinking randomly. They will follow any player that is within 5 blocks of them and is holding a carrot, a carrot on a stick, a potato or beetroot.

SPECIAL SKILLS
Pigs can be ridden, although they aren’t very fast. You’ll need to saddle them first, then lead them around using a carrot on a stick. They will eat the carrot over time so you’ll need to keep an eye on its durability bar. Saddles can be found in naturally generated chests. A saddled pig will drop its saddle upon death.

DROPS WHEN DEFEATED

SHEEP

BEHAVIOUR
Sheep wander around, bleating occasionally and eating grass blocks.

SPECIAL SKILLS
Sheep drop 1 wool when they die, but 1-3 wool if you shear them while they’re alive. The wool will grow back after shearing. You can also dye a sheep before you shear it to permanently change the wool’s colour. Dyes can be crafted from flowers, lapis lazuli, cocoa beans and ink sacs.

DROPS WHEN ALIVE

DROPS WHEN DEFEATED
**OCELOT**

**BEHAVIOUR**
Ocelots creep through jungles, occasionally attacking chickens. They avoid players and hostile mobs.

**SPECIAL SKILLS**
Ocelots are immune to fall damage.

**DROPS WHEN DEFEATED**

![Image of drops]

1-3

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**RABBIT**

**BEHAVIOUR**
Rabbits hop around, avoiding players, hostile mobs and wolves. They seek out and eat mature carrot crops.

**SPECIAL SKILLS**
Rabbits will approach you if you’re within 8 blocks and are holding carrots or dandelions. They will go over cliffs to reach carrots, but not through lava.

**DROPS WHEN DEFEATED**

![Image of drops]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Drop Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrot</td>
<td>0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dandelion</td>
<td>0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bone</td>
<td>0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egg</td>
<td>0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collar</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**SQUID**

**BEHAVIOUR**
Squid move through water using their tentacles. If attacked, they try to swim away. They suffocate if not in water.

**SPECIAL SKILLS**
Squid can swim against a current. They also have an impressive set of teeth, although they are harmless.

**DROPS WHEN DEFEATED**

![Image of squid drops]


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**HORSE**

**BEHAVIOUR**
Horses roam in herds of 2-6. They can have one of 35 different colour and marking combinations. Donkeys are a smaller variant of horse. If a horse breeds with a donkey they will produce a mule.

**SPECIAL SKILLS**
Horses are one of the fastest methods of transport, but they need to be tamed first. Tame a horse by mounting it repeatedly until it stops throwing you off, then saddle it so it can be ridden. Saddles can be found in naturally generated chests. Donkeys and mules can also be equipped with chests and used to transport items. When killed, horses will drop any equipment they have, and donkeys and mules will drop their chest, if equipped, plus its contents.

**DROPS WHEN DEFEATED**

![Image of horse drops]
NEUTRAL MOBS

Unfortunately, not all mobs are passive sources of food. A handful of mobs are classified as neutral, which means their behaviour varies and they can become hostile under certain circumstances. Keep an eye out for them – they drop some useful items that will aid your progress in different ways.

WOLF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEALTH POINTS</th>
<th>8 IF UNTAMED</th>
<th>20 IF TAMED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATTACK STRENGTH</td>
<td>3-6 IF UNTAMED</td>
<td>4 IF TAMED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW TO DEFEAT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITEMS DROPPED</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BEHAVIOUR
Wolves roam in packs of 4 and will attack rabbits, skeletons and sheep on sight. A wolf will become hostile towards any player or mob that attacks them, and any nearby wolves will become hostile, too. Hostile wolves have red eyes and growl.

SPECIAL SKILLS
Wolves can be tamed by feeding them bones. Once tamed they will wear a red collar and follow you around. Tamed wolves can teleport to their owner and will attack any mob that you attack, with the exception of creepers.

ATTACK METHOD
A hostile wolf will pounce on you, inflicting damage with each hit.
POLAR BEAR

HEALTH POINTS
HEARTS: 30

ATTACK STRENGTH
HEARTS: 4-9

HOW TO DEFEAT
ITEMS DROPPED
0-2 0-2 1-3

BEHAVIOUR
Adult polar bears are neutral but will become hostile if attacked by a player or if they have cubs and a player gets too close. Cubs are passive and will run away if attacked, but all the adults within a 41 x 41 x 41 area will become hostile and attack you in retaliation.

SPECIAL SKILLS
Polar bears are fast swimmers. They may drop fish when defeated.

SPAWN LOCATIONS
ICE MOUNTAINS
ICE SPIKES
ICE PLAINS

ATTACK METHOD
Polar bears will rear up onto their back legs and strike you from above with their front paws.

EDUCATOR TIPS
Don’t worry if these mobs look scary! Use Classroom Settings in Minecraft: Education Edition to set your game mode to peaceful, always day, or even turn on perfect weather.
Occasionally a regular spider spawns with a skeleton rider. These horrifying spider jockeys have the speed and agility of a spider combined with the archery skills of a skeleton, making them truly formidable.

**BEHAVIOUR**
Spiders are hostile to players and iron golems if the light level is 11 or lower. If the light level is higher, they won’t attack unless provoked. Once hostile they will continue to pursue you, even if the light level increases.

**SPECIAL SKILLS**
Spiders can climb over obstacles and up walls. They are immune to poison.

**ATTACK METHOD**
Spiders will pounce on their opponent, inflicting

**VARIANT: CAVE SPIDER**

**SPECIAL SKILLS**
Cave spiders inflict venom, poisoning you over time. They can fit through spaces that are 1 block wide and half a block tall.

**HOW TO DEFEAT**

Occasionally a regular spider spawns with a skeleton rider. These horrifying spider jockeys have the speed and agility of a spider combined with the archery skills of a skeleton, making them truly formidable.
Endermen hate endermites, so you can use the nasty little bugs as a handy distraction. You can, for instance, put an endermite into a minecart and set it rolling past endermen, using it to lure them away, or, if you are particularly well-prepared, into a pit.

Wear a pumpkin on your head and an enderman will remain neutral even if you look at it. See page 89 to discover how to equip armour.

**BEHAVIOUR**
Endermen are not hostile towards players unless provoked by attack or by a player looking directly at their head. Once provoked they will shake and scream, then launch themselves at you to attack. Endermen will also attack endermites on sight.

**SPECIAL SKILLS**
Endermen teleport to avoid danger. They drop ender pearls which, when thrown, will teleport you. They can also pick up and place certain blocks.

**ATTACK METHOD**
Endermen teleport to you and hit you, inflicting damage.

Wear a pumpkin on your head and an enderman will remain neutral even if you look at it. See page 89 to discover how to equip armour.
BEFORE YOU BEGIN

There are a few things to consider before you join the ranks of Minecraft’s master builders. Follow these tips to ensure you start your creative masterpiece in the right way and set yourself up for success.

THE ADVANTAGES OF CREATIVE MODE

If you set up your world in Creative mode you’ll be able to make incredible builds quickly and easily. Here’s a summary of the key features that make this mode so useful to builders.

1. Hostile mobs are passive in Creative mode, so you don’t have to tend them off whilst building.

2. Your hunger and health won’t deplete as you work, so you don’t have to worry about monitoring your food and health bars.

3. You can fly! Double press the jump button to start flight, then you’re free to ascend and descend as needed, making building and decorating tall buildings much easier.

4. Rather than hunting for the rare materials that are essential to your build, you’ll have access to unlimited numbers of every block, courtesy of a full creative inventory.

5. Whilst Creative mode makes it easier to construct incredible builds, you can use the tips in this book in Survival mode if you prefer. You’ll just need to collect the necessary materials first.
BEGINNER’S BUILD TIPS

Attempting grand feats of architecture can be difficult at first, especially if you’re used to constructing buildings to function well rather than to look nice. Following these tips will make your creative builds all the more impressive.

FIND INSPIRATION

Research the theme you want to incorporate into your build. Whether it’s a busy rail station, a dwarven fortress or a medieval cathedral, you can draw from examples in books, films, TV and the internet.

BIOMES

Some biomes are easier to build in than others. If you choose a plains biome, you’ll hardly need to do anything to the terrain before you can begin, but if you want to build in a roofed forest you’ll need to clear a lot of vegetation first. Consider how much time you have before choosing a biome.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

A moon base will look odd by a flowing river, as will a skyscraper peeking out the top of a jungle canopy. Spend some time scouting the right location before you begin.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Oak wood stairs in the roof? Trapdoors for windows? The blocks in Minecraft are incredibly versatile, and have a number of unintended uses that can really enhance the look of your build.

DEPTH AND DETAIL

Full blocks are perfect for defining your build’s shape, but a lot of them are lacking in detail. You can use partial blocks like slabs and stairs to create depth in walls and floors.
USING THE LAND

Where you choose to build is just as important as the build itself, so you should make sure that your ingenious idea has a setting that cleverly complements it. You can either search for the perfect location, or you can build it yourself.

BIOMES

Each biome and sub-biome in Minecraft has characteristics that lend themselves to certain types of build. Consider each biome in terms of the unique combination of these characteristics, then choose the one that is best suited to your build.

This flat, grassy biome has plenty of water holes and passive mobs, which makes it ideal for farmhouses, mills and industrial plants.

An abundance of trees and plants help the forest biome lend itself to cosy cottages, treehouses and fantastical elven villages.
Swamps have large bodies of water dotted with islands, which forms a great base for a stilted pirate village or harbour.

The tropical blocks, items and mobs of the jungle biome lend themselves well to lost temples, botanical gardens and simple huts.

The leafy taiga has snowy and mountainous variants, making it a versatile building biome.

The thick canopies of the roofed forest let in little light, which provides the perfect setting for spooky builds like decrepit temples and haunted houses.
Full of peaks and troughs, the extreme hills biome is the perfect place to build picturesque castles.

Covered in dry grass and acacia trees, the wide open savanna is the perfect location for a safari park.

Bright white snow and minimal wildlife make this biome perfect for ice palaces or isolated cabins.

A bright, sandy biome, deserts are perfect for Egyptian builds like sphinxes and pyramids.
The Nether and the End both have dark, unusual terrain that is perfect for alien landscapes, lairs and hideaways, while End cities have unusual ships and buildings, creating a fantasy feel.

Building opportunities are limited in the ocean, but underwater observatories will look spectacular.

The bizarre vegetation of this biome lends itself to quirky, fantasy-themed builds like fairy cottages.

Wild west saloons and sheriff offices look great against the red sand and canyons of the mesa.
The blocks you choose for your structure will define the look and character of your build. From the colour schemes and block textures of your build’s base to the unique finishing touches, every detail is important.

**COLOUR WHEEL**

The colour wheel is a handy tool for choosing a colour scheme for your build. The wheel covers the whole spectrum of colours, which change in subtle gradients. The colours interact in different ways with the colours around them to create a variety of colour schemes, which can be used to accent a building’s exterior, or decorate its interior rooms.
ANALOGUE COLOURS
An analogue colour scheme is the simplest. This requires that you choose two or three blocks adjacent to each other on the colour wheel. For instance, you could make a colour scheme using gold, yellow wool and yellow hardened clay blocks.

COMPLEMENTARY COLOURS
Complementary colour schemes are made by choosing blocks directly opposite on the colour wheel. These colours will contrast dramatically, but still look good together.

TRIADIC COLOURS
A triadic colour scheme is slightly more complicated. Choose three blocks equally spaced out on the colour wheel to create this scheme and give your build greater variety and interest.

MONOCHROMATIC SCALE
The monochromatic scale uses a spectrum of shades between black and white. Black is classed as the absence of colour, while white is the combination of all colours. Black and white contrast with each other, but can also be used to balance a build that involves lots of colourful blocks.
STRUCTURE

It’s important to get the structure of your constructions right so that the rest of the build will go according to plan. Once you have an idea, the next step is to plan it out and begin to lay the foundations.

SHAPES

The shape of your build affects everything from the foundations to the roof. For many builders simplicity is key, but more complicated shapes, which are harder to get right, can make for a truly impressive build. Take inspiration from these simple shapes to get you started.

QUADRILATERALS

Squares and rectangles are the easiest shapes to make. Use them as a base for simple, four-sided rooms, and to create flat walls. They are perfect for simple builds.

TRIANGLES

Most often incorporated into roofs, triangles can also be used as a base if you’re happy to have diagonal walls. Be aware that this could make it awkward to decorate inside, or to join to other builds.

CIRCLES

Flying in the face of Minecraft’s blocky nature, circles are often integrated into more impressive builds. The tricky part is knowing how to successfully make curves – consult the outlines below for guidance.

EDUCATOR TIPS

The sky is the limit in Minecraft. Teachers have recreated the city of Florence, Baghdad, Melbourne, and even Verona in Minecraft. Find a new world to explore at education.minecraft.net/class-resources/search-lessons/
**PYRAMIDS**
The pyramid is an iconic shape from the landmarks of Egypt. Begin with a large square base, then build upwards.

**SPHERES**
Small spheres can be incorporated into builds to add detail, but, for a real challenge, try building a spherical base. Look at the instructions below to find out how to build one. You can even make one by adding circles to the sides of a cube.

**TRIANGULAR PRISMS**
Built in a similar way to pyramids, triangular prisms are most commonly associated with attics and tents.

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**EDUCATOR TIPS**
Work smarter, not harder! Use the Agent and Code Builder to create spheres automatically in Minecraft. Type C to code and search for spheres. Learn more at aka.ms/Minecraft-CS

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1. Using the yellow outlines here as a guide, build five circles of increasing size.
2. Build another circle exactly the same size as the largest of the five circles.
3. Now build four more circles of decreasing size in the opposite direction. This will give you a perfect Minecraft sphere.
BUILD FRAMEWORK

Once you’ve chosen a shape for your build you can create the framework. Starting from the ground and working upwards, follow these steps to create the outer framework and add internal levels. We’ve chosen a simple rectangular build to outline the process.

1. Use cobblestone to mark the base of your build on the ground, then place your doors in the desired location.

2. Build upwards from each corner of your base until you have the frame for your ground floor. Now fill in your ground floor and first floor, leaving space in the first floor for a staircase.

3. If you want your first floor to be the same size as the ground floor, simply build upwards in each corner of your first floor. Alternatively, you could expand this floor, creating an overhang outside.

BUILDING BLOCKS
6. Aim for the bottom half of each dirt block when placing stair blocks, otherwise they’ll be upside-down. Add extra blocks at the edges to create overhangs.

5. Add glass to your window spaces, then create a base for your roof using dirt blocks. You can destroy these once the roof is in place.

4. Decide where you will place windows, then fill in your walls leaving the desired amount of space for them.

7. Add some interest to the land around your build. This can include torches for lighting, pathways, flower beds and trees.
Though it's not too much of a problem in Creative mode, use an item enchanted with silk touch in Survival if you're working with glass. It's a lot easier to correct your mistakes!

**ARCH**
A decorative adornment for buildings, arches are often used to frame doors and windows. They can also be a supporting structure, forming a walkway underneath part of a building.

**BALCONY**
A small outdoor platform that extends out from the wall, a balcony is accessed via a door from the building, and enclosed by walls or rails.

**BAY WINDOW**
A bay window is a type of window that extends out of the wall, forming a bay within a room and providing extra space, with a view of the area outside.
**COLOMNADE**
A series of columns is called a colonnade. These can be added to porches, ornamental features, or set into walls to create depth.

**CHIMNEY**
Chimneys funnel fumes and smoke out of houses. Much bigger examples can be seen on industrial buildings.

**CUPOLA**
Sometimes used for ventilation, but mostly ornamental, cupolas are square or circular structures that crown buildings. They’re often seen on temples, cathedrals and even farmhouses.

**CORNICE**
This is the decorative flourish on a structural corner. Just add two upside-down stairs to the top corner of a build to create a cornice.
FLYING BUTTRESS
An arched structure used in huge builds, flying buttresses provide additional support to walls and roofs and make for striking decorative features. Flying buttresses are often seen on the exterior of cathedrals.

FRIEZE
This is a row of decorative bricks or blocks that breaks up a plain wall. They are often seen in ancient and classical structures.

GABLE
A gable is the triangular area of wall between two roof pitches. Adding windows to a gable will provide light for an attic space in the roof.

PORTICO
Also known as a simple porch, this is a permanent structure attached to a building, with a roof and solid supports.
ROOF TERRACE
A roof terrace is an open space on top of a building, surrounded by low parapet walls. They are often used as green spaces in otherwise grey cities.

SPIRE
A spire is a tapered addition to the top of a building. Traditionally they were a celestial gesture, reaching towards the sky on churches and cathedrals. In modern architecture, spires are often seen at the top of city skyscrapers. Aircraft warning lights are often placed at the very top of skyscraper spires to ensure low-flying aircraft don't hit them.
Minecraft is a great tool for engaging students with Language Arts. Explore texts and enliven creative writing.

Explore lesson content in our Language Art subject kit at aka.ms/LA-Kit including lessons and worlds supporting *Minecraft: The Island*. 
Drowning!

I woke up underwater, deep underwater, and this was my first conscious thought. Cold. Dark. Where was the surface? I kicked in all directions, trying to find my way up. I twisted and turned, and then I saw it: a light. Dim, pale, and far away.

Instinctively I shot for it, and quickly noticed that the water around me was growing brighter. That had to be the surface, the sun.
But how could the sun be . . . square? I must be seeing things. Maybe some trick of the water.

Who cares! How much air do I have left? Just get to it. Swim!

My lungs ballooned, little bubbles escaping from my lips, racing me for the distant light. I kicked and clawed the water like a caged animal. Now I could see it, a ceiling of ripples coming closer with each desperate stroke. Closer, but still so far away. My body ached, my lungs burned.

Swim! SWIM!

Crack!

My body writhed as a sudden jolt of pain shot from toes to eyes. My mouth opened in a choked scream. I reached for the glow, grabbing for breath, for life.

I exploded into the cool, clean air.


Breathing.

For a moment, I just savored the experience, closing my eyes and letting the sun warm my face. But when I opened my eyes, I couldn’t believe them. The sun was square! I blinked hard. The clouds, too? Instead of round puffy cotton balls, these thin, rectangular objects floated lazily above me.

You’re still seeing things, I thought. You hit your head when you fell off the boat and now you’re a little dazed.

But did I fall off a boat? I couldn’t remember. I couldn’t remember anything, in fact; how I got here, or even where “here” was.
“Help me!” I shouted, scanning the horizon for a ship or a plane or even a speck of land. “Please, somebody! Anybody! HELP!” All I got was silence. All I could see was water and sky. I was alone. Almost.

Something splashed inches from my face, a flash of tentacles and a thick, black and grayish head.

I yelped, kicking backward. It looked like a squid, but square like everything else in this strange place. The tentacles turned to me, opening wide. I gazed right into a yawning red mouth ringed with white razor teeth.

“Get outta here!” I hollered. Mouth dry, heart pounding, I splashed clumsily away from the creature. I didn’t have to. At that moment, the tentacles closed, blasting the squid in the other direction.

I floated there, frozen, treading water for a few seconds, until the animal disappeared into the deep. That’s when I let out a long, throaty, tension-draining “ughhh.”

I took another deep breath, then another, then a whole lot more. Finally, my heart settled down, my limbs stopped jerking, and, for the first time since I woke up, my brain switched on.

“Okay,” I said aloud. “You’re way out in a lake or ocean or whatever. No one’s coming to save you, and you can’t tread water forever.”

I did a slow, 360-degree turn, hoping to see some thread of coastline I’d missed before. Nothing. In desperation I tried one
last scan of the sky. No planes, not even a thin white trail. What
sky doesn’t have those trails? One with a square sun and rect-
gle clouds.

The clouds.

I noticed they were all moving steadily in one direction, away
from the rising sun. Due west.

“As good as anywhere,” I said, giving another deep sigh, and
started swimming slowly west.

It wasn’t much to go on, but I figured the wind might help
me along a little bit, or at least wouldn’t slow me down. And if I
went north or south, the breeze might slowly blow me in an arc
so I’d end up swimming in circles. I didn’t know if that was really
true. I still don’t. I mean, c’mon, I’d just woken up, probably
with some kind of massive head injury, at the bottom of an
ocean, and was trying really, really hard not to end up back there.

Just keep going, I told myself. Focus on what’s ahead. I began
to notice how weird my “swimming” was; not the stroke, pause,
stroke motion, but the sense of gliding across the water with my
limbs along for the ride.

Head injury, I thought, trying not to imagine how serious
that injury might be.

One good thing, I noticed, was that I didn’t seem to be get-
ting tired. Isn’t swimming supposed to be exhausting? Don’t
your muscles burn and quit after a while? Adrenaline, I thought,
and tried not to imagine that emergency gas tank running out.

But it would. Sooner or later, I’d lose steam, cramp up, go
from swimming to treading water, then from treading water to floating. Of course, I’d try to rest, bobbing up and down to conserve energy, but how long could I keep that up? How long before the cold of the water finally got to me? How long before, teeth chattering, body shivering, I finally sank back down into the darkness?

“Not yet!” I blurted out. “I’m not giving up yet!”

Shouting out loud was enough to perk me up. “Keep focused! Keep going!”

And I did. I kept swimming with all my might. I also tried to be über-aware of my surroundings. Hopefully I would spot the mast of a ship or the shadow of a helicopter, but at the very least, it would take my mind off my current predicament!

I noticed that the water was calm, and this gave me something to feel good about. No waves meant no resistance, which meant I could swim farther, right? I also noticed that the water was fresh, not salty, which meant that I had to be in a lake instead of an ocean, and lakes are smaller than oceans. Okay, a big lake is just as dangerous as an ocean, but c’mon, you got a problem with me trying to look on the bright side?

I also noticed that I could see the bottom. It was deep—don’t get me wrong, you could sink a pretty decent office building and never see the top—but it wasn’t bottomless like the ocean is supposed to be. I could also see it wasn’t level. There were tons of little valleys and hills.

That was when, off to my right, I noticed that one of the hills
had grown so tall that its top disappeared beyond the horizon. Did it break the surface? I turned north, northwest, I guess, and swam in a straight line for the hill.

And before I knew it, the hill grew into an underwater mountain. And a few seconds later, I actually thought I saw its top sprout above the water.

*That’s gotta be land,* I thought, trying not to get my hopes up. *It could be a mirage though, a trick of the light or some mist or . . .*

That’s when I saw the tree. At least I thought it was a tree, because, from that distance, all I could make out was a dark green angular mass perched atop a dark brown line.

Excitement propelled me like a torpedo. Eyes locked forward, I soon saw other trees dotting a tan beach. And then, suddenly, the green-brown slope of a hill.

“Land!” I shouted. “LAAAND!”

I’d made it! Warm, firm, solid ground! A few strokes and I’d be there. A wave of total relief washed over me . . . and just like a real wave it washed right back out.

I barely had a second to celebrate before the island came into full view. By the time I reached the shore, I was just as confused as the moment I’d woken up.

The island was square. Or, rather, it was made of squares. Everything: sand, dirt, rocks, even those things I first thought were trees. Everything was a combination of cubes. “Okay,” I said, refusing to believe what I was seeing. “Just need a minute is all, just a minute.” Standing in waist-high water, breathing, blink-
ing, I waited for my eyes to clear. I was sure that any minute, all those harsh right angles would return to soft, curvy normalness. They didn’t.

“Gotta be that head wound,” I said, wading ashore. “No problem. Just make sure you’re not bleeding too bad and—”

Instinctively, my hand went up to find the supposed injury, and as it came up in front of my face, I gasped.

“Wha . . . ?” There was a fleshy cube at the end of my rectangular arm, a cube that wouldn’t open no matter how hard I tried. “Where’s my hand!” I shouted, my voice rising in panic.

Head swimming, throat closing, I looked nervously down at the rest of me.

Brick-shaped feet, rectangular legs, a shoebox-shaped torso, all covered in painted-on clothes.

“What’s wrong with me!?” I hollered to the empty beach.

“This isn’t real!” I screamed, running back and forth, trying to tear the painted clothes off my body.

Hyperventilating, I rushed back to the water, desperate for the calming reflection of my face. Nothing greeted me. “Where am I?” I shouted to the shimmering sea. “What is this place?”

I thought of the water, of how I’d woken up . . . but had I?

“This is a dream!” I said, relief breaking into my panicked voice, reaching for the only thing I could think of. “Of course!” And for a second I almost pulled myself together. “Just a crazy dream, and soon you’ll wake up and . . .”

And what? I tried to imagine waking up in my home, in my
life, but it was all gone. I could remember the world, the real world of soft, round shapes, of people and houses and cars and lives. I just couldn’t remember me in it.

My vision narrowed as an invisible fist closed around my lungs. “Who am I?”

Tension pulsed up through the veins in my neck. I could feel the skin on my face, the roots of my teeth. Dizzy, nauseous, I staggered back against the base of the hill. What was my name? What did I look like? Was I old? Was I young?

Looking down at my boxy body, I couldn’t determine anything. Was I a man or a woman? Was I even human?

“What am I?”

The thread snapped. My mind collapsed.

Where? Who? What? And now the final question.

“Why!” I screeched up at the bright square sun. “Why can’t I remember? Why am I different? Why am I here? Why is all of this happening to me? WHYYY!”

All I got back was silence. No birds, no waves, not even the rustle of wind through those angular excuses for trees. Nothing but pure, punishing silence.

And then . . .

GRRRP.

The sound was so small I wasn’t sure I’d heard it.

GRRRP.

I definitely heard it that time, and felt it, too. It was coming from inside me. My tummy was rumbling.
I’m hungry.

That was all I needed to break my downward spiral. Something to do, something simple and clear to focus on, and next to breathing, there’s nothing clearer or simpler than eating.

Grrrrp, growled my stomach, as if to say, “I’m waiting.”

I shook my head violently, trying to get the blood back in my cheeks, and looked down at my body to see if I had anything to eat. I’d been so shocked the first time I’d seen myself that I might have missed something earlier. Maybe I had a waterproof phone in my pocket, or even a wallet with my ID.

I didn’t have either, or even pockets. But what I did find was a thin belt, painted the same color as my pants—another reason I’d missed it the first time—with four flat pouches on either side. Each pouch was empty, but while going through them, I suddenly realized I could feel the slight pressure of something resting gently on my back.

I call it a “backpack” but it didn’t have any straps or hooks or anything that should have held it in place. It was just stuck there, and like the belt and my painted-on clothes, I couldn’t take it off. All I could do was reach back and swing it to the front.

“Crazy dream,” I said, coming back to the only mental crutch I had. The pack’s inside was lined with twenty-seven small pouches, just like those on the belt, and also totally empty.

So much for taking inventory, I thought, as the feeling of hunger grew constant. That meant foraging for food. I looked around for something, anything, that looked remotely edible. At first,
the only thing I could find appeared to be one-block-high blades of rectangular grass. They grew in ones and twos on the green-covered dirt behind the beach. I reached down to one sprouting right at my feet, but somehow I couldn’t pick it up. Instead I just swiped clumsily in a rapid punching motion.

Anxiety welled up in me again. It was one thing to have a strange-looking body, but a whole new crisis to discover that that body wouldn’t obey! I tried again, missing the grass, and again, and when I finally connected, my fist smashed my target to oblivion. And I do mean oblivion. The tall green stalks didn’t just fall over or break, they disappeared. One quick crunching noise and poof, gone.

“Aw, c’mon!” I pouted, looking at this angular appendage. “Just work, will ya?” For some reason, pleading with my hand wasn’t the answer. Neither was trying to repeat the same fruitless motion on another identical clump of grass.

I’ve heard, although I can’t remember where, that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again hoping for a different result. I don’t know if that’s true for some people, but for me, it was pretty darn close.

“Just work!” I grunted angrily, punching the grass like it had swung first. “Work. Work. WORK!” It was starting again, the mental slide. My mind was balancing on a thin tightrope at that moment, and I really needed some kind of win.

I didn’t get one, exactly, but I did break the cycle by accidentally, literally, breaking the ground. On the fourth try, I hit so
hard and for so long that I didn’t only destroy the little green blades, but also knocked away a whole block of dirt beneath them.

“Whoa . . .” I stammered, frustration replaced with curiosity.

At first I didn’t see the block, just the block-sized hole it’d disappeared into. I peered into the divot and saw a cube floating at the bottom—actually hovering off the ground—and much smaller than it had been. I reached in to pick it up and didn’t get halfway there before it flew up at me.

I stumbled back with a surprised “whoa!” and looked down at the cube in my hand. It felt like dirt, coarse and dry with a few little pebbles in it. I tried squeezing my hand and felt it give without crumbling. I brought it up to my face and sniffed. It smelled just like dirt.

I sniffed again, and suddenly felt comforted. Everything was alien up till that point; everything around me, including me. This wasn’t. This one sensation was familiar. I could feel my neck muscles relaxing, my jaw unclenching. Hey, I’m not embarrassed to say that I took another four or five good, long, tranquilizing whiffs of that dirt block, and I’m also not embarrassed to say that in between each inhale, I glanced over my shoulder just to see that no one was looking.

I won’t say the experience made everything better, but it did give me the confidence to try opening my fingers to drop the block on the ground. And it did. And I felt even better.

“Well, all right,” I exhaled, “At least I have the power to drop
things.” Not a huge win, I know, but something. Some tiny bit of control.

I watched the little dirt cube hover at my feet for a second, then reached out to pick it up again. I didn’t flinch the second time it jumped to meet me.

“Okay,” I said, taking a cautious breath. “If I can drop you, maybe I can . . .” I moved the cube down to one of the pouches on my belt, and sighed deeply as it obediently dropped inside.

“So,” I said, smiling down at the belt, “stuff—well, dirt, at least—shrinks small enough for you to carry it. Weird, but maybe useful in this w . . . dream.” I couldn’t say “world” yet. I was still way too fragile.

GRRRP, bubbled my stomach, reminding me it was still there.

“Right,” I said, and took the cube back out of my belt. “And since I can’t eat you, and can’t think of a reason to carry you around . . .”

I held the shrunken box out to the hole where I’d dug it up. At maybe a pace or two away, it jumped right out of my hand, swelled back up to its original shape, and snapped into place as if nothing had happened. Well, almost nothing; digging it out had taken off its green cover.

“Hmmm,” I hummed and tried digging it up again. Sure enough, a few punches drove it right into my hand. When I put it down this time, I tried setting it next to the hole instead of inside it. Again it sprang back to its normal size, sitting securely on the ground.
I hummed again, my newfound calm allowing the wheels to turn. Something about setting the block down in a new place reminded me of a buried memory. I don’t think it was a memory specific to me, but rather to the not-dream world. Something about little kids playing with blocks, making things, building.

“If everything here is made of blocks,” I said to the newly replanted cube, “and all these blocks keep their shape, could I stack them into things I want to build?”

Grrrp, came a particularly angry protest from down south.

“Right,” I told my stomach, and turning to the block, said, “Maybe later. I gotta eat.”

I figured I’d give the grass one more try before moving on. I’m glad I did. On this fifth attempt, the vanishing clump left a collection of hovering seeds. Finally, I thought and tried picking them up. One weird minor quirk of this dream was that I could only grab all six seeds at the same time, and wasn’t able to hold them individually. Another weird, and ridiculously major, quirk was that I wasn’t able to consume them. My hand just froze there, inches from my mouth, and wouldn’t let me eat.

“Really?” I said, and tried to move my face to my hand instead. That didn’t work either, like an invisible force field was holding them apart.

“Really,” I repeated sarcastically, feeling all the frustration and anger rising up. “Fine!” My arm cocked to throw the seeds away.

What stopped me was the block of dirt I’d just been experi-
menting with. When I’d set it down a few minutes ago, the green cover top was missing. Now it was back. The turfy layer had re-grown.

*That fast?* I thought, looking down at the seeds. *Do all plants grow that fast? Maybe I could try planting these seeds.*

And boy did I try! I tried every way I could think of. I dropped the seeds back onto the ground, but they just hovered. I punched them into the soil, but that just unearthed another block. And after setting that block down, in a new position aboveground, I even tried pushing the seeds into the side. Nothing worked.

“Why won’t . . .” I hissed through clenched teeth, then stopped myself. Going down the “why” path would lead me right back to a full-blown meltdown.

“Keep going,” I said with a huff. “Don’t give up.”

Dropping the seeds into a belt pouch, I desperately looked around for another option. Any other food source, any distraction . . .

The trees!

I ran over to the closest one, trying to peel away sections of the bark. Do people eat bark? Maybe, but I couldn’t. My hands wouldn’t let me grab the light-and-dark-striped brown cover. They also wouldn’t let me climb the waist-thick trunk up to the square bunches of small, mini-cubed leaves.

I didn’t give up; I couldn’t afford to. “If this is a dream,” I said, “then I can just fly up and get some!”

Fist raised, eyes up, I leapt into the air . . . and came down
just as quick. But in that crucial moment, suspended in midair, something truly magical happened. I tried punching at the leaves above me, and even though they were a block or two away, I felt my fist impact.

I began hesitantly striking up above me. “I can reach?”

Sure enough, though my actual arm didn’t stretch, from four full block lengths away I could still hit the dappled cubes above my head. “I can reach!” I shouted and began bashing at the leaves. Creeping insanity faded with each empowering punch. “Yeah!” I belted as the first cube vanished, dropping a red, shiny, semi-rounded fruit into my hand. “THAT’S what I’m talkin’ about!”

And this time, my body let me eat. Maybe that’s the key, I thought, crunching on the fruit’s crispy sweetness and feeling the juice run down my throat. Maybe my hand will only let me eat what’s edible.

It might not have looked exactly like an apple, but it tasted just like one. And if I thought the scent of the earth was comforting, this new sensation was so overpowering, I actually felt a sting at the corners of my eyes.

“Keep going,” I said as the entire apple disappeared into my welcoming stomach. “Never give up!”

Without realizing it, I’d just learned something. Call it a mantra or a life lesson or whatever, but they were words to live by, and they’d be the first of many on this strange and wonderful journey: Never give up.
I’d like to find whoever came up with the phrase “everything happens for a reason” and give them a piece of my mind. Because the exact last thing anybody needs to hear when their world is completely screwed up is that it’s actually a good thing. Like, even if you had a magical time machine that could go back and fix your mistakes, you totally shouldn’t use it? Yeah, right. Nobody really believes that.

Of course, there’s really no good thing to say after everything’s turned into a complete and utter mess. Better to keep moving forward, try to fix your mistakes, and hope everything eventually works out. I feel like I should have something wiser to say here, but nope. That’s all I’ve got. Oh, that and the time machine thing. There’s always that.

Anyway, the mistake I wish I could go back and fix happened days ago. How many days, I couldn’t tell you. Time is sort of . . . a mess right now. But one Friday, some time ago, my best friend
and I were headed to participate in the social event kickoff of the school year, also known as the homecoming game.

I’d convinced Lonnie to go with me, even though neither of us were sports fans. We were gamers, really. Sports—outside of a video game—was not high on our list of priorities. But I figured homecoming was one of those hallmark high school experiences they make a big fuss about in the movies, why not check it out? As a newly minted freshman, I was secretly excited about high school. It was like unlocking a new level in the video game of life—full-sized lockers for larger inventory, bigger bosses like the SATs, you get my drift. Lonnie, on the other hand, was not so convinced about homecoming. So I sweetened the deal, literally. I told him that I’d make my famous brownies and bring a blanket so we could huddle up together with chocolate in our teeth. I’d like to think it was the brownies and the blanket that appealed to him, but I’m not sure. I mean, there aren’t a lot of high school juniors that would want to be seen hanging out with a freshman, but we had been friends since I was six and he was eight. So we kind of went beyond the usual high school friendship parameters. Still, the point of all this is, it was all my fault. Everything that happened is on me.

Lonnie showed up around five. I bounded out with brownies and the blanket, got in the car, let him drive off, and we started talking about Minecraft. Our usual convo.

“Did you build all the traps?” he asked.

I scrunched up my nose. I hadn’t. Mainly because I forgot.

“Actually, I thought it would be better to build up on the base
instead. I decided to make the floor of the greenhouse glass, so you can look down on everything.”

“You mean you didn’t finish what you said you were going to. Again.” Lonnie sounded more like a disappointed dad than my friend, putting me on the defensive.

“I’ll get back to it after I finish the new greenhouse,” I said. “I don’t know why you have to get on my case about it.”

“Bianca.”

“Lonnie.”

“You need to stick to the plan. This whole world is going off the rails. If we want to have something that works really well, we have to do what we set out to make. Isn’t that the whole point of the test world? Perfect it there, and then move it to the real game?”

“I thought the point of the test world was to do crazy stuff so we could see what works and what doesn’t. To go as bonkers as we can go, blow stuff up, make a mess, and never have to fix it.”

Lonnie sighed. He passed his hand over his close-shaven head, and squeezed his eyelids down for a second as if he was in pain. When he opened his eyes again, they were a cloudy gray, like the sky, not the sharp steel gray that meant he was in a good mood.

“I thought you wanted to do this project,” he said. “You said you wanted to craft a whole world. New landscapes. Entire villages. A whole set of society rules, and then mess around with it.”

“Yes, but—”

“But first we have to make it. And to make it, we need to have a plan, Bianca.”

I didn’t mean for us to fight. I wasn’t sure what to say to get
him to stop breathing heavily like he was an angry dragon cooking up a fire to blow in my direction.

“You never follow the plan. First you say you want to do something, and I say, ‘Okay, here’s the plan.’ Then you say, ‘Great plan!’ And then you don’t even pretend to do what I outlined.”

Oh, so this was going to be a full-on fight.

“But here I am being your chauffeur,” he added.

“You just got your license. You need the practice,” I said. “Plus, think of all that horizon-expanding you’ll be doing by finally going to an actual sporting event!”

“Since when do you like sports?” he asked.

I shrugged. “Since it’s my first time ever going to a big school thing, and I just want to see what it’s like to be out with the masses.”

“‘Masses’ is just another word for mobs. Trust me, high school’s not all that it’s cracked up to be.” He turned, screeching down West Elm Road. “Where is the stupid field again?”

“Two streets down and then a right,” I said smugly.

He pulled up at the light and revved the engine. Even his body movements seemed annoyed. I sucked in my top lip and chewed on it as I pulled at one of my cornrows and wrapped and unwrapped it around my finger.

“You know, they’re bulldozing the playground,” I said suddenly.

The light changed and he lurched forward.

“So?”

“Do you want to see it before everything’s gone?”
“What for?”

“Uh, because it was the scene of our greatest adventures?” I asked. “Because it’ll never look like that again? Because it was our place first?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Do you remember how to get there?” I teased. He turned his steely gray eyes on me, and I grinned. I knew that look. It meant that our little fight was over.

Instead of turning right on Grandview, he turned left.

The playground already looked like a ghost town. The swing seats were gone. All that was left was the A-frame, mottled blue from the faded and peeling paint. The rope bridge was lying half in the black rubber mulch, one end still attached to what used to be the climbing wall when all the foot- and hand-rests were still attached.

I climbed up the ladder, which wobbled now that it wasn’t attached properly, and I went down the tube slide, coming out at Lonnie’s sneakered feet.

“Have a go?” I asked.

He shook his head. “I’m surprised this is the first renovation they’re doing since we were little,” he said. “They probably should have condemned it a long time ago.”

“But it’s our place!” I said.

“It was,” Lonnie replied, not unkindly. This playground was where we’d met, and where we’d become friends and imagined our first worlds together. We would pretend to be swashbuckling pirates on the rope bridge, launch ourselves like trapeze artists off
the swings, and defend our fortress from invading imaginary zombies. In fact, one of our first projects in Minecraft was to create a better version of the playground. The ground was always lava, naturally.

After all this time, we always stuck together, even as the playground itself fell apart.

“Remember the time I tried to flip off the monkey bars and you broke my fall?” I asked, looking to stoke some nostalgia.

“Yeah, I got a broken wrist for my troubles,” Lonnie said, shaking his head. “You never were a great planner even then, always wanting to push the limits but never thinking about the follow-through.”

“You know, if I wanted a lecture, I could just go to class.” I crossed my arms.

Lonnie shrugged and kicked the faded yellow plastic cap from something and walked off to what used to be a dome of monkey bars. Most of the bars were in a pile on the ground. I followed him. He stared down at the pile quietly. The sun was just going down, casting an orange glow over the playground. Silence settled around us.

He was right. This place wasn’t ours, not any longer.

“Let’s just go,” I said.

“Homecoming rally, yeah!” he mocked.

I reached my hand out to him and felt a jolt of electricity when he caught my fingers, swinging them as we walked back to the car. Most people thought it was really weird, the two of us hanging out the way we did. A two-year difference in high school is a
chasm. Especially when you’re going to two different high schools. It’s like trying to have a conversation with someone on the other side of the Grand Canyon with nothing but your cupped hands around your mouth. He turned over the engine, and made a U-turn on the tiny street, then peeled off.

I pulled out my phone and loaded the Minecraft app.

“If you’re going to give me grief all night over not building your dumb traps, you should at least appreciate this sick glass floor I put into the greenhouse.”

I waved my phone screen in his face.

“Look!”

“Bianca, quit it. I’m driving.” Lonnie batted the phone away with an arm.

He turned sharply to the left, tires screeching. The orange glow from the setting sun blinded us momentarily and we skidded a little, and Lonnie turned the wheel to right us. Then we realized, too late, that something was coming toward us, that we must have run the red light, but we still weren’t able to make out whatever the object was with the sun in our eyes, but we knew it wasn’t a small thing. It all felt like it was in slow motion, a few seconds strung out into years, until a robotic female voice suddenly blasted over the car’s speakers.

“Proximity alert! Evasive action recommended!”

The air in the car went from electric excitement to sharp fear in an instant, as an oncoming car came straight for us too fast to do anything about it.

Once the car was close enough and blocked out the sun, I
could see the other driver’s face, though not clearly. He had dark eyes and straight hair that spiked in every direction. His head lurched back as his green car collided with our blue one. I remember how the metal crunched as we crushed into each other, folding blue on green on blue on green, how pieces of things began to fly around. Glass, metal. At one point, even the light seemed to fracture and splinter off, bursting into fractals of beams, searing my eyes and my skin. And then there was the smell of smoke. And the taste of blood. And the scrape of something against my body that felt like it had gutted me open somewhere in the middle. I wondered if I’d been halved. I turned, trying to see if I could figure out what was happening, if I could see Lonnie’s face to know from his eyes just how bad it all was. But I couldn’t see him. It was like he’d disappeared and all that was left was me, and the blue car and the green car that now looked like one wrapped-up thing with glass tinkling as it fell like rain all around me, and the shocking realization that the man from the other car was right up on me, like we had been riding together. He was right there. I could reach out and touch him. And I tried. Only my hands didn’t move. Nothing moved but the cars still rippling toward and away from each other. So, I tried to scream for Lonnie, but nothing came out of my mouth.

And then everything went black.
MINECRAFT
WOODSWORD CHRONICLES

INTO THE GAME!

RANDOM HOUSE
CHILDREN’S BOOKS
Ash Kapoor stood in the shadow of the castle. It was a cursed place, with dark windows and tall, twisting turrets. A flag snapped in the wind. On it was the image of some fearsome beast, the likes of which she’d never seen. A crow cawed in the distance.

Any other kid would be afraid right now, Ash thought. But not me. I eat danger for breakfast!

Ash had in fact eaten oatmeal for breakfast.

And she wasn’t standing in front of a spooky old castle, either. It was just her new school, Woodsword Middle. But if she squinted at the building just right, she could imagine it was a
haunted fortress, or a forgotten temple, or an alien stronghold on some far-off moon.

Any of those places would be better than the truth: Ash was starting at another school as “the new kid” all over again. For the third time in three years, her family had been forced to move because of her mother’s job.

She straightened her sash. It was part of her Wildling Scout uniform, and it displayed dozens of badges. Each badge was a reminder of something Ash had done well or a new skill she had mastered. They were like little trophies that stayed with her no matter how many times she had to start over. She rubbed one for good luck.

“You can’t just stand in the middle of the staircase like that,” said a boy as he stepped around her.

“Yeah, are you lost or something?” added a girl, who edged past Ash on the other side.

“Actually, I could use some directions!” said Ash. “I’m looking for room 247.”

“It’s right next to room 246,” said the girl.
“And 248,” said the boy. “You can’t miss it.”

Ash smiled pleasantly. “Thank you!” she said, although their “directions” had been far from helpful.

She tapped her **Urban Exploration badge.** This wasn’t her first time alone in a strange new place or school. She would find room 247, and she would face down any perils she met along the way.

“Excuse me!” said another impatient voice at her back.

But first, she really had to stop standing in the middle of the staircase.

Ash was late when she reached room 247. She had hoped to slip in unnoticed. Instead, every single one of her classmates slid their eyes over to her as she walked in the door.

“Please take your seat,” said the teacher,
shuffling through some papers on her desk.

“Um, I don’t have a seat yet,” said Ash. “I’m new.”

“Oh! You’re the new girl.” The teacher looked up at her now. The woman’s hair was frizzy. Her topknot was held back with knitting needles, as if it were a half-used ball of yarn. “I’m sorry, dear. I’m so scatterbrained before my first pot of coffee.”

“Don’t you mean your first cup of coffee?” asked Ash.

“I’m Ms. Minerva,” she said, changing the subject. “Why don’t you introduce yourself to the class?”

Ash turned toward her new classmates. She took a deep breath, tapping her Public Speaking badge for luck and putting on a bright smile. She had been through this before.

“Hi, everyone!” she said cheerfully. “My name is Ash Kapoor. I just moved here with my family from the West Coast, but I was born in Florida. I like scouting, animals, and video games.”

A boy in the second row perked up. He pointed
to his binder, which was decorated with Minecraft stickers.

Ash nodded. “Minecraft especially,” she added. Maybe she wouldn’t have so much trouble making friends this time.

“An animal lover?” said Ms. Minerva. “Why, that gives me an idea. How would you like to take care of **Baron Sweetcheeks** for a while?”

The boy with the Minecraft binder perked up again. He raised his hand.

“Baron . . . Sweetcheeks?” Ash asked, uncertain.

“The class hamster,” Ms. Minerva clarified. Then she whispered, “I didn’t name him.”

“Ms. Minerva?” the boy said, waving his hand.
“Yes, Morgan?”

The boy straightened up in his seat. “Baron Sweetcheeks is actually a lot of work.”

Ms. Minerva sighed. “Twenty-four children are a lot of work, Morgan. **Baron Sweetcheeks is a hamster.**”

“Sure, he looks cute,” Morgan Mercado said. “From a distance! But if you neglect him even a
little bit, he **freaks out.** He needs food, fresh water, exercise, cute hats, intellectual stimulation—"

“It sounds like you could use a break from the hamster, Morgan,” said their teacher.

Morgan shook his head. “No, I—”

“I don’t mind,” Ash said. “I’m happy to help. I’ll start today.”

“It’s settled, then,” said Ms. Minerva. “Ash, there’s an open seat in the back there.”

Ash felt quite happy. The day was off to a good start. And she had so much in common with Morgan! As she walked past him on the way to her seat, she gave him a friendly little wave.

He didn’t wave back.
NIGHT OF THE BATS!
Ash Kapoor listened carefully for her name. She didn’t want to be marked absent by mistake even though her homeroom teacher, Ms. Minerva, had acknowledged the shiny red apple that Ash had placed on her desk upon arriving in class.

Ms. Minerva was trying to take attendance, but there was a strange sound coming from the
air-conditioning vents. Ash, seated at the back of the room, found it distracting.

“Po Chen,” the teacher called.

Ash’s friend Po spun around in his wheelchair. He raised his arm like he was lining up a hoop shot. Po was a master on the basketball
court. Everyone at school knew him for his skills as an athlete. “Here!”

After calling a few more names, Ms. Minerva said, “Harper Houston.”

Reading as always, Harper raised her hand without lifting her eyes from her textbook. Ash
thought Harper was brilliant. She was especially good in math and science. She also had a great memory. She seemed to remember everything, from algebra formulas to friends’ birthdays.

Ash was next alphabetically. She waited for Ms. Minerva to call her name, then raised her hand and made eye contact with the teacher. Ms. Minerva smiled, nodded, and marked Ash down as present.
Ash was new to Woodsword Middle School. She’d moved to town only a few weeks ago. But now that she was here, she hoped to get perfect attendance. Ash liked doing her best in all things. It was how she’d obtained so many Wildling Scout badges.

From the vents came another small shuffling sound, followed by a metallic clanging. Ash looked around. No one else seemed to have noticed.

Maybe the air-conditioning just got loud sometimes.

“Jodi Mercado,” the teacher said. Ash smiled. Jodi was the first friend she’d made here. She was creative, fearless, and a little bit weird. Since Jodi had skipped a grade, she was younger and smaller than her classmates. She was every bit as smart as the others, though, and Ash thought she was the best artist in the class.

Jodi’s big brother was next in the roll call. He was obsessed with Minecraft, like Ash herself. It was one of many things they had in common.
“Morgan Mercado,” said Ms. Minerva.

“Here!” Morgan said. He spoke loudly. Enthusiastically.

The noise in the vents came back louder. It was almost as if something was reacting to the sound of his voice. There was more shuffling and a small chirp.
This time, Jodi noticed it, too.

What was that? she mouthed silently.

Ash gave an exaggerated shrug, as if to say No idea.

It was at that moment that the door to the classroom flew open, slamming against the wall with a tremendous bang.
Their science teacher, Doc Culpepper, stood in the doorway. “Ms. Minerva,” she said, out of breath. “I’ve come to warn you—”

Before Doc could finish her sentence, the air-conditioning vent above Ash’s head burst open. Dozens of dark shapes flew into the classroom, squeaking and chirping, flapping and fluttering.

“Are those—?” said Jodi.

“Bats!” Ash shouted.

The classroom erupted into chaos. The kids screamed. Some ducked low, while others tried to wave the bats away.

Ash hid beneath her desk. She saw that Jodi had done the same.

“This is pandemonium!” said Ash.

“I know!” Jodi replied. “But I kind of love it!” Ash laughed despite herself. Of course Jodi would see the humor in this.

Ms. Minerva was swatting away bats as they swooped toward her frizzy hair. “Everyone, outside!” she instructed. “Please hurry.
But don’t run!”

Ash very much wanted to run, but crawling worked well enough. She had to drag her backpack behind her.

Most of the class was already out in the hallway when **Ash had a sudden realization.**

They’d left **Baron Sweetcheeks** behind!

She only hesitated for a moment before turning around and heading deeper into the classroom.

“Ash!” Jodi called. “What are you doing?”

Baron Sweetcheeks was the class hamster. It was Ash’s job, as well as Morgan’s, to take care of him. **She didn’t think the bats would hurt him,** but she also didn’t think it was a good idea to leave him behind.

Besides, he hadn’t had his morning hamster cookie yet.

Once Ash had crossed the room, she quickly stood up, slung her backpack over her shoulder, and grabbed the hamster’s cage. Taking the whole thing would be faster than scooping the hamster out.

But the cage was heavier than it looked.
“Let me help you,” said Morgan.

Ash turned to see Morgan had followed her back into the classroom. Then she was almost smacked in the face by a bat wing. Okay. Now she was really glad Morgan was there.

With Morgan’s help, the cage felt like it hardly weighed anything at all. They ducked their heads low and crossed the classroom in a matter of seconds.

Ms. Minerva slammed the door shut behind them.

Ash smiled at Morgan. “Thanks for coming back for me.”

He returned the smile. “Thanks for remembering the baron. I was so panicked that I forgot all about him!”

The hamster, for his part, seemed totally unbothered by the whole ordeal. Especially once Ash slipped a cookie into his cage.

“Minerva, I apologize,” Doc said. Full of nervous energy, she paced the hall while she spoke. “I wanted to warn you about the bats. It didn’t occur to me that my noisy entrance
would set them off.”

While Doc never stopped moving, Ms. Minerva always seemed patiently at rest. She put her hands on her hips. “And how did you know the vents were full of bats?” she asked. “Was this another one of your little projects, Doc?”

“I had nothing to do with it!” Doc insisted, waving her hands for emphasis. “I recognized the sounds coming from the vents this morning. I’ve been following the noise from class to class all morning.”

Ms. Minerva looked like she didn’t wholly believe the science teacher. “At least it’s nice outside,” she said. “Class, head to the bleachers. I’ll be there as soon as I’ve updated the principal.”

“What about Baron Sweetcheeks?” asked Morgan.

“Your hamster can stay with me,” said Doc. “It’s the least I can do.” She snapped her fingers as if remembering something. “In fact, I wanted to speak to
a few of your students anyway, Minerva. May I borrow Ash here, and Harper, Po, and the Mercado siblings?”

Ash and Morgan shared a look. Doc had just named their entire Minecraft team. That couldn’t be a coincidence, could it?

Ash wondered if their secret was out. Did Doc know the truth about the game? Or about the message the kids had found while playing it?

There was a high-pitched squeaking sound, and Ash looked over to see a small bat perched over Ms. Minerva’s head. The teacher didn’t seem to notice.

Ash sighed wearily. Whatever Doc had in mind for them, it couldn’t be any more of a disaster than homeroom had been. She hoped.
Agent - A small robot that helps the player learn coding skills and follows commands written in Code Connection.

Biome - Refers to different geographic regions within Minecraft. Each has its own climate and mobs.

Classroom Mode - Companion app for Minecraft: Education Edition that gives educators additional abilities to manage their students within the game.

Code Builder - An extension for Minecraft: Education Edition that allows educators and students to explore, create, and play in Minecraft all by writing code.

Creeper - Green skinned mob in Minecraft that explodes if it gets close to the player.

Gamemode - Refers to the type of gameplay in Minecraft. In creative players have unlimited access to all of the blocks in the game. In survival mode, players must search the world for resources.

Mob - Short for ‘mobile’, mob refers to creatures in Minecraft.
**The Nether** - Accessed via a nether portal, this alternate dimension is full of lava and unique mobs.

**NPC** - Non Player Character. Can be used to dispense information, run commands, or direct students to outside web links.

**Redstone** - Mined from redstone ore, redstone dust is used to power machinery in Minecraft.

**Skin** - The appearance of a player in Minecraft. Can be selected from the main menu, and can even be customized by players using digital art tools. Steve and Alex are the default skins.

**Slash Command** - Entered in the games chat window, these cheat commands allow for the control of game features such as time of day, weather, and even giving out blocks.

**WASD** - Common control scheme for games on Query keyboards that allows the right hand to be used to control the mouse.
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