



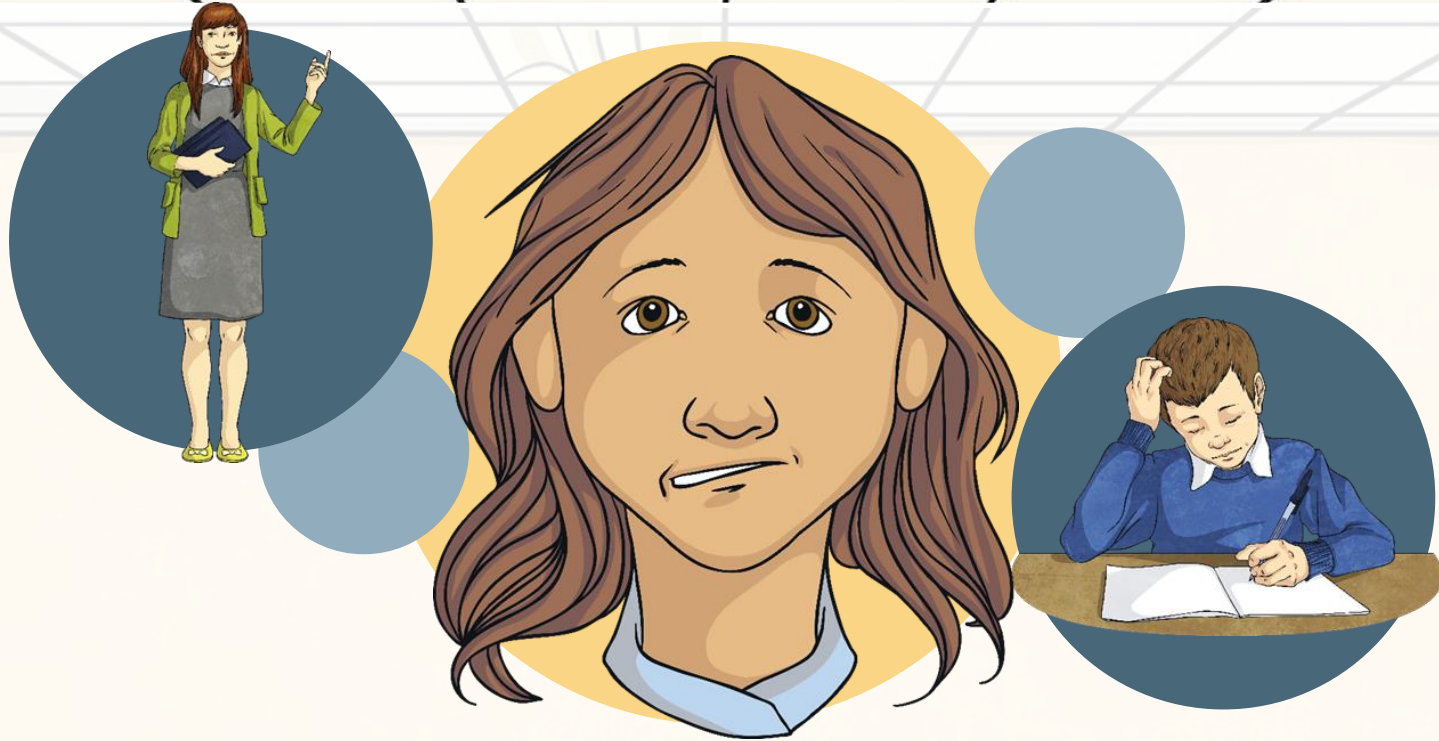
The Carrier Bag of Concerns

A Transition Story and Activity

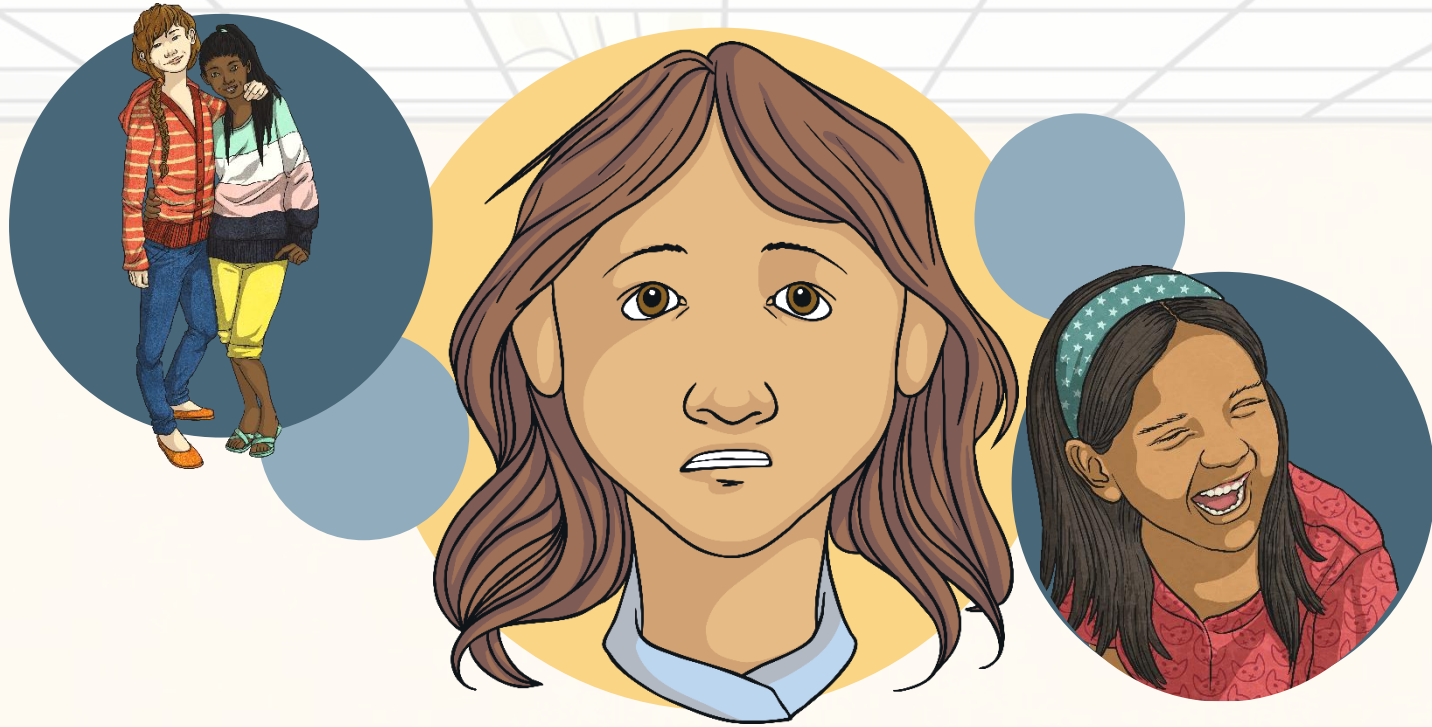
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Saima had always thought of herself as **lucky**. She had a hilarious group of best friends who always got on (well, almost always); she had a mum who was busy but fun; she had teachers she really liked, who really liked teaching her. Best of all, she had a hobby she loved: swimming. Saima's swimming teacher had told her that one day she could be a **champion**.



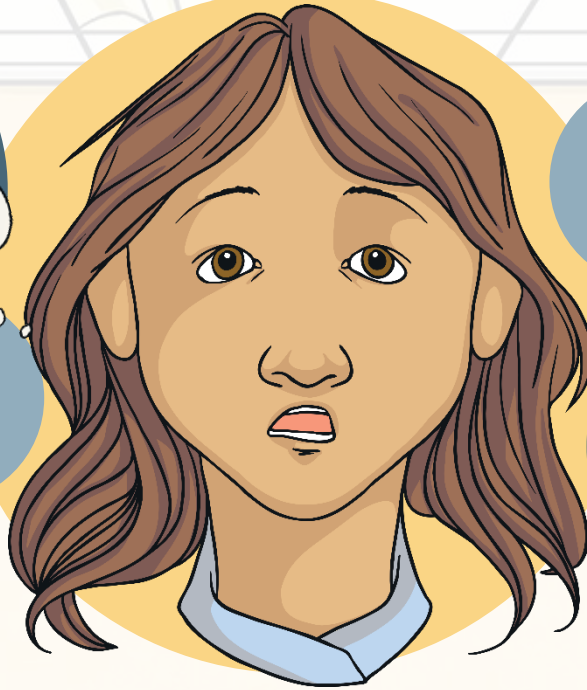
The end of the school year was getting closer and, as it did, Saima started to feel different. She didn't like change and she started to think about how many changes there would be. One day after assembly, her teacher, Ms Wilson, told her class who their new teacher would be next year. Saima didn't know the new teacher but she had heard he was strict and scary. She had also heard that he set a lot of homework and sometimes kept children in at breaktime. Saima started to think that perhaps she **wasn't** so lucky after all.



The next day, Saima saw her friends whispering in the playground. Normally, she would run over to them and ask what they were talking about. But today she felt certain that they were talking about her – about whether she would be able to keep up with the work next year. All day, Saima couldn't stop thinking about this and about all the other changes there would be. She probably wouldn't even sit at the same table as her friends next year, she thought, and then they would always have secret jokes she knew nothing about.



Over the next few weeks, Saima started feeling more and more anxious. Worried thoughts about the new class and the new teacher kept popping into her head, no matter what she was doing. She started to think of her worries and concerns as a carrier bag that she always carried with her, the kind she helped her mum to carry shopping home in. The more concerns she had, the heavier the carrier bag of concerns became. However, unlike a bag of shopping, she could **never** put this bag down – it just kept getting heavier and heavier.



Saima tried to talk to her mum about the carrier bag of concerns but her mum just laughed. “What can you possibly have to be worried about, my precious girl?” she chuckled. “It’s not like you have to go to work or pay the bills. Unlike me, you have no concerns at all!”

But Saima **did** have concerns; she had a whole carrier bag full of them! Hearing that they didn’t exist just made her feel worse so she decided not to bother her mum with the carrier bag of concerns again.



Saima thought about talking to her teacher, Ms Wilson, about the carrier bag of concerns. But Ms Wilson was constantly busy: taking displays down, marking tests and organising the end of year show. There never seemed to be a spare moment when she was on her own for Saima to talk to her.

Saima decided that, just like her mum, Ms Wilson didn't have time to listen to her concerns.



Saima's carrier bag continued to get heavier and heavier. It made her feel tired in the day and kept her awake at night. She found it difficult to concentrate at school and it stopped her having fun with her friends. Even things she enjoyed, like swimming, didn't make her happy like they used to. When she swam, she felt the weight of the bag pulling at her, making her strokes slow and clunky.



One day, after a particularly difficult swimming lesson, Saima's swimming teacher, Mr Ross, asked her what was wrong.

"I know you're a fantastic swimmer, Saima," said Mr Ross, "but I think something's been bothering you lately and holding you back. Am I right?"

Saima was so relieved that someone had finally noticed her carrier bag of concerns that she began to cry.

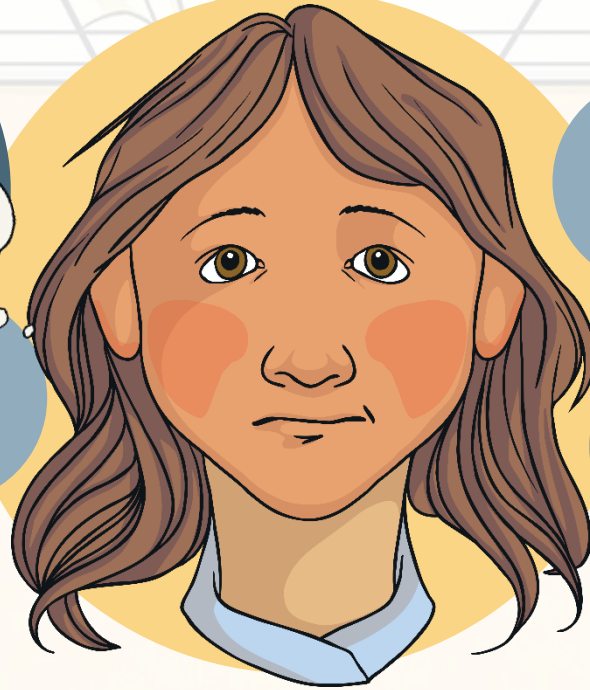


Saima told Mr Ross all about the carrier bag of concerns: how it had become so heavy now that she was scared to even look inside. She told him about how it followed her everywhere, even when she was swimming.

Mr Ross listened.

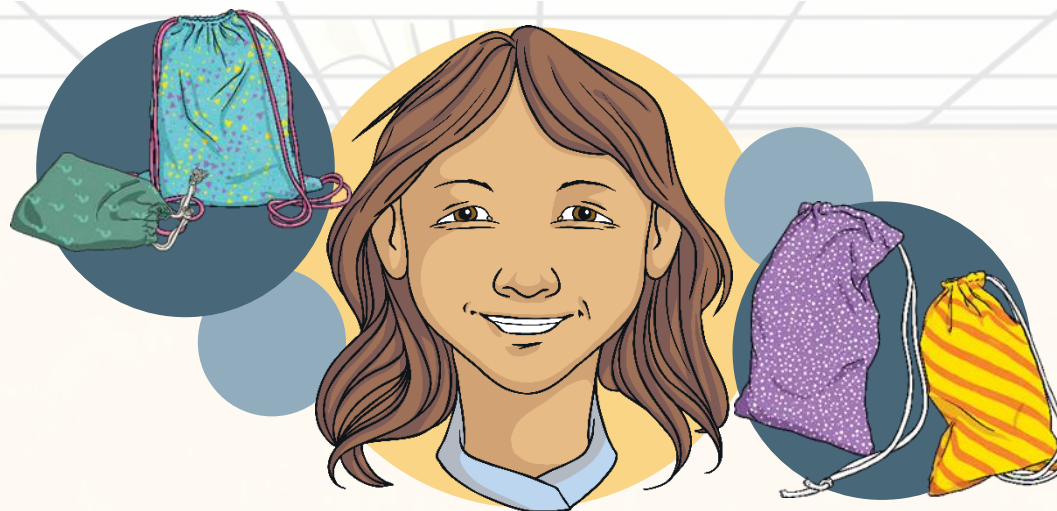
“I can see how a carrier bag of concerns is a difficult thing to have to carry everywhere with you, Saima.”

Mr Ross asked if he could speak to Saima’s teacher about the carrier bag to see if she could help. Saima said he could.



Talking to Mr Ross had made Saima feel better but, on her way to school the next day, she felt more worried than ever! What if Ms Wilson asked Saima about her carrier bag in front of the whole class? What if her friends found out and made fun of her? What if Mr Ross had told Ms Wilson that she was silly or making things up? Saima felt her cheeks turning red and the carrier bag got heavier and heavier.

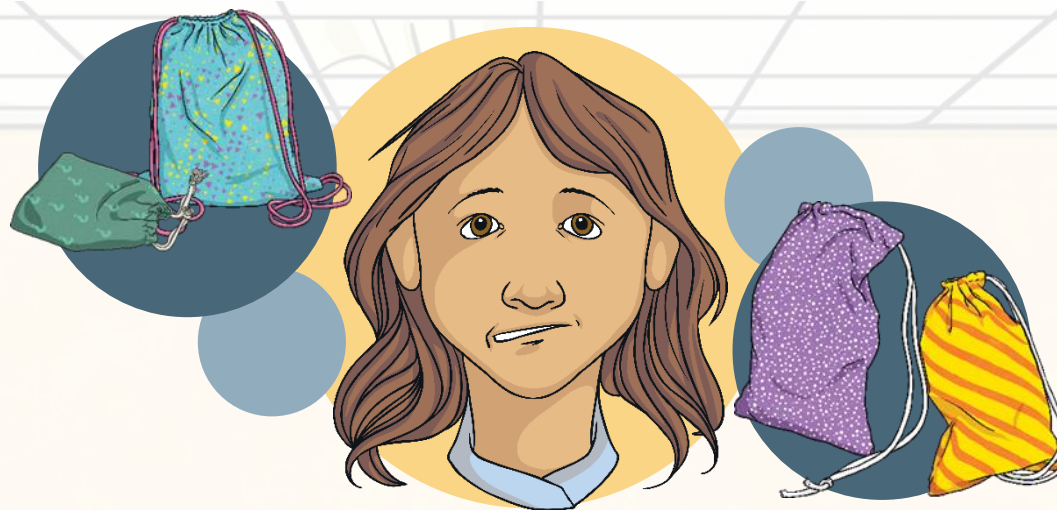
Yet, when she entered her classroom, Saima couldn't believe what she saw...



Every surface in the classroom was covered in **bags**. There were crinkly brown paper bags, brightly patterned fabric bags and re-used plastic shopping bags. There were bags of every shape, size and colour imaginable! Saima's mouth fell open in amazement.

“Right, class,” announced Ms Wilson, “everyone grab a bag!”

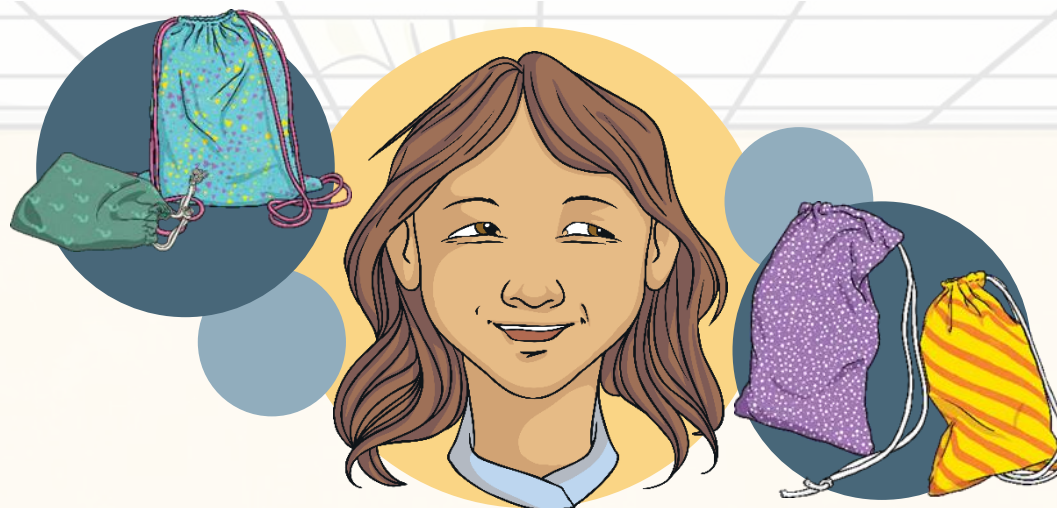
The class quickly chose their bags and settled down at their tables while Ms Wilson explained that they would be making ‘Concern Bags’. She handed out small pieces of paper for everyone in the class and asked them to write down their concerns or questions about moving to a new class. She told them to put all their concerns inside their bag.



Saima wasn't sure she could do it at first. She had so many concerns and questions – where could she possibly start? Yet, as she looked around and saw her classmates scribbling away, she found the courage to try.

To her amazement, as she wrote down her worries, her own carrier bag of concerns started to feel a little bit lighter. She had soon written a whole bag of worries and she began to feel better.

Then it was time for all of the children to share their concerns. Saima was certain that she would have more worries than anyone else in the class. However, to her surprise, everyone's bags were **full**. Even the most confident and cheerful children in the class had concerns about changing classes.



As the other children read out their concerns, Saima recognised many of them as her own. Children were worried about having a new teacher, the different rules and routines in the new class and the work becoming more difficult. There were worries about friendships changing and different amounts of homework. For every question or concern, Ms Wilson reassured them and explained how things would be in the new class. Without dismissing their fears, she showed them that some of their concerns were, in fact, nothing to worry about.

Saima felt better just saying her concerns out loud – especially when she learned that others had the same worries as her. She felt even better when Ms Wilson explained the realities of the new class.

By the end of the lesson, Saima realised that her carrier bag of concerns had become much lighter. Sharing her worries with Ms Wilson and her friends seemed to have helped to empty it.

Just then, there was a knock at the door. In came a tall, serious-looking man. Saima recognised him as Mr Blake – the teacher she would have next year. Just as she felt her concerns getting heavy again, she noticed he was holding something. As he lifted it up to show the class, she saw that it was a striped carrier bag.

“Is it too late for me to share my worries with you?” asked Mr Blake, with a smile. The children laughed and then listened as Mr Blake read from the many scraps of paper inside. He was worried his new class wouldn’t like him; he was worried about setting up his new classroom; he was worried about his book order not arriving in time.



“I worry about everything!” said Mr Blake with a sigh.

“I think you will be the perfect teacher for this class then,” said Ms Wilson cheekily, “and, as long as you share your concerns with each other often, your bags will never get too heavy to carry!”

The class cheered, throwing their pieces of paper in the air, making a confetti snowstorm of concerns that swirled around the classroom.

Saima smiled for the first time in a long while. She looked at Mr Blake and he looked back at her with kind, caring eyes. Saima gripped her real-life carrier bag and felt her imaginary one drifting off into the distance, as light as a feather.

She felt **lucky** to be rid of it and **extra** lucky to have a teacher who would understand if it ever appeared again.



Today, you will be making a carrier bag of concerns, just as Saima and her classmates did.

- You can decorate your bag however you wish.
- Write down your concerns or any questions you have about starting in a new class.
- Put your concerns or questions into your bag.
- You may even wish to combine your concerns into one class bag and pass this bag onto your new teacher.

