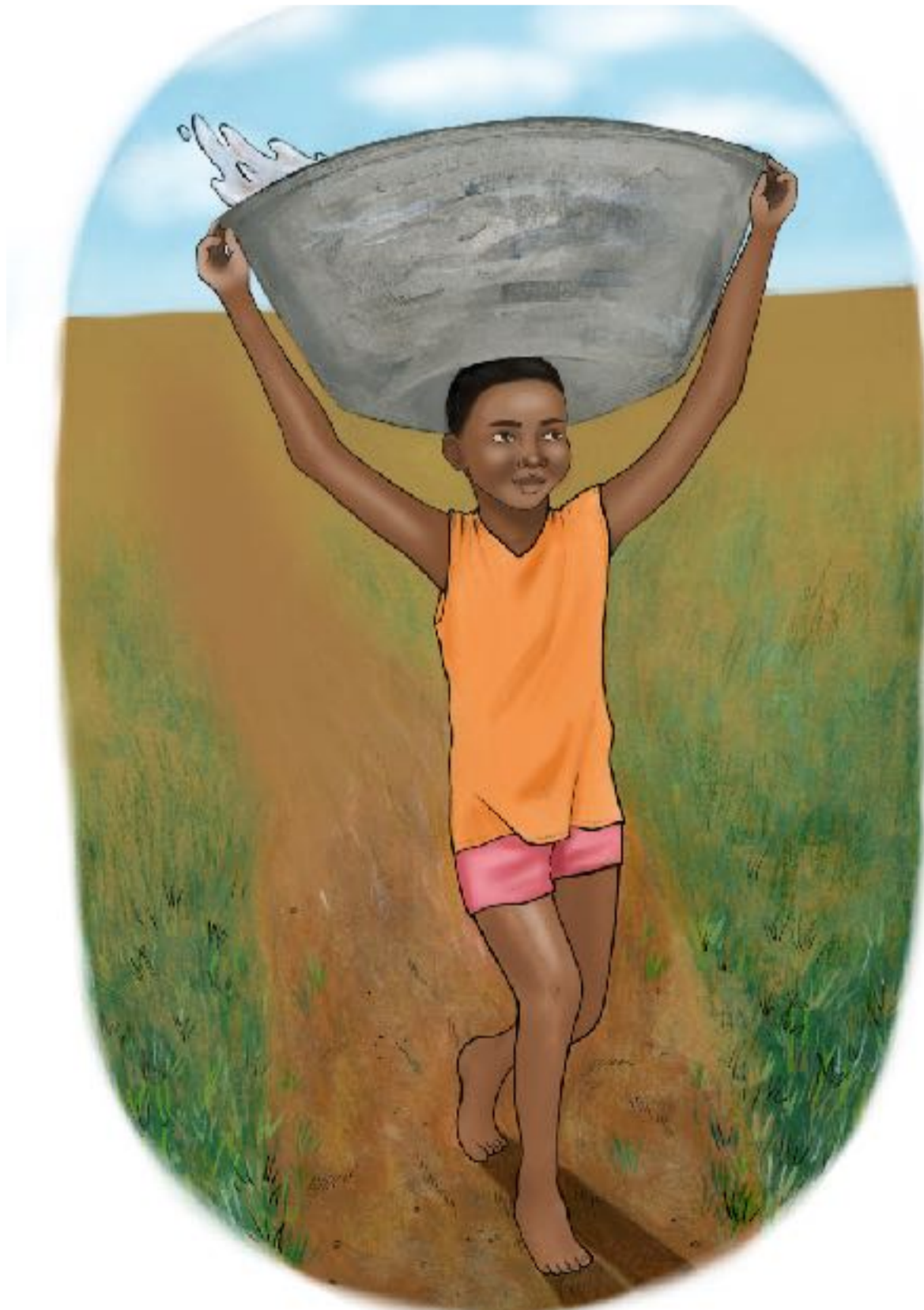




*A Day in the life of Benjamin:  
A School Child in Lawra,  
Ghana.*







Benjamin<sup>1</sup> wakes up at 5 o'clock in the morning. It's still dark outside but he can hear a few chickens scratching around on the other side of the mud wall that makes up his bedroom. It's where he sleeps with his two brothers, two sisters and both his parents. Benjamin is the eldest of his four brothers and sisters. He doesn't know his birthday but he knows it was during groundnut harvesting season because his father will often tell him that Benjamin was the good luck they needed for a good crop that

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin is a fictional child; this story was composed using the testimony of multiple students at ATE supported schools in Lawra (Upper West Region, Ghana) collected in May 2017

year. Both his parents are groundnut (peanuts) farmers, which Benjamin likes because groundnut soup is one of his favourites.

Benjamin has to wake up early so he can complete his chores and his homework before school. He doesn't have time to finish his homework after school because that's when he needs to help his parents on their farm. It is less than an acre but everyone needs to help out. Quickly pulling on his t-shirt and shorts from yesterday he moves quietly across the room and out into the dusty courtyard where the chickens are still scratching around. The courtyard is really another room in their house; it's where most of the daily activities take place: His mother and sisters will cook here in the evenings; they all shell groundnuts together here after harvest; his mother will repair his school shirt here when it gets another hole; and sat around the fire together, it's where his family eat. Benjamin's family will eat dinner most evenings and sometimes there's a bit left over for the morning; not this morning though.

Benjamin grabs the bundle of twigs in the corner which has been bound together to make a brush and sets about sweeping the yard. It's not a big space and it doesn't take him very long but the chickens start to noisily protest anyway.





Next on his to-do list is fetching water; at this time of day, when the sun has barely peaked his head above the horizon and it's still fairly cool, Benjamin doesn't mind walking to the borehole. The borehole is the pump his community uses to get fresh water. It's just over 3km away and takes just under 40 minutes to walk there carrying the large metal bowl on his head. There's always a queue when he arrives, mostly women and other children but they all know each other, they all share in this morning routine. A growing hum of voices greet him - "Fu-angsomaa" "Good morning" – and Benjamin starts chatting with the girl in front of him while he waits for his turn.

After he's filled his large bowl with as much water as it can carry the old lady in the queue behind him helps lift the bowl onto his head so he can start his much slower walk back home. This water won't be enough for the whole day but it'll be enough to help his parents in the morning, to wash the pots from last night and make sure his baby brothers can be washed. It also means that his brothers and sisters can all have a drink before they head off to school.

All day Benjamin has lessons – Social Studies to start, then English (although they have to speak in English all day at school, you can receive a punishment if a teacher hears you speaking in Dagaare), then Maths (only four questions wrong on his homework!) and finally a break for lunch. Benjamin’s school only recently started getting school meals and he loves it. Today is Tuesday, which means Gari and Beans. Gari is made from Cassava and has a tangy taste which goes best with the beans. When lunch starts he grabs his bowl and takes it to the kitchen building with the other students.

Both Benjamin’s parents helped to build this kitchen last year. They used mud and straw which works well until the rainy season comes. Benjamin hasn’t eaten yet today and his small dinner seems like a very long time ago so he is glad that the queue always moves so quickly. Once Benjamin is at the front he hands his bowl to the cooks who fill it up with Gari and then dollop a big spoon of beans on top. It’s a good portion and Benjamin is pleased.

Careful not to spill any, he takes his bowl over to the mango tree and sits with his classmates to eat. First they just eat, they’re all too hungry to talk right now. Some of Benjamin’s friends don’t get to eat with their family in the evening and so haven’t eaten

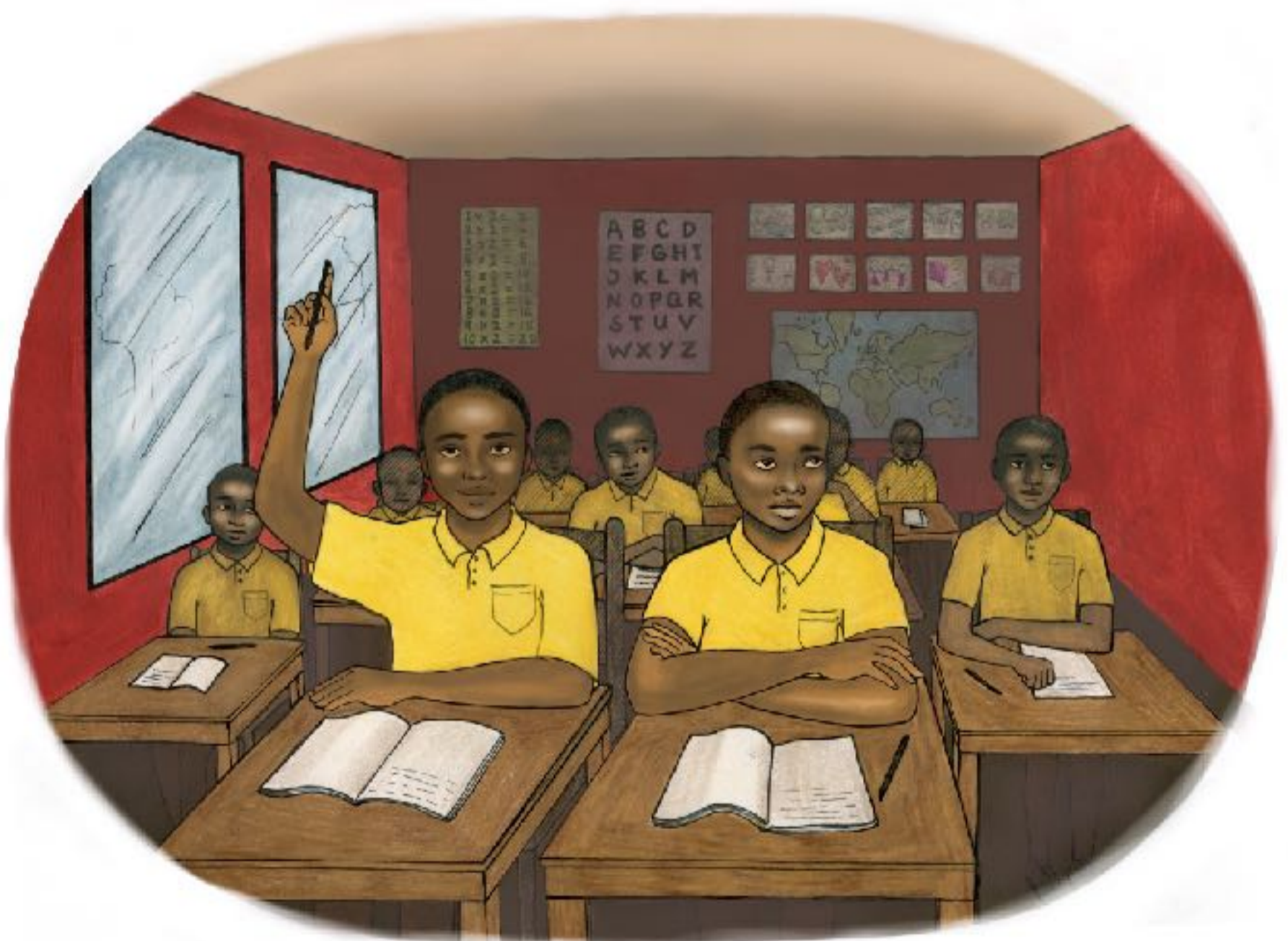




since yesterday lunchtime. When Benjamin puts his hand in he makes sure he gets a good mix of the Gari and the Beans, he doesn't like the Gari by itself and so he mixes it all around a bit first. It's normal to eat with your hands and means you can eat wherever you are! Although he is glad they have some water at school where he can wash his hands and bowl afterwards.

Next year, when he's in his third and final year of Junior High School, it'll be part of his responsibility to fetch the school water from the borehole, but he's not thinking about that just yet. After

he and his friends have washed their bowls and placed them back in the teacher's office, there's just enough time for Benjamin and his friends to play with their new footballs before the last lesson of the day. Benjamin loves playing football and his school yard is perfect for it; they don't have posts for goals but the yard is flat and the mango tree helps provide some shade from the very high sun. But before Benjamin can score a goal, Mr Dery rings the bell and it's time to get back in the classroom.



There are only three classrooms at school (one for each year group) so Benjamin hurries back into his and takes his usual desk, which he shares with two of his friends. The last class for today is Building Design and Technology. It's not one of Benjamin's favourites because they never get to practice what they learn, only writing it down from the chalk board but Benjamin's father tells him it's important to know so Benjamin pays special attention. The last class is always the slowest but soon enough they are all running across the schoolyard and making their journeys home.

For a while Benjamin walks with his friends and they talk and joke but soon they head off to their homes which are in different directions so Benjamin looks around for his brothers and walks with them. At home they change out of their uniforms and hang them in the yard ready for tomorrow. Benjamin changes into his spare clothes from this morning and heads out to the field to help his parents with farming chores. Benjamin and his brothers are helping to rake over the land today, which is hard work and takes a long time.



His sister helps for a few hours but eventually is called inside to help their mother start to prepare dinner. Benjamin doesn't have a watch but they work until the light fades and together they all walk back to the light shining out of their walled yard; he's tired and is glad he hasn't been out here all day working like his father.

Despite having eaten a good lunch, Benjamin is glad to see that his mother is dishing out Banku and soup when he walks in. Banku is also made from fermented cassava but sticks together in a big lump so is perfect for spooning up soup. It's not groundnut soup tonight but bean leaf soup. Bean leaves grow very quickly so are often the only vegetable you can find when the harvest supplies have run out. They don't amount to much if you eat them alone but make a tasty soup if you boil them. Benjamin's sisters, Gifty and Cecelia, both get a bigger portion than Benjamin at dinner; their school doesn't have any lunches for them. Sometimes there isn't enough for Benjamin's parents to eat dinner but tonight everyone has a bowl and they sit on the ground around the fire eating together. When he finishes eating he will stack his bowl with the others ready to



be washed in the morning after he fetches water. The fire will burn through most of the night but one of Benjamin's brothers will be sent out to fetch more fire wood in the morning.

Benjamin splashes his face with water, not the water he brought home this morning but fresh water that is still warm from the burning sun; now set. It's been a long day and he is craving his sleep before another day begins. Benjamin

makes his way into his family's mud hut to lay out his bed on the floor; his sister must have tidied it away for him this morning when he was out collecting water. The light from the fire outside only just reaches the far corners of the hut leaving most of the hut in darkness so once Benjamin puts his head to the pillow he falls asleep within minutes, ready to do it all again in the morning.





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